INVISIBLE SCHOLARS: RACIALIZED STUDENTS FROM IMMIGRANT BACKGROUNDS IN HONORS

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A Thesis

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the diverse academic and social experiences of first-generation college students of color from immigrant backgrounds in honors programs. Data from for this research were collected from semi-structured, one-on-one interview sessions with interested students. The findings and implications can educate institutions and offer valuable feedback for recruitment and retention. The recommendations could also be used to increase educational support for minority students in honors programs.

This study thesis sought to address the following research questions and sub-questions:

1) What are the academic and social experiences of first-generation, immigrant and/or refugee students of color in honors colleges?
   a) How do they describe their experiences?
   b) How and why do they join an honors program?
   c) What precollege experiences are most influential in their preparation for the honors college and persistence?
   d) What challenges do they face in honors? How do they cope with these challenges?

2) How do these students develop a sense of belonging in the Honors College?
   a) What makes them fit into the honors program?
   b) Why do they stay in the Honors College?
   c) What issues of belonging do they experience in the honors college? How do they respond to these issues?

Keywords: immigrants, minority students, Honors College, honors program, first-generation
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The United States is home to more than 840,000 immigrants and more than 4.6 million English learners in the public school system (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.; Zong & Batalova, 2017). The number of students from immigrant backgrounds in US public schools is continuously growing. In fact, by 2030, two out of every five students in US public schools will be an English Language Learner born abroad or to immigrant parents in the US (Shah, 2012). However, there is still limited research on the early childhood experiences of children of immigrant parents (Turney & Kao, 2009). Primary education offers students a fundamental foundation that impacts their long-term educational experiences (Turney & Kao, 2009). Yet, existing literature on immigrant students in secondary education is insufficient.

There is an abundance of research on first-generation college students as well as immigrant students in higher education (e.g. Deenanath, 2014; Felix, 2016; Fregeau, & Leier, 2001; Hansen, Moissinac, Renteria, & Razo, 2008; Hoover, 2004; Kanno & Varghese, 2010; Lee, 2011; Shwartz et al., 2013; Soria & Stebleton, 2013; Thomas, 1974). In fact, literature on the academic and social experiences of immigrant college students has expanded in the last few years, but it still lags behind in examining intersecting identities. Likewise, there are also many studies on students of color and college persistence (Anderson Goins, 2014; Chang, Witt-Sandis, & Hakuta, 1999; Harrison-Cook, 1999; Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009; Thomas, 1974). However, there is very little research focusing on these intersecting identities and the experiences of underrepresented students in honors programs.

The current study fills this intersectional gap by examining the experiences of first-generation college students of color from immigrant backgrounds in honors programs. Its aim is to gain a deeper understanding of how and why immigrant college students pursue and persist in
honors education. Specifically, this study seeks to shift the focus from a narrative of deficit and under-preparedness to acknowledging the persistence and achievements of marginalized students in honors education. This study examines the academic and social experiences of college-level honors students who identify as first-generation college students of color from immigrant backgrounds. This thesis attempts to describe and analyze the experiences of these students, share their stories, and uncover the roots of their persistence in Honors Colleges.

**Background and Purpose of the Study**

Harklau (2000) conducted a study following three US immigrants in their last year of high school and first year in a community college. Her work was driven by the fact that English Language Learners (e.g. immigrants) are highly underrepresented in the academic community and research on their transition from high school into college is virtually nonexistent (Harklau, 2000). As noted above, there is an abundance of literature analyzing the experiences of first-generation students, immigrant students, and students of color in institutions of higher education. However, much like Harklau’s (2000) argument, Deenanath (2014) notes that there is scant research investigating these intersectional identities. There is limited knowledge on the college selection process for first-generation immigrant college students and the role their families play (Deenanath, 2014). Undoubtedly, it is important to understand the academic and social experiences of first-generation immigrant college students. However, it is problematic that the majority of available studies tend to focus on a narrative of deficit, inadequacy, failure, or poor preparation (Harklau, 2000; Kannon & Varghese, 2010; Riazantseva, 2012). Such narrative depicts an incomplete image of immigrant students and can deter other marginalized students from pursuing higher education. Harklau (2000) stresses that societal portrayals of students, their backgrounds, and experiences, impact the curriculum and shape students’ identities and attitudes.
In high school, immigrant students are represented as determined, hardworking, and admirable, however; in college, the same students are viewed as deficient or under-prepared (Harklau, 2000).

When it comes to accessing an honors education, there are only two studies focusing on underrepresented students in gifted programs at the university level. The first study was carried out by Harrison-Cook (1999) to uncover reasons why most African American students choose not to participate in honors education and to determine ways to increase African American participation in honors programs. Harrison-Cook (1999) sought to understand why this disparity exists and what can be done to recruit more African American students to honors programs. The second study was conducted by Anderson Goins (2014) to explore persistence among African American males in honors colleges. To some extent, there is an overlap in the experiences of African American students and immigrant students when it comes to honors programs. For instance, similar to immigrant students, two studies found that African American students are not actively recruited by Honors Colleges even though an honors program can enhance their persistence because of the small classes, personalized advising, and opportunity to develop close relationships (Anderson Goins, 2014; Harrison-Cook, 1999). Ward, Siegel, and Davenport (2012) echo that since these underrepresented students are less likely to develop relationships with faculty and peers outside of class, they would be more likely to benefit from more intimate relationships that offer support, act as a means of acquiring cultural capital, and allow them to be recognized for their achievements.

In Harrison-Cook’s (1999) study, a substantial number of Black honors students viewed the honors programs as elitist, though this did not discourage their participation. These students had grown accustomed to being the only people of color in their classrooms and institutions.
Contrary to this, some academically eligible students did not join the honors college because they were discouraged by the lack of activities and courses of interest to Black students (Harrison-Cook, 1999). Some students claimed that they were never approached by the Honors College. In fact, in Anderson Goins’ (2014) study, out of twelve participants, only one reported being contacted by the Honors College, other participants learned about the honors program through college fairs, teachers, former Honors College students, or personal research (Anderson Goins, 2014). Some students saw the honors program as appealing to white students, and others were afraid of gambling their financial aid if the honors program interfered with their academic performance (Harrison-Cook, 1999). In Anderson Goins’ (2014) study, nine participants theorized that African American males who were not in the Honors College lacked the motivation to apply and complete the required coursework. Those who enrolled in the honors program enjoyed the friendships, networks, travel opportunities, graduate school preparation, scholarships, and motivation among many other personal benefits.

In general, honors programs are viewed as elitist or lacking diversity, as articulated in the studies above. A minority student’s enrollment and retention in honors is influenced by admission requirements, honors curriculum, lack of academic preparation, lack of diversity, negative perceptions of honors, and lack of support networks, to name a few.

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to describe the diverse academic and social experiences of first-generation college students of color from immigrant backgrounds in honors programs. Because of the limited existing knowledge base, this study seeks to fill a void in the literature by presenting and analyzing the experiences of these marginalized students in honors. Their stories can offer institutions valuable feedback for recruitment and retention. Similarly, findings from this study can be used to educate institutions and better understand the experiences
of these students and to improve or develop support programs and resources available to students who identify as first-generation, racial/ethnic minorities from immigrant and/or refugee.

**Definition of Key Terms**

It is important to define some common key terms that are frequently used throughout this research. First, this study focuses on first-generation and second generation immigrant students. First-generation immigrants are any foreign-born individuals (Zong & Batalova, 2017). Second-generation immigrants are individuals who were born in the US to at least one foreign-born parent (Zong & Batalova, 2017). In this study, the term “Students from immigrant backgrounds” is used to describe both first- and second-generation immigrant students (Zong & Batalova, 2017).

The terms “Advanced Placement” (AP) and “International Baccalaureate” (IB) are also prevalent in this study. According to the US Department of Education (n.d.), both terms describe high school programs that present students with the opportunity to pursue college-level courses while still in high school. Both programs culminate in a final exam. There is a testing fee for each exam, but reductions and subsidies are available based on financial need. Students who participate in either program may be able to skip some first-year college courses or sometimes receive college credit for the coursework completed while in high school. AP courses are commonly recognized and accepted at almost all US colleges and universities. Contrarily, IB courses lag in national recognition and acceptance at US colleges and universities. IB courses are available to students during their last two years of high school. It is important to note that “because it is a comprehensive two-year program it can be difficult to transfer during that last two years and complete the IB diploma at a different school” (U.S. Department of Education,
n.d., para. 4). Equally important to note is that preparation for both programs starts as early as elementary school (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Research Questions

This study seeks to address the following research questions and sub-questions:

1) What are the academic and social experiences of first-generation, immigrant and/or refugee students of color in honors colleges?
   a) How do they describe their experiences?
   b) How and why do they join an honors program?
   c) What precollege experiences are most influential in their preparation for the honors college and persistence?
   d) What challenges do they face in honors? How do they cope with these challenges?

2) How do these students develop a sense of belonging in the Honors College?
   a) What makes them fit into the honors program?
   b) Why do they stay in the Honors College?
   c) What issues of belonging do they experience in the honors college? How do they respond to these issues?

Organization of the Thesis

Chapter I introduces and reviews the gap in literature on first-generation college students of color from immigrant backgrounds in honors education. The remainder of this thesis is divided into four chapters. Chapter II reviews available literature on first-generation college students, immigrant students, and students of color in honors programs. Chapter III maps the methods used to conduct this case study. Chapter IV presents the findings of the research.
Finally, Chapter V analyzes the findings and concludes the study. It also addresses areas for further research and provides a list of recommendations to honors programs.
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter examines the development of honors education in the US colleges and defines voluntary and involuntary minority groups. Furthermore, this chapter highlights the role of education in perpetuating social inequalities. Bourdieu’s (2007) theory of capital will be discussed to better connect findings in this thesis with existing literature on immigrant students and first-generation college students of color. The chapter also describes some of the challenges first-generation college students experience, particularly, those from immigrant backgrounds. Lastly, although an honors education benefits underrepresented students, this chapter draws attention to the lack of existing research on the experiences of minority students in honors education.

The Development of Honors Colleges and Programs

During the 19th and 20th century, there was a growing concern and demand for higher academic standards among American colleges, especially on the East Coast (Veysey, 1965). As a result, many colleges and universities began establishing an honors program to promote higher academic performance (Veysey, 1965). In 1912, Reed College introduced a senior thesis and in 1920, Columbia University transformed one of its great-books courses into a program labeled “General Honors.” However, Swarthmore College is recognized for spearheading the honors program in 1922. They developed an honors program that would serve as a device for molding the best and brightest students to their fullest potential (Rudolph, 1990). For Rudolph (1990), honors education allows for “the recognition and encouragement of talent and for the return of intimacy and human consideration, even the return of the student, to the teaching-learning experience” (pp. 457-458).
Clauss (2011) argues that honors colleges and programs attract gifted students who are awarded the privilege of knowledge creation rather than knowledge reproduction. These model students “bring their engaged and sometimes aggressive curiosity to non-honors classes...raising the intellectual stakes...transform lectures and discussions into moments of uncertainty, ambiguity or wonder...inspire or provoke other students to search for answers on their own” (Clauss, 2011, p. 96). Overtime, honors programs have developed a core set of characteristics that include close faculty-student relations, discussion-based small classes, rigorous and challenging curriculum, research or independent projects, experiential-learning, and a culminating senior project (e.g. honors thesis, senior seminar, portfolio, proposal, etc.) (Anderson Goins, 2014; Clauss, 2011; Harrison-Cook, 1999; National Collegiate Honors Council [NCHC], 2013; Rudolph, 1990).

**Distinguishing Honors Colleges and Honors Programs**

Anderson Goins (2014) argues that a distinction can be made between Honors Colleges and honors programs. An Honors College exhibits the characteristics of a small liberal arts college and a research-intensive university (Anderson Goins, 2014; Barnard & Treat, 2012; NCHC Board of Directors, 2013; Sederberg, 2005). It is headed by a dean and possesses sufficient resources including operational funds, staff, and facilities (Anderson Goins, 2014; Barnard & Treat, 2012; NCHC Board of Directors, 2013). Not only that but Honors Colleges are typically stationed in a centralized space that houses academic courses and social activities for honors students (NCHC Board of Directors, 2013). It is common for Honors Colleges to offer students with an honors lounge, library, reading or study rooms, and computer facilities (NCHC Board of Directors, 2013). Students in Honors Colleges participate in honors governance or student committees (NCHC Board of Directors, 2013).
Moreover, many Honors Colleges are responsible for recruitment and admissions, so that they can determine the appropriate size of incoming classes or cohorts (NCHC Board of Directors, 2013). Additionally, Honors Colleges control students financial assistance for tuition, travel expenses, and research (Eckert, Grimm, Roth, & Savage, 2010; NCHC Board of Directors, 2013; Sederberg, 2005). They exercise freedom over their curriculum, faculty selection, and academic policies (Anderson Goins, 2014; NCHC Board of Directors, 2013). Their curriculum must provide at least 20% of the required coursework for graduation (NCHC Board of Directors, 2013). Furthermore, Honors Colleges offer honors residential opportunities to their students (NCHC Board of Directors, 2013).

Honors programs tend to have smaller enrollment numbers and fewer staff compared to an Honors College (Honorsadmin, 2014). Similar to Honors Colleges, they offer students special courses, seminars, independent study, and experiential learning as well as research opportunities (NCHC Board of Directors, 2013). However, because of limited staffing, honors programs are more decentralized and unable to offer a large number of honors-only seminars (Honorsadmin, 2014). As a result, honors programs have larger class sizes and allow students to take more honors contract classes since they are cost effective—these are non-honors courses that students can earn honors credits for if they complete extra assignments (Honorsadmin, 2014). The honors program curriculum must constitute at least 15% of the required coursework for graduation (NCHC Board of Directors, 2013). Moreover, few honors programs offer residential opportunities (e.g. Living Learning Communities) for students who choose to live on campus (Honorsadmin, 2014).

This thesis will focus on both Honors Colleges and honors programs since they are equally important and tend to enroll few marginalized students. Because the researcher found
that participants in the study made few distinctions between the two, the terms “Honors College” and “honors program” will be used interchangeably throughout this study.

**Voluntary and Involuntary Minorities**

This research engages the concepts of voluntary and involuntary minorities, as described by Ogbu and Simons (1998) to analyze the impact of migration experience on participants’ engagement in honors programs. According to Ogbu and Simons (1998), “A population is a minority if it occupies some form of subordinate power position in relation to another population within the same country or society” (p. 162). Minority groups can be divided into three groups: autonomous, voluntary (immigrant), and involuntary (non-immigrant). Autonomous minority groups are those that are small in numbers, for example; the Amish and Mormons (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). This paper focuses on voluntary and involuntary minorities.

**Voluntary Minorities**

Voluntary minorities are groups of people who are able to move by choice rather than out of fear of persecution or death (UNHCR, 2016). These individuals emigrate to the US based upon free-will in search of better educational or work opportunities, to reunite with family and loved ones, or for other motives (Ogbu & Simons, 1998; UNHCR, 2016). Ogbu and Simons (1998) highlight “(1) the people in this category voluntarily chose to move to U.S. society in the hope of a better future, and (2) they do not interpret their presence in the United States as forced upon them by the U.S. government or by white Americans” (p. 164). Because migrants are not fleeing any threat, they are able to return to their homeland if they choose to and without losing citizenship and protection in their native land (UNHCR, 2016).

Arnold (2012) expands on the description of voluntary minorities and argues that today’s voluntary migration is fueled by the desire for employment opportunities. In fact, today, most US
immigrants from Asia and Africa are people are educated and skilled people who are able to find employment and abstain from welfare dependence (Arnold, 2012). This population tends to be younger (aged 15-34), married, and less likely to be divorced compared to the native population (Arnold, 2012).

**Involuntary Minorities**

Involuntary minorities are non-immigrant groups that have been conquered, colonized, or enslaved (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). These groups have been forcefully incorporated into the US, for example, African-Americans whose ancestry can be traced to enslavement, Native Americans and Alaska Natives who were conquered, Puerto Ricans who feel colonized, and early Hispanic populations in the Southwest who were also conquered. Ogbu and Simons (1998) note that involuntary minorities are tend to be less economically wealthy, face greater cultural and linguistic difficulties, and have low academic performance in schools. In the United States, people often use the terms “refugee” and “(im)migrant” interchangeably, however; these terms have significantly different meanings.

**Refugees**

Ogbu and Simons (1998) clarify that refugees who flee their homelands because of war or other emergencies are neither immigrants nor voluntary minorities. They did not emigrate to the US based upon free-will in search of a better future. According to Article I of the 1951 United Nations’ Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, the term “refugee” describes someone who:

...owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail
himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. (p. 14)

Furthermore, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (2016), notes that refugees are recognized and protected in international law because it is too dangerous for them to return home. In fact, per international law, refugees should not be deported or returned to environments where their life and freedom continue to be in danger. Instead, they must be afforded sanctuary, basic human rights, and assistance from States, UNHCR, and other organizations (UNHCR, 2016).

**Legal permanent residents**

Legal permanent residents or “green card” holders are legally allowed to live and work in the US indefinitely (Arnold, 2012; Felix, 2016; Zong & Batalova, 2017). They are also allowed to own property, attend school without visa restrictions, receive financial aid, and vote in non-presidential elections. Refugees, asylum-seekers, some temporary workers, and relatives of U.S. citizens or permanent residents may apply for a Green Card (Felix, 2016; Zong & Batalova, 2017).

**International students**

Although some of their experiences may overlap with other non-citizens, international students are short-term, voluntary migrants who choose to study in the U.S. on a temporary visa and face employment restrictions (US Department of State, n.d.). Felix (2016) clarifies that refugee students are different from other foreign-born students because of their forced migration. This study focuses on permanent residents—refugees and long-term migrants—because their experiences differ from those of international students or other short-term migrants.
Frame of Reference

Ogbu and Simons (1998) notes that the way a person (or a group) looks at a situation is known as a *frame of reference*; which is expressed through their attitudes and behaviors. For instance, voluntary minorities tend to express a positive frame of reference based on their situation in the US and “back home”. Immigrant groups tend to see more opportunities for success in the US as opposed to their homeland (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). This is sometimes referred to as “immigrant optimism” since immigrants come to the US with high expectations and motivation to improve their chances of success (Baum & Flores, 2011). Not surprisingly, this positive frame of reference encourages immigrants to overlook issues of discrimination and perceive them as a temporary barrier to overcome (Ogbu & Simons, 1998; Thomas, 1974). Unlike immigrants, involuntary minorities (e.g. Black Americans, Native Americans, etc.) are mistrustful of institutions because they have experienced and continue to experience institutional racism (Ogbu & Simons, 1998; Thomas, 1974).

Furthermore, voluntary minorities perceive the US as having more educational opportunities compared to their native land and they interpret school success as carving the path to advancement. Many mirror middle-class white American values of “hard work, following the rules, and getting good grades” to succeed (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, p. 172). Likewise, many immigrants do not question school authority because schooling is seen as the gate to success in the US. In fact, many immigrant parents raise their children with high academic expectations and hold their students accountable for achieving these academic goals (Ogbu & Simons, 1998).

Role of Education in Reproducing Inequalities

According to Robbins (2000), “schools as institutions function in maintaining class distinctions without reference to the cultural contents which they transmit” (p. xii). Educational
systems are designed to endorse and legitimize these distinctions as if they are simply the results of differing innate abilities rather than differing social backgrounds (Robbins, 2000). On one hand, Fowler (1997) argues that school culture connects with and accommodates working class aspirations. She reasons that teachers “rescue” poor “‘bright’ children from the harsh deformities of poverty even while simultaneously employing categories of educability that favour the dominant class” (Fowler, 1997, p. 26). Not only that but schools use their “legitimating magic” to train the dominated to imitate the educational culture within schools in hopes of reducing the gap between school culture and that of the dominated class (Fowler, 1997). On the other hand, Kanno and Varghese (2010) and Kosut (2016) argue that schools reproduce social inequalities since they tend to mirror the cultural values of students from the dominant class. Specifically, schools tend to model the speech, attitudes, behaviors, and knowledge of the dominant class, as articulated by Gaddis (2013).

Knowledge and skills that contribute to social power are typically made available to students from privileged backgrounds while being withheld from students from working class (Anyon, 1980). Generally, many minority students lack exposure to the dominant culture and therefore have limited access to developing valuable cultural capital (Gaddis, 2013). Kosut (2006) theorizes that there is a class ceiling preventing lower-class students from achieving the same levels of successes as their counterparts. For students to succeed, they must strategically employ whatever form of capital they acquired from parents, communities, and lived experiences (Gaddis, 2013). However, minority students are continuously caught in a vicious cycle of being under-served, poorly represented, and often begin their educational journeys at a great disadvantage (Gaddis, 2013; Kanno & Varghese, 2010). Kosut (2006) concludes that the voices of marginalized populations will continue to be silenced and unheard as part of an elite cultural
reproductive cycle unless universities take on an active role in challenging and demolishing the class division.

**Social Class and Academic Tracking**

The concept of social class helps explain the achievement gap among students of differing socio-economic backgrounds. According to Anyon (1980), public schools in the US provide different types of educational experiences and curriculum knowledge to students based on their social class. Family socio-economic status is instrumental in the educational outcomes of students (Lutz, 2007). Although family background is influential, Anyon (1980) argues that social class is not inherited because it is a lived experience, a dynamic process, and a series of relationships. An individual’s occupation and income level contribute to defining one’s social class but they are insufficient in determining one’s class on their own. Rather, three key features determine one’s class: ownership of economic capital, relationship to authority and control at work and in society, as well as the type of activity that defines his or her work. Generally, upper-middle class groups have more autonomy when it comes to work, and their work tends to involve a great deal of conceptualization as well as creativity. Contrarily, working class individuals are trained to perform routine and mechanical work that contributes to a larger process with which workers are typically unfamiliar (Anyon, 1980).

Anyon (1980) conducted an ethnographic study of curricula, pedagogical and student evaluation approaches in five US elementary schools. Of the five schools, two were working-class schools, one middle-class school, one affluent professional school, and one executive elite school. Working class schools consisted of students whose parents were unskilled or semi-skilled workers, or unemployed. Middle-class schools included students whose parents were skilled workers earning between $13,000 to $25,000. Affluent professional schools were comprised of
students whose parents earned between $40,000 to $80,000. Executive elite schools were
dominated by students whose household income ranged between $100,000 to $500,000.
Anyon’s (1980) ethnographic work illustrates the type of educational tracking students
experience that defines their social class.

In working-class schools, Anyon found that students were trained to follow mechanical
procedures and orders that involve little decision making or choice. Teachers did not make it
clear to students why they were completing an assignment or engaging in an activity and its
connection to broader contexts. Working-class students were not encouraged to discuss,
conceptualize or explain ideas. Students simply copied procedures from text and/or teacher notes
from the board. Students were not encouraged to explore their creative capabilities, rather, they
were taught to follow rules and given “easy” assignments that required minimal thought (Anyon,
1980). Middle-class schools taught children to follow directions to acquire the right answers.
Students were awarded some choice and decision making as the directions typically required
some level of figuring out. Students were not taught to analyze how or why things happen and to
draw connections from lessons learned. Much like working-class schools, middle-class schools
did not foster creativity (Anyon, 1980).

Affluent professional schools promoted creativity, individuality, and independent work.
Students were encouraged to articulate and employ theories they learned in class to make sense
of reality. For instance, students were given the opportunity to write essays and stories to channel
their creativity. Much emphasis was placed on student satisfaction with their own work as a key
criterion for evaluating student work. Affluent schools had fewer rules to follow when
completing work or engaging in class activities. They fostered collaboration skills through peer
review and other group activities.
The most selective of Anyon’s four schools types, the executive elite challenged students to develop analytical skills through problem solving, independent research, writing assignments, and discussions of class concepts. Students were expected to produce academic work of high quality and they were taught that their opinions are important. Executive students were afforded the opportunity to lead class to practice presenting themselves, managing situations, and being in charge. According to Anyon, executive elite schools prepared students to achieve and excel in real-life.

Anyon concludes that working-class schools prepare children for mechanical and routine labor while middle-class schools prepare students for bureaucratic work. Affluent professional schools prepare students to become intellectuals, legal, scientific, or technical experts and professionals. Lastly, executive elite schools prepare students to take ownership and control of means of production in society. Differing curricula, pedagogical, and student evaluation norms lead to different cognitive and behavioral skills that contribute to the reproduction of social inequalities (Anyon, 1980). Anyon’s study is important in understanding the unequal academic achievements among students of differing social classes. Her theories can also be extended to understanding the honors grooming process and the educational experiences of participants in this study. To elaborate, Ogbu and Simons (1998) explain that involuntary minorities tend to be members of lower social classes and struggle in schools. Anyon’s study provides a detailed analysis of the role of social class in educational outcome which plays a key role in this study as discussed in details in later chapters.

**Bourdieu’s Framework**

Bourdieu’s theory of capital expands on the works of Anyon and Ogbu. His theories closely align with the findings of this study and provide a fundamental foundation for
interpreting the experiences of participants in this study. According to Bourdieu (2007), “Capital is accumulated labor (in its materialized form or its ‘incorporated,’ embodied form)” (p. 83). It can be a resource that awards its holders power and privilege, for example; prestige, status, and authority (Greenspan, 2014; Harker, Mahar, & Wilkes, 1990). Capital is constantly evolving and takes time to accumulate with the potential of being converted into another form (Bourdieu, 20; Greenspan, 2014; Harker, Mahar, & Wilkes, 1990). It is important to note that capital accumulation implies an unequal distribution of capital and an ongoing struggle for power among individuals and organizations (Greenspan, 2014; Kosut, 2006). Capital exists in four fundamental forms: economic, social, symbolic, and cultural.

**Economic Capital**

Economic capital is the most material and can be directly converted into money and institutionalized in the form of rights (e.g. property rights) (Bourdieu, 2007). Within the context of higher education, economic capital allows student to access the institution depending on their assets, and participate in activities such as study abroad, traveling to conferences, completing unpaid internships or volunteer work with less financial stress, or even staying for extra semesters. Kosut (2006) makes it clear that working-class students, much like many other minority students, cannot afford these luxuries if they are unpaid because they cannot afford it or they cannot take time off of work. Kosut (2006) discusses the opportunity cost of participating in school activities in relation to *temporal capital*, “the amount of time a student has available to devote to study, research, and writing” (p. 255). Increased temporal capital allows students to be more productive with their academic careers by utilize tutoring, attending more events or presentations, and networking to name a few (Kosut, 2006). It is common for minority students,
especially low-income ones, possess low levels of temporal capital as many of them work to support themselves and/or cover costs associated with higher education (Kosut, 2006).

**Social Capital**

Social capital is composed of social obligations or connections that can be exchanged for economic capital and may be legitimized in the form of a title (Bourdieu, 2007; Greenspan, 2014). Social capital signifies group membership (Bourdieu, 2007) as it is rooted in the relations within a social network based on shared norms, values, trust, and reciprocity (Greenspan, 2014; Litz & Hourani, 2016). According to Bourdieu (2007), social networks are “the product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establish or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term” (p. 89).

Thomas (1974) explains that college students accrue social capital through academic and social involvement. Students develop social capital in the form of camaraderie, campus resources, and academic support (Thomas, 1974).

It is important to note that for some, the formation of social networks is an easy task because of familial relations. However, for others, establishing social networks requires intentional and strategic effort to formulate long-lasting, fruitful relationships with the potential capacity of being traded in for material or symbolic capital. Marginalized individuals tend to join social networks composed of individuals from similar backgrounds who are also limited in accessing more economically and culturally rich networks (Field, 2003). Like other forms of capital, social capital contributes to the persistence of inequalities because access to various forms of networks is unevenly distributed (Field, 2003). Otherwise stated, some social networks are more valuable than others.
Symbolic Capital

Symbolic capital is concerned with honor, reputation, and dignity (Fowler, 1997). It is a form of credit that carries culturally valuable attributes such as prestige, status, and authority (Bourdieu, 2007; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2013; Greenspan, 2014; Harker et al., 1990; Kanno & Varghese, 2010; Swartz, 2013). In class societies, symbolic capital is best understood in relation to class domination (Fowler, 1997). Individuals accumulate symbolic capital through public recognition of their various forms of capital and the positions they hold in society (Swartz, 2013). Simply put, symbolic capital is economic capital disguised as non-material possession (Harker et al., 1990). It allows its holders to be recognized as legitimate authority and bestows upon them the power to name and classify (e.g. activities and groups), the power to represent, and the power to create and enforce law (Harker et al., 1990). In this study, symbolic capital is explicitly and implicitly discussed when analyzing the reasons for why participants joined an honors program and the outcomes students hope to gain.

Cultural Capital

The concept of cultural capital helps explain the unequal achievements of students from differing social background. It represents highly valued knowledge and educational qualifications (Kanno & Varghese, 2010). Cultural capital is linked to economic capital (money and property), symbolic capital (status and legitimacy), and social capital (networks and connections) (Harker et al., 1990; Kannan & Varghese, 2010). For example, according to Bourdieu (2007), cultural capital is convertible into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications (e.g. certificates and diplomas). Ward, Siegel, and Davenport (2012) add that cultural capital can be transmitted from parents by providing their children with the necessary knowledge and experiences to prepare for school.
Ward, Siegel, and Davenport (2012) further elaborate that “cultural capital represents the education and advantages that a person accumulates, which elevate his or her capacity to fit into higher social strata; it provides students with the means to ensure social mobility” (p. 6). Unfortunately, marginalized students are likely to begin their schooling with poor forms of capital and also graduate with smaller gains in cultural capital (Gaddis, 2013; Kannon & Varghese, 2010).

Riazantseva (2012) argues that the effective and successful academic socialization of immigrant students is available to those with greater cultural capital that “made it possible for them to enjoy the level of success in higher education that may be considered incongruent with the quality of their academic preparation” (p. 192). Not surprisingly, first-generation college students tend to possess less cultural capital since their parents lack meaningful college experiences and knowledge to transmit (Ward et al., 2012; Kosut, 2006). Ward et al. (2012) explain that for college-bound students, cultural capital means “researching institutions, making informed decisions, applying to schools, locating financial resources, developing expectations, and learning the language and terminology of college life)” (pp. 6-7). For enrolled college students, cultural capital is illustrated by navigating campus resources, networking, participating in campus activities, and mapping the requirements for graduation (Ward et al., 2012). For Gaddis (2013), cultural capital has the capacity to alter a student’s perspective on their ability to succeed because it offers them an opportunity to learn more about their privileged counterparts and to realize that those students are not necessarily more intelligent or gifted but rather more prepared and exposed to valuable experiences.

Bourdieu distinguished three forms of cultural capital: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized. *Embodied cultural capital* is comprised of attitudes, beliefs, perspectives, or
non-material legacies (Clucas, 2015). These attitudes and beliefs influence behavior, for example; beliefs about the value of higher education influence student and parental attitudes as well as behaviors (Stockfelt, 2016). Embodied cultural capital is learned and absorbed by the individual through a lifelong process of socialization (Clucas, 2015). This process of learning starts very early, when children begin observing and mimicking their parents’ everyday manners (Clucas, 2015). Objectified cultural capital is associated with cultural artifacts such as pictures, paintings, writings, instruments, (Bourdieu, 2007; Clucas, 2015; Greenspan, 2014). It is less frequented in this study. Institutionalized cultural capital grants its holders legal recognition of cultural competence and professional qualifications (Bourdieu, 2007; Clucas, 2015; Greenspan, 2014). These academic or legal qualifications are limited to the lifespan of their holders (Clucas, 2015). Institutionalized cultural capital can be connected to Anyon’s theory of social class and its impact on the quality of education students receive. Social class can impact the type of credentials students acquire. In this study, institutionalized cultural capital will be discussed in terms of formal education and credentials that prepare participants for an honors education and post-honors career goals.

Linguistic capital is a concept closely tied to cultural capital. It refers to a speaker’s proficiency in a socially powerful or highly valued language (Fowler; 1997; Kanno & Varghese, 2010; Kosut, 2006; Snook, 1990). According to Fowler (1997), knowledge of a certain language is linked to the dominant class influences cultural capital. As such, high linguistic capital expands one’s symbolic capital as well as cultural capital (Fowler, 1997; Snook, 1990). Similarly, Greenspan (2014) makes it clear that “language is as much an instrument of power as of communication: The more linguistic capital speakers possess, the more they are able to exploit the system to their advantage” (p. 103). In regards to immigrant students, Kannon and Varghese
INVISIBLE SCHOLARS

(2010) argue that immigrant students and English as a Second Language students are at a disadvantage because of their limited linguistic capital that is necessary for educational success. Likewise, Kosut (2006) adds that working-class and minority students with poor linguistic capital are less likely to be recognized as gifted or intelligent. These students lack the vocabulary and language command of their counterparts because lower-class, uneducated families communicate in a language manner that is different from the upper-class and often condemned in the academic world. This speech may include *likes, you knows, umms, am I rights*, and double negatives as Kosut (2006) reports. This lower-class dialect is typically unappreciated in the academic settings because it is more casual or informal and sometimes full of facial and arm movements. Students from the dominant culture, however, tend to exercise formal and authoritative speech patterns that allow for their voices to be heard and respected regardless of true intelligence. As a result, many minority students become more self-conscious and feel inadequate about their language skills and silence themselves in class or social settings.

**Barriers to Refugee and Immigrant Education**

There are many barriers that immigrant and refugee students face during their educational careers. In particular, this section highlights issues of language, age of migration, and parental involvement.

**Language**

Students with limited English proficiency face many academic difficulties including low levels of achievement, placement into lower grade levels or educational tracks, and high dropout levels (Lutz, 2007). Riazantseva (2012) notes that high proficiency in English and the ability to use it for academic purposes are crucial for the effective socialization of immigrant students into the academic culture and even success in their academic and professional careers. College
students are expected to possess advanced academic literacy, or the ability to read, write and think critically which can be a challenge for refugee and immigrant students with little knowledge of English (Riazantseva, 2012). In fact, Riazantseva’s (2012) study of generation 1.5 students illustrates that achieving high levels of academic literacy may take more than five to seven years.

Lambert (2013) discusses issues of acculturation that families face while adjusting to life in the U.S. For instance, newly arrived families experience a linguistic isolation phase where no adult in the household is fluent in English. This language barrier, discourages families from bonding with people who speak English. Immigrant children tend to learn English quickly and adapt to American culture faster than their parents. As a result, many immigrant youth begin to interpret for their parents or relatives as they gain a better command of English and American culture (Lambert, 2013).

**Age of Immigration and Culture**

Immigrant students faces many challenges while trying to adapt to American culture for successful social and academic integration. Age of migration and length of residence in the US affects educational attainment because immigrant groups adapt to the cultural and social norms of a society with time (Lutz, 2007). Baum and Flores (2011) claim that students who migrate to the US before the age of thirteen tend to perform as well as their native-born counterparts. Students who migrate as young children are at an even greater advantage because they tend to learn English and American norms at a faster pace (Baum & Flores, 2011). On the other hand, students who migrated between the ages of thirteen and nineteen face many academic challenges (Baum & Flores, 2011). This could be for various reasons including the need to find work or familial obligations (Baum & Flores, 2011). Greenberg, Macias, Rhodes, and Chan (2001)
published a report on English literacy and language minorities in the US. They found that the majority of individuals who migrated to the US at a young age were learning English outside the home, most likely in the public school system. Teenagers or young adult immigrants had limited access to studying English, and therefore, reported lower levels of English speaking and reading compared to those who migrated before the age of 12 (Greenberg et al., 2001). Essentially, students who have resided in the US for long periods of time have a linguistic and cultural advantage.

**Parental Engagement**

Parental engagement in children’s education is critical and linked to academic or behavioral success. Engagement can take various forms. According to Turney and Kao (2009), parents can demonstrate engagement by attending parent–teacher conferences, participating in parent–teacher organizations, attending school events, and volunteering at their child’s school. However, parental engagement can be measured indirectly based on how parents encourage and interact with their students (Halpern, 2005; Turney & Kao, 2009). Parental engagement contains a lasting effect on children’s educational experiences because it socializes children. Engaged parents convey a message to their children that education is important which is an example of embodied capital. Parental engagement allows parents to acquaint themselves with their children’s teachers and administrators which increases their social capital. Additionally, parental engagement allows parents to be more aware of their children’s academic performance so they may intervene if necessary (Halpern, 2005; Turney & Kao, 2009).

Immigrant parents face many barriers to involvement in their children’s education. Some immigrant parents may wish to be engaged but face cultural or language barriers, time constraints, lack of transportation, or lack of child care. Others may not be aware that they are
expected to be involved at school (Turney & Kao, 2009). Usually, more educated parents with higher incomes tend to be more engaged in their children’s education as opposed to parents with less education and lower incomes (Baum & Flores, 2011; Turney & Kao, 2009). In Lutz’s (2007) study, family socioeconomic background had the largest impact on high-school completion for immigrant students. Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds experienced greater challenges while trying to complete high school (Lutz, 2007).

**First-Generation College Students**

There are many different groups of students who fall into the spectrum of “first-generation.” Ward, Siegel, and Davenport (2012) and Deenanath (2014) articulate that the meaning of *first-generation college students* varies and ranges from those whose parents received no formal secondary education to those whose parents hold no diploma from a four-year university. First-generation college students wear an invisible minority status (Ward et al., 2012) because their identities normally rely on self-reported data. For example, during the application process universities may ask students to report their parental educational level, however, within the class it may be more difficult to identify first-generation college students unless they volunteer the information. Nonetheless, it is still crucial to identify first-generation college students to better meet their educational needs. First-generation college students tend to have intersecting oppressed identities. In particular, they are tend to be older, come from ethnic/racial minority and low-income backgrounds, be female, and non-native speakers of English (Deenanath, 2014; Ward et al., 2012). Not surprisingly, these students face numerous obstacles while pursuing higher education in the US. For instance, this group tends to struggle with establishing connections with peers and faculty (Deenanath, 2014). Time constraints and living
off campus interfere with their full academic and social integration which in turn can lead to lower retention (Deenanath, 2014).

Naranjo, Pang, and Alvarado (2015) explain that immigrant students are similar to many other Americans who believe in acquiring a college degree for upward mobility or personal growth. However, they note that many immigrant students find themselves trapped in undermatching and summer melts. Undermatching is when students are admitted to selective colleges but choose not attend college at all or wind up enrolling in a less selective college (Naranjo et al., 2015). This is a common occurrence among first-generation, immigrant students and low-income students (Naranjo et al., 2015). Naranjo et al. (2015) acknowledge that undermatching occurs for many reasons including low levels of parental education.

Closely related to undermatching is the concept of summer melts where college-admitted students decide to drop out over the summer. Naranjo et al. (2015) report that the summer melt rate for low-income students ranges from 20% to 44% of students. Summer melts occur because of the cost of higher education, fear of leaving home, barriers to navigating college forms and prerequisites. The authors point out that many of the college admission and enrollment requirements are challenging, complex, and highly bureaucratic. Coupled with language barriers and financial strains, this can very discouraging to first-generation students and their families who are unfamiliar with US higher education (Naranjo et al., 2015).

First-generation college students embark on a daunting and unfamiliar journey into higher education institutions often without the necessary support and resources. They navigate the college application and transition process with little or no parental guidance, and little experience themselves. Ward et al. (2012) suggest that first-generation college students “may
feel like frontier explorers who have entered a complex wilderness, equipped with their belongings and a lot of good wishes behind them but largely on their own” (p. 2).

Deenanath (2014) further notes that within the first-generation student umbrella are first- or second-generation immigrants who face additional challenges. This study focuses on *first-generation immigrants*, in other words, “those individuals who immigrated to the United States when they are older than age 17; [and] *second-generation* individuals who were either born in the United States or immigrated to the United States prior to age seven” (Deenanath, 2014, p. 3). Foreign-born students whose K-12 education was mostly in the US are sometimes referred to as generation 1.5 students (Riazantseva, 2012). First-generation college students, including immigrant students, are more likely to begin their higher education careers at a two-year college with the hopes of transferring to a four-year college or university (Deenanath, 2014; Ward et al., 2012). They are also more likely to postpone college enrollment, have interrupted enrollment, and enroll part-time (Ward et al., 2012).

Ward et al. (2012) acknowledge that restricting the definition of “first-generation college students” to those whose parents have not received a four-year degree is not accurate. They argue that *attending* college and receiving a diploma is insufficient. Rather, cultural capital is acquired and accumulated through meaningful college experiences such as “going through the admissions process, experiencing freshman orientation, interacting with faculty, doing college-level work, being self-directed, learning the language and customs of higher education, living with other students, taking finals, navigating the library, making decisions about majors and career pathways, developing help-seeking skills” to name a few (Ward et al., 2012, pp. 8-9). In other words, colleges and universities do not award cultural capital to students the same day they
confer a diploma (Ward et al., 2012). Cultural capital is acquired through a holistic process that highlights meaningful experiences rather than academic achievement.

**Cognitive Capital**

According to Ward et al. (2012), college students exude *self-efficacy* or confidence in daily tasks ranging from passing courses, making friends, speaking in class, creating a class presentation, managing time, to attending professor/instructor office hours (Ward et al., 2012). Kosut (2006) refers to this as *cognitive capital* or self-assurance. It is a way for students to know, perceive, and interact within academic settings (Kosut, 2006). Some students may feel comfortable within academic settings and experience no difficulties challenging, deconstructing, or questioning course materials (Kosut, 2006). These students were schooled to think creatively and critically (Kosut, 2006). On the contrary, schooling for lower-class students, like many other underprivileged students, teaches them to listen, write, and memorize (Kosut, 2006). Even at home they are often socialized to respect and follow hierarchy instead of challenging authority or information based on reason (Kosut, 2006).

Accordingly, first-generation college students tend to lack confidence because of their academic under-preparedness, lack of cultural capital, and poor integration (Kosut, 2006; Ward et al., 2012). Kosut (2006) writes that “as a first-generation college student who spent the initial 22 years of her life trapped in a small, economically wounded industrial region, who was I to challenge academic authority? What gave me the right to question a professor…” (p. 253). Kosut’s experiences mirror Anyon’s argument that social class impacts a student’s educational experiences. Issues of cognitive capital or self-assurance are present in the discussion of academic preparation of participants and the characteristics of those who enroll in honors.
Parental Engagement

Thomas (1974) reasons that parental education affects the academic attainment of children. In fact, all 20 of his immigrant Black participants praised their parents for motivating them to go to and graduate from college. Much like Thomas (1974), Riazantseva (2012) studied immigrant college students who came from educated families that promoted literacy, had high expectations of their students and were very involved in their academic lives. These students had sufficient cultural capital to fuel their successful integration into the elite academic culture (Riazantseva, 2012). Riazantseva (2012) reports that “this cultural capital seemed to have facilitated these students’ successful selfpositioning as ‘talented,’ intelligent and overall successful students in the eyes of their college instructors who seemed to have overlooked their low academic skills” (p. 192). Riazantseva (2012) found family engagement to be a common denominator among these successful immigrant college students. Her participants acknowledged receiving homework help from their parents and also receiving parental guidance with selecting a college and field of study (Riazantseva, 2012). Riazantseva (2012) noted that her participants received immense family support and as a result, it was common for them to discuss college coursework, grades, and career goals with their families.

Ward et al. (2012) argue that parents who experienced college—even if partially—have greater knowledge to offer to their children as opposed to parents with no college experience. By the same token, refugee and immigrant parents who experienced college in their native lands have more to offer compared to those with no college experience. However, because of the differing educational systems, they may not be able to offer meaningful knowledge that students can employ to their educational careers in the US. Ward et al. (2012) indicate that first-generation students little or no familial support which entails “engaging in decision making,
asking pertinent questions, providing financial resources, and giving basic encouragement” (p. 9). Lack of familial support does not automatically mean parents or families are indifferent. For many first-generation college students, family members may not know how to demonstrate engagement and support.

Immigrant students battle obstacles similar to those experienced by other first-generation college students. They face specific barriers revolving around “lack of information about college options, understanding financial aid and paying for college, being less academically prepared with poor English reading, and writing and math skills” (Deenanath, 2014, p. 3). Immigrant students may be challenged with balancing work and family obligations. These challenges tie to Bourdieu’s theory of capital, Ogbu’s theory of voluntary and involuntary minorities, as well as Anyon’s study of social class and educational outcome. All of these challenges will be revisited and connected to the experiences of participants in this study to better understand their Honors College experiences and the challenges they face as first-generation college students of immigrant parents.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

This qualitative case study examines the academic and social experiences of college-level honors students who identify as first-generation college students of color from immigrant backgrounds. This study attempts to describe and analyze the experiences of these students, share their stories, and uncover the roots of their persistence in Honors Colleges. There is an abundance of research on first-generation college students as well as immigrant students in higher education (e.g. Deenanath, 2014; Felix, 2016; Fregeau, & Leier, 2001; Hansen, Moissinac, Renteria, & Razo, 2008; Hoover, 2004; Kanno & Varghese, 2010; Lee, 2011; Shwartz et al., 2013; Soria & Stebleton, 2013; Thomas, 1974). In fact, there is an increase in literature on the academic and social experiences of immigrant college students. There are also a host of studies on students of color and college persistence (Anderson Goins, 2014; Chang, Witt-Sandis, & Hakuta, 1999; Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009; Thomas, 1974). However, there is very little research examining all of these intersecting identities and the experiences of underrepresented students in honors programs. As a result, this thesis hopes to add to existing literature by analyzing the experiences of these marginalized students in honors education. Their stories can offer institutions valuable insight for recruitment and retention. Not only that, but the results of this study can enlighten higher education institutions and honors programs on how to better serve and support students who identify as first-generation, racial/ethnic minorities from immigrant and/or refugee backgrounds.

Case Study Approach

Case studies are one of several approaches to conducting qualitative and quantitative social science research (Gerring, 2007; Hancock & Algozzine, 2011; Yin, 2003). They are fueled by the desire to understand extreme, deviant, influential, crucial, most-similar, most-
different, typical, diverse, and pathways cases (Gerring, 2007; Yin, 2003). Case studies are used to examine and contribute knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political, and contemporary real-life events (Gerring, 2007; Hancock & Algozzine, 2011; Yin, 2003).

Yin (2003) identifies three forms of case studies: exploratory, explanatory, and descriptive. Selecting the appropriate form depends on the type of research question(s), the researcher’s degree of control over behavioral events, and the extent of focus on contemporary real-life context as opposed to historical events. Exploratory case studies focus on “what” questions, and seek to describe an event or phenomenon that can be answered through surveys, experiments, or primary documents (Yin, 2003). On the other hand, explanatory case studies concentrate on “how” and “why” research questions that explain a cause-and-effect relationship, and are best answered through interviews, observations, or experiments (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011; Yin, 2003). Finally, descriptive case studies seek to document a holistic description of a single phenomenon (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011; Merriam, 1998).

**Research Questions**

As stated above, explanatory case studies concentrate on “how” and “why” research questions and are best answered through interviews, observations, or experiments. This case study focuses on addressing the following questions that reflect an explanatory case study design:

1) What are the academic and social experiences of first-generation, immigrant and/or refugee students of color in honors colleges?
   
   a) How do they describe their experiences?
   
   b) How and why do they join an honors program?
c) What precollege experiences are most influential in their preparation for the honors college and persistence?

d) What challenges do they face in honors? How do they cope with these challenges?

2) How do these students develop a sense of belonging in the Honors College?

a) What makes them fit into the honors program?

b) Why do they stay in the Honors College?

c) What issues of belonging do they experience in the honors college? How do they respond to these issues?

This thesis is an explanatory single-case study. Single-case studies are used for testing, confirming, or expanding theories (Yin, 2003). They are appropriate for capturing extreme or unique conditions, as well as ordinary life situations. Additionally, they can be used for exploring a unique event or situation that was previously inaccessible to other researchers. Single-case studies can also be used as a tool for investigating the same phenomenon over various time periods (Yin, 2003). In the academic community, case studies are often criticized for their lack of rigor, for being too time consuming and resulting in unreadable documents, and for the difficulty of generalizing from a single case (Gerring, 2007; Hancock & Algozzine, 2011; Yin, 2003). Many counterarguments highlight that case studies are problem-centered and small scale focused (Gerring, 2007; Hancock & Algozzine, 2011; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). Also, the goal of case studies is to provide analytic or theoretical generalizations instead of statistical or large population generalizations (Gerring, 2007; Hancock & Algozzine, 2011; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003).
Sample

This case study examines a particular group of people and how they experience an honors education. Consequently, a purposeful sample was appropriate to systematically select and exclude subjects based on age, race/ethnicity, immigration status/citizenship, and honors enrollment status.

Participants

Originally, this study was limited to participants who identify as first-generation college students, immigrants/refugees, people of color, and current or former honors students. However, this proved to be a challenge because the researcher could not find one single student who fit all four categories. Thus, the researcher departed from the original qualifications parameters and extended this study to:

- Participants between 18 to 26 years of age
- Participants from immigrant and/or refugee backgrounds
- Participants who self-identify as first-generation college students
- Participants who self-identify as persons of color
- Participants who have completed at least one-semester in the honors college
- Participants who are currently enrolled in a degree-seeking university program on a part-time or full-time basis

By changing the language to “participants from immigrant and/or refugee backgrounds,” the researcher was able to extend eligibility to students who were born in the US. Allowing participants to self-identify and self-report information made the eligibility requirements less restrictive. For instance, among first-generation college students, the researcher was able to include students whose parent(s) may have acquired a college degree before migrating to the US.
Because honors programs are only available for undergraduate education, the researcher recruited both male and female undergraduate students. This also justifies the age limited for traditional undergraduate students who are in honors programs. As long as a candidate identified as a first-generation college student of color from an immigrant background in an honors program, they were eligible to take part in this study. The researcher did not turn anyone away who expressed interest in participating. All those who contacted the researcher were given the opportunity to interview and the researcher determined which candidates qualified as final participants based on the eligibility requirements. This approach proved to be beneficial in verifying information shared by students from the same honors program.

Some students were confused about the participation criteria and whether or not they had to meet all of the eligibility requirements. As a result, the researcher interviewed all those who contacted her to avoid turning away students who did not understand the project or the participation requirements without listening to their stories to learn more about their backgrounds. As such, the researcher conducted interviews with fifteen candidates and later eight of the candidates were determined as participants based on meeting all of the eligibility requirements. Nonetheless, three of the candidates had compelling stories that are extremely relevant and of value to this research. They cannot be listed as participants since they did not meet all of the participation requirements. Specifically, Daisy is an international student rather than a long-term resident of the US; Amina’s parents attended college in the US; and Par is part of a college honors organization rather than an established honors program. Therefore, the researcher included their stories in Appendix A to portray the influence of families, social class, schooling, and age of migration in shaping a student’s educational outcome. These stories also
expand on the grooming process involved and some common characteristics among honors students in US universities.

**Recruitment**

To find participants, the researcher compiled a database containing a list of public four-year universities with an honors program in Midwestern states. This data was gathered from publicly available online information. These universities must have more than 10,000 students (undergraduate and graduate) to increase the chances of finding diverse student populations. The recruitment database included emails and phone numbers of staff members at these institutions. Afterwards, the researcher called and emailed universities on this list (See Appendix C). The Consent Form (See Appendix B) was sent along with the recruitment email. Email was the primary form of communication to distribute information about this study, recruit candidates and answer any their questions about this thesis. The researcher contacted 83 honors programs at public four-year universities in 20 states: Wisconsin (5), Michigan (12), Ohio (11), Indiana (9), Illinois (11), Iowa (3), Missouri (10), Minnesota (7), Tennessee (2), Washington (1), Mississippi (2), Kentucky (1), South Carolina (2), Alabama (1), Texas (1), Georgia (1), Pennsylvania (1), West Virginia (1), Nebraska (1), and Arizona (1). All of the participants in this study attend public universities. One private school was contacted in an attempt to follow past research that was conducted at this private institution with a larger population of minority students in gifted programs (i.e. Anderson Goins, 2014; Harrison-Cook, 1999). However, no participation resulted from this institution.

The researcher also recruited participants on Facebook by sharing a post explaining the participation eligibility criteria and contact information for those who are interested in learning more, participating, or recommending someone. In total, the researcher contacted 84 schools
and two organizations (The Refugee Center Online and the National Society of Collegiate Scholars). The researcher contacted multiple staff members at each school to increase the chances of receiving a response. Unfortunately, out of 84 contacted universities, only 15 responded. Of the 15 schools, six universities were willing to share this study with current students. Six other universities responded to inform the researcher that they do not have the targeted population. Three schools declined sharing this research opportunity with their students because of a “No Outside Policy for External Emails” that prevented the honors program from sharing outside research with current students. Students were free to contact the researcher, if their honors program forwarded the recruitment email to all honors students. After being contacted by interested candidates, the researched emailed them a consent form that provides more information on the study (see Appendix B) and answered any questions or concerns before setting up an initial interview. They were asked to sign the consent form and email a scanned copy of the document.

Candidates were informed that interviews would last for at least 60 minutes and they would be carried out via Skype, phone, or other communication tools available. After interviewing all interested candidates, the researcher then selected final participants from candidates who met each eligibility criterion. Some participants were drawn to this study as the result of snowball sampling after being encouraged to participate by a peer, friend, or colleague. Participants were mailed a “Thank You” card and $10.00 in cash after completing the interviews as a token of appreciation for sharing their stories and time with the researcher.

Confidentiality

In order to protect the confidentiality of participants, the researcher did not plan to reveal the identity of participants in any way. Participants were invited to select a pseudonym of their
choice. For those with no pseudonym preference, the researcher assigned random names. A few participants elected to use their first names in which case the researcher honored their wishes. The first names were slightly modified to further protect the identity of participants. In published research, the researcher may quote participants (with pseudonyms) with their consent, and this is explicitly stated in the consent form (see Appendix B).

**Participant Profiles**

Table 1 provides full participant details as well as their assigned or elected pseudonyms. The researcher was contacted by sixteen interested students. However, some interested candidates did not respond to follow up emails to schedule interviews after initiating contact with the researcher. In the end, this study was narrowed down to a sample of eight, two of whom were males and six females. The youngest participants were 19 and the oldest participant was 24. The majority of students who contacted the researcher were Asian American students whose families migrated from South or Southeast Asia, and four of the eight final participants are Asian American students. The next largest group is comprised of three Latina/o students whose parents originated from Mexico. Only one participant originated from an African country.

Additionally, all of the socio-economic status (SES) information in Table 1 are self-reported. As a result, it is important to note that participant perception may not align with mainstream categorization of social classes. For example, participants were not asked to provide financial proof of family income to verify their self-reported socio-economic status. The researcher invited participants to share information about their parental educational level, reasons for migrating, and the resettlement process to gain a more complete image of the students’ background. These factors contribute to understanding a student’s social class and some of the challenges attached to each class.
Table 1 Self-Reported Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Year in School</th>
<th># of Parents</th>
<th>Parents SES before Migration</th>
<th>Parents SES after Migration</th>
<th>Ethnic Background</th>
<th>Country of Birth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Rudy</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Lak</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Upper class</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
<td>Sri Lankan</td>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Aisha</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Sophomore/Junior</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
<td>Lower class</td>
<td>Somali</td>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Quinn</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Upper Middle class (mother)</td>
<td>Upper Middle class</td>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Marie</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Lower class</td>
<td>Upper Middle class</td>
<td>Spanish &amp; Filipino</td>
<td>US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Katia</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Junior/Senior</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Lower class</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
<td>Mexican/Indigenous</td>
<td>US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Sara</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Lower class</td>
<td>Lower class</td>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Lisa</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Lower class</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>US</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 Parental Highest Level of Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Name</th>
<th>Father’s education level</th>
<th>Mother’s education level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Rudy</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Lak</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Aisha</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Elementary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Quinn</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Marie</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Katia</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Sara</td>
<td>Elementary School</td>
<td>High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Lisa</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>High School</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Collection

Data for this thesis were collected from semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with fifteen candidates. The interviews were used to investigate the context of the issue in depth and to produce data that explored emerging theories. Of the fifteen candidates, eight qualified as final participants (Lak, Rudy, Aisha, Katia, Sara, Lisa, Marie, Quinn). The purpose of interviewing was to understand, from the student’s point of view, how first-generation college students of color from immigrant backgrounds experience honors education in college. Originally, the researcher sought to conduct two interview sessions per participant. The first interview was to gather demographic information including place of birth, income, family migration motives, and K-12 experiences. This interview helped ease the participants into discussing their college experiences in interview two. During the second interview, participants were invited to share when they began thinking of college, their experiences with the college application and transition process, as well as their experiences being in an honors program.

Conducting two interview sessions per participant became challenging with the limited timeframe for completing this study. The researcher began recruiting and interviewing in January when most participants were on Winter Break or beginning Spring semester. After the first month of interviews, it became apparent that two separate interview sessions were unnecessary since most interviews lasted between 60 to 70 minutes in total, depending on the length of student responses. In addition, some participants could not commit to interviewing twice because of their busy schedules. Other participants were eager to interview and asked if we could conduct both interviews in one meeting. Subsequently, the researcher transitioned to conducting one in-depth interview with candidates instead of two separate interviews. This change did not compromise the quality of interviews or the information provided. Overall, eight candidates
participated in two interview sessions whereas seven candidates were interviewed in one session. Fourteen of the candidates were interviewed via Skype and Facebook video chat. One interview was conducted via email due to the participants limited availability.

During the interview process, the researcher sought to create a relaxed environment with each student so they would feel at ease sharing their educational experiences and the stories of their families. All interviews were audio recorded on two devices to maintain accuracy of the data being collected. All participants consented to being recorded and the recording did not begin until candidates indicated that they were ready to begin. The researcher used a semi-structured script to guide interviews with students (see Appendix D) and provided elaboration on certain topics when necessary. The researcher used Transcribe.wreally.com to transcribe interviews verbatim within a month of the data collection to prepare for a thorough review and analysis. Some participants asked the researcher to correct their grammar and edit their transcripts to develop more coherent thoughts. Final participants were asked to review their own interview transcripts and offer feedback on accuracy and interpretation. When necessary, the researcher emailed participants with follow up questions to clarify comments or statements after reviewing the transcripts.

**Data Analysis**

Bassey (1999) argues that case studies are unique because they have no fixed methods of data collection or data analysis. This particular study uses an explanation building approach to “explain” a phenomenon through descriptive reporting. Descriptive reporting includes vignettes and other writings that attempt to narrate an instance without the proper story line (Bassey, 1999). To analyze data, the researcher engaged in inductive and deductive reading of the scripts. During the inductive process, the researcher began reading to determine what common patterns
emerge from the data and what theory or theories could explain the data. Originally, the researcher intended to use Critical Race Theory as an appropriate framework to analyze data, however; the inductive reading made it clear that an alternative theory was necessary to explain the data. Many participants discussed how their college preparatory education prepared them for an honors education and the role of family engagement. During the interviews and inductive reading, it became evident that the data did not highlight race as a critical barrier to honors education for participants in this study. The crux of their honors preparation was rooted in access to quality high school education in the US. This access was tied to economic status and parental level of education. During the deductive reasoning process, the researcher reflected on the research questions posed and sought to extract some statements that answer these questions and sub-questions.

The researcher created a Microsoft Word file with different categories or codes that could later be sorted together depending on the connections. Included in these categories were demographic information provided by interviewees (e.g. Table 1). The demographic information provide a visual overview of the participant background and some of the common elements that play a role in joining honors (e.g. socio-economic status). Included in this Microsoft Word file were also interview responses in quotations that correspond to the study’s research questions and sub-questions. Seeing this made it easier to analyze responses. Furthermore, the researcher incorporated interview statements that were not part of the research questions or sub-questions but resulted in an emerging theme. For example, the interview guide did not ask participants to discuss the cultural value of their US schooling, however; during the inductive reading process, it became evident that a US education is vital to enrolling in an honors program. This approach was used to develop other themes and to organize data for the findings chapter.
Trustworthiness/Reliability

To overcome issues of reliability, the research protocol (i.e. interview procedure) documented and included in the appendix section to allow other investigators to replicate this study. Triangulation, member checking, ethical considerations, and the interview protocol were designed to enhance the reliability and trustworthiness of this qualitative case study.

**Triangulation.** Case studies require using multiple sources of evidence (e.g. interviews, observations, documents, artifacts, etc.) that support the unique phenomenon being studied (Gerring, 2007; Hancock & Algozzine, 2011; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). This improves the quality and reliability of a study (Yin, 2003). In this study, data were collected through interviews and an examination of available literature to confirm the emerging findings.

**Member checking.** Participants were asked to examine their interview transcripts and invited to make any necessary revisions for accuracy. In addition, the researcher was able to interview two or three students from each school that assisted with recruitment, and confirming shared aspects of their stories. Although not all of the interviewees qualified as final participants, their interviews still provided a consistent narrative and similar experiences as minority studies in honors education. For example, interviewees were not informed that the researcher was interviewing multiple students from their program. Still, interviewees from the same school were consistent in describing the admission process to their honors program, program demographics, program structure, graduation requirements, and relationship with faculty/staff. This allowed the researcher to confirm the final participant stories and the study’s findings.

**Ethical considerations.** The researcher did not discuss her personal or educational background with participants prior to the interviews. If participants were interested in learning
more about the researcher’s educational and immigrant background, this discussion was reserved for after the interviews were completed. All participants were treated with the same level of respect and professionalism during all interactions. Participants were informed of how the researcher planned to use the interview information and that their responses might be quoted directly or indirectly in the study under a pseudonym. Participants were made aware that they could skip questions, avoid discussing certain topics, or end participation at any time without penalty.

**Interview protocol.** The researcher completed an interview protocol document to guide data collection (see Appendix D). This guide outlined interview questions, verbal consent statement, and provided a reminder of the voluntary and confidential nature of this study. It can be used to replicate this study to test its reliability and trustworthiness.

**Study Limitations**

According to Arnold (2012), California, New York, Florida, Texas, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Illinois comprise 44% of the total US population, and have large foreign-born immigrant populations. Other than Illinois, no other Midwestern states targeted in this study are on the list. This limits the inclusion of a more diverse sample. Furthermore, the researcher could not afford travel expenses to conduct in-person interviews. Face-to-face interviews may have provided more opportunity to observe non-verbal communication that could have contributed to the data gathered. Moreover, the researcher was faced with time restrictions when recruiting participants, interviewing, and analyzing data. With more time and available resources, future research should perform outreach efforts in states with high foreign-born immigrant populations.

Data in this thesis offers a glimpse at the experiences of first-generation college students of immigrant backgrounds in honors education. As stated earlier, it is difficult to generalize
beyond the sample from a single case since case studies are problem-centered and small scale focused (Gerring, 2007; Hancock & Algozzine, 2011; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). Much like other case studies, the goal of this study is to provide analytic or theoretical generalizations instead of statistical or large population generalizations. Statements made by participants cannot be generalized or used to represent other students from the similar cultural or geographical backgrounds. Students from the same cultural background or geographical region do not always experience education the same way as evident in the literature review as well as the experiences of participants in this study.

Another limitation to data collection was that the researcher had to rely on students to initiate contact after receiving communication about this thesis from the honors program. This decreases the pool of potential participants because some students may not read communication from the honors college and some may feel hesitant about reaching out. In fact, some participants contacted the researcher weeks after their program emailed students because they typically dismiss mass emails that are sent out to a listserv. Another student recommended interviewing their colleague but this colleague was rather shy and so the researcher initiated contact after receiving their email address through their peer. The researcher may have been successful in reaching more participants if it was possible to email prospective participants individually. Because of the “No External Email” policy, few universities could share the research information with students meeting the research. Lack of students who meet any of the eligibility requirements was another limitation of this study.
CHAPTER IV. FINDINGS

The findings in this chapter include responses provided by participants during the one on one interviews. Their transcripts were rich and provided abundant data to analyze. The researcher contacted participants via email for further elaboration on key points. The findings in this chapter are organized into themes and sub-themes that emerged during the inductive and deductive data analysis process. The researcher extracted quotes from each of the transcripts to support codes that were later converted into larger themes and sub-themes. The layout of Chapter IV is as follows:

- Participant Profiles
- Honors Pipelining
  o The cultural value of US schooling
  o Navigating college applications
  o Perception of college
- Why Honors
  o Post-honors capital accumulation
- Belonging and Alienation
  o Fitting in
  o Feeling welcomed
  o Feeling alienated
- Failure is Not an Option
  o Standing out
  o Pressure to succeed
  o Parental engagement
• Being first-generation

• Forms of Capital
  - Economic
  - Temporal capital
  - Cultural capital

• Honors Typology

• Messages to Future Underrepresented Students
  - A message from Lak
  - A message from Katia
  - A message from Aisha
  - A message from Rudy
  - A message from Marie
  - A message from Quinn
  - A message from Sara

Participant Profiles

This section is a brief narrative review of the participant profiles outlined in Chapter III. The study contains eight final participants who identify as first-generation college students of color in honors programs across the US. All of the participants in this study identify as voluntary minorities or their parents were voluntary minorities. All of their families migrated to the US voluntarily in search of job or educational opportunities.

Rudy and Aisha attend the same honors program but they are a few years apart. Rudy was born in the US and shortly after his parents went to live in Mexico with his father’s family. Rudy comes from a middle-class family. After his parents divorced, he returned to the US to
complete his middle and high school education. He is now a graduating college senior. Aisha attends the same university as Rudy. She was born in Saudi Arabia then migrated to her homeland of Somali but because of the ongoing conflict her family left for Malaysia and then the US. She attended part of her high school education in the US and is now a college junior. Aisha’s family was middle class in Saudi Arabia but after finally migrating to the US, her family is now lower class.

Katia and Lisa attend the same Honors College but they are years apart. Katia’s parents are from Mexico but she was born in the US. She identifies as indigenous. Both of her parents attended school in the US. In Mexico, they were lower-class but after moving to the US her family is now middle class. Katia is a third-year student who is graduating a year early. Lisa is a freshman at the same Honors College as Katia. Her parents are from Vietnam but she was born in the US. Her parents hold no college diploma. In Vietnam, her family was lower class but they are now middle-class.

Lak was born in Sri Lanka but his family moved to the US when he was in kindergarten. His parents earned a bachelor’s degree in their homeland. They were an upper-class family in Sri Lanka but after moving to the US, his family is now middle-class. Lak is a graduating senior who is studying to be a doctor.

Marie is also studying to be a doctor. She was born in the US but her parents are Spanish and Filipino. They earned their bachelor’s degrees before migrating to the US. In the Philippines, Marie’s family was lower-class but they are now upper-middle-class in the US.

Quinn is also Filipino. She is a graduating senior who is studying to be a teacher. She was born in the US but her parents migrated from the Philippines where they earned their bachelor’s
degrees. Her family was upper-middle-class in the Philippines but today they are middle-class in the US.

Sara was born in the US to immigrant parents from Mexico. Her family was lower-class in Mexico and they are also lower-class in the US. Sara is studying Spanish and American Sign Language. She is a part-time student and fifth year senior. She was the only participant in this study to withdraw from the Honors College after her first year.

**Honors Pipelining**

Participants were invited to share any precollege experiences that influenced their preparation for and persistence in the Honors College. They were asked to describe their college application and transition process. The following findings under the theme *Honors Pipelining* focus on how first-generation college students of color from immigrant backgrounds prepare for an honors education.

**Table 3 AP/IB and Honors Courses Taken in High School**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th># of AP courses</th>
<th>IB Courses Taken</th>
<th>Honors/advanced courses taken</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Rudy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Lak</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Aisha</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Quinn</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Marie</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Katia</td>
<td>5+</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Sara</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Lisa</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Cultural Value of US Schooling

As noted earlier in the literature review chapter, schools reproduce existing social inequalities. The US educational system is designed to endorse and legitimize class distinctions as if they are the product of differing innate intelligence rather than differing socioeconomic conditions (Gaddis, 2013; Kanno & Varghese, 2010; Kosut, 2006; Robbins, 2000). For many participants, attending K-12 in the US—especially high school—played a key role in their enrollment in an honors program. Lak provides a good example of how important it is to attend school in the US formal education in the US. He explained that:

I think one of the biggest things—being an immigrant—in our school district a lot of the students were already there. Pretty much—basically—every high school student in America at a really good school would finish Calculus. That’s like senior year. And I did that. But well over half of my graduating class was already in BC Calculus [second and third semester calculus]. The way our school sped people up was—[it] started in elementary [school]—if you had the money to get private tutoring that was not provided by the school, you had a much greater advantage and you were pushed a lot harder in sixth grade. You’re already taking eighth grade math so when you go to ninth grade, you’re taking 10th [grade] honors or 11th [grade] basic math.

Lak is not the only one to draw attention to the influential role of US schooling. His statement makes it clear that a US schooling is valuable and privileged students are “sped up” or groomed for academic success as early as elementary school. All of the participants in this study completed their high school education in the US. As shown in Table 3, almost all of the participants were able to take honors courses, as well as AP/IB courses. Some of the participants’ high schools only provided an honors or AP track. To illustrate, Katia shared that all courses at
her college preparatory high school were either honors or AP courses. Students at her school were required to take AP biology, chemistry, physics, among other courses. However, taking the AP exam was optional since it is expensive for some students. Katia explained that in terms of paying for extracurricular activities (e.g. paying AP exam fees) it was much more difficult for her compared to some of her classmates. A lot of times she sought fee waiver opportunities but most of the time her family had to make sacrifices to save money.

Many factors make applicants seem more prepared for an honors education and therefore more desirable for recruitment and admission. For example, in this study, Grade Point Average (GPA), taking advanced courses (e.g. AP, IB, honors, etc.), and test scores from the American College Testing (ACT) or Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) were key features for being invited or encouraged to join honors during the college application process. To illustrate, Quinn explained that when she was applying to the Honors College, she had a 28 on the ACT but the GPA required was still very high. Quinn added that “you have to be able to write pretty well too, so English was a big factor because we had to do an essay.” At Quinn’s university, the honors admission requirements are increasing, for example, newer students are now required to have a 30 or 32 on their ACT and close to a 4.000 GPA. Unfortunately, not all immigrant students are able to attend and/or graduate from high school in the US. Not many are afforded the opportunity to attend a high-performing school or the necessary academic support to prepare them for college. As Rudy points out:

I was fortunate to at least graduate high school from here but there's many that don't and if they can't provide them with a transcript in English, it's not possible for them to come to the honors program. If they can't provide a letter of recommendation, it's not possible.
there needs to be more flexibility, you need to talk to someone that’s interested and help them with the process and waive or go around some stuff.

Although requirements vary across US colleges and universities, some requirements are more common: educational credentials, recommendation letters, a personal statement, and standardized test scores. College applicants are typically required to submit original or officially-certified copies of academic records for their high school education (EducationUSA, n.d.). Applicants must also submit recommendation letters from individuals who can articulate their work and potential to succeed in college (EducationUSA, n.d.). Most colleges require students to complete a personal statement detailing any relevant experiences and qualities that would make applicants a suitable match for the university (EducationUSA, n.d.). Moreover, ACT or SAT test scores are typically required to assess an applicant’s academic ability and English proficiency, as reported by EducationUSA for those who are interested in studying in the US.

Aisha was the only participant who enrolled in no honors, AP, or IB courses. Of all the participants, she completed the least of her schooling in the US and her family was the only family to migrate to the US involuntarily because of the political turmoil in Somalia. As previously mentioned, because of her family’s constant migration, Aisha skipped several grade levels and was sometimes placed in a classroom based on her age even when her content knowledge did not match the associated grade level. Aisha opted out of taking any honors or AP courses because she heard that they were difficult. During a follow-up email, she explained that some of the AP courses would have required her to travel to the local university but she did not have the time or transportation. Furthermore, Aisha noted that the majority of students in honors courses were white. There were no minority students that she knew or saw in AP courses which
provided her with little motivation and reassurance. In addition, Aisha’s family was new to the area, and were still settling in and adjusting to US culture.

Originally, Aisha’s family wanted their children to attend a private school that was more culturally welcoming. Her parents did not want her to attend a crowded public school. They feared these schools would not align with their cultural and religious values. Consequently, for the first three years of high school, Aisha attended a small charter school that was predominantly Somali. However, her family relocated leaving her with no choice but to enroll in a public school that was nearby. Aisha reported that the school had only two Hispanic students and three Somali students, the rest were white. This was a major change for her and it took time to adjust. For Aisha, the white teachers at her public school were less encouraging when it came to pushing her to take honors or AP courses.

**High School Engagement.** Participants were asked about their high school extracurricular activities. As seen in Table 4, all participants were involved at least three activities. The table only reflects involvements that participants could recall during the interviews. The high level of engagement speaks to the type of students who enroll in honors. Halpern (2005) argues that extra-curricular activities assist students in developing social networks and skills that may be converted into social capital. In this study, the high involvement of participants during high school made them stand out as leaders, learners, and driven individuals who manage multiple commitments. However, these commitments require money, time, or transportation. For example, Lak was part of a private soccer club. He was learning about leadership, team work, networking, adaptability, independence, communication, among other skills. His family was willing to pay the membership fee for this private club because the
goal was to play soccer in college to finance his studies. It was an investment for them. However, few marginalized students can afford those experiences.

As noted previously, Aisha was the only participant with limited formal schooling in the US and the only one who did not enroll in honors or AP courses during high school. She was the only student to participate in only three extracurricular activities, and for a short period of time. She joined Girl Scouts for some time which allowed her to tour a local university. She only participated in robotics for a few weeks before leaving. Her longest commitment was with the Islamic School in her community. She attended with her siblings and takes great pride in being able to memorize the Quran. This is a celebrated achievement for her, her family, and her community. Compared to other students, Aisha was the least involved but it was because she was new and still adjusting to life in the US. Her educational experiences and limited involvement are similar to Par’s experiences when he was first adjusting to life in the US.

Table 4 illustrates some places where Honors Colleges may find marginalized students. The majority of participants were involved in religious groups or local organizations that attract young students who are looking for service opportunities. Some of the newly arrived immigrant or refugee students may be found in local safe spaces, for example, resettlement organizations that provide after school programming.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Rudy</td>
<td>Soccer, football, guitar, theater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Lak</td>
<td>Soccer, marching band, concert band, pep band</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Aisha</td>
<td>Girl Scout, robotics, Islamic school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Quinn</td>
<td>Marching band, flute, track, half marathons, workout club, National Honors Society, church youth group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Marie</td>
<td>Track, volleyball, theater, student government, speech competitions, chess, diversity club, campus ministry, church youth group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Katia</td>
<td>Library volunteer, Sunday school, Girl Scouts, band, part-time work, internship, library youth leadership program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Sara</td>
<td>Student government, culture club, math tutor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Lisa</td>
<td>Tennis, debate team, music lessons, museum volunteer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Navigating College Applications

Many of the participants in this study began thinking about college as early as ninth grade. For example, Marie, whose parents are from the Philippines, said she has always been thinking about college because her parents always stressed the importance of getting an education. As a result, she always knew that she was going to college to further her education. In ninth grade, Marie began to seriously consider which college she wanted to attend and what field of student would best suit her interests. Lak, too, began thinking of college in the ninth grade. However, his motivations differed from Marie’s. Lak credits the college preparation programs at his high school for forcing him to think about college starting freshman year. His guidance counselors assisted him with the college application every step of the way. His older sister also attended university in the US and helped him with the college application process. Lak is currently completing his bachelor’s degree at his sister’s alma mater.

Katia began thinking about college during her sophomore or junior year of high school because she attended a college preparatory high school. Her parents also played an important role in reminding her research and prepare for the college application. Katia applied for the Quest Bridge Program which provides financial support to students who apply to a specific number of universities. She received fee waivers for college applications through Quest Bridge and did not have to pay for any college application fees. Katia’s parents encouraged her to apply for scholarships, especially Hispanic scholarship funds and any first-generation scholarships. She received a lot of support from her high school counselors who held college information sessions about the Common App and how to submit the best applications. Katia applied to four Ivy League schools because she was always encouraged by her family to aim high and to apply to any colleges for which she qualified. She had confidence in her grades and test scores so she
applied to them and her parents reassured her that they will find a way to finance it. Katia is not the only participant who applied to Ivy Leagues. Marie, Quinn, and Lak also applied to Ivy Leagues or prestigious universities because they were taught by parents and teachers to have confidence in their academic abilities and to aim high. Their confidence and self-assurance relates back to Kosut’s theories on social class and educational outcome. As Kosut (2006) noted, lower-income students tend lack self-confidence because they are typically under-prepared and lack cultural capital. This is applicable to many marginalized groups of students who lack cognitive capital when it comes to feeling confident and comfortable within academic settings. Students who attend academically rigorous schools learn to think creatively, critically, challenge authority or information based on reason. Their schooling breeds students with desirable Honors College characteristics.

Five out of the eight participants in this study began considering college fairly late. Lisa began thinking of college her senior year of mainly because her peers were talking about college applications and deadlines. Her peers were talking about all different types of colleges that they or their parents wanted them to attend. Not surprisingly, Lisa began thinking about college too. Her college advisor assisted her with searching for scholarships. Her school required parents and students to meet with a college advisor to discuss college options for the student. So, Lisa met with her high school college advisor and her parents together, and separately.

Quinn recalls thinking about college the summer before her senior year of high school. She only thought about it when realizing that she was graduating soon and was not sure what to do next. Her parents, teachers, and guidance counselors were encouraging and helped every step of the way. Rudy, too, began thinking of college fairly late. In fact, toward the end of high school, Rudy’s mother began considering pursuing her bachelor’s degree. As a result, he and his
mother encouraged each other and applied to college together. Rudy’s college advisor offered him resources to find the right school and a suitable financial aid package. Rudy and his mother visited the schools he was considering. They talked to the admissions departments, went on campus tours, and explored the options for financial aid based on Rudy’s academic performance and financial need.

Sara and Aisha’s circumstances were different. Sara explained that:

Growing up I actually had a disability where I was in a wheel chair for about four or five years of my childhood. I still have a disability now but I had surgery to regulate it. Before that, I needed to get into college to do something with my life because I can't really do anything physical with work wise. It'd be smart to do something so I thought if I get into college I can be smart and be somebody.

For Sara, college was the next logical step if she wished to do something meaningful with her life. After her surgery, Sara began thinking a lot more about college. It became more realistic and she saw college as an opportunity to start fresh. She wanted to have a new persona, a new chapter. She and her mother went to a FAFSA seminar at a local college because they had no idea what it was about. As a first-generation college student, she struggled with applying to college and understanding the different steps that were required of her. For instance, she described how confusing it was for her parents to sign the housing contract since their English proficiency is limited and the concept of housing contracts was foreign to them.

Aisha was in a similar position. She had little support in navigating the college application process once she transferred from the Somali charter school to a nearly all-white high school. She explained that she went through the application process all by herself. Her school had only one guidance counselor and he was often busy serving nearly 200 students. He did not
have time and was no help to her. For example, she reflected on how difficult of a process it was for him to even send high school transcripts when she requested them several times. She recalled trying her best to understand the confusing process and documents that she needed to complete. Her father stepped in to help once she was admitted and needed help traveling to the local university for orientation.

**Perception of College**

Participants were asked to describe their thoughts and feelings on college before starting. This helps with understanding how first-generation college students of immigrant backgrounds see college. It uncovers any common expectations or misconceptions as well as gauges how prepared participants felt based on their perception of college. For instance, Sara, Lisa, and Katia thought college was what they saw in the movies: glamour, meeting new people, and independence. Before starting college, Sara was in a wheelchair for several years. She underwent a corrective surgery that allowed her to walk. After her surgery, Sara became excited at the possibility of attending college and starting a new chapter in her life where people did not know that she was disabled. She wanted people to befriend her for who she is rather than because of knowing that she was in a wheelchair for several years because of a medical condition.

Lak feared that college would be academically challenging. He explained, “I didn't feel like I was prepared in high school even though our high school was a blue ribbon high school. I didn't think I was adequately prepared.” Rudy’s perception of college is parallel to Lak’s. He also feared college would be extremely difficult, especially as a science major. He was unsure of being able to work and study. As he reflected, “I was just worried because I was not sure about anything. I did not have that many expectations. I was like, ‘Okay, I'm just gonna start, I'm gonna take it semester by semester, and I know I'll get through one way or another.’”
Marie did not expect college to be academically challenging. She felt prepared. However, she described how her first semester was a wake-up call when her perceptions of college collided with reality. She had a hard time adjusting, absorbing information at a faster pace, and studying. Marie’s perception of college was highly influenced by her school and parents. The majority of participants in this study attended college preparatory high schools and had parents who were really involved in their educational success.

Aisha and Sara come from a different educational and familial background which explains their divergent perception of college. For example, Aisha was asked to describe how she imagined college to be while in high school. Her response was:

I thought it was going to be so, so difficult. I thought only smart people can go to college. Let's say we have high school students [at a random school] and only 10% would go to college. They would be able to go there and graduate, so my thought was that it was going to be really, really difficult but I was wrong, it's not that difficult. You study. my thought was that you wouldn't ever succeed. College's only for smart people with 4.0 GPAs. So, that's what I told myself but I get there and it was okay.

Unfortunately, Aisha’s perception of college is common among many recent immigrants and refugees who know little about college. Kosut (2006) explains how because of her limited experiential knowledge, she imagined college professors as “brilliant godlike individuals who achieved their lofty positions based on innate intelligence” (p. 254). This made her impressed and simultaneously intimidated. Kosut’s experience as a student is true for many marginalized students like Aisha and Sara who viewed college as intimidating and restricted to those with “innate intelligence.”

Sara echoes this sentiment. She explains:
I always thought it was the hardest thing to do [going to college]. I didn't know anybody who had gone to college. That was something that was hard that I wanted to achieve and I worked really hard. I did a lot of clubs, tried getting all As. I thought getting into college was really hard. It's obviously not hard getting into college than staying in college.

Given the participants’ ideas about university education, an honors education seems even more remote for many under-represented students because of its rigor and associated costs. Students may feel under-prepared or inadequate as Lak discussed earlier. Some may fear having to finance honors courses that may not even count towards their immediate degree. Others may fear feeling out of place or alienated.

**Why Honors**

Participants were asked to discuss their motivations and aspirations for joining the honors program at their universities. For many participants, being encouraged or asked to join the Honors College by a specific individual or program staff played a key role in joining honors. For some students, joining the honors program was a natural next step or an obligation based on their educational and familial background. For others, joining the Honors College was a way to tap into limited resources and privileges.

Rudy received a formal invitation from the honors program when he received his admissions letter to the university. His invitation explained the benefits to joining honors and why he was automatically accepted. He thought of honors as a great opportunity to advance his education and celebrate his achievement. He was proud to receive the invitation and was thrilled to join honors. Sara was also approached by her university’s Honors College. They called several times to extend a formal invitation. She was annoyed at first and finally answered their calls. The
staff member explained to her the benefits of an honors education and she was interested so she informed them of her acceptance.

Lisa, Katia, and Aisha did not receive formal invitations but were encouraged to join the honors program by a college advisor and college professor. Lisa and Katia were not considering the Honors College until their high school counselors encouraged them to apply. Aisha was already in college when she was encouraged to join honors. She recalled taking a communications disorder class where her professor asked students to write an interesting fact about themselves during introductions on the first day of class. Aisha wrote that she speaks three languages and later her professor contacted her asking if she would be interested in working for a language research project between the university and the local community. The professor also commended Aisha for being a good student with outstanding grades. She encouraged Aisha to apply to the honors program and to highlight being involved in this research project on her application. So, Aisha applied to the honors program and was accepted. She credits her communications professor for seeing potential in her and inspiring her to join.

Quinn and Marie joined out of duty. Quinn explained that she was in a lot of honors organizations in high school and took AP classes “so it's only first nature for me to join an honors program.” Marie explained that being in honors felt like “a requirement or a necessity in my family just to make my family proud and to show them that all their hard work wasn't for nothing. So, I felt that being part of the Honors College is almost required of me.” Contrarily, Lak joined the honors college after observing the benefits his friends were enjoying. He explained that:

… all my friends are in it and they had a lot more opportunity than me….there are specific research opportunities only available to honors students. No one else is allowed.
Nobody knows and if they know, they won't be able to apply because they're not an honors student. Plus, you get a full team of advisors...you get money for doing these kinds of projects. They can fund your whole experiential-learning project. You can get funding up to like $2,000 and you can study abroad but I wasn't that interested in studying abroad. All my friends are doing it. I looked at the advantage and you can graduate with honors that other people can't and they just look good on paper.

Lak transferred into the honors program after starting college. His decision was influenced by peers and it was also strategic because he is interested in enjoying these limited opportunities and privileges that honors students are awarded. Lak further elaborated on how being in honors gives him more confidence, more credibility with professors and peers, more respected, and even makes him look better to other students which is important for his leadership.

At the surface, many of the participants see priority registration, smaller-class sizes, funding, and recognition as reasons to join an honors program. However, as participants continued describing their reasons for joining the honors program and what they enjoy about it, their continued enrollment seems to be fuel by pride, a sense of duty, and the desire to tap into restricted opportunities.

Post-Honors Capital Accumulation

Capital accumulation after graduation explores the relevant and convertible knowledge and skills transmitted to students through an honors education. Participants were asked to describe their how they plan to use their honors education after graduation. They were invited to share their hopes and expectations for an honors degree. The majority of participants hoped their honors education will aid with symbolic and/or cultural capital accumulation. To review, symbolic capital is concerned with honor, reputation, and dignity (Fowler, 1997). It represents
status and prestige and bestows legitimacy and authority upon its holders (Bourdieu, 2007; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2013; Greenspan, 2014; Harker et al., 1990; Kanno & Varghese, 2010). Cultural capital is concerned with highly valued knowledge and educational qualifications (Kanno & Varghese, 2010). It is linked to economic capital (money and property), symbolic capital (status and legitimacy), and social capital (networks and connections) (Harker et al., 1990; Kannon & Varghese, 2010).

Cultural capital is convertible into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational credentials (e.g. certificates and diplomas) (Bourdieu, 2007). In industrial societies, cultural capital describes “socially legitimated knowledge of how the production process works, its financial, managerial, technical, or other ‘secrets’” (Anyon, 1980, p. 69). It can also be represented by socially legitimated skills such as cognitive or analytical, linguistic, or technical skills that allow individuals to manage the systems of industrial and cultural production (Anyon, 1980). Strategical employment of cultural capital can expand one’s social and cultural capital as well as economic capital (Anyon, 1980). Students acquire cultural capital at school by sharpening their linguistic, artistic, and scientific skills (Anyon, 1980). Many participants in this study, explicitly and implicitly expressed interest in institutionalized cultural capital which grants them with legal recognition of cultural competence and professional qualifications.

After graduation, Lak hopes his honors education will show future employers that he is knowledgeable and capable of writing proposals and delivering a final product. Lisa hopes it will give her a “leg up” or make her look better in whichever industry she decides to join. Aisha expects her honors education to enhance her resume. She explained that her program focuses on leadership, global citizenship, and research. For Aisha, this can make her a better team player, better communicator, and better leader. Similarly, Katia and Lisa credit the honors program for
teaching them to think critically and analyze issues. Lisa hopes her future employers will see something unique about her based on her honors experience and the knowledge she accumulated by being in the Honors College. Along the same lines, Katia hopes her honors education will offer her a head start when competing for jobs because she is already capable of conducting and presenting research. Her honors degree can also help her with applying to graduate school or law school. She hopes the admissions committee will be impressed or see value in her honors experience. Katia discussed how there is a lot of prestige in being part of the Honors College and how it is something that people recognize. In fact, she states that “it is something good that everyone should strive for…it's something I didn't realize. I just applied to the Honors College and I got in but people do see it as a mark of prestige….”

For Rudy, being in honors is great preparation for a demanding career in science where he will be expected of go the extra mile and juggle multiple roles. Most importantly, the honors program is offering Rudy valuable first-hand knowledge because he is interested in being a professor. He described how the honors program is teaching him to be comfortable and to excel in academic settings. It is also teaching him to grow more comfortable explaining academic concepts. It is expanding on his academic values and providing him with guidance and great resources. All of this allows Rudy to gain a better idea of the type of professor he wishes to be.

For Marie, the honors program has taught her how much she is capable of managing and achieving. She noted that:

Being part of the Honors College with the extra assignments, extra projects and things like that, just showed me how much I'm capable of…. I can apply that to different things that I'm going into, whether it's other projects down to road or things that I want to be a part of.
Failure Is Not an Option

Participants in this study expressed feeling intense pressure to do well in school and to be seen as high achievers. For many, there did not seem to be any room for things to go wrong. Failure was associated with not going above and beyond in academics, receiving poor grades as discussed by Marie, and not taking advantage of available educational opportunities (e.g. AP, honors, research, conferences, etc.). Many of the participants described standing out during their K-12 education for not speaking English, for being religious and/or ethnic minorities. For example, Aisha described being a triple minority and having to work extremely hard because failure was no option. For many participants, their experiences of being marginalized coupled with parental pressure provided an informal grooming process for honors. Students like Katia did not want to be part of the statistics on minorities who drop out of high school and never make it to college. Some participants carry the memory of their parents struggling in their homeland as motivation to join honors and stay in honors. Overall, participants discussed the social pressure to succeed because they stand out as minority students and pressure to succeed because of their family backgrounds.

Standing Out

Throughout the interviews, various participants commented on how they stood out during their K-12 experiences in the US. Participants described standing out as an advantage and a disadvantage. For instance, Lak recounted how different he felt attending a predominantly white public school. He noted that, “I’m Buddhist and there was nobody else that was Buddhist so that was interesting. Just having a different name than everyone because everyone had just really basic names and it’s just a different experience growing up.” Lak’s high school was nearly 98% White with very few minority students.
For Marie, “standing out,” meant that no matter how hard she tried to emulate her peers, she still felt alienated. She shared that “I always felt like I never really fit in just because of what I look like.” Not only that but Marie felt culturally torn because her family traditions and customs were not as accepted at school. She enjoys being number one or being the best which is something that her parents instilled in her. They taught her to always do her best and try to be the best. They wanted her to stand out in an advantageous way, but she was bullied for standing out. She explained that:

Even if it wasn't outright bullying, being purposefully left out of things. It was more apparent [in high school] than in elementary and middle school where kids would call me names and make fun of me just because of what I looked like but then as I got into high school—nine through twelfth grade—it wasn't kids calling me names but just not including me in things that were going on and that hurts a lot because I can't change the way I look.

For Katia, “standing out” meant speaking Spanish as her first language and being the only one or one of very few students who spoke Spanish in elementary school. She did not learn English until she started attending school. She was placed in a bilingual classroom and some teachers thought she needed remedial classes. However, once Katia learned English, she tested into the Gifted and Academically Talented (GATE) program at her school which served 8% of the state’s gifted and advanced learners. She no longer stood out for needing remediation but rather for being a gifted student.

Similar to Katia, Rudy experienced a language barrier at the beginning of his US schooling. He attended part of his K-12 education in Mexico before moving back to the US with his mother. When he enrolled in middle school, he struggled with translating certain concepts
that he learned in Spanish. He explained that it took time and effort to catch up with his peers. He read extra materials to keep up with his native-speaker counterparts, he participated in after school tutoring, and completed a language intensive course for English. In return, this experience taught him to be resourceful and to look for things that he did not know. Lisa, too, experienced language difficulties like Katia and Rudy. Growing up her parents did not know English very well so she learned Vietnamese as her first language. From kindergarten to approximately third grade, she struggled with fitting in because she could not understand what the teacher was saying or what her peers were saying. She discussed how “it was really hard to make friends just because of that language barrier and also I wasn’t able to connect with other kids as well when I was younger.”

Like Rudy, Aisha found it difficult to adapt to schooling in the US when she first arrived. For example, she clarified that:

I didn’t even know Algebra existed and I skipped many education years of elementary school. Meaning, I was in the level of 5th grade when I came here and I was 15 also. So, they put me in high school as freshman. Everything was hard. However, after six months, I improved so much in school and I was the top ten honor students in my high school. Many teachers were amazed by my extreme significant improvement in school and that was an experience that still shapes me today and still stands out.

For Aisha, lack of content knowledge and skipping grades were only a few of the issues she encountered. She discussed her lack of linguistic capital when first she arrived in the US. She barely spoke English and only knew “How are you?” and “Thank you.” This made high school challenging for Aisha, especially in English classes where she had to read Hamlet and other literature pieces using Early Modern English. Before migrating to the US, she described her
educational experiences as being confusing because of how often her family moved. She had to learn many languages and adapt to many school cultures. This had a negative effect on her academic performance in school as she was constantly resettling and skipping grades without an opportunity to revisit the content knowledge she missed.

For Quinn, as a Filipino American, “standing out” meant trying to uphold the “model minority” stereotype for Asian students. She was expected to be smart and excel in school, which she does. Although she was the only Asian student in many schools or sometimes in the entire school, she expressed how fortunate she is to have grown up in multiple states and to have attended accepting, progressive schools. Much like Quinn, Sara lived in a diverse city where her school had Chinese, Hispanic, and White students, so she did not report feeling left out based on her race, ethnicity, or cultural background.

**Pressure to Succeed**

Throughout the interviews, participants were asked if they feel any pressure to succeed in the honors college because there are not many first generation, immigrant/refugee students of color in their programs. As a result, many participants described feeling pressured to succeed because of their intersecting underrepresented identities. Many pointed out that they had to prove others wrong and there was no room to make mistakes.

Aisha draws attention to how as a Muslim woman of color, she’s a “triple minority.” She had to work harder to achieve things. Quinn feels a similar way and argued that there is a lot of pressure to succeed as a student of color, as the child of immigrants, and as a woman in science. She sees this as an opportunity to be more inclusive and inviting of marginalized students in privileged spaces like honors education or STEM fields.
For example, Katia described having a teacher who did not think she would go as far as high school but she was able to prove her teacher wrong. As a result, some teachers did not bother with encouraging their Latina/o students to pursue or think about college because they automatically assumed these students are going to drop out. Katia enrolled in a college preparatory high school, and did not fully understand her teacher’s lack of faith until later in college while doing research on youth of color in different high schools. She found out that because she is a first-generation student and a Latina, all the statistics expected her to drop out somewhere between 8th grade and high school. She noted that:

I saw so many students in high school that were taking things for granted but [for] me knowing that I had to work hard in order to get here motivated me not only to try and be better than them but also to succeed in ways that they didn't expect me to do and in college as well. I didn't want to let my family down and I also wanted to make their lives better because once I graduate, hopefully, I can find an actual job that gives me an actual salary and that can help me give back to my family as well and help my sister and her college education.

Similarly, Marie suggested that based on current socio-political events, people of color are looked down upon or not taken seriously as other ethnicities and races. This only motivates her to “work harder to prove to other people that we [people of color] can be just as good, we're even better, we deserve to be treated equally as everybody else.” In addition to socio-cultural and political events, Marie’s parents always stressed going above and beyond in education. Not surprisingly, she felt obliged to enroll in the honors program. As a student of color and the child of immigrants, Marie felt that she had a lot to prove as opposed to students whose families have been in the US for years, decades, or centuries. She articulated that:
For me, I felt that was a requirement or a necessity in my family just to make my family proud and to show them that all their hard work wasn't for nothing. So I felt that being part of the Honors College is almost required of me. Of course, you're going to go to college and be part of the best programs out there, always do well because there isn't enough room for me to make mistakes.

Marie always remembers where parents came from, their socioeconomic background and how much harder she has to work to make her parents proud. She explained that she would feel great guilt if her parents moved across the world only to have one of their children underperform in school.

Like Marie, Sara wanted to go to college to make her parents proud. She wanted to show others that not only is she smart but she can also graduate with an honors degree. Likewise, Lak also fears disappointing his parents. He recognizes that even though he did not grow up with as many opportunities as his privileged peers, he still takes great pride in the achievements because not only is he in the Honors College, but he will also be graduating in the top of the Honors College as a Distinguished Scholar.

Rudy, on the other hand, feels pressured to succeed because the honors program is competitive. He pressures himself because he believes that he has already invested so much money in his honors education and the honors program has also invested so many resources on him. For this, he feels the need to work extremely hard and provide the best outcome.

Parental Engagement

During the interviews, many participants discussed the influential role their parents played in preparing them for college and an honors education. For instance, Katia began thinking about college as early sophomore or junior year of high school because she attended a college
preparatory high school that constantly reminded students about college. Her parents also played an important role in reminding to apply for college. Katia’s parents encouraged her to apply for scholarships, especially Hispanic scholarship funds and any first-generation scholarships. Katia applied to four Ivy League schools because she was encouraged by her family to aim high and to apply to any colleges for which she qualified. She had confidence in her grades and test scores so she applied to them and her parents reassured her that they will find a way to finance it. Katia explained that:

I did really well in school and that was partially because my parents double checked my homework. They would answer any questions that I had and they would always make sure that I did it. They would always make sure that I did my homework and turned it in the next day.

Unfortunately, once Katia began high school, her parents stopped helping her with homework because the subjects grew more difficult and unfamiliar to them. For example, they have never taken trigonometry, physics, or calculus so for most of high school Katia was on her own. Similar to Katia, Quinn reflected on how grateful she is to have had a family pushing for academic success. Her parents were the first in their families to go to college. This is why they taught Quinn and her brother to value education and academic success.

Rudy’s mother believes that for most jobs nowadays, you need a minimum of an undergraduate degree. As a result, she instructed Rudy to go to college immediately after high school. The two of them started college together. Rudy explained that “we were both in that together. We both were like ‘Huh. Let's look into it [college]. Let's see if it's not going to be super expensive, if we can manage doing that and working at the same time.’” Thus, Rudy and his mother began the college application process together. It was a new process for both of them.
They gathered their questions and concerns and reached out to colleges. They went on tours together. They spoke to admissions and financial aid staff together. Rudy praises his mother’s engaged and explained that “because of her being there to support me and her, we got through to come to college.”

Marie, too, praises her parents for being involved in her education. She reflected on how confusing it was to decide on a college and discipline. After she told her parents that she wanted to become a doctor, they began to offer more specific guidance. They encouraged her to look for a school with a quality Pre-Med track. They instructed Marie to look for educational opportunities for Pre-Med students that can help build her resume. Marie’s parents paid all application fees as a way of supporting their daughter. They encouraged her to look for less expensive programs and schools because she will have to pay a lot of money for medical school.

Unlike most participants, Sara felt alone in her educational journey. Her father completed middle school and her mother is currently pursuing her GED. She explained that when she came to college, her parents supported her but did not really give her any advice on college because they did not know anything about college. Overall, her parents’ lack of experientialknowledge and familiarity with US schooling limits their ability to be involved in her education.

**Being First-Generation**

Interviewees were invited to share what it means to be a first-generation college student to them. In their responses, participants highlighted many challenges that they faced because of their first-generation college student status. They were also asked to describe how they feel their honors experience compares to the experiences of those who are not first-generation college students. In response, Aisha noted that immigrant students are more vulnerable and more likely to drop out of college when compared to their non-immigrant or non-first-generation
counterparts. She explained that first-generation college students, including immigrant and refugee students, are met with many challenges that they tackle on their own because their families cannot understand or empathize with their experiences. These students also have few, weak, or unstable support systems and necessary resources.

For Aisha, starting college was much like starting high school in the US: everything was new. She had to adapt to a new school system and culture which was difficult as she admits. Classes were happening at a fast pace and the tests were different as she recalled. However, because of her experiences moving from one country to another, Aisha was accustomed to change. As a first-generation college student and immigrant student, she wished she had connections with current college students who could have offered her tips and advice on which professors and which classes to avoid. She described taking first-year chemistry and getting a B in the class instead of an A. She wished she had connections with other students who could have warned her about the professor or provided her tips on surviving the class. For immigrant, first-generation college students, Aisha leaves a message that:

You might not know much about American culture but you learn every day. Sometimes, you might feel like you don't know a lot but you have to have the confidence to learn. Being a student of color, sometimes it can be 10 times the responsibility and courage, especially during a lecture where you're the only person in class—sometimes I have a lecture class, it's like 200 students and I would only see myself as a student of color… you're a minority and it feels that way. When you get connections with mentor groups and services that help you, you understand yourself more and you have a different experience to share. You went through a lot of stuff but made it. You worked so hard to be where you are.
Indeed, many of the participants admitted to working very hard to reach honors programs. Many credited their parents for their achievements. Katia praised her parents for being highly involved in her education and academic success. However, she recalled how her parent were unable to help her as she transitioned to high school and college. She also reported studying a lot more than her other peers when it came to preparing for the SAT or the ACT. Katia described how her family could not afford a tutor or any preparation courses. Her parents found study manuals so she could prepare for the SAT and ACT exams. She retold how some of her peers bragged about their high SAT scores and how their parents were lawyers and doctors. She could not relate to their stories or experiences. It was during those moments that she began noticing educational differences based on social class and her parents immigrant backgrounds. Nevertheless, because Katia was enrolled in a college preparatory school and many AP courses, she was expanded her cultural capital which helped her with adjusting to college.

As a first-generation college student, Katia’s family was unsure of what to expect from college. She explained that this is “something that’s only relatable to first-generation students. You also have this large amount of pressure: your parents are working really hard to put you through this so you don’t want to fail them because it’s an opportunity that very few people get.” Sara was told similar things: go to college. However, without her school’s help, she was unsure how she would ever make it to college. She explained that she received little guidance, completed most of the applications on her own, never thought about researching or touring any schools. Sara reflected on how absurd she sounds to her old-self because no one told her to tour college campuses or research schools. She was simply expected to go to college. Sara wished she knew that it is not hard to get into college so she could have stressed less about college
acceptance. She wishes that someone told her it would be harder to stay in college rather than getting admitted. She also wishes she knew what classes were going to be like.

As a first-generation college student, Lak described how not much of his parents’ college experiences in Sri Lanka could be transferred to the US because of the cultural and generational differences. However, this taught him to take initiative. He began gathering college-related materials on his own and learning as much as he could in school to feel equally prepared. Lak also turned to his sister with help since she had already completed college when he was starting. Like Lak, Rudy struggled with the confusing college application process and learned to be resourceful. He had a lot of questions and ended up calling universities to ask for assistance. Not only that but as soon as he began the honors program, he made it a priority to learn about the different campus resources available. For example, he learned about where to go if he is in need of health services or instead of buying books, he should visit the library first in case they have it on reserve. He connected with peers in the honors program who were able to share some survival tips with him. Academically, Rudy felt under-prepared when he first started college. As a result, he decided to take some beginning courses to ensure he had sufficient background knowledge. He did not want to risk poor academic performance. He later learned that he knew more than he credited himself and that he can easily catch up with his fellow classmates in advanced courses.

There are many factors that facilitate the social and academic success of first-generation college students. For example, many of the participants credit their schools, guidance counselors, peers, or parents in helping them survive college. Katia acknowledges her high school’s efforts in preparing students for college, especially since this is the first time anyone in her family had ever seen FAFSA forms or college applications. Like many other first-generation
college students, Katia is now passing on her knowledge and experience to her younger sister who is ready to apply for college.

**Belonging and Alienation**

Findings under the theme Belonging and Alienation focus on how first-generation college students of immigrant backgrounds develop a sense of belonging in the honors program and the challenges they experience as part of being in honors. During the second part of interviews, each participant was asked to describe what makes them feel like they belong in the honors program. Nearly all of the participants referenced the impact of their close relationships with faculty, staff, and peers in the honors program. Participants also discussed having common goals with peers, the role of diversity within honors, and feeling challenged.

**Fitting In**

After being admitted to the honors program, Rudy was invited to a kick-off event where he met the director of honors. He was surprised at how culturally competent the director was. Rudy went on to describe how the director demonstrated having read his application. The director was also kind, knew how to engage Rudy, answered his questions as if he had met Rudy’s parent to gather some of his questions and concerns in advance. Rudy was impressed and felt more comfortable being in the Honors College. When asked about his sense of belonging in the honors program, Rudy stated that:

They really know you, the faculty members for the honors program. They really get to know you and they know your ambitions; they know your strengths, your weaknesses; and they just try to make the most out of it. I know I belong because the first semester, I just started taking classes and meeting people but later I was exposed to many opportunities that I would have not had. I was funded to present research; I was helped to
go to Hawaii; there are just so many things that I knew that without it, I would have not experienced. And it gives me just this feeling of pride, like I knew I did something right because I'm excelling and I'm getting places that I probably would've never. I really appreciate the honors program. I feel like it's always done a great effort for me and I've given it back through my contributions to the school.

In his reflection, Rudy acknowledges the influential role of faculty members as well as staff in the honors program. They are supportive of and attentive to his academic needs. They know him well and challenge him academically instead of remediating him. Not only that but, for Rudy, funding his research and Hawaiian experiential-learning trip signifies an investment made by the honors program that speaks to his worth and value.

For Lisa, belonging is evident in the diversity within honors and the common goals she shares with other peers. She noted that her program recruits a diverse group of people with open minds and the desire to make a difference. They all accept each other based on their personality and abilities and what they wish to achieve in the future. They share common goals as Lisa explained. Aisha shares similar feelings of belonging. She expressed that “I think you belong in the honors program because of the diversity that we have here and also the different experiences that shape the program. So, people really listen and always welcome new ideas and opinions.” Aisha values the acceptance of diversity in her program and having peers from different backgrounds. Not only that but she added that an “honors program is different from other classes you take. I feel like in the honors class you can express yourself and become a better person than you are.” The small class sizes and discuss-oriented classroom culture allow Aisha to feel a sense of belonging. Marie finally found her niche in the Honors College. She described how throughout high school she was an intelligent, hard-working and well-rounded student. Not
surprisingly, for Marie:

Being part of the Honors College that's where all the students like me, from high school, are, which is really, really nice because you have these people who understand where you're coming from or understand your work ethic, if that makes sense. Just being around them was really, really nice and also pushed me to be better.

An honors program is where Marie finally felt accepted among other competitive and intelligent students who share her work ethic.

Quinn’s sense of belonging stemmed from multiple factors. She commented on how ethnically diverse the honors program is compared to other programs at her university. Her honors program consistently offered different events and programs throughout the year. These events include honors trivia night, pancake nights, and game nights. They are fun and she enjoys them. More importantly, Quinn shares that:

I have been an honors mentor since my sophomore year of college and I've been an [honors] ambassador since my sophomore year too. Those two are probably the biggest aspects that connect me to the honors college because some students don't ever set foot in the Honors College because they don't need to whereas with both of those [roles] I needed to at some point. Also, the faculty is really nice too. One of the faculties [Sic] that they have is very personable with students, he really makes me feel welcomed.

For her, representing the honors college and mentoring newcomers has a positive impact on her sense of belonging. Her leadership roles allow her to develop close relationships with faculty/staff and also students in honors.

Unlike most of the above participants, Lak’s sense of belonging derived from his achievements. He described how his accomplishments inside and outside the classroom enhance
his sense of belonging. He’s won several research awards and participated in undergraduate research at children’s hospital. His high GPA reinforced that he belonged in honors.

**Feeling Welcomed**

Each participant was asked to describe what makes them feel welcomed in the honors program. Their responses echoed those in their sense of belonging. Many participants reflected on interactions with faculty, staff, and peers in the honors program. For example, Rudy appreciated the faculty member or Graduate Assistant who comes from a diverse background because they have a different perspective on things and they help me with different issues. Quinn offers another example of feeling welcomed in the honors program because they have honors students working at the front desk and one of the full-time staff members was a recent graduate of the same Honor College. It shows that there is potential for students to become part of the staff team in the Honors College. Along the same lines, Katia and Lisa discussed the important role faculty/staff and relationships within the honors program. They report making many great friends through the honors program and the honors residential floor. Both respect how the honors professors engage, motivate, and challenged students. They make it clear that honors students are in the honors program because they like being challenged and this makes Katia and Lisa feel welcomed. They also admire how honors professors and staff can place a face to their names.

Some participants discussed events that they attended or the privilege of having a space dedicated for honors students only. For instance, Lak retold the story of how:

They had info sessions for students who are interested in applying for the Honors College. I attended that. There you could meet the advisors who were involved in the selection process so I strategically met with an advisor, made a connection and met with her. I set up an advising appointment even though she wasn't my advisor prior to
submission of the application and I asked her what could I improve on my application
and how competitive I am without cheating.

For Lak, being able to meet with an advisor to discuss his application was a sign of being
welcomed in the honors program.

For Marie, feeling welcomed stems from having a part of the university library that is
designated for honors students to use. She is a competitive student who found her home in
honors without being excluded based on race or ethnicity. Her academic performance and
contributions mattered more. Having a designated part of the library reassures her of being
welcomed and valued by the Honors College.

**Feeling Alienated**

During the interviews, participants were asked to discuss any moments where they felt as
if they did not fit in or did not belong in the honors program. If they have ever felt alienated,
participants were asked to share how they coped with such feelings. When asked about his
experiences as a person of color in the honors program, Lak explained that:

Sometimes I feel pretty different because majority of the honors students, especially my
year, the people graduating from the honors college with me, I think a ton of them are
white. I see a lot of the younger students being more diverse…but it's definitely a lot of
white people.

Lak takes great pride in his grades and achievements as reassuring factors that he belongs in the
honors college. However, students of color and immigrant students are outnumbered in his
honors program. He reflected on how every honors student is required to complete a learning
portfolio that may be published in a weekly newsletter displaying some of the best student
portfolios. Lak admitted that, “sometimes I feel insufficient in that way compared to other
people's achievements. It's never good to compare yourself, that's what I've learned. Just reaffirming to yourself that you belong based on what you achieved and things like that.” Even as a high achieving student, Lak still experiences moments of self-doubt when looking at “model” honors students’ profiles that do not reflect him.

He described how frustrated he was when he began college and did not perform very well on his set of exams whereas his honors peers seemed to be excelling with no difficulties in adjusting to college life. To cope with this, Lak continues to remind himself of everything he has achieved and earned. He reminds himself that he is just as good and just as qualified as his non-first-generation colleagues. Additionally, his strong peer network provides him with support and a heightened a sense of belonging.

Rudy explained that there are very few first-generation college students in his honors program. There are few students of color and immigrant students in the program. He remembered how when he first joined the honors program, his peers would tell stories of their siblings who already graduated from college which made Rudy feel isolated. He explained that he had no stories to share at the beginning that felt relevant. Even when his peers discussed joining the honors program because it was a family tradition or because of siblings who graduated with honors, Rudy could not relate. He explained that “Well, I don't have a sister that did that [honors]. I'm just here because I think it's important.” Rudy felt that this was a barrier that hindered his ability to connect with peers at the beginning because he did not know what to say. He explained that “I felt—not embarrassed—but uncomfortable sharing that at the beginning.” It is also difficult for Rudy to discuss his ethnicity and immigration status. It makes him uncomfortable to have to “explain” himself to others. To keep himself grounded, Rudy attends all of the Latina/o student events on campus and loves being part of the Latino
community. He even promotes Latino campus events in his honors courses as a way of connecting his intersecting identities. As he explained:

There’s a Latino organization on campus and they just make sure that we all get a space where we can share our community and someone to guide us [through] problems and just to make sure our culture is celebrated as well. We have somewhere to come and feel that it's all relative or just share our common concerns and maybe they'll help us find a common solution. So, that's a big one for sure. I just feel like it's a family away from home.

Unlike Rudy, Marie could not find a Filipino community at her university or the Honors College. Her roommates and the people she lived with on her floor were Indian. She recognized that it was nice to be exposed to another culture but it still did not feel like she fit in. Although she was looking for different experiences, she still wanted to find a group where she fits in with people who understand where I come from. It was not until Marie’s sophomore year that a Filipino Student Society was established and she was able to participate in it.

Relatedly, Sara could not find a community or an anchor in the Latino Student Union on campus. When asked to describe what made her feel like she belongs in the honors program, Sara had mixed feelings. The small class sizes and discussion-oriented seminars made her feel like a true member of the honors program. However, she felt alienated when she was not able to build strong relationships with peers in the honors program. She described that what made her feel a sense of belonging was her first-year honors seminar:

The best times were if I had something to say, I'm gonna say [it] and it's gonna be correct. There are other times I felt like, in that same class—I’m a person who likes to talk; I like to be social and when I feel like I put myself out there and no one reciprocates, I didn't
like that. Some girls in that class weren't as friendly to me and it really bothered me. I met one friend in the honors college ever. She's actually Hispanic herself but she looks white. She's half-Puerto Rican and half-white—no, she's like a quarter Puerto Rican, a quarter Mexican, and half white—Jacky. She was in my Cleopatra class. She looks completely white. She's the only person I made a connection with. Other than that, I feel like everyone else didn't really want to be friends, they didn't want to be social and that did bother me. The only times I did feel accepted was when I raised my hand and had an actual discussion about the class, that's the only time…that is not enough for me to stay.

Sara also reflected on how when she joined the Honors College, she was invited to a mix and mingle event where she felt isolated. She recalled not feeling smart enough to be there. She felt odd being among peers who were predominantly white women. Sara explained that “I'm not dark-skinned but I didn't feel welcomed, I didn't feel like I was part of a group. I felt different. I didn't like that.” Not only that, but Sara viewed her honors advisor as someone who was not very welcoming and made her feel like a burden. Eventually, a small class and a student-centered learning environment did not suffice. As an extravert, she yearns to connect with others. As a racial minority, her choices were limited as far as developing a relationship with someone from a similar background. She grew frustrated and was not sure how to cope with feeling alienated. Her frustrations grew until she determined an elitist honors education was not worth the feeling of alienation.

For Katia, feelings of alienation arose when her peers discussed how they finance their tuition, especially with study abroad opportunities. Katia’s honors program does not guarantee funding for study abroad. As a result, she understood that if she wished to study abroad like the majority of her white peers, she would need to finance it herself. She explained that her white
counterparts do not have to worry about tuition hikes. It annoyed her when her peer flaunted how their highly educated, wealthy parents connected them to employment opportunities. It made her feel as if she did not fit in. In fact, Katia’s father had to take out his retirement savings to finance her first two years of college. Her honors program’s culture of elitism alienated her at times. To illustrate, Katia recalled working for a call center on campus where they were trained to ask for large donations from honors parents and honors alumni. There was an assumption that honors students and parents are wealthier or they are likely to prosper and accumulate economic capital. To cope with feeling left out, Katia opted to not engage with elitist students who constantly reminded others of their privilege. She decided to focus on her schoolwork, and not apply for study abroad. During networking events, she spent most of her time with people who understood her views and where she was coming from.

For Aisha, feelings of alienation surfaced when professors and peers made unfamiliar cultural references or when a language barrier hindered communication. For example, sometimes she was unsure what her professors were saying and other times her peers were unsure of what she was saying because of her accent. Aisha learned to research unfamiliar information and be resourceful in other ways to minimize her feelings of isolation. Aisha also learned to answer the questions of curious people who inquired about her culture, religion, or why she wears a headscarf. She explained that “for some, maybe they don't understand why you wear the headscarf, why you are that way. If any student has a question, I answer them and explain myself. If not, then that's it.”

Similar to Aisha, Lisa learned to be resourceful and to advocate for herself after feeling left out. She felt alienated when she started taking her first-year honors seminar that focused on the works of Plato, Aristotle, and other Western philosophers. The content was confusing and
difficult to comprehend for Lisa. As a result, she felt out of place because she struggled to decipher the meanings of what she was reading. During class discussions, her peers seemed to understand the readings more than she did and they seemed to offer more meaningful contributions. Lisa continued feeling alienated until she decided to attend the honors professor’s office hours. There they explained the course concepts to her in a way that she could grasp.

Sara was the only participant to withdraw from the honors college. After her first-year honors seminar, she did not have the time, and also reported overwhelming financial challenges. She did not want to deal with feeling excluded by other honors students while trying to finance her education. Honors seemed like a luxury adding more stress to her life. Other participants briefly considered leaving their honors program. Lak, was frustrated that some of the courses he took were not counted as honors years later. However, because he had already spent several years in the honors program, he decided to continue. Katia’s financial challenges were similar to Sara. She was also uncertain if she could afford the honors courses and living on campus in the honors Living Learning Community. Katia decided to graduate a year earlier because it seemed unlikely that she could afford another year of college. She explained that “at the end, I never had the intentions of leaving because I had already bought so much into this and my parents are already sacrificing so much into this so I stayed in the Honors College.” Completing an honors thesis was intimidating and foreign but she and her family had already invested in an honors education.

For Rudy, feeling alienated was rooted in a discriminatory incident that he experienced. He described how when he started researching graduate programs, most schools listed physics as a minimum admissions requirement. As a result, Rudy met with his advisor to discuss making space in his schedule for physics but his advisor was not able to help him. He was not able to
enroll in any physics courses because of the numerous prerequisites and his advisor would not make any exceptions or advocate for him. His frustrations were magnified when he met other students who exempted from the prerequisites and were allowed to enroll in physics. He did not believe he was not any less qualified. Rudy complained about this incident but was not able to find any closure.

Three participants commented on the lack of diversity contributing to feelings of alienation. Katia explained her Honors College was “still not diverse enough to the point where you can say that it's essentially diverse and that goes back to social class and how that intersects.” In fact, most of the students Katia knew said they did not want to be part of the Honors College because they could not finance the extra tuition cost for honors courses and they could not afford to live on campus as part of the honors college requirement. Similarly, Sara explained that:

I think being in the honors college and seeing how un-diverse it is definitely was part of making me feel left out. I'm a social person, I want to talk to you but they're [other students] like “we don't want to talk to you.” You feel like what is wrong with you, what makes me different from you? If you internalize that problem and [start] thinking something is wrong with me as a person, when the only difference between me and you is that I’m not white like you are. So, I definitely did start thinking about that stuff in the Honors College and other classes because they were predominantly—there was one Indian girl in my class but that was it. I didn't know why anybody didn't want to talk to me. I didn't like that feeling.

Lack of diversity and lack of representation impacted the academic and social experiences of first-generation immigrant students in honors programs. In addition, participants faced with overt
or covert racism. This discourages those with limited or unstable support networks and those with little tolerance for exclusion.

Rudy’s honors program is not diverse but he has developed a good relationship with the director. They discussed diversity issues in their honors program. Rudy explained that his honors program director is from Sweden which makes her an immigrant. To some extent, their experiences intersect so she is also very interested in making the program more inclusive and having diverse programming. Rudy joined a small committee of students who are set to work with the honors Director on increasing diversity in the honors program. Together, they will examine how to make the honors admission process more comfortable and easy to navigate as well as what resources to offer marginalized students. Not only that, but this committee of students is also interested in the persistence of minority students once they are in honors. They will discuss ways to make students feel include and to help them thrive in the honors program.

**Forms of Capital**

**Economic Capital**

Katia draws attention to how there are a lot of resources for funding help for first-generation students but once you are in college, there are fewer resources and scholarships for sophomores, juniors, or seniors which is frustrating to Katia. In her view, colleges fail to understand that first-generation students need ongoing assistance and guidance. Along the same lines, Sara wished she had learned about financing college because no one told her how much she would have to pay out of pocket after financial aid. She stressed that tuition is so expensive that many first-generation college students cannot even conceptualize how much money it will cost them to pursue a college degree. As a result, many will not know how to plan ahead.
Sara recollected how after her first year of college, she was in shock because of how much money she still owed the university. She began panicking because she was unsure what to do. She did not want to drop out, she did not want to go home and “feel like a complete failure.” Consequently, Sara registered for her first credit card because someone suggested opening up a credit card account and paying the monthly minimum so she did that. However, Sara did not have a job at the time. She explained that she never had a job before because she was in a wheelchair and had a hard time finding accommodating jobs. As a result, Sara dropped down to part-time status to be able to work three jobs to finance college. This in turn limited her campus involvement and meant that she would not be able to participate in tutoring because of her full work schedule. Katia expands on Sara’s pain and explains that:

As a first-generation student, it's very difficult for people to realize that because their parents were able to pay for their college—they take it for granted but for me, I know that for anything I want in life I'm going to have to work for it because no one is going to be there to provide it for me. It’s all so different because…you don't have someone to go back to, you don't have someone that can tutor you in your courses, you don't have anyone in your family that can help you understand school work or can help you understand grad school applications…You also have this large amount of pressure: your parents are working really hard to put you through this so you don't want to fail them because it's an opportunity that very few people get…you want to make sure that your parents sacrifices are worth it because they didn't have those opportunities.

As a result, Katia, Sara, Quinn, and many other first-generation students learn to be independent and not to take things for granted. For example, Katia’s described having to function as an adult
at an early age. She started working in high school, learned to pay her own bills, pay rent, file
taxes and more.

**Temporal Capital**

Kosut (2006) explained that students of working-class families struggle with finances
college, study abroad experiences, vacations, and cannot take time off of work. This is linked to
having economic capital which allows for temporal capital. To review, temporal capital is the
amount of time a student dedicates to studying, researching, and writing. Privileged students are
less likely to work as many hours whereas many underrepresented students work their way
through college. Having time to study or make school a “full-time job” translates to having a
high level of preparedness and productivity. Students with high levels of temporal capital can
attend office hours and interact more with their professors since they have the time and
flexibility. Not only that but, temporal capital allows students to attend scholarly presentations or
seminars, volunteer, take on unpaid internships, as well as other opportunities that allow for their
academic and professional development (Kosut, 2006). In this study, students with ample
temporal capital are those whose education is paid for through scholarships or by parents. Table
5 offers an illustration of how participants finance their college education which is influenced by
their current economic capital and impacts their possession of temporal capital.

Rudy is involved in research and study abroad but he made it clear that “I can't volunteer
40 hours a week because I need to work 30.” He worked over summer to be able to pay back the
student loans he had to resort to during semesters where he was not able to receive as many
scholarships. Like Rudy, Katia and her parents work several jobs to finance what her
scholarships and loans are unable to cover. Katia struggled with working over 30 hours a week to
be able to afford rent and textbooks. She was required to live on campus for two years as an
honors student. She explained that “it frustrated me because they expected us [honors students] to have more money when that's not the reality.” It is aggravating to Katia to see how money influences the academic and social experiences of college students, especially those in the honors program. She acknowledged how challenging it is for marginalized students to afford tuition hikes and the extra fees association with honors. Many minority students have to work and attend school simultaneously. She noted that she does not have the luxury to study abroad because she needs to work during the summer to afford next year's rent and tuition. As a student with little temporal capital, she cannot afford unpaid internships nor can she finance study abroad out of pocket since her university offers limited funding.

Quinn pointed out that she struggled to acquire her current scholarships and she is proud of them. They freed economic capital difficulties and rewarded her with more temporal capital so she can focus on school. For many participants, having an abundance of temporal capital helped them stay on track and take advantage of the honors educational opportunities available (e.g. research, internships, conferences, tutoring, office hours, etc.).

Aisha had to work two part-time jobs to cover rent and personal expenses. Her temporal and economic capital levels are low like many marginalized students. Sara works three part-time jobs and decided to drop to part-time status to be able to finance college. For Sara, it made no sense to work extra hours and worry about financing college as well as honors courses when she felt excluded because of her racial and ethnic background. She is not alone. It would be understandable for first-generation college students of color from immigrant backgrounds to reject the idea of honors education if it meant having to stress about financing extra courses and tolerating further alienation by joining a program where they feel academically and socially excluded.
Table 5 Participants’ Self-Reported College Financing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Scholarships</th>
<th>Grants</th>
<th>Loans</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Rudy</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Lak</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Katia</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Quinn</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Marie</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Sara</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Aisha</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Lisa</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cultural Capital

Ward et al. (2012) explain that cultural capital encompasses knowledge that students and their families have about getting into college. This includes researching institutions, making informed decisions, applying to schools, locating financial resources, developing expectations, and learning the language and terminology of college life. Cultural capital also entails persisting in college which includes locating campus resources, developing friendships and social connections, learning how to navigate the academic curriculum, participating in campus activities, and making progress toward graduation (Ward et al., 2012). Cultural capital plays a key role in shaping the experiences of first-generation students (Ward et al., 2012).

Lak, Lisa, Katia, and Marie acquired cultural capital through their familial engagement and high school college preparation programming. They learned about researching institutions, applying to colleges, making informed decisions, and learning the language and terminology of college life. For examples, Lisa’s school had college advisors who encouraged her to apply to honors. Katia’s school offered college preparation as early as ninth grade. Marie’s parents guided her application decisions when she expressed interest in becoming a doctor. Rudy’s high school counselors assisted him with locating financial resources. Lak’s school provided a full team of counselors who aided students with navigating the college application process. In addition, his sister attended college in the US and her experience allowed her to coach Lak through the college application process.

Honors Typology

During the interviews, participants discussed the structure of their honors program and the requirements to graduate with honors. It became apparent that the program structure and requirements influence students’ decisions to enroll and persist in honors. For example, Lak
appreciated the flexibility in his honors program. He was not required to take many honors courses that would not count toward his Biology degree. In fact, Lak’s program is so flexible he has never taken an all-honors course. His program is project-based which is encouraging for Lak because he does not have to take extra courses or pay extra tuition. He is only required to complete five experiential-learning projects and a final research proposal. This flexibility is beneficial and encouraging for many students. For instance, Sara felt excluded in her honors program and was also bombarded with financing the extra honors courses she was required to take. Her program was not as flexible as Lak’s program. She was required to accumulate and finance at least 21 Honors credits, many of which did not overlap with her degree program.

Quinn, Lisa, Katia, and Marie are required to accumulate more than 21 Honors credits to graduate. They are also required to complete a thesis. Their honors experiences are costlier and the thesis option can be intimidating to some students. In particular, it can intimidate immigrant and first-generation college students with little academic preparation and support. Rudy and Aisha attended the same university. Their honors program is portfolio-based. They are not required to take honors-only course as long as they are able to justify how their courses meet the requirements for honors and they must be willing to complete extra assignments in their non-honors courses to count these courses toward their honors graduation.

**Messages to Future Underrepresented Students**

Each participant was asked if they have any tips or advice for first-generation college students of color and immigrant students who are thinking of joining honors. Below are some of their closing messages participants left for future minority students who are contemplating honors. Their messages were drawn from to formulate recommendations for honors programs in Chapter V.
A Message from Lak

Definitely have an open mind and don't get frustrated if you don't get in the first time. Definitely keep trying even though other students may have a perceived advantage over you based on background, economic status. Just always remember education is the great equalizer. Work hard and you can be the best person you could be.

Definitely do something out of the ordinary. Everybody gets in honors college, whoever has high grades and high test scores—standardized test scores—but I would recommend doing something that you honestly want to do. Maybe go out and do research at a hospital or do something of that nature that can really put you ahead of other people and make you stand out because those experiences are life. Standardized test scores aren’t life…I think I neglected to do that to my fullest abilities because if you're in an honors college you have the most opportunity of any student so I think that's really important to succeed.

A Message from Katia

Definitely apply because you won't know unless you try. I would definitely encourage people to apply to the Honors College. Once you're in the Honors College I would also go find groups, I'm part of nonprofits that work and focus on Latino issues…being able to find groups that you can relate to and groups that come from the same perspective as you, they can not only be your support system but they can also provide you with help as you're in the Honors College…always be part of different groups that you care about and can also relate to you.
A Message from Aisha

I would say be strong and take advantage of the resources they give. Sometimes that can be a little bit of pressure, maybe you don't speak English or there is a language barrier and you're facing too many other problems in your life but taking advantage of what they offer will help you succeed.

A Message from Rudy

I think it's a great opportunity. I do think before giving them any advice, I would like to give at least my department advice on having resources, specifically, to welcome students of such backgrounds. I've been an exception and I have my peers of different backgrounds and sometimes it's tough and you need resources from other places that maybe students with not that background don't need to. I would first work on having set admission requirements or sometimes—I was fortunate to at least graduate high school from here but there's many that don't and if they can't provide them with a transcript in English, it's not possible for them to come to the honors program. If they can't provide a letter of recommendation, it's not possible. There needs to be more flexibility, you need to talk to someone that's interested and help them with the process and waive or go around some stuff. This next week we're talking about that, I will suggest that because that's the first step. There needs to be more for students with different backgrounds like me but once they are, I do suggest for everyone that is interested in going the extra mile and getting unique experiences or someone who's really interested in academic success and just want extra support, it's a great community for those that want to volunteer or passionate advocates. There is a space for everyone to succeed. They will be welcomed so I will
encourage them, if this is what you want, you have a space in the honors program but I want to make sure that at least there is more done work for them.…

A Message from Marie

I would tell them to definitely look into it and go into it if they want to challenge themselves, I would say that it's required for them. I definitely say look into it and if it seems like it's something you would want to do, you want to take the extra step, then go for it. and really think about what you want to do because it is a lot of extra work that isn't required for you but it's just as important to do well in school overall. I would definitely tell them to consider it.

A Message from Quinn

Do it even if you think that you're not capable of doing all the things that they require because chances are there are going to be people who apply and they get in and they keep going until the last year and then they just drop because they realize they don't what to do the thesis. Best advice is to probably just continue to do it and do it fully through because even though you might not use the honors degree to its fullest extent—I don't know what fullest extent is—but it still looks better than someone who doesn't have it. It also shapes you to be a better person in college…the required honors classes just makes you more academically competitive, it requires for you to have better time management skills. So all the things that the honors program does, it's for your benefit in the future, not just to be in college and not just for the honors degree.

There's a lot of programs that universities offer…granted they can always offer more programs that support minorities…even if there is not anything, I would advise to
just get out into the community, not even in the university…I've done things like this before so get as involved in the community as you can while also maintaining your grades and I think you'll be more successful than if you only focus on the fact that you're the only one that looks like you there and who's had to experiences you had because everyone has different experiences even if they're not a minority.

A Message from Sara

I would tell them to really do their research and figure out what they want to do, figure out [the] class that they want to join because it's not fun if you don't enjoy it. I definitely stayed because I enjoyed learning about Cleopatra in general. really try to be more vocal like “I don't belong, what can I do about this?” I guess if I tell myself advice it would be like, “Hey, girl. You're cool as f***. Those other girls are just not as cool. You're way better than them.” If I go back in time and tell myself something, “You are a badass because you did all this to be here and they have all support systems and they have these privileges that you don't have. You work twice as hard.” I wish I would've known that. I wish someone had told me that, “Hey, girl. you got this,” but you're still learning. I wish someone had told me and cheered me on. I didn't see all that back then.

Summary of Findings

Data presented in this chapter has resulted in the conclusion that attending high school in the US is crucial to joining the honors pipeline. It is equally important for students to attend well-performing high schools that offer AP, IB, or honors courses, as well as counselors who guide students through the college application process. Further research is needed to determine whether these results are generalizable. The literature review chapter discusses how minority students are less likely to be recruited by honors programs. As such, findings from the interviews reveal the
significance of being formally or informally invited to join honors. Most importantly, the findings of this study unveil the connections existing between economic capital, cultural capital, and gifted education at the university-level. Even after admission, economic and cultural capital play a role in persistence in the honors program.
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

To review, the goal of this study was to address the following research questions and sub-questions:

1) What are the academic and social experiences of first-generation, immigrant and/or refugee students of color in honors colleges?
   a) How do they describe their experiences?
   b) How and why do they join an honors program?
   c) What precollege experiences are most influential in their preparation for the honors college and persistence?
   d) What challenges do they face in honors? How do they cope with these challenges?

2) How do these students develop a sense of belonging in the Honors College?
   a) What makes them fit into the honors program?
   b) Why do they stay in the Honors College?
   c) What issues of belonging do they experience in the honors college? How do they respond to these issues?

This chapter will draw connections between the interview findings, the research questions above, and current literature on first-generation college students of color, as well as immigrant students in higher education. Information in this chapter is organized based on themes from the findings chapter that answer the above research questions.

Summary of Findings and Analysis

Bourdieu’s (2007) theory of capital was used for a better understanding of the various forms of capital that impact a student’s decisions to join honors as well as their overall experience in honors. The findings of this study emphasis the significance of attending high
school in the US for students to join the honors pipeline. Not all US high schools serve as gateways to honors education. Students in this study attended challenging high schools that provided AP, IB, or honors courses, as well as college advisors or counselors to guide students through the college application process. Data from the interviews reveal the influential role of being formally or informally invited to join an honors program. More broadly, the findings of this study highlight a relationship between economic capital, cultural capital, and enrollment as well as persistence in an honors program.

**Honors Pipelining**

The honors pipeline was crucial to the participants’ precollege experiences and helping them persist once they joined an honors program. The interview findings suggest a US high school education is highly valued and almost required to develop a foundation for honors or be invited to join. Specifically, a US education is valuable because of its legitimacy, access to linguistic capital and competitive academic opportunities, in addition to the influential role of guidance counselors. Included in the honors pipeline are parents who play an informal role in preparing students for honors education through their involvement, as well as the values and attitudes they instill in students. In other words, students develop embodied cultural capital from their engaged parents. To review, embodied capital is composed of attitudes and beliefs that influence behavior. In this case, supportive attitudes and parental engagement can have a positive impact on students’ academic performance and can prepare them for an honors track as well.

**Institutionalized Cultural Capital**

As noted in the literature review chapter, length of residence in the US is linked to greater school enrollment and performance because immigrants adapt to the cultural and social norms of
a society (Lutz, 2007). It is difficult to generalize beyond this sample of a single case study. However, the findings illustrate characteristics of an American education that are socially and culturally significant in preparing students for an honors education. In this thesis, participant responses depict US schooling as a vehicle for institutionalized cultural capital. In other words, their US schooling experience provided them with legal as well as cultural recognition of having the necessary qualifications. For many immigrant students like Par, it may be a challenge to gain legitimacy or transfer their educational credentials to US schools. This increases the value of US schooling because of the associated cultural capital, for example, learning English, taking the SAT or ACT exams, and having access to advanced courses (e.g. AP, IB, honors, etc.).

**Linguistic Capital**

The literature review chapter discussed the value of linguistic capital. In other words, mastery of a socially powerful or highly valued language (Fowler; 1997; Kanno & Varghese, 2010; Kosut, 2006; Snook, 1990). Students who attended school in the US learned American academic English, therefore gained knowledge of a language linked to the dominant class, and high linguistic capital brings high symbolic capital as well as cultural capital (Fowler, 1997; Snook, 1990). Kannon and Varghese (2010) discuss how ESL and other immigrant students are at a disadvantage because of their limited linguistic capital that is necessary for educational success. This was seen in the experiences of Aisha, Katia, Lisa, and Rudy who were challenged with learning English for academic survival and success.

**Academic Preparation**

All participants in this study attended high school in the US which allowed them to enroll in honors courses and/or Advanced Placement courses. College and honors programs’ admission requirements can be a burden on immigrant students who were not schooled in the US. The fees
for professional transcript evaluation services can be costly for low-income immigrant students who were educated abroad. For some foreign-born students acquiring a transcript or recommendation letters can be challenging if they have limited access to communicating with their former schools overseas. Attending school in the US equips immigrant students with linguistic capital given that English is the medium of instruction at nearly all public schools. A US schooling provides students with valuable classroom culture and a better understanding of the US education system. Those educated in US high schools have more access to ACT and SAT testing.

Nearly all participants had guidance counselors who assisted them with applying to college as one approach to preparing students for further academic success. Seven out of the eight participants in this case study were enrolled in AP/IB and/or some form of advanced course. In fact, some schools required their students to take a certain number of AP/honors courses. For instance, Katia’s high school had only two tracks for all students: honors or AP. Aisha was the only one to opt out of advanced courses for fear of the difficulty level of AP courses, lack of diversity in AP course, besides time and transportation issues. She only saw white students in AP classes and her teachers did not encourage her to participate. As noted by the US Department of Education (n.d.), academic preparation for both AP or other advanced programs starts as early as elementary school and those who transfer schools will have a hard time participating in these programs.

The findings on academic preparedness relate to Anyon’s (1980) study on how differing curricula, pedagogical, and student evaluation norms contribute to the unequal academic achievements among students of differing social classes. Their schools focused on preparing students for professional jobs that demand their full creative capacities. The schools they
attended are more closely aligned to Anyon’s (1980) middle-class and affluent professional schools. Those who attended middle-class public schools were taught to analyze how or why things happen and to draw connections from class lessons. Participants who attended private or wealthier and more rigorous public schools learned about creativity, individuality, independent work, and also collaboration. They were coached to express and illustrate theories they learned in class to make sense of reality.

**Role of Parents and Guidance Counselors**

During the interviews, participants credited their high schools, team of advisors, and parents for the important role they played in helping them navigate college applications and exploring honors. The majority of participants in this study attended competitive public or private high schools that focused on preparing students for college. Half of the participants in this study began thinking of college as early as freshman year of high school because of their school programing. Many participants explained that their parents wished to enroll them in well-performing high schools based upon their own research or recommendations from relatives in the US. High GPAs, outstanding standardized test scores, and a track record of participating in advanced courses are indicators of academic preparation that qualify students for honors (Baum & Flores, 2011). These factors are closely tied to socioeconomic status (Baum & Flores, 2011).

Participants in this study were able to attend schools that offered advanced academic opportunities. Almost all of the participants attended schools with supportive guidance counselors who offered important information about college. They played an important role in encouraging students to take AP or honors courses in high school and informing students about honors education at the university-level. For example, Lisa and Katia did not consider honors until their guidance counselors encouraged them to apply for honors. In fact, three participants
felt so empowered by their schools and parents that they decided to apply to Ivy League schools and other prestigious universities. Some were rejected and some declined admission because they could not finance an expensive private school education. Some participants admitted during the interviews that they simply wanted to test if they would be admitted to a prestigious university.

Ogbu and Simons’ (1998) frame of reference; specified that voluntary minorities tend to express a positive frame of reference based on their situation in the US and “back home” (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Voluntary minorities perceive the US as having more educational opportunities compared to their native land and they interpret school success as carving the path to advancement. Not surprisingly, many immigrant parents raise their children with high academic expectations and hold their students accountable for achieving these academic goals (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Many emulate middle-class white American values of “hard work, following the rules, and getting good grades” to succeed (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, p. 172). Ogbu’s theories are consistent with the interview findings. All eight participants described parents who migrated to the US for a better life and more educational opportunities compared to their native land. Many of the participants’ parents taught them to value school because it was the key to a successful life in the US. Nearly all participants discussed how their immigrant parents raised them with high academic expectations and taught them to be the best or do their best when it comes to school. Because of the social and parental pressure to succeed, many students learned to view failure as no option. Some expressed feeling an immigration guilt if they were not able to make their parents proud after the efforts of moving to another country to ensure a better future for their children.
Parental Educational Level

Ward et al. (2012) recognize that the label “first-generation” should not be limited to those whose parents have not received a four-year degree because attending college and receiving a diploma are not enough. First-generation students should be determined based on the cultural capital generated by the participants’ parents who engaged in a meaningful college experiences that provided them with knowledge and skills to be transmitted to their students. Otherwise stated, cultural capital is not accumulated by simply enrolling in college courses and receiving a diploma. Parental cultural capital depends on the college process and experiences of parents and how much they are able to share with their students. Many of the participants in this study identify as first-generation college students because their parents did not attend college or attend college in another country. For many of the participants, their parents’ college experiences are difficult to transfer to the US context because of differing cultures and generations. However, simply having a college experience seems to lead to increased parental engagement and setting high expectations for students. For example, many of the educated parents were more strategic with their decision to enroll their children in certain schools.

Engaged parents convey the importance of education to their children, an example an example of embodied cultural capital (Clucas, 2015; Turney & Kao, 2009). Such attitudes and beliefs that influence behavior, and are transmitted to students. For example, parental beliefs about the value of higher education influence student attitude and behavior (Clucas, 2015; Stockfelt, 2016; Turney & Kao, 2009). In this study, embodied capital acts as an informal honors pipeline. This form of capital is learned from the minute children observe and mimic their parents (Clucas, 2015). The interview findings suggest that parental educational background impacts their embodied cultural capital which is transferred on to the student. Having some form
of education leads parents to teach their students to value education and be more involved. For example, going on college tours with students or paying for some part of school as many of the parents in this study are doing.

**Why Honors**

In Anderson Goins’ (2014) study, out of twelve participants, only one reported being contacted by the Honors College, other participants learned about the honors program through college fairs, teachers, former honors students, or personal research. Data from the interviews do not concur with these findings. The majority of participants joined the honors college because they were asked to join. To illustrated, four out of the eight participants joined the honors program after being formally recruited by the Honors College. Three participants joined after being encouraged to join by their guidance counselors and college professor. Lak was the only student to transfer into the honors program without being invited or encouraged by anyone. He decided to join after learning from about the honors program from his peers.

**Capital Accumulation**

The interview findings help illuminate the significance of being in an honors program. Participants discussed three important motivations for an honors education. First, an honors education is convertible capital. All participants described hoping their honors education will broaden their overall cultural capital, which reflects middle-class values. To review, cultural capital is comprised of highly valued knowledge and educational qualifications (Kanno & Varghese, 2010). This includes “the education and advantages that a person accumulates, which elevate his or her capacity to fit into higher social strata; it provides students with the means to ensure social mobility” (p. 6). Specifically, the participants in this study hoped their honors education would prepare them to be critical thinkers, researchers, better communicators, leaders,
and producers of knowledge. For instance, Rudy sees his honors education as an experience to inform his future career in academia and valuable source of cultural capital.

Secondly, all participants valued the institutionalized cultural capital acquired upon graduation. An honors degree recognizes the highest academic qualifications. Next, participants recognized that symbolic capital, including reputation and dignity, is embedded in an honors credentials. All eight participants described the sense of pride and prestige derived from being in honors. An honors education provides legal recognition of academic achievement and exceeding expectations.

According to Bourdieu (2007), cultural capital is convertible into economic capital and can be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications. The interview findings are consistent with Bourdieu’s (2007) argument. The majority of participants alluded to the economic capital to be gained from being in honors. Seven of the participants described their desire for standing out to future employers because of their honors education. They see an honors education as a tool for acquiring symbolic capital and institutionalized cultural capital that is capable of being converted to economic capital when competing against non-honors job applicants.

Kosut (2006) explains that temporal capital is the time students can dedicate to school. The more time they devote to their studies, the more involved they can be, academically and socially. Generally, marginalized students have less temporal capital because of the need to work to support themselves and cover costs associated with higher education (Kosut, 2006). Although none of the participants explicitly stated that they lacked temporal capital, many discussed financial difficulties that forced them to work multiple jobs and kept them from being as involved in the honors program. For instance, Katia described having to work multiple jobs and
not being able to afford study abroad or living on campus for two years as part of the honors college requirement. Sara, too, was not able to dedicate as much time to the honors college or school because of financial obstacles. Contrarily, some students described the impact of having honors scholarships that make it easier to live on campus and be more involved without worrying about working multiple jobs. For students without stable funding and little temporal capital, an honors education may seem burdensome or unnecessary.

**Belonging and Alienation**

The interview findings offer a better understanding of how participants develop a sense of belonging in the honors college. Available literature highlights that honors programs pride themselves in having great faculty-student relations, discussion-based small classes, rigorous and challenging curriculum, research or independent projects, experiential-learning, and a culminating senior project (e.g. honors thesis, senior seminar, portfolio, proposal, etc.) (Anderson Goins, 2014; Clauss, 2011; Harrison-Cook, 1999; National Collegiate Honors Council [NCHC], 2013; Rudolph, 1990). Based on the interviews, these characteristics influenced the participants’ sense of belonging. More than half of the participants linked their sense of belonging to their academic achievement. They see their achievements inside and outside the classroom as reminders that they belong in honors because of their work ethics and recognized accomplishments.

In addition, in Anderson Goins’ (2014) study, those who enrolled in the honors program enjoyed the friendships, networks, travel opportunities, graduate school prep, scholarships, and motivation among many other personal benefits (Anderson Goins, 2014). In this current study, many participants highlighted their relationship with faculty and staff in honors as an important component of what makes them feel welcomed. In particular, many students drew attention to
having supportive advisors or professors who challenge them and remind them why they are in honors. For instance, Rudy feels welcomed and heard because of his relationship with the Dean and because he sits on a student committee that is striving to diversify the honors program. More than half of the participants discussed the role of discussion-oriented seminars in making them feel welcomed and part of honors. Equally important, participants discussed their interactions with peers and how it impacts their sense of belonging. Almost all participants established strong peer networks with students in honors through taking common courses together or being required to live in an honors Living Learning Community. Some students developed a sense of belonging through mentorship programs. For example, Quinn serves as a mentor and ambassador for the honors program which deepened her connection to the Honors College.

Harrison-Cook’s (1999) study found honors programs appealing to white students only, and others were afraid of gambling their financial aid if the honors program interferes with their academic preference. The interviews uncover similar issues of belonging that students experience in the honors college and their decisions to stay. Four out of eight students alluded to the lack of diversity in their program contributing to their isolated. As part of being first-generation, two students perceived college in general as a place for only smart people and two other students perceived the honors program as being elitist and all-white. Some students expressed feeling excluded because they did not have similar stories to share when their peers were discussing financing study abroad or a family legacy of attending college. Students like Aisha experienced cultural and language barriers in the classroom that make them feel excluded. As a coping mechanism, many of the participants sought out cultural groups that they identify with to act as their support network and anchor. Some avoided peers who do not understand
where their social and cultural backgrounds. Others like Sara withdrew from the honors program altogether.

**Honors Typology**

During the interviews, it became apparent that the program structure affects the academic and social experiences of participants. For example, being part of the Honors College or program can impact funding and graduation requirements which influences participants’ decision to enroll and stay in honors. The distinctions below are tied to the interview findings to better understand the impact of program type on student experiences.

**Honors College.** An Honors College is headed by a dean and possesses sufficient resources including operational funds, staff, and facilities (Anderson Goins, 2014; Barnard & Treat, 2012; NCHC Board of Directors, 2013). Additionally, Honors Colleges award students financial assistance for tuition, travel expenses, and research (Eckert, Grimm, Roth, & Savage, 2010; NCHC Board of Directors, 2013; Sederberg, 2005). For participants with financial barriers, this means receiving funding to finance their honors education so they can be more involved in and persist in honors. Honors Colleges offer students with an honors lounge, library, reading or study rooms, and computer facilities (NCHC Board of Directors, 2013). Many of the participants discussed enjoying these resources and for some students, having honors-only spaces and resources shows an investment by the Honors College on their education and needs. Students in Honors Colleges are also afforded the opportunity to share their voices by serving on an honors governance or student committee (NCHC Board of Directors, 2013). Only one participant described having an honors student committee and he is participating in this committee to improve the admissions process for immigrant students and racial minorities.
**Honors program.** Honors programs tend to have larger class sizes and allow students to take more honors-by-contract classes since they are cost effective—these are non-honors courses that students can earn honors credits by completing extra assignments (Honorsadmin, 2014). Three participants expressed appreciation for not being required to take several semesters of honors because they program allows honors-by-contract after taking a few honors seminars. Along with this course flexibility, other students seem to enjoy having to choose between a thesis or portfolio. Many participants expressed feeling intimidated by the thesis requirement and rethinking the honors program because of the thesis. However, the portfolio option seems more popular because it is more flexible, less demanding if students are working multiple jobs or majoring in several fields. For example, Lak’s program is project-based. It’s flexibility meant that he has never been required to take an honors seminar but he is still working as a TA and conducting research for his Biology degree as part of being in honors.

**Conclusions and Research Implications**

The findings of this study highlight that for college students from immigrant backgrounds, a key component of enrolling and persisting in honors is attending high school in the US. To be specific, it is crucial for students to attend well-performing high schools that offer AP or honors courses and a team of college advisors. Many students were told to go to college but never coached on the logistics of applying for college and what to expect. This is where a school with a team of college advisors plays an influential role in preparing students for college and informing them of honors opportunities. It is also important for students to be invited or encouraged to join honors since only one participant joined honors without any formal or informal invitation. Attending high school outside the US limits a student’s institutionalized cultural capital, linguistic capital, as well as their chances of taking the SAT or ACT and
advanced courses. Therefore, honors admission requirements can be burdensome to immigrant students who were not schooled in the US.

Moreover, students must have supportive parents who teach them to value education and play an active role in their education. Only three of the participants are from households where neither parent a college degree. However, the majority of participants described how invested their parents are in their education and the supportive role they played in helping them navigate the college application process.

Once students enrolled in an honors program, many turned to their academic achievement as a way of ensuring that they belong. Some find cultural groups that they identify with to keep them anchored and supported. The majority of participants valued their close relationships with faculty or staff in the honors program. They feel welcomed and included when they faculty members who challenge them and see potential in them. Many students remain in the honors college because they feel invested or they feel pressured to succeed for their parents and to defy the negative statistics about marginalized students dropping out or struggling in college.

The findings of this study demonstrate that immigrant, first-generation college students of color in honors program is a very small population that is difficult to find. The researcher could not find participants meeting these characteristics and as a result, the eligibility was extended to those whose parents earned a bachelors degree abroad and those who were born in the US. This study is the first of its kind to focus specifically on first-generation college students of color from immigrant backgrounds in honors programs. There is a gap in gifted education literature in regards the experiences of marginalized students. This gap needs to be addressed to develop relevant programming that supports and encourages first-generation college students of color from immigrant backgrounds to enroll and persist in honors education.
Though the results are not generalizable, they describe and most importantly offer voice to the diverse experiences of first-generation college students of color from immigrant backgrounds to enroll and persist in honors education. This study provided the participants with an opportunity to share their stories and reflect upon their experiences as one of few students in honors. This chapter has presented a summary of my findings and analysis, as well as the implications of this study within the field of refugee education and suggestions for future research. While extensive literature exists regarding first-generation college students, immigrant students in college, and students of color in college, little is known about experiences of those marginalized groups in honors programs.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

The results of this research study can be analyzed even further, expanded on through deeper and different research methods and goals to provide useful insight for improving the experiences of first-generation college students of color from immigrant backgrounds in honors programs. First, this study was conducted over the course of two months which limits the recruitment timeline. Extending the data collection timeframe may generate more participants. In fact, because some participants were on Winter Break, it took several weeks to schedule an interview with them. After the researcher completed interviewing, more students were reaching out to participate but it was beyond the interview and data collection timeline. Furthermore, the majority of participants in this study are located in the Midwest which limits our understanding of the diverse experiences of immigrant honors students in different regions of the US. Despite this limitation, the results are still beneficial for developing programs for the academic and social integration of marginalized students in honors. Future studies should investigate enrollment and persistence among immigrant students in honors programs at public universities and private
universities. Future studies should examine why eligible immigrant students choose not to enroll in honors.

Additional recommendations would be to conduct a nationwide survey that asks first-generation college students of college from immigrant backgrounds to describe any challenges they face in the honors program and how the Honor College could better serve them. This survey may reach more participants who are not able to interview and it may be more accessible since it can be self-administered and taken at any time. Another recommendation to take into consideration is to explore the experiences of first-generation and second-generation immigrant students in honors programs, and interview honors faculty and staff to learn more about their admissions process and why their programs tend to enroll few marginalized students. In this study, many participants credited their educational success to parental involvement. Future research should interview the parents of first-generation college students of color from immigrant backgrounds to better understand their impact on the experiences of their students.

**Recommendations for Honors Programs**

The recommendations below are derived from the messages participants left for future students and their responses to things they wished they had known before starting college or joining honors. In their messages, participants extended their suggestions beyond their personal experiences reach for future students and honors programs at large.

**Representation and Advocacy**

Harrison-Cook’s (1999) study found that the honors program was viewed as appealing to white students and some academically eligible students did not join the Honors College because they were discouraged by the lack of activities and courses of interest to Black students. In this thesis, some participants described feeling underrepresented when they saw newsletters and other
communiques from the honors program that did not include students from their backgrounds. Students should be able to see themselves represented in the curriculum, honors events, publications (e.g. newsletter, website, social media, etc.), to name a few. Some of the participants were happy to see staff members who looked like them or come from similar backgrounds. They felt more welcomed and saw these staff members as deeper connections to their honors program. A challenge to consider is drawing a line between representation and tokenization of minority students.

**Student committees and advisory boards.** Two interviewees discussed having an honors student platform or advisory board. For example, one student discussed having a new honors student committee that meets with the Dean to discuss student concerns, more specifically, issues of minority recruitment and service. Establishing a student committee or advisory board can help gather ongoing feedback from marginalized students to improve honors programs. This is one way to make students feel welcomed and to invite them to partake in decision making. Kosut (2006) argued that the voices of marginalized students will always be silenced and unheard as part of an elite cultural reproductive cycle unless universities take on an active role in making their voices heard and challenging the status quo.

**Multicultural programming.** In Anderson Goins’ (2014) study, participants indicated that the social events hosted by honors were not appealing to them. This illustrates that there is a need to ensure that an honors program offers academic and social programs to better engage and represent students. For example, in this study, Sara enjoyed taking a class on Cleopatra because she idolized her and saw her as a powerful woman. Rudy took an honors-by-contract class on multiculturalism and had the honors program add the class to their list of recommended courses for future students. More multicultural programming can promote a culture of inclusivity and
acceptance, as well as challenge the elitist perception of honors education. For example, Katia and Sara acknowledge that the honors program can be elitist, pretentious, or “bougie.” As discussed in the history of honors development, much of the current curriculum focuses on Western literature and philosophy (i.e. the Great Books approach). Understandably, underrepresented students may feel detached or alienated in classes that where their cultural and historical contributions are not as valued in intellectual spaces.

**Recruitment and Admissions**

Rudy brought up an important point about targeting admission requirements and services offered to minority students in honors. Findings from this study suggest that an American education is almost a requirement to be recruited and admitted into an honors program for high school applicants. There is a need to adapt the recruitment and admission process to be more inclusive of immigrant students who were educated abroad but have difficulties requesting their educational credentials. The college application process may be confusing enough for first-generation and immigrant students. Offering more support to eligible immigrant students is an equitable approach that allows programs to reach a student pool that may not be flagged for recruitment because of their foreign educational background or other factors that place them at a disadvantage.

**Refugee-serving offices.** As discussed in the literature review, public schools in the US provide different types of educational experiences and curriculum knowledge to students based on their social class (Anyon, 1980). If possible, honors programs should extend outreach efforts to immigrant dominated space. For example, recruitment staff should reach out to refugee resettlement offices to recruit students who may not receive any formal invitation or encouragement to apply for honors from someone they know.
Recruit current students. High school counselors may not encourage all qualified students to join the Honors College. Many minority students are not actively approached by Honors Colleges even though an honors program can enhance their persistence because of the small classes, personalized advising, and opportunity to develop close relationships (Anderson Goins, 2014; Harrison-Cook, 1999). In Anderson Goins’ (2014) study, only one out of twelve participants was recruited by the Honors College, while other participants learned about the honors program through college fairs, teachers, former Honors College students, or personal research. To provide students with a second chance at honors, it may be fruitful to contact multicultural centers on campus to recruit current students who may not have been invited to join honors.

Shadow days. As previously discussed, many minority students lack exposure to the dominant culture and therefore have limited access to developing valuable cultural capital (Gaddis, 2013). Kosut (2006) speculates that there is a class ceiling preventing lower-class and other under-privileged students from achieving the same levels of successes as their counterparts. Therefore, honors programs should offer students with an opportunity to sit in on a class to see what an honors seminar is like and what to expect from an honors education. This can be an authentic seminar or a mock session designed for recruitment purposes.

Parent weekend. One interviewee mentioned having parents come to Parents Weekends at her university. This helps engage an immigrant family rather than the involving students only. This study revealed that most immigrant parents stress education and have high expectations for their students. Thus, inviting immigrant parents to the honors program can develop a sense of inclusion and may help narrow the gap between first-generation students and immigrant parents.
since numerous participants described how their parents can only do so much without understanding their college experiences.

**Scholarships.** Participants in Harrison-Cook’s (1999) study desired monetary incentives to manage any financial risks associated with enrolling in honors education and possibly earning lower grades (Harrison-Cook, 1999). Relatedly, participants in Anderson Goin’s (2014) study described how the Honors College was responsible for reducing their financial stress. Offering scholarships can reward and help retain students who may struggle with financing college and cannot afford to take on an honors track.

**Program Flexibility**

Based on the findings and student suggestions, it may be beneficial to have night classes or online classes to accommodate students who work multiple jobs and cannot commit to daytime courses or in person courses every semester. Small group seminars are crucial to an honors program and online courses do not support close discussion environment. It may be rewarding to allow honors-by-contract for students who worry about financing tuition for honors courses and staying in college longer than they could afford. Students may appreciate having flexible final projects options such as portfolios for those who may be intimidated by the thesis option or overwhelmed by research projects in their own discipline. For example, Quinn wrote a children’s book on religion for her thesis, however; many first-generation and immigrant students have misconceptions about thesis and research-related projects that can deter them from participating in honors. Traditional curriculum like the Great Books may deter minority students like Lisa who find this pedagogical approach too intimidated or too far detached from their reality and majors.
Personalized Student Success

There was an interviewee who did not qualify for this study but she discussed a program that helped her with her college that could be applied to honors. Xena participated in a JumpStart program at her university. This program allows underrepresented students to move in a week early before everyone else moved in so they can get better acquainted with campus and learn about available resources. The program also seeks to connect underrepresented students with other freshmen from similar backgrounds. Xena appreciated this opportunity because she made friends with other people before the official move-in and it was a different, relaxing environment. It made her college transition easier. In addition, the JumpStart program offers students with an additional advisor who monitors students’ academic progress and completes check-in meetings with students once per semester. During these meetings, students discuss their academic plans with the JumpStart advisor, calculate their GPA, or revisit what other general courses they need for graduation outside of their specific majors/minors. If an honors program wishes to attract and retain first-generation, immigrant students of color, it may be beneficial to develop a program or assign a staff member to offer extra support to underrepresented students.

Relationship with honors faculty/staff. As described earlier, the connections students developed with honors faculty or staff play an important role in belonging. For example, Lak described the honors faculty and staff as being very nice and warm. In fact, his honors program provides students with a full team of advisors. The advisors are always available to help students and some even mail out birthday cards to provide students with personalized advising and show them that they matter. As an honors ambassador and mentor, Quinn interacts a lot with faculty/staff in the honors program which deepens her connection to the Honors College.
Cross-cultural sensitivity training. Providing a cultural competence training to honors faculty/staff can help with recruitment and retention. Diversity sensitivity training equips faculty and staff with the necessary skills to educate under-served honors students. This is truly important, for example, some participants still remember their interactions with culturally sensitive honors staff which strengthened their relationship with the honors program. Such training may lead to developing more multicultural programming for students. It can also aid honors faculty/staff in accommodating student needs and recognizing the educational backgrounds of those from marginalized backgrounds who need extra support.

Capitalizing on Peer Relations

Many participants highlighted their relationship with peers in the honors program. For Lak, his relationship with honors peers is very strong. As previously noted, he joined the honors program because all of his college friends were in honors and this provided him with an already established peer network. He was already a group member before his official acceptance into honors. Katia also met a strong group of friends through the honors program and the first-year seminar they are required to take. Marie and Lisa were able to establish strong connections with peers in the honors program who live(d) on the honors floor. Quinn met some of her closest friends through the honors program and because of her role as an ambassador and mentor.

Honors peer mentoring. Halpern (2005) discusses the role of mentoring as an intervention approach to boost the educational achievements of marginalized students by boosting their social capital. The findings of this study reinforce the important role of mentoring in improving the educational experiences of underrepresented students. Participants discussed the various forms of mentorship available for honors students and its impact on their academic and social experiences. For example, Lak’s program offers honors ambassadors who are ideal
students in a variety of disciplines that make up the honors college. It is not a formal mentorship program but students are free to contact these honors ambassadors or ideal students with any questions or concerns. Katia and Lisa’s Honors College offers a first-year mentorship program. Their program provides new students with Peer Mentors and Peer Advisors who are upperclassmen students with valuable experiences and advice to share with newer students. Current students are free to reach out to these Peer Mentors and Advisors with any academic or social issues. At Rudy and Aisha’s university, upperclassmen in the honors program are charged with leading honors orientation. However, this is a very short-term and informal mentorship approach. In fact, Rudy remembered how he explained being “mentored” by a student who graduated the same year he started college. He did not maintain contact with his so-called mentor, did not know them, and did not build any relationship with them. He clarified that “it was just to help you set up, settle, and explain to you some things.”

When Quinn was a freshman everyone in her cohort was assigned an honors mentor. Not many students were thrilled about a required mentorship program. Today, their mentorship program is optional and students choose an honors mentor after reviewing mentor profiles. It is important to note that Sara’s program was the only honors program without a formal or informal mentorship program. For many of these participants, a mentorship program increases their access to gaining social capital and feeling supported. Sara’s program was the only honors program in this study without any form of peer mentoring. Sara struggled with academic and social integration. Her advisors and peer group seemed unwelcoming. An informal or formal mentorship program might have helped her feel more welcomed and aided her with establishing connections. In summary, peer mentoring can range from one-day events to semester-long or
year-long coaching opportunities. Mentoring can help students establish connections, make participants feel more welcomed, and overall assist with their academic and social integration.

**Researcher Reflection**

In this thesis, I examined an educational issue of concern to me as a first-generation college student of color from a refugee background. In 2012, I joined the honors program at my undergraduate institution only to withdraw from the Honors College the same semester. Much like the participants in this study, my immigrant parents raised me with very high academic expectations. They raised me to value education and to always be the best, do my best to exceed all expectations when it comes to school. Not surprisingly, the pressure to succeed made it a painful experience to withdraw from the honors college.

I still remember my first Honors College seminar. It was a class focused on religious beliefs that I was interested in because of my ethnic and religious minority background while growing up in Khartoum. My first week I was very intimidated because I was the only black, ESL, political refugee/non-citizen student in the class. Many of my classmates seemed to know so much more (or at least they played it off well) and I struggled to feel like I belonged in that classroom. I do not think I ever spoke after sharing my name during introductions.

Like Kosut (2006), I am always fascinated by the classroom discussion in many US colleges where students are not afraid to voice their opinions or challenge the professor. During discussion, I felt lost, the content was new to me and the philosophical readings were difficult for me to comprehend at the time. Like Marie, I admired my professor but I was also afraid to approach her because she seemed very intimidating and unwelcoming. When discussion was happening so fast about religions that I did not know about, I was becoming more and more isolated and questioning what I was doing in a classroom full of people who were familiar with
this topic and natives of the English language. Similar to Lak, Rudy, Sara, and Lisa, I felt inadequate and feared that I would never be able to catch up or contribute to discussion.

I remember weeping in my dorm room, feeling frustrated, underprepared and finally clicking the “drop” button on my StudentCenter account to withdraw from my first honors course. I then emailed my advisor to inform her of my decision. I feared that if every honors seminar was going to be identical to my first seminar, then I would never survive. As a competitive student, it was unbearable to sit in class without contributing a word. I wondered how many other students felt this way and what kind of help or support they received to keep them in honors.

I wished my professor knew my background and how to make her classroom more inclusive of non-White American students. I wished she would reach out to students since it was a small class and honors programs pride themselves in having close faculty-student relations and discussion-oriented classrooms so that instructors know you. Like Sara, I just wanted to be part of the class discussion. It is heartbreaking to feel excluded, inadequate, and afraid to ask for help.

I received conditional admission to my undergraduate university. In other words, I was admitted through a support program for students whose prior academic experience may not have prepared them for college. I was required to participate in a remedial course the summer before starting college and to take courses designated for students in the Academic Opportunity Center students only. This was confusing to me because I graduated as Valedictorian with a 3.9 GPA and I took as many honors and advanced courses as I could. I remember taking three city buses to my prospective university, several times, to speak with an admission’s staff willing to explain to me why I was admitted conditionally. I remember one of my own prospective advisors walking out of the office and slamming the door after saying, “I have no intentions of explaining
anything to her.” As an immigrant and a first-generation college student, these were my first interactions with higher education in the US. I was not allowed to question anything or ask for explanations.

Eventually, after pestering enough offices, someone from admissions met with me and explained that my ACT math and science scores were alarming which is why I was admitted as conditionally. Simultaneously, I was admitted to the Honors College when I was admitted to the university because of my high GPA. It was very confusing to be admitted as an at-risk student whose prior education may not have prepared her for college. I felt like Katia: a statistic, a stereotype. How was it possible to be admitted as an at-risk student but also receive admissions to the Honors College? This conditional admission status had a negative impact on my sense of belonging in the Honors College. Like many of my participants, I felt alienated and insufficient. I convinced myself that I was underprepared. The brochure of our support program explained that the program was designed for students with poor academic preparation. Gradually, I convinced myself that I was not ready. I convinced myself that I was honors material. I was not elite material.

Last year, I reached out to my first Honors College professor from my undergraduate institution. I explained to her my experience in her class and how alienated I felt. I did not expect her to remember me and I knew nothing would come of the email. However, I wanted someone to hear my experience. I wanted someone to know and I wanted her to be more mindful of future students from similar backgrounds. I wanted my program to do more for marginalized students. Sara and I attended the same Honors Program. We had similar experiences of feeling intimidated, isolated, and unsupported. There is a need for developing programs to support the academic and social integration of minority students in honors which is why I felt compelled to
pursue this research. Like Rudy and Katia, I think there is more to be done to recognize and accommodate the needs of minority students in gifted education. I hope that my research begins to change that.

When I first began my thesis, I reached out to my current institution’s honors program. Unfortunately, I was not able to find any potential participants because of the lack of diversity at our school. It saddens me to move from one institution to another and see similar issues of underrepresentation. Thankfully, in April 2017, my graduate assistantship office received an email about a diversity, equity, and inclusion conference that the honors program is hosting in October 2017. I know I am not alone in thinking that it is important to make honors education more accessible and equitable for underrepresented students. Simply acknowledging its importance is not enough. This conference offers hope that someday, honors education across the US will be more accessible to first-generation college students of color from immigrant backgrounds.
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APPENDIX A. UNTOLD STORIES

Nearly half of those interviewed did not qualify as final participants but their unique stories still hold value to this study. The stories below depict very different experiences, supports and challenges. They illustrate the influence of families, social class, schooling, and age of migration in shaping a student’s education and their pathways toward academic achievement. Furthermore, these student profiles capture the grooming process involved and some common characteristics among honors students in US universities.

Daisy

Daisy’s parents are from India. Her mother earned two bachelor’s degrees in India and a third one in Canada. Her father acquired his master’s degree in India and later pursued a PhD in Canada. In India, Daisy’s parents were lower-middle class. In Canada, after her father completed additional schooling, Daisy’s family was upper-middle class. In the US, they are still upper-middle class. Daisy’s family migrated to Canada when she was a child. She completed first through ninth grade in Quebec. A few years ago, Daisy’s parents relocated to the US for work. As a result, she completed high school in the US and was later invited to join the honors program once she was accepted to her current university. When she moved to Canada, Daisy did not speak English or French and the school system was different from her school in India. She stressed that because she migrated to Canada at such a young age, she adapted and mastered English and French a lot faster than older migrants. Her age eased the process of academic and cultural integration. Not only that but she did not face any difficulties transitioning to a US school because she learned English in Canada and the school cultures are similar. In addition, her school was racially and ethnically diverse and had students from different immigrant backgrounds. She was able to take the ACT at her US school. She was also able to enroll in
honors courses and more than five AP courses. Like many of the students interviewed, her parents and school counselors assisted her with navigating the college application process.

Daisy attends the same Honors College as Marie. However, she is classified as an international student because of her parents’ work visa and temporary migration status. This eliminates her from being a final participant, however; her story is important because it reinforces the importance of attending a high-performing high school in the US to be part of the honors pipeline. For instance, she participated in AP courses and ACT testing in the US. These are key admission requirements that some immigrant students are unable to access depending on their age of migration and the type of school they attend.

**Amina**

Amina is a half-Chinese and half-Lebanese college student. Her father migrated to the US after receiving a scholarship to attend the University of Mississippi and later he became a professor in the US. Amina’s parents stressed the importance of education and taught her how valuable it is to gain a college education and to be part of something like the honors program.

Amina did not qualify as a final participant because her parents were educated in the US and they continue to transfer their meaningful college experiences to Amina’s educational life. They have been involved in shaping her education and preparing her for an honors education. For example, throughout her K-12 education, Amina was not involved in many extracurricular activities but she did skip a grade, took three AP classes and enrolled in enough college credit courses at a local university that she skipped a year of college and will be graduating at the age of 19. She had always known that she wanted to go to college. Her parents pushed her academically and taught her to see the need for higher education in terms of finding meaningful jobs and personal growth.
The college application process was no challenge for Amina who already knew what to expect after taking college credit courses at the local university. She was invited to join the honors college and gladly accepted this invitation because she wanted to challenge herself. She wanted the smaller classes because they would allow her to interact with professors and peers. They also allow her to gain in-depth knowledge of topics. Amina’s college education is fully funded through scholarships. Like Daisy, her story portrays the role of social class and parental educational level on grooming students for an honors education.

Par

Par is a 25-year old Karen refugee who was born in Burma and later fled to Thailand. His parents are farmers and because of the high cost of schooling in Burma, they were not able to send all seven of their children to school. Consequently, Par moved to Thailand after completing fifth grade in Burma. In Thailand, he lived in a refugee camp and completed high school. In the refugee camp, he saw no hope, no jobs, no opportunities for him to advance his education. Refugees in the camp struggled with limited food access, being forced to live in a ghetto and constantly guarded by Thai police. In 2009, Par migrated to the US after being sponsored a relative. He applied to come to the US when he was seventeen but was not allowed to come without his parents, therefore; Par waited until he was eighteen to be able reapply. When he was close to turning nineteen he was finally able to join his aunt and brother in the US. Once he arrived in the US, Par had to redo high school to get into college. He explained that “I actually finished high school there [Thailand] but since refugee camp is not recognized as a legal school, when you come here, you have to do your high school again in order to go to college.”

Par reflected on how little knowledge—historically, culturally, and politically—he had about the US. He did not speak English and it was an arduous learning process. Because of his
age, his local high school placed him in the eleventh grade and later he completed two years of twelfth grade. He also participated in summer school to be academically caught up and graduate on time. It was difficult for him to attend school in the US because of the differing school culture, curriculum, and language. As his English improved, he was able to enroll in AP calculus and AP Government. He pointed out that if he had had more time in high school or even started school in the US as early as ninth grade, he would have been able to enroll in more AP or college credit courses. In the US, besides his English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher, Par had teachers who were not trained on working with refugee or immigrant students. He recalled falling further and further behind because his teachers made no attempt to accommodate his learning needs or encourage him in anyway. To illustrate, he explained that when ESL students received poor grades, the teachers assumed it was because they did not care about school.

Field (2003) noted that those with more financial and cultural capital tend to have higher social capital. In addition, the most disadvantaged individuals tend to associate with those from similar backgrounds who are also limited in accessing more economically and culturally rich networks (Field, 2003). This can be seen in Par’s story. During the college application process, Par had no family guidance or role models. He saw other Karen students struggling in an unsupportive environment. This inspired him to found a student club at his high school that coaches Karen students on how to better communicate with teachers and how to apply to college. The club invited local speakers to come teach students how to apply to college and scholarships. During his spare time, Par went to a local church for English lessons and tutoring. His senior year, he also went to the same local church for help with writing his college essay. His aunt wanted him to go to college but she does not speak any English and has no knowledge on US schools. Thus, Par relied on his guidance counselor and church volunteers to help him navigate
the college application process. His guidance counselor helped him apply for several scholarships and he was able to receive a scholarship that covered all of his tuition and fees.

For Par, the college application process was overwhelming because it was a foreign territory to him and he had no family members or friends who could offer him support. His guidance counselor informed him that if he wished to improve his English, he should not live near other Karen speakers. For this reason, she instructed him to attend a small, rural college that was far from his aunt and Karen community. He clarified, “I did not really choose it. My counselor chose it for me. She wanted me to improve my English.” Par’s counselor sent him to her rural alma mater where he felt like alienated and constantly reminded of his minority status. Par struggled to make friends at his rural college. He was completely isolated from his relative and had no support network.

Although Par was not a final participant, his experience relates to the importance of linguistic capital. Because of his limited English, he was not able to take as many advanced courses as he would have liked. Because of his limited English, his guidance counselor directed him to a rural college because she believed isolation would help increase his linguistic capital and ultimately ensure his academic success. Par had to endure overt racism at this school. He said his counselor was aware of the racial tensions and was nervous about sending him to her alma mater. He did not understand why she still made the final decision and instructed him to move to such school. As an immigrant first-generation college student, Par obeyed. He trusted his guidance counselor to know what was best for him since he had no family or friends to guide him. Par was harassed by the police in that rural community. Not only that but his professor who was also his advisor referred to him with a racial slur. To make matters worse, Par was physically assaulted by his roommate who was very disrespectful to him and did not understand
his cultural background. He did not report any of this because he thought no one would believe him and his roommate had many friends who could further harm him. It was very difficult for Par to integrate socially and academically.

After one year, Par reached out to his high school guidance counselor again and asked for help transferring out of his rural college. He was miserable. His guidance counselor then helped him transfer to a larger university in a more urban area. His new university had more immigrant students and it made Par feel at home. He is much happier now and participates in many organizations on campus, including an honors society.

Par’s story is important because he is an ideal candidate for this study since he identifies as a first-generation college student of color from refugee background. However, he was not given an equal or equitable chance at the honors pipeline in high school. In a way, he was like Katia whose teachers had little faith in her success based on statistics that said she is likely to drop out of high school or will not even make it to college. Ogbu and Simons (1998) highlighted the involuntary minorities tend to have low economic capital, face greater cultural and linguistic difficulties, and struggle in schools. Some of these key elements can be observed in Par’s experiences. His story reinforces the cultural value of a US high school education. It also speaks to the economic and cultural capital students must possess to be able to attend well-performing public or private schools, the important role of parental engagement, and the role of those who aid students with navigating the college application and transition process. In particular, it speaks to the institutional cultural capital attached to US schools and the value of formal education since his refugee camp education in Thailand was not considered legitimate.
APPENDIX B. CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent Form

UNRAVELING THE EXPERIENCES OF FIRST-GENERATION, IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE STUDENTS OF COLOR IN US HONORS COLLEGES

My name is Keji Kujo and I am a graduate student in the Masters of Art in Cross-Cultural and International Education program at Bowling Green State University. My advisor is Dr. Christopher Frey. He is an Associate Professor in the Master of Art in Cross-Cultural and International Education program at Bowling Green State University.

Purpose of the Study
You are invited to be part of a research study seeking information on the experiences of first-generation, immigrant and/or refugee students of color in honors colleges at four-year universities in the United States. You were selected as a possible participant due to your enrollment in the honors college, status as a first-generation, immigrant and/or refugee student of color in the honors college, or because of your interest in the study. The purpose of this study is to better understand the experiences of first-generation, immigrant and refugee students of color in honors colleges.

The goals of this study are to describe and analyze the experiences of first-generation, immigrant and refugee students of color in honors college programs in the US.

Procedures
This study is part of a thesis research. If you agree to be in this study, you must meet the following requirements:

Participants must be between the ages of 18 and 26. Participants must identify as an immigrant and/or refugee as well as persons of color. Participants must be currently enrolled on a part-time or full-time basis at a four-year university in the US. Participants must have completed at least one-semester in the honors college.

Participants will take part in two interviews, each lasting at least 60 minutes. The interviews will occur at the participant’s location of choice or via video chat. All interviews will be digitally recorded. All interviews will be transcribed into a typed document. The first interview will ask you to share demographic information. The first interview will also ask about your move to the United States as an immigrant/refugee.

The second interview will ask you to share your honors college experiences in the US.

Voluntary nature
Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to take part in this study. If you decide to take part, you can change your mind later and withdraw from the study. You are free to not answer any questions or withdraw at any time. If you decide to withdraw or if you are withdrawn from the study before it ends, I will not use any of the information collected. Your decision will not change any present or future relationships with the Bowling Green State University.
Confidentiality/Anonymity Protection
All information collected about you during the course of this study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. You will be identified on tape or on paper with a pseudonym. Only I will have access to the information.

The voice recordings of interviews will be typed word for word by the interviewer. The recordings will be erased immediately after this is complete. The transcripts of the recordings will be stored in a password-protected computer and stored in a locked storage cabinet in my office in 210 Hanna Hall.

All of the information collected for this study will be destroyed when the study is complete.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study
The potential risks for participating in this study are minimal. The risks of participation are no are no greater than those you would encounter everyday life. If at any point you wish to terminate your participation in the study, you may do so.

Participants will receive a $10.00 VISA gift card as a token of appreciation after completing the second interview. The information collected may enhance how colleges and universities address the needs and concerns of the population being studied.

Contact Information
For more information about the study or the study procedures or treatments, or to withdraw from the study, contact: Keji Kujio at (kkujio@bsu.edu) or 414-388-3124. You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Christopher Frey at (cjfrey@bsu.edu, 419-372-9549). You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Review Board at 419-372-7716 or hsrb@bsu.edu, if you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research.

To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. If you choose to take part in this study, you may withdraw at any time. You are not giving up any of your legal rights by signing this form. Your signature below indicates that you have read this entire consent form, including the risks and benefits, and have had all of your questions answered, and that you are 18 years of age or older.

Statement of Consent:
I have been informed of the purposes, procedures, risks, and benefits of this study. I have had the change to have all of my questions answered. I have been informed that my participation is voluntary. I agree to participate in this research.

Participant Signature
Outreach Email to Honors Programs

Hello,

My name is Keji Kuijo and I am a graduate student in the College of Education and Human Development at Bowling Green State University. For my master’s thesis, I am conducting a study to explore the experiences of first-generation, immigrant and refugee students of color in honors colleges at four-year American universities.

I am reaching out to your honors college program to find potential participants who meet the requirements for my study:

- Participants must be between 18 to 26 years of age
- Participants must self-identify as an immigrant and/or refugee
- Participants must self-identify as first-generation
- Participants must self-identify as persons of color
- Participants must have completed at least one-semester in the honors college
- Participants must be currently enrolled in a degree-seeking university program on a part-time or full-time basis

Participants will take part in two 60-minute interviews at their location of choice or via video chat.

Participants will receive a $10.00 VISA gift card as a token of appreciation after completing the second interview.

I have attached a copy of my recruitment email to be sent to students if your program is interested in assisting me with outreach. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at (kkuijo@bgsu.edu) or (414-388-3124).

Thank you, and I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

Keji Kuijo
Recruitment Letter to Students

Hello,

My name is Keji Kujjo and I am a graduate student in the College of Education and Human Development at Bowling Green State University. For my master’s thesis, I am conducting a study to explore the experiences of first-generation, immigrant and refugee students of color in honors colleges at four-year American universities.

Your participation is voluntary and you may discontinue at any time.

If you choose to participate in this study, I will conduct two 60-minute interviews, with you. Interviews will occur at the participant’s location of choice or via video chat.

Eligibility in this study is limited to those who meet the following requirements:
- Participants must be between 18 to 26 years of age
- Participants must self-identify as an immigrant and/or refugee
- Participants must self-identify as first-generation
- Participants must self-identify as persons of color
- Participants must have completed at least one-semester in the honors college
- Participants must be currently enrolled in a degree-seeking university program on a part-time or full-time basis

All of this information will be kept strictly confidential; your identity will not be revealed and all materials will be kept secure in my office.

Participants will receive a $10.00 VISA gift card as a token of appreciation after completing the second interview.

If you would like to participate, please contact Keji Kujjo at (kkujjo@bgusu.edu) or (414-388-3124).

Thank you, and I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

Keji Kujjo
Follow Up Email to Interested Students
Hello [Student’s Name],

Thank you for responding to my email. As I mentioned, my name is Keji Kujjo and I am a graduate student in the College of Education and Human Development at Bowling Green State University. I am currently beginning my master’s thesis under the advisement of Dr. Christopher Frey in the Master of Arts in Cross-Cultural and International Education program. I am using this study to learn more about the experiences of first-generation, immigrant and refugee students of color in honors colleges. The risks of participation in this study are no greater than those you would encounter in everyday life. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw from participating in this study at any time without penalty. I will not include your name within my thesis. This study consists of two 60-minute interviews with participants. Interviews will occur at the participant’s location of choice or via video chat.

Eligible participants must meet all of the following criteria:
- Participants must be between 18 to 26 years of age
- Participants must self-identify as an immigrant and/or refugee
- Participants must self-identify as first-generation
- Participants must self-identify as persons of color
- Participants must have completed at least one-semester in the honors college
- Participants must be currently enrolled in a degree-seeking university program on a part-time or full-time basis

Participants will be asked to review transcripts from the two interviews to confirm accuracy. In addition, participants will receive a $10.00 VISA gift card as a token of appreciation after completing the second interview.

If you meet the eligibility requirements and you would like to participate in this study, I would like to set up a time for our first interview. Prior to our first meeting, I will send you an informed consent form that fully details your rights and requests your formal participation in the study. I will also provide you with a summary of the findings after the completion of the main study.

I look forward to hearing from you. Thank you, again, for your time and interest.

Sincerely,

Keji Kujjo
kkujjo@bgsu.edu
414-388-3124.
Interview Protocol

Interview #1

Date:
Time:
Institution:
Interviewer:

Thank you for participating in my study on first-generation, immigrant and refugee students of color in honor colleges.

As explained in my email, the purpose of our two interview sessions will be to understand, from your point of view, how first-generation, immigrant and refugee students of color experience being in the honors college at American universities. There are no right or wrong answers. I only want to hear your point of view. I will use your words to identify themes and may quote you—using a pseudonym—in my final report. Your participation and your institution will always remain confidential in this study. Do you have any questions?

If I ask you any questions that you do not want to answer, you do not have to answer those questions. I will move on to another open-ended question.

I would like to record these interviews. A digital recording will allow me to represent our conversation more accurately. I may also take some notes during the course of our conversation. If at any point in time, you would like me to stop the digital recorder, please raise your hand, and I will stop the digital recorder. Do you have any questions?

To participate in this study, please provide your verbal agreement. You may agree to participate by repeating the following statements aloud:

“I have been informed of the purposes, procedures, risks, and benefits of this study. I have had the change to have all of my questions answered. I have been informed that my participation is voluntary. I agree to participate in this research.”

[Start digital recording].

To begin, I would like to ask you a few demographic questions.

Interviewee (Self-selected Pseudonym):
College/University:

1. What is your name?
2. How do you identify your gender?
3. How old are you?
4. How do you identify your race and/or ethnicity?
5. Where were you born?
6. What language(s) do you speak?
7. Did you live in another country before coming to the US?
   a. If so, what country?
8. When did you move to the US?
9. How would you describe your family’s economic status before coming to the US and after coming to the US?
10. What was your education level before coming to the US? What about your parents and siblings (if any)?
11. What are you studying?
12. Are you enrolled as a part-time or full time student?
13. What year are you in?

Conversation Prompts:

What was your life like before coming to the US?
   What was your childhood like growing up in _____?

Do you consider yourself an immigrant or refugee?

Why did you (or your family) come to the US?

Tell me about your resettlement process.
   To where, state or city, did you relocate to?
   How old were you?
   Who came with you?
   What do you remember most about resettling?

Describe for me your school experiences in the US.
   What grade were you in when you came to the US?
   What was it like to be a student in the US?
   What issues did you encounter when you enrolled in school in the US?
   What did you enjoy most about school?
   What did you enjoy least about school?
   What classes did you take? E.g. honors, AP, college credit, etc.
   What programs did you participate in outside the classroom? E.g. college credit plus, Trio programs, tutoring, sports, etc.

Is there anything I have not asked that you would like to share?

Closing statement:

Thank you for spending time with me and sharing your experiences. To confirm, we will next meet on [date]. Thank you, again, for your participation. It was great meeting with you.
Interview #2

Thank you for meeting with me again. I really appreciate your time. This will be our second and last interview.

I would like to record this interview as well. A digital recording will allow me to represent our conversation more accurately. I may also take some notes during the course of our conversation. If at any point in time, you would like me to stop the digital recorder, please raise your hand, and I will stop the digital recorder. Do you have any questions?

Interview Date:
Time:
Institution:
Interviewer:
Interviewee:

When did you start to think about college?  
What made you start thinking about college?

Describe the college application process.  
What type of support did you get in applying for college? Who was there for you (e.g. family, peers, teachers, community)? How?  
What sort of advice do you remember getting?  
What was it like to apply to college?  
What did you think of the college application process?  
What schools did you consider and why?  
How did you imagine college to be?

What made you come to this particular school?  
What parts of your identity played a key role in your school choice?

Can you tell me what you remember about your transition to college?  
How prepared did you feel? What challenges did you run into? What do you wish you knew?

What extracurricular activities are you involved with on and off-campus?

Tell me about a time when you were frustrated with your experience at this university.

What support systems and programs do you have at your school? How do you use them?

Tell me about being in the honors college.  
Describe for me how you became part of the honors college? What motivated you? What role models do you have that influenced your enrollment in the honors college?  
What does your school require to join the honors college?
How will you use your honors education after graduation? What hopes and expectations do you have?
How are you funding your college education? (e.g. scholarships, financial aid, loans, etc.)

What makes you feel like you belong in the honors college?
What did you program do to make you feel welcomed?
How is your relationship with peers, faculty, and mentors in the honors college?
Have you had any moments where you felt like you didn’t “fit in” or didn’t belong?
If so, can you tell me more about those moments and how you dealt with them?
Do you live on or off campus? How did you end up there?
What is it like to be an immigrant/refugee in the honors college?
What is it like to be a first generation student in the honors college?
What is it like to be a student of color in the honors college?
Do you have any responsibilities besides being a student? If so, tell me more.
Have you ever thought of leaving the honors college? If so, why? What made you stay then?
How does being part of the honors college impact your overall college experience? Does it make things harder? Easier?
Do you feel pressure to succeed in the honors college because they are not many first-generation, immigrant and refugee students of color in those gifted programs?

Tell me about a time when you were frustrated with your experience in the honors college.

What kind of support systems and mentoring do you have in the honors college?
How do they affect your experience in the honors college?

How do you feel your honors college experience compares to the experiences of students who are not from an immigrant or refugee background? Students who are not first generation? Students who are not minorities?

What advice would you give other first-generation, immigrant or refugee students of color looking to attend an honors college?

Is there anything I have not asked that you would like to share?

**Closing statement:**

Thank you for sharing your time and experiences with me. I really appreciate your participation in my study. I will share a copy of your interview transcript as soon as possible. You will have the opportunity to read, review, and revise your responses as you see fit. Do you have any questions?

Thank you once again. I will be in touch soon.
APPENDIX E. HSRB EXEMPT LETTER

DATE: December 8, 2016
TO: Keji Kujo
FROM: Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board
PROJECT TITLE: [986879-2] Unraveling the Experiences of First-generation, Immigrant and Refugee Students of Color in Honor Colleges
SUBMISSION TYPE: Revision
ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS
DECISION DATE: December 7, 2016
REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category # 2

Thank you for your submission of Revision materials for this project. The Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board has determined this project is exempt from IRB review according to federal regulations AND that the proposed research has met the principles outlined in the Belmont Report. You may now begin the research activities.

Note that an amendment may not be made to exempt research because of the possibility that proposed changes may change the research in such a way that it is no longer meets the criteria for exemption. A new application must be submitted and reviewed prior to modifying the research activity unless the researcher believes that the change must be made to prevent harm to participants. In these cases, the Office of Research Compliance must be notified as soon as practicable.

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records.

If you have any questions, please contact Kristin Hagemeyer at 419-372-7716 or knagemy@bgsu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board’s records.
APPENDIX F. HSRB ACKNOWLEDGEMENT LETTER

DATE: December 5, 2016
TO: Keji Kujo
FROM: Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board
PROJECT TITLE: [986879-2] Unraveling the Experiences of First-generation, Immigrant and Refugee Students of Color in Honor Colleges
SUBMISSION TYPE: Revision
ACTION: ACKNOWLEDGED

Thank you for submitting the Revision materials for this project. The Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board has ACKNOWLEDGED your submission. No further action on submission 986879-2 is required at this time.

The following items are acknowledged in this submission:
- Application Form - Revised Kujo HSRB App.docx (UPDATED: 12/1/2016)
- Consent Form - Revised Kujo Consent Form letterhead.doc (UPDATED: 12/1/2016)
- Cover Sheet - Kujo HSRB Modifications.docx (UPDATED: 12/1/2015)

If you have any questions, please contact the Office of Research Compliance at 419-372-7716 or hsrb@bgsu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence regarding this project.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board's records.