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# Beyond Ethnicity: Experiences of Racism and Perceptions of Belonging Among Latina/o/x Students at an HWCU

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## Introduction

Bonilla-Silva and Peoples (2022) highlighted that Historically White Colleges and Universities (HWCU or PWI) perpetuate “informal segregation,” disenfranchising students and faculty of color, leading to feelings of rejection and isolation.

This phenomenon, also documented in studies on microaggressions and minority students’ sense of belonging (Lewis et al., 2021; Harwood et al., 2012), prompted our investigation into the experiences of Latina/o/x students with diverse racial and national identities at Hope College.

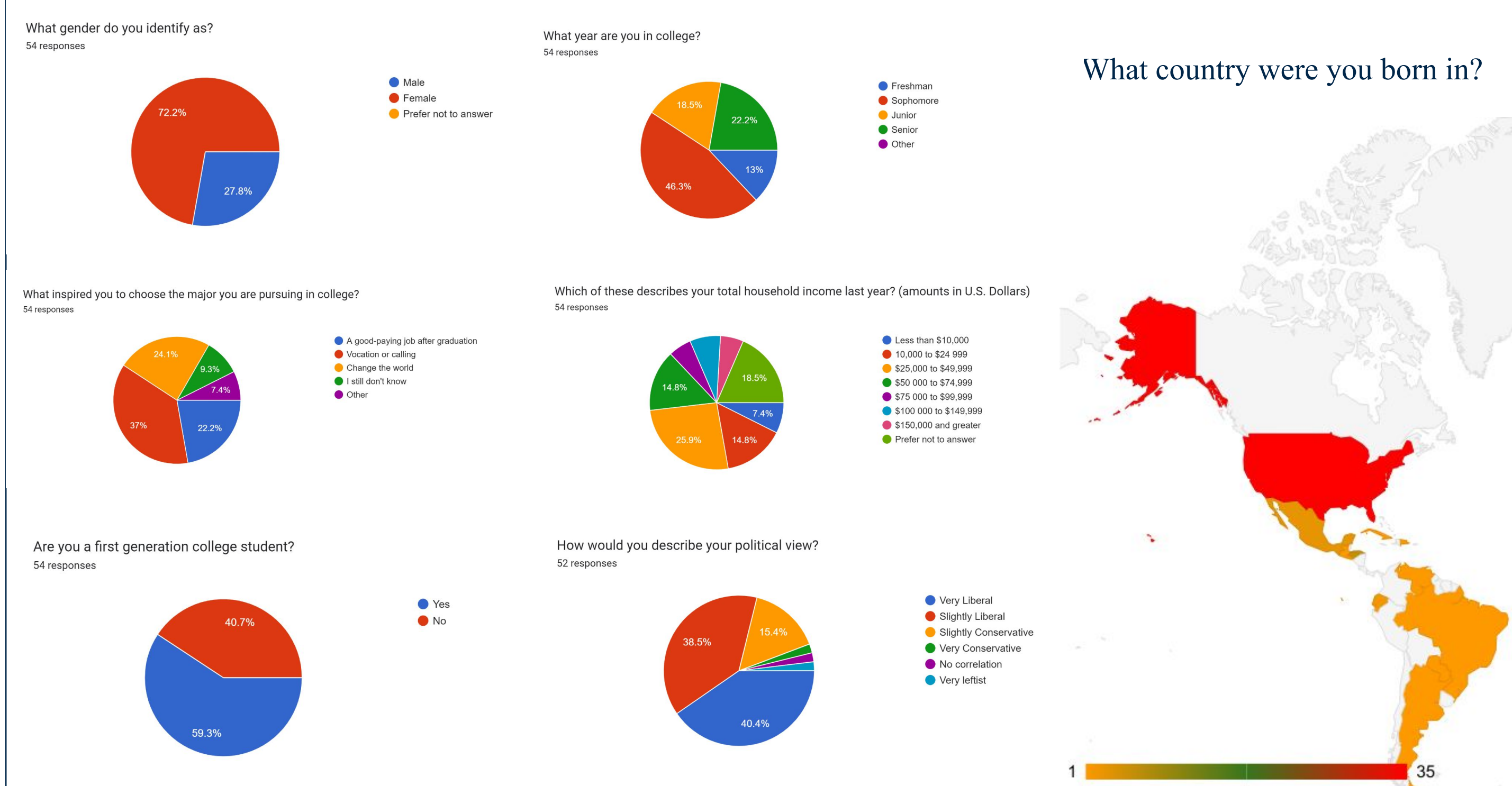
### Key Questions:

- Do Latina/o/x students experience racism/microaggressions?
- Does the experience differ by students’ race or immigration status?
- Do Latina/o/x students feel welcomed and included?
- Where do Latina/o/x students feel most/least welcome on campus?

## Methods

This project’s data comes from interviews with Latino/a/x students who self-identify racially as White (WI), non-White (NWI), or are International Student (IS) of any racial identification. For the entire project, we interviewed 20 WI, 20 NWI, and 15 IS students. For the Demographics section of the poster, we included the entire sample (N=55), while the Preliminary Findings’ part on Racism and Microaggression featured data from 25 participants (10 WI, 10 NWI, and 5 IS). The part on Belonging and Places Where Students Feel Most and Least at Home, included data from 35 participants (10 WI, 10 NWI, and 15 IS). Recruitment methods involved proximity to student researchers, snowball sampling, response to campus flyers and emails from the study’s Principal Investigator.

## Demographics



## Preliminary Findings

	Overall (N=25)	NWI (N=10)	WI (N=10)	IS (N=5)	At Hope
<b>Experienced Racism</b>					
Yes	60%	70%	50%	60%	53%
Unsure	28%	20%	10%	--	
No	12%	10%	40%	40%	
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	
<b>Experienced Microaggression</b>					
Yes	80%	80%	70%	100%	68%
No	20%	20%	30%	--	
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	

Source: Data from the Beyond Ethnicity Project.

## Racism

### Non-White Identifying (NWI) Latino Students:

Data shows that 70% of NWI Latina/o/x students at Hope College have experienced overt racism while 80% has experienced microaggressions. “Oh, yeah, my freshman-year roommate. [...] He was full-on racist, homophobic, xenophobic. He was just awful. He was going to put a Confederate flag up in the room. One of the things that he said was like, ‘Oh, you’re just here on a scholarship because they want the diversity numbers.’ He knew I got a good scholarship and everything, and he was just like, ‘You’re only here to fill out the numbers’ [...]” (NW-5)

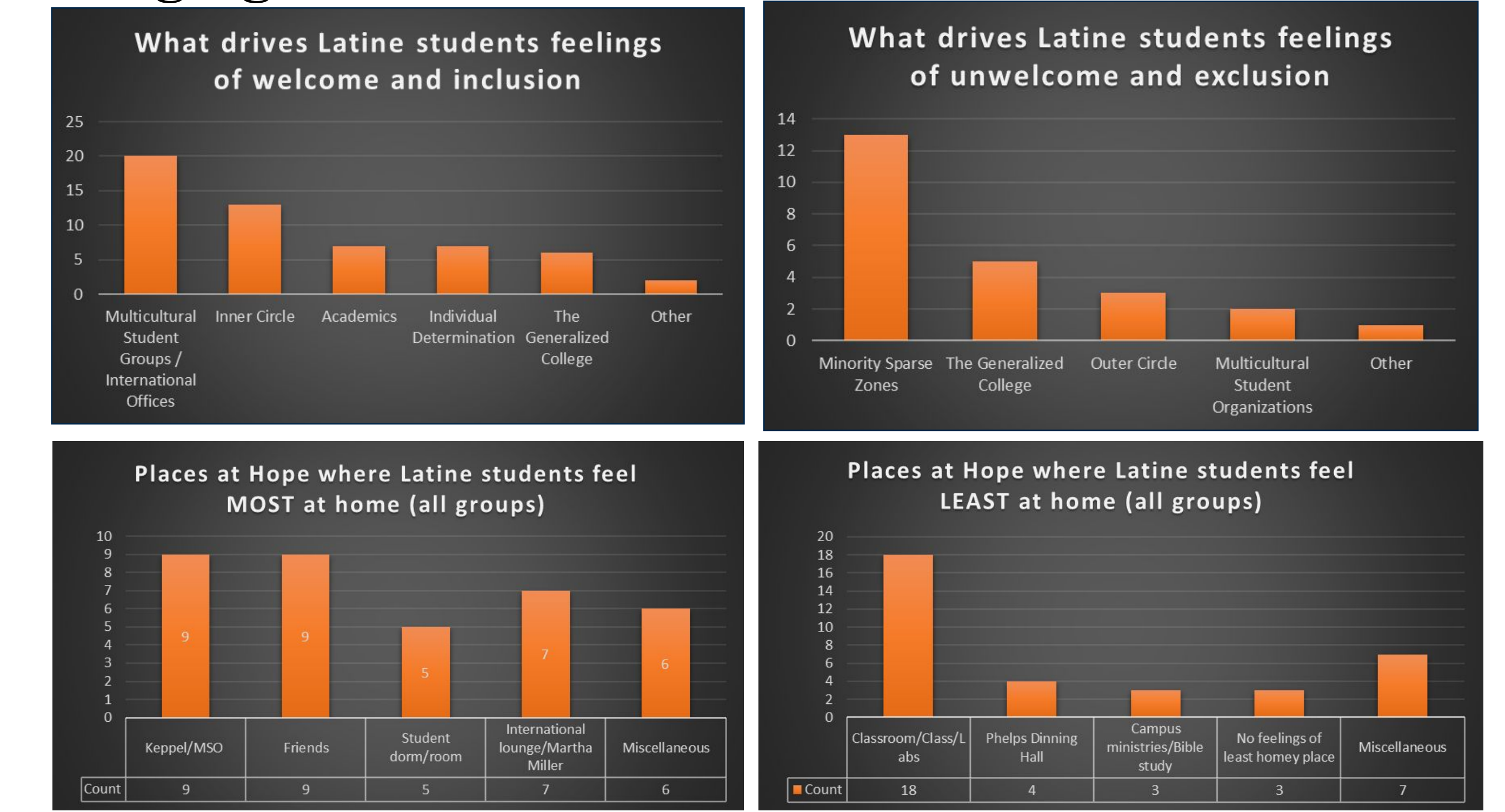
**International Students (IS):**  
Our small sample indicates that international students from Latin America have experienced a high rate of racism (60%) and microaggressions (100%) at Hope College. “I vividly remember this one instance because it was my freshman year [...]. We were soldering, and there were not enough solder irons for everyone, and so someone was working with theirs, and I was like, oh, can I steal this for a little bit? [...] And the person knew that I was international and said a comment that I don’t remember verbatim, but it was along the lines, ‘Of course, you can. That’s all your people do. You always steal.’” (F1-1)

### White Identifying (WI) Latino Students:

Though not as prevalent as NWI and IS students, WI Latina/o/x have also experienced discrimination, with 50% reporting experiences of racism and 60% reporting experiences of microaggressions. “[...] it’s Halloween weekend [...] I was on the Keppel steps waiting for the campus shuttle to come. [...] I remember, [...] being called names and being cursed out by somebody who’s passing in a car. And there were racist comments.” (W-4)

The data also reveals that Latina/o/x students experience high levels of racism (53%) and microaggressions (68%) through interactions at Hope. Such negative experiences vary by the Latina/o/x students’ phenotype, levels of acculturation, and nationality. Continued efforts are needed to change this reality, particularly involving the interactions between Latina/o/x students and the majority student population.

## Belonging



Source: Beyond Ethnicity Project. X-axis: Categories derived from student responses during interviews. Y-axis: Frequency of spontaneous references to locations, individuals, and organizations captured during interviews.

### Non-White-identifying (NWI) Latina/o/x Students:

“Yeah, I feel included by the MSOs again because they’re the only ones that get it. But other than that other than that, no.” (NW-3)  
“I’d say so because there’s LSO and there’s Rumba Latina [...] And having those two does make me feel like I am included in some way, [...]” (NW-9)

### White-identifying (WI) Latino Students:

“I made myself feel included. I made my way into Hope, and I made my spot here to make myself belong.” (W-6)  
“I do feel included, but that’s only because I include myself.” (W-4)  
**International Students (IS):**  
“They have the whole Fried Center and Global Engagement and everything [...]. They’re basically the ones who are focused on our well-being and everything that is good here...” (F1-5)  
“So when you come to Hope, you are welcomed by these people [Fried Center], who are awesome. [...] everything’s pink and beautiful and rainbows, and then you’re thrown into what actually Hope College is.”

## Major Takeaways

- The importance of DEI and student education on campus:**
  - Students feel at home with friends or in spaces like Keppel House and MSOs, where they’re accepted and included.
  - Latina/o/x students at Hope College feel isolated as sole minorities in predominantly White spaces, and despite institutional support, they continue facing racism mainly from the majority student body.
- Interactions and Support Networks:**
  - Student connections are key to their sense of belonging. They feel at home with friends or peers who share backgrounds or interests.
  - Support networks like Multicultural Student Organizations (MSO) or places such as the International Office foster community and belonging.

Scan for more data and a bibliography →

