Identifying as an American:
Acculturation in First-generation Latino/a and Hispanic Immigrants

Cara B. Borja
University of Maryland, Baltimore County

UMBC AN HONORS UNIVERSITY IN MARYLAND

Making Words Count Research Lab

ABSTRACT

❖ People of Hispanic origin constitute the largest minority group in the nation, with 35 percent of Hispanics being immigrants.

❖ First-generation immigrants face challenges related to adapting to and adopting American values, beliefs, and traditions.

❖ The purpose of this study is to identify the barriers and facilitators to first-generation Latino/a and Hispanic immigrants' identification with the larger American community.

INTRODUCTION

What is acculturation?
❖ Acculturation is the impact of peoples, groups, and/or communities on changes in practices, cultural values, and identifications from exposure to different cultures.

❖ Two components of acculturation are behavioral and psychological:

• Behavioral: How much one participates in the activities of either culture.
 - Ex: Social Activities, Foods, Language
• Psychological: How much an individual identifies with either culture.
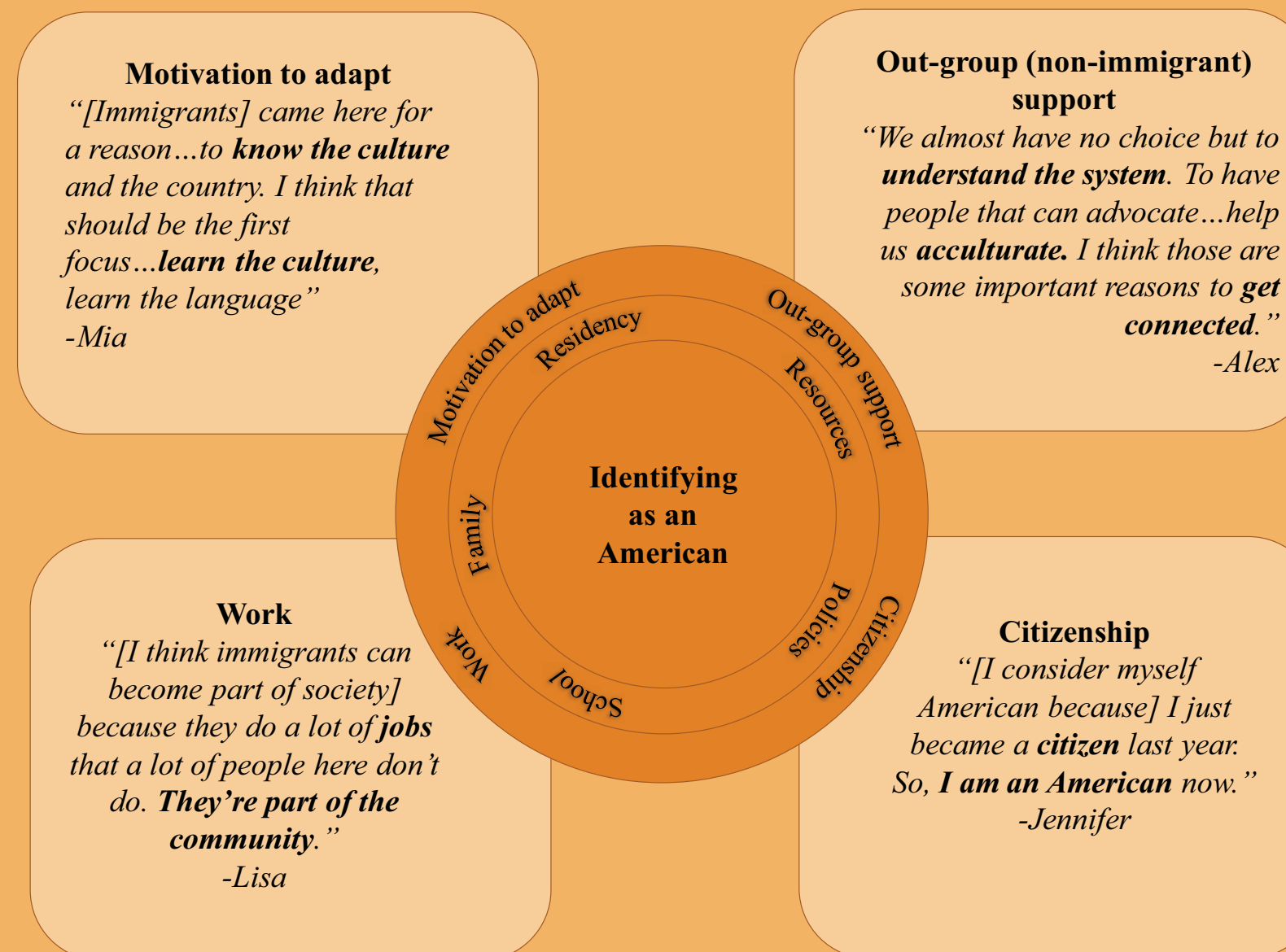 - Ex: Values, Attitudes, Identity

Why study acculturation?
❖ As of 2014, there are 42.4 million immigrants in the U.S. who face challenges related to acculturation

❖ Individuals who experience "culture shock" or "acculturative stress" are prone to mental diseases and cognitive vulnerabilities, such as depression or anxiety

❖ Research has shown that individuals who adapt to their country of residence have both psychologically and physiologically better outcomes
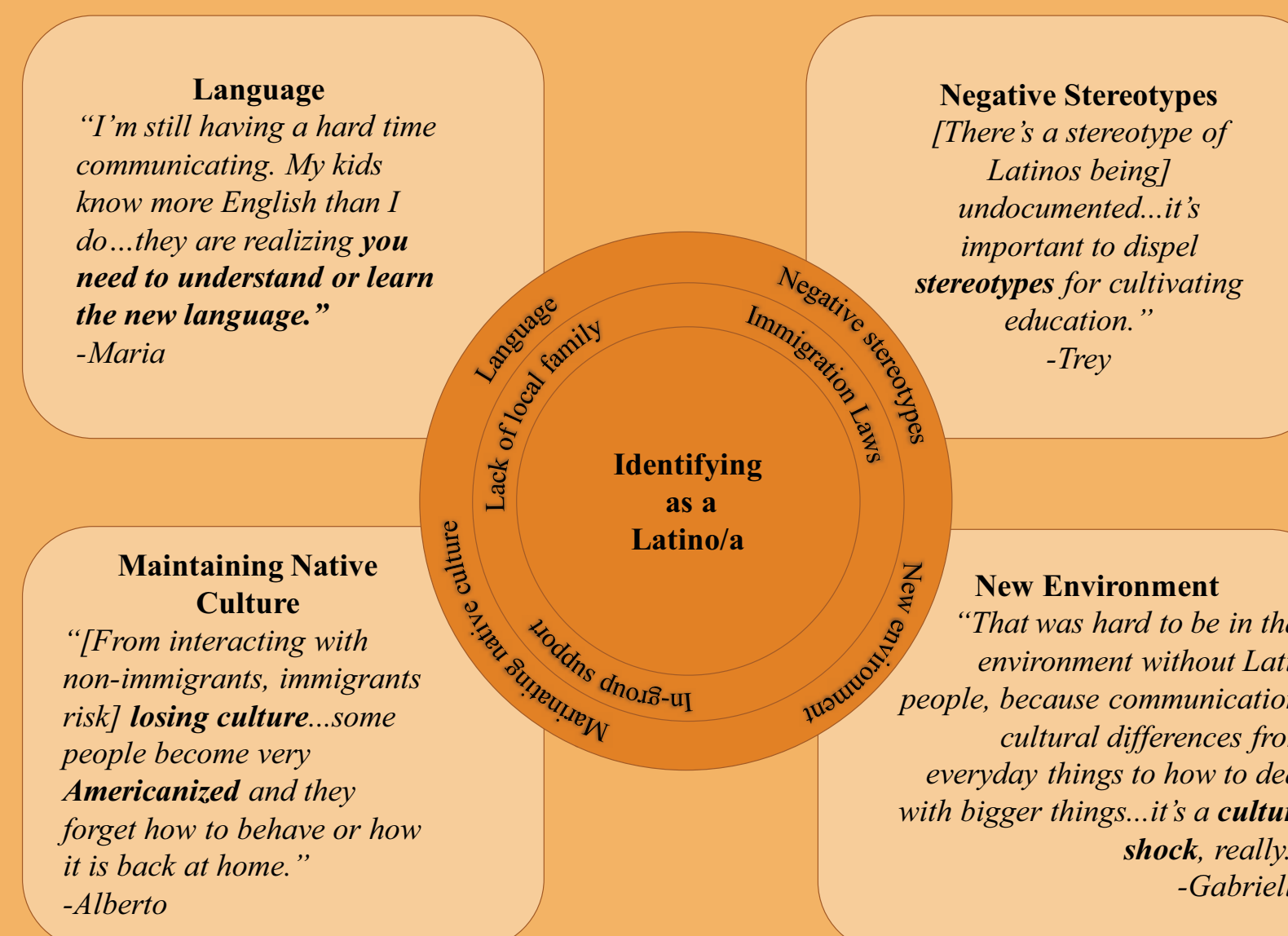
METHOD

❖ The study is based on the analysis of 15 semi-structured interviews with first-generation Latino/a and Hispanic immigrants living in the Baltimore/Washington, D.C. area.

❖ Data was coded into ATLAS.ti, a qualitative data analysis and research software.

❖ Using grounded theory approach, subcodes were created within superordinate codes to analyze data pertaining to acculturation and identification.
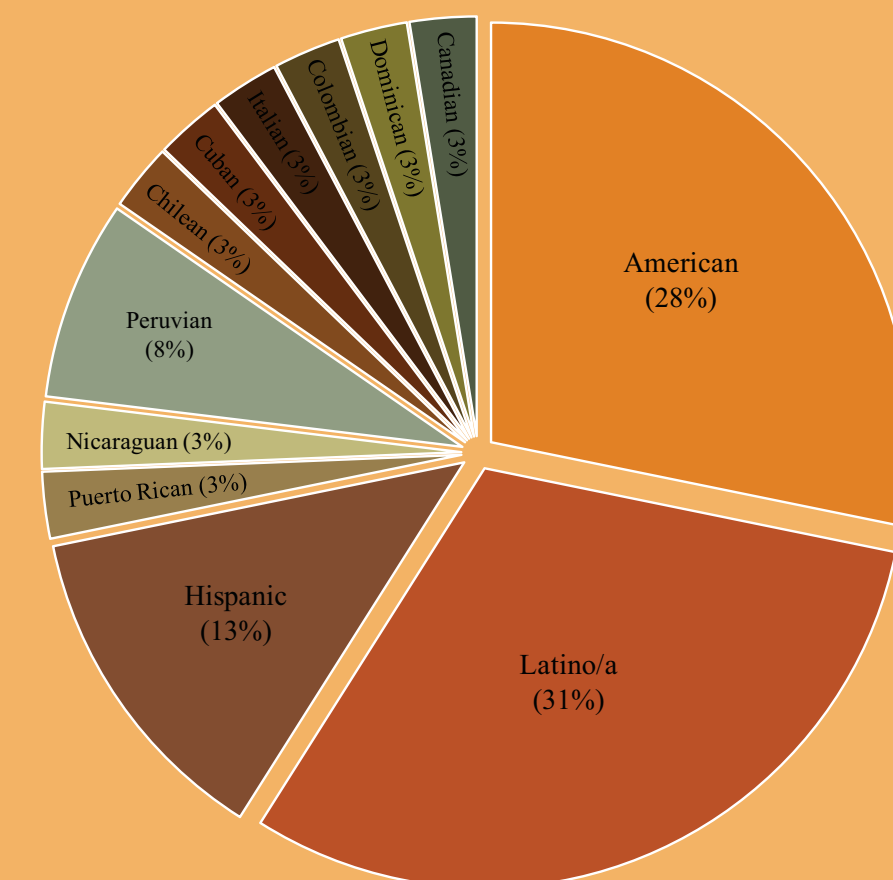
RESULTS

Acculturation Facilitators

Motivation to adapt
*"[Immigrants] came here for a reason...to **know the culture** and the country. I think that should be the first focus...**learn the culture**, learn the language"*
-Mia

Out-group (non-immigrant) support
*"We almost have no choice but to **understand the system**. To have people that can advocate...help us **acculturate.** I think those are some important reasons to **get connected**."*
-Alex

Work
*"[I think immigrants can become part of society] because they do a lot of **jobs** that a lot of people here don't do. **They're part of the community**."*
-Lisa

Citizenship
*"[I consider myself American because I] just became a **citizen** last year. So, **I am an American** now."*
-Jennifer

Circle diagram: Identifying as an American — Motivation to adapt, Residency, Out-group support, Resources, Citizenship, Policies, School, Work, Family

Acculturation Barriers

Language
*"I'm still having a hard time communicating. My kids know more English than I do...they are realizing **you need to understand or learn the new language.**"*
-Maria

Negative Stereotypes
*[There's a stereotype of Latinos being] undocumented...it's important to dispel **stereotypes** for cultivating education."*
-Trey

Maintaining Native Culture
*"[From interacting with non-immigrants, immigrants risk] **losing culture**...some people become very **Americanized** and they forget how to behave or how it is back at home."*
-Alberto

New Environment
*"That was hard to be in that environment without Latin people, because communication, cultural differences from everyday things to how to deal with bigger things...it's a **culture shock**, really."*
-Gabriella

Circle diagram: Identifying as a Latino/a — Language, Negative stereotypes, Immigration Laws, New environment, In-group support, Maintaining native culture, Lack of local family

Self-Identification of 15 First-generation Latino/a and Hispanic Immigrants

Pie chart:
American (28%)
Latino/a (31%)
Hispanic (13%)
Peruvian (8%)
Nicaraguan (3%)
Puerto Rican (3%)
Chilean (3%)
Cuban (3%)
Columbian (3%)
Dominican (3%)
Canadian (3%)

DISCUSSION

❖ The most common facilitators of acculturation, leading participants to identify as American were: motivation to adapt to U.S. American culture, support from out-group (non-immigrants), U.S. citizenship, and work

❖ The most common barriers of acculturation, leading participants to identify as Latino/a were: language, negative stereotypes of native culture, maintaining "roots," and navigating a new environment.

❖ Research has shown that immigrants who learn the practices of American culture are able to navigate the U.S. environment

❖ This knowledge can be used for communities to better accommodate the needs of Latino/a and Hispanic immigrants, such as providing support groups, English classes, or aids in obtaining U.S. citizenship

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