

SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT-ATHLETES IN
COLLEGIATE ATHLETICS

By

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We respectfully acknowledge the University of Arizona is on the land and territories of Indigenous peoples. Today, Arizona is home to 22 federally recognized tribes, with Tucson being home to the O'odham and the Yaqui.

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Abstract

This study explores the experiences of international student-athletes (ISAs) of Latin American origin at a National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I (D1) 4-year public institution in the Western part of the United States. ISAs of Latin American origin comprise less than 1% of the entire NCAA D1 student-athlete population (NCAA 2023). ISAs of Latin American origin navigate their new day-to-day lives without a trusted support system. Social connectedness means feeling supported, valued, and cared for by others with a sense of belonging (CDC 2024). Drawing on discourse analysis, which is informed by the linguistic anthropology field, this research study employs interviews to examine the impact of social connectedness in the college-athletic experience of ISAs of Latin American origin. The findings reveal the challenges ISAs face and how social connectedness helps them overcome them. I conclude by reiterating the sociopolitical climate in the U.S., including Trump's executive orders (2025) and how it can impact the college experience of ISAs of Latin American origin.

Introduction

The United States is a hot spot for immigration, more recently on sport labor migration. In the late 19th century, foreign athletes started to be recruited for professional sports such as baseball, basketball, and American football. “Over the years, the globalization of sport has been achieved at the expense of individuals, organizations, and countries with limited resources and on the backs of the poor” (Sethi et al. 2024, 3). Many poor nations lose skilled athletes who want access to better training facilities, coaching, and financial support. In return, the U.S. gets high-skilled athletes at a low cost. The same goes for sport labor migration within intercollegiate athletics, in which American universities recruit elite foreign athletes to be part of their athletic programs for cheap. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) is the governing entity for college sports in the U.S., a multi-billion-dollar industry in charge of thousands of student-athletes from different nationalities, genders, races, and ethnicities who compete in a variety of sports every year. The NCAA has three divisions (D1, D2, and D3); D1 institutions are the most well-funded and competitive level (Grafnetterova et al. 2020). Currently, over 23,000 ISAs compete for NCAA member institutions across all divisions and make up around 4% of the entire college athlete population (NCAA, 2024). In 2022, at the D1 level, ISAs made up 7% of the whole D1 college athlete population, while in 2017, ISAs made up 6% of the NCAA D1 participants (NCAA 2024). A very small, but significant increase for this population. However, despite the rise of D1 ISAs, there has not been a significant increase in the number of D1 ISAs of Latin American origin during the 2017 and 2022 academic years. ISAs of Latin American origin make up less than 1% of the entire NCAA D1 student-athlete population (NCAA 2023). Even among the D1 ISA population, ISAs of Latin American origin make up less than 10% of the 2022 D1 ISA total population. The top three Latin American countries with more athletes in the

NCAA D1 in 2022 were Brazil (280), Mexico (265), and Argentina (177). The NCAA database on international student-athletes' home countries only shows data from 2017 through 2022 in divisions I and II.

The NCAA has been criticized for the exploitation and commodification of student-athletes who generate billions for the NCAA at the expense of student-athletes. “This sport system dehumanizes and commodifies student-athlete bodies by viewing them as sources of athletic labor for institutional gain while often disposing of them at their own will” (Sethi et al. 2024, 4). It was not until 2021 that student-athletes were able to get paid for their Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL), which allows domestic student-athletes to monetize their student-athlete status. However, ISAs were left out of the picture due to visa restrictions. ISAs come to the U.S. on an F-1 visa that allows foreigners to come to the U.S. to obtain an educational degree. International students are allowed to work only on their campuses for a maximum of 20 hours per week, or they will need official employment statuses like Curricular Practical Training (CPT) or Optional Practical Training (OPT). CPT allows international students to work paid or unpaid off-campus internships or practicums during their degree program (USCIS 2025). OPT is a work permit that allows international students to work in the U.S. after completing their studies, still on a F-1 visa (USCIS 2025). Therefore, ISAs are limited to being financially secure while in the U.S.

International student-athletes are regulated and discriminated against by the federal government and exploited by the NCAA and its member institutions (Sethi et al. 2024). This makes them a vulnerable population due to their backgrounds; those coming from “under” developed countries could be even more vulnerable to the exploitation of collegiate sports labor migration because they have fewer social and economic factors, including unequal access to

resources, lack of social support, and language barrier. Despite not being able to get paid via NIL, ISAs from Latin American countries in this research study felt grateful for the opportunity to get a U.S. education and to access high-quality training facilities and coaching. This is in comparison to domestic student-athletes, who tend to be less appreciative of what is being offered to them (Bale 1991). Coming from Venezuela, I was amazed by all the resources given to me for being an athlete. I remember when I received my first round of Nike gear, I could not believe it. I received two pairs of shoes, new high jump spikes, joggers, shorts, leggings, tops, t-shirts, a sweater, and a backpack. It was like Christmas! However, some of my American teammates were complaining about the gear, saying that it was not enough, and it was ugly. Meanwhile, I was extremely happy because I had never owned anything Nike.

From Majority to Minority: Latin American ISAs in a Politicized Landscape

ISAs do not arrive in a perfect world. The U.S. has a history intertwined with colonialism and racism, which might not be well understood by international students. International students moved from being part of a majority culture to entering the U.S. as a minority group that is racialized (Lee and Rice 2007). In the U.S., people of Latin American descent might be discriminated against due to border issues and anti-immigration rhetoric, especially during Trump's administration. Trump's 2016 and 2024 presidential campaigns had a hyper focus on "illegal" immigration, particularly at the U.S. southern border with Mexico. Trump had used harsh language towards immigrants coming to the U.S., labeling them as "migrant criminals," "illegal monsters," "killers," "gang members," "poisoning our country" among other degrading language creating a hostile environment for all foreigners in the U.S. including ISAs of Latin American origin. An analysis of Trump's public statements from Factbase by The Marshall Project found that Trump has made false claims about immigration to the U.S., which, on several

occasions, are very misleading. During Trump's 2015 campaign announcement in the Trump Tower, New York. He spoke.

When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're sending people who have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with them. They're bringing drugs, they're bringing crime, they're rapists, and some, I assume, are good people.

Trump's link between immigration and crime is a misleading statement, however, it influences the way people perceive immigrants. "Trump's oft-repeated assertion that immigrants make crime worse is shared by around half of Americans, according to a 2023 survey—a number relatively consistent with when Pew started asking the question nearly a quarter-century ago. Only 5% of respondents thought immigrants reduce crime" (The Marshall Project 2024). Although there are studies that disassociate immigration from high crime, false statements are still disseminated among Americans. Fact-checking is now more important given that we are living in a digital era where information spreads faster than ever. News outlets like Reuters, The Washington Post, The Associated Press, and The New York Times have fact-check beats to address misinformation.

Trump has been specific on the type of immigrants he wants in the U.S.—“very high-level people.” On February 25-26, 2025, Trump spoke about a new “better and more sophisticated” green card that will allow rich foreigners to live and work in the U.S., a gold card. Trump said.

[The gold card] is going to be a route to citizenship, and wealthy people will be coming into our country by buying this card. They'll be wealthy, and they'll be successful, and they'll be spending a lot of money and paying a lot of taxes.

This is a way to filter immigrants who come to the U.S. On the other hand, he has falsely claimed that South American countries have intentionally released mentally ill and incarcerated people to the U.S., but there is no proof of this claim (The Marshall Project 2024). From negative language to exclusion on class and race/ethnicity, ISAs of Latin American origin must navigate a new country together with its political and socioeconomic climate that depicts them as threats rather than contributors. It is worth noting that international students accounted for 6% of the total U.S. higher education population and contributed more than \$50 billion to the U.S. economy in 2023, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce.

Trump's focus on securing borders, restricting and revoking visas, contributes to a hostile environment for international students. ISAs of Latin American origin may feel targeted by anti-immigrant rhetoric, making it harder to feel welcome or secure in the U.S. Policies that emphasize "protecting American citizenship" and "preventing foreign threats" contribute to the racialization of Latin American identities which could lead to an increase of discrimination against Spanish speakers, greater exclusion from social and athletic networks. During a visit to Guyana on March 27, 2025, Secretary of State Marco Rubio said (Halper 2025).

If you apply for a student visa to come to the United States and you say you're coming not just to study, but to participate in movements that vandalize universities, harass students, take over buildings, and cause chaos, we're not giving you that visa... If you lie, get the visa, and then engage in that kind of behavior once you're here, we're going to revoke it.

This statement came after the detention of a doctoral Turkish student attending Tufts University who wrote a "co-authored an op-ed for the school's newspaper criticizing the university's response to the war in Gaza and demanding that the institution take steps to 'hold

Israel accountable for clear violations of international law” (Wise 2025). Trump’s second administration is targeting foreign students who publicly expressed their support for Palestine by making use of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, which allows the State Department to deport non-citizens, including green card holders, who are “adversarial to the foreign policy and national security interests” of the U.S. said White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt on March 11, 2025, at the White House, in Washington (Sullivan 2025).

Arrests against international students, who exercise their First Amendment right, which protects freedom of speech, religion, the press, assembly, and the right to petition the government, might create a silent dissent in which international students may feel they do not have any kind of protection for their beliefs and opinions. In terms of ISAs of Latin American origin, it puts them in an uncomfortable position where they might have to limit showcasing their values and what they stand for, including their nationality, which might affect their social connectedness in the host country.

Why study social connectedness among ISAs of Latin American origin?

I never thought I could be a D1 athlete, I didn't even know what that meant. That whole world—college sports, scholarships, the roar of a crowd—meant nothing to me at first. I just knew I had a shot to keep doing high jump while earning a degree. That was the deal. That was what my parents wanted.

Most mornings started before the sun came up. I'd pull on my university-issued Nike gear and head to practice. Then, still wearing the same gear, I'd rush straight to class. Between showering and eating, I usually choose food. I'd just switch shirts. Splash some cold water on my face. But deep down, I think I wore that gear so often because I wanted people to see me. To know who I was. An athlete. A student-athlete.

On campus, the swoosh meant something. People noticed. There were team posters with my teammates' faces and mine at the student center, at restaurants, even at banks and hospitals. I'd walk through campus like I belonged to something bigger. Like I was someone important. A small part of me liked the attention—it felt like being a celebrity in a world I barely understood.

But under the surface, I was still an outsider. Privileged, yes. But still figuring everything out. The language, the rhythm of American life, the unwritten rules in classrooms and locker rooms. Making friends felt like starting from zero. I was in my early twenties, living two lives—one where I was seen as a star, and one where I was just trying to keep up.

New Beginnings, Diana Ramos Sacaria

As a former D1 international student-athlete, this research is very close to my heart. I come from Venezuela, which has experienced a crackdown on its economy and politics. Venezuelans are the second-largest diaspora in the world, with over 7 million Venezuelans living abroad (IOM 2025). I came to the U.S. in 2019, during Trump's first administration. At the time, I fantasized about the U.S. as a place where I could grow as an athlete and get a degree on the side. Soon after my arrival, I encountered microaggressions, which, until this day, I try not to take personally since they came from people I care about. Their comments targeted my racial and national identity. For example, addressing my skin color as "Your coffee-with-milk skin color is beautiful," or introduced me as "She is from Venezuela, she is exotic," although these comments were not necessarily negative, they made me understand that I was not in Venezuela anymore and that now my skin color and nationality are visible and relevant. Back in Venezuela, no one would describe me as "exotic," after all, my brown skin color is the "norm" in Venezuela.

However, I realized that my race/ethnicity, nationality, and English proficiency were pertinent before coming to the U.S. My identity was first tested in the Venezuelan U.S. embassy in 2018, when I went for my interview on my F-1 visa application. I stood in the waiting line for my turn with sweaty hands, although the AC was on. From the line, I could overhear other people's interviews, some were speaking Spanish and others English. At that point, my English-speaking skills were basic. I walked to the window and said "*Buenos días.*" The agent asked for my passport and my application form, which specifically said I was applying for a student visa. As soon as he noticed I was applying for an F-1 visa, he said "It says here, that you

are going to the U.S. to study and that you are proficient in English, so let's do this interview in English," I knew this was part of the test, and that my visa approval would depend on if the agents think I am English proficient or not. I embraced myself, and I spoke the "best" English I could. I observed the agent being surprised as if he did not expect me to speak English "well." He asked me questions like "How are you paying for your education in the U.S.?" I proudly answered that I got a full athletic scholarship for track and field to study at a D1 university. His eyes got even bigger when he realized that I spoke decent English and that I seemed "worthy" enough to have been granted a full ride to a top American university. He proceeded to tell me my visa had been approved.

After getting out of the embassy, I felt relieved. "I did it," I thought to myself. However, that was my first challenge on my journey to U.S. college athletics, and it was my first introduction to the U.S. Sometimes, I wonder what would have happened if I had frozen and could not speak fluent English; would my visa have been denied? I do not know, but I know that the agent cared about my English proficiency and nationality. My experience in the U.S. embassy in Colombia was quite different from my experience in the U.S. embassy in Venezuela. In 2023, I went to Bogota, Colombia, to renew my F-1 visa. The U.S. Embassy in Caracas, Venezuela, suspended operations on March 11, 2019.

After graduating *summa cum laude* in journalism with a global studies emphasis, I decided to go to graduate school and pursue a Master of Arts in Latin American Studies. This time, in the U.S. embassy in Colombia, I was interviewed in Spanish, and the only new question they asked me was "Why do you want to study Latin American Studies in the U.S.?" I answered. "Because it is needed that people of Latin American origin study Latin America, given that much of the research in Latin America comes from foreign white male...I want to add a deeper

understanding of Latin America from the eyes of a born and raised Venezuelan.” I decided to pursue Latin American Studies to continue researching Latin America and sports. My unique experiences as an ISA of Latin American origin inspired this research study. During my time in college athletics, there were not many ISAs of Latin American origin, and although I was friends with other ISAs from European countries, I still believed we were experiencing college athletics differently in terms of race/ethnicity, nationality, and social class. Besides coming from different countries, I bonded with other ISAs over being foreign athletes in the U.S., and that was enough for me. However, I still tried to make friends of Latin American origin and Spanish speakers to take a break from English and to stay close to my mother tongue. Once I started graduate school, I knew I wanted to research ISAs of Latin American origin, but I did not know what. It was not until my second year of graduate school that I came across the concept of social connectedness. After doing some research on social connectedness, I knew it was what I wanted to explore for my master’s thesis.

Social connectedness is not just about friendship—it is a critical factor in mental health, academic success, and overall well-being. The lack of strong social networks could heighten levels of stress and isolation, academic and athletic underperformance, and cultural alienation (Bruss et al. 2024). In this study, I investigate the impact of social connectedness in the college experience of ISAs of Latin American origin from a holistic point of view, in which ISAs of Latin American origin can take advantage of all areas that imply going to college, including academic, athletic, personal, and professional development. ISAs who establish strong social networks experience greater emotional support to navigate language barriers and cultural adjustment, higher confidence in speaking English, and stronger academic and athletic performance, as they feel more integrated into their teams and classrooms (Seppala 2014). From

this holistic approach, college athletic experiences are understood beyond athletics. ISAs in this research study seemed to understand that they are more than athletes getting a degree in the U.S.; they understand that they represent their university sports teams as well as their countries. They live with the complexities of being foreigners in the U.S. and the need for social connectedness.

By centering the voices of Latin American student-athletes, this study contributes to a growing body of literature on international student mobility, collegiate athletics, and social connectedness. It seeks to deepen our understanding of how these athletes navigate their dual roles as students and competitors, and how they construct social connectedness within the U.S. sports system and sociopolitical climate, considering their identities. Ultimately, this research highlights the broader implications of migration, access to education, and the pursuit of athletic excellence in a globalized world.

Methodology

For this study, I used qualitative methods, including an online application and interviews with each participant, to understand the social connectedness of ISAs of Latin American origin in U.S. universities. The online application required participants to self-report their race/ethnicity, gender, age, country, sport, major, year, and contact information. This study aimed to answer the following research questions: *1. What is social connectedness like for international student-athletes of Latin American origin at NCAA DI universities? 2. How does social connectedness impact the college athletics experience of ISAs of Latin American origin at their DI institution?* My approach was based on a responsive interviewing style that aimed to maintain a friendly and gentle tone, minimizing confrontation to build a relationship of trust between myself and the interviewees (Rubin and Rubin 2012). The interviews were in a semi-structured format with open-ended questions designed to address the research questions of

this study and lasted between 45 minutes to one hour. Semi-structured interviews allowed for flexibility and follow-up questions that helped to clarify and elaborate on any additional information (Rubin and Rubin 2012). Interview questions included: *Describe any instances where you felt a strong sense of belonging or community due to shared cultural experiences. How do you handle feelings of isolation or homesickness? What kind of support systems have been most beneficial for you?* I conducted and video/audio recorded interviews in Spanish and English (according to the participant's preference), then transcribed the interviews using the online transcribing service, Trint. I paid close attention to meaning and language for analyzing data using a discourse analysis approach.

For this study, participants were limited to international student-athletes who are natives of Latin American countries, are enrolled full-time at an NCAA D1 Western university, and are 18 years old or older. Participants for this study were bilingual (Spanish-English or Portuguese-English) and non-native English speakers. For this research study, I use Gal's concept of "translation/transduction." Transduction "opens ways of understanding the productivity that characterizes many phenomena grouped under the rubric of "translation" (Gal 2015, 233). Gal argues that translation is not a neutral act, but rather a "whole family of semiotic processes" (Gal 2015, 226). She emphasizes that translations are "always positioned, never politically neutral, never innocent" (Gal 2015, 236). I will be using transductions of practices to "translate" my excerpts from Spanish to English. Transduction is about finding a functional equivalent that works with a specific context, even if the literal translation is not there. Transductions are more likely to capture the essence of my interviewees' discourses. I recognized that, as the translator, my perspective and choices are likely to show in the translations.

The sampling population was purposely selected to investigate an accurate representation of the issue being examined (Honigmann 1982). Additionally, I used the snowballing technique to reach potential participants. The snowballing technique was very useful because ISAs are a small community in which they all know each other. So, I was able to rely on the social network of initial participants. The sample consists of ISAs of Latin American origin at a D1 public 4-year Western university. The university is a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) and is also considered a Predominantly White Institution (PWI). HSIs are designated as such by the U.S. Department of Education (whose website has been suspended following President Trump's executive orders) through a variety of eligibility requirements, such as having an enrollment of undergraduate students that is at least 25% Hispanic/Latino. On the other hand, PWIs are institutions whose White students comprise 50% or more of the student body. In addition to being a designated HSI, according to the international office at the university, 6% of the entire student population at the university are international students. Of this international student population, roughly 2% are ISAs. I made efforts to recruit ISAs of Latin American origin from a wide variety of Western universities who have HSI designations, however, I did not get responses from the contacted universities. I reached out to 11 Western HSI universities via email. My interest in the Western U.S. was because the U.S. Western states hold the largest and second-largest population of Hispanics/Latinos, according to the U.S. 2020 Census.

To recruit my sample, I approached the university's athletic department via email. I explained my research topic and asked them to share my research flyer with their student-athlete population. Individuals who were interested in participating in this research study were directed to the online application and were contacted to schedule an interview. Interviews were conducted between summer 2024 and fall of 2024.

This study included seven participants: one male and six female ISAs of Latin American origin. There were fewer men than women participants because there were far fewer male ISAs of Latin American origin at the studied institution than female ISAs of Latin American origin. The sports represented included beach volleyball, track and field, golf, and triathlon. All participants received partial to full athletic scholarships. Participants were from a variety of countries, including Argentina (2), Brazil (2), Mexico (1), and Puerto Rico (2). The participants were in varying grades from sophomore to senior. Participants' ages ranged from 19–23 years old. Pseudonyms were given to participants to protect their identities. Participants were compensated \$50 for their participation in this study.

Additional demographic information about participants can be found in Table 1A.

Table 1. Participant information (n = 7).

Pseudonym	Sport	Country	Year
Ana	Triathlon	Argentina	Sophomore
Andrea	Golf	Argentina	Sophomore
Jorge	Track and field	Brazil	Senior
Brenda	Triathlon	Brazil	Senior
Gloria	Track and field	Mexico	Junior
Marcela	Beach volleyball	Puerto Rico	Sophomore
Perla	Beach volleyball	Puerto Rico	Junior

This thesis is organized into four chapters. The Introduction began the thesis by providing an examination of sports labor migration, particularly in the context of international athletes of Latin American origin participating in collegiate athletics. It explores historical and

contemporary trends, systemic exploitation within the NCAA, and the political and socioeconomic challenges faced by Latin American ISAs in the U.S. In Chapter 1, I explore the motivations of ISAs of Latin American origin and how a linguistic anxiety stance manifests among ISAs of Latin American origin, considering factors such as language barrier, sociocultural influences, and their identities. I use the concept of stance to analyze ISAs of Latin American origin positioning about what they say, to their interlocutor (me), and the broader sociocultural and political context. I also elaborate on the literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of chronotope to explore how language constructs, reflects, and challenges temporal and spatial understandings, shaping ISAs of Latin American origin's college experience in the U.S. Chapter 2 focuses on social connectedness and its benefits for ISAs of Latin American origin. In this chapter, a social connectedness chronotope materialized as a space-time in which ISAs of Latin American origin intentionally build social connections with others who share similar characteristics with them, including nationality, race/ethnicity, and ISA status. Finally, I conclude my thesis, affirming that social connectedness is an important factor to consider when analyzing the college experience of ISAs. I highlight the role of Hispanic Serving Institutions towards the Latino/Hispanic population in the U.S., including those who are non-U.S.-born but identify as Latino or Hispanic. I end with suggestions for universities and athletic departments on how to better support ISAs, specifically those of Latin American origin.

Chapter 1

Between Dreams and Challenges: The Journey of Latin American Student-Athletes in the U.S.

The United States has long been an attractive destination for international athletes seeking to further their athletic careers. For athletes of Latin American origin, the U.S. college athletic system represents a significant opportunity, given the limited infrastructure for collegiate sports in their home countries. Unlike in the U.S., where the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) provides a structured system that allows athletes to compete at a high level while pursuing a degree, many Latin American nations lack comparable collegiate athletic programs. Consequently, the U.S. emerges as the most viable option for those hoping to continue their sports careers. In this chapter, I examine the motivations that drive ISAs of Latin American origin to pursue college athletics in the U.S. and the challenges they encounter upon arrival. Drawing on personal interviews, I explore the socioeconomic, political, and cultural dynamics that shape their journeys, including financial constraints, language barriers, and the pressures of competing in a highly structured athletic environment. Additionally, I engage with theoretical frameworks such as Bakhtin's concept of chronotopes to analyze how ISAs position themselves within temporal and spatial narratives, as well as the concept of stance to explore ISAs of Latin American origin perceptions of language and identity. These concepts helped me understand how ISAs of Latin American origin use language to position themselves about others in the U.S. and how they construct social connectedness through language/discourse.

Attractive U.S.

Jorge is an international student-athlete from Brazil, whom I have known for a while now. In mid-September, I interviewed him at his campus library. We greeted each other with a kiss on the cheek, a typical greeting within the Latin American community. We did small talk for

about five to 10 minutes, checking on each other: “How are you doing? How was your summer?” And the typical question among foreign students “Did you go home over the summer?” And if you didn’t go home, you follow up by asking “When are you planning to go home?” As we sat down across from each other, I had my laptop on the table, pen in my right hand, and my notebook on the other. I put the recorder down on the table and pressed the record button.

Early in our conversation, I asked Jorge about the motivations that drove him to come to the U.S. His straight answer was because of the opportunities. I followed up and asked him to elaborate on his statement. By opportunities, he meant the ability to earn a college degree while simultaneously doing his sport. This was a common feeling among the international student-athletes of Latin American origin that I interviewed.

In a study focusing on the motivations of international athletes in coming to the U.S., Love and Kim (2011) found that the complex decision is made by a combination of factors such as “the desire for a university degree, the desire to play a sport at a high level (while training in good facilities with good coaching), the unique opportunity provided by the U.S. college sports system to simultaneously obtain a university education and compete in a sport at a high level, the desire to achieve a better financial situation for themselves, the desire to experience another culture and interact with others from different cultural backgrounds, the specific desire to experience American culture, the desire to improve English skills, and the desire to “grow up” by getting out on one’s own” (Love and Kim, 2011, 101).

Love and Kim (2011) noticed that future research is needed to further investigate how previously mentioned factors might differ based on race, national origin, and gender. In their study, participants were mostly from European countries such as England, Germany, Romania,

Serbia, Slovakia, and Spain, and only one country from Oceania (Australia), Africa (Congo), and South America (Brazil). This research study is solely focused on ISAs of Latin American origin.

The socioeconomic and political crisis in Latin American countries was a driving factor for athletes of Latin American origin in this research study to decide to participate in the U.S. college athletics system. Participants in this research study are on athletic scholarships, most are on full-ride scholarships, which pay for tuition and fees as well as cover room and board. I asked interviewees if it was possible for them to have come to the U.S. without a scholarship, and their unanimous answer was no. Participants stated that without a scholarship, coming to the U.S. was not a viable option for them or their parents. International students pay significantly more in tuition than in-state students. According to U.S. News, the average out-of-state cost of tuition at public colleges in the 2024-2025 academic year is \$24,513. The average cost for in-state students at public colleges comes to \$11,011 for the same year. Additionally, students must pay for other expenses such as housing, food, and textbooks (Wood 2024). According to Statista, in an article by Jose Sanchez on July 5, 2024, the average minimum monthly wage in Latin America in U.S. dollars is \$360.45. Costa Rica is the country with the highest minimum monthly wage in Latin America, with a monthly wage of 687 U.S. dollars. On the other side of the spectrum is Venezuela, where the minimum monthly income is 130 bolivars, which translates to little more than three dollars per month. With these incomes, it is very hard, if not impossible, for a person of Latin American origin to afford tuition and living expenses at a university in the U.S.

In my talk with Jorge, he shared his desire to achieve a better financial situation for himself and his family in Brazil and explained the hardship of coming to the U.S. with little to no money. Yet, he felt grateful to be in the U.S. and be able to access high-quality training facilities and education. Jorge said.

I did not come with a lot of money, so I had to be very limited for a long period. But I was happy for the opportunity that I was getting over here, like for training, for studying, for getting materials and stuff like that.

Jorge started doing track and field in 2016 when the Olympic Games took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Until that point, he was a soccer player like many young Brazilian boys. Jorge was offered a tryout for track. To his surprise, he was good, actually very good. Jorge switched sports, and a range of doors opened. Due to his athletic talent, Jorge got access to a private high school and started to travel in and out of Brazil for competitions. Being in new spaces expanded Jorge's horizons. Growing up in the favelas, "shanty towns," Jorge saw people using drugs and weapons daily. He learned to be strong and what he described as being in "survival mode," meaning to confront everything coming your way. Jorge adds that being from Latin America makes a difference in the motivations to come to the U.S. He affirmed that it all depends on how rich your home country is. For example, \$1 in Brazil is worth around 5.78 Brazilian real, and 1 Brazilian real is worth 0.17 cents of a dollar. However, if you are from Spain, euros are worth more than dollars. Bale (1991) suggested international athletes may be more grateful for the resources available to them, even if those resources are considered modest by American standards. Jorge argued that the country of origin makes a difference in people's lifestyle in the U.S. and how appreciative they are of the opportunity to play sports and study. Jorge affirmed.

I feel like for an athlete to come to America and go back to France, go back to England, or go back to Spain. It's not the same thing as going back to Venezuela, going back to Brazil, going back to Ecuador after getting access to stuff over here, because you have better stuff in here and you probably have [something] similar in Europe, but you don't

have similar [facilities, coaching...] in South America. So, we value the opportunity that we have more.

International student-athletes of Latin American origin take advantage of the college athletic system provided by the U.S. In Latin America, there is no comparable college athletics system like the NCAA. Latin American athletes have limited options to continue competing in their sports at a high level while pursuing a college degree within their home countries. For example, Andrea, an international student-athlete from Argentina who plays golf at a Division I university in the U.S., explained how she knew from a young age that she wanted to attend an American university because of golf. As for women's golf in Latin America, coming to the United States is the best option because there are no women's golf tournaments on the professional circuit in Argentina or Latin America. There are only men's. Therefore, what she and other female golf players do is try to secure an athletic scholarship to come to the U.S. and play college golf. Andrea affirmed that it is much easier to become a professional golf player after playing college golf. Additionally, she reaffirmed that in case of not becoming a professional golf player, she will have what she called "a plan B"—a college degree—to use in her career of choice. Andrea stressed.

Estados Unidos es el único lugar donde puedes estudiar y practicar y competir. Todo, todo a gran nivel.

The United States is the only country where you can study, train, and compete. Everything is at a high level.

Andrea emphasized the unique opportunity to study, train, and compete that the U.S. higher education system offers, highlighting the U.S. as the only country in the world where you

can do such. Participants in Love and Kim (2011) unanimously agreed it would be extremely difficult (if not impossible) to play a sport at a high level while simultaneously attending a university as a full-time student in their home countries. On the contrary, the college-athletic system that exists in the U.S. allowed them (easily and accessibly) to continue playing their sport at a high level while also working to obtain a university degree. The limited options for athletes of Latin American origin to continue their sport and education in their home country have driven them to U.S. college athletics.

Ana, an international student-athlete from Argentina, explained her desire to continue doing triathlon after graduating from high school. In Argentina, she noticed a common pattern among her teammates who started college or working in Argentina. She observed that after a couple of months, they had to make the difficult decision to quit training due to academic or professional commitments. Ana did not want to be just another one of the crowd. Even though she wanted to go to college, she did not want to do it at the expense of quitting triathlon. Ana talked about the importance of getting a college education for her and her parents.

Si yo me quedaba en Argentina iba a ser o hacer triatlón 100% y no estudiar, cosa que yo no quería y [mis padres] no querían tampoco, o iba a hacer una carrera, pero la iba a hacer en 18 años.

If I stayed in Argentina, I was either going to do a 100% triathlon and not study, which I didn't want and [my parents] didn't want either, or I was going to obtain a degree, but I was going to get it in 18 years.

Ana expressed that although it is possible for her to obtain a college degree in Argentina, it will take her a long time if she does it alongside playing sports. Love and Kim (2011) found

that although international athletes were highly ambitious about pursuing a university education in the U.S., they generally believed they could have attended universities in their home countries if studying in the U.S. had not been an option or worked out. Therefore, while obtaining a degree was significant to them, it was not their main reason for coming to the U.S. Instead, they were largely drawn by the unique opportunity to combine higher education with competing in their sport at an elite level. Similarly, for participants in this research study, the opportunity to come to the U.S. and obtain a U.S. college degree while simultaneously doing their sports represented a lifetime opportunity.

Brenda, a Brazilian student-athlete, highlights two motivational factors found in Love and Kim (2011). Besides being pushed by the possibility of obtaining a university degree and competing in triathlon at a high level, Brenda was also pushed to the U.S. by the value of a U.S. degree and her desire to improve her English skills. Brenda expressed.

A degree from [U.S.] weighs a lot like means a lot. If you have a degree from the US in Brazil, you're going to get the best job... Learning English, I think it's super important today, and I think [learning English in the U.S.] is different from when you learn English just in your country.

For Brenda, obtaining a degree from an American university and improving her English skills were some factors that motivated her to come to the U.S. She acknowledged that graduating from an American university, plus being fluent in English, could be beneficial for her in the future in terms of career prospects and higher salaries. The clash of choosing one over the other (academics versus athletics), and the socioeconomic and political situation in Latin America, has led Latin American athletes to choose to go to the U.S. and play college sports, as it is the most attractive option for getting ahead in life.

The initial excitement of a chance for an athletic scholarship can obscure important factors for ISAs of Latin American origin to consider when choosing which university to attend. One important factor that many forget is location (geographically) and community. In a study focusing on what factors were most influential for ISAs when choosing a U.S. university, Popp et al. (2011) found that ISAs' most important factors were the amount of athletic scholarship and personality of the head coach (athletic related) while domestic student-athletes top factors were a degree from a school leading to a good job and the overall reputation of the school (academic related).

As previously mentioned, my participants agreed that the amount of athletic scholarship was an important factor for them to choose a university. Most athletes of Latin American origin cannot fully afford an education in the U.S. During the interviews, I was curious to know if my participants considered the location and community of their chosen universities. Most of them did. They wanted to attend a university located in a city with warm weather year-round, which they qualified as “good weather.” Location/weather was important for them because their sports are mainly played outdoors.

Gloria, an athlete from Mexico City who attended IMG Academy—a prestigious boarding school and sports training facility in Bradenton, Florida that focuses on student-athlete development and college athletics preparation—brought up in our conversation that besides considering the amount of athletic scholarship and the personality of the head coach, she also considered choosing a university located in a city with a high volume of Latinos and Mexicans.

The Honeymoon Phase

During the first weeks of being in the U.S., international student-athletes of Latin American origin are in a honeymoon phase where everything seems perfect. It is the initial

excitement of arriving in the U.S. after all the efforts made. This excitement is ephemeral; once school starts picking up with assignments and competition season starts, ISAs' excitement flees away. The honeymoon phase is full of early enthusiasm for the eager anticipation of finally being in the U.S. ISAs of Latin American origin find themselves in amazement with the campus, training facilities, the gear, and the whole US-TV-like college image. Once the beginning fervor fades away, feelings of isolation and depression start catching up from the realization of being far away from home.

The honeymoon phase is all about that first flush of excitement. Once the honeymoon phase is over, you start seeing things you were not able to see when you were enthralled by that initial excitement. Similarly, ISAs must face all the untold and unthought-out challenges that start bubbling up to the surface later during their U.S. college athletic journey.

Language Barrier: ISAs Take on a Linguistic Anxiety Stance Towards English

One of the first challenges international student-athletes of Latin American origin face while in the U.S. is the language barrier. In Latin America, the official language is Spanish due to its colonization history by Spain, except for Brazil, which was colonized by the Portuguese. In this section, I explain how ISAs of Latin American origin take a linguistic anxiety stance towards speaking English in an American setting—U.S. universities. I use stance to analyze the stance-taking of international student-athletes of Latin American origin, whose stance-taking shows to be culturally and linguistically rooted, signaling their national identities and language anxiety about speaking English with Americans.

Marcela is a student-athlete from Puerto Rico who is over 18 years old and plays beach volleyball at a Division I university. In this study, I consider Puerto Rico a “Latin American

country” due to having a national identity that is unique from the U.S. national identity.

However, Puerto Rico is a U.S. territory. At the beginning of my interview with Marcela, she differentiated Puerto Rico from the U.S., but at the same time, she recognized Puerto Rico as a U.S. territory.

Excerpt 1

- | | | |
|---------|---|---|
| Diana | 1 | ¿Qué tipos de desafíos te has enfrentado desde que llegaste [a los Estados Unidos] hasta ahora como una estudiante internacional?
<i>What kind of challenges have you faced since you arrived [to the US] until now as an international student?</i> |
| | 2 | Porque incluso de que eres de Puerto Rico, osea, eres diferente que [las personas que son de] los Estados Unidos.
<i>Because even though you are from Puerto Rico, I mean, you are different from the [people from the] United States.</i> |
| Marcela | 3 | Si, no en verdad Estados Unidos y Puerto Rico.
<i>Yes, not actually the United States and Puerto Rico.</i> |
| | 4 | O sea, pues Puerto Rico puede ser un <i>US territory</i> , pero son cosas totalmente diferentes.
<i>I mean, well Puerto Rico may be a US territory, but they are totally different things.</i> |

In excerpt 1, line 1, I asked Marcela what kind of challenge she has faced as an international student since coming to a U.S. university. We must consider that Marcela is technically not an international student because all people born in Puerto Rico are U.S. citizens. I followed my question with a statement (in line 2) attempting to distinguish Puerto Ricans from people who are born and raised in the U.S. and are Americans. In lines 3-4, Marcela evaluated and agreed with my statement by describing Puerto Rico as *totally different* (than the U.S.), she expressed a stance towards Puerto Rico’s political status and positioned herself as Puerto Rican and not American. The use of English (*U.S. territory*) versus the Spanish equivalent (*territorio de Estados Unidos*) indicated Marcela’s reflection on the power of English as a language that

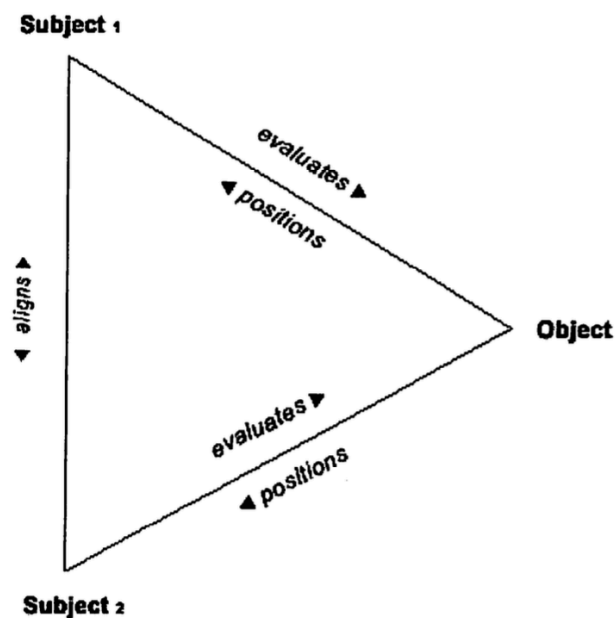
illustrated the power dynamics between the U.S. mainland and Puerto Rico. By code-switching to English (in a Spanish conversation), Marcela captured these ideologies around what Puerto Rico is. She used the English term to capture the kind of schema of understanding what Puerto Rico is in English, and Puerto Rico is neither a sovereign nation nor a U.S. state. Marcela took on a solidarity stance towards Puerto Rico and positioned herself as an international student-athlete from Puerto Rico who is also navigating her college athletic experience in the U.S.

According to Irvine (2009), stance refers to the evaluation/positioning speakers take toward a (shared) object, proposition, or interlocutors in discourse. There are three different kinds of stances: evaluation, positioning, and alignment, which work as subsidiary acts of a single stance act. First, the speaker goes through the evaluation process “whereby a stancetaker orients to an object of stance and characterizes it as having some specific quality or value” (Du Bois 2007, 143). Then, the speaker positions themselves towards the stance object or proposition. Du Bois (2007) defines positioning as “the act of situating a social actor with respect to responsibility for stance and for invoking sociocultural value” (Du Bois 2007, 143). When positioning, the stancetaker can subsume on affective, epistemic, or social stance acts. Epistemic stance “concerns the truth-value of a proposition and the speaker's degree of commitment to it” (Irvine 2009, 53). Affective stance “concerns the speaker's feelings about a proposition, an utterance, or a text—an attitude, that is, toward some bit of discourse” (Irvine 2009, 54), and social stance “concerns a speaker's self-positioning in relation to an interlocutor, or some social dimension of an interaction and its personnel” (Irvine 2009, 54). Therefore, stance-taking is a social act performed in interactions and is influenced by context. Du Bois defines alignment “as

the act of calibrating the relationship between two stances, and by implication between two stancetakers” (Du Bois 2007, 144).

To better illustrate the act of stance-taking, I use John Du Bois’ geometrical framework for analyzing stance—the stance triangle. “Stance is seen as a single unified act encompassing several triplets sets of distinct components and processes” (Du Bois 2007, 162).

Figure 1. The stance triangle



The three points of the triangle represent the three entities in the stance act: the first subject (the speaker taking the stance), the second subject (the addressee or another participant), and the shared stance object (the entity or idea being evaluated). The three sides of the triangle represent vectors of directed action that organize the stance relations among these entities: two sides represent evaluative vectors directed from each stance subject toward the shared stance object, and the third side represents an alignment between the two subjects, which may originate in either subject or be directed toward the other.

Marcela continued.

Excerpt 2

- | | | |
|---------|---|--|
| Marcela | 5 | Uno de los desafíos que fue como que al instante [de llegar a los Estados Unidos] fue el inglés,
<i>One of the challenges that was like right away [of arriving in the U.S.] was English,</i> |
| | 6 | pues yo aprendí inglés como que desde chiquita, pero osea, hablarlo así con gente Americana era como que okay,
<i>well, I learned English like when I was little, but I mean, speaking it with American people was like okay,</i> |
| | 7 | me estoy trancando, como que me trancaba en palabras y como que me daban [ih eh eh eh]
<i>I'm getting stuck, like I was stuck on words and as if they gave me [ih eh eh]</i> |
| | 8 | y es como que Dios mío, qué vergüenza!
<i>and it was like my God, how embarrassing!</i> |

In excerpt 2, Marcela identified English as a challenge she has faced since arriving in the U.S. Using Du Bois' stance triangle, in line 6, the first-person pronoun I, indexed the stancetaker (Marcela) and is followed by Marcela's evaluation of English in which she used the past tense of the action verb *to learn* to index her position towards her English knowledge, specifically when speaking to Americans expressing a linguistic anxiety stance towards speaking English. She also expressed a feeling of embarrassment (see line 8) when speaking English, signaling a drop in her confidence. The stuck-on words are a shared feeling among people who are learning a new language.

I recognize that, as the researcher and analyst of this paper, I take on a stance as well, a stance that comes from my own lived experiences, biases, and assumptions that shaped how I see the world. I use my stance to interpret the participants' stances, and as Irvine (2009) described,

“We say a person takes a stance, but they—and we ourselves—may also find themselves in one” (Irvine 2009, 70).

Brenda, a student-athlete from Brazil, did not think coming to the U.S. on an athletic scholarship was possible. She was already 20 years old by the time she got recruited, which is late in comparison with domestic athletes, who get recruited as early as juniors or seniors in high school. However, her college coach was familiar with triathlon athletes from Brazil and had noticed Brenda’s athletic results. Once Brenda saw she could come to the U.S., she started restudying English. Similarly to Marcela, Brenda expressed an epistemic stance towards speaking English with Americans.

Excerpt 3

Brenda	9	The English was really hard for me in the beginning because
	10	like, I knew English before,
	11	but when I arrived here and I started to talk with the American girls,
	12	I was like, okay, I don't know anything

In these stance utterances, Brenda evaluated English (Stance Object) as *hard*, predicting an affective stance. In line 10, the first-person pronoun *I*, indexing the stancetaker (Brenda), is followed by an epistemic predicate, positioning her on a scale of knowledge about her English skills. The epistemic stance in line 12 *I don't know* (English, especially when talking to Americans), indexed specific aspects of the subject’s feelings about her English knowledge, positioning her subjectively along some scale of epistemic value, resulting in a linguistic anxiety stance towards speaking English with Americans.

In excerpt 3, Brenda used the past tense of the verb *to know* and the word *before*. She then set the discourse in a “there” chronotope of back home in which she reflected on her prior

knowledge of English, juxtaposing it with the present struggle of talking English with the American girls (see line 11). I use the concept of chronotopes, drawing on Bakhtin’s notion that time and space converge in discourse to create meaning. Chronotopes, which literally means “time-space,” are used by linguistic anthropologists to analyze how language situates interlocutors into time and space that are identifiable through discourse. According to Blommaert, “chronotopes invoke and enable a plot structure, characters or identities, and social and political worlds in which actions become dialogically meaningful, evaluated, and understandable in specific ways. Specific chronotopes produce specific kinds of person, actions, meaning, and value” (Blommaert 2015, 109). Brenda’s narrative reflected a transition period—in the beginning—in a new cultural and linguistic context where she contrasted her prior knowledge of English—*I knew English before* (when she was in Brazil speaking English with other Brazilians who were learning English)—with the moment she realized her English was insufficient in a real-world American setting (see lines 10-12). The “there” chronotope of back home anchored ISAs in a specific time and space that evokes familiarity, language and cultural comfort, and a sense of relaxation and relief while the “here” chronotope of being a D1 international athlete situated ISAs in a high-pressure, present-focused environment defined by tension: navigating between English and Spanish/Portuguese, managing the academic demands of university life, and performing under the competitive expectations of collegiate athletics. For Brenda, the “there” chronotope of back home clashed with the “here” chronotope of being a D1 international athlete; indeed, Brenda linked the past and present, allowing her to reinterpret her earlier confidence in English in a new context.

Excerpt 4

Andrea

13

El hablar en público eso me [pausa]

- public speaking makes me [pause]*
- 14 todavía al día de hoy no, no me gusta.
still to this day, no, I don't like it.
- Diana 15 Sientes que es por el Inglés o
Do you feel that is because of English? or
- 16 ¿Por esto de que no te gusta hablar en público?
Because you just don't like public speaking?
- Andrea 17 No, el inglés, el inglés.
No, because of English.
- 18 A ver, tampoco te digo que me encanta hablar en público,
Look, I'm not telling you that I love public speaking,
- 19 pero sé que en español tranquilamente [lo haría]
But I know that in Spanish I would easily [do it]
- 20 En las clases, yo en high school la profesora preguntaba algo
In class, in high school, the teacher would ask something
- 21 y yo levantaba la mano y lo decía sin ningún tipo de problema.
and I would raise my hand and answer without any issues.
- 22 Pero acá, acá me lo guardo.
But here, here I would not answer
- Diana 23 Incluso cuando sabes la respuesta?
Even when you know the answer?
- Andrea 24 Sé la respuesta perfectamente y yo así [en silencio]
I know the answer and I stay [in silence]
- 25 espero que haya otra persona que diga la respuesta. Yo no puedo
I wait for someone else to answer. I can't
- Andrea 26 Es que no me gusta, no me gusta
I just don't like, I don't like
- 27 además siento que me voy a equivocar
beside I feel that I going to make a mistake
- 29 o voy a pronunciar mal las palabras

or that I am going to mispronounce words

In excerpt 4, Andrea, a golfer from Argentina, took on an affective stance, indexing specific aspects of her feelings, positioning herself subjectively along some scale of affective value (*don't like*). Andrea first expressed her dislike of public speaking, then I followed with a clarification question: *Do you feel that is because of English? Or because you just don't like public speaking?* Andrea immediately clarified that it is not that she doesn't like public speaking, it is that she doesn't like public speaking in English. Andrea's fear of public speaking in English deprived her of participating in class. She admitted that on many occasions when professors asked questions, she knew the answer but opted to remain silent. On the contrary, she clarified that during her high school years in Argentina, she did not shy away from raising her hand and participating in class.

Andrea's evaluation and self-positioning of her feelings about public speaking in English indexed her position towards her confidence in her English skills. Andrea's fear of public speaking in English was directly related to speaking English in an American setting, indexing a linguistic anxiety stance towards speaking English with Americans. The fear of mispronouncing words and people noticing one's foreign accent made ISA of Latin American origin feel like they are under surveillance in an academic setting where they are expected to perform a particular Standard Academic English (SAE). So, there is a sense of feeling ashamed or embarrassed due to sounding foreign.

Similarly, in excerpt 5, Brenda talked about her worries when speaking English in a U.S. setting—in the classroom—she expressed similar, if not the same, feelings as Andrea. Brenda clarified that her fear is not about the action of public speaking itself, it is the public speaking in English in front of an English-speaking audience. She continued by explaining that public

speaking in Portuguese is not a problem (See line 31), she went on to reveal her worries about public speaking in English were due to her fear of mispronunciation and not being understood. Therefore, Andrea expressed a linguistic anxiety stance towards speaking English with/to an American audience.

Excerpt 5

Brenda	30	Until today, I'm kind of nervous about doing presentations in front of the class.
	31	In Portuguese. I don't care, I can talk whatever you want,
	32	but in English I'm always like, if I say something wrong, you know,
	33	like if my pronunciation is not that good if they don't understand me

From my interview with Brenda, I could tell she was a very outspoken and confident person; she seemed to be the kind of person who is not afraid of public speaking, and I was right. Brenda's fear of public speaking came from not feeling confident in her English skills in the American setting. Feeling that she was going to be judged for mispronouncing a word could lead to negative emotions like embarrassment. Existing in an English-speaking context made ISAs of Latin American origin feel stunted and away from who they truly are.

Using the concept of stance, I was able to identify social positioning and power dynamics in the discourse of ISAs of Latin American origin. Additionally, Bakhtin's concept of chronotope helped to understand how different cultural and spatial contexts affect communication and narratives. ISAs of Latin American origin's linguistic anxiety stance toward English, particularly in a U.S. context, was directly related to how ISAs of Latin American origin built social connectedness in the host country.

Buenos Dias!... [silence]

ISAs come to the U.S. with an image of the U.S. that is shaped by the media. Soon enough, ISAs realized that there were cultural and social norms they were unaware of. In Latin America, it is polite to say good morning, good afternoon, or good night, depending on the time of the day, whenever you encounter a group of people in a public space (it does not matter if you know or do not know them). For example, saying good morning when you get on the bus at 7 am or saying goodbye after you are done working. However, in the U.S., not greeting others is not considered impolite. Another greeting formality applied in Latin America is the kissing on the cheek when meeting someone; this greeting is perceived as a sign of sympathy, saying hello to someone. However, in the U.S., this is not well perceived or utilized.

It is often talked of Latin America as a place where people don't mind being close to each other. In the U.S., on the contrary, it is often talked about how Americans are colder than Latin Americans and do mind their personal space. ISAs of Latin American origin have to navigate these cultural and social norms that, most of the time, are untold and learned by personal experience, like Andrea, who recalled a funny and embarrassing moment when her mother came to visit her from Argentina. Andrea's mom hugged and kissed everyone she met, creating confusion and awkwardness. Later, Andrea had to explain to her mother that she could not say hi like that.

Gloria, a track and field student-athlete from Mexico, described an experience where she was saying hello to some Latina friends and how some American boys reinterpreted a cultural norm in Mexico (greeting with a kiss on the cheek) and sexualized it. Gloria remembered.

Saludé de beso [en el cachete] a unas amigas y unos [chicos Americanos] vieron y ellos de qué ‘¿Cómo? ¿Así se saludan?’ Y yo de que ‘si es normal, de saludar a todos de beso’ y ellos quisieron, pero o sea por morbo.

I greeted some friends with a kiss (on the cheek) and some [American boys] saw and said, ‘Is that how you greet each other?’ And I was like, ‘yes, it is normal to greet everyone with a kiss’ and then they wanted [me to give them a kiss on the cheek], but out of curiosity (in a sexualized way).

Gloria’s encounter with American boys, sexualizing her cultural way of greeting her female friends, made her feel uncomfortable. She shared that comments like that are regular. For example, she recalled having people (and even teammates) comment that her accent is sexy or spicy, adding to the “Latin woman” stereotype, in which Latino/Hispanic women are hypersexualized.

Once ISAs of Latin American origin arrived in the U.S., they could become subject to discrimination, racism, and sexism due to the intersectionality of their gender, race/ethnicity, social class, and athletic identities. Once in the United States, ISAs of Latin American origin have to face the American necessity of defining themselves within the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) categories for race, which includes White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander. Ian Haney López, in his article *Chance, Context, and Choice in the Social Construct of Race* explored the construction of race through three terms: *Chance*, *Context*, and *Choice*. Haney López defined *Chance* as the characteristics that we don't have control over; for example, the family we are born into, our skin color, and our hair type. *Context* is the place where “races

are recognized, constructed, and contested” (Haney 1998, 11). *Choice* is the conscious or unconscious choices someone makes to assimilate into a race. Because of a switch in the racial landscape, ISAs of Latin American origin navigate a fraught racializing situation that could impact their social connectedness.

In the U.S, there is an expectation for those of Latin American origin to fulfill the brown Latin stereotype, a person of Latin American descent with brown skin, dark hair, curves, a foreign accent, who knows how to dance and cook... This U.S. stereotype that a Latin person has one look, one personality could impact ISAs of Latin American origin racial identities. For example, Brenda’s identity has been questioned by people in the U.S. who have asked her “How are you blonde and you are Brazilian? Or you look like a White girl, how are you Brazilian?” Brenda, frustrated by these questions, has to constantly answer “What do you mean?” Taking on the task of explaining herself to others about the way she looks. On the other hand, Jorge, who is also from Brazil, identifies as Black. He explained how he has noticed negative stereotypes towards Black people in the U.S. He spoke.

I feel like people doubt your knowledge, and somehow, they get surprised if you say something very smart.

Jorge felt that because he is Black and an athlete, he was expected by the campus community to perform less well academically. A study that explored the relationship between male Black and White student-athletes and faculty, as well as the impact of specific forms of student athlete-faculty interaction on academic achievement, suggested that Black and White male student-athletes did not benefit equally from their interactions with faculty (Comeaux and Harrison 2007). Black participants in Comeaux and Harrison (2007) felt that they were

marginalized by White professors on campus. This can negatively impact internal academic expectations and accentuate negative stereotypes towards student-athletes of color.

Collegiate Athletics as a Full-Time Job

As I have explained throughout this chapter, the honeymoon phase is ephemeral. Soon enough, ISAs realized they had to exceed a set of demands. Student-athletes have the same academic demands as their non-athlete counterparts. Student-athletes are required to be in good academic standing according to the GPA standards of their institutions to be eligible to compete and remain on the team. Because student-athletes have academic and athletic demands, the NCAA limits to a maximum of four hours per day and 20 hours per week for Countable Athletically Related Activities (CARA), which includes practice, strength and conditioning, film review, competition, and supplemental workouts. Other activities such as academic meetings, nutritionist sessions, media activities, injury treatment/prevention, community service, sports psychology sessions, team fundraising, prospective student-athlete host duties, and compliance meetings do not count towards CARA limits. However, based on a 2015 survey of D1 student-athletes, student-athletes reported spending four to nine hours on athletics during a typical day of competition. Likewise, studies have shown that student-athletes spend 40 or more hours a week in activities related to their sport (Wolverton 2016).

A study that analyzes ISA recruitment and transition into American college sports indicated that ISA prospects do not fully understand what they are “getting themselves into” related to the level of commitment that implies college sports (Pierce et al. 2011, 3). In addition, as previously discussed, when ISAs are offered the chance to be a Division I athlete, the initial excitement of a chance to travel and compete in the U.S. obscures other key factors such as the location and environment of the specific college they attend (Bale 1991). Prospective ISAs of

Latin American origin and their parents might not understand college athletics: the recruitment process, scholarships, and commitment. They also fail to consider issues beyond just the opportunity to be and compete in the U.S., such as the possibility of experiencing anxiety, stress, cultural shock, and social isolation while having to juggle coursework and athletics (Rodriguez 2014). Unfortunately, feeling overwhelmed by academic and athletic demands is part of being an ISA, at least in the first semester, as ISAs try to figure out what works best for them in terms of organizing and managing their time. Student-athletes often struggle with balancing both demands (Woodruff and Schallert, 2008). The conflict between academic and athletic demands creates an imbalance in student-athletes' lives, putting this non-traditional group at a higher risk of attrition in higher education (Johnson et al. 2013), which can impact student-athletes' academic and athletic performances (Manwell et al. 2021). In addition, the commercialization of college sports, the pressure to win or perform well, passion for their sport, and the financial attachment to the sport are all factors that add to the stress of being a student-athlete (Comeaux and Harrison 2011). On the same page, student-athletes who are in revenue-generating sports (basketball and football) struggle to balance their academic and athletic roles more than those in non-revenue-generating sports (Comeaux and Harrison 2011). As a result of this imbalance between academic and athletic demands, student-athletes can experience social isolation, affecting their personal life (Ortega 2021). Student-athletes, the same as their non-athlete counterparts, go through social and academic adjustment in college. However, student-athletes have the layer of athletics, which changes their social interactions and integration with the rest of the campus community (Comeaux and Harrison 2011). For ISAs, these imbalances can be more intense as they are in a process of adjustment: adjustment to the U.S. itself, the U.S. higher education system, college athletics, and language. "In fact, the greater the cultural distance

between the sojourner's native country and the host nation, the greater the adjustments international athletes would be expected to make" (Pierce et al. 2011, 3). Andrea was raised by loving parents who supported her regardless of her athletic results. When Andrea left Argentina to pursue college athletics, she knew there would be challenges and that she would be competing in a highly competitive environment. However, Andrea did not foresee the pressure that entailed being a Division I athlete. Once in the U.S., Andrea felt pressure to excel in her athletic performances because this time she was not only representing herself, but she was also representing a university.

Excerpt 6

Andrea	34	Yo llegué y la verdad que jugué un poco bien al principio, <i>I arrived and I played a little bit well at the beginning,</i>
	35	después empecé a jugar un poco mal, pero me di cuenta que es porque <i>Then I started to play a little bit bad, but I realized that it's because</i>
	36	yo nunca estuve acostumbrada a la presión, digamos, de nada, <i>I was never used to the pressure, let's say, of anything</i>
	37	siempre era jugar por mí y <i>it was always about playing for myself and</i>
	38	el llegar acá y empezar a jugar para un equipo, para un coach, <i>coming here and starting to play for a team, for a coach,</i>
	39	era como una presión que yo nunca había sentido. <i>it was like a pressure that I had never felt before.</i>
	40	Fue como un cambio fuerte para mí empezar a jugar para otra persona, <i>It was like a big change for me to start playing for someone else,</i>
	41	el sentirse que sos un resultado o que tenés que jugar bien para otra gente. <i>feeling like you are a result or that you must play well for other people.</i>

Through the “there” chronotope of back home and the “here” chronotope of being a D1 international athlete. Andrea juxtaposed her past (no feeling pressure and playing for herself) with her present (feeling pressure and playing for a team and coach). Those are moments in which Andrea confronted the demands of the emotional weight of her new role as an ISA in a Division I university. Andrea signaled a point of transition (see line 38), the “here” chronotope of being a D1 international athlete became a time and space in which ISAs were not only dealing with an academic, linguistic, and cultural challenges, but they are also dealing with athletic challenges, where athletic outcomes are measured and judged. It is noted to point out the code-switching Andrea briefly did during our conversation in Spanish. She used the English word coach instead of the Spanish equivalent, *entrenador/entrenadora*. This can indicate Andrea’s bilingual skills she has developed by doing her sport in the U.S. Her vocabulary related to sport is performed through English because it is the common language of communication among her coaches and her teammates.

Feeling like your worth is based on your athletic results is also expressed by other participants in this research study. This shared feeling by ISAs may be due to the pressure to win that many Division I coaches are under, as well as the penalties for losing (Love and Kim 2011). “Many Division I coaches’ jobs are predicated on the strength of their programs, causing them to recruit the best talent they can find, in many cases from the international pool” (Weston 2006, 860). As coaches lean on ISAs to remain competitive within their programs, ISAs acknowledge that their presence in the team is to provide a result to the coach, athletic program, and university. Jorge admitted.

To be honest with you, I feel like [coaches] just worried about how I'm going to bring the results back to them... I feel like they're more concerned about how I can solve a problem for them, like, how can Jorge jump far?

Jorge acknowledged he needs to perform well under the pressure from coaches. Popp (2009) examined the adjustment of ISAs to U.S. universities and found that ISAs generally perceived American coaches as instilling a “killer instinct” and a “winning-is-everything” mindset from an early age. In contrast, ISAs felt that coaches in their home countries focused more on the benefits of participation and overall health in youth sports rather than emphasizing competition (Popp et al. 2009, 104). A “killer instinct” and a “winning-is-everything” mindset can impact the way ISAs view college sports and, therefore, impact their college experience overall.

Real support, or is it just performative?

Most NCAA Division I institutions have services and programs that support student-athletes' academic success. However, student-athlete support services personnel have yet to understand the adjustment process ISAs go through in American universities (Popp et al. 2009). This support is meant to help student-athletes organize their academic and athletic commitments. Academic counselors (in athletics) often help student-athletes pick their classes and majors, do grade checks, and make sure they are on track to graduate. However, their focus is to keep student-athletes' academic eligibility (Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics 2001). As mentioned before, student-athletes often surpass the maximum CARA hours per week, especially those who are in revenue-generating sports. “As a result, student-athletes have less time available for their academic pursuits and other

educationally productive activities. Whether by choice or heavily influenced by the athletic structure, student-athletes also live, eat, study, and socialize together and are even tracked into the same majors, which leads, in part, to academic and social isolation from the rest of the campus community” (Comeaux and Harrison 2011, 236). Most college student-athletes have practiced and competed in their sport for a big part of their lives. They develop a very strong athlete identity linked to their passion for the sport and sometimes their self-worth related to their athletic performance. Student-athletes whose athletic identity is dominant tend to experience emotional stressors that can impact their academic performance (Johnson et al. 2013). In a national study of student-athletes regarding their experiences as college students, Potuto and O’Hanlon (2007) found that some student-athletes viewed themselves more as athletes than as students. This can be attributed to the social construct, where being an athlete is more rewarded in society than being a student, as well as the status, opportunities, and resources that come with being a college student-athlete.

Teammates, the ISAs’ first friends’ circle

ISAs are in a different situation from the rest of the international student community because ISAs arrive on campus and are immediately placed within a team structure. Teammates become an essential part of the college-athletic experience. An average student-athlete spends more time with teammates than with family. Becoming friends with a teammate can happen organically after all, you train and travel to competitions together, and in many cases, live, eat, study, and socialize together. Ana, a triathlon student-athlete from Argentina, confirmed that in her first semester, her friends were her teammates, and she asserted that living in the dorms with them helped the friendship develop. Although it may feel forced at the beginning, having supportive teammates can enhance the ISA college experience.

The opposite can happen when ISAs don't get along with teammates.

Chepyator-Thomson (2003) found that many Kenyan runners in her study felt excluded by their American teammates, who often displayed jealousy and a lack of support, treating them as outsiders. In her freshman year, Perla, an ISA from Puerto Rico, experienced bullying from other freshmen in her team who were also her roommates. Among tears, Perla recalled her freshman year as a bad year because she felt excluded and very lonely. She believed the other freshmen were jealous of her because she was having playtime as a freshman.

This highlights the complexities ISAs face when integrating into U.S. collegiate sports. Similarly, some ISAs of Latin American origin in this research study reported feeling left out by their teammates. As a matter of fact, ISAs of Latin American origin who commented on feeling excluded within their teams attributed it to having mostly American teammates. On the other hand, ISAs of Latin American origin who commented feeling welcome in their teams attributed it to having three or more ISAs (no matter the country) in their team.

Early in my conversation with Gloria, a track and field student-athlete from Mexico, she confessed she did not have a good impression of the team when she first arrived on campus. She felt her teammates did not reach out to offer any guidance. Contrary to what she would expect from people from Mexico. Gloria described.

Yo no tuve una muy buena experiencia cuando recién llegué, la verdad... Siento que nadie del equipo me buscó para preguntarme si necesitaba ayuda con mis cosas para mudarme. O sea, nadie me ayudó literalmente y nadie me habló ni siquiera en el primer entrenamiento.

I didn't have a very good experience when I first arrived, honestly... I feel like no one on the team approached me to ask if I needed help with moving my things to move. I mean, literally, no one helped me, and no one even talked to me at the first training session.

In addition, Gloria recalled a compilation of uncomfortable experiences with a roommate/teammate who made her living situation discomfoting. Gloria believed that the reasons might have been related to Gloria having a full-ride scholarship and her roommate/teammate did not, even though she was an American. Gloria added.

No sé si ahí hubo un rencor por su parte de yo ser internacional y tener como que todo el apoyo. Y ella no.

I don't know if there was any resentment on her part due to me being international and having all the support. And she didn't.

Feeling concerned about being discriminated against for her status as a foreign student-athlete was not something Gloria thought she would experience in college athletics. A study on international student perceptions of discrimination in the U.S. revealed that international students might face discrimination due to their foreign status, race, or language (Lee and Rice 2007). Lee and Rice (2007) explained that determining the extent to which the reported experiences from their participants stem from actual discrimination based on foreign status, language, or race versus personal misperception is challenging, if not impossible. However, a clear divide existed between the experiences of White international students and those of color. While students from Asia, India, Latin America, and the Middle East reported facing significant discrimination, students from Europe, Canada, and New Zealand did not mention any direct negative experiences related to their race or cultural background.

Sports in the U.S.

Participants in this research study reported that in the first year of college, they were very focused on their sports. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, ISAs of Latin American origin motivations to come to the U.S. were mainly to pursue their sports while working on obtaining a degree on the side as a “plan B.” Therefore, it is no surprise that their focus, at least in their first semester of college, was on their sports. Ana reported.

El primer año, yo estuve muy concentrada en entrenar y todo lo que lleva entrenar, no solo ir a nadar o ir a correr, o sea también en las horas de sueño o comidas y todo eso, descansar entre los entrenamientos. Entonces como que no le tenía tanta prioridad a [actividades sociales].

The first year, I was very focused on training and everything that training entails, not just going swimming or running, but also on sleeping, eating, and all that, resting between training sessions. So, I didn't really give it that much priority to [social activities].

Here, Ana expressed her commitment to her sport by highlighting not only the physical exhaustion but also other factors of being an athlete, like resting between training, sleeping, and eating well. Marcela added.

Pues yo en verdad aquí yo era solamente voleibol de playa, voleibol de playa, voleibol de playa, voleibol de playa y cuando yo me lastimé, yo me lesioné de ACL. Pues ahí fue cuando yo dije okay, pues tengo que hacer otras cosas.

Here, I was all about playing beach volleyball, beach volleyball, beach volleyball, beach volleyball, and when I got hurt, I injured my ACL. That's when I said, okay, I have to do other things.

Marcela, a beach volleyball player from Puerto Rico, expressed her focus on playing her sport until an injury left her out of the playing field. She realized she needed to look forward to other things besides her sport. Marcela situated herself in the “here” chronotope of being a D1 international athlete that indexed a high-pressure and present-focused environment defined by the tension that requires being a Division I athlete.

Ana and Marcela’s early experiences in college athletics resembled the early experiences of the rest of the participants in this research study, where doing well in sports was very important for them and counted as their priority. “It is important to note that student-athletes exhibit less interaction through extracurricular activities and campus services because of sports demands that limit their participation in such activities” (Comeaux and Harrison 2011, 241). “Not to mention the mental fatigue, physical exhaustion, and nagging injuries that afflict those who participate in college sports” (Comeaux and Harrison 2011, 236). ISAs of Latin American origin in this research study expressed their commitment and gratitude to play college sports.

Excerpt 7

Gloria	42	Yo vengo aquí por mi futuro. <i>I came here for my future.</i>
	43	O sea, yo sí sé que las decisiones que tome ahorita van a impactar mi futuro <i>I mean, I know that the decisions I make right now are going to impact my future</i>
	44	y no me la voy a pasar, por ejemplo, de fiesta, sabes? <i>and I'm not going to spend my time, for example, partying, you know?</i>

The “here” chronotope of being a D1 international athlete, which highlights the spatialization of ISAs of Latin American origin’s experiences in the U.S., can also be evaluated as a chronotope of progress, one in which ISAs of Latin American origin evaluate the offered opportunities in the U.S. as better than the opportunities in their home countries labeling the U.S. as forward, modern and Latin American countries as backward and traditional. Dick (2010) explored how non-migrants in Uriangato, Mexico, used discourse surrounding the U.S.-bound migration to imagine and position themselves within broader sociohistorical narratives. Dick analyzed conversations and interactions in the town, focusing on the ways people deployed a “modernist chronotope,” a framework contrasting the U.S. as a land of socioeconomic development and progress with Mexico as a land of socioeconomic stagnation (Dick 2010). Gloria and other ISAs of Latin American origin in this research study configured themselves in a “modernist chronotope” where they felt coming to the U.S. for college sports was necessary to get ahead in their sport, academics, and life in general by gaining access to high-quality training facilities, knowledgeable coaches, American education, and the U.S. itself. In excerpt 7, Gloria stated *I came here for my future*, which set her in a “here” chronotope of being a D1 international athlete, where she reaffirmed her dedication to work towards shaping a better future for herself while in the U.S.

Excerpt 8

Jorge	45	I feel like I cannot like just mess up
	46	because I have a mission to like, inspire other people, especially in Brazil.
	47	So, I try to kind of keep myself focused
	48	because I have a responsibility being over here with my family, with my cousins, with my aunt.
	49	You know, I don't want to go back home like nothing.

Coming to the U.S. for college athletics represented a way for ISAs of Latin American to get ahead in life. Through the “here” chronotope, Jorge evaluated his commitment to being a D1 international athlete as a stepping stone to improve his life and comply with his family duties. As mentioned in this chapter, ISAs of Latin American origin came to the U.S. (in addition to playing college sports) seeking to improve their lives, including their financial situation in the long term. ISAs in this research study agreed that obtaining a degree from an American university will open many doors for them to find jobs in their respective home countries and therefore improve their financial situation for themselves and their families. It is important to note that no student-athlete, domestic or international, was allowed to receive profits from their name, image, and likeness. That changed after July 1, 2021, when the NCAA approved an interim policy that allows college athletes to monetize their name, image, and likeness, or so-called NIL (NCAA 2021). However, ISAs were left out of this policy due to visa restrictions. Most ISAs are under an F-1 visa, which allows foreigners to come to the U.S. to be full-time students. Along with mandating a full course of study, the F-1 visa imposes strict working limitations on international students, based on the principle that their primary purpose in the U.S. is to study rather than to work (USCIS 2025). International students are allowed to work on campus up to 20 hours per week during the regular academic year. For off-campus employment or to work more than 20 hours per week, additional U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) authorization is required. International students and their educational institutions can face penalties for violations of USCIS rules and regulations, including unauthorized employment. Among the penalties are immediate termination of student visa status, removal/deportation, and the inability to obtain future visa statuses or permanent legal status in the U.S. (8 U.S.C. § 1182). ISAs can pursue NIL deals as long as the activities are performed and payments are made outside the U.S.

Through this chapter, I have discussed the motivations and main challenges ISAs of Latin American origin faced when they first arrived in the U.S., which answers my first research question: *What is social connectedness like for international student-athletes of Latin American origin at NCAA D1 universities?* Using Du Bois's (2007) stance triangle, I identified a linguistic anxiety stance towards English taken by ISAs of Latin American origin. This stance was revealed when ISAs of Latin American origin were in the presence of native English speakers. I also used Bakhtin's concept of chronotope to illustrate the interplay of space and time in which ISAs of Latin American origin temporally and spatially set themselves in a "there" chronotope of back home and in a "here" chronotope of being a D1 international athlete articulated through their discourse during the interviews. Using stance and chronotope, I was able to observe the nuances in power dynamics, cultural assumptions, and the performative aspects of communication, as well as the emotional and social weight of language learning (not just about grammar but about identity and power).

To this extent, social connectedness for ISAs of Latin American origin is limited during their first year of college as they are adjusting to life in the U.S., juggling academic and athletic commitments, and improving their English skills. In conclusion, social connectedness for ISAs of Latin America is heavily influenced by the athletic structure. In the next chapter, I explore the impact of social connectedness on the college experience of ISAs of Latin American origin as a third, emergent chronotope of social connectedness materializes. Additionally, I elaborate further on how a linguistic anxiety stance towards speaking English with/to an American audience impacts the social connectedness of ISAs of Latin American origin in U.S. universities.

Chapter 2

More Than Just a Game: Social Connectedness and the College Experience of ISAs of Latin American Origin

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines social connectedness as “the degree to which you have the number, quality, and variety of relationships that you want. It is when you feel like you belong and have the support and care that you need” (CDC 2024). There is a strong connection between social relationships and physical, mental health, and well-being. A research study by the CDC examined the associations between loneliness and lack of social and emotional support to mental health variables. Its findings showed that loneliness and lack of social and emotional support were significantly associated with poor mental health outcomes (Bruss et al. 2024). Loneliness occurs when someone feels they don't have meaningful or close relationships, going beyond the quantity of those relationships. For instance, a person with many friends can still feel lonely. Social isolation occurs when someone feels they do not have a social and emotional support system. Both loneliness and social isolation can be influenced by various factors, including culture, demographics, and the environments where people live, work, study, and play (Holt-Lunstad 2022). Furthermore, loneliness and social isolation are linked to an increased risk of heart disease and stroke, type 2 diabetes, depression and anxiety, addiction, suicidality and self-harm, dementia, and earlier death (CDC 2024).

ISAs of Latin American origin are at risk to experience loneliness and social isolation because they are a non-traditional group in U.S. universities that face challenges to accessing resources, such as limited transportation and language barriers, being marginalized or discriminated against, stress due life imbalance (academics and athletics), and major life transitions like going to college in a different country, in which language and culture are different.

ISAs of Latin American origin arrive in the U.S. feeling like a fish out of water. They must navigate speaking English, U.S. college athletics, and U.S. individualistic and consumerist culture, among other differences. According to the CDC, a characteristic of social connectedness is having more than one person to turn to for support, including emotional and physical support. For example, having someone to talk to when feeling down, or having someone to give you a ride to a doctor's appointment or grocery store. Because ISAs are new in the U.S., they lack social connectedness. In this chapter, I discuss the importance of social activities, social connectedness, and social integration in the lives of ISAs of Latin American origin.

The benefits of social connectedness can help ISAs to lower levels of stress, anxiety, and depression (Holt-Lunstad 2022), which are regular emotional challenges ISAs face during their transition to U.S. college athletics (Rodriguez 2014). Social connectedness provides higher self-esteem and empathy, better emotion regulation skills, and creates a positive feedback loop of social, emotional, and physical well-being (Seppala 2014). I use the concept of social connectedness because it is a topic often overlooked in college athletics due to college athletics' reputation of functioning as a business for economic gain over student-athletes' well-being. Through interviews with ISAs of Latin American origin, I identified a social connectedness chronotope that emphasized the desire and necessity for social connection among ISAs of Latin American origin. This chronotope is about bringing back home to the present time of being a D1 international athlete as they struggle to reconstruct their narrative of the self.

As a former D1 international athlete at a U.S. university, I often experienced the tension of comparing my home country to the United States. This duality—“there” and “here”—was a recurring theme in my interviews with ISAs of Latin American origin. Their narratives revealed not only the contrast between these two spaces but also the temporal dynamics of their identities

as D1 international athletes. The sense of “there” represented a familiar, past-oriented space tied to cultural roots and comfort, while “here” symbolized a present-focused, challenging environment characterized by growth, pressure, and opportunity. Within this framework, ISAs proactively sought out the community to navigate and reconcile these competing dimensions, creating a social connectedness chronotope.

Challenges to Foster Social Connectedness

As discussed in the previous chapter, athletic demands limit student-athletes from engaging in campus activities other than athletics-related. Student-athletes have a set of demands that take them away from being part of the rest of the student body. “Social integration occurs primarily through student–athletes’ engagement in campus extracurricular activities (other than their sports), interactions with faculty, and interactions with peers other than their teammates” (Comeaux and Harrison 2011, 241). It is important to note that student-athletes have access to many resources due to their student-athlete status; for example, access to meals, locker rooms with showers, fridge and resting area, training rooms, training facilities, and tutors all within walking distance from each other or in the same quadrant of campus. The accessibility of multiple resources within one space might be one of the reasons why student-athletes do not branch out to campus resources and services. This is true even for academic resources, as many universities have designated spaces to help student-athletes achieve academic success. Thus, when ISAs arrive on campus, they are introduced to all the resources and services provided by athletics while skimming through other campus resources and services. This could have an impact on ISA’s social integration on campus and, therefore, an impact on their college experience. Comeaux and Harrison (2011) explained how the college environment is multifaceted, covering both academic and social aspects (and in the case of student-athletes, the

athletic aspects as well). They argued that for student-athletes to successfully graduate, they must effectively engage in both areas (academic and social) and be aware of how students allocate their time between the two.

There was a moment where Andrea, an ISA from Argentina, felt she needed to dedicate more time to athletics, she considered she could take some of her social time and apply it to training time. However, she felt she was missing something important to her, social connectedness. She went on to explain that she would burn out if she did not distribute her time well between training, studying, and socializing. Andrea recognized that it is important to her to find a middle ground between sports, academics, and her social life. A middle ground where she can thrive athletically, academically, and socially. Andrea explained.

Buscar ese balance entre todo para mejorar (atleticamente), pero también sentirme bien y hacer las cosas que me gustan al mismo tiempo, porque si no siento que me saturaría de golf, y de lo académico.

Finding that balance between everything to improve (athletically), but also to feel good and do the things I like at the same time, because if not, I feel like I would get saturated with golf and academics.

Andrea's awareness of social connectedness has allowed her to have a more well-rounded college experience. Andrea used the adjective saturated to describe an overwhelming concentration of athletics and academics if she could not find a balance between her sport, studies, and time with friends. Most college student-athletes have practiced and competed in their sport for a big part of their lives. They develop a very strong athlete identity linked to their passion for the sport, and sometimes their self-worth is related to their athletic performance.

Student-athletes whose athletic identity is dominant tend to experience emotional stressors that can impact their academic performance (Johnson et al. 2013). This emotional attachment to athletic identity could be a result of social construct, where being an athlete is more rewarded in society than being a student. For example, the status, opportunities, and resources that come with being a D1 student-athlete.

Familismo, Respeto, and Educación

At the beginning of their journey in the U.S., ISAs of Latin American origin struggled to juggle their athletic and academic demands as they are in a transition process of adjusting to life as student-athletes in U.S. college athletics. For a short period, ISAs live in the honeymoon phase, a time where they are experiencing a sense of euphoria and excitement for being in the U.S. Once ISAs move past that phase, they start noticing flaws that were overlooked during the honeymoon phase, such as starting to miss family, friends, and food. Upon arriving in the U.S., ISAs of Latin American origin experience a shortage of their social capital, which is primarily their families, and cultural capital such as language, behaviors, and values.

Family plays an important role in the Latino culture. Halgunseth et al. (2006) explored Latino parental control and its effects on child development, using social information processing and cultural change models to explain its variations. They argued that Latino parenting practices are influenced by cultural values such as *familismo* (familism), *respeto* (respect), and *educación* (moral education). “*Familismo* is a firm belief in strong family ties, with the family as the primary source of support and loyalty to the family taking precedence over one’s personal desires” (Turcios-Cotto and Milan 2013, 1400). For ISAs of Latin American origin, it is not easy to be away from family. Coming from a humble family in Brazil, in which *familismo* values are taught, Jorge described being in the U.S. as a sacrifice, as he gave up family time for the sake of

pursuing his athletic and academic goals. Jorge explained in a calm voice.

To not be homesick, I just think about my future and how I can help [my family]. And, I just be like, 'oh, I need to go through this in order to help my family.' So, it is worth it to miss them for a little bit or to be away from home.

Jorge's strong ties to his family have shaped his social interactions, decision-making, and personal identity. Being in the U.S. is not exclusively for his benefit; Jorge foresees being in the U.S. (away from home) to support his family. Thus, he is not only prioritizing individual desires (competing at the D1 NCAA level), but he is also considering his family's well-being and how he can help them, for example, by supporting them monetarily. This reinforces a sense of unity and responsibility with his family. Jorge, who was raised in the favelas "shanty towns" in Rio de Janeiro, also indexed Dick's "modernist binary [chronotope] that configures the United States as a land of socioeconomic mobility and progress, but also of moral dissolution, and Mexico as a land of morality and family, but also of socioeconomic stagnation" (Dick 2010, 276). In Asif Agha words, "a chronotope is a semiotic representation of time and place peopled by certain social types" (Agha 2007, 321). Dick's "modernist binary [chronotope] laminated Jorge's in two spatiotemporal framings: one with a progressive sense of time, in which Brazil is languishing his opportunity to excel in both sports and academics, and another with a stationary traditional sense of time, where being in the United States requires him to be away from his family but staying on a fixed path. Using the concept of chronotope in linguistic anthropology helped in understanding how language not only represents but actively produces temporal, spatial, and identity-based realities, shaping how people experience and interpret the world.

Respeto is a cultural value centered on fostering harmony through mutual respect for oneself and others (Halgunseth et al. 2006). It encompasses more than the English concept of

“respect” by also including acknowledgment of family roles (Valdés 1996). ISAs in this research study expressed cultural obligation towards family. Jorge, specifically, expressed a sense of duty to his family as he takes on the role of a son. Jorge shared.

I send money to my family every month, and if I don't send it, I feel bad.

Aware of his family's financial struggles, Jorge felt the responsibility to support his family when he had the means. This demonstrates Jorge's *familismo*, *respeto*, and willingness to take advantage of the opportunity given to him. Now, in the U.S. on an athletic scholarship and working an on-campus job, he can contribute financially to his family back home. Turcios-Cotto and Milan (2013) explored racial and ethnic differences in adolescents' expectations for their future, focusing on Latino youth and their views on higher education. Through cultural factors like *familismo*, people of Latin American origin are taught by their caregivers (parents, grandparents, etc.) the importance of providing for their families. Latino males may feel a moral obligation to support their families (Ortega 2021). Jorge embodied this sense of duty.

Guadalupe Valdés in her book *Con Respeto: Bridging the Distances between Culturally Diverse Families and Schools. An Ethnographic Portrait* explored Mexican American family life, parental perspectives on education, and initiatives aimed at improving student success by influencing family dynamics. Her findings indicated that in Mexican American families, children are taught from an early age to show *respeto* through specific verbal and nonverbal behaviors, such as greeting elders politely, not interrupting adult conversations, and accepting the viewpoints of older family members. This value reinforces family structure, instilling the idea that respect is both demonstrated and earned by adhering to one's designated role. For example, Marcela mentioned that while growing up, her parents emphasized values such as humility and respect toward elders. In the U.S., she observed people disrespecting their parents. Disrespecting

one's parents can go from raising your voice to disobeying their commands. Similarly, Gloria, an ISA from Mexico, said in an assertive tone.

Nunca le hablaría como que mal a ningún coach y a ninguna persona mayor.

I would never speak badly to any coach or any older person.

Gloria's utterances illustrate her upbringing and how *respeto* is rooted in Latin American culture. By badly, Gloria meant she would not raise her voice, and she would use proper language; for example, using the third-person singular *usted* instead of the second-person singular *tú* when referring to an elderly person or any adult with authority. In Spanish, *usted* is the formal way to say *you* (singular). *Usted* is usually used when addressing strangers, authority figures, or showing respect.

Educación goes beyond academics and obtaining good grades. In Spanish, *educación* is more about moral education. For example, the term *ser buen educado* translates to "be well educated." It refers to being respectful, polite, responsible, well-mannered, and having high morals (Turcios-Cotto and Milan 2013). Jorge, an ISA from Brazil, argued.

I feel like I'm way more educated than a lot of people over here because my mom taught me a lot of things.

When Jorge said he is more educated than a lot of people from the U.S., it meant he has more moral education than people in the U.S., not that he has more academic knowledge or degrees. He explained that his mom taught him to be humble, honest, and respectful to all people.

Familismo, *respeto* and *ser buen educado* represent a cultural obligation for ISAs of Latin American origin. These cultural values can impact the social connectedness of ISAs of

Latin American origin by shaping how they interact, build relationships, and integrate into new environments. It is important to note that those values are not unique to Latin America; they can also apply to Hispanic/Latinos(as/xs) in the U.S. and around the world. They can also apply to other regions like the Mediterranean, where familism is strong.

ISAs of Latin American origin noticed that some people from the U.S. do not share their same values of *familismo*, *respeto*, and *ser buen educado*. Instead, they saw a country that prided itself on individualism and consumerism. Perla, an ISA from Puerto Rico, added.

Yo pienso que [la vida en Estados Unidos] es una vida más solitaria. En Puerto Rico, todo es más como que las familias son más unida, la gente se ayuda.

I think [life in the United States] is a more solitary life. In Puerto Rico, everything is more like families are more united, people help each other.

Perla's observations of life in the U.S. as lonely suggested that life in the U.S. is more individualistic, whereas Puerto Rico fosters a collectivist culture with strong family bonds and community support. The solitary nature of life in the U.S. may contribute to loneliness, stress, and mental health issues due to weaker interpersonal connections, and ISAs of Latin American origin are already a vulnerable population to experience social isolation while in the U.S.

Connect to Memories Through Food-Evoked Nostalgia

ISAs are in an adjusting process during their first year of college. They are not only adjusting to the U.S. higher education system and college athletics, but they are also adjusting to an independent lifestyle that includes being far away from home with no parents around and no homemade food. Food was one of the themes that I identified from my interviews with ISAs of Latin American origin. Every Latin American country has a distinct cuisine, unique and

embedded in tradition, therefore, it was not a surprise when all participants mentioned food as an important part of their identity and culture.

Excerpt 9

Marcela	50	Ay, la comida, la comida. La comida ha sido un choque bien fuerte
		<i>Oh, the food, the food. The food has been a real shock</i>
	51	porque en Puerto Rico, yo comía pues arroz habichuela, chuleta, chuleta can can, bistec, bla, bla...
		<i>because in Puerto Rico, I would eat rice, beans, pork chop, can-can pork chop, steak, blah, blah...</i>
	52	Y aquí pues los fast food.
		<i>And here, well, fast food.</i>

Marcela's utterances came from my question: *What are some differences or similarities you notice between the U.S. and Puerto Rico?* Marcela's eyes widened as her face gave the impression of "there are too many differences, where do I even start?" She started by mentioning driving styles and the tendency of Puerto Ricans to speak loudly. Then she paused and sighed when she remembered Puerto Rican food. Marcela, a D1 beach volleyball player, was born and raised in Puerto Rico. Before coming to college, she had only left the island a few times. During our conversation about food, Marcela's tone of voice ranged from joy to disappointment. When she started listing the foods she ate in Puerto Rico (see line 51), her tone of voice was high and joyful, and her eyes lit up. Then, when she said *and here, well, fast food* (see line 52), her voice pinched down with a disappointing feeling, which signaled to me that she misses Puerto Rican food and dislikes U.S. food.

Not knowing much about cooking, Andrea, a D1 golf player from Argentina, calls her mom, asking for guidance on how to make Argentinian dishes she used to eat at home. Andrea told me she was never much of a cook, but moving to the U.S. kind of forced her to get in the

kitchen. Cooking was not only out of need, but to remember and feel at home. Similarly to Andrea, other ISAs of Latin American origin reported that food was a big change for them and one of the things they miss the most from their home countries.

ISAs of Latin American origin resorted to food to reconnect with their families and home countries. By calling their mothers for guidance on a family recipe or making traditional food from their countries, ISAs of Latin American origin got to taste a little bit of home. Simpson et al. (2024) explored the relationship between nostalgia, food, and mood, looking into how food-evoked nostalgia influences mood and social connection. They found that nostalgic foods evoke both positive and negative emotions, help maintain social bonds and identity and play a role in mood regulation. The findings suggested that nostalgic foods can improve emotional well-being and enhance quality of life. “Nostalgia has been found to positively influence numerous areas of individuals’ lives, improving positive affect, self-regard, and social connectedness” (Simpson et al. 2024, 1344). ISAs of Latin American origin intentionally used food-evoked nostalgia as a coping mechanism to deal with low mood states, such as feeling homesick.

Some participants reported it was hard to adapt to mealtimes in the U.S. as they were juggling classes and practice schedules, which would interfere with their eating times. Brenda highlighted that in Brazil, the main meal is lunch, so she found it strange that her teammates would eat a peanut butter and jelly sandwich for lunch when she needed more of a main dish. She explained how Brazilians, or at least her family, care about eating together. Brenda shared that on Sundays, her family gathers to eat lunch together, usually barbecue. Now, this is something she has introduced to her roommates: preparing a meal and eating together. Likewise, Ana and her teammate/roommate from England shared their cultures through food. The English

woman taught Ana about teatime, and Ana shared with her typical Argentinian foods. Hence, food has served as a medium for ISAs of Latin American origin to socially connect with others in the U.S. Sharing one's culture reinforced ISAs of Latin American origin's sense of self and roots, preventing cultural loss. It also allowed them to celebrate their heritage while adjusting to a new environment, fostering opportunities for deeper human connections and mutual appreciation.

U.S. College Party Culture

Another cultural theme that came up in my conversation with ISAs of Latin American origin was parties or the way Americans have fun. I had a flowing conversation with Marcela, an ISA from Puerto Rico, we connected over our shared status as ISAs of Latin American origin, and I believed that was helpful for her to open and share her genuine self. Since the beginning of the conversation, Marcela looked very comfortable with my presence and my questions. She was joyful and thoughtful with her words. When we were talking about language barriers, Marcela concluded her thought and lowered her voice tone, a sign that I understood as a precaution for what she was about to say.

Excerpt 10

Marcela	53	También te quería decir así como que es bien leve,
		<i>I also wanted to tell you that it is very slight,</i>
	54	pero a veces hay como que un poquito de exclusión
		<i>but sometimes there is a little bit of exclusion</i>
	54	y es bien leve, pero es que se hace natural.
		and it is very mild, but it is done naturally.
	56	Porque, por ejemplo, cuando uno va a una fiesta con Americano
		<i>Because, for example, when you go to a party with Americans</i>
	57	y tú estás acostumbrado a otra vibra.

and you're used to a different vibe.
 58 En Puerto Rico es totalmente diferente las fiestas que aquí
In Puerto Rico the parties are totally different than here.
 59 igual como juegan los equipos, que aqui yo soy mas fogosa,
just like the teams play, here I am fierier,
 60 quizas las nenas no son tan fogosas como yo
maybe girls aren't as fiery as me.

Marcela used the adjective *leve*, which is the equivalent of slight in English, to describe the exclusion she felt among Americans. I perceived Marcela using slight to downgrade her feelings by saying it is very slight, but it is done naturally. What I decoded from her utterances is that she did feel excluded by Americans (mostly referring to her teammates), but she felt it might not be personal, and it is more of a characteristic of American culture. Marcela went on to mention two examples where she observed differences between Puerto Rico and the U.S., including parties and the way beach volleyball teams play. Marcela continued.

Excerpt 11

Marcela	61	Ay, Dios mío! Pues en Puerto Rico fiesta es como que okay escuchas reggaetón, estás socializando, quizás un palito, <i>Oh my God! Well in Puerto Rico, party is like, okay, you listen to reggaeton, you socialize, maybe you get a drink</i>
	62	Perooo <i>Buttt</i>
Diana	63	[Laughs] <i>[Laughs]</i>
Marcela	64	Ay perdón, Pero aja <i>Oh, sorry, but yeah</i>
Diana	65	No no, esta bien <i>No, no, it's okay</i>
Marcela	66	Eh, este pero es bien bien social. <i>Eh, but it's very social.</i>
	67	Aquí, yo noto es como que vamos a emborracharnos y ya

68 here, I notice it's like let's get drunk and that's it
 y es como que ahí no macheo.
and it's like I don't fit in there.

Marcela's vision of a party comes from her previous experiences of parties in Puerto Rico. So, when she went to parties in the U.S., she immediately noticed some differences: the type of music, the drinking, and the lack of socialization. Marcela concluded she did not fit with the U.S. party culture. For Marcela, a party is an opportunity to mingle, dance, and drink (optional). Contrary to what she observed at parties in the U.S., where drinking seemed to be a requirement to have fun, according to Marcela. It is important to consider that drinking might not be exclusively U.S. college party culture but, instead, a college party culture in general. Nevertheless, I cannot disregard that ISAs of Latin American origin in this research study distinguished differences within parties in the U.S. compared to parties in their home countries. A party, as in an event, is a social gathering, arguably a space where people have fun; however, having fun is an experience influenced by culture, age, gender, and race/ethnicity. For example, when Perla, another ISA from Puerto Rico, went to a party with her American teammates, she saw them having fun, but she was not. Perla and her teammates are close in age and identify as women, though Perla is Puerto Rican. Perla's way of having fun did not match the way her teammates had fun at parties. Jorge agreed.

The way [Americans] have fun is different than when you go to a party in Brazil, South America. The music, how you connect with people, how you dance, and the drinks. It is just different.

Marcela, Perla, and Jorge agreed they did not fit in with American college party culture; in Jorge's words, *it is just different*. ISAs of Latin American origin accept the fact that people

have different ways of having fun. However, in this study, the U.S. college party culture influenced the social connectedness of ISAs of Latin American origin. Many choose not to attend these social events because they felt they would not enjoy their time. This is not to disregard that ISAs of Latin American origin were not willing to engage in social events; they were actively seeking ways to make their time in the U.S. enjoyable.

Language and Identity

It was mid-March 2024 when I was invited to a mixer for international student-athletes—a space meant for us to get to know each other, share a few slices of pizza, and open up about what it’s like navigating life in the U.S. as both a student and an athlete from abroad. At the time, I was still an athlete myself.

There were about ten of us, all women, representing a patchwork of countries. Half were from Latin America—Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and Puerto Rico. We each introduced ourselves with the usual: name, sport, country. And then, almost without effort, little groups began to form—not out of exclusion, but out of magnetic familiarity.

The Spanish speakers naturally gravitated toward one another. I watched as they broke into lively conversation, bright laughter bouncing off the walls. Some had only met moments before, but it felt like talking to old friends. They talked about music and the quirks of Latin American Spanish dialects while seamlessly code-switched between Spanish and English, like the flip of a switch.

It felt like home in a room far from home.

Global Mixer, Diana Ramos Sacaria

Throughout my conversation with Marcela, she had made clear that she positions Puerto Rico as different from the U.S. in several aspects, like language and culture, including the way people have fun. Additionally, she added that the way people play beach volleyball in the U.S. is also different from the way Puerto Rican beach volleyball players play. In excerpt 10, lines 59-60, Marcela described herself as *fogosa*. In Puerto Rico, *fogosa* describes someone with great enthusiasm, energy, and passion; *fogosa*’s *English* equivalent is the positive connotation of fiery,

a high-spirited individual. Marcela recalled a moment where an American beach volleyball referee approached her, asking her where she was from. Marcela answered, “I am from Puerto Rico.” The referee quickly shared with Marcela their experiences officiating Puerto Rican men’s beach volleyball games, saying negatively, “They talk and shout too much.” Marcela answered positively, saying “yes, we are like that,” meaning that Puerto Rican beach volleyball players are vocal on the sand court. By being vocal, Marcela meant that she likes to shout out “Let’s go!” when she is playing. However, she told me that some teammates did not like her playstyle. Marcela explained that sometimes she gets self-conscious and stops being vocal. This causes her to lose confidence to dominate on the court, she affirmed that being vocal in the court helps her to stay happy on the playing field. Restricting herself from her playstyle has impacted Marcela’s college athletic experience in the U.S. because she felt she needed to change her playstyle to comply with her teammates.

In my interviews with ISAs of Latin American origin, I shared a little bit of my personal experience as a former Division I athlete from Venezuela. I resonated with Brenda’s experience the most because she, like me, came to the U.S. when she was 20 years old, and we both have similar personalities, as we are both very talkative people. In my interview with Brenda, an ISA from Brazil, she described herself as an outgoing and talkative person; however, when she came to the U.S., she claimed to have become quite the opposite. Brenda shared.

I was kind of like another person, I was quiet. I was shy, and that is not me.

As Brenda, I also felt like another person in the U.S. because I felt that I could not express my personality in English. Feeling like a different person when speaking English was a shared feeling among other ISAs of Latin American origin in this research study. They positioned themselves in a linguistic anxiety stance towards English, specifically when they

speak to an American audience. Although all participants in this study met their university requirements for English proficiency, their English skills for social settings seemed to be insufficient. Therefore, the sentiment of not feeling oneself in English appeared to be a norm among these ISAs of Latin American origin. Perla added.

Yo pienso que como que yo tengo dos personalidades diferentes... [Cuando hablo inglés] soy más como que más reservada... No, me tiró chistes. Yo pienso que yo soy way funnier en español.

I think I have two different personalities... [when I speak English] I'm more reserved... I don't make jokes. I think I'm way funnier in Spanish.

For Perla, not being herself meant that she could not be spontaneous or make jokes. For Perla, making jokes in English represented a process. First, she thinks of the joke in Spanish, translates it into English, and then says it. By the time she completed the whole process, the “funny” moment had already passed, and the Spanish joke does not translate well in English. Thus, she opted to stay silent. ISAs of Latin American origin in this research study said they have become more cautious and restrained in their interactions with others, often preferring to listen and observe before sharing their thoughts and opinions, openly giving the impression of being somewhat distant or shy. From my conversations with ISAs of Latin American origin, they are all outgoing and sociable people. Gloria commented.

Yo siento que mi yo en Inglés no es la misma que mi yo en español. O sea, me siento como una persona diferente literal... [En Inglés] como que me doy cringe. como que no soy cool, o sea, me siento súper ugh.

I feel like my English self is not the same as my Spanish self. I mean, I feel like a different person... [In English] I am kind of cringe. Like, I'm not cool, I mean, I feel super ugh.

Gloria, a Mexican track and field athlete, indicated that her English-speaking self is far from her Spanish-speaking self. She went on to describe her English version as *cringe* and *not cool*. She used *cringe* as a slang adjective meaning “so embarrassing, awkward, etc. as to cause one to cringe; cringeworthy,” according to Merriam-Webster’s online edition. *Cool* is defined by Merriam-Webster as an informal adjective meaning “fashionable” or “excellent.” Although Gloria said she doesn’t feel like herself when speaking English, she has adopted some English words into her Spanish lexicon. ISAs of Latin American origin have developed uses and forms of English that work with Spanish in their daily U.S. college life. This English can be borrowed from or switched with Spanish, as it carries out everyday functions of language. “It has expanded and reorganized functional resources available in Spanish” (Urciuoli 1996, 77). Gloria used proper Spanish grammar to formulate a sentence, though she added an English adjective (no soy *cool*). Note that *gringe* and *cool* come from the English language and are popularized among the youth generation outside English-speaking countries. Therefore, Gloria described herself (in English) as “embarrassing” or “awkward” and as “non-fashionable” or “not excellent.” This reflected both her self-perception and how she believed others saw her. In contrast, in Spanish, she feels *cool* and not *cringe*. For Gloria and ISAs of Latin American origin in this research study, it was hard to make friends when they did not feel comfortable in their skin (speaking English). This is a challenge because most ISAs in this research perceived themselves as extroverted, friendly, confident, and talkative. However, upon arriving in the U.S., they feel the opposite. Feeling social connectedness is vital for human health and well-being, given that humans are fundamentally a social species (Holt-Lunstad 2022). Therefore, feeling disconnected

from oneself can make it difficult for ISAs of Latin American origin to engage in social interactions, leading to withdrawal from activities and forming meaningful relationships.

Existing in an American setting where you must perform in English made ISAs of Latin American origin feel embarrassed due to not being able to portray themselves in the way they wanted to when speaking English. During my first three years in the U.S., I believe some of my teammates perceived me as a child (even though I am older than they are) because of my limited vocabulary. I had the vocabulary of a child; I did not know “big” words, and I would express myself in basic ways or wrongly form sentences in a way a child would. My teammates, out of consideration, would not correct me, and instead, they would validate my wrong grammar and tell me, “Oh, that was cute.”

I never owned a car while doing college sports, so I was always asking my teammates to give me a ride to practice. I would text them asking, “Can you ride me to the track?” Their answer was always “yes.” It was not until my junior year that one of my teammates explained to me that the way I was asking for a ride was incorrect and had a totally different meaning. I was extremely embarrassed!

Social Connectedness: Building Community Among Latin American ISAs

Due to ISAs of Latin American origin holding back their personalities because of English, they feel the need to release themselves. Marcela’s linguistic anxiety stance towards speaking English opened the need for her to take a “break” from speaking English. In excerpt 12, Marcela explicitly mentioned her need to *juggle* English and Spanish to feel in balance. By speaking Spanish with other individuals of Latin American origin who share cultural similarities, Marcela found equilibrium between her English and Spanish versions of herself. Marcela’s

utterances in excerpt 12 expressed, indeed, her feelings towards English as a language that she needs a break from.

Excerpt 12

Marcela	69	Algo que me ha ayudado bastante, que como que a balancear el inglés y español. <i>Something that has helped me a lot, to kind of juggle English and Spanish.</i>
	70	Pues yo conocí a un par de personas de Latinoamérica, México, Venezuela, Argentina, de todo, <i>Well, I met a couple of people from Latin America, Mexico, Venezuela, Argentina, from all over,</i>
	71	y pues eso me ayuda como que a balancear, <i>and well, that helps me kind of juggle,</i>
	72	porque a veces no puedo hablar inglés todo el tiempo [laughs]. <i>because sometimes I can't speak English all the time [laughs].</i>

In the U.S., ISAs of Latin American origin experience ongoing linguistic negotiations by switching between two languages (Spanish-English or Portuguese-English) based on their surroundings and the people they interact with. In the case of Marcela, she found comfort in social spaces with other Latin Americans, where she could speak Spanish and connect over shared cultural experiences. The “there” chronotope of back home infused with the “here” chronotope of being a D1 athlete to create a social connectedness chronotope, as a way of reconstructing one’s narrative of the self in the present, in which ISAs of Latin American origin sought out a community that shared their language and background to preserve their cultural and linguistic identity while adjusting to life as D1 athletes. These cultural and linguistic bonds served as a crucial support system in their new environment. For Andrea, it was important to have a group of people with whom she would feel comfortable. She shared that just right before coming to the U.S., a Chilean friend of hers told her about one of her high school friends, who

was studying at the university Andrea was coming to. Andrea reached out to her friend's friend, asking if there are any Latin American-related groups on campus that she can join. Andrea shared.

[Él] me invitó a una juntada que hicieron tres días después de [mandarle mensaje] y ahí me hice como un regrupo. Eran españoles, chilenos, peruanos. Era como que medio un poco de todo.

[He] invited me to a get-together they had three days after [messaging him], and from there I formed a group. They were Spaniards, Chileans, and Peruvians. It was like a bit of everything.

Andrea was happy to have found Spanish-speaking people who shared similar cultural backgrounds with her. However, she did not find anyone from her home country, Argentina. After Andrea's first semester, she was in disbelief that she couldn't find anyone from Argentina. In her quest for other Argentinians, Andrea went to Facebook and found a group of Argentinians in her area. She put up a Facebook post with her name, age, nationality, and that she is a student, then she went to ask if there are any Argentinian students enrolled at the university around her age. Andrea was able to reach two Argentinians, whom she now hangs out with to talk about Argentina and drink *mate*, a typical Argentinian drink.

In the same vein, Brenda expressed the satisfaction of meeting people from her home country in the U.S.

That is the best feeling, and it's so funny because people who don't live outside of their country, they do not understand that. But when you find someone that is the same nationality as you, you don't care, you are already friends.

Brenda went on to explain that when people live in their home countries, they don't automatically befriend someone just because they share the same nationality. However, when living in a foreign country, meeting someone from the same nationality creates an instant connection. This illustrated Andrea's desire to find someone from Argentina. She did not personally know the Argentinians from Facebook, but she knew they were from Argentina, and that's all it mattered to her; they instantly bonded over being Argentinians in the U.S.

Beverly Daniel Tatum's book, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations About Race* explored the psychology of racism and the importance of open conversations about racial identity. Tatum examined the common phenomenon of self-segregation among racially mixed groups, questioning whether it is a problem or a coping mechanism. She argued that as individuals become more aware of the challenges of living in a racist society, it is crucial to share these experiences with others who understand them. The lack of community and relative-based networking accentuated the need for ISAs to develop meaningful relationships in the U.S. (Manwel et al. 2021). When seeking friendship, ISAs of Latin American origin were looking to make meaningful connections with people who share a mutual understanding of their language and culture. For example, Andrea was intentional in her search for fellow Argentinians when she posted on Facebook. She wasn't just looking for someone to drink *mate* with—she wanted to share the experience with other Argentinians, engaging in conversations about their homeland while enjoying their traditional drink.

Excerpt 13

Andrea	73	<p>Lo primero que hice también igual afuera en la universidad fue como buscar un grupo más Latino</p> <p><i>Also, the first thing I did outside of campus was to look for a group more Latino</i></p>
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	74	para como sentirme yo más integrada y poder ser yo digamos, <i>to feel more integrated and be able to be myself, let's say,</i>
	75	porque siento como que en inglés cambia un poco mi personalidad. <i>Because I feel my personality changes a bit in English.</i>
	76	No es que cambie, pero como que no me puedo soltar tanto. <i>It's not that I changed, but it is like I can't get loose [with English] that much.</i>
Diana	77	Okay <i>Okay</i>
Andrea	78	Y entonces <i>And then</i>
	79	sí, yo creo que eso fue clave, <i>Yes, I think that was key,</i>
	80	como buscar afuera del deporte un un como mi ámbito social <i>like looking outside of sports for something like my social environment</i>
Diana	81	más <i>more</i>
Andrea	82	Más Andrea, más normal. <i>More Andrea, more normal.</i>

In excerpt 13, Andrea expressed feeling *normal* when she speaks Spanish and is surrounded by people who share similar cultural backgrounds as her (Argentini-ans, Latinos, people who speak Spanish). So, there is a sense of speaking in Spanish as a way of truly feeling like herself. For Andrea, Spanish is intimate; Spanish is community. She evaluated English as a language in which she *can't get loose*. She took on a linguistic anxiety position towards speaking English as a language that constrains her fluency and comfort when communicating in the American setting (see lines 75-76). It is important to notice that Andrea did not perceive herself as fundamentally *changed* in English, but rather how English limited her ability to express her personality freely.

In lines 73-74, Andrea reflected on a moment in her adjustment process where she recognized the need *to look for a more Latino group*, a group where she feels *more integrated* and can be her authentic self. In lines 79-82, Andrea reaffirmed the need to seek out a social environment in which she can be *more Andrea, more normal*. Here, the social connectedness chronotope highlighted the pivotal role of shared cultural and linguistic spaces in providing support, belonging, and a sense of ease amid the challenges of navigating a new linguistic and cultural environment. Andrea's deliberate choice to seek out a Latino group revealed how culturally familiar spaces serve as a refuge and anchor during periods of adjustment.

In her book, *Exposing Prejudice: Puerto Rican Experiences of Language, Race, and Class*, Bonnie Urciuoli explored the intersection of language, race, and class in the lives of working-class Puerto Ricans in New York City to examine how their bilingualism is often stigmatized, with their English being labeled as “broken” or “impure,” reinforcing broader patterns of social and economic exclusion. Urciuoli introduced the concept of *spheres of interaction* to analyze language functions within these power dynamics, where an “inner sphere” consisted of relationships among social equals, and an “outer sphere” included interactions with those who hold structural advantages. In the U.S., ISAs of Latin American origin have an “inner sphere” of relations among fellow ISAs of Latin American and Spanish-speaking Latinos with whom English is not a problem. Their “outer sphere” is defined by relations with American student-athletes, professors, coaches, athletic administrators, and others with the advantage of authority, class, and stereotypical (though not always actually) race; with these people, English can be a problem” (Urciuoli 1996, 77). Therefore, the “inner sphere” is intimate, one's tribe and the “outer sphere” is remote or distant.

Moving to a different country, even if it is temporary, requires an adjustment process. For these ISAs coming to the U.S., it was not just about athletics and academics; they became part of their institution's student body as well as part of the community in which their institution is located. ISAs found themselves adjusting, not to "adapt" to a life in the U.S, but to adjust accordingly to preserve their personhood in an English-speaking dominated environment. ISAs in this study emphasized the importance of building a sense of embeddedness in the host country. As discussed in this chapter, values like *familismo*, *respeto*, and *educación* influenced how ISAs of Latin American origin sought social connectedness. They chose to connect with people who understand their unique experiences in the U.S. and share their culture, language, and values. However, these were not strict requirements for forming friendships with ISAs of Latin American origin—rather, they served as qualities that helped facilitate social connectedness with ISAs of Latin American origin.

Jorge pointed out his desire to find individuals who were facing similar barriers to him. He found refuge in fellow ISAs of Latin American origin. Jorge explained the importance of finding people who are on a similar journey to him because he could ask for guidance, especially in terms of U.S. immigration laws, like where to go, who to talk to, and what he or she is not allowed to do as an ISA. Jorge stated that as a foreigner in the U.S., he was afraid of doing something wrong (unwittingly). So, finding people who could provide pieces of information and advice on ISA matters made him feel at ease.

Ana, a triathlon athlete from Argentina, found a group of Latin American Spanish-speaking friends. She described it as a space to disconnect from feeling homesick and reconnect with her roots. Similarly, Marcela admitted feeling comforted when she got to spend

time with other ISAs, who speak Spanish, because speaking only English made her feel overwhelmed.

Cuando yo me junto con [estudiantes-atletas que son internacionales y hablan español] es como que okay, estoy con mi gente, ellos me entienden y es como un alivio.

When I get together with [ISAs who speak Spanish], it's like, OK, I'm with my people, they understand me, and it's like a relief.

On the same page, for Gloria, her friends of Latin American origin made her feel at home because she could speak Spanish to them, as well as share cultural similarities like jokes, humor, and traditions, and that made her feel a sense of belonging.

According to Tatum (2017), individuals from marginalized groups face ongoing, subtle, and often unnoticed stressors in their daily lives, like microaggressions, racial profiling, or limited access to opportunities. Having a sense of belonging to a larger group can serve as a crucial coping mechanism, offering support and solidarity. The lack of this support can result in social isolation and depression (Tatum 2017). Perceptions of shared identity can be shaped by factors like gender, social class, location, skin color, and ethnicity. These influences determine how individuals find and build supportive communities. ISAs of Latin American origin have found shelter in fellow ISAs of Latin American origin and other ISAs. As Jorge explained, he tried to find people with similar experiences who could guide him. For example, finding a senior ISAs who could advise him on where to search for an on-campus job or which grocery store to go to that has Latin American products. In this way, ISAs strengthened efforts to make their time in the U.S. more at ease and beyond athletics and academics. Additionally, Jorge mentioned he

bonded with Black African Americans due to shared racial identity and similar experiences. Marcela, who had not played in any official matches due to her injury, added.

Nos ayudamos porque todos venimos de afuera, todos estamos súper lejos de casa y pues a veces como que estar con una persona que está pasando lo mismo que tú, pues es como que ok, no estoy sola en esto o no estoy solo y pues nos ayudamos bastante.

We help each other because we all come from outside [the U.S.], we are all very far from home and sometimes being with a person who is going through the same thing as you, well, it is like, ok, I am not alone in this and well, we help each other a lot.

Marcela expressed a solidarity stance in which she and other ISAs support each other because they know what it is like to be far away from home and not have a close supportive system in the U.S., demonstrating a commitment to collective action and the well-being of each other. Keeping each other company is a way to combat feeling isolated, depressed, or both.

ISAs of Latin American origin agreed that having social connectedness in the U.S. has helped them emotionally to stay focused in their studies and athletic commitments and has contributed to a more fulfilling college experience. Contrary, if they did not have social connectedness. Andrea said.

Me parece súper importante tener [conexión social] para vivir bien la experiencia de lo que es *college* sin duda.

I think it's super important to have [social connectedness] to fully enjoy the college experience without a doubt.

The preference to seek out other fellow ISAs of Latin American origin was not only due to linguistic reasons, as ISAs of Latin American origin were also looking to bond beyond language. Cultural attributions seemed to be an important aspect for ISAs of Latin American origin to build social connectedness. See below Marcela's utterances on how she perceived conversations with Americans compared to those of Latin American descent.

Yo noto que aquí es todo superficial, las conversaciones que yo escucho es como que 'compré esto en ZARA, LuluLemon ah, fuimos a Sephora y me compré skincare, makeup bla bla bla' y no hay otros temas... Y con el grupo de Latinos como que hablamos de todo, de cómo está tu mamá, cómo están tus hermanos, extrañas tu casa, temas más profundos.

Here, I notice that everything is superficial. The conversations I hear are like, 'I bought this at ZARA, Lululemon, ah, we went to Sephora, and I bought skincare, makeup, blah blah blah' and there are no other topics... And with the group of Latinos, we talk about everything, about how your mom is, how your brothers are, do you miss home, deeper topics.

For Marcela, the value of *familismo* represented an important set point for ISAs of Latin American origin to build social connectedness. Feeling valued and supported is a key aspect of social connectedness, often expressed through simple gestures like asking about each other's families. By incorporating *familismo* into friendships, individuals show genuine care for one another and their loved ones, which becomes especially meaningful when they are far from home. Whether it is the experience of being an international student-athlete, seeing people racialize/ethnicize you for being of Latin American origin, or not speaking English "properly",

ISAs of Latin American origin could benefit from seeking support from those who have had similar experiences.

I want to acknowledge that these chronotopes of back home, being a D1 international athlete, and social connectedness are not static, they have the potential to shift over time as ISAs of Latin American origin spend more time in the host country. Past the honeymoon period, participants in this study reported feeling homesick, but once they had settled and made friends in the U.S., the “there” chronotope of back home became somehow distant from what it used to be. The same happened with the “here” chronotope of being a D1 international athlete, where after the initial culture shock, participants started feeling more comfortable speaking English and had a better understanding of life in the U.S. as D1 athletes. Through my conversations with ISAs in this study, I noticed how they all have embraced themselves to be willing to take risks; for example, Brenda decided to speak more in English even with mistakes, and Andrea asked her teammates to correct her whenever she would say something “wrong” in English. All these risks are brave attempts from my participants to make their time in the U.S. more like back home. Because the host country starts to feel more like back home, ISAs tend to feel less homesick after their first year in the U.S. With these two chronotopes evolving, it is expected that the social connectedness chronotope will evolve as well as ISAs of Latin American origin learn more about the U.S. and its culture, their English skills get better and they make friends (domestics and internationals), who they will miss when they go back home during summer or winter break.

Further research is needed to understand how these chronotopes might evolve over time, more specifically over the course of four years, which is the standard time to obtain a bachelor’s degree in the U.S. Additionally, it is important to look into how social media has facilitated or not social connectedness among ISAs.

ISAs Pipeline

ISAs of Latin American origin have created a pipeline of ISAs. Those who are more extroverted have taken on the responsibility to connect other ISAs who may be more introverted with other ISAs. This can be seen as a coping mechanism for ISAs to find and support each other. The pipeline works as a structured support system that ISAs utilize to meet people in a similar situation to them. For example, I identified Andrea as one of the lead ISAs in her university. She has shown to be an extroverted and outgoing person who recognized the need for ISAs to find community in the U.S. beyond the sport team setting. She drew on her global network and Facebook to find people of Latin American origin in her area, and she succeeded. Andrea has shared her network with fellow ISAs of Latin American origin by introducing everybody she knew and creating a culturally responsive community that fitted the needs of ISAs of Latin American origin.

Ana believes in casual, pressure-free gatherings, she attributed her openness to interacting with everybody to being of Latin American origin. She observed that in the U.S., people are more hesitant to talk to others and mix friend groups. Ana expressed.

Yo creo que en toda Latinoamérica... Es como bueno, yo soy amiga de esta persona y como soy amiga de esta persona también soy amiga de sus amigos, porque en algún momento nos vamos a ir cruzando.

I think that in all Latin America... It's like, well, I'm friends with this person, and since I'm friends with this person, I'm also friends with their friends, because at some point we're going to cross paths.

According to Ana, the idea that we all can be friends with our friends' friends came from being welcoming, a stereotypical trait of people of Latin American origin. Ana affirmed that being welcoming, accessible, and approachable facilitated her ability to make friends in the U.S. On the other hand, it is important to recognize that stereotypical traits, behaviors, and attitudes in Latin American culture are not unique to its people. For example, Gloria is a taciturn person who is not as approachable as Ana or Andrea. She entailed that this behavior gave the wrong impression of personality to others. Gloria explained.

Una de mis amigas era de que 'no [te hablaba porque], es que yo pensé que eras súper sangrona.' Y yo no es que me daba miedo hablar.

One of my friends was like, 'I wouldn't talk to you because I thought you were super unfriendly.' And I was like, no, I was just afraid to talk.

Gloria's linguistic anxiety and reserved personality gave the wrong impression of who she is as a person to people. Gloria's personality can be understood through "the onion analogy," which suggests that people, like onions, have multiple layers of personality and experiences that are revealed gradually as relationships deepen, with the core layer representing their most authentic self. For many ISAs of Latin American origin, it is just a matter of time until they gain some confidence in their English skills to feel comfortable enough to express themselves freely.

For Gloria, her journey to build social connectedness in the U.S. was not an easy one, she had to act on her own.

Excerpt 14

Gloria	83	La verdad osea tuve que cambiar. <i>The truth is I had to change.</i>
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- 84 Bueno, esforzarme un poco más en mi personalidad de que ser
más abierta con la gente y acercarme.
*Well, put a little more effort into my personality, to be more open
with people and approach them.*
- 85 Porque yo normalmente soy de las que no se acerca con nadie.
Because I'm usually one of those who don't get close to anyone.
- 86 Y si ellos me hablan bien, pero si no pues yo no les hablo,
*And if they speak to me good, but if not, then I don't speak to
them,*
- 87 entonces como que sí sabía que eran de que Latinos o
internacionales,
so if I like knew they were Latinos or internationals,
- 88 pues como que me acercaba y les platicaba
well, I would approach them and talk to them
- 89 y así entonces como que eso me ayudó mucho a hacer varios
amigos
and so that helped me a lot to make several friends
- 90 de que abrirme con las personas
to be open to people
- 91 y pues ahora sí que lo tuve que hacer porque si no lo hacía me
quedaba sola.
and I really had to do it because if I didn't, I would be alone.

Gloria described how she had to make a significant effort (on her side) to meet people. She described herself as a person who is not super talkative, but she realized that if she did not talk to people, no one would. This is an active adjustment Gloria had to make for herself to make her stay in the U.S. more comfortable. Thus, the qualities of being sociable, outgoing, and approachable were learned during her time in the U.S. In the same way, Gloria affirmed she has embarked on a journey of personal growth since coming to the U.S. I want to highlight that these ISAs came to the U.S. roughly at the age of 18 and moving to the U.S. for college athletics represented a life-changing experience that they had to tackle at a young age.

Excerpt 15

- Gloria 92 He madurado bastante; he crecido bastante.
I have matured a lot; I have grown a lot
- 93 Osea, siento que si me hubiera quedado en México no hubiera crecido tanto como como aquí.
I mean, I feel like if I had stayed in Mexico I wouldn't have grown as much as I have here.
- 94 Osea, crecí más en seis meses que lo que hubiera crecido chance como persona en tres años allá.
I mean, I grew more in six months than I would have grown as a person in three years back there.

In excerpt 15, Gloria reflected on her personal development since coming to the U.S. She acknowledged her personal growth has been at a fast pace—*I grew more in six months than I would have grown as a person in three years back there (in Mexico)*. Her vulnerable position in the U.S. as a Mexican ISA forced Gloria to try to be more social. Likewise, Perla affirmed she has become less shy of a person and has been able to branch out to meet people. Andrea added.

Siento que [tener conexión social] es clave y más para nosotros los latinos, que necesitamos un poco de vida social.

I feel that having [social connectedness] is key, and more for us, Latinos, that we need a little bit of social life.

Andrea concluded the interview by restating the importance of social connectedness in the life of Latinos. By Latinos, she referred to people of Latin American origin regardless of the place they were born, though she spoke inclining herself to her fellow ISAs of Latin American origin.

The experiences of ISAs of Latin American origin in U.S. college athletics highlighted the critical role of social connectedness in their academic, athletic, and personal well-being. This

chapter answered my second research question: *How does social connectedness impact the college athletics experience of ISAs of Latin American origin at their D1 institution?* ISAs face unique challenges, including language barriers, cultural adjustments, and the rigorous demands of collegiate athletics, all of which can contribute to social isolation and loneliness. However, the findings in this research study revealed the resilience of ISAs in actively seeking out and forming supportive communities that help them navigate these challenges. Key cultural values such as *familismo*, *respeto*, and *educación* shaped how ISAs approach relationships and social integration. Their desire to maintain cultural ties was evident in the way they gravitated toward fellow ISAs of Latin American origin, engaged in food-evoked nostalgia, and created informal support networks that served as a bridge between their past and present experiences. Additionally, while linguistic barriers often impacted their sense of identity and self-expression, many ISAs found comfort in bilingual social spaces where they could fully express themselves and share cultural understanding.

Conclusion

My overarching goals for this research study were to present situated and “lived” accounts of the impact of social connectedness in the college athletic experience of ISAs of Latin American origin in public 4-year Hispanic Serving Institutions at the Division I level in the Southwest United States. Through the chapters, I likewise sought to illuminate what social connectedness is like for ISAs of Latin American origin in the U.S. context. I have journeyed far in pursuit of answers to my research questions: 1. *What is social connectedness like for international student-athletes of Latin American origin at NCAA D1 universities?* 2. *How does social connectedness impact the college athletics experience of ISAs of Latin American origin at their D1 institution?*

Through the lens of linguistic anthropology, I explored how ISAs navigate language barriers, cultural differences, and social integration while competing at the collegiate level. The findings reveal that ISAs experience heightened linguistic anxiety in English-dominant academic and athletic spaces, which shapes their stance toward language and identity. Simultaneously, ISAs established a social connectedness chronotope—a specific space and time where they find comfort, solidarity, and belonging, particularly among fellow Latinos, Spanish speakers, and other ISAs.

As shown in this research study, ISAs of Latin American origin positioned themselves in a linguistic anxiety stance towards English in the American setting. Although many ISAs arrive in the U.S. with prior English education, when faced with native English speakers in academic, athletic, and social environments, they experienced linguistic insecurity. This was manifested through, for example, fear of mispronunciation and judgment. For example, ISAs of Latin American origin in this research study reported feeling hesitant to speak English in public,

avoiding class participation and social interactions with native English speakers for fear of being judged for their accents or mistakes. As linguistic anthropology posits, stance-taking is not just an individual act but a socially and politically situated practice that reflects broader societal ideologies. The ISAs' linguistic anxiety is shaped by structural pressures, including the dominance of English as the legitimized language of academia. This reinforces existing power hierarchies in which linguistic proficiency becomes a gatekeeping mechanism for social integration and academic achievement.

Furthermore, the “there” and “here” chronotopes highlighted the temporal and spatial dimensions of ISAs' experiences. The tension between back home and their current realities in the U.S. illustrates their ongoing negotiation of language and identity. Linguistically, this manifested in a sense of fragmentation, where English became associated with restraint and Spanish (or Portuguese) with authenticity and emotional comfort. This linguistic duality shaped their social interactions.

Amidst these challenges, the emergence of a social connectedness chronotope provided an essential counterpoint. Within the temporal and spatial context of social connectedness, ISAs found solace in communities of fellow ISAs, Latinos, and Spanish speakers, creating safe spaces where they could express themselves freely without linguistic anxiety. While teammates offered an automatic social circle, ISAs of Latin American origin in this research study reported varying experiences—some felt supported, while others experienced exclusion from American teammates.

Within the social connectedness chronotope, ISAs of Latin American origin maintained cultural practices, such as speaking Spanish, sharing traditional foods, and engaging in Latino solidarity networks. Social connectedness was not merely a comfort mechanism; it is a

sociopolitical act of solidarity that resists linguistic hegemony and challenges the dominant narratives of integration. By forming their support networks, ISAs created alternative spaces where their linguistic identities were valued rather than stigmatized.

Sociopolitical Climate Under the Second Trump Administration

The experiences of ISAs of Latin American origin in U.S. college athletics do not exist in a vacuum—they are deeply influenced by the sociopolitical climate of the U.S., particularly under Trump’s second administration, which has promoted nationalist and exclusionary policies that impact language, immigration, and social integration. Forbes Senior Contributor Stuart Anderson who writes about immigration, business, and globalization wrote in a November 03, 2024, Forbes article “If Donald Trump regains the presidency, international students and applicants for employment-based green cards may find Trump’s immigration policies will affect them more profoundly than many today imagine.” According to the American Council on Education, with Trump's administration many international students, faculty, and staff are worried of the possibility of the “chilling effect that increased scrutiny of visa applications may have on applicants and international student enrollments, and concerns of campus community members with a fragile immigration situation” (ACE 2025).

President-elect Donald Trump took office on January 20, 2025, after defeating former Vice President Kamala Harris, the first woman, Black person, and person of South Asian descent to serve as vice president, in the 2024 U.S. presidential elections. Trump secured 49.8% of the vote, making him the 47th president of the United States. On his first day back in the White House, President Trump signed a series of executive orders that concern ISAs. Throughout his campaign, Trump adopted a “shock and awe” approach, and in his inaugural speech, he pledged that these orders would lead to a “complete restoration of America.”

President Trump signed several executive orders that could impact the college athletic experience of ISAs of Latin American origin. One executive order targets Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives, effectively seeking to ban institutional programs that promote multicultural engagement and language inclusivity within federal entities and directing investigations into public and private institutions with DEI programs. For universities, this could result in reduced funding and support for programs that promote cultural diversity and inclusion. The dismantling of such programs could lead to a decrease in culturally responsive support systems for ISAs, hindering their ability to connect with peers and access resources that facilitate community-building opportunities, academic and athletic success.

Trump's executive orders have raised concerns among the international higher education community. In an interview with Forbes on November 03, 2024, Dan Berger a member of the Legal Advisory Board and the Board of Directors of the Presidents' Alliance on Immigration & Higher Education, which supports immigration policies and practices that impact immigrant, undocumented, and international students on U.S. campuses, said "My biggest concerns are about discouraging international students and scholars from coming to the United States...During the last Trump administration, the visa process got harder, with processing times going up, longer security checks, and many more questions." Executive Order No. 14161 (2025): *Protecting the United States from Foreign Terrorists and Other National Security and Public Safety Threats* focuses on enhancing vetting procedures for visa applicants to prevent the entry of individuals deemed national security threats. While aimed at security, such measures can lead to delays and complications in the visa process for ISAs. The perception of being associated with security risks could stigmatize ISAs, leading to social isolation, distress, and challenges in forming meaningful connections with domestic students and the broader community. Likewise,

Executive Order No. 14159 (2025): *Protecting the American People Against Invasion* and Executive Order No. 14165 (2025): *Securing Our Borders* emphasize the administration's commitment to securing the U.S. borders and addressing illegal immigration, including the construction of physical barriers and deploying additional personnel to prevent illegal crossings. While intended to address unauthorized immigration, these actions can create a climate of exclusion and discrimination against individuals perceived as foreign, particularly those of Latin American and African origin. ISAs from Latin America may experience heightened scrutiny and bias, affecting their comfort on and off campus.

On March 14, 2025, The New York Times reported a draft list of travel bans in dozens of countries. The Trump administration listed three tiers by color: red, orange, and yellow. The “red” list, which includes Afghanistan, Bhutan, Cuba, Iran, Libya, North Korea, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Venezuela, and Yemen, suggests a full visa suspension. A ban on travel for Cuban and Venezuelan nationals will affect athletes from those Latin American countries from coming to the U.S. for college athletics. These bans come from Trump's executive order of protecting American citizens “from aliens who intend to commit terrorist attacks, threaten our national security, espouse hateful ideology or otherwise exploit the immigration laws for malevolent purposes.”

Table 2. Draft List of Proposed Travel Ban Countries.

An internal Trump administration proposal lists the following countries whose citizens could face restrictions on entering the U.S. Some countries may change in any final order.

Red All travel banned	Orange Visas sharply restricted	Yellow 60 days to address concerns
● Afghanistan	● Belarus	● Angola
● Bhutan	● Eritrea	● Antigua and Barbuda
● Cuba	● Haiti	● Benin
● Iran	● Laos	● Burkina Faso
● Libya	● Myanmar	● Cambodia
● North Korea	● Pakistan	● Cameroon
● Somalia	● Russia	● Cape Verde
● Sudan	● Sierra Leone	● Chad
● Syria	● South Sudan	● Republic of Congo
● Venezuela	● Turkmenistan	● Democratic Republic of Congo
● Yemen		● Dominica
		● Equatorial Guinea
		● Gambia
		● Liberia
		● Malawi
		● Mali
		● Mauritania
		● St. Kitts and Nevis
		● St. Lucia
		● São Tomé and Príncipe
		● Vanuatu
		● Zimbabwe

By The New York Times

In December 2024, many universities, including Harvard, USC, and Cornell, advised their international students to return to campus before Trump was sworn in. Now, in 2025, some universities, mainly Brown University, are again advising their international students to avoid leaving if currently in the US (Raymond 2025). As reported in The Guardian, “across university campuses, the potential ban and targeting barrage has rocked student and faculty bodies alike, particularly after recent high-profile deportation cases.” The case of Dr. Rasha Alawieh, a Lebanese citizen, kidney transplant specialist, and professor at Brown University’s medical school, made the news after Dr. Alawieh was deported on her return to the U.S. from a trip to Lebanon to see her family (Raymond 2025). She was deported despite holding a valid visa and

securing a court order temporarily blocking her expulsion; the court order was ignored by Customs and Border Protection.

In another round of executive orders, on March 1, 2025, President Trump signed an executive order declaring English as the official language of the United States. This order revokes previous mandates that required federal agencies to improve services for individuals with limited English proficiency, aiming to “reinforce shared national values and create a more cohesive society.” While the order does not mandate changes in services provided by agencies, it may influence institutional policies, potentially reducing support for non-English languages in educational settings. For ISAs of Latin American origin, this could exacerbate linguistic anxiety, as the institutional emphasis on English may marginalize their native languages, affecting their sense of belonging and willingness to engage in social interactions, while their Spanish-speaking spaces become politically contested.

ISAs of Latin American origin come to the U.S. to take advantage of the unique college athletic system provided by the U.S., in which athletes can remain competitive, and at the same time, they work to obtain a college degree. However, being a college athlete goes beyond athletics. Upon arrival in the U.S., ISAs of Latin American origin could get caught up in the U.S. sociopolitical climate, which could impact their college experience. Thus, ISAs grounded themselves within their values to build social connectedness. Values such as *familismo*, *respeto*, and *ser buen educado* play an important role in the way ISAs made meaningful friendships while in the U.S. *Familismo* fosters a deep sense of loyalty and belonging towards family, leading ISAs to seek support networks among other ISAs, Latinos, and Spanish speakers, who share similar values. This can help them feel a sense of home away from home. Marcela, a beach volleyball player from Puerto Rico, described her support system, which is made up of fellow ISAs of Latin

American origin, as a “mini family,” this illustrated the importance of familism for ISAs of Latin American origin in building a trusted support network in the U.S. *Respeto* fosters polite relationships and a reputation for being disciplined and well-mannered. *Ser buen educado* instills politeness, humility, and responsibility, making ISAs more likely to be perceived positively in social settings. Their well-mannered behavior can facilitate smoother interactions with peers, professors, and community members who value *educación*. These values helped ISAs navigate cultural differences by promoting mutual respect and adaptability. While they may experience cultural shock, their upbringing encourages them to find common ground, fostering cross-cultural friendships.

Despite the structural limitations imposed by the demands of college athletics, ISAs in this research study demonstrated agency in building a sense of belonging. Through strategic networking with those who share similar experiences, ISAs cultivated a social environment that fostered emotional well-being and enhanced their overall college experience. These findings underscore the impact of social connectedness in the lives of ISAs of Latin American origin during their time in the U.S.

Initiatives like the NCAA Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC) offer student-athletes the opportunity to make their voices heard in their athletic departments. ISAs should be encouraged to participate in SAAC by coaches and athletic administrators. In 2024, the NCAA released an International Student-Athlete Handbook as an initiative to support ISAs. The manual came with information for prospective and current ISAs and their families, as well as those who teach and lead them on and off the playing field. The handbook covered student life, eligibility, taxes and immigration, cultural orientation, health and wellness, safety and security, and more. This was a solid effort from the NCAA to provide written information on what can be

an extensive and exhausting process of becoming an ISA. NCAA member institutions can refer to this handbook for specific information/questions regarding ISAs. Additionally, Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) need to continue playing a crucial role in higher education by increasing access and success for Hispanic/Latino students, offering targeted resources, and promoting a supportive environment that fosters both academic and social growth. Although HSIs are tailored to the needs of U.S.-born Hispanic/Latino students, international students of Latin American origin can benefit from their programs and resources.

Suggestions from ISAs of Latin American origin for Athletic Departments and Universities

ISAs in this research study considered that universities and athletic departments must foment activities and spaces dedicated to ISAs, where they can connect with other student-athletes, athletics administration, and staff, and campus partners. Jorge, a track and field student-athlete from Brazil, suggested that athletic departments should have international staff who could mentor ISAs on their college athletic journey. Gloria and Perla, student-athletes from Mexico and Puerto Rico, suggested that athletic departments could make an effort to raise awareness of cultural values and practices among ISAs to U.S. nationals who work and interact with ISAs, including teammates, coaches, athletic administrators, and staff. Andrea, a golfer from Argentina, suggested that athletic departments could connect ISAs with other ISAs, from the beginning, specifically if they are from the same country. So, new ISA newcomers have someone they can reach out to early on their college athletic journey. During her quest to find another Argentinian, Andrea recalled that she did not know there was another ISA from Argentina in her university; she found out on her own later. However, she said it would have been great if someone had introduced them from day one.

Moving forward, findings from this research study revealed how essential it is for universities and athletic programs to develop initiatives that promote inclusive and culturally responsive environments. Encouraging participation in broader campus activities, providing mentorship programs, and fostering cross-cultural interactions can significantly enhance the social connectedness of ISAs. By prioritizing the well-being of international student-athletes, institutions can contribute to their holistic success, allowing them to thrive academically, athletically, and socially.

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