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The Self-Perceived College Persistence Factors Of Successful Latino Males

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THE SELF-PERCEIVED COLLEGE PERSISTENCE FACTORS OF
SUCCESSFUL LATINO MALES

BY

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Higher Education in Leadership, Management and Policy

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SETON HALL UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SERVICES
OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

APPROVAL FOR SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE

Doctoral Candidate, **Carolina Gonzalez**, has successfully defended and made the required modifications to the text of the doctoral dissertation for the **Ph.D.** during this **Fall Semester 2015.**

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ABSTRACT

The experiences of Latino male students are oftentimes consolidated with those of other student populations from similar backgrounds. While the research on Latino males has been slowly expanding to include their varied experiences, it has been mostly characterized by a deficit-oriented narrative focusing on their challenges rather than their successes. Concentrating on the difficulties experienced by Latinos socializes administrators and researchers to focus on students from underserved backgrounds as problems, instead of resilient beings (Harper, 2015).

This qualitative study focused on the experiences of 20 successful Latino male students at a four-year public institution. Through semi-structured interviews, participants discussed how they understood and explained their persistence in college. The analysis of the data focused on how participants' perceptions and explanations of persistence differed by ethnicity, being first generation college student, household income or immigrant generation. Findings from this study revealed that successful Latino male students' validating and invalidating experiences contribute to their success, self-efficacy beliefs and academic optimism. Additionally, findings revealed distinctions in how first and second generation students explain their educational experience and contextualize their persistence in relation to their ethnic and gender identity.

Keywords: Persistence, Hispanic, Latino, Latino male, Qualitative, Higher Education, Latino male, Self-Efficacy, Peer, Educational Experience

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family.

Thank you for your continued support, love and admiration.

I love you

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The completion of this doctoral degree could not have happened without the grace of the Almighty Lord. I am first and foremost thankful, blessed, and privileged to have been able to pursue my dreams and achieved them. While dreams like this one seemed far-fetched for a Dominican immigrant raised in the projects in East Harlem, NY, this accomplishment is proof that with hard work, a vision, and God by your side, anything is possible!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Statistics relaying the spectrum of success and persistence of college students do not comprehensively capture the experiences of all students within higher education. A holistic picture can be better reached when researchers study the experiences of specific populations and subgroups. This is particularly true for those student populations who are homogenized and categorized as all being the same, such as the Latino/Hispanic¹ male population. The Latino population is the fastest growing ethnic group in the country (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014); this growth is also represented within the U.S. educational system. Despite this fact, the graduation rates of Latinos, particularly of males, are stagnant and trail behind their ethnic counterparts. More specifically, gaps in degree attainment are evident between Latino males (13%) and Latina females (19%) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014) as well as their Asian (55%), White (37%) and African American (17%) counterparts. Given the low levels of educational attainment of Latinos, it would be beneficial to understand which strategies and resources have helped those who have been successful in their educational journey. This knowledge would constitute a step towards reaching the national goal of improving the college completion rate by the year 2020 for a population that will represent 25% of the 18-29 year old population in the United States (Santiago & Callan, 2010).

Recent reports reveal the gains that the Hispanic population has made over the last ten years. For example, Latinos are the fastest growing population in the United States. They also account for 17% of the nation's total population, making it the largest

¹ For the purposes of this study, I will use both the terms Latino and Hispanic interchangeably for the single purpose of varying the reference to the group.

² For the purposes of this study, a successful student is defined as a junior or senior that

racial and ethnic minority in the country (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Other positive trends are found in the area of education, as college enrollment has significantly increased. Out of all Hispanic high school graduates in the class of 2012, 69% enrolled in college that fall, which is two percentage points higher than the rate (67%) among their White counterparts (Fry & Taylor, 2013). In fact, more Latino students are enrolled in college than ever before and among those, nearly half (46%) attend community colleges—the highest percentage for any race or ethnicity (Krogstad & Fry, 2014). Although there are increases in Latino enrollment and population growth, there are issues with the education of Latinos such as their level degree attainment, racist educational environments, and poor academic supports in schools and institutions of higher education.

The deficit-focused segment of the research on Latinos overwhelmingly discusses the challenges faced by Latino males in American education. It discusses how Latinos are faced with many personal and institutional deterrents that cause them to drop out of college. Researchers have even proposed that Latino males are vanishing from higher education (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). Additionally, the data confirms that there are inequities in the education of Latinos on all levels of education. For example, specialized programs serving as a college pipeline such as Gifted and Talented Education are comprised of higher percentages of White males than Latino males (Torres & Fergus, 2011). Further, data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) confirms that there is a substantial proportion of fourth (37%) and eighth (21%) graders who are English Language Learners and closing the achievement gap between them and their White counterparts has been a national challenge for many years (NCES, 2011,

2015). Another challenge is the representation of Latino males in higher education and their successful completion. Although the number of Latino males earning college degrees is slowly increasing (yet not to desirable levels), it has increased more quickly for Latina females. For example, between 1995-96 and 2005-06, the number of Latino males receiving bachelor's degrees rose by 67%; for Latinas, the figure increased by 97% (NCES, 2007). In recent years, the percentage of Latino males earning a bachelor's degree or higher was 13 percent compared to 19 percent for Latina females (NCES, 2015).

The lack of degree attainment among Latinos has implications on the labor market and socioeconomic status of individuals. Unfortunately, the Latino population is one of the poorest in this country. Based on a measure from the U.S. Census Bureau, the poverty rate for Hispanics was 28% in 2010, higher than it was for Blacks, non-Hispanic Whites or Asians, and higher than the official poverty rate for Hispanics, 27% (2010). The voluminous report from the National Center for Education Statistics titled Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups reported that at each level of educational attainment, other than the master's level, the median income for Hispanic males was lower than the income for White males (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010). Additionally, among those with at least a bachelor's degree, the median income was \$71,000 for White males and \$69,000 for Asian males, compared with \$55,000 for Black males and \$54,000 for Hispanic males (Aud et al., 2010). The argument is that although Latino males have higher employment rates in comparison to other minority groups (even among those lacking a high school diploma), they also have the second highest unemployment rates in the country (Torres & Fergus, 2011). When considering the low

college completion rates of Latino males, it is difficult to surmise that educating this population will positively contribute towards decreasing these gaps in, graduation rates, earnings and employment. If Latinos are entering college, but not graduating, then they are not successfully earning the credentials that will help decrease unemployment rates and increase participation in the labor market.

There are many reasons why Latinos are lagging behind their counterparts in the area of education. Some research suggests that there needs to be a concerted effort on the part of higher education institutions to not only enroll Hispanic students, but also get them to graduate (Strayhorn, 2008, Swail, Redd, Perna, 2003, Oseguera & Locks, 2008). Another cross-section of research discusses how immigrant generation determines and influences (and in many cases predicts) the levels of educational attainment for many Latino students (Telles & Ortiz, 2008, Portes & Rumbaut, 2001, Vigil, 1997.) Other researchers explain how other mediating factors such as a parent's educational background, socioeconomic status, pre-college preparation, household income, etc., plays a role and determines whether a student will succeed in college (Perna, 2007, Saenz & Ponjuan, 2008, 2011, Ojeda, Navarro, & Morales , 2010). While many—if not all, of the theoretical premises and findings on Latino students' levels of education accurately represent the issues that these students face, it is important to reframe the body of literature to focus on how successful² Latinos navigate their educational trajectory. We must consider what experiences have propelled them to reach (or get on the road to reaching) academic success. Perhaps by understanding the successful strategies and

² For the purposes of this study, a successful student is defined as a junior or senior that has at least a 2.0 cumulative GPA and has the desire and is actively working towards staying within the system of higher education until degree completion.

resources employed by thriving students, institutions can focus their resources on what yields successful Latino graduates.

Research Problem

While Latino high school graduation rates and college enrollment rates in some years has grown in accordance with the overall population, the rate of degree attainment remains low and lags behind their counterparts. This is especially the case for Latino males, who have the lowest percentage in degree attainment when compared to both their racial and gender counterparts. In 2013, the percentage of Latino males that attained their bachelor's degree or higher was 13 percent, while their Latina (19%), Asian/Pacific Islander (55%), White (37%), and African American (17%) male counterparts attainment were higher. Because education has an impact in the social mobility of Latino males as well as an influence on labor market outcomes (Reimers, 1985), it is important to pay attention to the under-education of this population.

Since higher levels of education are generally associated with greater likelihood of employment, adults with a bachelor's degree are reported to earn about 66 percent more than those with a high school diploma over the same period of time (College Board, 2009). A deeper look at the data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2013) reveals that among people of age 25 and older in the labor force who had at least a high school diploma, only 71 percent were Hispanics, compared to 90 percent of Whites, Blacks and Asians. This trend is also evident in postsecondary degree attainment, as only 18 percent of Hispanics in the workforce have a bachelor's degree or higher compared with 71 percent of Asians, 37 percent of Whites and 27 percent of Blacks. Of those men in the workforce, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2013) also reports that Hispanic men in the

workforce were more likely than White and Asian men to work in production, transportation and material moving occupations and that one-quarter worked in natural resources, construction and maintenance occupations—which is a higher share than that of White (18 percent), Black (11 percent) and Asian (6 percent) men. The disparity is also evident in earnings, as Hispanics have considerably lower earnings than their White and Asian counterparts for management, professional, service and production occupations. Latino males are not only occupying mostly blue-collar jobs, but they are also the “new face of the low wage industry” (National Poverty Center as cited in Torres & Fergus, 2012). Consequently, the patterns of limited academic performance and overrepresentation in the low-wage industries prevent Latino males, as compared with other ethnic subgroups, from achieving further education and, in turn, positive upward mobility (Torres & Fergus, 2012).

Significance of Study

The research on Latinos and Latino males calls for continued development and robust investigation on their successful experiences. As it pertains to this study, there are three important reasons why the success of Latino males should be studied. First, not enough is known about the success of Latino male college students and how these experiences vary by different characteristics, such as their immigrant generation. Many of the Latino students in today’s institutions are children of im/migrants who are going through a process of segmented assimilation where the outcomes of second-generation students can vary depending on the their acculturation process and other factors such as family structure and parental human capital (Rumbaut & Portes, 2001). More specifically, the way immigrant students adapt to their new country or balance the cultural values of their families and the environment around them is no longer defined by

expected ways of settling in to a new country. These experiences now vary across each im/migrant group, resulting in different outcomes across these im/migrant minorities in how they adapt and assimilate to the United States (Rumbaut & Portes, 2001). Because of these varied adaptive experiences, the research community does not have a robust set of data that documents the different patterns in acculturation amongst diverse group of Latinos in the United States. Much of the data focusing on Latinos focuses on the collective Latino experience, and as a result is very limited. Studies focusing on Hispanic students oftentimes treat Latinos as a monolithic group (Kao & Tienda, 1998). For example, many scholars exploring Latino groups exclusively concentrate on those from Mexican backgrounds (Bohon et al., 2006) or only discuss a single subgroup and shy away from providing a comparative approach. Studying a cross-section of this multicultural and multiethnic group can provide a better understanding of this group's educational experiences, which is of importance to college administrators who develop initiatives to impact the persistence of Latino students on their campuses.

Second, little has been done to focus on the successful experiences of this group, let alone the male population. By understanding the successful experiences of Latino males, researchers and practitioners can effectively promote the implement strategies that positively impact Latino males' retention and graduation. Shaun Harper's report (2014) on Black and Latino male achievement focuses on the aspects of a students' lives that produce success; reports such as these, in turn, can serve to inform action-oriented strategies for administrators, researchers and faculty. Scholarship about successful students will help reframe research that solely focuses on the low-performance of Latino male students.

Third, the literature on persistence—“the desire and action of a student to stay within the system of higher education from beginning year through degree completion” (Berger, Ramirez, & Lyons, p. 12)— of Latinos is oftentimes documented quantitatively and in aggregate form. Consequently, there are a limited number of qualitative studies (Huddy & Virtanen, 1995, Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009, Hall & Rowan, 2001) that compare how successful Latino male students understand and explain their experiences of persistence. Studying their personal histories can inform practices geared towards improving collegiate academic experiences. Undoubtedly, the need for qualitative scholarly work addressing the successes of the fastest-growing population in the United States is warranted. The literature on this targeted group benefits the education field in particular because it provides scholars, administrators, and educators with a framework that supports student success (The College Board, 2010).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand how successful Latino males understand their persistence in higher education. More specifically, this study explores the academic and socio-cultural factors that shape the persistence of Latino male students within the context of higher education.

Research questions

1. How do successful Latino male college students understand and explain their persistence in college?
2. How, if at all, do their perceptions and explanations of persistence differ by ethnicity, being a first generation college goer, household income or immigrant generation?

Diversity of Latino Ethnic Subgroups

Research studies have aggregated minority ethnic populations into one category for a plethora of reasons stemming from assumptions of inter-group homogeneity, ensuring a good sample size, and possible similarities in the background of minority groups (Pew Hispanic Research, 2009, Hurtado, 2008, Perna, 2000). It is important to note that due to the different countries and regions within Latin America, Hispanics are diverse in terms of not only places of origin, but experiences and identities. Hence, there has been a shift in using the term Hispanic and Latino to identify this group.

The term Hispanic was created by demographers working for the U.S. Census Bureau in the 1980's as a way to categorize people who are either historically or culturally connected to the Spanish language (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Today, both terms, Latino and Hispanic, are used interchangeably and synonymously; however, there are key differences between them. The term, Hispanic, usually denotes a person's nationality group, lineage, or country of birth while the term Latino has a more cultural nuance, such as language, heritage, and traditions. However, federal government agencies such as the U.S. Office of Management and Budgets and the U.S. Census Bureau (2010) use the term Hispanic and describe it as, a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race. The Pew Research Center (2005) explains that the Hispanic population is not a racial group, nor does it share a common language or culture. Although all Latinos share a connection by ancestry to Latin America; different factors contribute to their diversity, including culture, history, sociology, politics, and geography (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001). Given the diversity that exists amongst this group, it is not appropriate to define

them with a single identity, belief system and set of values (Pew Hispanic Center, 2005), even while they are increasing in numbers within the country.

Scope of Study

This study explores Latino males from different backgrounds and examines what influences their persistence in college. I used the phenomenological strategy of inquiry, as this method is useful in focusing on the “essence of the human experience about a phenomenon as described by participants” (Creswell, 2009, p. 13). Connecting meaning to the experiences of participants through their own accounts was imperative in this study and was accurately captured by the phenomenological approach.

The study took place at a four-year public university designated as an emerging Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). An emerging HSI is one that is soon to meet the Latino student enrollment of 25% or more criteria, as designated by the Higher Education Authorization Act of 1998 (Laden, 2004). Further, each participant was selected using the following criteria:

(1) Academic standing: Students must have a 2.0 cumulative grade point average or above. Studies (Cabrera, Nora, & Castenda, 1993, Porter, 1990), show that not only is the intent to persist highly related to college GPA, but that college grades have the most influence on student persistence. Since a majority of institutions regard a cumulative GPA of 2.0 and above as good standing and the minimum for graduation, it was essential to this study that students meet this academic criteria, as they will have to realistically be en route to successful graduation.

(2) Class level: Current enrolled college junior and senior students. Since in the present study, persistence is defined as, the “desire and action of a student to stay within the

system of higher education from beginning year through degree completion” (Berger, Ramirez, & Lyons, p. 12), it was important to only include participants who are close to their goal of graduation and are in line with their respective institution’s satisfactory academic standing. In this study, this is defined as students in their junior and senior levels.

(3) National Origin: Latino from any country

(4) Gender: Male student.

A total of 20 students who met the criteria were selected to participate in the study. Over the course of two semesters and using an interview protocol, I met with (10) Dominican, (2) Colombian, (2) Salvadorian, (2) Puerto Rican, (1) Peruvian, (3) multiethnic—a combination of Puerto Rican and Dominican (2), or Dominican and Argentinian (1) students. Most of the study participants were of traditional college age and were mostly from low-to-mid household incomes. The average GPA of participants was 2.96. The data collection process yielded 20 transcribed interviews, 20 interview memos and observational notes, and 10 analytic and thematic memos. I interviewed all participants for 60-90 minutes. I analyzed the data using the analysis process described by Creswell (2009) where the main goal is to continuously analyze the data; reflect on the collected information, which I accomplished by writing thematic and analytic memos; and interpret the themes and descriptions. Additionally, I followed Tesch’s (1990) steps of coding analysis, including: a) reading all transcriptions carefully and thoroughly; analyze them for underlying meanings, writing thoughts in the margin, c) making a list of topics and clustering them together and by their level of significance; and d) using topics to analyze data and abbreviate each topic into codes and place them next to appropriate

segments of text.

Assumptions

This study assumes that students enter college with preconceived notions and an idea of what their college experience may feel like; therefore, students do not arrive to postsecondary education *tabula rasa*. Rather, they are the products of many years of complex interactions with their families of origin and cultural, social, political, and educational environments (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006, p. 3). They have been educated and potentially misinformed not only about academic subjects, but the expectations and the learning process of success. A second assumption is that like many other students, intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991, Weber, 1998) is critical to the experiences and identities of Latino students in the United States.

Theoretical Perspective

To examine the experience of successful Latino males in college, it is necessary to utilize theoretical frameworks that help understand the experiences in college, academic success and personal factors of students. For this reason, I used Laura Rendón's validation theory (1994); Tara Yosso's community cultural wealth model (2005); and Albert Bandura's self-efficacy model (1997) to explore the interplay between the external and internal factors influencing students' successful continuation in their collegiate studies.

Validation Theory

Laura Rendón's validation theory (1994) defines validation as "an enabling, confirming, and supportive process initiated by in- and out-of-class agents that foster academic and interpersonal development" (p. 44). She posits that in order for students to

persist, they must experience an active validation from both academic and interpersonal areas. This validation process “affirms, supports, enables, and reinforces their capacity to fully develop themselves as students and as individuals” (Rendón, 1994, p. 44). Academic validation occurs when agents within and outside of the classroom interact with the learner by validating his experiences, potential, and growth. Furthermore, interpersonal validation occurs when agents familiar with a student’s background (family, friends, mentors) validate and support the learner’s experiences. This validation from both areas of a student’s life result in students who persist because they have received encouragement and affirmation regarding their academic capability as well as support in their academic endeavors and social adjustment (Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000). Based on research of Hispanic students’ college experiences, Rendón’s (1994) validation theory includes six elements positing that validation, (1) is enabling; (2) yields student self-worth;(3) must exist in order for student development to be present; (4) occurs in and out of the classroom; (5) is a development process; and (6) is most effective in the first years of college.

Community Cultural Wealth Model

Stemming from Critical Race Theory, the Community Cultural Wealth Model critiques Pierre Bourdieu’s (1977) notion of cultural capital. Yosso (2005) explains that the Bourdieuean concept of cultural capital uses a deficit model to explain the disparities between students of color and White students and therefore asserts that some communities are culturally wealthy while others are culturally poor. For example, according to Bourdieu’s definition of culture capital, those who are in the upper and middle classes would be considered as having cultural capital because of their presumed

access to formal schooling and resources. Yosso (2005) argues that those from communities of color possess and utilize an array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts to survive and resist macro and micro- forms of oppression; this is referred to as community cultural wealth.

Yosso posits that communities of color nurture cultural wealth through six forms of capital, which can exist independently, but are not mutually exclusive and often build upon each other (Yosso, 2005). These six forms of capital are: aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistance. Aspirational capital is the ability to maintain hopes and dreams despite the confronted barriers. Navigational capital is the ability to use strategies and skills to navigate through communities and institutions, such as colleges and universities as well as structures of inequality. Social capital includes the available networks of people (i.e., peers or supportive social networks) and community resources utilized in order to help navigate throughout society's institutions. Linguistic capital is the intellectual and social skills attained through multilingual/style communication practices within their networks and families. This form of capital asserts that students of color arrive at school equipped with multiple languages and communication skills as well as talents in storytelling, artistic, musical, poetic and translation skills. Familial capital is the concern and commitment to the community's well being. It embraces the cultural knowledge of the family and emphasizes the importance of community history, memory and cultural intuition. Resistance capital is the knowledge and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality. It is built on the historical experience of resistance as a defense mechanism while challenging oppression. It includes the cultural knowledge of the structures of racism and motivation to transform oppressive structures

within their communities (Pizarro, 1998, Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). These forms of capital are the underpinnings of self-efficacy beliefs that influence their optimism in their academic performance.

Self-Efficacy

The self-efficacy theory refers to an individual's belief in his/her capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments (Bandura, 1997). According to social cognitive theory, individuals assess their experiences and thoughts by engaging in constant self-reflection, which leads to an evaluation of their actions and environments followed by change either to their environments or social systems (Bandura, 1977). The theory posits that individuals who have self-efficacy reflect confidence in their ability to exert control over their own motivation, behavior, and social environment.

Bandura (1997) explained how self-efficacy varies along three dimensions—level, strength, and generality. Level refers to the degree of difficulty of the behaviors or tasks that an individual feels capable of performing. Strength refers to the confidence a person has in his or her performance estimates. Generality concerns the range of situations in which an individual considers him or herself to be efficacious (Lent & Hackett, 1987). The participants in this study have strong self-efficacy, as they constantly evaluate their environments and take action to improve or strengthen their mindset for the challenges they face. However, they are constantly presented with new situations that they must master and as a result, their self-efficacy strengthens as they learn how to improve their ability to navigate through the difficulties.

Key Terms

First-Generation – Students whose parents do not have a bachelor’s degree, but may have some college experience (Choy, 2001)

Graduation rate- The percentage of students who graduate from any given institution, college, or department

Hispanic- A person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race. The term Hispanic usually denotes a person’s nationality group, lineage, or country of birth

Latino- A term to describe individuals from Mexico, Central and South America, and the Caribbean islands, which has a more cultural nuance, such as language, heritage, and traditions (López, 2007)

Persistence- “The desire and action of a student to stay within the system of higher education from beginning year through degree completion” (Berger, Ramirez, & Lyons, p. 12)

Retention- ”The ability of an institution to retain a student from admission through graduation” (Berger, Ramirez, & Lyons, p. 12)

Self-Efficacy- the belief and conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce the outcomes (Bandura, 1977)

Success- For the purposes of this study, a successful student is defined as a junior or senior that has at least a 2.0 cumulative GPA and has the desire and is actively working towards staying within the system of higher education until degree completion.

First-generation immigrant- Someone who lives in the United States, but was born outside of the United States or U.S. territories

Generation 1.5- Someone who arrived to a country at 12 years old or younger
(Rumbaut, 2012)

Second-generation immigrant- Someone who is U.S. born and has at least one
immigrant parent (Pew Hispanic Research, 2013)

Organization of Dissertation

This study is organized into five chapters. The first chapter introduces the research study and discusses the need for and basis of this study. The second chapter reviews the scholarly literature and empirical research supporting this study. Additionally, it describes the historical background and factors impacting the persistence of Latino males in college. The third chapter details the methodological design approach for this study. Qualitative methodology was utilized to understand the college persistence of successful Latino college males. Chapter four presents and discusses the findings based on collected and analyzed data by connecting them to research and theoretical underpinnings of the study. Finally, chapter five provides future recommendations and policy implications for administrators, researchers and policy makers. Future recommendations on research are also provided.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on minoritized populations, such as the Latino population, has evolved immensely throughout the years. However, there are flaws in the way that some of the research has evolved. Many research studies either focus on the experiences of students of color as a whole or approach it by consolidating all of their experiences without taking into account the varied factors that may mitigate how they transition through academia. Strayhorn (2010) purports that researchers should assume that the structural and cultural constraints that continually yield educational disparities for racial/ethnic minorities in higher education are not necessarily the same for all groups.

Review Method

Creswell (2009) explained, “when reviewing the literature, the researcher should include conceptual articles or thought pieces that provide frameworks for thinking about topics” (p. 29). Therefore, when designing the structure of this literature review, it seemed appropriate to use a thematic approach. A thematic review is organized around the themes that have impacted the development of the phenomenon. This approach employs a focus on the most relevant aspects of a topic and allows for the researcher to address the studies that center on the particular issue at hand.

In order to best inform this review’s focus, it was necessary to consult with quantitative and qualitative forms of inquiry. Miles and Huberman (1994) explain how using quantitative and qualitative information to frame one’s study is crucial to supporting a successful analysis. Further, Salomon (1991) explains that the importance does not lie in the methodology, but whether the researcher has taken an analytic

approach to understanding a few controlled variables, or a systemic approach to understanding the interaction of variables in a complex environment. In addition, Rossman and Wilson's (1984, 1991) broad reasons for linking qualitative and quantitative data are: (a) to enable confirmation or corroboration of each other via triangulation; (b) to elaborate or develop analysis, providing richer detail; and (c) to initiate new lines of thinking through attention to surprises and paradoxes, turning ideas around, and providing fresh insight. For this study, both quantitative and qualitative studies will be reviewed in order to provide insight and richer detail.

Limitations of the Review

This review does not intend to be exhaustive in nature. Its intention is to strategically examine the research that has directly addressed the aforementioned topic. Unfortunately, the literature exclusively focusing on the factors impacting the persistence of a collective group of Latino males is not diverse. Further, most studies focus on investigating matters of this population in an aggregate form and do not explore the within group differences of these factors. Another limitation of this review is that it does not provide a comprehensive overview of the theoretical models addressing persistence of college students. This review will focus on a selection of these research studies.

Criteria for Inclusion

As previously discussed, this review focuses on the literature that quantitatively and qualitatively studied persistence of Latino males. For the most part, the scholarly literature documenting the persistence of Latino males utilizes a quantitative approach. In order to provide ample support for this topic, the literary works consulted mostly addressed issues amongst the Latino population collectively. Most of these studies

address the differences between Hispanic males and females and consequently, provide a contextual frame of reference. Specifically, the following are the parameters for the inclusion of the literature in this review,

1. Studies focusing on Hispanics/Latinos, especially Latino males.
2. Studies using theoretical frameworks to investigate persistence and ethnic group differences amongst males in higher education.
3. Studies addressing the factors impacting persistence.
4. Studies with either a quantitative or qualitative approach. Quantitative studies provided the rich data detailing the graduation gaps and the need for more research on the topic. Qualitative studies provided a rich context for the kinds of experiences that students faced.

Theoretical Framework

Considerations of Student Departure Theory

Oftentimes, scholars use a deficit model to explain the research focusing on Latino students' academic and social experiences in higher education. Although he has updated his position on student retention, the initial works of Vincent Tinto and his Student Departure Theory (1975, 1987, 1993) did not address the limitations of diverse student populations and did not adequately address the needs of a multidimensional population as the ever-changing college student. Grounded on interactionist and acculturation models, his theory places the responsibility of persistence primarily on students. It is also framed through a deficit model, which disregards the responsibility of agents other than the student herself/himself. Tinto (1987) also posits that in order for students to successfully persist, they must separate from the environment or group which they originally came

from or associated with and must transition into their new environment by interacting with their new surroundings and incorporating these new learned behaviors, values, and expectations into their own world. For Latino students, especially males, this is oftentimes not possible, as students are faced with responsibilities tying them back to family responsibilities. Besides having familial responsibilities, for many Latino students, the ability to remain connected to their past communities, family, church, or tribe is essential to their persistence (Attinasi, 1989, Nora, 2001; Terenzini, Rendón, Upcraft, Millar, Allison, Gregg, & Jalomo, 1994, Tierney, 1992, Torres, 2003). Additionally, with the 2-year sector having the greatest concentration of Latino students (Karen, 2002), asking this cross-section of the student population to disconnect from their communities and focus primarily on their academic environment is not realistic, as they go home every day and may work in the neighboring communities. Lastly, as developing young adults, students are also negotiating their identity and trying to figure out whether their loyalty lies with their native home community or their new environment in college. Hence, asking students to separate from their original environment is also unrealistic for students who are going through their identity development and feel the need to “stay true” to who they are and their community expectations.

Many researchers (Berger 2000, Braxton & Lien, 2000, Rendón, 2000, Nora 2001 Braxton, Sullivan & Johnson 1997, Hurtado & Carter, 1997) have described Tinto’s theory as flawed with poor empirical support, weak conceptual foundations, and inapplicability to all student populations—especially those from historically underrepresented backgrounds. Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora (2000) explain that other theoretical considerations should be taken into account when studying minority student

retention. She explains that there is a universally entrenched view of the Tinto departure model that assumes it is complete, appropriate, and valid for all undergraduate students regardless of their varied ethnic, racial, economic, and social backgrounds (Rendón et al., 2000). As a result, Tinto has gathered the critical analysis and theoretical models that have been developed subsequent to his groundwork (Bean, 1980, Braxton & Brier, 1989, Cabrera, Castaneda, Nora, & Hengstler, 1992, Braxton & Hirschy, 2005, Nora, 2001; Tierney, 2000, Tinto, 1993, 2005) and has acknowledged that the student population in a changing society needs to be at the forefront of any model used to conceptualize student retention and persistence (Tinto, 2006). One of the theories that Tinto (2006) acknowledged as contributing to understanding the needs and behaviors of underserved populations is Laura Rendón's validation theory.

Validation Theory

Laura Rendón (1994, 2000) notes that many researchers who study student retention focus on majority White students, failing to take into account the differences amongst the growing population of minority students. In fact, it has been noted that most of the research guiding theories of student access, adjustment, retention and persistence in college is often based on White males (Tierney, 1992, Belenky, 1986). This homogenized approach to methodology resulted in gaps in the research of issues of persistence affecting issues unique to minority populations, especially Latino males.

Validation is a concept that Rendón introduced to explain what significantly influences the persistence of students of color, particularly those of Latino backgrounds. She explains that her theory of validation (1994) accounts for those students who are forced to unlearn their past experiences which may not be related to a college-going

culture. She explains that persistence theories such as Vincent Tinto's Student Departure Theory (1975, 1987, 1993) expect students to immerse themselves within the structures of a college environment without having the tools or social cues to navigate the academic infrastructure. This expectation only works for students who "have the skills to gain access to these opportunities" (Rendón, 1994, p. 45). The six tenets that comprise the theory are: (1) The responsibility for initiating contact with students is on institutional agents such as faculty, advisors, counselors, and coaches; (2) Validation yields student self-worth and in return, they feel capable of learning and a valuable part of the college experience; (3) Validation must exist in order for student development to be present; (4) Validation occurs in and out of the classroom and includes validating agents such as faculty and professional staff or family, friends, mentors, significant others, coaches, etc.; (5) Validation is a developmental process without an end point with a final outcome. As students continue to be validated, the better academic and personal experience they will have; and (6) Validation is most effective throughout a student's first year of college and during the first few weeks of their academic career.

Instead of placing the onus on the student, this theory posits that it is the institution's responsibility to approach the student with the necessary assistance and support, as marginalized populations are often hesitant to ask how to navigate their new environments. As Rendón (2001) notes, "the role of the institution is not simply to offer involvement opportunities, but to take an active role in fostering validation" (p. 147). In other words, institutions should not confuse validation with enabling and coddling, rather they should frame validation as empowering and strengthening the student's ability to learn and succeed. Rendón (1994) reported the following findings from her study:

- Traditional students expressed few, if any concerns about succeeding in college, while nontraditional students, particularly those in community college, communicated some doubts about their ability to succeed.
- Some students are quite independent and can function within academic and social infrastructures quite easily, but many non-traditional students need active intervention from significant others to help them negotiate institutional life.
- Success during the critical first year of college appears contingent upon whether students can get involved in institutional life on their own or whether external agents can validate students, in academic and/or interpersonal ways.
- Even the most vulnerable nontraditional students can be transformed into powerful learners through in- and out-of-class academic and/or interpersonal validation.
- Involvement in college is not easy for nontraditional students. Validation may be the missing link to involvement, and may be a prerequisite for involvement to occur.

Rendón's findings are essential to this study because they provide a powerful framework to examine the experiences of this study's participants. This framework helps in understanding how non-traditional students are a multifaceted population which need in-class support, and out of class academic and social validation in order to succeed. Although Rendón's findings are in line with what much of the literature states about students from underrepresented backgrounds, it contributes to the literature by placing the responsibility of student success and initial contact on the institution and its personnel, rather than the student. With the proactive support from the institution, students can build on their cultural wealth to navigate their college environment.

Community Cultural Wealth Model

Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model stems from Critical Race Theory (CRT), which addresses racism at its intersections with other forms of oppression and subordination (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, Howard, 2008, Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Rooted in critical legal studies (CLS), critical race theory addresses the so-called race neutral laws and policies that when placed into practice, only perpetuate racial/ethnic and sociocultural and gender discrimination (Delgado Bernal, 2002, Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). It is a way to theorize and challenge the ways race and racism impacts society and counters the idea that students of color come with cultural deficiencies (Delgado Bernal, 2002).

Yosso's community cultural wealth model also critiques Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital, which refers to the accumulation of cultural knowledge, skills and abilities possessed and inherited by privileged groups in society (Yosso, 2005). Yosso asserts that Bourdieu's cultural capital theory deems some populations as culturally wealthy and others as culturally poor. She explains how the assumption that diverse groups lack the social and cultural capital required for social mobility sets up structures and policies from a disadvantaged lens, which can oftentimes be a disservice to the communities that are being served (Yosso, 2005). Therefore, in instances where a student from an underrepresented background has the necessary knowledge to succeed, educational institutions may overlook this student's potential due to their disadvantaged viewpoint and may generalize the experiences of all of their students. Institutions fail to improve the campus climate and services to students when they adopt deficit frameworks

about students. Understanding the importance of theories and the empowering force they have behind addressing the issues of a phenomena (Anzaldúa, 1990), Yosso (2005) critiques deficit-oriented theories around communities of color and proposes that people in these communities have different forms of capital that develop as a result of their oppression, family ties, and significant successes. These forms of capital are referred to as community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005).

Yosso (2005) explains how community cultural wealth is an array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts utilized by communities of color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression. This is evidenced by the numerous accounts of students who employ such strategies to help them navigate their environments. These strategies are developed over time and emerge as a result of interacting with the environment. According to the community cultural wealth model, there are six forms of capital that explain how communities navigate their environment: aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital. She notes that these forms are not mutually exclusive or stationary, but rather dynamic in that they each build upon one another as part of the community's cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005).

Self-Efficacy

According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy is the belief in one's own capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments. The key factor in acquiring self-efficacy is human agency, which determines the effort an individual will exercise towards accomplishing their goals. The Latino male participants in this study oftentimes expressed how, regardless of the challenges they experienced, they were determined to accomplish their goals. None of the participants reported

wanting to give up or stop their academic trajectory. This was a testament to their high level of self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1977, 1989), individuals gain this level of self-control and perseverance through continuous self-reflection and evaluation of their own environments and social systems.

Bandura (1997) proposed three dimensions of self-efficacy. These three dimensions are level, strength and generality. Level is the degree of difficulty of behaviors or tasks that an individual feels capable of performing. Strength refers to the confidence a person has in his or her performance estimates. Generality is the range of situations in which an individual considers him or herself to be efficacious (Lent & Hackett, 1987). Generally, all of the study participants demonstrated high levels of self-efficacy. The fact that they are successful makes sense, as Bandura (1997) states that those who are efficacious persist longer and work harder when they encounter difficulties as opposed to those who doubt their abilities and potential. Because everyone encounters challenging moments, Bandura (1997) explained how self-efficacy beliefs might change depending on the individual's successes and failures. However, once an individual has developed self-efficacy, their self-efficacy beliefs are crucial to their ability to persevere and persist through the challenging time in their life. Because people's lives are multidimensional, self-efficacy is not the only factor that helps individuals navigate their environments. For this reason it is necessary to have a multipronged approach to analyzing a phenomena. Self-efficacy along with validation and community cultural wealth provides a robust background in setting the stage for analyzing the successful paths of the Latino male participants in this study.

Differences Amongst Latinos

Reports from the Pew Hispanic Research Center shed light on the multidimensionality of the Latino population and how racial/ethnic identities shift based on how Hispanics respond to standard race questions (Pew Hispanic Research, 2015). A majority of Hispanics say they most often identify themselves by their family's country of origin; just 24% say they prefer a pan-ethnic label (Pew Hispanic Research, 2012). On the other hand, another Pew Hispanic Research report (2009) also revealed how most young Latinos (64%) see more cultural differences than commonalities within the Hispanic community in the United States. Nevertheless, despite the many sociocultural and economic differences, there are many fundamental commonalities that tie the cultures together. These commonalities drive the influx of homogenized research design. However, as Vasti Torres (2004) explains, these commonalities often overshadow distinct immigration patterns, varying ethnic experiences in the United States, and research findings that are different for particular ethnic groups. Their cultural identification impacts their persistence because the experiences that come with identifying from a certain Hispanic ethnic group shapes their attitude and behaviors as a college student.

Some research has focused on the differences within the Latino population. Muñoz and Ortega (1997) conducted a study on the socioeconomic and sociocultural differences among Hispanic subgroups. Their quantitative study examined the extent to which the experiences of Hispanics were shaped by the geographic region in which they reside. They used the 1990 U.S. Census' Public Use Micro Sample (PUMS), which is a stratified random sample of approximately 16 percent of U.S. households to compare different Latino national origin subgroups living in various regions of the United States.

They compared these subgroups on a variety of sociodemographic, socioeconomic, and sociocultural indicators contained within the PUMS data files. Their findings concluded that with respect to every variable used in their study, there are distinct regional socioeconomic and cultural differences among U.S. Latinos. They found that “inferences based on the Latino population at large obscures substantial variation in the experiences of specific national origin Latino subgroups” (Muñoz & Ortega, 1997, p. 310). Their findings also revealed that inferences drawn from historically Latino regional samples are not necessarily valid for the larger population of Latinos in the country (Muñoz & Ortega, 1997). Their study had many significant themes supporting the premise of this review. The limitation of their research however, is that the dataset was not comprehensive and that their findings were based on descriptive statistics. The researchers recommend a multivariate analysis linking age, migration, education, employment and occupational status, and linguistic proficiency for a more thorough conclusion. However, their research reveals that approaches involving the triangulation of quantitative and qualitative methods will provide more complete knowledge about the rapidly growing Latino population. Further, their results suggest that the Latino experience must be studied with an explicit recognition of its national origin and regional diversity (Munoz & Ortega, 1997). Lastly, although their research was limited, it advanced the notion of regional socioeconomic and cultural differences among U.S. Latinos.

Seymour and Hewitt (1997) conducted a qualitative study on the reasons students leave the sciences, providing a comprehensive understanding of the differences between gender and racial attributes on the persistence of student within science, math and

technology courses of study. They found that a generalized classification of several nationalities as ‘Hispanic’, solely on the basis of common original language, led to misleading assumptions (Seymour & Hewitt, 1997). For example, students in their study commented that the Latino culture has different identities according to varying nationalities. Students in the study indicated that, at times, it felt as though there was a lack of cohesion among Latinos on campus because of the existing differences amongst the groups. Their findings suggested that only one-third of Hispanics who enrolled in science, math or engineering majors graduated in them (p. 3). Their findings also showed how the racial and ethnic differences and customs contributed to students’ access and retention within the science, math, and technology majors. For example, the researchers found evidence that there were culture clashes amongst Hispanic students from different regional and national origins. Although this was not at the core of their study, it provided context for their investigation on the reasons that high-achieving undergraduates from different backgrounds leave the sciences. This does not necessarily represent the experiences of students within other majors; however, their conclusions provide future researchers with an insight into the racial and gender differences of students in a focused course of study, including that of Hispanic students.

Latino College Student Retention Research

Several studies note that academic underpreparedness, low socioeconomic status, family obligations, ethnic identity, and campus climate influence Latino attrition in education (College Board, 2010, Stanton-Salazar, 1997, Strayhorn, 2008, Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009, Hurtado, 1997). This literature review will focus on family, identity, peer

influence, involvement, immigrant status, and ethnic identity. The following is a brief overview of the significance of each factor.

Immigration

Immigrant and U.S.-born children of immigrants are the fastest growing segment of the country's total population of children under 18 years of age (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). By 1997, there was an estimated 3 million foreign-born children under 19 years of age and another 11 million U.S. born children under 18 living with one or two foreign-born parents (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Latino students are multigenerational—their experiences tend to vary depending upon their generational status.

Gender role and masculinity

The role of gender for undergraduate males is a prominent theme in the literature. For many Latino males, their household responsibilities strongly predict their behaviors (Ojeda, Navarro, & Morales, 2010). For example, in an all male study, Mirandé (1997) reported that for Latino males, not fulfilling their household expectations is unmanly. Their role as a male in the household is intertwined with the cultural value of loyalty, commitment and dedication (Marín & Marín, 1991).

Gender roles are a significant predictor of how students socialize within and outside their homes and are often deeply embedded to the relationship they have with their families. This “familismo” or familism is a concept that refers to a strong identification with a sense of responsibility to family. Tatum (1997) refers to this term as having an importance of the extended family as a reference group and as providers of social support. Although this close knit relationship is important to the success of a male college student, it can also be a debilitating factor, depending on the level of expectations

from the family members. Some responsibilities may include needing to be one of the main providers of income to their household. “Machismo” also plays a role within the culture of many Latin American households. “Machismo” refers to the socialization of males which include negative and positive dimensions of masculinity (Ojeda, et al., 2010). In the Hispanic household, machismo often symbolizes, “strength, bravery, power, and importance” (Novas, 1998). However, it can also have a negative dimension, such as hypermasculinity (Arciniega, Anderson, Tovar, Blank, & Tracey, 2008), exaggerated masculinity, male dominance/authoritarianism, aggressiveness, and self-centeredness (Mirandé, 1997). However, it is important to note that for many Latino males, the concept of college is not only a personal endeavor, but a goal they must reach for their family as well (Schwartz, Donovan, & Guido-DiBrito, 2009). Thus, “familismo” and “machismo” are usually shaped by family messages on gender roles and can have a positive correlation to a student’s persistence, depending on how the messages are delivered. This concept creates a unique background for Latino male persistence and support (Baum & Payea, 2011).

Family Expectations

In Schwartz, Donovan, & Guido-Brito (2009), a group of Mexican students indicated that college was a form of social mobility and a gateway to provide their families with a better and financially comfortable life. However, these desires created a challenging and uncomfortable cultural clash between their role as a student within higher education and their role as a son and “breadwinner” at home (Schwartz et al. 2009). For the male students in this qualitative study, family expectations centered on supporting their future and, in some instances, supporting their current family

economically, expectations not necessarily placed on their sisters (Schwartz et al., 2009). In a different study, Seymour and Hewitt (1997) documented how Hispanic students' close ties to their extended family created the need to return home for family traditions (even if it conflicted with academic requirements/responsibilities.) Further, paralleled with Schwartz et al. (2009) study, students felt the need to make regular financial contributions toward the support of immediate and extended family members. This conflicted with their academic progress, as they were not able to make sufficient time for their course work (Seymour & Hewitt, 1997, p. 341). Part of the family messages and expectations of a Latino son as a male in his household comes with economic responsibilities, which often impact persistence negatively, as the work hours take a primary role. This is not the case for all Latino males; however, it is a pattern that widely exists and a burden that lingers in the college-going minority male community.

Ethnic identity

The Pew Research Center (2009) reports that Latinos identify themselves in a variety of ways, given that their identities are multifaceted and multidimensional (Pew Research Center, 2015). Whether they use the term, Hispanic, Latino, or American, 51 percent of the respondents from the National Latino Survey chose to identify themselves by their family's country of origin (Pew Research Center, 2009), while 24 percent prefer to use a panethnic label such as Hispanic or Latino (Pew Research Center, 2012). This concept is also layered by the classification of their origin as an ethnicity versus a race. For the purposes of clarification, this study adopts the definition that a racial group is considered as one that shares certain distinctive physical and genetic characteristics and an ethnic group is one that shares a common culture, language, and heritage (Pew

Research Center, 2009). But the perspective from which the Latino population views itself varies depending on sociocultural factors influencing how one sees themselves, their family's teachings, and how society defines and views one's identity.

First and second-generation immigrant students (and their parents) engage in constant cultural adjustments as they navigate their environment in the United States. Trying to decide how to describe themselves and what terms to use when asked about their ethnic or racial classification is part of their im/migrant journey (Mahalingam, 2006, Louie, 2012). These pressures do not take into account the intersectionalities of the Latino population. Consequently, this generalization of their experiences may breed forced upon acculturated identity. Mahalingam, Balan, & Haritatos (2008) posit that there are three tenets to intersectionality including: no social group is homogeneous; people are often defined in terms of social structures that define the power relations implied by those very same structures; and there are unique, non-additive effects of identifying with more than one social group. To that end, im/migrant children are oftentimes faced with having to negotiate their identities as it relates to their race and ethnicity.

The concept of ethnic identity stems from several theoretical models (Phinney, 1996, Torres, 2003). The identity development of students has been often studied by many researchers including, Erikson (1968) and Chickering (1969). Both researchers focused primarily on the stages related to the identity development of humans. Expanding on this focus, Phinney (1993) and Torres (2003) have explored the process and the factors affecting the ethnic identity development of Latino/a students in higher education. Phinney (1996) explored the different aspects related to ethnicity, such as culture, ethnic identity and minority status. More specifically, she used these factors to explore the

process of general identity development of Latino/a students in relation to their White counterparts. Torres (2003) developed this focus by developing the research about Latino/a students in college compared to their White counterparts. In that same vein, Guardia (2008) sought to include the importance of fraternity involvement in relation to ethnic identity development of students in Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs). His study concluded that membership in a Latino oriented fraternity enhanced the Latino fraternity members' ethnic identity development by providing them with a group that helped build connection, community and familial connection to the campus environment (Guardia & Evans, 2008).

Regardless of diverse ethnic identifications, the battle between assimilation to the mainstream norms and the retention of their familial customs is displayed as students navigate through college. Further, many discuss (Boykin, 1988, Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001, Mahalingam, 2006) that children of color are expected to negotiate cultural expectations of the minority and majority culture as well as their own culture. As a possible consequence, students who are marginalized may develop a negative perception of themselves, engage in self-destructive academic behaviors, or build enough resiliency to challenge any negative social mirroring (Suárez- Orozco & Suárez- Orozco, 2001).

Issues in Studies of Latino Males

While Latinos increasingly play a role in shaping American society, there are many limitations in the research that addresses their multifaceted identity—especially for those in college. The existing concern with the (lack of) research of college Latino males is namely three-pronged. First, the data sets used to research a phenomenon with the

Latino population are limited in what they track. These datasets are designed to measure student academic outcomes and are not designed to include non-cognitive variables such as social, cultural, psychological factors (Norah & Crisp, 2012). Including these factors would be significant, as it could yield large-scale cross-sectional studies that may provide the research community and practitioners with a more comprehensive picture in understanding the Latino population. As suggested by Chen and DesJardins (2010), there is an opportunity to improve longitudinal datasets by including information for observable and measurable variables that may change over time (e.g., family income, GPA, parental support) (Nora & Crisp, 2005).

In that same vein, another limitation with the studies on Latino college students and their persistence is the lack of theoretical models and frameworks that include an ecological perspective and include aspects of the person and of the environment in predicting achievement and adjustment (Dennis, Phinney & Chuateco, 2005). Including the importance of these networks is important because it allows the researcher to consider contextual variables that influence the success of Latino college students.

Third, much of the data that exist for Latino males are quantitative in nature. Although quantitative research has yielded an in depth understanding of aggregate-level and generizable form of analysis, it does not explain the unique experiences of those students. While quantitative research can provide the consequences of aggregate action, qualitative inquiry can provide the lived experiences within that aggregate action (Wagner, 2006). The research community is oftentimes recommending researchers to allow Hispanic students to tell about their own college experiences, as rigorous qualitative work is needed that provides a rich description of students' experiences and

perceptions specific to the college environment (Zurita, 2004, Nora & Crisp, 2012). Expanding the breadth and depth of research into the qualitative sphere, will provide a robust arsenal of understandings for the Latino population.

Summary

This literature review has provided a focused analysis on factors impacting the persistence of Latino males. Most important, the review was based on the notion that there are differences within a widely generalized group of students who enter post-secondary education at higher rates, but are not graduating. According to the themes in the literature, there are significant factors that have impacted the lagging retention rate of these students. The review has explored these factors and has used different theories to provide different conceptual frameworks shaping this research topic.

In order for the research to be more extensive and accurately depict the experiences and condition of Latino males, I provide a few recommendations that emerged from noticing some omissions in the literature:

- a. Publish more peer-reviewed scholarly articles on the experiences of Latino males. Studies should avoid continuing to group all minority students in one category and generalizing the outcomes. Documenting specific issues impacting separate groups provides a more conservative picture of specific issues impacting these minority populations (Hurtado, Griffin, Arellano, Cuellar, 2008, Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009, Stanton-Salazar, 1997, Strayhorn, 2010, Torres & Fergus, 2011).
- b. Investigate the within-group differences of the Hispanic male subgroup populations as it relates to their persistence in postsecondary education. The data on this population stemming from the NCES, College Board, and U.S. Census Bureau

reports are significant. However, because many quantitative studies seem to use national databases (which do not have a large sample of subgroup identified students), the number of studies dedicated to this population is very low (Muñoz & Ortega, 1997, Pew Hispanic Research, 2009).

- c. Use qualitative form of inquiry to investigate the contexts for the differences of subgroups of Latino males. Many research studies documenting the experience, retention, and persistence of minorities in higher education recommend that more qualitative research be developed in this area. More specifically, researchers have recommended the investigation of Hispanic subgroup differences with a qualitative approach. The reason is that researchers and practitioners would obtain a richer context for the variance in persistence amongst these groups. As mentioned, national datasets are limited in scope and do not provide a large sample to conduct such types of research (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009, Stanton-Salazar, 1997).

Providing a richer empirical and contextual background for this topic will also have implications for policy making and implementation. Understanding that cultural and social capital has a significant impact on the postsecondary academic attainment of a minority population, which will grow steadily, will prompt policy makers to address factors impacting communities and pre-college preparation programs. This, of course, will come if the level of scholarly research is heightened and further documented. Given the current political debates, there are many politicized issues that arise with the Hispanic population's presence in the United States. These issues stem from undocumented students; college affordability for students with high levels of need; unemployment rates of post-secondary graduates; high school dropout rates, etc. In conclusion, more research

needs to be conducted to better explain this often generalized population within higher education.

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Pilot Study

In spring 2011, I conducted a small-scale pilot study that served as a springboard for this present qualitative study. In the pilot study, I was interested in the collective perceptions of Latino male students' persistence in a four-year public college. To achieve this goal, I individually interviewed three Latino males from the Dominican Republic. Following an interview protocol, I asked them questions about their family, messages received in high school and at home, and their college experiences and involvement. I also observed the three male students in their environments. For example, a student leader invited me to attend one of the meetings he led as president. I was also able to arrange a class observation for another student. The third student invited me to an on campus educational program that he was helping to organize. The interviews, along with the observations, helped me examine emerging themes as well as conceptualize the students' behaviors in settings they felt most comfortable in. I created causal displays to visualize the outcome of the interviews and field observations. The themes that emerged from the data collection demonstrated that their persistence in college was a result of their family expectations, community support, social influence (friends), and resiliency (self-motivation). These results aligned with the research and literature on the success of Latino males in college (Fry, 2002, Lee & Ransom, 2011, Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). Consequently, as I delved deeper into the literature on Latino males, I noticed that there was room to further develop and refine the study.

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to understand what influences the persistence of successful Latino males from different Hispanic ethnic backgrounds in their baccalaureate course of study. For the remainder of the chapter, I will discuss the components of my research design by highlighting the research strategy, data collection, data analysis, validity and limitations.

Research Strategy

It is through qualitative research that one can uncover and discover the deep-rooted reasons for participants' behaviors and reactions to their environments or societal constructs. Addressing areas within scholarly research that have not been examined provides investigators with varying ways and perspectives to address issues impacting target populations (Marshall, 1985). Another way in which unexamined topics could be further explored is looking at them through different lenses and methods. For example, qualitative research helps investigate complexities and processes on developing phenomenon and examines constructs from the vantage point of the participants, that may not have been identified by researchers (Marshall, 1985). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe qualitative inquiry as a set of interpretive methods used to “study things in their natural settings attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3). Therefore, as researchers focus on the individual experience of the participants, it is important to ensure that each unique perspective is reflected in the analysis.

For the purpose of this study, I used the phenomenological strategy of inquiry. This method is useful in focusing on the “essence of the human experience about a

phenomenon as described by participants” (Creswell, 2009, p. 13). As a researcher, I believe that the human experience, as described by the participants, is essential in understanding the inequities within the contexts of education at any level.

A phenomenological approach allows the researcher to become the expert on the topic, deeply understand prior research, develop new knowledge, and know the research that extends the topic (Moustakas, 1994). Further, it allows the investigator to understand the social and psychological phenomena from the perspective of those who are involved (Welman & Kruger, 1999). I believe that a phenomenological approach provided me with the opportunity to connect meaning to the lived experiences of these students through their own accounts. Their voices were brought to the forefront, in an educational landscape where their experiences are often challenged by generalized research studies and social assumptions of Latinos and their ethnic subgroups.

Data Collection

This study took place at one institution over the period of two academic semesters. For the purposes of this report, the institution is referred to as Hudson State University (HSU). The institution was selected on the basis of its type/characteristics, number of Latino students enrolled, and its status as an emerging Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). A Hispanic Serving Institution is defined by federal law as an accredited and degree-granting public or private nonprofit institution of higher education with a 25 percent or more of total undergraduate Hispanic full-time equivalent student enrollment (EdExcelencia, 2012). While emerging HSIs do not have the critical mass of Latino student enrollment required to meet the definition of an HSI, these institutions may soon meet the criteria as their enrollment grows and Latino representation increases

(EdExcelencia, 2012). Hispanic Serving Institutions make up 12 percent of non-profit institutions and enroll 20 percent of all college students and 59 percent of all Latinos (HACU, 2015). Therefore, utilizing these criteria to inform my choice of institution in this study provided me with a large number of Latino students to sample from.

Hudson State University is a large public university in the northeast part of the United States with a 21% enrollment of Latino students. As an emerging HSI with an enrollment of 14,500 undergraduate students, the institution is actively working towards increasing the number of Latino students. To increase their enrollment of Latinos on campus, the university has targeted key markets within the state and hosts events earmarked for the prospective and current Latino student population. For example, when recruiting, the university targets counties within the state that have high populations of Latino students. Additionally, the university has attempted to appeal to students by holding a Latino Leadership conference where multiple university partners collaborate to welcome current and prospective students to learn about leadership while exploring the university and its offerings. What is most appealing about the university is its location and proximity to major cities. The institution is centrally located and has two train stations on campus. It is easily accessible and minutes away from a large city center. Notably, the institution has experienced a pronounced growth in Latino applicants; with a 21% increase in 2013 over 2012 and a 35% increase over 2011 (Hudson State University President's Address, 2013). At the time of the study, the racial composition for the institution was 5% Asian; 9% Black; 24% Latino; 45% White; and 14% other (NCES, 2014). While the 4-year graduation rate for undergraduates was 36%, its 6-year graduation rate was 63 percent. The trends for the Latino graduation is the same as the general university as its 4-year

Latino student graduation rate was 31%, its 6-year Latino student graduation rate was 61 percent. (Hudson State University OIR, 2014). On average, they have a higher rate of Latino males graduating when compared to African American male graduation rates. For example, in the 2004 entering cohort, the 4-year graduation rate of Latino males was 21%, the 5-year graduation rate was 45% and the 6-year graduation rate was 52% (Hudson State University OIR, 2014). On the other hand, African American males 4-year graduation rate was 15% and a 5-year graduation rate of 40% and 6-year graduation rate of 44% (Hudson State University OIR, 2014). This graduation trend is significantly lower than White males' 4- (24%), 5- (50%), and 6-year (57%) graduation rates (Hudson State University OIR, 2014).

Furthermore, in order to promote the scholarly inquiry about Latinos, the 2013 undergraduate student catalog highlighted a Latin America/Latino Studies minor, which provided students with opportunities to learn about Latin America. Additionally, the university has a Latin American Student Organization designed to provide students with an opportunity to engage with the campus community and develop programming impacting the Latino community on its campus. It is also one of the largest student organizations on campus and has been received many awards.

Participant Sample

The data collection approach for this study was stratified purposeful sampling as well as snowball sampling. Researchers utilize purposeful sampling to select individuals (or information-rich cases) that will illuminate the questions under study and will help the researcher understand the research problem (Creswell, 2009, Patton, 1990). More specifically, in qualitative research, stratified purposeful sampling assists the researcher

in illustrating subgroups and facilitating comparisons amongst those cases. My goal with this sampling strategy was to focus on the key characteristics of the participants I am interested in exploring while providing opportunities for “continuous adjustment of the sample” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 202).

Because the purpose of this study was to understand how successful Latino males make meaning of their persistence, I selected students who were motivated to persist and who were on track to graduate. For the purposes of this study, I defined persistence as the “desire and action to stay within the system of higher education from beginning through degree completion” (Seidman, 2005, p. 14). Therefore, I selected those male students who were approaching graduation (junior or senior class standing) and had a cumulative grade point average that qualified them for application for graduation (2.0 cumulative GPA). I decided to use a minimum GPA of 2.0 because in order to graduate with a bachelor’s degree, institutions require students to have minimum GPA of 2.0. Additionally, based on the review of the literature, there is evidence to conclude that good grades both reduce the chances of stopout throughout one’s academic career and increase the probability of graduation (DesJardins, Ahlburg & McCall, 1999, 2002). I used a demographic questionnaire to record each of these students’ backgrounds and academic profiles. Using successful students who are considered persisters—ones that have the desire and act towards completing their degree— provided me with the opportunity to recommend practical strategies for retaining students and recommend frameworks that help in understanding their experiences (Padilla et al., 1997).

Although there are guided expectations in qualitative research, there are no set rules for sample size (Patton, 1990). The size of the sample for a qualitative study

depends on many factors, “what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what’s at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources” (Patton, 1990, p. 184). The goal in sampling for this study was to include the perspectives from as many eligible Latino male respondents as possible. In total, there were 20 students who participated in the study. I tried to recruit a diverse group of Latino males such as those from different nationalities, majors, academic standing and levels. For example, I recruited from academic programs and organizations that were connected to the sciences. I also asked the administrators to recommend students who had varying academic interests (i.e., dance, nutrition, math, humanities, arts, etc.). Also, when I encountered a non-traditional student, I used the snowball sampling strategy and asked him about his peer network and asked if he would be willing to refer me to some of his peers. These were students who were also older and non-traditional. Understanding the work of Crenshaw (1991) and Weber (1998) on intersectionality, I understood that there are multiple dimensions that are significant in the context of educational success. According to Weber’s (1998) intersectionality framework, students are deeply impacted by the complex layers of all of their surroundings. Having students from varying backgrounds and circumstances allowed me the opportunity to compare different dimensions within race, class, and gender and served as a lens with which I studied the complexities of how they persisted in college. Essentially, my goal in the recruitment process was to ensure that the participants provided me with insight and perspective of the phenomenon while taking precaution in experiencing saturation, which occurs when no new insights seem to emerge (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Data Collection method

I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews, which allowed me to understand the stories from the participants' own perceptions, understandings, and cultural frames of reference (Manning, 1992). Semi-structured interviews require that the researcher inform the participants of the organization of the conversation, but also allow them to explore and delve into topics that emerged as a result of our discussion. The semi-structured interviews provided me with several opportunities to follow up on questions by probing the participants' answers and allowed me to adjust or customize interview questions based on their responses.

There were two phases to the data collection design of this study. The first phase was the recruitment and selection of participants. I was able to recruit students at Hudson State University because of my relationships with a few colleagues at the University. First, I connected with the staff from a college access program called the Educational Opportunity Fund program (EOF) program. The EOF program provides academic and financial support to in-state student residents who come from economically and academically disadvantaged backgrounds and exhibit the potential for high achievement. This program is state funded and in order to qualify, a student's household income must meet the state's criteria. As an EOF student, participants in the program complete a summer bridge program and receive academic support; leadership development, financial literacy, career enrichment, intentional counseling/advisement, and need based financial assistance to maximize the intellectual and social growth of all participants. While admission to the program is not race-based, most of the students are from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds. From this connection, I received a list of potentially

eligible participants. I cleaned up the list and narrowed it down to all eligible participants. I sent these students a letter of solicitation via email explaining the study to them and inviting them to participate. In total, 15 study participants were part of the EOF program.

The administrator of the opportunity program also introduced me to a few of his colleagues at the institution who worked directly with students. Some of these administrators were advisors to student organizations such as the pre-med, Latino, and male empowerment organizations. Others worked with a pre-med program for underrepresented students and residence life. After meeting with these administrators, they agreed to send a template recruitment email to their student groups. They also invited me to attend the student groups' weekly meetings to recruit participants. I ended up presenting to all three organizations I was connected with—Latino, pre-med, and male empowerment.

After students expressed interest, I asked them to fill out a demographic questionnaire prior to the interview; however, most filled out the form at the time of the scheduled interview. Also, at the time of the interview, each participant read and signed a consent form. I also requested participants to provide me with an unofficial copy of their college transcript. While many participants provided me with this document, not all of them gave me a copy. For the ones who never provided me with a copy, I was able to verify that they fit the academic profile established for the study by asking the administrators to confirm their eligibility based on my criteria (minimum 2.0 GPA and junior/senior status). Because at the time of the data collection process I was not an employee of HSU, I was not privy to accessing their academic transcript without the student's consent. The goal of the transcript was to provide me the ability to triangulate

data by analyzing each of the participants' academic progression through their post-secondary journey.

The second phase of data collection consisted of interviewing the participants. I interviewed 20 Latino male undergraduate students (6 seniors and 14 juniors) on Hudson State University's campus. Because the study did not restrict participation based on ethnicity, students identified themselves as Dominican (10), Colombian (2), Salvadorian (2), Puerto Rican (2), Peruvian (1), or multiethnic—a combination of Puerto Rican and Dominican (2), or Dominican and Argentinian (1) backgrounds. Sixteen (16) students reported a household income between \$30,000 and \$49,000; two (2) participants reported a household income of less than \$30,000 and four (4) reported a household income of \$50,000 and \$74,999.

The interviews ranged from 45 to 90 minutes in length and were audio recorded. To guide the semi-structured interviews, I followed an interview protocol, which helped ensure that I addressed the different concepts I was interested in exploring with each participant. Informed by the pilot study in early spring 2011, the interview protocol had three focal points. First, the questions concentrated on a student's cultural and ethnic identification. Second, the questions focused on their college experiences and the interplay between cultural identification and their life as a student. The third focus consisted of the structures or systems that may have contributed to the students' persistence. Further, the questions in the study were informed by the principles behind validation theory, community cultural wealth and self-efficacy models. The intersectionality conceptual framework also inspired the questions. For example, the questions delved into the interplay of structures such as race (ethnicity), class and gender

because these impact individuals on many levels (micro and macro) and their different environments (i.e. college, community, family). Further, understanding Rendón's validation theory, the questions focused on the elements that have provided participants with support and validation in their educational journey.

Data Analysis

The process in the data analysis was methodical and meticulous. In order to ensure a structured method of analyzing the data, I employed the data analysis process described by Creswell (2009), as delineated in figure 1 below.

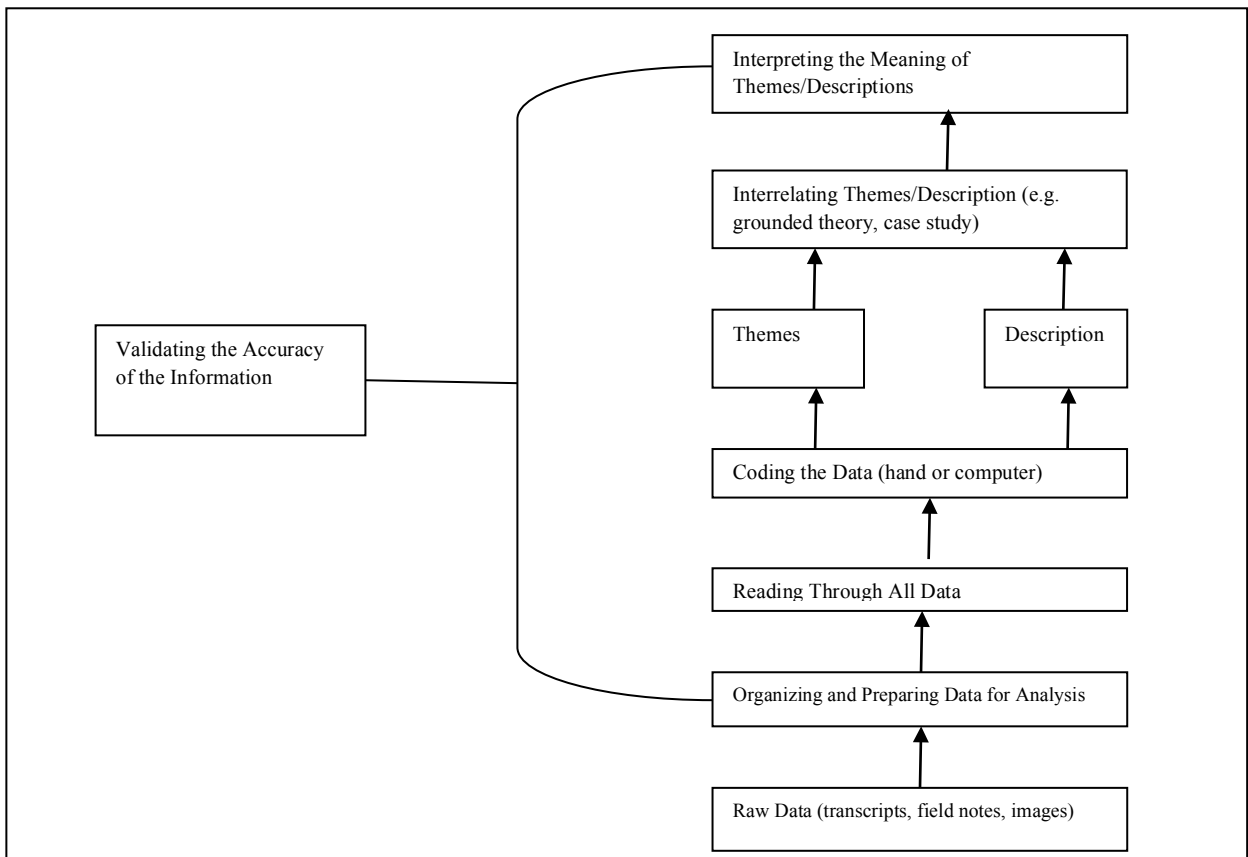


Figure 1. Data Analysis in Qualitative Research (Creswell, 2009)

As depicted in Figure 1, my analysis process started with collecting and organizing raw data. This data consisted of participant interviews, memos, observation notes and

transcripts. However, a step that is not captured in Creswell's model of data analysis is the ongoing nature of data analysis. For example, I improved the style of interviewing and deepened the level of engagement with each participant after each interview. New emergent concepts arose with each participant and my goal was to get the perspective of others on such new concepts. For instance, while I did not include questions about language in my protocol, a few participants discussed the role of language in their lives and family dynamic. As a result, when appropriate, I started engaging participants about the Spanish language and the role it played in their life. This process helped further reveal the complexities of the participants' identities and their development as Latino males in the United States and within their families.

As I completed each interview session, I sent all recordings to be transcribed by a professional service within one week of the recording. While the interviews were being transcribed, I started the data analysis process. I listened to the interviews and started making notes of glaring themes that emerged. I also wrote memos for each interview participant and expanded on any preliminary themes that seemed important at the moment. This ongoing data analysis was helpful, as it required that I continuously engage with the data in between interview sessions and prevented a lull in recording ideas pertinent to the data analysis process. As I received each transcription, I reviewed each one of them while listening to the corresponding recording to check for the accuracy of the transcription. I also expanded my notes on preliminary emerging themes.

After I cleaned up each transcript, I loaded it into qualitative research analysis software, NVivo10 (for Mac). I used this software to manage and track all of the

documents used for the study as well as data analysis. Loading all memos and transcripts into the software began the official coding process.

Coding

Following the organization of the data is one of the most important steps in analysis—coding. Coding refers to the organization of data into chunks or segments of text before bringing meaning to information (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, as stated in Creswell, 2009). The coding process must be conducted in a detailed manner and with precision, although it is often an evolutionary and cyclical process in qualitative research (Saldana, 2009). The coding process is often influenced by the researcher’s background; thus, influencing preconceived notions about the research topic. However, as the investigator of this study, I chose to not use pre-determined codes and allowed the data to reveal meaning (Creswell, 2009). My role as a researcher including my background and familiarity with the population being interviewed helped me make meaning of the themes that emerged across interviewees. Rather than trying to fit each of the participants’ experience in a box or predetermined theme, I felt it was important to allow the voices of each participant formulate the results of the study consequently forming an inductive approach to analyzing data. This process is especially important because even with a fixed set of questions informed by one’s background and research, one cannot anticipate all of the codes and themes that arise before analyzing the data (Dey, 1993, as cited in Ryan & Bernard, 2007).

After loading the interviews onto NVivo10 for analysis, I created the preliminary theme that I previously identified while cleaning and preparing the data. Also, as I re-read each transcript uploaded to NVivo10, I highlighted every section that fit into those

preliminary themes. If the data did not fit into the previously created themes, I created a new one and placed that chunk of data under that new theme. I did this for all 20 interview transcripts and in the end had 43 different preliminary themes. I went through each theme and read the corresponding summary of passages. I began seeing similarities in some of the created categories; therefore, I started combining, deleting or uncoupling themes. For example, one of the first themes that were identified was transitions. After reading the summary, I realized that there were several types of transitions mentioned by the participants. Therefore, I unpacked the theme and identified various types of transitions: im/migratory transitions, college-to-college transitions, and high school to college transitions.

Using within and cross-case analysis, I thoroughly analyzed the coded data to identify what themes and/or descriptions emerged from the participants' interviews. After organizing the emerging themes, I identified reoccurring themes and categories for conclusions and findings. Creswell (2009) also states that the coding and analysis process should not only be based on the data provided by participants, but should reflect the past literature on the research topic. Therefore after narrowing down the themes, I used the research and theoretical models to help facilitate meaning to the data and advance the discussion of the analysis.

Validity and Reliability

Qualitative researchers must consider a variety of potential concerns regarding their study. With naturalistic inquiry, ensuring that the research has both validity and reliability are two of the major concerns. Ensuring validity requires a researcher to check for accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures, while ensuring reliability

requires that the researcher's approach is consistent across different researchers and projects (Gibbs, 2007, as cited in Creswell, 2009). The validity strategies that I employed in this study include triangulation, clarification of researcher bias, and peer debriefing. Triangulation allowed me to check data across many sources, in this case, member's unofficial college transcripts (and verification from administrator's on student's eligibility). Researcher memos helped me reflect on the varying phases of the data collection process such as the participants' interviews, my biases, my processes in data collection and important concepts. These memos not only helped me reflect, but also prompted me to refine or change any practice that did not align with the goal of the study.

A researcher's bias is one of the most salient issues of discussion within qualitative research. Throughout the study, I intentionally exhibited sincerity, transparency, and self-reflexivity about my biases so that others could understand how through the analysis, I claimed to know what I knew (Tracy, 2010). I elicited the assistance of knowledgeable colleagues (both practitioners and researchers) in the peer debriefing process. Peer debriefing calls for the uninvolved party to revisit the elements of the study and probe the researcher's thinking about the entire research process, including and not limited to, the statement of the problem, research design, interpretation, and analysis of data (Nguyen, 2008). I utilized peer debriefing in the beginning of the data collection process and towards the end of the data analysis process in order to demonstrate self-reflexivity.

Reliability is an important component of a study design and is often a "precondition for validity" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 292). External reliability addresses the issue of whether independent researchers would discover the same phenomena in

similar settings, while internal reliability refers to the degree to which other researchers would match previously generated constructs in the same way as did the original researcher (LeCompte & Goetz, 2007). In order to ensure reliability, I followed these procedures, as proposed by Gibbs (2007): (a) checked interview transcripts to make sure that they were accurate and did not deviate from the participants' message and (b) ensured that the definition and meaning of codes did not differ in the coding process. I accomplished this by repeatedly cross-referencing recordings and transcripts with the codes; wrote memos about the codes and their definitions; and solicited an external person to serve as a cross-checker in order to see if another researcher would code the same passage with the same or similar codes (Creswell, 2009). I also listened to the interviews as many times possible and cleaned up transcripts for accuracy in words and grammar, as these improvements helped maintain the fidelity in intention of the participants' statements. These strategies were essential in establishing trustworthiness throughout the study.

Limitations

As a qualitative researcher, I understand the potential limitations within my study and in my role as a researcher. For this study, there are three main limitations.

First, just as there are differences amongst Hispanics of different countries, there are also other stratified regional and nativity-related differences within each population. For example, I recognize that foreign born and U.S. native born Latinos vacillate between either identifying themselves by their family's country of origin (51%) or by simply describing themselves as American (21%) (Pew Hispanic Research, 2012). For this

reason, in the recruitment stage, I specifically asked for interested participants who identified as being Latino or Hispanic.

Second, this study focuses on the factors that have successfully promoted the persistence in the lives of Latino male students and does not take into account the comparative experiences of those who did not persist. Having the perspective of this student population would have been helpful in order to comprehensively understand the experiences and conditions that lead to persistence or prove to be important factors in the drop out patterns of students.

Finally, the last limitation is that since most of the study participants ($n=12$) were part of an educational opportunity program, their reflections may have been impacted by the type of academic and personal support they have received from administrators in the program. Being part of the educational opportunity program means that these students have high expectations of scholarship and personal development. Academic advisors, who oftentimes serve as mentors for these students, managed their progress and success in the program. Students in the opportunity program come from underrepresented backgrounds and are often underprepared for the college experience. Through a series of pre-college preparatory interventions as well as some programs during the academic year, they become well equipped for the college experience.

Role of the Researcher

My interest in issues of Latinos in higher education grew out of both my personal and professional experiences. I have worked in many capacities in colleges and universities with the goal of improving Latino/a students' retention. It was in college that I realized the disproportionate number of females in higher education. I pondered on

various reasons why this might be the case and eagerly surveyed the literature surrounding this research problem. I noticed that most of the research I found focused on African American males and their dropout rates. I rarely saw studies solely focusing on Latino males, let alone studies acknowledging the diversity of the Latino population. For those studies that included Latinos, the researchers labeled the population as “minority students” or aggregated their educational experiences with those of African American students. Additionally, throughout my years as a college administrator and academic advisor, I have witnessed many instances when Latino male students are discriminated against and stereotyped by fellow colleagues. These experiences sparked an interest in understanding how successful Latino male students navigate and succeed in their educational environments.

While interviewing participants, I oftentimes felt as though the person in front of me was recounting my story and journey in the United States. There were many similarities and parallels in the way the study participants experienced their transitions and the way that I experienced mine as a first generation college-going Latina from the Dominican Republic. According to Patton (2002), the perspective that the researcher brings to qualitative research is part of the context for the findings. Therefore, I was conscious of how I interpreted what the study participants shared with me and tried to understand their experiences through their lens, while using my background as the lens for understanding. My identity also influenced the manner in which I conducted interviews. As a Latina, I know how language plays an important role in many of our lives. Therefore, I tried to make the participants feel comfortable in speaking to me in Spanish or Spanglish (an overlapping of English and Spanish language through

conversation) when they felt appropriate. Participants were also interested in my background and rationale for the study. I used that opportunity to build trust between us and indirectly reassure them of my genuine intentions in learning about their experiences.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter provides an in-depth report of the findings from 20 semi-structured interviews over the course of two academic semesters. Through these participant interviews, I sought to address the following research questions:

1. How do Latino male college students understand and explain their persistence in college?
2. How, if at all, do their perceptions and explanations of persistence differ by ethnicity, being first generation college goer, household income or immigrant generation?

By way of those questions, I sought to understand how Latino males from different backgrounds experienced college and how they successfully navigated their environment in their persistence experience. Additionally, I sought to understand if there were any ethnic differences in how the combination of different factors of success impacted students in the process. This chapter presents the narratives of these Latino male students and summarizes the study's major themes. I organized this chapter by listing each key finding category and discussing the associated themes (and subthemes) for each finding. Additionally, in order to fully understand their experience in the context of education, I used supporting literature to contextualize the experiences of the participants. I primarily used Rendón's (1994) validation theory (1994); and the perspective lens of Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model as well as Bandura's (1994) self-efficacy theory to analyze and interpret the overarching meaning of findings and supporting themes. The chapter is organized in three sections. First, I

provide an overview of the participants' profiles. In order to protect the participants' identities, I used pseudonyms when referring to them. I also used a pseudonym for the university where the study took place. The second section provides an in-depth review of the key findings and supporting themes that emerged as a result of the data analysis. The third section addresses the themes that emerged across all participants based on their ethnicity, first generation college status, household income and immigrant generation.

Research Participants

I conducted 20 interviews over the course of the fall and spring semesters. The semi-structured interviews ranged from 45-90 minutes in length. The demographic background of the participants is detailed in the table below.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Background

Pseudonym	Age	Ethnicity	Nativity	Class Standing	1 st Gen College	Household Income	Immigrant Generation	EOF Status
Adonis	20-21	D.R.	D.R.	Sen	Yes	Low	2nd	EOF
Antonio	20-21	D.R./P.R.	U.S.	Jun	No	Middle	2nd	EOF
Arturo	20-21	D.R.	U.S.	Sen	Yes	Middle	1.5	EOF
Billy	22-24	D.R.	D.R.	Jun	Yes	Middle	1.5	Non-EOF
Carlos	20-21	Per.	Peru	Jun	No	Middle	1st	EOF
Federico	22-24	D.R.	D.R.	Sen	Yes	Middle	1.5	Non-EOF
Frankie	25+	Col.	Col	Jun	No	High	1.5	EOF
Guillermo	20-21	P.R.	U.S.	Jun	Yes	Middle	2nd	EOF
Jacobo	20-21	D.R.	U.S.	Jun	Yes	High	1.5	EOF
Jancarlos	25+	D.R.	D.R.	Sen	Yes	Middle	2nd	Non-EOF
Kenyon	22-24	D.R./P.R.	U.S.	Sen	Yes	Middle	2nd	Non-EOF
Kristian	20-21	D.R.	U.S.	Sen	No	High	2nd	EOF
Manuel	20-21	P.R.	U.S.	Jun	Yes	Middle	1st	EOF
Marcos	20-21	D.R./Arg.	U.S.	Jun	Yes	High	2nd	Non-EOF
Misael	20-21	Col.	Col	Jun	Yes	Middle	2nd	EOF
Pascual	25+	D.R.	D.R.	Jun	No	Low	2nd	EOF
Porfirio	20-21	D.R.	D.R.	Jun	No	Middle	1st	EOF
Ramón	20-21	D.R.	U.S.	Jun	Yes	Middle	2nd	EOF
Vicente	25+	Sal.	El Salvador	Sen	No	Middle	1.5	EOF
Wilfredo	22-24	Sal.	U.S.	Jun	Yes	Middle	2nd	EOF

Participants' Profiles

Marcos

Marcos is a Latino male student who identified as Dominican and Argentinian. He is 20 years old and a junior majoring in economics. Like one of his parents, he was born in the United States. He is a first-generation college student and is very involved on campus. Marcos has engaged in all types of leadership activities and holds a leadership position in one of the cultural organizations on campus. This position is one that he is very proud of, as it combines his passion for organizing Latino students with his affinity for leading and building strong communities.

Guillermo

Guillermo identified as a Puerto Rican male student. He is a junior and a finance major. Like one of his parents, he was born in the United States. He has a job both on and off campus. He is a resident assistant and has demonstrated leadership skills by participating in several campus clubs and is particularly proud of his leadership accomplishments in Greek life. Guillermo has three brothers, one of whom went to college and graduated with his masters. His second oldest brother attempted to go to college, but transferred from a private to a public 4-year institution and then to a 2-year college. He did not finish his Associate's degree. While his brothers were college educated, they were unavailable to guide Guillermo and his twin sibling through college. His mother graduated high school and his dad dropped out to work and support her while she was pregnant at a young age. Guillermo had his struggles during middle and high school, but worked hard to graduate from high school.

Vicente

Vicente is a Latino male student who identified as Salvadorian. Born in El Salvador, he is 25 years old with senior class standing majoring in nutrition. Both of his parents graduated college in their native country of El Salvador. After arriving to the United States, he regularly visited his family in his native country. He is involved in some campus activities, but has mainly focused on maintaining jobs on and off campus. Before arriving to Hudson State University, he attended two community colleges and earned his associate's degree.

Pascual

Pascual is a Latino male who identified as Dominican. He and his parents were born in the Dominican Republic, but he has been living in the United States for more than 10 years. At the time of the interview, he was a junior. He is a transfer student; however, he previously started his college career at Hudson State University. He had withdrawn from college as a sophomore due to a lack of connection with what he was studying. He decided to move to Florida to seek a different job opportunity in the motor vehicle industry. Due to the recession in 2008 and the troubles with the motor vehicle industry, he decided to enroll in a community college and then transfer to Hudson State University.

Kenyon

Kenyon is a 22-year-old Latino student who identified as half Puerto Rican and half Dominican. He was born in the United States to immigrant parents. He is a senior majoring in Sociology. Kenyon has attended different colleges for a variety of reasons. He first enrolled in a 4-year institution, but withdrew as a result of his inability to manage the expectations of a college environment. He then enrolled in a community college and

subsequently enrolled in Hudson State University. As a commuter student who works long hours in an off campus jobs, Kenyon has struggled with balancing his responsibilities on and off campus.

Adonis

Adonis is a 20-year-old senior student who identified as Dominican. He was born in Dominican Republic to Dominican immigrant parents and has been in the United States more than 10 years. His major is public health and is the first one of his siblings to finish college. His older brother started college and did not finish due to life circumstances to be discussed later in the chapter. In addition, Adonis is a natural born leader. He is very involved on campus and dedicates most of his student leadership to his fraternity. His main motivation to succeed is propelled by his commitment to do better than his parents.

Jancarlos

Jancarlos is a transfer and non-traditional college student. On his demographic questionnaire, he indicated that he is older than 25 years old. He decided to pursue a college education after a series of failed business ventures as well as encouragement from others. Early on in our interview, he expressed that he did not like school. He did not follow the traditional road to college and instead of finishing high school, he decided to drop out and embark on business ventures. The U.S. economic recession of 2008 caused him to rethink his plans and prompted a series of decisions that placed him on a path to collegiate education. Since then, he's worked full time, but has fully engaged in his academic journey.

Jacobo

Jacobo is a 20-year-old student who is a junior and biochemistry major. He has used his networks and resources to navigate the college environment. Like one of his parents, he was born in the United States, but identifies as Dominican. His mother was born in the Dominican Republic. Jacobo made sure he specified he was from Dominican heritage, despite many people thinking he is Irish. He enrolled at Hudson State University, after transferring from a private institution that was unaffordable.

Porfirio

Porfirio is a 20-year-old Dominican male from immigrant Dominican parents. He has been living in the United States less than 5 years. He is a math major and both parents graduated college in their native Dominican Republic. Porfirio is a campus leader and considers himself one of the few Latino males on campus who is involved. He is very close to his family and makes sure that he schedules time to be with his family on weekends, despite it being difficult to balance with his academics.

Misael

Misael is a 21-year-old Colombian male with immigrant parents. He's been in the United States less than 10 years. He is a junior majoring in biology. Neither one of his parents graduated from college. Despite Misael being a biology major, at the time of the interview, he wanted to change the focus of his study to an area that he loved, which is that of dance. He is very involved on campus and serves as a peer advisor for the living learning communities on campus and for GLBTQI students. Misael enjoys being a resource to other students and looks forward to orienting others through the college process.

Billy

Billy is 23 years old and identifies as Dominican. His parents were born in the Dominican Republic. He's a junior majoring in business. Neither one of his parents graduated college. Billy is very involved on campus and considers himself a leader. He is very proud of his Dominican heritage and considers it a cornerstone of his identity. He is a junior, but took off a year from college due to a non-academic suspension. This was a sad, yet important moment in his life. Before leaving, Billy had many administrators advocate for him. After returning from his suspension, he integrated successfully back to campus life and was rehired by many of the departments he used to work for at the university. Billy is a commuter student and is very active on campus through his activity in his fraternity as well as the Latino student organization.

Wilfredo

Wilfredo is a 22-year-old student who identifies as Salvadorian. He was born in the United States to immigrant parents. He is a junior majoring in physical education. Wilfredo had to take off a year due to his parents' financial difficulties. During that year, he found himself working from 9am- 5pm in a job he detested. This experience quickly confirmed that he wanted to work hard to make sure he could work at a job he loved

Federico

Federico is 23 years old and identifies as Dominican. He and his parents were born in the Dominican Republic and have lived in the United States for more than 10 years. He is a senior majoring in art and design. During his interview, Federico explained how he oftentimes feels marginalized as a Latino male. He hopes that he's able to show his great attributes to others through his academic success.

Carlos

Carlos is 21 years old and identifies as Peruvian. He and his parents were born in Peru. He has been living in the United States for less than 5 years. He is a junior majoring in biology and minoring in business. Carlos is enrolled in an education opportunity program designed for students interested in medicine or other health careers. Carlos explained how important his Peruvian heritage was to him. To ensure that he connected with his cultural values, his mother used to intentionally put him in cultural shows and dances as a young child. His dream is to be a doctor and a business owner. He would like to own a Peruvian restaurant and name it after his mother.

Manuel

Manuel is a 21-year-old Puerto Rican male who was born in the United States. Both of his parents were born in Puerto Rico. He is a junior majoring in biology. Neither of his parents graduated from college. Manuel is part of an education opportunity program designed for students interested in medicine or other health careers. He wants to be a doctor one day. As a young child, he witnessed how some of his family members did not get the proper care because of a lack of insurance. He wants to become a doctor and ensure his patients receive the best care possible, and not discriminate based on the type of insurance they have.

Arturo

Arturo is a 21-year-old Dominican student who was born in the United States. Both of his parents were born in the Dominican Republic. He is a senior majoring in psychology. Arturo is a college athlete and has played consistently throughout his four

years. Arturo dreams of becoming a motivational speaker and serve as a mentor for students in low-income communities—like the one he came from.

Antonio

Antonio is a 21-year-old student who identifies as half Puerto Rican and half Dominican. He is a campus leader and is a member of a Latino-oriented fraternity. Antonio extensively discussed how his high school educational experiences influenced the way he approaches his academics. Antonio focused on graduating with the intent of returning to his community in order to help reform the disadvantaged school district. As a member of a Latino-oriented fraternity, he discussed how important it was for him to stay connected to his culture and teach others about diversity and multiculturalism.

Frankie

Frankie is an older student who returned to earn a bachelor's degree after having worked with in his family's business and interning at companies. While interning at a famous luxury watch-making company's headquarters, he realized that in order to reach his goals, he needed a college degree. He decided to go back to college after he was informed about the partnership the company he worked for had with Hudson State University. He realized that his goal of being an industrial designer could benefit him to move up in the ranks within the company.

Kristian

Kristian is a 21-year-old Dominican student. His circle of friends began to change once he transitioned from elementary school through middle and high school. He described how his friends in the younger grades were mostly Latinos, but were also not the group of friends he felt most comfortable with. He explained that he currently does

not have any Latino friends and how his current group of all White friends sometimes makes derogatory comments about other races/ethnicities. They also refer to him as Black. He does not confront his friends, with the exception of correcting them when they call him Black because it is not a daily occurrence and he does not feel that his friends are doing it with ill-intent.

Ramón

Ramón identified as a 21-year-old Dominican male. He attended an underresourced high school, which didn't prepare him adequately for college. Ramón felt as though he had to work hard in order to become a better student. His major is environmental science/biology and while explaining his post-graduation goals, he vividly described how he wished to impact “the sustainable future of everyone in the United States”. Ramón is skillful with the way that he managed his time. He also discussed how his siblings and his mother have had a significant impact on his success. As the youngest of three, he feels that along with his mother and two siblings, he has three parents because of the constant support and high expectations from all of his family members.

Key Findings

This chapter presents the major findings in this chapter: (1) validating and invalidating agents of success: people & experiences matter; (2) successful Latino males have self-efficacy beliefs that positively influence academic optimism and performance, (3) first-generation and second-generation immigrants students have distinct differences in how they adjust and navigate the college environment, and (4) Latino males contextualize their persistence in relation to their ethnic and gender identity. The following sections will present each finding with discussion and corresponding themes.

VALIDATING AND INVALIDATING AGENTS OF SUCCESS

While validating experiences promoted study participants' success, invalidating core moments in their lives pushed them to become ever more dedicated to their educational pursuits. These invalidating moments served as fuel to progressively move forward with their desired goals. Students constantly provided examples of how giving up or dropping out of college was not an option for them. This was not only because of their families' expectations, but also because of the struggles they experienced. Growing up with limited resources gave these students a frame of reference on the direction that they did not want their life to go. This was also the case for students with higher household incomes. Despite them growing up with more resources, the racialized experiences of these students helped them understand that they were vulnerable and prone to ending up facing the same experiences as those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. The following section provides an overview of the validating forces in the participants' lives that emerged as themes (family support, family expectations, peer influences, and involvement) and invalidating messages or people that motivated students to succeed (family struggles and messages of masculinity).

Validating Agents of Success

Family Support (*Familismo*)

All 20 participants identified their family as being one of the main driving factors in their academic success. The reasons why their families played an important role in their educational success varied. This is supported by research on Latino male students

that discusses family as the core of students' success (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007, Saenz & Ponjuan, 2011, 2008). This close connection, responsibility and appreciation for their family is described as *familismo* (Gallardo & Paoliello, 2008, Ojeda, Navarro, & Morales, 2011). With a *familismo* approach, matters related to the community are addressed as a collective. Through these familial values, individuals place their family's needs over their own personal desires and choices. Researchers indicate that *familismo*-related values foster the creation or facilitation of the whole, rather than that of the individual.

Scholars further define *familismo* as the most important cultural aspect defining the beliefs and attitudes of Latinos. To examine the role of *familismo* in the persistence of college men, specifically Mexican American male students, Ojeda, et al. (2011) discussed how the family is a core value in many Latino families. For the men in the study, achieving their goal(s) was especially important because of its symbolism of success to their parents and siblings. This eager desire to succeed was oftentimes intrinsically motivated while also being supported by family expectations.

Family Expectations

Kao and Tienda (2005) concluded that immigrant parents' optimism is most important in the success of their children's academic careers. This was also the case for the majority (16 out of 20) of the students in this study, as they reported that the expectations that their family members held helped them succeed in college. Students such as Arturo explained how optimism and normalized expectations of success transcended through generations, "that's what my family is about. You got to keep moving forward for my grandparents to my parents they keep pushing me forward...they

always expected me to go to college. They wanted higher education for me.” Students (and their families) also felt as though they needed to earn a college degree because of the representation of success and symbolic meaning to their families. This was especially the case for students whose parents did not have a college degree. Billy oftentimes explained that going to college was more than a goal that he had for himself, “I’m not only doing this myself. I’m doing it for my mother obviously for my sister.” This is the same reason that Jancarlos, a non-traditional student, decided to earn his GED and continue with his collegiate career. He stated, “that was one of the reasons before selling the business I already was thinking of getting my high school diploma, GED. In part to give a gift to my mother, it’s a birthday gift. It was for her. So I decided to do a GED.” This approach to education makes sense when analyzing Jancarlos’ experience through a validation theory lens. Rendón (1994) explains that for nontraditional students, the decision to attend college is typically not automatic or expected, as they struggle with the benefits of attending college versus working full time. Non-traditional students such as Jancarlos, Frankie, Pascual, and Vicente all discussed external forces that influenced them to go to college.

While their families wanted them to attend college, it was not necessarily supported by their active engagement in activities such as helping with college choice, brainstorming about homework, or discussing academic challenges and accomplishments. Because the expectations of success are embedded in family norms, immigrant parents communicate the importance of education in abstract terms in contrast to their acculturated counterparts (Kao & Tienda, 2005). This was the case for many of the study participants, as their parents were not knowledgeable of the education system in the

United States. In fact, this form of parental behavior aligns with findings from Robinson's (2014) study, which concludes that amongst other behaviors, what works in student performance is expecting children to go to college, not necessarily having parents/guardians engaged and involved in their child's academic activities. While the researcher's findings did not include other family members such as siblings, for some of this present study's participants, siblings were also a source of motivation within the family structure. For Antonio, he explained how his brother oftentimes told him to "just do it...if it's going to get you in a better place."

Most students reported that witnessing their parents' general attitude towards education helped motivate them in pursuing their education. For example, despite Marcos' parents not having a college education, he appreciated his father's curiosity and desire to learn. He remembers watching political, historical and finance-related shows with his father at the young age of seven. This piqued his interest in the business/political industry; hence his choice to major in political science. Other students with college-educated parent(s), such as those of Porfirio, indirectly influenced him because of their messages about education. When it came to school, he did not question his path because his parents already had a degree and he knew that their level of education was a benchmark for success. It was not a difficult choice to make, as he liked school and learning. Although Porfirio believes his choice to attend college did not take much effort, it is important to remember that research shows a link between parental education levels and child outcomes such as educational experience, attainment, and academic achievement (Aud, Fox & Kewelramani, 2010). Students who receive positive messages about learning and education tend to do better in their academic environments (Arbona &

Nora 2007, Longerbeam, Sedlacek, & Alatorre, 2004, Sanchez, Marder, Berry, & Ross, 1992) and, as such, tend to embrace and engage their learning process.

Peer Influence (*Los Amigos*)

There is mounting evidence documenting that peers influence academic performance on all levels of schooling--elementary (Ammermueller & Pischke, 2006, Cooley, 2007); middle school (Lavy & Schlosser, 2007); high school (Ding & Lehrer, 2007); and college (Marmaros & Sacerdote, 2006, Mayer & Puller, 2008). Additionally, the research on peer support and persistence suggests that early peer involvement appears to strengthen perceptions of institutional and social support and ultimately persistence (Berger & Milem, 1999). These students' peer groups were the key source of motivation while in college because they comprised a network of people that understood the participants' journeys and served as a community of like-minded individuals working towards the same goal. This is supported by Saenz and Ponjuan's (2012) research where they discuss how Latino males who indicated that they had positive peer support were likely to have stronger aspirations for attending and succeeding in college.

Much like what the research describes, all 20 participants reported their peer networks as a source of motivation for their success. They believed that these relationships helped them navigate their environments through a shared network of support, influence and knowledge. Porfirio describes the process behind his choice of friends, "like you gravitate towards people that have the same goals as you have and the same mentality that you have." For many of the participants, when reflecting on the relationships they had in high school versus the friendships they cultivated in college,

they consider those recently formed relationships in college more influential. For example, Porfirio states that “in college, you have like those people that you meet and you try to keep like in touch with them. Because you want to have that barbeque someday or that when you want them to be your godfather for your kids whatever.” He is not only thinking about the immediate benefit of the types of friends he has, but also the long-term effects of the validating relationships. While being selective in their choice of peer networks, these successful students also feel pressured to balance the time they spend with their other circle(s) of friends who no longer meet their needs or long-term goals.

These successful students acknowledge that there are people in their circle who are not good examples, and as such, consider these relationships distant acquaintances. Consequently, they make a conscious decision to limit socializing with those who do not have the same goals and aspirations. Making conscious decisions about compartmentalizing their group of close friends and acquaintances based on the values they hold has positive effects, especially when the values of the peer group are more aligned with societal demands (Dornbusch, et al., 1999). In this case, the peer groups these students have chosen to keep a close connection with are encouraging of academic achievement and healthy behaviors leading to the overarching goal of academic success (Brown, 1990, Aloise-Young, Graham, & Hansen, 1994). For example, Billy describes his circle of friends, “that’s how my circle is. I mean people that share the same morals and values as me pretty much, that’s my lifestyle. I like to keep myself busy, me being proactive and whatnot. So I like the people who like to work as well and put in work pretty much.” Other students discussed how they became selective with their friends

since their high school years, as many of them were not good influences. This is a navigational strategy that they have carried throughout their college years. Arturo states,

Arturo: So I isolated myself from the individuals who lived in negative atmosphere and not only just my circle of friends is very small. I say like four or five friends and those were all close friends that I consider brothers. We've played baseball throughout high school.

Interviewer: Uh-hum.

Arturo: We all went out for higher education, went on to college.

Interviewer: You all went to college?

Arturo: Yes. All of them went to college, are currently graduating this year or are still in school. And I think that was a big, big, big part of what I do today and just keeping me going because I see my friends doing well. You know, these are guys who I probably would say I was a kind of role model for them. Because they were -

Interviewer: Uh-hum.

Arturo: --they came from less than I had. They have less, their parents don't work. You know, their parents not one lick of English. I tried to help them you know, and I felt like my circle of friends was very important. Back home I had a very small circle of friends. When I came to college I realized that everyone was where I wanted to be. Everyone was at the same level.

Federico explained how he only surrounds himself with people that he knows are going to push him to do better. He especially has an affinity for friends who come from the same socioeconomic backgrounds because it shows him that despite the experienced struggles, he too "can succeed." Federico describes his friendship with one of his friends who is successful as a validating motivation impacting his approach to his academics:

So like I like to hang around people like him...if I don't feel pressure it means...I'm not doing enough [in school]. So with him...that's kind of my motivation. It's like all right we're from the same background. I have no excuse. If he's doing this [is successful with a high paying job], then I can do it.

Some students report that they use their friendships as a source for learning to navigate their environments. For example, as a biochemistry major with aspirations to become a doctor, Jacobo is engaged in academic-related opportunities because of the friendships he has made in his environments. He describes how he initiates conversations

with fellow peers, which eventually lead to friendships. He explained, “they would always hang out there and like I made friends with them during orientation...they would tell me about like programs that they were like applying to.” These supportive relationships have led him to apply (and be awarded) with internships in prestigious pre-med programs. In analyzing Jacobo’s experiences through a community cultural wealth model, it is evident that he has refined his navigational capital to successfully make his way through his academic environments. His close networks opened the door for him to be considered for opportunities that otherwise would not have been offered to him. For students who do not have these relationships or are apprehensive to engage a member of the majority group, they are more likely to never gain those same opportunities Jacobo sought and acquired.

Friendships are an important factor in the success of Latino male students, as they serve as a source of motivation and resource sharing. These supportive relationships provide students with a coping mechanism that helps them navigate their environments, which can oftentimes feel overwhelming. A notable mention should be given to how students in this study explained how they recognized that some friends in their circle are not positive influence. They have distanced themselves from such company and now consider these friends as acquaintances. When talking about their process for distinguishing the types of friendships they have with people, students oftentimes explained how their values and beliefs play an important role in distinguishing who they want in their circle and who should be kept at a distance. The positive influence in terms of future aspirations and goals, academic achievement, network of opportunities and behavioral modeling is what these students seek when forming relationships with peers.

In essence, the more positive their perception of peer support, the stronger the institutional commitment and persistence (Berger & Milem, 1999). In considering the work of Yosso (1997), this strategy aligns with the survival characteristics students bring with them when they get to college. From a community cultural wealth lens, these students sought to increase their social capital, as they utilized their resources to help them navigate throughout their environments. These resources may come in different forms such as peer tutoring, mentorship, study groups, etc.

Involvement

There is a body of research that supports the notion that students who are involved while in college are more likely to graduate (Tinto, 1993, Astin, 1993). Tinto (1993) noted how students would be more likely to succeed if they maintained a sense of connectedness to the university and had an environment that actively encouraged their involvement in college activities (Tinto, 1998). This is much like Rendón's validation theory, which hones in on the value of the affirmation process students receive while in college. Activities (academic and co-curricular) that engage students and reassure their role in their environment have been instrumental for two reasons. The first reason is that these activities have exposed these students to a network of other successful peers. Second, these activities have uncovered another layer of their identities as leaders and members of the community.

Many of the study participants (15 out of 20) were part of the Educational Opportunity Fund program, which provided them with supportive staff members and advisors as well as a cohort of students to feel connected with prior to beginning their collegiate careers. Such enrichment programs provide learners with key social and

academic skills necessary for a successful college experience (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). This program created a culture and a sense of community where involvement and academic success were valued. Given the academic nature of this campus office, most involvement was academic-centered. This was especially important for Jancarlos, a non-traditional student who is older than 25 years old. Because of his limited time on campus, Jancarlos needs to strategize his visits to campus to either attend class or attend an academic-related activity/event that will benefit his success in class, such as tutoring. While many institutions of higher education focus on the student affairs aspect of involvement, for students like Jancarlos, connecting with his advisor is a high impact proactive practice (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2011) and a good sign of engagement since he is seeking institutional validation. His advisor, as a validating agent, is making sure he is encouraged and supported so that he becomes stronger in terms of his ability to learn, acquire self-worth, and increase his motivation to succeed (Rendón, 1994).

For other students, such as Kenyon, his involvement includes an active role in playing soccer for an off-campus league. His coach has served as a validating agent through his years in school. In fact, it was because of his soccer coach that he pursued higher education. Kenyon explained how his coach facilitated everything relating to applying for college. He felt as though it was an opportunity he could not afford to miss. For many others like Marcos, involvement comes in the traditional sense, as he is the vice president of a prominent student organization with a Latino focus on campus. This experience has not only given him pride, but has connected him with a network of students that inspire him to do better. Similarly, the same student organization has exposed Carlos to leadership responsibilities that have inspired him to minor in business.

He states, “I wanted to become programming chair because it [relates] a lot to business...that pushed me for my business minor...for me, it’s all coming together.”

Another form of involvement, as described by Pascual, is working on campus. As a nontraditional student, Pascual uses his experience in working in the department for his major as an advantage. He describes how he really enjoys being around his professor, the head of the department, as he feels supported by him. Pascual explained how the expectations set forth by his supervisor (also, head of department) help him become a better student. The constant interaction with this faculty member provides an immersive validating experience.

Perhaps a major reason that involvement has been important for these participants is the level of support they receive from those academic and student affairs administrators as well as faculty members that they engage with while leading or participating in their collegiate experiences. While not the only source of academic motivation, an important resource many students identified was the Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) program. The connection that the EOF staff has with its students is not by happenstance, but rather comprised of intentional interventions designed to help students persist through college. In addition to academic advisors, these students gain mentors—nonfamily adults who take interest in the life of others (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2003) and offer support, role modeling, encouragement, and/or academic support (Louie, 2012, Roffman, Suárez-Orozco, & Rhodes, 2003). While the focus of this study did not include EOF outcomes, this program was reported to have an impact on student success at the college level. Non-EOF students described how different sources of support, similar to those in EOF, impacted their success. These include cohorts of peers who have common goals,

academic support from mentors, academic offices and faculty members and involvement in student groups that embrace their identity and celebrate their success.

Participants described involvement in a variety of ways. Engaging with their environment was important because it helped them feel connected to the experience of going to college. Many of the participants not only found connections to friends, but also faculty and administrators very helpful. Aligning with theories of social capital, academic support personnel and mentors provide an additional network of resources that these students have available to them and purposefully utilize (Kim & Schneider, 2005, Lin, Cook, & Burt, 2001, Maeroff, 1998, Stanton-Salazar, 2001, Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). The building of this capital is essential, as they draw upon those relationships to achieve academic success (Louie, 2012). In essence, when students felt a connection to their environment, they found it more difficult to disconnect or leave, as they felt a sense of belonging and “fit” in their environment.

Invalidating Agents of Success

Family Struggles

Children of immigrants oftentimes have to endure a host of struggles, conflicts and adjustments (internal and external). They often learn the English language before their parents and as a result, feel the need (or have to) advocate for them, consequently reversing the roles of the parent and their child (Suárez- Orozco & Suárez- Orozco, 2001). Witnessing the struggles that their parents’ experienced was enough reason for eight of the participants to feel the need to work hard to earn their college degree. They wanted to learn from their parents’ circumstances and not see themselves “in the same position”. Marcos stated,

So my parents struggled when they were in their teenage years. I didn't want that for myself. I always figured you know, they struggled day and night to get me to where I am. Like the least I can do is pay them back and show them that what they're doing isn't for nothing.

These students formulated an expectation of success for themselves after seeing their family's struggles. For example, Adonis explained how his brother's life circumstances served as a reminder for why he needed to stay focused,

'Cause my older brother once he got his girl pregnant, he moved out. And then got his own spot, married her and then he's on his own. And he's struggling hard body too because he didn't finish college. It's not a bad thing. But that's not how he would have wanted it to be. It's not how I would want it to be. I wouldn't want to get my girlfriend pregnant now cause then I got to work for the kid.

Adonis also described several invalidating experiences from his parents. However, because of self-efficacy beliefs, he motivated himself to work harder. He explained how his dad would tell him, "...why would you want to do all of that stuff? Why would you work so much to pay your own thing?" He does not understand why Adonis is not taking "advantage" of the public assistance and social service programs, such as food stamps and welfare, available to those who live low-income communities—like the one Adonis lives in.

Experiencing their family's struggles with poverty and navigating the U.S. culture also served as motivating factors in these students' lives. For students who expressed that their parents were not as involved in their academics, they attributed it to their parents' inability to navigate and serve as advocates for their student's academic progress within the collegiate academic systems. This is often the case for students who are first generation immigrants and do not have the navigational capital to swiftly find resources available to them. A strategy that these students' parents used was providing them with moral and emotional support, stressing the importance of education, and talking to them

about university-going expectations (Auerbach, 2007, Delgado-Gaitán, 1994a, Gándara, 1995, Valdés, 1996, Villanueva, 1996). These priorities reflect several traditional Latino immigrant cultural values and modes of expression (Auerbach, 2006).

Children of immigrant parents oftentimes experience the repercussion of the intentional decision of their parents to migrate from their native country to the United States in seeking better opportunities. This means that at times, immigrant parents have to bargain their own personal and career goals for the betterment of their children and their success (Louie, 2012, Portes & Rumbaut, 2001, Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). While many hope to arrive from their native country with the hopes and dreams to upgrade their lifestyle and access to opportunities, many immigrant parents experience a downgrade in occupation, working multiple jobs or a lower status occupation than what they experienced in their native country (Redstone Akresh, 2006, Foner 2000, Louie, 2012). For example, this was the case for Carlos, as he discussed how he has seen his mother go through health issues in order to support her three children in their educational aspirations. His mother worked a minimum wage job at a fast food chain with overnight shifts. He explained how “when she would be coming back from work, she’d be getting me ready for school.” She also had a second job working at a factory. Carlos explained, “seeing my mom working different jobs - that just impacted me like my mom is doing this and she’s like older. Like she’s going through osteoporosis.” As the only son in the family, Carlos felt like he had to be successful in order to help his single mother. This pressure of upholding the expectations as the “man of the family” is discussed later in the chapter.

First-Generation College Goer

The research on first-generation college students indicates that Hispanic first-generation students were 35% less likely than White first-generation students to persist (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005) given the likelihood that they are less equipped for college due to poor academic preparation in high school (Dennis, Phinney & Chuateco, 2005, Terenzini et al., 1996). The research also states that being a Hispanic first-generation student, or a lower income first-generation student, makes persistence more problematic (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005). Evidence suggests that for those who come from low-income families, like many of the participants in this study, the impact of a mother's educational attainment has the largest effect on reducing the attrition of students in second to third year rates (Ishitani & DesJardins, 2002). However, as noted in this study's findings, all of the participants successfully persisted through college. Their persistence behaviors may be explained by Torres' (2006) research on how academic integration and encouragement influences first generation Latino college students' commitment to the institution and, in turn, affects their intent to persist.

Students who are either the first ones in their family to attend college have many obstacles to overcome. While these obstacles can be difficult, the participants in this study described how they used their resources to successfully progress towards their goal. This was evident for all first-generation college going students in this study, regardless of ethnic backgrounds.

SELF-EFFICACY BELIEFS, ACADEMIC OPTIMISM AND PERFORMANCE

The self-efficacy beliefs of successful Latino male students influence how they perceive the challenges in their lives. The experiences and people that have made an

impact in their lives, such as family, friends, mentors, administrators, and faculty, nurture their self-efficacy. This finding has thoroughly been discussed in research. Students discussed how they used each supportive network for specific purposes. While in college, students reported that the network they relied on the most was their peer. Peer networks helped the study participants navigate micro aggressions and oppressive experiences within the collegiate environment. They also helped build a network of students with similar goals and who were invested in the effort that it took to achieve them. Parents/family members, faculty and administrators also served as validating agents contributing to their self-efficacy beliefs as they navigated their collegiate environments.

Self-Motivation (*Ganas*)

The literature on self-efficacy discusses how students' strong sense of belief in their abilities tends to continue throughout their adulthood (Pajares, 1996). For the study participants, this was evident in every facet of their lives. They discussed at length how regardless of barriers and struggles, they had an innate feeling of confidence to confront the challenges they faced despite how difficult it became for them.

All 20 participants indicated that their *ganas*, or desire to succeed, played an important part in their success. Each participant explained how ultimately, self-determination and motivation were primary reasons why they succeeded in college. Using the self-efficacy lens, one can align their *ganas* with the fact that they believe in their capability to organize and execute course(s) of action required to produce given attainments (Bandura, 1997). Their self-efficacy beliefs influenced their course(s) of action and how much weight they placed on their failures, detrimental environmental influences, and adversity. Hence, self-efficacy as a validating agent helps to explain how

students not only thrive in an academic environment by way of in and out of class validating agents, but also affirms their internal belief in their potential to succeed.

Keeping their eye on their goals is a strategy that they used when overcoming obstacles regardless of was a strategy that many of these students have implemented while navigating their academic settings. In fact, this strategy encompasses an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts designed to survive and resist oppression (Yosso, 2005). Many of the study's participants (13 out of 20) cited having to constantly overcome obstacles in order to succeed. As a biochemistry major, Jacobo learned to navigate his competitive environment in order to engage in the same opportunities (medical-related internships) that his classmates secured for themselves. He describes how he did not focus on the obstacles but rather worked toward his end goal,

I can't think of anything else like that that really like stopped me from doing something. I usually just motivate myself to do it and apply or do something like that. I try not to think about the barriers too much. I try to think that there's no barriers at all...So that's the way I think about it and if there are barriers, I would overcome it in some way.

Jacobo used his social and navigational capital to maximize the experiences, people, and resources to prepare him for medical school. He stated how he "usually gets guidance from peers" and "always makes friends with people in programs that [he] usually cannot get into." This way, he engaged them about the types of resources shared in the pre-med programs or about the details of his friends' advising sessions with their pre-med academic advisor. In short, Jacobo had a clear understanding of his goals and was able to use capital to navigate within his academic circles. He effectively drew from his social and community contacts to gain access to ... and reassure him that he was not alone in the process (Yosso, 2005). Another example of finding the motivation and determination in challenging life circumstances was demonstrated by Kenyon's mindset.

Kenyon encountered many obstacles throughout his academic career such as twice transferring colleges and experiencing his parents' divorce. He used those opportunities to shape his self-efficacy beliefs and determination towards life. He explained:

You know, I don't let things get in my way... I have this thing in me that when there's something, there's always a way around it or through it you know, regardless of if you had to tear down the walls you got to you know, kind of take an alternate route you know, like my goal is to get where I want to be and like I don't let anything stop me regardless if I have to take the year off from school regardless if my parents got divorced... You know, it's I feel like I have this thing inside of me that tells me don't give up. You know, if I want something I have to get it.

Kenyon's narrative accurately buttresses one of the main tenets of the concept of self-efficacy. Individuals who have self-efficacy beliefs persist longer and work harder when they encounter difficulties. Of course, one's self-efficacy may shift depending on the successes of an individual; however, if it is already developed, the failures will not have as great an impact on someone's trajectory (Schunk, 1991). Another example is students reporting other sources of motivation, such as their desire to succeed and finish a goal, despite "not liking school". As Jancarlos explained,

I feel in part that I've been successful because of my dedication because of the organization I have and the desire I have to finish something that I haven't before. I have always dropped something like if I started something I always dropped it. I never finished it. So I decided when I joined college I wanted to finish this.

Students also reported that their environment inspired them to remain motivated in reaching their ultimate goal of graduating college. Jacobo explained, "Yeah taking inspiration from things around you, peers, teachers, having inspiration like aspiring to do something definitely having those aspects will definitely make you a successful college student."

Despite facing issues related to academic under-preparedness and struggles in their upbringing, these college men consistently reported that their ability to understand

the reward at the end of the finish line played a major role in their continuous progression towards success. As these students found internal drivers that helped them over the course of their academic journeys, a major factor in helping with this success included supportive structures, such as their family members. All of the participants expected that their attainment of a higher degree would serve to blaze a path of success and upward mobility for them and their families. For many of the Latino male student participants, their success represented strength, perseverance and accomplishment for others facing the same challenges. This is consistent with the research examining Latinos from a cultural wealth vantage point (Borrego & Manning, 2007, Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003, Yosso, 2005, Schwartz, Donovan, & Guido-Brito, 2009), which looks at students from a success-based lens, instead of a deficit-oriented vantage point. The scope of self-motivation strategies for many of the participants extended from dealing with oppression, failure, mental health issues, stress, poverty, pressure from family, negative peer influence, and poor schooling. In order to face these invalidating experiences, strong efficacy beliefs played a major role in the courses of their actions, how much effort they put forth in given endeavors, how long they persevered in the face of obstacles and failures, their resilience to adversity, whether their thought patterns were self-hindering or self-aiding, how much stress and depression they experienced in coping with environmental demands, and the level of accomplishments they realized (Bandura, 1997).

Academic Resiliency

Most first generation college-going students indicate that their family and friends have impacted their academic career. Students who are the first ones to graduate (or be on the successful track to do so) relied heavily on their supportive networks such as family,

friends, or mentors to help navigate their studies. In fact, while family had a major role in motivating students to pursue college, positive friendships and support networks were the factors that played a dominant role in students' college persistence.

Some of the male students in the study struggled with balancing the expectations of their parents' and their role as a college student. Adonis explained how his father refused to learn the ways of the United States and from a young age, wanted Adonis to look for a job—even if it meant “going to the corner store and bagging groceries off the books.” He refused to do so and justified it by saying, “No. Why would I want to make fifty cents a day [bagging groceries]? No. This is America. This is the land of opportunity. Like I can work and make real money. A concept he could not grasp because he's Dominican from over there. He couldn't transition and listen [to me] in that aspect.” As Adonis confronted these challenges, his aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005) and self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997) provided him with the academic ammunition to persist and continue striving towards his goals.

NAVIGATING THE COLLEGE ENVIRONMENT – FIRST AND SECOND GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS

For this study, a first-generation immigrant is someone who lives in the United States, but was born outside of the United States or U.S. territories. Second-generation Latinos are U.S. born and have at least one immigrant parent (Pew Hispanic Research, 2013). Findings from this study suggest that first generation and second-generation college students have distinct differences in how they adjust to and navigate through the college environment. Special attention was paid to students considered part of the 1.5 generation. Because the process of acculturation varies for immigrant children based on their age of entry to the country, the term generation 1.5 is designed to characterize those

who arrive to a country younger than 12 years old. While Rumbaut (2004) has more specific definitions for each immigrant population based on the age of entry to the country, I oftentimes combined those who are first and 1.5 generation because their experiences were very similar regarding language acquisition and acculturation. This distinction is made because the experience of being born abroad and coming to the United States at an early age is different with regards to the of use of language, development of ethnic identity, educational attainment and aspirations, patterns of social mobility, and even the proclivity to remain attached to their national heritage and customs than for those who come to the United States at an older age (Rumbaut, 2012).

Immigrant generation has an indelible impact on how students view and experience college. For example, Vicente who came to the United States at the age of two, explained how he felt alienated, ostracized and a lack of belonging in the United States. In school, he would lock himself in the bathroom trying to escape from the uncertainty he felt interacting with his peers, teachers, and American society as a whole. This culture shock also varies by the immigrant's point of entry as it shapes their perception and opportunities in their new land (Suárez- Orozco & Suárez- Orozco, 2001). Many of these students lived in similar communities and were from similar socioeconomic backgrounds and despite experiencing many of the same challenges, their outlook on the barriers were different. This supports the body of research that explains how first generation immigrants' experiences in the United States can in some ways be more challenging than the second generation's. This is in part because while the first generation tries to acculturate to the United States, American norms become complicated, as they worry about rejecting their nationality and identity (Louie, 2012).

Despite there being differences in students who were born outside the U.S. and those that were born in the U.S., they share one important commonality, both have (at least one) immigrant parent(s) (Suárez- Orozco & Suárez- Orozco, 2001). This is important because parents and family members influence how students make sense of their development and schooling. The primary reason that parents of first and second generation students come to the United States is to pursue better opportunities for their children, especially in education; the attitudes towards how students take advantage of those opportunities shift after they settle in the new country (Suárez- Orozco & Suárez- Orozco, 2001). Students are met with varying messages and expectations and as a result, experience life differently. But as widely noted, patterns of immigration are segmented and not static nor predictable across all immigrant populations (Portes, 1995, Portes & Zhou, 1993, Waters, Tran, Kasinitz, & Mollenkopf, 2010). The major differences in how first and second generation students experience persistence relate to language, less-than-desirable conditions in their schools and/or community, and household income levels.

Language

Language in the Latino community is important because it helps people define their community, identity, and solidarity. For Latinos, language is the glue that binds the cultural community, especially when accents and dialects are taken into account (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). For example, Vicente describes that by speaking Spanish, he feels “a deeper connection.” He explained, “when speaking English, you know—you have a different kind of connection. It’s not deep, but it’s more like to get to the point, straightforward. Cut and dry.” Latino students that are foreign born may have a different relationship with language than those who are born in the United States. For example, all

of this study's first and 1.5 generation immigrant students primarily spoke Spanish at home, with the exception of one student, Billy (1.5 generation). He was one of the study participants who despite coming to the United States at 2 years old, had an acute connection to his country of birth. Within the first few minutes of beginning our interview, he immediately indicated that he was from the Dominican Republic and stated the exact city he was from. While most of the second-generation students (5 out of 8) spoke English at home, some (3 out of 8) spoke Spanish with their families at home. Most of the first generation immigrant participants in the study discussed how English language acquisition was a significant challenge in their education. They all understood the importance of learning the language, but were baffled to learn that despite taking English courses in their native country and feeling comfortable with a basic textbook understanding of the language, they were placed in classes for students learning English as a Second Language (ESL).

At one point, ESL was not considered a form of tracking— a method of grouping and separating students according to their abilities. However in the 1990s, the research community deeply investigated and found that immigrant children were segregated by the language that they spoke and their ethnicity (Valenzuela, 1999). At that time, these ESL classes were characterized by offering students low-level skills and focused more on oral fluency (Christenbury, Bommer & Smagorinsky, 2011). Any potential for the student to excel in content was undermined by the placement of these students in a course unparalleled to what the rest of the student population was learning. Because of this segregation, English learning Latino immigrants are now the most segregated of all minority students in U.S. schools (Frankenberg, Lee & Orfield, 2003, Gifford & Valdés,

2006, Arias, 2005, Faltis & Arias, 2007) creating an environment of ESL ghettos (Váldes, 1998). Invalidating environments such as these, along with grade demotion, discourages students and conveys a message of less-than in comparison to the rest of their classmates.

Despite this educational “set back” of being demoted in the grade level, they were determined to quickly progress and “make it out of ESL classes quickly”. Reasons for wanting to progress quickly varied, but most discussed how they did not want their immigrant status to serve as a reason for not progressing at an adequate pace in school. Pedro stated, “I don’t want to let the fact that I came from the United States, I wasn’t born here...that I’m an immigrant kind of like define the whole thing.”

To learn the English language, he and other students used strategies such as diversifying their group of friends by socializing with English speaking Latinos, watching television, using YouTube videos, and watching others speak the language in order to learn colloquialisms and dialects. Misael could not understand how some of his classmates who arrived to the United States before he did were not able to learn the language fluently. He stated, “they will be here for four years and they didn’t speak no English at all still. I was like why not? Like it’s four years you’ll be in this country. And it’s because they – like Latino people, they always stay together and they try not to like find themselves in other cultures and another type of race or people.” This was also the case with Porfirio, as he explained how he was trying hard to not feel as though he was behind his counterparts, “I think those people that are still on the same level for like four years that just you letting your like kind of stereotype kind of take over your life. I wasn’t going to be that type of person. I only lasted one year in ESL.”

Students like Kenyon, a Dominican-Puerto Rican male, generalized his experiences and said that his Latino identity impacted the way in which he experienced his educational career. His narrative focused on his experiences as a Spanish-speaking Latino male. For example, he felt as though his ability to speak Spanish was especially important for him because it made him feel like he was connected to his culture; he stated that talking to another Latino is “different” and that there is an indescribable “connection” that makes him feel closer to the person when both parties speak the Spanish language. In a sense, for Kenyon, there was a sense of “we-ness” that linked him firmly to a common historical past (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). While language served as a bonding agent for Kenyon, for other students such as Marcos (second generation), the Spanish language was a point of tension in his life. Although Marcos was one of the leaders for the Latino organization on campus, and considered to be very close to his culture and heritage, he did not like speaking the language. This was a result of being judged by his family and peers on not speaking the language the “proper way” when he was younger. The more his family encouraged him to speak properly, the more it discouraged his ability and initiative to connect with them over the language or use it as bonding agent between members of the family and himself. The pressure Marcos experienced from his family is in a sense the struggle that many immigrant families face. On one hand, they come to the United States and push towards a measured level of assimilation, while simultaneously relying on efforts to keep their culture and language (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). For Marcos, English has become his “home language” and although he speaks some Spanish with his mother, it is not perfect. He understands the importance, however, of learning and using the language.

Despite the importance of language within the Latino culture, it tends to be one of the most difficult “legacies” to transmit across generations because of the opposing messages of the need to acculturate to U.S. norms and the need to remain close to the native culture and heritage (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). First generation immigrant students struggled with trying to learn not only the language, but also the nuances associated with speaking English. Being placed in an ESL class benefited the study participants in that they learned the language, but also made them uncomfortable. They felt like being around other ESL students delayed their progress, because they were not practicing the language with other English-speaking students and were missing valuable content-specific lessons. For many of the first generation and 1.5 generation students, learning the English language came at a price that included sacrificing their proficiency in their native language for the sake of perfecting the newfound expectations for communication. For second-generation students, this was not a problem, as they were born in the U.S. and were immersed and surrounded by the language from birth. Although Spanish is a bonding agent for many Latinos, including the participants in this study, it is sometimes regarded as a point of shame for students who know it and speak it in different circles and those that do not know it very well. When spoken incorrectly, members of the Latino group, including family members, criticize and wonder whether one is “Latino enough”. However, when spoken amongst those non-Spanish speaking circles, Latinos oftentimes are told to speak English instead or even worse, are prohibited from speaking the language amongst other Spanish-speaking colleagues in the workplace. There is a constant vacillation in linguistic allegiance for these two groups of students; they are often left wondering whether they should maintain closeness to their native

language or fully acculturate and use the English language as the primary mode of communication.

Poor Schooling Conditions

While learning the language was the primary barrier for first generation immigrant students, poor educational preparation from disadvantaged school systems was the barrier that most second-generation immigrant students identified. The challenging task of becoming accustomed to the United States and its norms was not a primary cause of concern for second-generation students. While not all school settings for the participants were disadvantaged, they expressed how the community in which the school was situated impacted their experiences. Additionally, for those whose parents had limited resources, they lacked the tools to best advocate and help their children throughout their educational endeavors (Fernandez-Kelly, 2008, Louie, 2012, Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2003).

As Ramón discussed his high school experience, he mentioned that he was enrolled before “they changed it.” He explained that after he graduated, his high school “got more strict and pretty much laid off the teachers who weren’t as effective.” He explained how before the reform, he had gone to high school to socialize and keep up to date with what his friends were doing. This placed him at a disadvantage because when it came to applying to colleges, he did not have the grades to get accepted where he wanted to attend. Antonio also discussed how the high school in his town had to go through reform because of the way it was mismanaged. He explained how the high school system

did not help develop students as college ready graduates. He felt that it focused more on disciplining the “bad kids” rather than increasing the potential of those who had a promising future; it seemed as though learning was a secondary goal to policing the environment (Kasinitz, 2008, López, 2003, 2004, Louie, 2012). He also explained how it was hard for parents to be involved in students’ academic success because, “we come from lower income [and] our folks are working rather than pushing a child, trying to push a child through school.” Besides not having the flexibility to miss work in order engage in school activities, parents lacking a college education as well as immigrant parents sometimes do not understand the “subtle labels” placed on their children at schools. For example, Valdés (1998) found that parents of students in ESL classes thought that their children were placed in “regular” classes and did not question their child’s academic arrangement. These are subtle ways in which systemic practices in schooling structures discourages parents from engaging in their child’s education (Christenbury, Bomer & Smagorinsky, 2011).

In considering income levels for both first and second-generation students, there was a difference in the way that second generation students viewed their educational experience in the urban schools they attended by income levels. Students who were middle-to-high income seemed to regard education as a privilege, while those low-income first generation students considered educational success as a right and much-deserved accolade for their hard work. Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) explain how immigration patterns have a lot to do with how families settle in the new land. For example, immigrants with mid-to-high socioeconomic status are usually able to retain much of their privileges and prestige while offering their children better opportunities.

Those individuals of low-to-mid socioeconomic status “have to often compromise on the neighborhoods and schools they settle into because of their lack of resources” (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001, p. 82). While the research on this needs expansion, the current body of research documenting the struggle that immigrant children face when arriving to their new land (Baum & Flores, 2011, Louie, 2012, Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001, Portes & Rumbaut, 2001) can be linked to the outlook that these first and second generation students from different income levels have on their success.

First generation participants in households with low to mid incomes referred to their education as an experience they had to work hard on because of they felt that the odds were against them. Instead of viewing their experiences as a privilege, they described their educational experiences as a merited reward for their hard work given the disadvantage circumstances they faced while going to school. As Guillermo states, “I consider myself successful. I went from basically nothing, dropping out, to having a 3.0, being part of the various orgs [organizations]. Knowing what it takes to succeed and knowing that, you know, you have to believe in yourself in order for others to believe in you.” It is important to note that these participants’ sentiment was not that of entitlement, but more of a humble acknowledgement that they have worked for what they have. Manuel acknowledges that there are different experiences in education and he wishes those who are underprivileged had an opportunity to purposefully interact with those who come from backgrounds with more resources with the goal to learn and motivate each other. He states, “I was in a [disadvantaged] school district so we didn’t have as many opportunities, but there are also some people who are Latino and they get brought up in a little wealthier community where there’s more opportunities. I don’t feel they are part of

a number or a set of statistics.” Manuel’s main concern relates to the dichotomous ways that students from low-to-mid income families experience their education versus those who are from high-income households. One student explained how he sometimes feels guilty because of his ability to attend college and therefore, wants to make sure he helps others strive to achieve what he has achieved. He stated, “you know, if you’re in a place of privilege you should look back and think. I’m not supposed to be here alone.” The participant also explained how there is a point of pride that he feels because of the hard work he has put forth. He states, “so that’s why I always feel like you know, I can’t categorize people who aren’t doing well and people who are doing well. It’s how far along have you developed to understand how much you deserve.”

The interplay between a dismal learning environment and uncaring educators creates the expectation of low performance for many students. In a sense, the moral contract that is supposed to exist between schools (responsibility to teach valuable lessons and morals relating to life, educational and professional skills) and their students is broken (Louie, 2012, Sizer & Sizer, 1999) or unmaintained. The difference for these students was their self-assurance (supported by validating agents) that they were going to succeed no matter the challenge they faced. It is quite impressive that despite attending schools with low resources, low academic expectations and high dropout rates (Kasinitz, 2008), these students persevered and carved a path for continued success. Additionally, situated themselves in middle class environments viewed education differently than those who were lower income or even those who were native born Latinos living in the same communities as those from middle and low- income class.

PERSISTENCE IN RELATION TO ETHNIC AND GENDER IDENTITY

Racial and ethnic identification is important because it influences how minority students make sense of their school experiences and engagement (Carter & Segura, 1979, Fergus, 2012, Ogbu, 1978); therefore, as a pre-requisite to participation in the study, all participants were required to identify their nationality. In total, 13 students explained how their ethnic category identification had an impact on their academic outcomes, while 7 students stated that they often do not think about their success as it relates to their heritage or parent's country of birth, but how it relates to them being Latinos. Findings in this study suggest that there was no evidence of successful Latino male students explaining or correlating their success to their national origin or country of birth. However, the findings do suggest that participants used their panethnic identity of Latino or Hispanic as a source to connect, navigate and build community with their Latino peers. While the research on immigrants and children of immigrants discusses differences in achievement by national origin (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001, Rumbaut, 2005), it does not delve with great detail into the reasons why these differences exist. The findings in this study further warrant a need for this phenomenon to be studied further.

There was no evidence that the Latino male students from different ethnic backgrounds conceptualized their identities differently from others based on their ethnicity as it related to their success. Although many students discussed their ethnic pride, many of them explained how they did not actively think about their Latino ethnic background as it relates to success. In fact, they generalized their experiences and discussed how being Latino has mattered more in their educational journey. Latino

students explained that most non-Latino individuals acknowledge their ethnicity, not their national origin; therefore, they did not feel as though their experiences varied simply because they were from a different background than their peers.

Identity

In one sense, there has been an increase in diversity as new immigration patterns have emerged and younger groups of generations depart from their parents' cultural identity; however, one can argue that the identity of Latinos has been generalized, as individual cultural identities are homogenized under one umbrella (Alcoff, 2000). This pan-ethnicity is not only socially constructed, but oftentimes accepted by the very members of the Latino community (Oboler, 1995). Solely using this panethnic approach or lens to identifying members from the Latino community generalizes their experiences and does not acknowledge the multiplicity of the Latino community (Alcoff, 2000, Glazer, 1983, Schutte, 2000). To elucidate this concept, Frankie discussed how although he is proud of his Colombian background, he feels like the Latino population tries to compartmentalize their experiences based on their ethnic group identification, which in his opinion, is the wrong approach. He states, "I see people raise their flag, and they're really proud of their culture and heritage. I think that's important, but I feel like that's only part of their story and we should [as Latinos] be more united."

Part of the college maturation process is the exploration of self and identity. For the participants in this study, two major areas that shaped their collegiate experiences and ultimately helped them persist were their ethnic identity and gender identity. The findings suggest that while many participants felt connected to their nationality and ethnic background (it has helped them feel situated and remain grounded in American society),

they did not view their success differently from others based on their Latino ethnic identity. Latinos in the United States are used to having their nationality ignored, generalized or simplified to the term Hispanic/Latino. Many students in the study explained how “no one outside of their group of Latino friends cares about their nationality, they simply view them as a Hispanic male.” Masculinity was also a concept that the study participants discussed in relation to their identity. For Latino males, the messages of machismo simply reinforced the expectations for their gender through a culturally infused lens, even as gender roles for Latinos are very much in flux (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2008). These two dimensions to their identity will be discussed in the following section.

Ethnic Identity (*La Conexión Latina*)

Immigrant parents adopt American norms, but claim it is complicated, in part because they view it as contributing to the belief of rejecting their nationality. Identity work for first generation parents also involves cultural adjustment of the immigrant journey as they try to figure out how the new terms are being used to describe them, such as Latino or Hispanic in the dichotomous American black-white racial classification system (Mahalingam, 2006, Louie, 2012). Although all students acknowledged their Latino ethnic category, many stated that their identity as a Latino person has had a more salient influence on their educational experience. They explained how their Latino ethnic background is not oftentimes recognized; as others are unaware of the social, cultural, geographic, and political differences amongst the people from Latin American countries. To that end, the treatment they receive is aligned with whatever preconceived notions exist for Latino males. For example, Porfirio explained, “I think that being Dominican

hasn't really affected the whole process of college...but being Hispanic—yes.” He explained how outside of his Latino group of friends, no one identifies him as Dominican. He further details how non-Hispanic people see him as a Latino male and the treatment he receives from them is in line with how they would treat a Hispanic person, not necessarily a person from Dominican Republic. For many Latinos, this treatment manifests in the form of microaggressions. To illustrate this, Porfirio recounted an anecdote relating to his Dominican/Latino identity during a high school event, where they were playing rock music. Assuming that he would not like or understand rock music, they changed the music to bachata as he approached the table, a traditional type of music from the Dominican Republic. Porfirio stated that he felt as though “people just want to put you in that box and they only see you as that box, and that’s it.” He continued explaining how there was more to his identity, “I like people to see me not as an ethnicity or [as part of a] group of people...I’m not only Latino that’s only one piece of the picture...I’m also a student I’m also a scientist. I want to be this, I want to be that. So I like people to see me as Latino but know that there’s some more to me than just being Latino.” This narrative highlighted Porfirio’s racializing process within the educational context and demonstrated how others within those environments define the interactions they have with him. Porfirio’s narrative illustrated how oftentimes external forces, structures, and individuals define and frame others’ social world based on preconceived generalizations. Like many other student participants, Carlos explained how his culture, as it relates to his Peruvian background, was important in the way that he navigated his collegiate environment because he wanted to ensure that he was not fitting a pre-determined stereotype. As part of his values system, it was important for him to represent his culture

in his social and educational context and sought ways to educate others about it through casual, but intentional interactions and his membership in the campus Latino student club.

All of the participants identified their Latino ethnic category and most of them identified ways in which their ethnic heritage impacted their identity and their educational outcomes. Many of the students who discussed their experiences as it relates to their Latino ethnic group discussed how the values their families engrained in them as well as customs from their country have shaped how they approach their education. For example, for students like Misael, it was a culture shock for him when he arrived to his low-income neighborhood from the Dominican Republic. Coming from a college-educated “good” family, he saw that there was a difference in the way that Dominican males from his town in the United States behaved when compared to those from his native land. He explained,

The Dominican community here is not the Dominican community that I know [in the Dominican Republic]. Even the street people, the common folk over there have a lot more integrity than all the stuff you see here. It’s like they got brainwashed... so, I had a lot of reasons to hate everything about America-- and then high school made it even worse because now you’re dealing with the kids of those people...and fighting, and stealing, and drugs.

Because of how he viewed the Dominican population in his town in the United States, Misael felt as though he needed to contradict the negative stereotypes associated with the Dominican population. He discussed how the values learned in his homeland through his family helped him remain true to himself and his goals. In fact, many other participants echoed this very same sentiment. On the other hand, as a Peruvian student, Carlos often experienced others assigning him an ethnic identification of Mexican background simply through a combination of assumption based on his physical appearance. He oftentimes

felt that he had to educate others about the diversity within the Latino culture and how Latin America is comprised of 21 different countries. He felt as though that was something he learned from his mother—teach others about his heritage. He stated,

I guess being judged for being Latino like people automatically think they're Mexican here or Puerto Rican or Cuban. And they're like oh you're Mexican right? I'm like well... no I'm not that. Like I just smile it off. I'm not Mexican, I'm Peruvian. Like that's in South America. I guess I've come to a point where I like educating as well. So I'm like we could go eat sometime like I'll show you.

Students discussed how important it was to use their ethnicity as a tool to navigate their academic environment as well as a motivation to do well academically. This is illustrated by Jacobo's narrative as he explained how he uses his ethnic identity to his advantage by applying only to programs available for minorities. He explained, "like those minority programs on campus like I always try to apply to them and like say that I'm a Latino male. I would like to get into this program, I'm a first generation college student." He feels that by being a successful Latino male in an environment where he is the minority, that he is helping counter the negative stigma associated with Latino males. He seeks to not only take advantage of being one of the few minority applicants, but also wants the opportunity to educate others on the intellectual diversity amongst the Latino population. Marcos also shares this sentiment and explained how he finds that his academic success makes him part of a minority within a minority, "which as a Latino is very—I don't want to say rare, but it's not something that you don't see very often either." His success is a symbolic accomplishment and explained how it makes him feel. He states, "I feel like I have to push myself to meet a standard that I need to set for everybody else including people of my race...who feel that they can't do it." Other students, such as Arturo, also feel like they have to work more than others in order to succeed. He explained that,

...being that going to college here in the U.S. is such a big deal due to the job opportunities, the benefits of it just being a young educated Latino, being a minority also plays a big role because you know you're at a disadvantage as we would say compared to like a White male in society. Or we have to strive a little bit harder and work a little bit harder.”]

He felt that other Latino males do not have the same opportunities in the workplace and are discriminated against. He explained how there are “people with a Spanish name [that] apply [to jobs]...they don't get called back but [when they replace their name on the resume] with that of a White [person's] name they will get called back [for an interview].”

While all of the participants did not attribute their ethnic group identification to their success, they all discussed how being considered Latino has played a role in their academic success. The data illustrated that there was little evidence to support any conclusions generalizing the experiences of students from each ethnic category. The participants' narratives illustrate how race and ethnicity is not a straightforward concept and cannot be generalized by explaining the lived experiences of each group of students. It is impacted by the experiences in the racialization process for each student. This builds upon the research (Fergus, 2012, Logan, 2003, Noguera, 2012) that discusses how who argue that matters of racial and ethnic identities and experiences build on different mechanisms including how individuals are socialized, the expectations from their family members, how others perceive them, and their educational environments.

Masculinity

Half of the study participants from Dominican backgrounds indicated that their parents expected them to be the “men of the family.” Oftentimes, this expectation involves financially contributing to the household expenses. For some of the participants,

this expectation compromises their potential for academic success, as they have to work to contribute towards household expenses such as rent. Adonis explained the invalidating and stressful expectations his father had of him, “I give them [my parents] money for rent. And I don’t even live there right now. I live on campus. And I give them \$150 every single month. But then like there’s times that I don’t have the \$150 and he [my father] makes me feel like dirt. He makes me feel like garbage.” Adonis is one of three brothers and takes the lead in helping his family financially and with other family responsibilities. Federico explained how his father passed away when he was young and despite him having older brothers and sisters, he feels like he is, “the man of the house so I have to be there for her [mom] and help her out whenever she needs me.” Although he is not resentful of the responsibility, he feels that he is doing his family a favor, but it is not recognized as such by his mother, “... she sees that as like it’s obligated. Well that’s just like her mentality, whereas me it’s like [I’m] trying to do you [my mom] a favor.” On the other hand, Kenyon feels like he is more independent since his mother is not as involved in his academics. However, he feels some pressure from his mom. He states, “her expectations of me outside of school is just to help her out with the rent even though she knows I don’t want to be there. She knows that I’m capable of moving out now but she’s afraid of that so she kind of like she kind of doesn’t push me too much.” Many times, immigrant parents use this strategy to commit their children to the responsibilities of home with the hopes of maintaining their close connection to the family. It is also a strategy for parents that depend on their children for financial assistance to extend the length of assistance with finances and translation (Suárez- Orozco & Suárez- Orozco, 2001).

Cultural expectations of males, such as being strong and lacking emotion, form a “boy code” that includes the set of behaviors and rules of conduct such as being strong, tough, and independent (Pollack, 1998). To that end, although masculinity can have negative affect a students’ life, there are positive dimensions to these characteristics such as honor, integrity, and courage (Mirandé, 1997). These values were guiding forces in the everyday lives of the study participants.

Summary

This chapter was based on a comprehensive analysis of the participants’ narratives. Drawing from the conceptual frameworks of community cultural wealth, validation and self-efficacy, the data revealed that the participants’ families, friends, self-motivation, and involvement while impacted their college success. While there were some similarities in the way that successful Latino male students experienced college, there were variations when considering different factors, such as household income, first-generation college going status, and immigrant generational status. To that end, the major findings that resulted from the study included: (1) key people and experiences mattered in the success of Latino males; (2) successful Latino males have self-efficacy beliefs that positively influence their perseverance, optimism and performance; (3) first-generation and second-generation immigrants students have distinct differences in how they adjust and navigate the college environment and; (4) Latino males contextualize their persistence in relation to their ethnic and gender identity.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The focus of this study was to understand the ways in which successful Latino male students experienced their persistence in college. I examined the different factors that contributed to the success of the study participants, as perceived by them. Twenty Latino males participated in the study and the analysis of the data revealed that there are several salient themes that buttress the success of these students. This final chapter expands on the findings in the three sections. First, I provide a summary of the study. In the second section, I explain how the findings deepen our understanding of Latino male college persistence by examining the landscape of factors that cause Latinos to continue through their schooling through degree completion. The final section is comprised of the findings' implications for policy, practice and research as well recommendations for future research.

Summary

The shift in the literature addressing the issues that students from underrepresented backgrounds experience has progressed significantly. Although this evolution has advanced the conversation and services for traditionally underrepresented students, it has generalized the experiences of these students and recommended a one-size fits all approaches to serve this population. Considering the different characteristics of students, especially those that have varied experiences, is essential in implementing strategies to help them succeed in the collegiate environment. To help understand their experiences, the two questions that guided the research were, 1) How do Latino male

college students understand and explain their persistence in college? and (2) How, if at all, do their perceptions and explanations of persistence differ by ethnicity, being first generation college goer, household income or immigrant generation? In addressing both research questions, four findings emerged: (1) validating and invalidating agents of success: people and experiences matter; (2) successful Latino males have self-efficacy beliefs that positively influence academic optimism and performance; (3) first-generation and second-generation college students have distinct differences in how they adjust and navigate the college environments; and (4) Latino males contextualize their persistence in relation to their ethnic and gender identity.

Methodology

For this qualitative study, interviews were conducted over the course of two semesters—fall 2014 and spring 2015. In total, I interviewed 20 students who met the following criteria: (a) male; (b) identified as Latino (c) at least 2.0 cumulative GPA; (d) junior or senior class standing. The demographic breakdown of the participants were as follows: (10) Dominican, (2) Colombian, (2) Salvadorian, (2) Puerto Rican, (1) Peruvian, (3) multiethnic—a combination of Puerto Rican and Dominican (2), or Dominican and Argentinian (1) backgrounds. Most of the student participants were of traditional college age; however, four participants were non-traditional students who either returned to college to earn their bachelor's degree or had arrived to the United States and had experienced a delay in progressing through middle and junior high school.

The data collection process yielded 20 transcribed interviews, 20 interview memos and observational notes, and 10 analytic and thematic memos. I interviewed all participants for 45-90 minutes. For the data analysis process, I followed Creswell (2009)

and Tesch's (1990) steps of data and coding analysis which included: reading all transcriptions carefully and thoroughly, analyzing each for underlying meaning, making a list of topics and organizing them by their level of significance, using topics to analyze data and assigning topics to text, assembling data belonging to each category, conducting preliminary analysis, and recoding existing data, if necessary.

Implications for finding 1: Validating and invalidating agents of success

The goal of this study was to understand the strategies used by Latino males to successfully persist in college. To that end, the findings suggest that the importance of having supportive structures for Latino males cannot be underestimated. Reassuring experiences and people that they encounter throughout their formative years matter in their success. Although the study focused on their success in college, the study participants referred to experiences and people from their secondary years in education (even elementary) that made an impact in their lives. Experiences and people such as pre-college programs, supportive mentors amongst an unsupportive environment; high expectations from family members and opportunities to connect and build communities were essential to their growth and development in their educational careers.

An analysis of the findings suggests that the role of family members is likely to benefit the success of Latino males. While supportive family members help build students' confidence, which leads to success, acknowledging that unsupportive family members also play a role in students' lives is also necessary to acknowledge. This means that for educators and administrators in high schools and college, it is essential to create the structures that not only informs and involves family members, but also supports students and builds their confidence in their abilities. Importantly, educators and

administrators should customize their strategies for the population and needs of their student population instead of seeking blanket approaches that may not cater to the individual challenges facing their student cohorts. For example, a school coordinating an open house should consider whether its attendants are likely to be mostly Spanish-speaking or from low educational attainment backgrounds. Such considerations may help in successfully engaging the parents who may not fully understand the implications of attending college (i.e. college expenses, requirements of classes, student commitment to seek assistance). By setting up events such as career nights or orientations, schools and colleges may consider offering sections of these programs in Spanish; not assuming parents understand the policies and process for high school or college.

It is also essential for students to feel connected to their environments through peers and activities or programs that keep them engaged. While some participants did not have the capital that connected them to a network of people, they knew how to navigate the right circles that provided them with access to desired opportunities. These students used peers to navigate the circles neither they nor their parents had access to. This is why it is important for institutions of higher education to focus their efforts on creating spaces and opportunities for Latino males to engage and interact with peers. Students who connect with other students on matters of personal, academic and social development build communities, develop their emotional intelligence and learn to better contextualize their academic journey. Students strengthen their relationships and increase their access to networks through their involvement in campus activities. Involvement in activities such as advisement, leadership, study abroad, research with faculty, is important because it helps them build meaningful relationships that strengthen their capital. Students that

participated in academic opportunity programs also described the indelible impact they had on their development and growth. Through their participation in such programs, they found mentors, academic support and a supportive network of peers that fostered positive expectations of success.

Implications for Finding 2: Self-Efficacy Beliefs, Academic Optimism, and Performance

According to Bandura (1977), levels of self-efficacy can be measured in four ways: performance accomplishments (previous performance), vicarious experiences (observing others), social persuasion (suggestions from self or others), and emotional arousal (stress or anxiety) (Bandura, 1977). Therefore, creating opportunities for students to build up and support their confidence in personal, academic and social integration is essential for successful transition into college. Performance accomplishments help students feel proud and promote their ability to encourage and promote positive behaviors. Seeing others succeed is also a motivating factor that promotes self-efficacy beliefs, as students are motivated when others like them are experiencing educational gains. Hence, fostering, celebrating and supporting the environment where students are successful and supportive of one another will not only help boost the confidence of learners, but also promote an attitude of perseverance.

Implications for Finding #3: Navigating the College Environment – First and Second Generation College Students

Educators must understand that all Latino students are not the same and characteristics such as their immigrant generation shape their experiences and backgrounds. It is estimated that 21 percent of second-generation Hispanic children are

not fluent in English, compared to 43 percent of those that are first-generation (Fry & Passel, 2009). Therefore, sensitivity towards language and bilingualism is important in education and school settings. Latino students may speak English with their friends and professors, but when at home, students may respond in English or a blend between the Spanish and English language called, “Spanglish” (Ardila, 2005), to their parents. Therefore, higher education professionals need to be creative in the initiatives they create to cater to this student population, as their way of communicating may be multifaceted.

Implications for finding # 4: Persistence in Relation to Ethnic and Gender Identity

The experiences of these students were great examples of how race, class and gender intersect and shape their outlook on their education. Intersectionality contextualizes how socially constructed elements such as race, class and gender operate on societal (macro) and individual (micro) levels. The interplay of these elements is continuous and deeply impacts many levels of a marginalized individual’s experience within their settings, whether it is college, community or family. Providing programming that specifically caters to Latino males would provide the appropriate messages to the population conveying that they matter and are a priority. Programming has to be relatable to their experiences and must meet their needs. For this reason, utilizing available resources that exist in students’ communities such as Latino families, community leaders/organizations, and other successful Latinos (i.e., alumni) would raise awareness on the multipronged approach needed to successfully transition students through their years of schooling.

Recommendations for Practice, Policy, and Research

The road to college graduation does not begin upon entering the doors of post-secondary academia; it begins the moment students start their schooling in elementary and secondary grades. This is a process that parents, students, schools and college personnel need to actively engage with in order to successfully promote student success. Findings for this study are important to several active agents interested in higher education, including administrators, policy makers, and researchers. The following section provides recommendations and directions for future policies, research and practices.

Higher Education Practitioners

Higher education practitioners have the ability to shape the experiences and provide the necessary resources for their students' success. However, in order to do this, it is important for institutional leaders to assess their campus climate and understand who is their Latino student population. Understanding the climate of their campus may help campus personnel in learning students' intersectionality and the interplay between their identities and how well their campus meets their needs. Learning their student population will help in allocating resources and services for Latino students as well as for faculty and staff to understand how to better serve the Latino population.

One way in which practitioners better serve Latino students is to create "safe spaces" for Latino students to gather, socialize and build a sense of community. Similar to the safe spaces in college settings for the LGBTQ community, this center would host programming, create opportunities for Latino faculty members to engage with Latino students in a mentorship or advisory role, and help engage and inform the community and

parents about college-related matters. Another initiative that would be highly beneficial to Latino college students is for institutions to create initiatives to specifically support (and celebrate) first-generation college students. First in the family programs have started forming in some institutions; however, the practice has not been wide spread, as this would mean that the university would have to allocate resources to support this population of students.

Latino male prospective students should be exposed to marketing materials and messages that stimulate their interest and help them feel connected to the university. Recruitment materials (including an institutions' website) and events such as open houses should target those students and families who may not understand the college-going process and provide sessions for parents whose primary language is Spanish. This will yield parents' interest and avoid feelings of alienation. Oftentimes, first-generation Latino college students do not engage their parents in the college-going process because they feel as though their parents will not understand their college-going behaviors and decisions. By providing them with a platform to support and encourage their children as they embark in college, it is likely that there will be a collaborative approach to student success, especially for Latino males, as family is usually at the core of their success. Customizing the offerings of events for parents should not only be restricted to those intended to recruit students, but also to orientations and academic-year family engagement events.

In line with the findings of this study, I recommend that administrators think critically and thoughtfully about the services provided to underserved students. Services and programs should engage in value-centered interactions such that interpersonal

exchanges are grounded in Latino students' values (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007). Such values could take the form of understanding the importance of their family, community, masculinity, and desire to succeed. These can be coupled with strength-based practices of implementing initiatives focusing on family and validation, mentorship, cultural congruity, research opportunities and professional development (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007).

Another important recommendation is for administrators to make decisions based on an understanding of students' multidimensional identity and responsibilities. Traditional college students are often thought of being engaged with their college experience and campus environment. However, for many students who are burdened with the rising costs of education coupled with their household responsibilities, immersing in the college culture is difficult. Many students are serving the role of surrogate parent to their sibling and financial contributor to the household, while still being expected to perform well academically. Ensuring that students are well supported when on campus is important. This includes providing services that include having key administrative offices opened for longer hours; providing adequate parking spaces for students who are non-traditional and commuters; designing opportunities for engagement during non-traditional hours of programming so that all types of students are able to partake in the college culture.

Lastly, practitioners should provide opportunities for students to socialize with high-achieving students. This study's findings suggests that there is a benefit to having students interact and engage with high-achieving students and those that have self-efficacy beliefs promoting educational success. Peer mentoring is a possible outlet for

engaging students with other high-achieving students. Offices for career and tutoring assistance could also develop a peer assistant component to their departments where through formal training, students are equipped to help their peers in reviewing resumes, establishing a professional social media presence, and connecting their academic strengths to potential job opportunities.

Policy Makers

First and second generation immigrant children are the most rapidly growing segment of the U.S. child population. The future character of American society and economy will be intimately related to the adaptations of today's children of immigrants (Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Native-born Latino high school graduates are enrolling in college at a higher rate than their foreign-born counterparts, and that is especially true of the second generation, the U.S.-born children of immigrants. About 42 percent of second-generation Latinos in the 18-to-24-age range are attending college, which is almost the same as the rate for Whites, 46 percent. The figure is lower both for first generation, 26 percent, and for all those with U.S.-born parents—the third generation and higher—36 percent (Fry, 2002). Policy makers should not only be aware of the population growth and diversity of the Latino population, but also actively plan for the influx of children enrolling in college. While increasing enrollment numbers is good the lack of degree attainment amongst the Latino population demonstrates that efforts and resources need to be expanded. For this reason, I also recommend that HSIs carefully design services that help their Latino male population succeed in their academic environments by bolstering student readiness for college and provide counseling, guidance and opportunity for family involvement.

Participants in this study discussed how college access programs such as the Educational Opportunity Fund program has been helpful in their ability to enroll in college and also persist. While it is up to institutional personnel to implement similar programs at their respective institutions, policy makers may facilitate the implementation of such initiative by providing funding for both the summer bridge experience and academic year support. Such programs provide students from historically underrepresented backgrounds with the necessary academic and sociocultural support to successfully transition into college. Additionally, these programs have reported high rates of graduation amongst African American and Latino students. Continued support for successful initiatives such as academic opportunity programs will contribute towards increasing the graduation of students that partake in it.

Researchers

Researchers should consider carefully selecting the appropriate terminology to narrate phenomena impacting those from Latino backgrounds. The category of “people of color” should be explained and used critically so to not rest on the binary opposition between White and non-White (Schutte, 2000). This creates a hierarchy of normality where White is the common norm and non-White individuals are viewed as different than the norm. In order to work towards the engagement and embracing of different cultures, we need to acknowledge the challenges and experiences of different groups and consider those when designing a research study. Despite this study’s findings suggesting that there are not many differences in the way that students from different Latino ethnic group experience college, it is imperative to understand that students’ cultures are not only represented by their background, but also their experiences in the United States.

Improving data collection strategies reflecting heterogeneity and allowing for disaggregation would provide a better explanation for the reasons behind the differences in persistence levels from Latino ethnic subgroups. Suggested areas to take into account are students' status as a part-time, full-time, re-entry, transfer, commuter in both two-and-four year institutions. In return, this will provide researchers and practitioners with the necessary information to better design their studies and practices. In essence, researchers should be cautious about generalizations that fail to take into account the internal experiences and dimensions within groups (Schutte, 2000).

Researchers should expand efforts to understand a wide array of factors that can impact the persistence of students. The present study focused on four factors; however, further examining the experiences of these students can benefit institutions, researchers and policy makers. In that same vein, studies engaging the non-persisting population would help in understanding what contributed to their decision to exit the institution.

Future Research

Because the data on Latinos is evolving, there are many ways the focus of this study could be further expanded especially by comparing outcomes of different groups. While this study's sample included students who are on track to graduation, comparing these students with those that stopped out and did not persist would yield interesting results as it relates to the differing strategies and factors of success and non-academic success. Additionally, comparing successful Latino males with Latina females fitting the same criteria could strengthen the body of research by providing a comprehensive picture of successful strategies for both males and females. This is especially the case if there is a comparison of first generation immigrant and second-generation Latina females as it

compares to Latino males. Future research studies may also focus on successful Latino males across different institution types. Designing the study as such could provide researchers with an understanding of whether successful students explain their reasons for success the same way as others. This would help practitioners better understand how to plan for students' needs.

An additional area that should be further studied is how education opportunity programs such as the Educational Opportunity Fund program impacts Latino students in different settings including two-year colleges, predominantly White institutions, and Hispanic Serving Institutions. The body of research on the experiences of African American students in these types of institutions has been expansive and as a result, meaningful practices have developed, yielding success. Investigating the outcomes of the Latino student populations in these different types of institutions may also yield practices that contribute to the success of Latino students in the university setting.

Concluding Thoughts

The intent of this study was to understand how successful Latino men perceive their educational trajectory and success and to explore whether there were any differences amongst this group of students. The research design considered the perspectives of successful Latino male students, rejecting the deficit lens that tries to remedy or document the struggles of the deficiencies in students. Although addressing the struggles of a minoritized population is important, I believe it is even more crucial to understand what these students are doing well and what supportive structures we can establish to ensure that we nurture and set up the factors that yield the desired results. The research on student success suggests that students who have positive self-efficacy beliefs and

encounter several validating moments throughout their development of community cultural wealth that shape their educational experiences (Harper, 2006, 2009, 2012, Palmer & Strayhorn, 2008, Rendón, 2004, Yosso, 2005.) On the other hand, solely focusing on the problems socializes administrators and researchers to focus on students from underserved backgrounds as problems, instead of resilient beings (Harper, 2015). Similar to the goal in academia for students, we must empower ourselves to break through the status quo and challenge conventional practices or research topics that do not meet the needs of the students or address any new phenomena impacting this population. As concluded from this study, all students have the community cultural wealth and self-efficacy to succeed.

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