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DAME LA MANO, SOMOS HERMANOS: EXAMINING LATINO MALE STUDENTS' PATH TO SUCCESS AT A MINORITY SERVING INSTITUTION

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DAME LA MANO, SOMOS HERMANOS: EXAMINING LATINO MALE STUDENTS' PATH TO SUCCESS AT A MINORITY SERVING INSTITUTION

By July P. Coleman

We recommend acceptance of this dissertation in partial fulfillment of the candidate's requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

The candidate has completed the oral defense of the dissertation.

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ABSTRACT

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The "vanishing Latino male" has a number of elements impacting the Latino male's postsecondary experience. Factors shaping Latino male students' college experiences include family, academic support, and co-curricular opportunities. The purpose of this study was to address the decreasing number of Latino male students from enrollment to graduation in higher education. This phenomenological study developed a deeper understanding of influences and support shaping the graduating Latino male in their postsecondary journey. The intent of this study was to develop a comprehensive understanding of critical influences shaping Latino males' experiences in college. A triangulated approach was used to facilitate three phases of data collection. The work produced from this study contributes to identifying what Latino males believe are tools to build student success as Latino males.

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INTRODUCTION

In just twenty years, from 1996 to 2016, the United States population doubled in size, largely as a result of the growth in the Latinx population (Nasser, 2018). With the large increase of Latinxs living in the United States, the educational enrollment averages for Latinxs have also shifted. Currently, the number of Latinxs completing high school has significantly increased since the mid-1990's (Bauman, 2017). Overall, in a ten-year span from 1996 to 2006, the Latinx enrollment in postsecondary institutions more than doubled, from 0.7 million to 1.7 million (Bauman, 2017). However, college enrollment trends show a decrease in Latino male students—a phenomenon known as the "vanishing Latino male" in higher education (Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2009, p. 158). This trend is somewhat ironic, as at one point in the 20th century, postsecondary graduation rates for Latino males surpassed that of Latina females, irrespective of the fact that both groups fell below other racial and ethnic groups (Cammarota, 2004).

Background and Context of the Problem

While the growth of the Latinx population shaped college enrollment, among the Latinx community, "in Fall 2012, Latino males represented only 6% and females represented 8% of the total undergraduate population" (Excelencia in Education,

2015). The National Center for Educational Statistics reported 38% of Latino males received an associate or bachelor's degree in comparison to 62% of Latina females in 2013-2014 (NCES, 2017). Even now, higher education enrollment rates in the Latinx community indicate Latino male students still lag behind Latina female students with "10 percentage points [difference] for Hispanic young adults" (NCES, 2019, p. 3).

One factor contributing to the vanishing Latino male in higher education is the lack of support systems throughout their K-12 experience, which shapes and limits their decision-making process regarding post high school options. The decision-making process that leads Latino males away from higher education and directly into a vocation without a high-school degree or any postsecondary education is one aspect of the vanishing Latino male phenomenon that needs further examination. Clark, Ponjuan, Orrock, Wilson, and Flores (2013) found Latino males attending high schools in underprivileged areas are without well trained/credited teachers and have insufficient faculty-to-student ratios. Another component of the disconnect with Latino male students' pursuit of education is the lack of Latino male professionals represented in the education system (Halx & Ortiz, 2011).

For those Latino males who do enroll in college, successfully navigating the higher education environment can present additional challenges. To support and improve Latino male engagement and success in college, higher education professionals must understand the factors that contribute in Latino males' social and emotional capital. For instance, understanding factors contributing to Latino male interaction with on-campus programs and academic dynamics leading to college graduation could help improve the overall engagement and success for Latino males in higher education. Based on both the

historical and current context, the intent of this study is to uncover factors—academic and personal—supporting Latino male college students at a four-year institution.

Problem Statement

Historically, the United States has viewed education as a gateway to economic success as well as social mobility (Cabrera, Guzman, Turner, Malin, & Cooper, 2016). Better employment opportunities along with a larger annual salary are more likely connected to those with a higher level of education. In the past, racial and ethnic minorities have not had the same access to economic opportunities as the White population due to systemic barriers that often adversely impact their ability to receive postsecondary education. For Latinx communities, access to the education system has many obstacles and limitations. If Latino males are not able to enroll in early childhood centers with the use of their family resources and explore early skill sets for school readiness, they are less likely to be as prepared as their counterparts for (Winsler, Gara, Alegrado, Castro, & Tavassolie, 2019). Reasons for the inability to enroll in early education centers are mainly due to financial stressors (Cabrera et al., 2016). Already drawn back in early education centers, Latino males' educational K-12 journey and their financial opportunities to enroll in a postsecondary institution continue with a significant disadvantage due to the lack of college knowledge to make informed decisions (Clark et al, 2013). As a result, Latino males lag behind Black and White males in preparation and willingness for school, which can lead to weak relationships with instructors. The problem this study will address is the decreasing number of Latino male students from enrollment to graduation in higher education. This study will research how to engage Latino male students in their higher education experience with a focus on persistence.

Purpose and Research Question

Current literature identifies a gap between Latino male college enrollment and graduation numbers (Murphy & Murphy, 2018; Pérez & Taylor, 2016). To identify what causes the gap, additional research is necessary to identify factors that support and contribute to Latino male success in postsecondary education. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to a) identify the types of support necessary for Latino males to be successful from the beginning of their undergraduate career through graduation and b) gain an understanding of how to strengthen their support system to promote a positive postsecondary experience. Results from this study provide practical insights to be shared with institutional and community stakeholders to create on-campus spaces and support for students to thrive while in college and complete their degree. The main research question guiding this study was: How do Latino male students enrolled in an urban, research university make meaning of the support they have received to succeed in college?

Research Design Overview

A qualitative research design allowed me to collect descriptive data by using the participants' own words to examine how Latino males view their experience in higher education (Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2015). A phenomenological approach was necessary to understand the lived experiences and use the collected research to proactively make changes to improve life experiences for others (Morgan, 2011; Delamont, 2012). A critical construct in the research process was analyzing the data and examining how students made meaning of their experiences with an emphasis on the "intentionality of consciousness where experiences contain both the outward appearance

and inward consciousness based on memory, image and meaning" (Creswell, 1998, p. 52). Through a qualitative, phenomenological study, Latino male students enrolled in an urban, research university shared their interpretations for on-campus student programs, organizations, and academic outreach as support during their collegiate career. My role as the researcher was to "understand the multiple realities from the perspectives of participants" (Bloomberg & Volpe, p. 43, 2016).

Research was collected from Georgia State University (GSU), a bachelor and associate degree awarding, public, research Minority Serving Institution (MSI) located in Atlanta, Georgia. Its campus consisted of a downtown Atlanta location primarily serving bachelor and graduate degree-seeking students, as well as five local two-year college campuses known as Perimeter College (PC) at GSU. Participants interviewed for this study attended the four-year Atlanta campus. GSU enrolled more than 52,000 students with 10% of students identifying as Latinx. Except for gender diversity, GSU surpassed the national average in ethnic, geographic, and the overall diversity score in the most recent 2019 report of College Factual (Georgia State University Rankings, 2018). GSU's enrollment consisted of 40.9% male students in comparison to 59.1% female, which paralleled the national college enrollment data between male and female students (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Due to the increasing gap in higher education enrollment and graduation of Latino males, recruiting study participants in their final year of their undergraduate career provided a direct and collective perspective of their social and emotional capital and experiences. Ten Latino males were selected to participate. In this study, Latino males within one year of graduating with a bachelor's degree offered more

insights regarding their success due to their experiences compared to Latino males who had been enrolled in college for less time.

Through qualitative inquiry, an in-depth, open-ended, three phase approach was conducted in this phenomenological study. I selected a focus group meeting as the first phase to identify similar experiences and common themes from the participants. The data gathered in the focus group discussions explored the central problem of this study. Phase 2, written reflection on their undergraduate experience, helped individuals share essential points in a non-judgmental, free of distraction, comfortable setting. Written reflection or journaling encourages self-reflection and critical thinking skills (Duran & Jones, 2019). The goal of Phase 3 was to understand how participants make meaning of their lived realities. In Phase 3, individual interviews, highlighted reflective thoughts on the transition from the participants' first year to their final year in college. Additionally, interviewing participants as the last step of the process allowed the interviewees to connect the first two phases with the final phase to validate the results (Fellows & Liu, 2015). Seidman (2013) stated, "At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (p. 9). Ultimately, all three phases authenticated the experiences of the participants while providing rich and insightful data.

Significance of the Study

This study was significant because it examined an often-overlooked issue in higher education: Latino male students are not enrolling and persisting through graduation at rates equal to their peers. A list of challenges facing Latino males in pursuing postsecondary goals consists of a lack of academic preparation, unfamiliarity

with postsecondary opportunities, and unfamiliarity of financial impacts (Shelton, 2019). Using a phenomenological approach, this study helped define how Latino males can become persistent college students. In the most recent annual National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) report, four themes were identified based on ten engagement indicators: academic challenge, learning with peers, experiences with faculty, and campus environment (NSSE, 2018). Throughout the report, first-year and senior male students, generally, fell below the year-to-year means and standard deviations in comparison to female students in varying assessment categories. The study was significant due to the contributions the findings made to push supportive, social experiences into more advanced initiatives to support Latino males in higher education.

Researcher Assumptions

Based on my own professional experiences and my current research, the assumptions I made about Latino males were based on differentiating pressures between Latino males and Latina females in their postsecondary paths. The differentiating pressures for Latino males directly contributed to a stark disparity in college completion between these two groups. Latino males are often looked to as the person responsible to lead the family into better financial stability. Another pressure includes a lack of understanding the college experience and balancing family responsibilities.

In general, the Latinx families I have worked with knew the importance of their children earning a postsecondary education and contributing to the overall success in the child's life but were limited in understanding the kind of support they could offer as a family. Latino males' experience of enrollment in colleges and universities often clashes with home family and cultural expectations. The call for Latino males to work in lower

skilled occupations with immediate income pulls them away from the opportunity of enrolling and engaging in higher education. Families of first-generation college students may also have difficulty fully understanding the various responsibilities necessary for their child to be a successful and engaged student. General family expectations, whether academic or social, are to bring pride to the family (Rodriguez, Mira, Myers, Morris & Cardoza, 2003). In my experience, I knew being the first in my family to graduate high school in the United States and the accolades I accumulated (i.e. Honors, extracurricular clubs and sports, winning homecoming queen, etc.) brought pride in my family. After graduating from high school, I did not feel my family had expectations for me to enroll in college or pursue any form of postsecondary education. Despite not having a conversation of the expectations after high school, my family shared their beliefs that the opportunity to attend any postsecondary education system was only available to community members with financial stability. Since there was not an absolute expectation to save money for college, I did not feel pressure to enroll. I felt my contribution to my family's pride was met when I graduated high school.

While the Latinx population in the United States has increased, funding and staffing in postsecondary institutions still do not meet the needs to support the represented population. Professionally, I witnessed institutions using scarce and overlapping resources to support Latinx students. As an example, I noticed institutions funneling Latinx students into cultural spaces intended for other students, such as African-Americans, which further depleted the resources offered. Along with limitations in self-identifying, cultural spaces, I believe there were less engaged Latino males in higher education because of the missing mentoring components, as well as a lack of on-

campus professional members that Latino male students could relate to, receive guidance from, or view as role models. I assumed Latino male's need to see themselves in professional ranks of higher education would build their efficacy towards graduating and being successful.

Definitions of Terms

The following definitions clarify how various terms and concepts are used in this proposal:

Student Engagement: College student interaction with institutional members and resources that positively encourage the student's retention and progression to graduation (Kuh, 2013).

First-Generation College Student: A first-generation student is the first in their immediate family (legal guardian) to attend a two-year or four-year degree awarding institution (Vasquez-Salgado, Greenfield, & Burgos-Cienfuegos, 2015).

Hispanic or Latino: The Latino population is racially and ethnically diverse with various pan-ethnic labels used to identify it. According to the Census Bureau (2018), Hispanic or Latino ethnicity is defined as "a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race."

Latinx: The term 'Latinx' emerged in 2004 (but did not have a significant presence in the lexicon until 2014) and is used as a gender inclusive term referring to those of Latin descent (Salinas & Lozano, 2017).

Minority Serving Institutions: Umbrella term that includes Hispanic Serving Institutions,

Tribal Colleges and Universities, Historically Black Colleges & Universities, and Asian American and Pacific Islander Serving Institutions that account for significant minority enrollment (Flores & Park, 2013).

Predominantly White Institutions: Institutions that account for more than 50% of White students in their enrollment (Flores & Park, 2013).

Social Capital: A supply of human resources inherited or acquired and may differ in quantity and quality pertaining to social development (Bourdieu, 1989)

Student Success: Postsecondary persistence in either a four-year or two-year institution. Additionally, the term defines the preparation of students to complete future personal, professional, and academic goals contributing towards their collegiate journey (Murphy & Murphy 2018).

Thriving: Used to describe students who are intellectually, socially, and emotionally engaged in college (Pérez & Sáenz, 2017)

Validation: Builds social capital through in-and-out of class agents enabling, confirming and a supportive process fostering academic and interpersonal development (Rendon, 1994).

White: A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa (Census Bureau, 2018).

Researcher Self-Reflection

As a researcher in this study, I am a member of the Latinx community and I identify as a cisgender, Latina female. I was raised in a single parent home by my father who identified as a cisgender, Latino male. As an immigrant from Colombia, South America, my father never completed high school or received a GED. My educational

background consists of schooling in predominantly White, suburban and rural communities. I did not have any intention, nor was I pressured to attend a postsecondary educational institution. Fortunately, a high school mentor challenged me to attempt one semester at any higher educational institution. During my undergraduate career, my connection with other students, life-altering experiences, and on campus support channeled me to pursue a graduate degree in higher education after completion of my undergraduate degree. After committing several years in the field as a professional, my doctoral degree pursuit adds to my educational value and collective advancement.

In addition, other social identities are as follows: I am married to a cisgender, African-American male; I have two daughters and a step-daughter; I do not have living, present parents or siblings. I am a member of the higher education community and provided over six years of service to students – having served the Latinx community through student success efforts as well as retention, progression, and graduation rates. My own experiences in education, both as a student and educator, my origins in family, and self-awareness in cultural identification shaped my research lens.

This lens affects my positionality in research. The goal of my research is to highlight strategies for engaging Latino male students, thus bridging the gap between enrollment and retention. During the collection of data and research, I represent the overlapping insider/outsider status. I can relate to a few of the research findings from the literature regarding Latinx college students, such as overcoming difficult decisions between an educational pursuit and instances in life with financial impacts. As an insider, I am the first in my family to graduate from high-school and transition to a postsecondary institution. My single-parent household was also a low-socioeconomic

background. Altogether, the little support I received in high school in conjunction with a general lack of knowledge regarding higher education led me to feel unprepared, ill-equipped, and scared to attend college. I recognize that as a female, the educational background and achievements I possess separate me from the group I am detailing in my research. Currently, my role as a member of higher education and a professional makes me an outsider to students at Georgia State University and limited in face-to-face interactions. Both my identity and my command in leadership are, in relation, influences from my undergraduate and graduate experiences as a Latina female student.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to develop a deeper understanding of factors that shape the graduating Latino male-identifying student experience at a Minority Serving Institution (MSI). Informed by my work with Latinx students throughout my career, I sought to discover factors contributing to or hindering Latino male college student success. By identifying these factors, I hoped to provide valuable insight on how institutions might improve Latino male enrollment to graduation rates. The following chapters will complete the introductory foundation of the study through a review of literature in Chapter II, followed by the methodology used in the study in Chapter III.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

High school graduation and college enrollment continues to rise in the past decade for Latinx students (Gurantz, Hurwitz, and Smith, 2016). For the prosperity of Latinx students in postsecondary education, distinguishing what engages students to enroll and graduate is critical. In 2011, degree attainment was as low as 8% for bachelor's degrees and 13% for associate degrees among Latinx students compared to Whites at 11% for bachelors and 21% at associate degrees (Fry & Lopez, 2012). According to the United States Census Bureau of 2015, "over the last decade, there has been a decline in college enrollment rates for all male racial and ethnic groups" (Freeman & Martinez, 2015, p. 68) with the decline in Latino male enrollment steeper than that of White and Black males. While the gap of postsecondary enrollment to graduation between Latinx male and female students is slowly closing, emphasis was placed on Latino males since higher education enrollment and graduation rates indicate Latina female students surpass Latino male students (Murphy & Murphy, 2018). As stated in Chapter I, the purpose of this phenomenological study was to:

1. Identify types of support necessary for Latino males to be successful from the beginning of their undergraduate career through graduation at a minority serving

institution.

2. Gain an understanding of the support systems that promote a positive postsecondary experience.

Identifying support and engagement strategies can provide insights to develop models of student success for Latino males. This literature review will explore the gap between Latino male college student enrollment and graduation rates from a historical and environmental context.

Background and Overview

Latinx families have an interest in their children's education but due to cultural, cross continental expectations, many are unaware of how to support a future college student (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001). While Latinx families value "*familismo* (familism) and *ser buen educado* (being well educated) [which] impact Latino's educational attainment" (Pérez, 2017, p. 124), Latina female students have a stronger presence in institutions of higher education and are more supported by family members than Latino male students. For example, Harris (2005) reported that "Latino mothers tend to be strict with their teenage daughters while, in many cases, the sons are given free rein" (p. 7). The systemic expectation from Latinx mothers towards their female daughters includes having an education, which is one of the reasons Latina female enrollment numbers are higher than Latino male students.

Year after year, Latino male students represent the smallest demographic in the U.S. education pipeline of students entering postsecondary education. Sáenz and Ponjuan (2009) wrote of the vanishing effect of Latino males in postsecondary education and established the concept of "the vanishing Latino male student." Instead of enrolling at

higher education institutions, Latino males typically enter low-paying jobs right out of high school (Carrillo, 2016). Developing effective support for Latino males is necessary to reduce "the vanishing Latino male student" effect in college enrollment and ultimately, graduation. Exploration into the decision-making process which leads Latino males directly into a vocation without a degree or any postsecondary education can provide insights into how to support Latino males to degree attainment.

This review of literature begins with an examination of the knowledge, skills, and resources gained through pre-college opportunities, family contributions, and on-campus support for Latino male students to thrive in higher education. The national data did not indicate high success rates for Latino males in relation to higher education, yet there have been a few, select institutions contradicting the national data (Pérez & Taylor, 2016). While there have been stories in scholarly literature portraying the problems of Latino males' enrollment to graduation rates, researchers have not moved to produce many models, policies, or practices in support specific to Latino males (Pérez & Taylor, 2016). Although Latino males were funneled into general support programs for minority students, educators still did not find the need to create specific support programs for Latino males (Pérez & Taylor, 2016). Pérez and Taylor (2016) also concluded that not all "Latino males possess the knowledge, skills, or resources needed to succeed in higher education" (Pérez & Taylor, 2016, p. 1). Therefore, this literature review focuses on the K-12 experience, financial decision-making considerations, family cultural expectations and emotional impact, and the on-campus environment.

Latino Male Student Success: Impacting Elements

Various factors contribute to Latino male success, on-campus engagement and efficacy in college. While on-campus experiences play a significant role in a student's higher education success, pre-college factors also contribute to how students fare in their undergraduate experience. Amongst the varying contributing factors, kindergarten through 12th grade experiences either help Latino male students build college confidence or tear it down (Sáenz, Ponjuan, & Figueroa, 2016). The experiences potentially impact and guide them towards or away from postsecondary education. Some of the positive impacting elements in their K-12 experience include access to information regarding obtaining a college degree, understanding the financial responsibility necessary to further their education past high school, and being cognizant of family expectations (Murphy & Murphy, 2018). The literature provides insight on negative and positive influences impacting postsecondary enrollment. One of the negative impacts include college professors complaining that Latinx students lack high-level thinking and problem-solving skills (Murphy & Murphy, 2018). The literature also shares the importance of preparing Latinx students diligently in their high school career for a strong academic experience as students potentially enter college.

K-12 Experiences

Social rules and norms are outlines of how people should exist or develop their identity to be accepted in society (Bispinch-Funke, 2017). European beliefs about identity were used to propel social norms in education (Baker, 2012). College access with "traditional models that are built on White, middle-class values dismiss the perspectives and contributions of Latino males and perpetuate deficit-based models of education" (Pérez & Taylor, 2016, p. 14). As society began to construct the ideal

educational system such as students needing to come from homes with educated parents, some social rules used in the formation of the foundation of the system created inequalities for people of color (Rendón, 2008). Many elements impact Latino males' academic success, beginning with their experiences in primary, middle, and high school. Latino males enrolled in high schools in underprivileged areas are one of the exemplified elements found by Clark, Ponjuan, Orrock, Wilson, and Flores (2013). Schools that lack well-trained teachers and do not have a sufficient teacher-to-student ratio also negatively impact Latino male success (Clark et al., 2013). Research examining high school enrollment compositions with differences in race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status have proven that student learning varies depending on where they are enrolled. For example, Ryabov and Van Hook (2007) found Latinx adolescent students learn less at higher socioeconomic status schools than when attending low socioeconomic status schools. While the majority of Latino males attend schools in areas without the same resources needed to academically succeed as those of their non-Latino counterparts, some Latino male students have been able to persist and enroll in a postsecondary institution. Inequities in the school system directly impact Latino male students' decisions about whether to pursue postsecondary education.

Counselors and high school college advisors are meant to provide all students with information to access postsecondary education, navigate through academic choices, and provide emotional and psychological support. As a minority population, Latino males rely heavily on their guidance and the accuracy of the information to fill in gaps of knowledge (Pérez & Sáenz, 2017). Rodriguez and Oseguera (2015) state the underperformance of Latinx students in college is due to their experiences in

underperforming high schools, such as lacking proper mentoring or high expectations, as well as facing cultural bias. In addition to missing key positive, influential experiences with teachers in academic settings, Latino males and White males identify with different experiences from their K-12 journey based on disciplinary outcomes. Complicating the educative process is the historical fact that too often, the Latino male struggle in K-12 is considered behavioral rather than a representation of a lack of resources (Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, & Rosales, 2005). Administrators are more likely to link the disciplinary action with Latino males as a behavioral or learning disability compared to how they perceive the White male behavior. For example, White males are less likely to be identified with learning disabilities when involved in disciplinary action as opposed to Latino males whose actions are considered more than behavioral (Pérez & Sáenz, 2017). These responses to Latino males cause guidance counselors to be less likely to push postsecondary education opportunities (Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2009). For Latino males, experiencing a level of inequity in a disciplinary process can compel them to drop-out of school. Nieto (as cited in Halx & Ortiz, 2011) considers a life achievement such as earning a high school diploma is "indispensable as a gateway to higher learning" (p. 417). If Latino males are not supported to reach such a life achievement, they are less likely to find interest in postsecondary options (Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2009). Despite these many social constructs, for Latino males, the information they obtain in high school can continue to build their skills towards completing a college admissions process (Huerta, 2015, p. 120).

High school teachers play a vital role in many aspects of the students' tenure in high school. Although society expects teachers to create positive experiences for

students despite nationality, gender, race, and socioeconomic status, most teachers develop perceptions of their students based on their background, socioeconomic status, and high school progression (Green, 2002). As a result, the perceived understanding of their students leads to motivation that could encourage or hinder students from pursuing postsecondary options. When it comes to their understanding of the student's family's involvement, researchers have disputed the "lack of care about their children's education which is often derivative from misunderstandings of actions by these families" (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001, p. 120). For example, the lack of English proficiency can be interpreted as a lack of interest from parents who must rely on their children to interpret for them. As first-generation students, aside from their responsibilities for their in-class assignments, they often translate documents into Spanish or decipher and connect any offered educational support services to their families if they choose to better themselves.

Emotional and Cultural Impact of Family and Peer Expectations

Latinx families hold different expectations for males and females based on cultural values and beliefs. These expectations are often based on sociocultural blueprints of male gender roles in Latinx families known has machismo (Nuñez et al., 2015). Machismo demands reverence and obedience from people, especially in family settings (Mirandé, 1985). Mirandé (1985) posits the relationship between a father and his children, especially male children, to be formal and respected. Furthermore, the authoritarian power and dominance from the father creates a distant and formal relationship with their children which "creates dependence, stifles normal personality development, and discourages achievement in children" (Mirandé, 1985, p. 167). The term machismo developed as native Mexican men found themselves unable to protect

"their women" from theft and rape during the Spanish Conquest of the 1520's (Mirandé, 1997). According to Mirandé (1997), during this period, native Mexican men felt the need to overcompensate for their feelings of weakness and powerlessness, thus machismo was a way to conceal their sense of inferiority.

Gutmann (2007) argues that the machismo term has taken on negative traits in the United States among Mexican, Mexican American, and Latin American men. By contrast, Nuñez et al. (2015) describe the "machismo" sociocultural construct through expectations of masculinity in Latino males' roles in society that have a more positive connotation. For example, "men are taught to be responsible for the needs, concerns, and the financial wellbeing of a large and far-flung family system, which may include family members in another state or country" (Vega-Costas, 2012). Vega-Costas (2012) elaborated on the dignity and pride in Latinx culture which causes males to believe in the importance of working for money now rather than studying for a degree that may offer a larger compensation in the future. A student with significant non-academic responsibilities may have less energy for engaging in educationally enriching activities. Clark et al. (2013) found in their research study, from a variety of high school administrators, the ways in which Latinx families "still exert pressure on their sons to contribute financially to their families" (p. 462) even when encouraging the Latino male to explore their postsecondary education options. In a separate study, Gloria, Castellanos, Scull, and Villegas (2009) sought to identify and help define self-esteem based on culture and fitting in, educational barriers and coping experiences from 100 Latino male undergraduate students. They reiterated the current role of Latino males in family settings as financial providers where their main responsibility is to be the main source of

income – the financial contributors to the household and family providers. Latino males are "often unable to provide fully (e.g., financially, emotionally, physically) for their family, which creates undue stress as they alter or negotiate familial roles" (p. 320). Thus, Latino males carry great responsibility in providing financially for their families.

Latinx families may also have conflicting expectations regarding the role of Latino males once they enroll in a postsecondary institution. In addition to the expectation that they provide financial support, Covarrubias and Stone (2015) found Latino males are pressured to avoid academic success as it is not considered "macho." Ultimately, Latino males who chose their postsecondary academic endeavors over family responsibilities "are forced to abandon family traditions, customs, and values [in order] to gain membership in Predominantly White Institutions" (Pérez & Sáenz, 2017, p. 164). This phenomenon is known as "cultural suicide" (Tierney, 1999). In addition, there is an assumption of marginalized college students needing to suppress their own cultural identity and conform to the society they live in (Tierney, 1991). To continue to exist and be accepted in the society, marginalized students are committing cultural suicide in order to be academically successful (Baker, 2013). Preparing families for the college transition from home will also instill confidence, trust, and awareness which, in turn, relieves stressors from the Latino male student.

Overall, for the Latinx family, the act of the Latino male staying at home is perceived as an aid but hinders the Latino male as an individual student. When Latino males leave home, they are less likely to provide their family with financial, emotional, and physical support (Gloria et al., 2009). The absence of the Latino male at home creates stress and burdens to existing family roles as their families negotiate the

remaining responsibilities (Gloria et al., 2009). These conflicting familial expectations, combined with their own goals regarding college, can cause Latino males to face identity challenges in and out of the home.

While postsecondary institutions can offer on-campus housing and other benefits, Latino males may commute in order to respect the wishes of parents to remain in their home (Pérez & Taylor, 2016, p. 10). Due to "limited access to college-related resources and capital such as information about their required courses and how to finance a college education" (Rivera, 2014, p. 288), Latinx families experience insecurities about on-campus safety, financial accessibility, and independence away from home for their children. Greenfield's theory (Vasquez-Salgado, Greenfield, & Burgos-Cienfuegos, 2014) predicts Latinx students with parents who are highly educated have fewer barriers with their college enrollment and degree attainment. Vasquez-Salgado et al. (2014), used the theory to examine the social change and human development prediction of Latinx students' sense of family obligation to attend a postsecondary institution and found the theory's prediction to hold true. In their study, Latinx students had less familial conflicts in their education pursuit when their educational values aligned with their parents'.

Peer influences can also have an emotional impact on the Latino male student; having to choose between social acceptance or academic success from various male peer groups can be conflicting for the Latino male student. This conflict is further complicated because other peers such as Latina females also evoke different emotions in Latino male educational decision making. In order to avoid shame or embarrassment, Latino males are cautious to avoid making postsecondary decisions similar to Latina

females as those decisions could be perceived to have feminine predispositions (Gloria et al., 2009).

As an additional family impact on pursuing a postsecondary education, the immigration status of Latinx students and their families also plays a large role in the experience of the Latino male student in college. If the parents are undocumented, they will not have tax forms which are required to apply for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). If the student is undocumented they are unable to apply for the FAFSA or other government-funded grants which are also not available to undocumented families and students. While there are educational opportunities for Hispanics, students without documentation rarely have opportunities to enroll in postsecondary institutions and face challenges if granted admission (Patrón & Garcia, 2016). For example, undocumented students in Georgia are expected to pay out-of-state tuition which can be more than three times the amount of in-state tuition for most public institutions. Additionally, maintaining a work-life-school balance is essential for undocumented students who are attempting to finance their education while navigating the challenges that come with the lack of citizenship. Both Latino male and Latina female students who are undocumented are forced to reject scholarships that cannot be provided to students without citizenship (despite academic performance) (Patrón & Garcia, 2016).

In 2012, about 800,000 previously undocumented immigrants received temporary relief from immediate deportation along with a work permit through the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) under the Obama Administration (which was later revoked in March 2018 by President Donald Trump) (Venkataramani & Tsai, 2017). DACA did not, however, provide a direct path towards citizenship nor allow

students to be eligible for federal financial aid in the United States, but in many cases, it did allow students to attend school and earn money on their own (Cadenas, Bernstein, & Tracey, 2018). In the state of Georgia, some policies exclude immigrant students who seek to gain a higher education but allow them to adopt a role to work legally in order to establish themselves in the U.S. community. These policies uniquely and specifically impact "undocumented and DACA students from joining this arena of higher education scholarship" (Maltese, 2017, p. 2). Living in fear of deportation or getting the news of family members being deported while working towards a bachelor's degree can have a large emotional toll on Latino male and Latinx students, in general.

Financial Decision-Making Considerations

Concomitant to the experiences of Latino males in the K-12 educational system, are the socioeconomic pressures they face as young adults. Harris (2005) explains that "young Hispanic and African-American men are often lured into lower-paying job fields by the promise of an immediate, steady income" (p. 7). The option of starting a vocational job with a steady paycheck versus enrolling in a postsecondary institution is more tangible and fitting to their cultural role as Latino males. Protecting and leading the family are just a few reasons Latino males feel the need to bypass on postsecondary education and enter the workforce (Gloria et al., 2017). Insecurities regarding financial support for the collegiate journey can lead to Latino males making decisions towards producing an income versus spending one.

If Latino males do find a gateway to postsecondary options, they are more likely to be first-generation students (Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2009). In general, Latinx students are often first-generation students, meaning neither parent of the student had more than a

high school education (Ross & Kena, 2012) and their parents have little to no understanding of the postsecondary college pipeline process. The cost to cover college is a common struggle Latino families with low incomes encounter (Santiago, 2011). Apart from a financial deficit, Santiago (2011) emphasized Latino families' lack of knowledge in financial-aid options and the unexpected changes students face in postsecondary institutions compared to their high school experience. Santiago (2011) also claimed the need for more Latinos to attend and graduate from postsecondary institutions to help raise the national goal of college-completion rates. In turn, Santiago (2011) pointed out the need for colleges to understand Latino families' needs and roles in the college process. The family's support did not include understanding requirements for matriculating to college or navigating a college environment. One such requirement is affordability, and Latinx families and students need further support in finding available financial aid resources as well as applying for them in order to attend a postsecondary institution. For Latinx families, an "understanding of the college financial aid application process is a critical factor that contributes to Latino male students' college enrollment" (Ponjuan, Paolmin, & Calise, 2015, p. 61). Accurate and detailed information on how to apply for the FAFSA is important for Latino males because they "are less likely to enroll into college if they are unsure how they will pay for their college expenses" (Ponjuan et al., 2015, p. 61). As first-generation college students, Latinx students are often caught in the middle of deciding between family obligations despite family support and educational opportunities that drive them away from family involvement as well as discovering resources to rely on for financial aid in order to attend college.

In terms of financial support at college, Latino males have a higher balance in financial loans in comparison to Latina females (Santiago & Cunningham, 2005) which may discourage Latino males from attending a postsecondary institution. Latino male students are depleting sources of financial aid to attend a postsecondary education, instead of producing financial income for their families. Additionally, as students of color, Latino males are faced with underrepresentation and without the necessary social capital to feel confident in higher education which is tied to the financial stability or lack thereof. Early notice and informative pre-college application processes can educate Latinx families and increase the confidence of the Latino male student to apply for FAFSA and colleges.

Campus Environment

Peer support shapes the engagement of the Latino male student and a strong presence of peer support is important as they can be more influential than student-faculty interactions and familial ties during college (Rodriguez et al., 2003). Current literature invites further investigation on the ways Latino males cope and persist through their undergraduate career. In a study conducted by Pérez and Taylor (2016), the researchers found that at Predominately White Institutions (PWI's), Latinx students are "more likely to seek academic information from peers because they did not trust their advisors and believed seeking advice from authority figures would result in a negative academic appraisal" (p. 4). Unfortunately, despite selective areas of success in postsecondary enrollment, "Latino males that successfully enroll in college are likely to experience racial, gender, and class dynamics that diminish their educational outcomes" (Pérez & Taylor, 2016, p. 2). Despite an institution's attempt to initiate ethnic and racially

engaging strategies for students of color, minority students often feel a conflict in cultural integrity (Baker, 2013). These strategies, through programming and initiatives, often do not specify support for special populations of students (race, ethnicity, gender, etc.) and place inequities on the institution rather than the student (Johnson, Wasserman, Yildirim, & Yonai, 2013). Unfixed, failed attempts make the institution less of a supportive space for minority students (Baker, 2013).

The need to strengthen Latinx students' sense of trust for higher education personnel points to the importance of hiring diverse faculty and staff proportional to minoritized student populations. New hires representative of minority enrollment in higher education would be more likely to "be fully aware of the barriers students experience in not only getting to college but *through* college" (Tovar, 2015, p. 65). Being able to connect with institutional personnel shapes the student experience, making it one surrounded with support and encouragement rather than a distant experience which could hinder yearly educational progression.

A lack of minority representation in staff and faculty can also add to negative racial climates (Kiyama, Museus, & Vega, 2015, p. 30) which create negative emotions in Latinx students. Negligent staffing efforts can create "feelings of marginality and isolation, decreased sense of belonging, higher levels of racism-related stress, increased withdrawal from classroom participation, and lower levels of persistence and degree completion" (Kiyama et al., 2015, p. 30). Additionally, such inequities further demand the need for on-campus programs to foster Latino male student success. Clark et al. (2013) found that Latino male school employees exerted a strong positive influence on Latino male students through personal encouragement and academic

support. Interactions between Latino male employees and their students increase the social capital and knowledge of the students which increases the confidence and knowledge to prepare for the transition to a postsecondary institution. For Latinx students, some institutions have been able to identify the need for special population programs and, as a result, they have created various pipelines to connect students:

> There is some evidence that campus cultures characterized by strong networking values, a commitment to targeted support, a belief in humanizing the educational experience, and an ethos characterized by institutional responsibility for student success are more conducive to college success among undergraduates of color (Kiyama et al., 2015, p. 30).

A study by Holloway-Friesen (2016) found that Latinx students who are well accustomed to both the Latinx and Anglo cultures are more successful and confident in their college career with increased professional opportunities than those with less of an Anglo influence. The study emphasized how the cultural assimilation of Latinx students allows them to be successful within educational systems built for White, majority communities. It further noted that being able to identify with similar cultural/ethnic groups on campus provides opportunities for Latino male students to share common personal and academic struggles they are experiencing, particularly those related to cultural and gender role expectations.

Gloria et al. (2009) encouraged the creation of student groups designed to support Latino male students by providing a space for them to connect with each other to discuss similar stresses around social, cultural, and gender expectations. If Latinx students are unable to establish a connection on campus, they may "continue to experience the

university as an unwelcoming and often discriminatory learning setting" (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007, p. 383). Supportive programs on campus (student organizations, Latino fraternities, etc.) require time outside of the classroom, which builds leadership opportunities, the feeling of community, and the holistic experiences necessary for the Latino male to have a successful postsecondary experience. Access to peer networks where they can benefit from shared academic insights would benefit Latino male students. Tovar (2015) posited that "participation in select student support programs enhances ethnic minority students access to social networks" (p. 52). For instance, membership in Latino fraternities promotes personal development, builds leadership abilities, and self-growth while building a supportive network in college (Guardia & Evans, 2008). In select networks, Phinney, Campos, Kallemeyn, and Kim (2011) identified the importance of mentoring programs for Latinx students with reports of students feeling more connected and supported than those Latinx students that did not participate in a mentoring program. Additionally, support programs for Latino male students can also create stronger ties to academic endeavors and persistence. A communal group on campus shapes and adds to foundational support systems in the absence of faculty, staff, and other higher education personnel (Guardia & Evans, 2008). Connections and supports heighten the self-efficacy of Latinx students and contribute to their success in graduating (Lopez, 2014).

Theoretical Framework

This study informed by social capital theory, validation theory, and the culturally engaging campus environment model (CECE model). The theories mentioned in this framework have various aspects of supporting student determination. Determination is a

characteristic variously defined through a multitude of efforts and opportunities students partake in to engage and thrive in higher education (Pérez, 2017). This study examined Latino male engagement through their personal experience, campus environment connectedness, and use of available resources on and off campus through their postsecondary experiences. Together, the use of these theoretical frameworks assisted in the phenomenological investigation of Latino male experiences involving retention and success factors in a Minority Serving Institution (MSI).

Social Capital Theory

From similarities identified through natural association between more than one connection, people begin to build their social network which increases the availability of resources. The benefit of social capital theory is the impression of relationship bonding created from the behaviors among individual people in social groups, social spaces, and social order (Johnson, 2013). The main component of this theory is grounded in "actual or potential resources" (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 248), in terms of social groups as well as independent relationships that individuals form, in this case Latino male students.

Some non-Latinx community members are born into social groups with a large network of people with strong influences in their communities. Those who have less social capital can run into several obstacles (Luedke, 2017). A key element of social capital is investing in resources to obtain a high level of social capital (Tovar, 2015). For Latinx students, as their main option for college guidance, they are often forced to refer to their peers (relatives, classmates' resources, acquaintances, etc.) who have attended a postsecondary institution. Through possible connections, it is essential for Latino males to become familiar with available educational resources for college success. With the

foundation of the relationship being reciprocal, resources shared with Latino males support the expansion of their network (Johnson, 2013). Accessing various networks with high-levels of social capital leads to "greater persistence and more meaningful experiences in postsecondary education" (Garcia & Ramirez, 2018, p. 358). Providing the Latino male with a supportive mentor and/or a Latino male identifying high school advisor has proven to increase the social capital of the student. In a study by McDonough et al. (1997), students with a low level of postsecondary education social capital did not possess sufficient knowledge to define what college is and did not understand the college admissions process nor financial aid opportunities. Additionally, their study concluded that students with a low level of social capital or weaker network of resources and less knowledge were unable to differentiate institution types of postsecondary options. By contrast, students who connect with various supportive people including peers for academic guidance result in an increase of social capital (Pérez & Taylor, 2016).

While Latinx families may not have the level of social capital necessary to be fully knowledgeable in postsecondary education, teachers and counselors are direct connections who are able to provide information and direction to contribute significantly to Latinx students' social capital and decision-making skills (Garcia & Ramirez, 2018). These connections include access to higher education and economic mobility. For non-Latinx students entering higher education with a high-level of social capital, their decisions are influenced by those in their network, such as family members and mentors, and by their personal knowledge due to the resources available to them early on in their K-12 experience. Latinx families prefer face-to-face discussion regarding the

preparation of education and prefer all members of the family to be engaged (Ryan & Ream, 2016). Latinx parents reported feeling restricted in their ability to provide their children beneficial information without direct support from financial and educational resources. Meanwhile, the family's inability to provide Latino students with a college decision-making model to follow creates less choices in postsecondary degrees and less access (Pérez & McDonough, 2008).

Validation Theory

Rendon's (1994) validation theory was developed based on a study conducted with postsecondary students' in which she examined their experiences and interactions with peers and administrators in postsecondary environments. Prior to Rendon's (1994) study, researchers identified validating experiences as moments that were inspirational and affirming to students during various states of life, including college experiences with peers. Validating experiences can consist of academic and interpersonal support from peers, faculty, staff, or other support agents. Rendon's (1994) study highlighted the need for validation to be constant from the first week to the last year.

Rendon (1992) identified the following six elements of validation theory:

1. "Validation is an enabling, confirming and supportive process initiated by in- and out-of-class agents that foster academic and interpersonal development.
2. When validation is present, students feel capable of learning; they experience a feeling of self-worth and feel that they, and everything that they bring to the college experiences, are accepted and recognized as valuable. Lacking validation, students feel crippled, silenced, subordinate, and/or mistrusted.
3. Like involvement, validation is a prerequisite to student development.

4. Validation can occur both in- and out-of-class. In-class validating agents include faculty, classmates, lab instructors, and teaching assistants. Out-of-class validating agents can be 1) significant others, such as a spouse, boyfriend, or girlfriend; 2) family members, such as parents, siblings, relatives, and children; 3) friends, such as classmates and friends attending and not attending college; and, 4) college staff, including faculty who meet with students out-of-class, counselors/advisors, coaches, tutors, teaching assistants, and resident advisors.
5. Validation suggests a developmental process. It is not an end in itself. The more students get validated, the richer the academic and interpersonal experience.
6. Validation is most effective when offered early on in the student's college experience, during the first year of college and during the first weeks of class" (p. 44-45).

For Latino male students, validation theory is important because the validating agents are designed to initiate contact with students in the early stages of their postsecondary career (Rendon, 2002). In Rendon's (1994) study, Hispanic students' perceptions evolved into a productive and positive outlook from their initial, apprehensive K-12 experiences.

Rendon's (1994) study identified successful student validation during the early stages of their postsecondary experiences such as the first weeks and even their first year. Rendon (1994) produced evidence of nontraditional students recognizing their ability to learn in academic spaces when they are supported and validated regardless of insecurities. A validating agent is someone that provides information to advance any opportunity to another individual towards the progression of their postsecondary journey.

The validation process requires validating agents such as "significant others, family members, friends, and classmates" along with "out-of-class agents that foster[s] academic and interpersonal development" (Rendon, 1994, p. 44). The need for additional support outside of campus involvement, along with institutional validation agents such as staff, faculty, and students is needed to encourage first-generation students, especially Latino males. Furthermore, Mendez, Bonner, Mendez-Negrete, and Palmer (2015) emphasized that "college and university professionals are [to be] encouraged to reach out in ways that honor the history, experience, and knowledge students bring with them to the postsecondary setting" (p. 88) to help connect with the Latino males' culture and engage in approaches helping them master their disadvantages.

Culturally Engaging Campus Environment Model

The culturally engaging campus environment model (CECE model) is the practice of space, people, and cultural initiatives that recognizes, supports, and creates a foundation for students of non-Western identities. The CECE model is a model of college success with elements of external, internal, environmental, and individual engagement as well as various inputs from pre-college to on-campus graduation influences (Kiyama et al., 2015). Similar to Rendon's validation theory, the CECE model "suggests external influences (e.g., family, employment, and finances), precollege characteristics (e.g., sex, race, age, and socioeconomic status), and campus environmental factors influence individual experiences and outcome in college" (Museus, Zhang, & Kim, 2016, p. 772). Over 30 years of literature and 100 qualitative interviews with racially and ethnically diverse students helped create the foundation and frame for the CECE model (Museus, 2014). To illustrate, the design and purpose of student

organizations and spaces offer support, security, and institutional engagement for students (Strange & Banning, 2015).

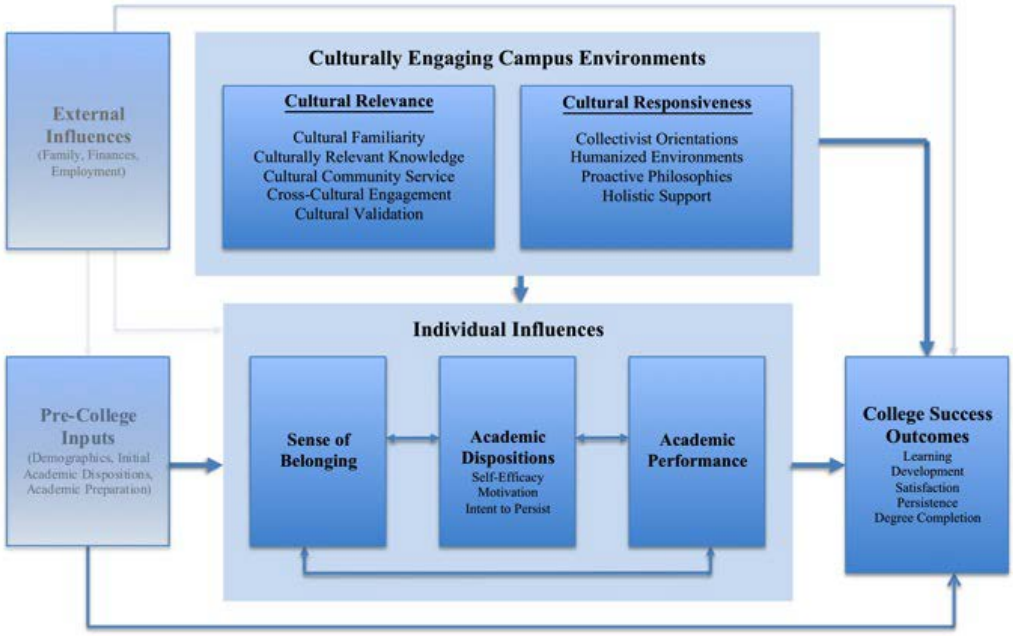

Figure 1. The Culturally Engaging Campus Environments (CECE) Model of College Success

For Latinx students, supportive programs were created as the Latinx population grew in the United States, with the intent to retain and progress students towards graduation (Patton, 2010). Lozano (2010) posited "most theories and models of college student retention include a person-environment fit or match as a key ingredient of student persistence" (p. 7). Generally, students in higher education need to be aware of the importance of student involvement, the value of peer-to-peer relationships and mentoring, and of academic support programs (Brooms, Clark, & Smith, 2018). Hurtado and Ponjuan (2005) defined the emotional distress of unwelcoming campus environments as ultimate factors impacting student success and persistence among undocumented

students. With welcoming environments and spaces being influential for student engagement, the CECE model can help define peer and mentor familiarity and recognition through culturally supporting centers offered on-campus (McShay, 2017). In order to support on-campus and academic engagement, the CECE model provides several opportunities for students to be more inclined to use the resources offered.

> The quality of information exchanged is largely based on the functional components of social capital, trust, and norms. High levels of trust between individuals facilitate the exchange of more knowledge, whereas norms regulate and influence behavior related to this exchange (Pérez & McDonough, 2008, p. 260).

Kuh (2013) identified student engagement on college campuses for Latino males as an impactful element towards earning a postsecondary degree. Gloria et al. (2009) offered the idea of students having a stronger sense of group identity by sharing a commonality and experience being more connected with one another to the academic journey and, ultimately, lessening the number of experienced stressors and barriers. As an innovative student success model, the CECE model contributes to the intentionality of holistic spaces and practices for populations like Latinx students while providing an understanding of campus climate and sense of belonging.

Chapter Summary

Several factors shape Latino male students' postsecondary experiences, impacting their enrollment, retention, and graduation rates. Between family, academic support, and co-curricular opportunities, the "vanishing Latino male" (Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2009) has a number of elements affecting their experience in higher education. In this chapter, I

shared pre-college experiences in academic settings, considerations towards financial decisions, emotional impacts and family expectations, as well as components contributing towards campus experiences—all of which can positively (or negatively) contribute to Latino male student success. In support of initiatives for a better Latino male college experience, social capital, validation theory, and the culturally engaging campus environment model all serve as the premise for this study. In the next chapter I provide a more detailed explanation of how my theoretical framework informed my research.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Introduction and Overview

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study is to develop a comprehensive understanding of the critical influences shaping the experience of Latino male students positioned to graduate from a Minority Service Institution (MSI). The research question for this study focuses on gathering participants' first-hand experiences regarding contributing academic success factors. Research questions "can give direction for the study design and collection of data and offer the potential for developing new, more specific questions during data collection and analysis" (Agee, 2009, p. 435). The primary research question for this study is: How do Latino male students enrolled in an urban, research university make meaning of the support they have received to succeed in college? This chapter begins with a description of the research approach and methodology, followed by an explanation of the research design and a discussion of the study's delimitations.

Research Approach and Methodology

The purpose of conducting a qualitative, phenomenological research study is to collect information on real-life experiences of participants (Taylor et al, 2015). Qualitative researchers study things and people in natural settings in an attempt to make

sense of the world participants live in (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Ritchie & Lewis (2003) defined qualitative research as making connections "between the functions of theory building, hypotheses testing and content illumination" (p. 26). A key characteristic in a qualitative method is the process of describing and showcasing lived experiences as a phenomenon based on the words of the participants (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The use of an inductive analysis in qualitative research allows the researcher to become absorbed in the participants or group (Jonsen, Fendt, & Point, 2018). An inductive approach, sometimes implicit or explicit, is a method of analyzing qualitative data driven by evaluation objectives (Thomas, 2006). According to Denzin and Lincoln (as cited in Ritchie & Lewis, 2003), commonalities of participants' responses are concluded from various methods such as interviews, recordings, conversations, memos from the researcher, fieldnotes, and even photographs. Common characteristics of qualitative research include taking place in a natural setting and using more than one method to find emerging data in an interpretative method (Jonsen et al., 2018). Parts of building a qualitative study with a sound judgement is "inquiring, knowing, and sharing" (Jonsen et al., 2018). Taylor et al. (2015) concluded a qualitative approach works best when seeking a deeper understanding of a social setting from the perspective of research participants. Ritchie & Lewis (2003) also highlighted the need to interpret a phenomenon by how the participants make meaning of it.

A qualitative research approach will allow the researcher to explore values and feelings that define postsecondary Latino males' interpretations of the spaces they utilize and the types of opportunities they engage in. Ritchie and Lewis (2003) highlighted the use of mapping the range of "elements, dimensions, classes or positions within a social

phenomenon" (p. 27) to generate new thoughts and ideas. Identifying participants' behaviors, key experiences, and critical influences in their college journey will provide insights on how to better support Latino male college students from enrollment to graduation. Qualitative inquiry in a group interview setting will assist the researcher in observing nuances of social context, including specificities of social grouping, language, or use of cultural symbols that might otherwise remain unacknowledged (Delmont, 2012). By using a qualitative approach in this study, the research question can bring forth various perspectives based on the responses from participants' overall involvement from their postsecondary experiences (Agee, 2009).

The idea of philosophical topology focuses on the understanding of the human, the world, and the philosophical based on Martin Heidegger (Malpas, 2012). Heidegger introduced a basis of thinking that is fundamental and touches unconsidered assumptions of all work conducted through a phenomenological approach (Clark, 2011). The theory of phenomenology according to Heidegger requires the idea of deserting any presumptuous thoughts and ideas to conduct an analysis of human existence (Elliot, Elliot, & Brian, 2004). A phenomenological study depicts the philosophical worldview through the lens of the participants being studied (Morgan, 2011). A phenomenological approach examines the relationship between experience and knowledge to help explain a phenomenon (Morgan, 2011). Harper et al. (2011) asserted that phenomenology addresses the common experience of a group by examining everyday lived experiences. Phenomenology examines how the participants make meaning of their experiences or create knowledge as a result of an event (Harper et al., 2011). Ritchie and Lewis (2003) defined phenomenology as understanding the day-to-day building blocks of people's

lives and how they make sense of their experiences. Heidegger emphasized that "our very first encounter with things is indeed with the things as they appear" (Malpas, 2012, p. 46). The intent of using a phenomenological study is to "challenge taken-for-granted assumptions and prompt new insights to what it means to live, work, and play and learn in our world" (Dall, 2009, p. 7). I used a phenomenological approach to examine experiences and influences that drive Latino male students to graduation. This approach captured engagement tactics through the lived, interpreted experiences of Latino males at Georgia State University (GSU). The findings of this study should influence practitioners to improve efforts supporting Latino male success in college. Jerolmack and Khan (2017) stated, "While we often think of the subjects of our study as the people and places we observe, the primary subject of explanation may instead be the mechanisms that operate through our participants" (p. 6). Responses from participants served as directional research themes that I further investigated with the use of the theoretical framework. In the study, I explored participant responses that referenced specific people and/or programs that may have guided their college career.

This study was grounded in a constructionist approach which asserts that how people make meaning of their world is constructed through their personal experiences and perspectives, rather than through universal truths (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2013). This approach allowed me to gather data based on socially constructed and personal experiences from participants, therefore giving various interpretations of the population researched (Jones et al., 2013). The intent of this study was to connect social and lived experiences to student learning outcomes in order to construct an understanding of how professionals can engage Latino males in higher education. Results from the

collected data consist of students' life history, similar on-campus experiences, language affirmations, and other detailed occurrences. A constructivist phenomenological approach allowed me to explore how meaning is constructed through peer interaction and sharing experiences in a group setting (Delamont, 2012).

In addition to a constructionist approach, Latino Critical Race Theory played a key role in how I conducted this research. Latino/a Critical Race Theory started in 1995 and is "an intervention designed to highlight Latina/o concerns and voices in legal discourse and social policy" (Valdés, 1999). Lat Crit seeks to enlighten the experiences and perceptions of Latinx to the front through four essential functions:

1. Production of knowledge to create understanding of the Latinx culture,
2. Advancement of transformation in the form of social change,
3. Expansion and connection of the struggles of all subordinated groups,
4. And the cultivation of community and coalition of scholars and activists (Gonzalez & Morrison, 2016, p. 89)

A Latino/a Critical Race Theory (Lat Crit) was used in this study as a lens to explore and examine the data from the participants shared, lived experiences. Lat Crit addresses important dimensions of critical race analysis such as those found in this study with Latino males (Bernal, 2002). Some of those important multidimensional issues addressed in Lat Crit include language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, identity, phenotype, and sexuality (Bernal, 2002).

Research Sample

I recruited ten graduating Latino undergraduate male students from Georgia State University - a public, research institution located in an urban city. I utilized criterion, or

selective, sampling which helps to identify participants who meet specific criteria related to the phenomenon being studied (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2013). With criterion sampling, participants have direct identities and characteristics which contribute to rich data to help answer the research question in the study (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Participants met the following criteria to participate: a) be within two semesters of full-time enrollment to obtain a bachelor's degree and b) identify as a Latino male. These criteria connected to the research question to ensure the participants could provide the most pertinent, detailed information regarding the phenomenon studied (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

Georgia State University is comprised of six campuses that include two-year and four-year programs. Undergraduate students on the Atlanta campus pursue the four-year track while students from Perimeter College, which include the Alpharetta, Clarkston, Decatur, Dunwoody, and Newton campuses pursue the two-year track. Georgia State University has an online student population with Clarkston being the campus online students go to for on-campus support. Since I needed to collect data from students earning their bachelor's degree, I only recruited undergraduate Latino male students from the Atlanta campus.

GSU is a leading institution in graduating students from diverse races and ethnicities (Morgan-Smith, 2018; Jones, 2018) and serves as a national model for student success. Graduation rates have increased by 23 points in the last 10 years (Morgan-Smith, 2018) and include minoritized student graduation rates being on par with the rest of the student body. The institution has a total of eight Latinx student-led organizations and one Latinx-focused office consisting of three department staff members who identify

as Latinx. In sorority and fraternity life, the multicultural Greek council has two Latino fraternities and three Latina sororities. According to the Georgia State University 2016 Status Report (2016), Latinx students represent about 58% of the undergraduate student population.

Recruitment

To start, an email was sent to three different professional staff members with a direct connection to the Hispanic/Latinx population at Georgia State University to share with their networks. The email announcement instructed students to contact me for more information if they were interested in participating in the study. No participants showed interest through this outreach, therefore, none of the participants came from professional staff recruitment. Through my posts on social media outlets, former students were aware of my progress in the dissertation process and offered support in finding Latino male participants that fit the criteria. All participants for this study were recruited through social media outreach. Seven of the participants were referred to me by former graduates or other Latino males who were unable to participate – they all used social media to contact me. Seven of the participants were referrals from former, recently graduated students; former, undergraduate students (mostly female Latinas students); or other Latino males that were unable to participate in the study due to time constraints or did not reach the credit hour criteria. As a more direct method to recruit potential participants, I saved the email announcement as a Joint Photographic Experts Group (JPEG) from a Word document and sent invitations to several Hispanic/Latinx group chats from Georgia State University in the GroupMe application. Two Latino males responded and agreed to participate. A JPEG of the email announcement of the study was also sent to several

GSU Hispanic/Latinx Greek organizations' Instagram accounts through direct messages. From this path, I added one additional participant.

All participants were selected through referrals, convenience, and snowballing methods. The recruitment process presented a strong finding in the peer-to-peer networking ability in the Latinx community at GSU, as well as the strong influence of social media networks as a formal method of communication for students. I was able to get more interaction and feedback from participants to set up interview days and times from social media communication than email and phone calls. This system of interaction will inform practice by exemplifying innovative methods to communicate with students via modern technology. This study presents practitioners with 21st century methods of communication through influential platforms such as Instagram, GroupMe, video teleconferencing and other social media platforms.

Participant Demographic

All ten participants were of Hispanic ethnic origin and identified as Latino males. The participants were all undergraduate students with 90 credit hours at Georgia State University. Only one participant transferred from a different institution after their first year while the other nine students started their postsecondary careers at Georgia State University – Perimeter College or Atlanta campuses. The majority of the participants were first-year generation status in the U.S. Only one participant lived on campus while seven lived with their parents and two lived off-campus. For the eight participants who worked, they worked an average of 23.5 hours per week with one participant working a full 40-hours per week and another working as little as 12 hour per week. None of the participants worked on-campus.

Interview Structure

For this study, I conducted two focus groups of five students per group, a written one-page reflection from participants, and an individual, follow-up interview with each participant to confirm, correct, or expand on data from the focus groups. I chose to interview participants in their final undergraduate year, along with the other criteria, to deepen the discussion with the group setting, anticipating their vast experiences at university would produce rich data. In the focus group, participants were sent a link to join an open Zoom meeting with the other four participants and myself. The focus group lasted no more than two-hours. Written reflections were collected no longer than one week after the focus group interview and did not exceed one page in length. The one-on-one interviews were also conducted via Zoom and did not last longer than 30-minutes. In this instance, the Latino male participants were able to expound on their experiences with different on-campus departments and interactions with staff and/or faculty members.

Interview Scheduling

To accommodate any possible conflicting schedules in coordinating the focus group and one-on-one interviews, participants were offered to participate using a virtual platform called Zoom. Zoom held the capability to virtually host multiple people in the same meeting as well as individual meetings. The Zoom platform recorded meetings with transcription capability which saved time and allowed more time to review the interviews at any moment. This option helped participants decide on a collective day and time since the location wasn't a concern. Participants could decide to join from the location of their preference. Participants joined the focus group and one-on-one interviews from a variety of places such as their bed, a desk in their basement, their

family's home in a different state, and one participant joined internationally from Mexico as he was traveling to be more acquainted with his father's family. They also used laptops and phones to connect into the meeting rooms for the study. In preparation for the interviews on Zoom, participants were made aware of needing to find a private space, with strong Wi-Fi access, and a set of headphones to help reduce surrounding noises. In order to enter the meeting rooms, they were sent a reminder email with the date, time, recommendations for teleconferencing, and a direct link for the group and individual interviews. None of the participants shared an apprehensive disposition to the suggested meeting preparations.

Innovative Communication Strategies

This study was solely driven through the use of technology. From current literature, recruitment, execution of the study, and analyzation of findings, various forms of technology helped facilitate and conduct the study. The online library from my research institution served as a primary tool of selecting literature to support my study which was incredibly useful as an out-of-state, online student. As a non-student, non-employee of GSU, recruitment for participants via email communication was the best method as I was unable to recruit participants face-to-face. Aside from email efforts, I used social media platforms to reach out to eligible Latino male Greek organizations and former Latino male students. Non-eligible students who follow any of my social media pages sent referrals of potential participants through social media messaging, as well.

After confirming the total number of participants needed, all focus group and one-on-one interviews were conducting on an online platform called Zoom, a remote conferencing service. This choice was due to my absence on campus and more for being

able to accommodate possible Latino male conflicting schedules (work, family responsibilities, student organization meetings, academic priorities, etc.). Participants' benefited from the Zoom option included being able to join the scheduled interviews from any location and setting as long as they had Wi-Fi or a strong cell phone signal. For example, two of the participants traveled out of Georgia to visit family for the holiday season. One student traveled to another state while the other traveled to another country. The remaining eight participants stayed in their homes and either interviewed from a desk or bed in their bedrooms or from a home office. They also either used their computers or their cellular phones and all participants used headphones as recommended to help cancel surrounding noises in their spaces. An additional feature of utilizing the Zoom platform was its capability to record and transcribe the scheduled interviews. I used three of the four recording and transcription options. One of the transcriptions was text only; the second transcription option included a video and text recording with editing capabilities much like closed-caption; the third option was an audio recording only. The video with text also offered two separate views; one view was a speaker view which only displayed the individual that was speaking in the moment while the other included a gallery view of all individuals included in the recording such as the focus group.

Finally, an additional use of technology in this study include Microsoft Excel and OneNote which allowed me to conduct an organized data analysis. After several rounds of reviewing the transcribed recordings, I created an Excel workbook with three different tabs for the triangulated approach (focus groups, individual interviews, and written reflections) for open coding. For each approach, I pulled codes from the transcriptions to list per each tab. As part of my analysis, I began to color organize each code by similar

concepts and existing relationships. In preparation of writing the findings, a digital notebook in OneNote allowed me to organize with many levels of depth - notebook, sections group, sections, pages, subpages, sub-subpages. Sections and pages helped me begin the writing process of the themes and subthemes (respectively). For axial coding, I was able to change vital findings where needed to fit the subthemes and themes and found the use of OneNote incredibly useful. Major parts of its benefits was using the digital notebook on and offline as well as on a computer or through an application on the cell phone. The use of OneNote saved a large cost in utilizing other qualitative data analysis computer software packages. Given the different responsibilities throughout this process, the accessibility of working through data analysis at my fingertips was practical, hands-on, innovative.

Methods

This study used a three-phase data collection process, consisting of: 1) focus groups, 2) written reflections, and 3) individual interviews. The intent of the study was shared with all participants along with timeline and expectations of participation. Expectations included participation in the focus group lasting no longer than two-hours; writing a one-page reflection (see Appendix B) to be submitted one week after completing the group interview; and, closing the study with a final, individual follow-up session lasting as long as thirty minutes. This process took place over the Winter holiday during a two-week period. Each participant received $25 after they completed their participation in all three phases of the study through PayPal or CashApp which are online, mobile payment systems and preferred methods of payments from the participants.

During the first phase, group discussions were conducted in two focus groups of five participants. The purpose of the focus group in this study was to explore Latino males' current enrollment experience and their college career as students at Georgia State University. Focus groups were used to collect specific information directly relevant to the research topic (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Additionally, focus groups exposed shared feelings and perceptions from common or similar experiences. Focus groups were an effective form of data collection for empirical research which acknowledges the notion of a social phenomenon (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The virtual environment created from focus groups provided a welcoming and safe space (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

I offered video meetings for two focus groups of five students. Video meetings provided students with a simplistic, mobile, and accessible pathway to participate in the research. The video meeting, in comparison to an in-person interview, relieved stressors on the student's behalf such as scheduling conflicts, commute time, and deciding between other responsibilities (Klenke, Martin, & Randall Wallace, 2016). The multi-person video meeting was arranged through a professional Zoom account, which is virtual platform often used to conduct small and large group discussions and personal meetings. Participants did not need an account to access the invitation to the Zoom meeting. For access, participants needed a computer or phone with a camera and microphone (with a recommendation to use a headset) as well as an internet connection. After accepting the invitation via a web-link, participants had access to the Zoom meeting room free of charge. With the focus group questions as the base of the discussion (see Appendix A),

participants had the opportunity to provide examples of experiences that shaped their college journey and reflect on impactful moments.

Within a week after the focus group, participants needed to submit a one-page reflection also known as reflective journaling. This portion of the research provided participants an opportunity to share additional aspects of their college experience they may have missed sharing during the focus group and/or one-on-one interview. Journaling served as an additional strategy for participants to comfortably share key points they may have felt they were unable to share in a person-to-person setting or with other participants present (Duran & Jones, 2019). The use of the reflective journaling could have encourage self-reflection, criticism, and self-analysis of participants (Bashan & Holsblat, 2017). Participants may have also used reflective journaling as a way to reaffirm what they shared from the focus group.

This research studied ten participants in an extensive, triangulated method to develop the meanings of the relationships being studied (Saldaña, 2011). Triangulation refers to using multiple methods to collect data in order to have more useful, validating data to analyze (Patton, 1999). Triangulation is based on the principle that a single method cannot be sufficient to solve a problem (Patton, 1999). More than two research techniques were required for a triangulated study (Fellows & Liu, 2015). For this study, a triangulation of sources was used to collect data and examine the consistency within the method of qualitative research (Patton, 1999). Thus, one of the last phases of the study consisted of an individual, follow-up interview (see Appendix C). As a society, we conduct interviews to gather information "we do not and cannot know" (Delmont, 2012, p. 364). The final, individual interview with the participants helped validate results from

the focus group and reflective journaling (Fellows & Liu, 2015). In addition, I closed the final interview by answering lingering questions, providing an opportunity for participants to add closing remarks, and conclude with my personal remarks of gratitude.

Data Analysis

A final report of the findings from the study encompasses the true voice of the participants (Creswell, 2007). In this phenomenological study, the information and stories each participant shared about their college experience was used for data analysis through direct quotes and statements in order to find themes (Creswell, 2007). Attention to detail and organization were essential to conduct a thorough analysis of the data. In my study, group and individual interviews were recorded upon the consent of the participants in order to collect information from student responses and provide descriptive data to identify codes, categories and generate themes. In order to begin the data analysis process effectively, all recorded interviews needed to be transcribed. The Zoom platform offered a feature to transcribe any recordings and transcriptions were available after ten to fifteen minutes after the recording stopped. This took repeated plays of the gallery and audio recordings within days of the initial interview(s) to keep the memory vivid. Analyzing data is about searching for patterns and themes (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). As the research is based on a qualitative study, data analysis was an ongoing process (Taylor et al., 2015). To help organize the large volume of data collected, I identified important patterns and placed them in a structured chart within Microsoft Excel.

I used a process called coding and open-coding method (Saldaña, 2011) to identify, name, categorize and describe the experiences from the participants. I was able

to apply codes using -ing or gerund words to designate actions (Saldaña, 2011). In order to establish an open-coding method, transcriptions, my personal notes, and the reflective journals were used to help answer the research question. As an early phase in interpreting participant's feedback in research, the coding process took several rounds (Scott & Morrison, 2007).

More codes were recognized and properly grouped from having various forms of data to review. The selection of choice words was key in identifying possible connecting points from structural and in vivo coding. Structural coding categorized data into segments based on similar or differentiating relationships (Saldaña, 2012). In vivo coding is the application of participants' responses verbatim to study possible categories (Saldaña, 2012). The results of the transcribing process provided the template to create descriptions from the data collected (codes and themes). The ability to theme the data (Saldaña, 2012) was a coding process where the data could be captured for its true essence of what the participants meant which will also help with my research.

Next, I wanted to assure the categories I created were properly captured from the multiple instances I review the data. After identifying the codes, I began to categorize the codes that closely related and answered my research question. From audio recordings and transcriptions, I was able to dissect and classify the varying categories into themes (Delamont, 2012). The framework created was the focal point of managing my data (Saldaña, 2011) where all codes and categories were tracked and organized. Developing categories from the codes is an instinctive process that was used to highlight social phenomena from participants (Taylor et al., 2015).

Lastly, feedback based on the research question needed to be identified from tentative labels of larger pieces of data from participants. Themes, as these higher-level of labels are called, were identified after organizing specific data into categories from all of the participants. I generated about four themes from the organized categories and codes in the data and concluded with three themes after I consolidated two of the themes. All of the information including the recordings, Excel data analysis, and drafts are stored on my password protected, personal computer.

Ethical Considerations

With my various roles and relationships with students on group and individual levels, students' perceptions of my professional position and authority may have been a deciding factor of their participation in the study. I did not want participants to feel forced to participate in any way given the direct or indirect contributions I may have offered to their overall success as in individual or in a group setting. Therefore, I understood that participants may feel more or less inclined to participate based on how they perceived our relationship.

Given existing relationships and dynamics of students connected to the LASSO office from which I recruited participants, I understood the importance of maintaining a high level of student confidentiality. Many of the participants are connected through organizations, individual relationships or family connections (siblings, cousins, etc.). In the selection process and prior to the start of the group interview, I affirmed the need for confidentiality among one another. I ensured that participants were aware that confidentiality of the information shared during the interviews relies on their commitment to not share stories or information with others outside of the focus group.

Hosting the focus groups online could have also brought an ethical consideration. After conducting the study and saving the recorded interview, videos are locked and stored in my virtual drive. Since the virtual drive is associated with my private account, I would be the only one to have access to open and review the video file(s). To add to the ethical consideration in this study, I would not label any files with a direct connection to the participants to avoid compromising their anonymity. Additionally, I would only open the recorded files on my personal laptop which is also password protected.

I did not limit participants' citizenship status and may have had one or more Latino males who are undocumented. Unless the participants disclosed their personal information, I would have not been able to know. However, if any of them were to have shared their citizenship status, I would have to consider exactly what I would be able to share in my results as to not compromise their identity. I would not be able to report detailed information that could convey who the participant could be. To this point, participants needed to be given anonymity and a clear explanation of their participation.

Issues Of Trustworthiness

Conducting a sound and trustworthy study through triangulation, such as strategically collecting data from three different sources, lends the opportunity for thick descriptions. Through triangulation, analyzing various responses from the same participant decreases the chance of the potential bias from my end as the researcher (Roberts, 2010). Also, using various methods of data collection offers the opportunity to cross-check data regarding the same phenomenon which strengthens the findings in a study (Scott & Morrison, 2007). Thick descriptions are a way of recounting people's

social interactions observed within their surroundings (Ponterotto, 2006). Additionally, thick descriptions include direct quotes and descriptive mannerisms from participants and are used in qualitative studies because "results presents adequate 'voice' of participants" (Ponterotto, 2006, p. 547).

The collection of literature and academic sources supported the problem and purpose of this study. Additional strategies to build a strong foundation for the trustworthiness of the study came from participation feedback. I used recordings and written reflections to provide myself with visual and auditory responses of the cues and tones of participants. As I connected literature and recordings as well as my personal notes from the interviews, I limited any gaps that may have formed and bring doubt from the data in my research.

I understood similar and differentiating identities could impact participants' responses during the interviews, which would position me as having an insider or outsider status. The researcher positionality as an insider/outsider could have compromise the results of the study. Research with populations of which the research is a member is considered being an insider or having an insider status such as "identity, language, and [an] experiential base" (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 58). Since I identify as a Latina, I anticipated an insider status because of overt and covert similarities shared between the participants and me. However, an outsider status may have been possible because of other differentiating identity variables and factors (gender, socioeconomic status, institutional classification/level, and country of origin).

An example of an insider status is language as I am bilingual and may have participants that respond in English and Spanish. As a Hispanic researcher conducting a

study within my own culture, I am considered an insider (Hua, 2016). I was raised in a single-parent home and as a first-generation student, thus I could have directly connected with participants who are also first-generation students. From previous experience of overseeing the office where the main form of recruitment was conducted, participants may have automatically labeled me as an insider. An insider status could have support my efforts in conducting the study as participants may have been comfortable with me and open during the study. However, participants could have falsely assumed similarities between us, leading them to fail to elaborate on their responses. (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). As an outsider, I am not a student, faculty, or staff member of the institution where I conducted my study. The study focused on Latino males and as a female, this identity also places me as an outsider in the study. Additionally, having already earned my postsecondary degree could have made participants feel a level of intimidation as they have yet to earn their degree (Flores, 2018).

I used bracketing as a method to avoid having my assumptions (discussed in Chapter I) unduly influence my data analysis and findings. Tufford and Newman (2010) defines bracketing as "a method used by some researchers to mitigate the potential deleterious effects of unacknowledged preconceptions related to the research and thereby to increase the rigor of the project" (p. 81). Throughout the data collection and data analysis process, I respected and valued the lived experiences the participants shared with me and did not want to presume to know and understand more of their experiences from what they shared with me during this study. As a Latina female who attended college during a different time, different institution, and with a different support system, I had empathy and wanted their experiences as Latino males to be valid, autonomous, and

independent from any experiences I may have had as a Latina student. I wanted the participants to have their own experiences and be unrelated to the experiences of Latinas. Additionally, this study was constructed as a platform for Latino male participants to share their lived experiences despite what I have seen from other Latino males and in my previous exploration of this student population. This study was solely about what Latino male students overcame and how Latino male students persevered through year-to-year challenges and pushed towards their ultimate goal of graduation.

With the various positionalities I played as a researcher, I was open, honest, and deeply interested in participants' individual experiences to assure proper representation of their responses in the study (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). How participants may have believed their responses *should* be versus responding candidly could have impacted my interaction in the study and I did not want to encourage specific responses. Therefore, I had to be intentional in using minimal encouragers which are short verbal actions or understated nonverbal actions to encourage participants in their dialogue (Guindon, 2011).

Delimitations

In order to properly seek information contributing to the purpose of my study, I created the following delimitations or controlled boundaries (Jones et al., 2013). From the total number of participants sought after, virtual focus group interviews, and other prerequisites (Roberts, 2010), the delimitations helped shape my investigation. Given the research and higher success rates in graduation with Latina females, I chose to exclude them to focus on the Latino male population. I chose to collect data from Georgia State University (GSU) due to its growing numbers in diverse student populations and GSU's

status as the only MSI in the state of Georgia. With Latino males statistically lagging in graduation rates at GSU and on a national level, specifically choosing Latino males emphasized my focus on engagement efforts to help them achieve graduation. Recruiting students in their final undergraduate year allowed participant responses to be reflective of three or more academic years. Asking Latino males who are at the start of their postsecondary career would not have offered an abundance of exploratory experience nor a reflective-understanding of student success.

Chapter Summary

While the enrollment and graduation rates of Latinx students in higher education have increased, Latino males are not enrolling or persisting at the same rate as Latina females. Instead of enrolling in college, Latino males are committing to lower-paying jobs upon their high school graduation with hopes of supporting themselves and fulfilling financial family responsibilities. The gap in Latino male and female postsecondary completion highlights the need to further investigate influential factors contributing to Latino male college success. By using a phenomenological approach through a qualitative study, findings further defined and identified factors that support the Latino male in higher education and college completion. The literature indicated barriers and challenges of Latino males in their enrollment and progression to graduation in postsecondary education with opportunities to explore engaging efforts for student success. This chapter outlined the research design, including methodology, methods, and data analysis proposed to answer the overarching research question for this study.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

"CAMINO LARGO, PASOS CORTOS"

The purpose of this study was to examine engaging success strategies for Latino males and develop a comprehensive understanding of the critical influences shaping their experiences at an MSI. The main research question guiding this study was: How do Latino male students enrolled in an urban, research university make meaning of the support they have received to succeed in college? The framework of the study was built on social capital, validation, and the culturally engaging campus environment model. *Camino largo, pasos* cortos means *long journey, small steps* and is used to reflect the postsecondary journey of the Latino males in this study. This chapter offers key findings attained from a triangulated approach comprised of focus groups, written reflections, and one-on-one interviews with participants.

Demographic information was collected through a survey focusing on social characteristics of the participants (Table 1), including social identities, campus interactions, and engagement variables. The demographic data is useful because of the value the information brings to understanding the brief shared moments of each participant. For instance, one characteristic represented the living arrangement of the Latino male participants. All participants with the exception of one lived off-campus,

either independently or with their parents. This characteristic is important to highlight because their decisions to live off-campus were based on financial-need and will relate to the findings in this chapter. Yet, while the majority did not live on-campus, they were still engaged on-campus. The majority of participants were engaged in campus activities such as student organizations and/or fraternities. This characteristic is relevant as it highlights the participants' desire to be engaged in co-curricular activities and their ability to connect with the necessary resources to advance in their year-to-year progression towards graduation. Another noteworthy result from the demographic survey is the number of participants that did not identify as first-generation college students. 60% of the participants' parents started or earned an international college degree. Their parent's college degree was from outside of the United States (U.S.) and the international equivalency evaluation process did not always allow international degrees to transfer in the U.S. Additionally, this also contributes to significant differences in culture and college experiences between the participants and their parents.

Table 1. Demographic Survey Results of Latino Male Participants

Characteristic	Alejandro	Bernardo	Carlos	Diego	Felipe	Hector	Jose	Manuel	Roberto	Vicente
Generational Status in US	2nd	1st	4th	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	2nd	1st
Bilingual	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Spanish Proficiency	Semi	Full	Min	Full	Full	Semi	Full	Full	Full	Semi
First Generation College Student	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Living Arrangement	On-Campus	Parents	Parents	Parents	Parents	Off-Campus	Parents	Off-Campus	Parents	Parents
Participation in Organized Sports	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Participation in Performance Arts	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
# of Organizations	4	0	3	1	2	3	1	3	2	3
# of Hours per Week Working Off Campus	12	0	0	20	40	30	36	15	20	16

In Chapter IV, a brief biography is given of each participant to provide the reader with greater insight of the participants' shared experiences. Ten participant biographies are shared followed by the exploration of the key themes. Three major themes were identified using a triangulated approach for data analysis. Each of the themes contain at least three sub-themes based on an analysis of the participants' demographic surveys, one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and written reflections

Dame La Mano; Somos Hermanos

The following section provides a brief biography of each participant based on information gathered from the demographic surveys, focus group interviews, one-page written reflections, and one-on-one individual interviews. The saying *dame la mano; somos hermanos* translates to "give me your hand; now we are brothers." Mostly this saying is used as a greeting during introductions to inform the other person you mean well and extend yourself as a friend. I chose to provide the following biographies to give readers an overall introduction of each participant and create a connection to them. My intent is to humanize each participant so they may be viewed as an individual first, then as a group of participants through the explored themes. The biographies are important to share because each participant's introduction gives readers a better understanding of the experiences shared throughout this chapter. A direct quote is included at the conclusion of each participant's biography representing their reflective moments of their postsecondary experience and impactful, influential moments on campus as a Latino male.

Alejandro

Alejandro has a Cuban father and a White mother. His father's side of the family has given him the most support in his educational endeavors, he explained, "having a family that values an education helps a lot with my success." He believed in the importance of self-education. As an on-campus resident, Alejandro connected with staff and faculty on an average of 15 times per week and registered in four different student organizations. Since his academic and merit-based scholarships did not cover his tuition and fees, he returned to his hometown every weekend to work at least 20-hours per week

to finance the balance of his college education. As a Latino and Cuban male, Alejandro's most rememberable moment was a study abroad opportunity that allowed him to see the home where his family lived in Havana.

"This trip helped me to understand my culture, familial history, and overall, my identity as a Latino and the son of a Cuban immigrant."

Bernardo

As a first-generation student, Bernardo thought "college was like high school but harder." He learned early and quickly the need to have good habits in order to be successful in college such as having an organized calendar and creating to-do lists. He looks up to Hispanic and Latinx role models and professionals in higher education since his father was unable to complete high school. His biggest motivation to graduate is to have a "better life" than his father and "to do it for people who can't go" so he can provide advice and tips to future students to alleviate the intimidating factors of pursing a college career. He lives at home with his parents.

"Overall, being a Latino male in college has aided me in being a role model to younger people and I find the motivation from higher-level positions academically."

Carlos

Carlos was a biracial, fourth-generation student with minimal Spanish-speaking skills. Within his third year of his college experience, Carlos stumbled across the Hispanic/Latinx serving office on campus and began to uncover his roots as a Latino male. He was also a part of two different student organizations: one organization specifically serves African American males and the other serves minority students. Carlos had the opportunity to be a part of a summer-bridge program before starting his

college career and believed his participation helped him with his confidence at the start of the fall semester his first year in college.

"I've been blessed with a good support system, the people I've gotten to know, resume help, job opportunities and job fairs... I've always been proud of being African American but now I'm learning more about my Latino culture."

Diego

After the tropical storms in Puerto Rico, Diego and his family traveled to Georgia to stay with relatives while the island recuperated. As a first-generation student, Diego found the Hispanic/Latinx office to be a special place in his life because he felt the office was a home away from home. His integration and engagement to campus was linked to a Latino male fraternity. Diego also worked 20-hours per week to help his mother with financial expenses. A member of the Latino male fraternity helped him become more knowledgeable about the Latinx community and shifted his perception of identity in America, in contrast to his perception of identity from his experiences in Puerto Rico.

"I was born and raised in Puerto Rico; it's like, okay, I'm Puerto Rican, cool, whatever. But now, here, it's like, moving here, it's like, oh, you're Hispanic/Latino... In Puerto Rico, I didn't know the struggles that we faced in the United States as a minority group. So, as Latinos and coming here has definitely, like, opened my eyes to, you know, what our people face and struggle with every day."

Felipe

Felipe was brought to the United States at the age of five. As an undocumented student, Felipe worked 40 hours a week to cover his out-of-state tuition, lived with his parents to save on costs, and "wanted to be respected and an equal" after feeling

unwanted on campus as a Latino male. After transferring into a Georgia State University – Atlanta campus, he was in a Latino male fraternity and a professional, student organization which helped him stay focused on educational and career goals. His father started supporting his postsecondary journey after he began to receive recognition and honors due to a 3.0 GPA.

"Through my participation in the study, I was happy to know that I am not the only Latino student that has faced different struggles throughout college. The study also motivated me to continue helping my community and helping those students who are lost in what they want to do in college."

Hector

Raised in a strong machismo household, Hector consistently looked for resources to keep him engaged in his postsecondary pursuit. He was the only participant engaged in college organized sports, performed in some sort of arts program or event, and participated in on-campus discussions. It is pivotal to notate that despite his high level of engagement and participation in on campus programs, events, and organizations, he felt unwanted on campus as a Latino male. Although his father did not understand the need and purpose of attaining a postsecondary degree, Hector was supported by both of his parents. His parents instilled core values of leadership, community, and encouragement.

"I've always wanted to learn on my own - my own desire. I love to learn. I just want to learn. Read books. Go to class and learn different things. I've seen my parents struggle a lot... like language, not knowing anything. It was just them and the family; they had themselves... seeing them go through all of that and acknowledging how they were raising us... I wanted to give back."

Jose

Jose's parents immediately left their country when they found out they were expecting their son. Although Jose worked 40 hours a week, he was encouraged by his parent's motivation to expose him to new opportunities. As his high school friends began to stop out of their college careers within their first year in college, Jose began to see a greater need to stay in school. Though he attempted to remain academically engaged and on track towards graduation, his committed time at his job restrained him from building an extensive network of peers and resources.

"Both parents work all day. I want to help them retire. College was the next step in order for me to reach that. I didn't apply myself in high school and now I have to. Because I know I have to. I've had a 4.0 [GPA] since I started college."

Manuel

Manuel shared his appreciation for being a part of a diverse campus in an urban city throughout the different phases of the study. One of his biggest hesitations was being stereotyped and tokenized because of his identity. Consequently, he expressed never missing an opportunity to educate others on his Hispanic and Colombian roots. In addition, he emphasized the need to give back to his communities and invest the same effort and support others invested in him.

"As for advice to incoming students, I would say, don't let anybody define you just because you identify as a blank; whether it be Colombia or Mexico, Puerto Rican, whatever. Don't let anybody put you in a box. That's, I think, the biggest limiting factor."

Roberto

With limited resources before entering college, Roberto was transparent with his reflections and open to share many of his experiences in the study. He proudly shared he was the only member in his family to, soon, graduate from college. While this triumph was not a requirement, the pressures of his family's unrelatable experiences paired with his high sense of responsibility, made postsecondary degree attainment his only option. *"I believe the only thing that separates me and where I want to be is a lack of skills. I think a good way to sum this is that I have been learning to be a leader from others and myself and I have reached this stage to now begin the journey of leading through servitude. I know where I'm going, but I'm not sure where I'll end…. but I just know I'm going to win."*

Vincente

Vincente lived with his siblings and parents. His parents and Latinx peers are extremely supportive. During his third year in college, he has taken an active role in leadership in three different Hispanic/Latinx led organizations on campus and worked 16 hours a week off campus. He desired to encourage others in the same way he has been encouraged:

"Sometimes you need like-minded people to get through your struggles. Different major. Different goals. Different backgrounds. We are social creatures based on biology. You need interactions in order to move forward. You need a group of people."

Key Themes

Though each participant individually experienced key influences as postsecondary, Latino male students, the participants all shared common influences which are defined in three key themes: (a) *De hombre a hombre/Man to man*, (b) *No te*

ahogues en un vaso de agua/Don't drown in a glass of water, and (c) *Para adelante, para atrás ni para tomar impulso/Always forward, never backwards – not even to gain momentum*. The three themes highlighted similar concepts from each of the participants. Moreover, this chapter explored the essence of persistence and gained confidence for Latino males who decided to pursue postsecondary education. The first theme, "*De hombre a hombre"*, explored the development and concept of "machismo," as well as the relationship with their fathers while connecting with other strong male influences on and off campus. The second theme, "*No te ahogues en un vaso de agua"*, highlighted gained resources and networks used to nurture academic, social, and professional growth throughout their college journey. The third theme, "*Para adelante, para atrás ni para tomar impulso"*, exposed methods of engagement, postsecondary student success, and career exploration and development. The following section provides an explanation of each theme.

Theme 1: De Hombre A Hombre

Many of the Latino males in the study made references to other Latino males in their lives who have impacted their identity and helped shaped their self-definition of college student success. Influential Latino males included fathers and uncles at home as well as peers on campus. The summarization of experiences into the theme, *"De hombre a hombre"* or *"Man to man"* highlight the differentiating relationships participants established with other Latino males and gives insight to their ability to establish their own identity as a Latino male.

Machismo

Latino male participants had three different opportunities to reflect and share on their perceptions of success stories through their college experiences. Although machismo was not a premeditated point of discussion for any of the interviews, participants recurrently used it as talking points. For many participants, machismo was viewed from different family-constructed concepts. In some participants' families, machismo was viewed as a guiding principle for being a male figure in the Latinx community. The definition of machismo was also broken into different fragmented beliefs, (e.g. men as the sole provider, male dominance, and cultural gender roles), which led Latino male participants to only take on certain aspects of machismo. In this instance, the machismo belief of males as providers was a shared belief, but the belief that the male gender should dominate over women was not shared among participants. Although the perception of machismo identity was vast and subjective for each participant, the overall perception for each group was summarized as a way to frame how Latino males constructed a sense of responsibility in order for Latino males to make sound decisions on life choices, such as generating finances and leading a family.

Alejandro, of Cuban descent, shared negative and positive images associated with machismo as generally defined in the Latinx culture, but highlighted the unspoken perception of the identity within his own family. Since there are more females than males in his family, he admitted the family emphasized a high value on education towards younger members in the family, both male and female. Despite the various definitions of machismo from cultural perspectives, the shared support for both genders in his family led Alejandro towards the following identity of machismo:

> We kind of chopped off all the bad stuff of machismo, and the good aspects, I guess the good aspects being like supporting, like being a provider, being successful, being a go-getter, being somebody who makes decisions responsibly, makes you stick to their guns, you know, knows what they believe, that kind of stuff. I think that's not exactly... it's not – it's not machismo, because it doesn't have the bad elements being sort of men here and the women you know come second or whatever.

Other participants, like Hector, experienced the machismo identity through his childhood. His family believed in typical stigmas cemented in the construction of the Latino male identity:

> Machismo really for me is a where like – the males think that they have the dominance. It's like between, like all of these genders, like where they think they're above from everyone, which I didn't really like growing up, but it was like the norm for like my family like even, like, you know, with my own course as well.

As Hector described his experience, his eye contact with me broke several times as he gathered his thoughts. Nonetheless, Hector explained he wanted to remove all traits of machismo from his identity. He feared the identity was limited and would hinder his future successes.

> Like I grew up in a very machismo household. So, with that, my – my... it's mostly my dad, where he still doesn't understand or maybe like, "oh, you have to do hard labor, work to – to kind of seem successful" but he's still supportive that I'm at GSU. I'm still studying something, but there's still like – I don't even want

to call it like toxic masculinity, but it is. Machismo is – that's one of the main things of being a machismo, and – and drawing from those like teachings and like... uh I wanted to kind of like expand – like to get rid of that barrier, really.

For other participants, the stereotypical, cultural definition of the machismo identity was almost insignificant in their families and self-identity. Vincente came from a household with a father who worked full-time, a stay-at-home mother, and siblings. His parents experienced a unique upbringing which impacted their beliefs of raising their own family:

I guess for me, I was lucky enough to have like, parents and like – in knowing that um really, machismo didn't really play a huge role into our family. And I think one reason that I might have played into that was that both my parents, they never had a dad so they grew up without a father figure. So, I guess – my parents always told me, like when they got together, they always promised themselves they'd be a fam – like a united family. They'd work out through any differences and make sure that their kids always grew up to like, the best that they could be.

While Vincente did not directly feel the pressures of machismo from his family, he shared his reality of the pressures of living up to the machismo standards from his surroundings like his peers: "I've always dealt with machismo and how deeply rooted it is within Latinx families. Latinx males still have the pressure on providing for the family and being the bread earner of the family alongside the dad." After this thought, Vincente explained the norm within the machismo identity framed Latino males as laborers. Therefore, pursing a postsecondary education would cause Latino males to have life experiences that contradict the standards of machismo:

> Another factor [of machismo] could be as simple as earning money. I know in certain Latinx families, it's normal for the sons to accompany their dad to work and get paid for working. I feel that gaining access to money at an early age from working and knowing it is a significant amount leads to many Latinx males to not pursue post-secondary education.

Participants shared their belief of machismo having a long-standing negative perception in the Latinx community. Some participants admitted to harmful and detrimental effects (i.e. exaggerated control, hypersexuality, or strong dominance) machismo imposed on their family, relatives, and their roles as they grew up in the family. Other participants indicated not seeing strong female-to-male power struggles between their internal circles such as parents, uncles and aunts, siblings, and other family dynamics but did in the Hispanic/Latinx community. Participants' feedback concluded that machismo is more of a learned behavior introduced from an early age. However, they also concluded Latino males can make the ultimate decision to continue or discontinue the cultural norm.

Father/Son Relationships

When participants were asked to share their different networks of support, all of them mentioned their family as a support network; but others also expounded on their relationship with their fathers. For a few of the participants, the relationships with their fathers deeply impacted their ability to openly express their emotions as Latino males in both positive and negative aspects. Participants shared different household interactions between them, their siblings, and their parents. The participants also shared different ways their fathers showed their opinions and attitudes towards college success and their

overall well-being. I summarized these father-to-son interactions into two categories of support: tangible and intangible in which tangible represents the seen, heard, and obvious support and intangible represents the obscure, unclear support.

In a one-on-one interview, Vincente openly shared his appreciation of his father's positive and transparent support; which he deemed as culturally uncommon from a Latino father in the Latinx community:

> ... household plays a huge role into it [college support]. And luckily for me, it was always like – my parents were always emotional, and my dad would cry, hug me saying how he's proud of me like he wasn't really – he didn't really care like whether you showed emotion or not. It is something I'm really thankful for it because he-he made me – he showed me that it's okay to show your emotions.

As Vincente described his relationship with his father, he looked very relaxed and had a small grin on his face. He continued to share other emotional displays of affection from his father.

In a separate one-on-one interview, the story of a father's inability to complete college propelled a fourth-generational U.S. status participant to attend college. Carlos's father completed a few years of college but was unable to graduate as a result of working full-time. Although he could not see the support from his father in the same way Vincente did, for Carlos, his fuel to enroll and stay in college was a promise to his father who also encouraged him to pursue a master's degree:

> Um, he said, so you gotta, you gotta get your masters, so you can be able to provide for your family; not call on me and stuff. [He was] Always wanting me

> to get like a master's or Ph.D., kind of like, I've always like said I would like, uh, promise, that's kind of been my thing.

Many of the participants who identified as first-generation students, shared their sense of responsibility to attend college and get a degree for the father and families. With the support from his father, Bernardo had something to prove: "Because he didn't go to college – he didn't even graduate high school, so I want to prove to him that I… I'm going to have a better life than he did." In general, Bernardo said his father motivated him, "because I don't want to let him down." Prior to attending college, Bernardo explained how his father motivated him to research and find the resources to fit his financial and academic needs.

Other students shared examples of intangible support. Hector did not feel pressured to attend college but wanted to attend for his own sake. He shared a story about a cousin he looked up to who encouraged his desire to attend college. In a family where machismo had a strong presence, Hector was content simply knowing his father could be happy with his progress in college:

> … I think he's happy that I'm still in in college because I have older siblings that some of them didn't really finish out college to see, but for him to see one or two youngest kids to still attain an education and even like put it forward and finding a career that – that makes him happy at least, I think.

He admitted his father was emotionally absent and unable to verbalize his love and emotions towards him as a son. The participant felt this reality was one that many people could experience in Latinx families.

> So really, where my dad wasn't really there like emotionally, he wouldn't say like '*te quiero mijo*'. And I think that's a lot for – I think – that's like common in Latino families, Latinx families.

Often, Hector looked to his mother to confirm support from his family. He said, "so, I didn't get that much like… more emotional support but I still saw him like cheer me on from a far where [as] my mom was giving me a lot of like, "all right, *te quiero*." In the same intimate moments of expressed support, he also remembered his mother comforting him and his father's unseen support:

> She would always like, remind me that my dad was proud, and I think that was like one way of getting that reassurance, but I think it was also, as I said, he was like – he was always at work and like working to like help us out because we are a big family.

Hector described a gesture of support from his father's busy work schedule and limited time at home as financial support:

> I think him showing like his like, "oh, he's proud of me" was to pay that like, small amount of like, what I owed and doing, just like, those actions like, oh, just like, being able to buy my book sometimes cause they do get expensive. I know like, he's proud of me, and he supported me throughout my whole college career.

Jose's parents halted their lives and left everything they owned in the Dominican Republic to establish and assure Jose's livelihood and education in the United States. This type of sacrifice helped Jose endure all of his barriers and struggles in his educational journey. Since then, his father has spent the majority of his time working

with limited time at home. Even though his father is not often physically present, Jose understood he had his father's support:

> Like my dad wasn't there, like, emotionally, but he was there, like... he was there, my whole life, but like he didn't really say a lot when it came to, "I love you", like, "I'm proud of you. I just had to understand that.

For many of participants that mentioned their father's support, the tangible support was seen as nonexistent; but participants had to believe their father's support existed. Hector shared his experience regarding his relationship with his father and said, "so, I didn't get that much like, [a more] emotional support but I still saw him... like, cheer me on from a far..." While the supportive presence of the fathers was either limited or nonexistent, participants had to build their motivation on their own accord. As long as the support from their fathers wasn't shown negatively or in a form of rejection, participants expressed simply 'knowing' their fathers were supportive. For Roberto, a participant who traveled abroad in Mexico for the holiday season to familiarize himself with his father's side of the family, the importance of moving forward regardless of the support he received was key:

> I've had a lot of family really dear to me that have been in the streets all their life, you know, and some of them are even like, you know, in prison and it's like I'm a poster... where I'm like this – this is not the only thing that's out there for us, you know? And kind of, everybody's looking to me to, to make that happen. You know, and I just – it's not that it's like the glamour of being the first one. It's like a thing of necessity, you know, if you really want to change the course of your family, you know?

In this moment of the interview, Roberto's openness in the focus group provoked other participants to slowly nod in agreement followed by a very brief moment of silence. The next participant contributed another personal notation of their relationship with their father and family. After a break in silence, Felipe shared how difficult it was to progress in college with his father's doubt and nonexistent support:

> It was kind of hard because my dad wasn't a big fan of school. He actually didn't support me going to school... [he said] "You're gonna end up dropping out" or like "it's not going to be for you", or "you're wasting your time."

Unfortunately, additional family members withdrew their support after his father's negative and public responses to pursuing his bachelor's degree. Felipe's father blatantly told him he preferred Felipe to work alongside with him in the construction business. The lack of support from his father forced him to work and pay for college tuition and fees on his own. In addition, he was unable to get financial aid from the state or federal government. Despite missing the support from his family and government, Felipe shared the development of his first years in college:

> As I progressed throughout college, I demonstrated to him [that] I'm not there to play games. I did really good in school. I got like, recognition in school, or even like right now, I'm taking honors courses and like, it's dumb [crazy] seeing how much like, how I got – have recreated it. [It] has completed like done the whole 360 where my parents are like really supportive. Like now whenever I go out and we meet someone, like one of his friends, he's always like, "oh, my son is in school" like "he's doing this" and like he's – they [family] show way more support. They're [family] the ones that are helping me pay my tuition, now. Like

I pay majority of it, but there's times where I show them the amount [owed] so they help me.

This subtheme highlighted the deep impression Latino fathers had on the participants. The relationships between the participants and their fathers each depicted a different level of engagement and support from their fathers. As participants continued their journey in their postsecondary pursuit, the fathers heightened their support or began to support the participants, in contrast to their previous non-existent support. The subtheme also underlined the resilience of Latino male students as they pushed against the social and cultural norms of identifying as a Latino male.

Male Peer-to-Peer Experiences

Outside of family experiences, many of the participants reflected and shared the support they received from other Latino males in their pursuit of success in college. For participants, male peer-to-peer relationships manifested through seeking ways they could serve Latino males and the Latinx community. Male peer-to-peer experiences include relationships built from high school, college encounters and friendships, and participant's eagerness to provide the support in return for any support they received towards their own successful completion of a college degree.

Jose considered the friendships he had from his hometown and realized the choices he had to make if he wanted to achieve his own success. He described his dedication for staying in college, in comparison to his Latino male friends who followed the traditional machismo model of going to work at an early age with their fathers. In general, his Latinx community connections came primarily from his hometown. Jose and many of his Latinx peers attended the closest institution of postsecondary education to

their hometown, but Jose transferred out to seek a diverse institution. He shared the following about his hometown friends:

> Some of them don't even like, they're not in school anymore. And they see that I'm still in school. So, all of them were like "you gotta keep pushing" you know? I wish I was just like through with it [college] but they [are] kind of like living it through me. I guess they want to see me succeed because they I guess – it wasn't, they say it's not their thing. So, I know they're... they're rooting for me.

He recognized what kind of financial impact staying in college would do for him long-term in comparison to his peers' current financial circumstance:

> They over here – they work [in] construction and stuff so they're over here working, making like, what I – what young me thought was like, good money because all [of them], they're getting paid like $600 cash every week from like... there's jobs that I can make double or triple that if I just stick through with college.

As participants progressed through college, they realized their need to interact with others for support and looked to receive that same support from other Latino males. Jose recognized he needed to reach out to other peers for support:

> Every job I've had I've always been referred in by a friend, so I've always skipped the interview process. I looked up videos on how to answer questions, but I needed someone there to help make sure my answers were acceptable.

Another participant gave credit to one Latino male friend from his high school who also attended the same college. The friend provided him with navigational help through vital college experiences:

> I think the person that helped me the most was one of my friends. We were good friends in high school. So, he was like the only other person that I knew that I was in college with at the time, and he of course he had already picked his classes, he knew about financial aid... he actually sat down with me and helped me pick my classes like, before I started school so he was definitely a huge help. I do want to point out, though, when I was in high school, my counselors were like terrible. They were very, very bad.

As a community within the Latinx community, Felipe was appreciative of the support he received from his Latino fraternity brothers and compared his experience to that of his peers in high school. His peers in high school made him feel less than while he worked in construction and began to pursue his academic career. His peers in college, such as his fraternity brothers, made him feel motivated while he worked in construction and continued to pursue his academic career. He referenced how his fraternity brothers helped him adapt to the large campus environment, meet other Latinx peers, and connected him to resources necessary for navigating college:

> My [fraternity] brothers were the main motivator. Just the fact that all my [high school] friends were getting into college and I felt like all, like all surrounded by people who were like, “oh, I got accepted into this school and that school.” You know? I’m [Felipe] just the one that’s all over here working construction and that kind of like, made me feel like, you know, I was less than them. And they kind of made me feel that way. So, like in a way, like, I don't want to feel that way I know I can do this.

For Roberto, the Latino male fraternity members played an active role as mentors and served as accountability partners, motivating one another towards success:

> For one, undergraduate [brothers] – we keep each other in check with the grades and you know keep each other, kind of aware of where we are mentally and the same with, the same of the alumni. But also, we have kind of, an example to look to, you know, from the ones that graduated already. So, I think that's def one part of the entire community support.

Participants were asked to reflect, consider, and pinpoint specific benefits of male peer-to-peer support they received. Bernardo summed up the collective responses from the two focus groups with the following:

> It also helps me communicate with them and better, and because... when you have people that are around... are your same kind of ethnicity and your kind of in the same background, it is easier to work together; it is easier to communicate, easier to share your ideas and opinions, and you feel more comfortable...

He also highlighted what working and connecting with other Latino male peers was like for him: "we're not the only ones here, you know, so there's other people like us. So, we kind of feel like we're more united, I guess."

Generally, the support the Latino male participants experienced compelled them to pay-it-forward and serve as a mentor and guide to others. For Roberto and Hector, their interactions with peers significantly impacted their college experience and success.

> So, yeah, I think that if I can serve like as a big brother to anybody, then you know that that really makes me know that, you know, my hardships are worth it,

too, you know? [To] be able to get other people across. I don't really believe in freedom unless other people around me are free too, you know? (Roberto)

So just like, being in exemplary if I were like a mentor to the freshman. I just like being there and trying to like be able to relate to the freshman's or the underclassmen. Like those roles, really, like, helped me. I identify myself as a Latinx leader, not just for Latino men, but like, Latinos in general – the Latinx community in general. I want to see everyone succeed in our community. And I just, like, want to be a part of that. (Hector)

As they began to share their reflections and stories, they all spoke to their relationships with other Latino male peers and the help they contributed to their success. The important consideration in this subtheme is a solidified desire each participant mentioned wanting to deliver to other Latino males – peers and younger generations.

Theme 2: No Te Ahogues En Un Vaso De Agua

Other key findings from the triangulated study included the participants' belief in their own progress as Latino males in order to achieve success. Part of believing in themselves was a learned skill that requires one to focus on the larger, overarching barriers in order to overcome them instead of focusing on smaller details that distracted their mometum towards graduation. I summarized this skill into the theme, "*No te ahogues en un vaso de agua"* or *"Don't drown in a glass of water"* which interprets to not sweating the small stuff or overcomplicating a situation. This section of the chapter will explore the participants' lived-experiences in overcoming barriers while in college. In addtion, this section highlights dicussions on concepts such as the development of new

networks of people, practices of success, and forms of communication as tools for college success.

Breaking Out of the Comfort Zone

Participants shared common struggles of finding assistance and information needed to progress in their postsecondary journey. I gathered some participants were able to break out of their comfort zones by necessity. Through these experiences, they were forced to meet new people and learn about resources. Participants also pointed to their levels of confusion and lack of guidance as motivational moments that pushed them out of their comfort zones. In these instances, the moments were identified as key times when skill sets were built and tested by overcoming their barriers.

Felipe started at a Georgia State University – Perimeter College before transferring into the Atlanta campus. His day to day operations consisted of working, going to class and going directly back to his home. During his two years at the community college, he said, "I was confused and lost with no guidance on what steps to take to achieve success. I was the college student who would just attend class and then go to work." His transition to the four-year institution changed things for him as he expanded his social network through his involvement in a Latino male fraternity:

> So, I come from a community college – I started and then I transferred. Before I transferred, I wasn't really involved into campus because I was scared, um, that you know people wouldn't like talk to me. I was sort of like shy and um that's when I, um started – when I transferred, that's when I joined [the Latino male fraternity] and those people like really helped me like get out of my comfort zone.

> They helped me a lot like develop professionally, be able to speak in front of people.

Despite social barriers and challenges, Vincente shared how he had to force himself to speak to new people. He said, "you know, it really just takes you to step out of that comfort zone, you know, speak to that one person that could probably potentially lead you to another person and you know." As he elaborated his experience of stepping out of his own comfort zone, he also shared his perception of what the college experience was supposed to offer enrolled students:

> College is that time where you're supposed to like, you know, it's like going out on... out of your shell and then see new, try new things, doing new thing that you don't really see yourself doing but, you know, you never know. Like, it could be something that you turn out to like.

Other participants, like Diego described their experiences of learning more within the Latinx community after breaking out of their comfort zone:

> I've put myself out there more and I'm learning more about certain issues that are attacking our community as a Latino and [as] minorities in general. Nowadays, such as, you know, immigration policies, you know, political things and all those things... And other topics such as, you know, hunger and the homeless population in Georgia... education for young Latino students, since we [Latino fraternity] have kind of done events and stuff related to those topics, I guess it kinda has helped me obtain more knowledge and in a way, you know, become more successful, since I'm more aware of those issues. And I can better understand them and... and you know strive and aim to, you know, help as much as possible.

During a different part of the focus group meeting, he also mentioned the outcome of being able to break out of his comfort zone:

> So ever since I got here, I basically live in the [Hispanic/Latinx] office. So, I'm just getting to know, also, the staff there in the office – getting to know more students. And yeah, it's been good, just because I've been able to, like, kind of, I guess, get out of my comfort zone and put myself out there through my fraternity.

In summary, participants appreciated getting to know different people outside of their normal circles. Felipe announced breaking out of his comfort gave him the confidence "to join different organizations that continued to open new doors for me." All participants shared their growth in social skills and increased engagement in their academics and cultural surroundings as a result of the learned skill of breaking out of their comfort zone. These positive results directly impacted and transformed the success of their college career.

Places and Spaces: "Where Latinos Learn Next to Other Latino People"

Attendance at an institution located in an urban, city was another element that pushed participants to break barriers. With a non-traditional layout for a college campus, many of the buildings at the institution were described as being physically spread out with limited green space and non-traditional housing options. While some participants enrolled at the institution for the diversity and career opportunities, others decided to enroll based on the location of the institution in a big and busy city. Within the institution, participants also shared communal spaces that impacted their engagement and sense of belonging.

Before the first day of class, Manuel's orientation experience set the stage for framing the type of space he believed he would thrive in. As a reflection of his positive experience during his orientation, he said:

> I remember like on my first day of orientation feeling really overwhelmed just because of like, this is like a new life that I'm about to embark on; a new journey, you know? I had some friends because I went to, you know, a high school in Georgia but beyond that, like I was really nervous about what was going to come ahead. And so, having the orientation like with the different speakers and like the tours and somebody that really helped me a lot, and I made some – I met some friends during orientation who ended up becoming my friend for all of college and we're going to be graduating students, so it's been really nice to have that.

Social by nature, this experience provided him with an optimistic outlook for the opportunities and experiences he would encounter at the institution. The speakers and the person who provided him with support were of Hispanic descent. For others, locating a space and identifying with a place at the institution was more than finding Hispanic/Latinx friends. With a career interest in radio and music, Hector described going to college in the city as a privilege:

> For me, it's the energy that Atlanta has; it's the creative people, the new like thrill I feel. Like, it's like an uprising right now in Atlanta, where everyone feels like they can make something and it's very like, natural and it looks nice and I want to believe that I'm part of that community as well, where there's a lot of Atlanta individuals that are creative and that really helped expand what I really want to do in my career – which is to work within the music industry.

For some participants, choosing to attend college in a major city created some premediated challenges. For example, Manuel explained the importance of finding his own space:

> I think one challenge that I foresaw before was kind of like finding my space, you know? Going to school in Atlanta is like easy. There's a lot of hustle and bustle. I knew it was gonna be a little challenging to find that space – to find the people, the right people to commune with.

Despite his experience during orientation, he struggled to find a group to connect with post orientation. As Manuel suspected, after signing up for numerous on-campus, student-led organizations during his first year of college, he located a group of peers he felt most connected with. Although this experience was brief, he described it as his biggest barrier in his first year of college.

On campus, there is a unique office all participants highlighted as an instrumental part of their connection to the Latinx community on campus. The office is known as a welcoming, academic resource office for all students and specific to Hispanic and Latinx students. The space was described as a "home away from home." For Felipe, the space "makes you feel like, welcomed there. Like, [they are] understanding that other people went through the same thing as you." Diego described the office as an opportunity to either find or create a community and "where Latinos learn next to other Latino people, in general." He also described the culture of the office as a place where students can "socialize and bond with their own ethnicity" as well as:

> Create, you know, [a] family feeling, you know? As a Puerto Rican, being a US territory, I am able to, you know, just go back and forth from a country where you

know a lot of people are not able to go back to their country. So, having that office where you can meet people from the same country or just your same ethnicity in general is good.

In his written reflection, he closed out with a statement in relation to the office:

> Being able to continuously participate in events hosted by the office has made a great impact on my college experience. This office has become a special place in my life since it is like a piece of home, away from home.

Alejandro, a second-generational Cuban American, began his college career with the intent to explore his cultural identity a little further than what he already knew from his home and family. He described the office and said:

> It allows us to sort of have an HQ, a little bit like a headquarters. This is where Latinos come to operate out of – this is where we come to gather, together. And if you need help on something, go here. Like if you need anything.

Manuel described the office as a motivating space.

> Because for me, as I mentioned, everything about my life like... I was around people (I'm a very people-oriented person) so if I have a friend who's like got an event to go to, like I feel more inclined to go to an event with them, even if I'm like, not as interested in the event. I think it's kind of a motivator for me.

While many students were able to connect with the office early their college career, Carlos did not connect with the space until his third year and described his first experience in the following manner:

> People started talking to people and I'm talking with [one of the staff members] and everybody is there and then I started to build a family. I was like, "oh, I'm

> gonna start coming here" and [I] started studying and just using the resources there and from there, they just became like a family. Literally where everybody are friends like – just, again, to know more people in there, that's how I kind of got involved.

In his written reflection, he added the following about the office:

> This has been a space that I literally call home and feel a sense of community. Here, I've made so many friends and learned about my Latino community, been a part of so many social, career, and leadership opportunities for Latino/Hispanic students available at GSU.

Roberto's experience in the Hispanic/Latinx office was a major part of his identity development and sense of belonging in the Hispanic/Latinx community. The office and the professional staff in it provided him with reassurance of knowing he could get support at any time:

> If I'm ever facing any sort of hardships, whether it's, you know, financial or whether it's something that is – I guess, will impede me professionally, you know, I kind of always have it in the back of my mind that there are professionals and staff that I can reach out to and that, I – you know... I can't, I can't really let anything circumstantial take over, because, you know, there's the resources and the support there for me.

Roberto elaborated on his appreciation for the three years of experience within the office: "[They] get us through finals and I mean there's always workshops related to prevalent like, Latinx issues and causes and, you know that, make us aware of how we can be involved."

Majority of the participants felt a strong sense of community from the Hispanic/Latinx office and believed in the positive impact their connection that the office made in their community. From focus groups and one-on-one interviews, participants also shared reflective thoughts on the institution's lack of efforts towards the Hispanic/Latinx community. They pointed to the importance of stepping out of their comfort zone in order to identify supportive allies.

Communication

With over 50,000 enrolled students at GSU, participants shared engagement strategies for navigating the campus and large city environments. Communication and distribution of information and resources became a recurring theme within the focus group interviews. Besides the institutional-led forms of communication, there were a few virtual methods of communication that kept them abreast of resources, events, and tips of success catered to their retention in college.

During the focus group interviews, participants explained they connect with one another through social media platforms such as Instagram (a mobile photo and video sharing social network) and GroupMe (a mobile group messaging social network). In unison, participants talked about numerous groups created in GroupMe such as a group chat for all Hispanic/Latinx students at the institution, student led organization groups, Greek letter organization group chats, larger study groups based on class assignments, etc. Carlos described the use of the social media platforms, especially the GroupMe application as a freedom of expression:

> It allows you to give – like a, I say a voice so it needs to be heard, you know? I think you learn, you learn things, as well. I've learned a lot just listening to

> people and understanding different sides – different perspectives that I wasn't aware of before.

As a new student in the state of Georgia, Diego learned more from the social network applications than he did at his orientation and other campus announcements:

> I'm like learning these programs and stuff and I've learned a lot like, what they don't tell you about our university. Like there's so much people don't know, like the resources and everything that is available, and I think that it's important to get [those] out so people know what you're paying for [student fees].

Along with emails and physical paper-flyers posted around the campus, Hector agreed with participants on the overall increase of their engagement stating, "our engagement like, by using these platforms, brought more engagement and like, I agree, like it gave me more knowledge and more understanding but just to be able to engage and talk about it [our culture, our heritage] was good." Alejandro, realized what an open-line of communication did for his success and engagement saying, "I guess the more you get dependent on people, the more supportive, I suppose they are and the more likely you are to see other fluctuations or consistent, you know, increase or decrease of staying in school."

Even for students that are not as involved with on-campus activities, the level of communication taking place at the institution includes more than the traditional campus-oriented structure such as emails and phone calls. Participants divulged the numerous group chats created on social media platforms among the Hispanic/Latinx student population and admitted to the communication's redundancy. Despite the number of group chats, the participants appreciated being included as voices of the institution's

Latinx community. Organically, as Latinx students began to uncover more resources that helped them, they began to share resources, fun facts, and other important institutional news that affected the progression of other Latinx students through informal lines of communication.

Theme 3: Para Adelante, Para Atrás Ni Para Tomar Impulso

In the third theme, *"Para adelante, para atrás ni para tomar impulso"* or *"Always forward, never backwards – not even to gain momentum"*, participant's feedback embodied a sense of maturity and growth as college students from what they described their first year of college. Overall, participants contributed their success to the following factors: engagement, career development and on-campus resources, as well as the importance of building legacies and balancing their life responsibilities.

Social Engagement: "There's an Organization for That"

Each participant highlighted some level of engagement as a contributor to maintaining success from their first year moving towards graduation. As a result, there was a high level of campus engagement for the majority of the Latino males that participated in the study. As Manuel explained: "the clubs you are involved in, I think the people you surround yourself with, the connections you make, I think that it all plays a role in what success looks like." He also expressed his personal interest: "it's more about being involved on different organizations on campus. And so, whether it be the Latino one or it'd be any other club, I always wanted to go to events." Throughout the triangulated research approach, participants shared how they connected with at least one or more groups and organizations. From this type of engagement, participants in the study said they were afforded high levels of participation based on the growth of their

social, professional, and academic networks. In addition to participation with organizations, participants discovered friendship during the engagement process.

Diego's engagement on campus began with an introduction to another Puerto Rican student. In this instance, both students shared similar cultural backgrounds. Additionally, their hardships as college students helped them establish a direct line of communication. The relationship between the two Latino male peers led to Diego's involvement with a Latino male fraternity.

> I just started in the Latino fraternity that I am in right now. And that's what kind of like elevated my involvement on campus because now we're doing, like events all over the place, all the time. Being part of the fraternity has also made me you know, do stuff even outside of campus, you know – going to different conferences and all those things, hanging out a lot.

Hector's engagement increased as he attended more events sponsored by different university organizations. He was able to develop more sub-circles in his social life which nurtured his appreciation for the institution. Additionally, Hector's social engagement led him to find more students interested in a similar career path and noted:

> I was able to almost get like, my career started just because they're [student organizations] very on top of everybody in there. Um, I think for me, is – really, like through the organization's, I found most of my friends through campus and student organizations and I think... yeah, I think that's like just being active in that I've met more people. I brought in my friend group. And now I have more different friend groups, as well. So just like if you're active in, in like, student

> body organizations that... that really like, made me more consistent with liking the GSU's community.

As a reflection of his engagement, Roberto explained his experiences on campus opened doors of opportunity. For example, Roberto had an epiphany after he met with business leaders in corporate America who looked like him and identified as Latinos as well. In this moment he realized he could also succeed and exist in non-Hispanic/non-Latinx spaces on campus:

> I think that really opened my eyes to be able to see that I could be between the four walls of corporate America and, you know... being able to see beyond after that, you know, I had a couple more experiences.

Shortly after this moment, participants continued to share similar stories and experiences highlighting the growth in their social and academic circles which also encouraged their attendance at events they would not attend on their own. As a reflection, Hector wanted to give advice to incoming students to assure they knew how to stay engaged and informed, by introducing success strategies which his fellow focus group participants agreed with:

> You know, what I would tell them to do is like get more involved like, actually show your presence in school and don't be scared to like talk to this person or talk to that person. Because at the end of the day, it's all about helping each other and like graduating as a Latino.

Overall, the students agreed with the connection of student success through campus engagement and involvement in student organizations. As examples, participants began listing various student organizations offered at the institution. Diego and others in

the focus group began to laugh as they listed the names of the organizations they knew of:

> I just like the fact that, you know, there is a really diverse – maybe they try their best to keep it that way, you know? There are so many organizations! Like for everything, bro! Like this literally is so funny! It's so funny because you can think about something and there's gonna be an organization for that. Like okay, there's a lot of ways for you to get involved. They offer a lot of resources for like everything as far as, I don't know... yes, workouts and just ways to get students involved and I guess they try their best to, you know, help every other ethnicity, because they understand that, you know, the campus is really diverse.

Academic Engagement: "Can You Teach Me This?"

For most of the participants, access to career related information started in their third year. Participants learned about internships and career related opportunities, as an extension from their on-campus engagement, as well as specific career related student organizations, national organizations, and professional associations. During the focus groups, students shared the initiatives they took to get more information related to their career interest and academic preparation, as well as the on-campus resources that contributed to their advancement. In order to acclimate themselves to the different opportunities, Bernardo shared the following guidelines for success as fellow participants agreed:

> So, for campus resources, I would say go to your [professor's] office hours if you don't understand what the professors teaching you or if you're stuck on a certain part. Just tell them, "can you teach me this from the beginning of the chapter?"

> Take notes or at the end of class go to TA [teaching assistant/graduate assistant] office hours.

Participants felt a difference when getting help from the Teaching Assistants (TA) who were different ethnicities. For the TA's of Hispanic/Latinx descent, Bernardo shared "communicating with them was more relaxed, and I felt more comfortable interacting with them." The subject of reading to stay informed of opportunities came up as another initiative recommended by participants for career development. Alejandro urged students read:

> Number one, read it, read everything. So, if there's a pamphlet about your school – the school that you're interested in, read it. If there are reviews online or something read it. If there's descriptions about the major, read that. Read about what you want to do before you make a decision, because you don't want to be halfway through your career.... That way you can sort of hit the ground running in your college career. Because you don't want to be sort of figuring things out, or it's not preferable that you're sort of figuring things out past your freshman year. But you want to make sure the more knowledge you have about what you're doing, the better you can be at it.

In general, the group wanted to make sure Latino males and Latinx students in general were aware of every possible opportunity the institution was offering. Alejandro asserted, "If there's a campus resource for Latinos, go visit that. Make sure you get the emails – get it! Get phone numbers, get all kinds of contact information and start building the relationships." For others who were not as predetermined with their college

career, they learned along the way. This group of participants recognized they needed help in their professional development to persist and advance. Jose shared:

> I have never usually been one to seek help. In virtually every area of life I've tried to do things my way. Whether it was because I felt that I was better off doing it myself or if I simply didn't want to bother anyone with my questions; I've always been this way. This past semester I've been trying to get my resume in order and started applying to internships, but then I realized that I've never actually had any interviewing experience and was behind compared to others.

At a computer science department sponsored event, Bernardo attended a weekend long "hackathon" as a way to connect with his career choice and campus environment. He admitted that this event was hosted every semester and on his own accord, he decided to attend in his third year. He enjoyed the event and weekend-long activity where he had the opportunity to network, team build, and increase his career skillset:

> We didn't get first place or, you know, third place, but it was a good experience. That was the first time I worked with the team for that long, and we had a close connection because we're like in the same... in the same environment, the same group.

Bernardo explained "another resource was Supplemental Instruction (SI)." Apart from the direct support students could solicit from their professors and in-class assistants, a couple of the participants in the study shared the SI resource greatly benefited from. SI gave the students who received a course grade of at least an 'A' the opportunity to help other students who were academically at-risk. The peer-to-peer support was directly tied to the course the students were having difficulty in. For more direct assistance in career

exploration and course selection, Alejandro expressed his gratitude with the academic advisors:

> "And talk to advisors, talk to staff members – go visit. [They] Really helped me out in terms of either getting an internship, finding out how to navigate the accounting world, finding out how to navigate my class selection."

A big moment of satisfaction and a success story that connected with career interest came from Hector. He participated in a student organization that worked directly with the radio station on campus, which lead to his intern position at the station:

> Like I helped out in like, this last rotation. I gave my recommendations of songs and then, I saw one of them, like, pop, pop up in the rotation. So, I was like, oh! Like a little bit of me is like in this virtual like, soundwave! Like oh, people can hear that, now. And like, I'm like, my voice is on a radio station. I'm like, oh, that's crazy.

The career-related opportunities and on-campus resources participants were able to take advantage of were always offered by the institution but, from the student's perspective took a great deal of initiative to locate and identify. Some participants began to understand the importance of getting involved in their career-interest to build a stronger resume, while others truly needed the help of professional members within the institution. At the end of their participation, they were enthusiastic about their next steps in their postsecondary journey.

Career Preparation: Building Legacies and Balancing Life

One of the key themes in the collected data referenced the need to build a legacy, either of their own or from their family's legacy. In order to overcome challenges as

college students (e.g. finding campus resources, navigating college life, and participating in organizations) their need to identify motivational tools to increase their desire to persist and succeed was also a valuable finding. It is important to note, participants' personal characteristics also kept them motivated with their various on-campus involvement and executive leadership, their desire to seek additional academic resources, and their ability to balance a full-time academic schedule with 16 or more hours dedicated to their off-campus job responsibilities.

Jose started his first year of college solely attending classes and going home and admitted his lack of staying busy made him feel more unproductive and reflected on the negative impact it had on their GPA. Since his first year, he worked forty-hour work weeks in combination with a full-time course load (twelve to fifteen credit hours per semester). Jose shared how he managed to balance his schedule and still maintain a 4.0 GPA:

> I mean it is, it's hard, obviously. In my freshman year I kind of took it easy. I didn't really work. So, I was probably, I feel like for me as a person I am – like if I'm not staying busy, I get, like, comfortable [at] being lazy. So, I have to constantly be doing something, like, I feel like the more classes I've done and, like, the help more hours of work that like I work, I feel like the better I've done. Like freshman year I didn't work or anything. That was probably like my worst year. It [freshman year] was still like good but it was probably my worst year like terms like GPA wise.

In another focus group, two other participants shared similar attitudes regarding their time management and momentum in college towards their success.

> But I feel like overall success in college or sort of success is finding that balance of having a decently high you know GPA being active in your campus community with a certain organization, having those connections. I like being busy. You know, it's kind of like, I like being a little bit, uh, a little bit stressed. Not too much, just a little bit stressed because I feel like I'm doing stuff, you know, I feel like I'm doing something. I'm not just laying around not doing anything. (Diego)

Immediately after, Hector added: "I like how you said that you like to be kept busy because I'm the same way I want to do something." The quotes received undisputed agreements such as "mmm-hmm" interjections followed by non-verbal approvals, such as head nods, during the video recordings.

The theme, building legacies, also derived from participants desire to show their siblings that degree attainment was possible. In a conversation about his siblings, Felipe shared:

> They really look up to me like they see that I stay up late to do homework – they see that I studied up to like four in the morning. What I tell them to do, now, especially the one in high school, is get more involved in school, because that's one thing where I failed at. So, I'm telling them, do this, do that like, having someone to tell you what, like, not tell you what to do, but, like, guide you really... I don't know, he's like really grateful that I'm here like because for me when I was, um, I was child, I had trial and error – I had to do it. They know what they're gonna do, they're more motivated.

After he received the help and resources from Latinx people on campus and surrounding communities, Diego felt Latino males and other Latinx people, “have the capacity to be in higher ed institutions. And not only that, because you know, that's the foundation, but succeeding in them is really an influential factor. And, you know, getting you across the finish line.” As another encouragement piece to build legacy and success, Diego shared:

> People have been successful. You know, they fought through whatever they fought through as minorities, but they end up being successful. That also motivates me there [Georgia State University]. Hey, they could do it, I can do it, also.

The college setting was described as a place where the participants were able to grow the most from other moments in their life. Building a legacy for Manuel was more about what he was able to give and the ability to give back:

> I think this was one of the first places where I really began to understand what it meant like to be an adult, because most people entering college are around 18 and so this is like legally what it means to be an adult and being able to be involved with students, your age and being involved in clubs and going out and going to class and all that stuff. I think [this] is all part of that process and like I feel like being successful is... is... is about finding where you fit in most and whether or not you have anything you want to contribute to, whether it be the school or yourself or your peers or whatever.

Students continuously shared their passions and interests throughout the study. Their foundations initially starting with their families and home-life and evolving

as their own identity evolved. Their passions and pride that were instilled and developed are what kept them persisting in their postsecondary journey as college students.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to a) identify the types of support necessary for Latino males to be successful from the beginning of their undergraduate career through graduation and b) gain an understanding of how to strengthen their support system to promote a positive postsecondary experience. Participants identified father and other male peer-to-peer relationships essential to identity development and academic, social, and professional growth. Participants shared the different ways they pushed and forced themselves to go beyond their comfort levels to get closer to their academic goals and achieve their defined success. Additionally, to support their momentum towards graduation, participants ascertained different ways they increased their involvement on campus, such as choosing to work off-campus jobs, and seeking resources to keep them on the path of success towards graduation. Chapter V will include an analysis of the findings and conclusions from this study.

CHAPTER V

INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to develop a comprehensive understanding of the critical influences shaping the experience of Latino male students positioned to graduate from a Minority Serving Institution (MSI). To participate in the study, students had to meet the following criteria: identify as a Latino male student with at least 90 credit hours completed. Participants shared experiences and perspectives of how they utilized the support around them and the resources that were available to them. I conducted a three-phase data collection process which included: virtual focus groups, one-page written reflections, and one-on-one virtual interviews. For faster access to the students and the accommodation of possible impeding schedules, all interviews were recorded on Zoom, a virtual platform.

Latino male participants shared their college experiences with a focus on their academic, personal, familial, and friendship dynamics as a Latino male college student. The data collected provided insight into how the participants made meaning of people and places connected to their success in college. The triangulated approach brought insight on Latino males' strong-will and desire to push against odds towards their success in completing a four-year degree. This chapter revisits the themes and patterns discussed in Chapter IV to provide a deeper interpretation and analysis of the findings. In this

chapter, I offer a three-phase model depicting the participants' linear development in student success. I then discuss how the research findings answer the research question, focusing on two key aspects of the participants' experiences, which serve as analytic categories: negotiating familial/cultural expectations while building social capital and finding validation within the college environment. These interpretive insights, which connect to the guiding research question and the literature, provide a more holistic understanding of Latino male student success. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the and limitations of the study and a personal reflection.

Analysis Of Findings: Understanding Latino Male Student Success

The findings from this study focused on Latino male participants' engagement and student success experiences at a four-year Minority Serving Institution. Latino male participants shared how they navigated and made meaning of many of their successes by connecting with peers and resources who acknowledged the participants' identities as members of the Hispanic/Latinx community, but more so as Latino males. This study demonstrates points of success and potential struggles for Latino males pursuing a postsecondary degree. This study provided insights on how to support Latino male college students from enrollment to graduation by identifying behaviors, key experiences, and critical influences. The themes from the findings depicted a linear, developmental process for how Latino male participants in this study made meaning of their experience and their success as a student.

"Latino Male Stages of Student Success" Model

Latino male participants made meaning of their experiences of transitioning to college and progressing into the college experience in three phases: *De hombre a*

hombre/Man to man; No te ahogues en un vaso de agua/Don't drown in a glass of water; Para adelante, para atrás ni para tomar impulso/Always forward, never backwards – not even to gain momentum. From creating a male identity, identifying resourceful paths, and discovering motivational assets (i.e. family, friends, and concepts), each phase revealed to be a vital part of the participants' advancement towards earning a postsecondary degree.

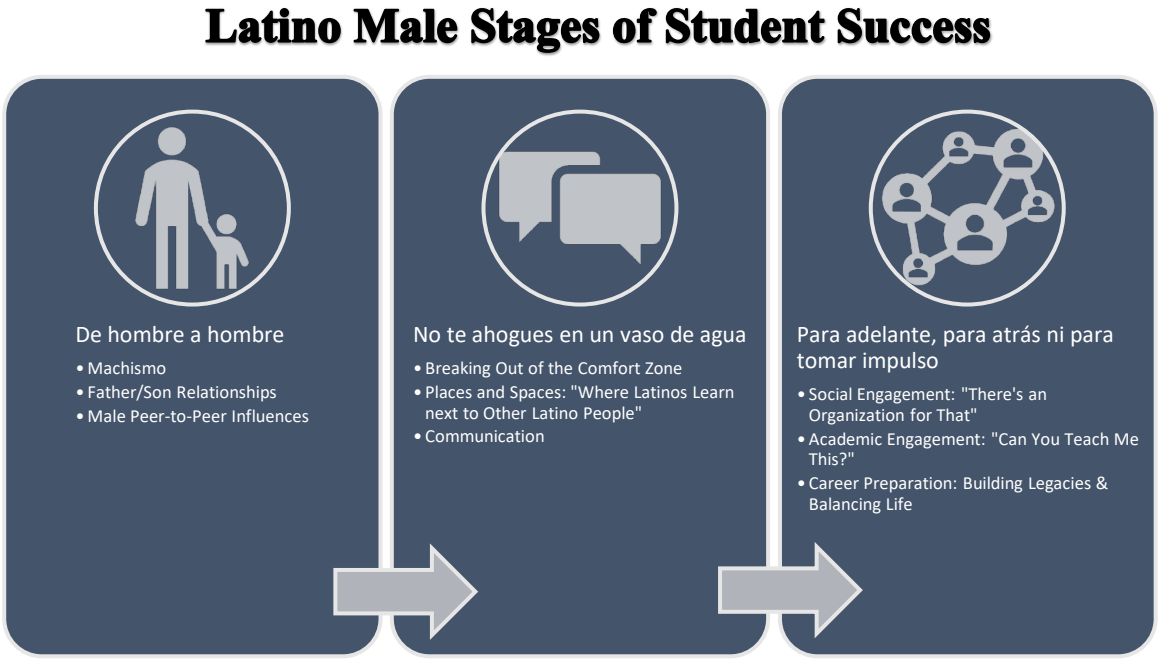

Figure 2. Latino Male Stages of Student Success

In the first phase, *"De hombre a hombre"* or *"Man to man"*, I found essential moments of identity development for the participants. Key aspects of development included interactions with family members, primarily with their fathers; redefining the sociocultural identity of machismo; and directly and indirectly built relationships with other Latino males from participants. All three of these experiences played a critical role in the Latino male participants' decision to enroll in a postsecondary institution. The

experiences helped participants begin to create habits that would serve as a firm foundation to support their own success during their educational journey.

During focus group discussions, there was a heavy focus on the fathers' unspoken expectations of success and accomplishment towards the Latino males that participated in this study. In contrast to the paternal presence of their fathers, the participants explained their mothers were present. As a result of their mothers' unconditional affection and support, the participants did not feel pressured to fulfill their sociocultural identity as a Latino male. However, throughout the study Latino males communicated internalized pressure and obligation to meet expectations to fulfill male responsibilities set by their fathers.

In the second phase, participants shared moments that were most impactful and strengthened their confidence as they transitioned to college. Latino males were apprehensive in looking for support and mutually described having to break out of their comfort zones. After breaking out of their comfort zones, participants were inspired to further engage and communicate with more people in and outside of their career and social interests. These significant experiences promoted their resiliency, as emphasized in the name of this phase, "*No te ahogues en us vaso de agua*" or *"Don't drown in a glass of water"* by worrying about any experiences that they felt were going to keep them from success and could be solved.

In the third phase, *Para adelante, para atrás ni para tomar impulso* or *"Always forward, never backwards – not even to gain momentum"*, participants exhibited a spirit of endurance and persistence as their postsecondary experiences continued to transpire. These experiences included on campus engagement with student organizations,

integrating their career interest with professional organizations, and determining their immersion with career preparation. Constructed from data collected in the triangulated approach, the stages identified in this model represent how Latino male students in this study made meaning of their engagement and student success during their postsecondary journey.

Sáenz and Ponjuan (2009) point to one of the factors that contributed to the "vanishing Latino male" in higher education was the faulty decision-making process into their postsecondary education (Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2009). The participants in this study shared common sentiments regarding the challenges they experienced before enrolling in college. Those challenges included the pressure of choosing academics versus their family, maintaining their responsibility in their household, and the burden of balancing the demands as Latino males pursuing a postsecondary degree. Reoccurring themes such as the cost, location, travel, and overall impact enrolling would have on their families were common views shared by most participants.

In addition, the data pointed to an emerging theme of how they defined themselves as a "man" through various male relationships. Although it is common for a man to define masculinity through male relationships (Covarrubias & Stone, 2015), I found participants had to navigate and select which male roles they wanted to adopt and reject in order to succeed in their college journey. I discovered this process forced Latino male participants to adopt or reject sociocultural male roles and responsibilities that left them with limited support upon starting college because their selections often went against the expected cultural norm.

As the participants navigated through their first experiences in college, the notion of “sink or swim” surfaced. These collective experiences led to the second phase which exposed the hurdles Latino male participants went through to essentially succeed and set the tone of success within their first year. Participants communicated they found resources to aid college success throughout their time at GSU. Kiyama et al. (2015) emphasized in the CECE model the importance and need for Latinx students to interact with people and have spaces that validate their cultural identity and background. Strong points of support included being engaged on campus, finding spaces on campus where their identity as Latino males were supported, and discovering new ways to succeed by breaking out of their comfort zones.

Chapter I also highlighted a disconnecting component of Latino males in higher education being the lack of represented Latinx professionals in the education system. The participants lacked connections with professional Latinx males as role models at Georgia State University who could have served as an important part of their postsecondary career. This connects to Rendon’s (1994) validation theory which states the need to have a strong presence of Latinx staff to support Latinx students. Professionals or validating agents such as Hispanic/Latinx staff, graduate assistants, faculty and other professionals (Rendon, 1992) served as other points of support, according to the findings in the study. The instances when participants saw or interacted with Hispanic/Latinx professionals working at the institution provided evidence to the participants that Latino males could achieve success. The interactions between peers in various student organizations and Greek affiliations expanded their perception of what a Hispanic/Latinx community could look like outside of their family and high school

experiences. These examples of in- and out-of-class validating agents support Rendon's (1992) elements of validation. As a result of the interviews, I found when participants were able to identify with Hispanic/Latinx teaching assistants, faculty, staff, and peers, they described a sense of empowerment from their ethnic and racial connection to campus members. This connection fostered self-confidence within the participants which encouraged their drive to seek support from non-Hispanic/Latinx professional members. Thus, this instance of validation is a prime example of participants building their social capital and increasing their network. Participants experienced a high level of comfortability and assistance from GSU campus members and, thus, felt connected and engaged in their social, personal, and academic systems at GSU.

Many of the participants went into depth in describing the ease of college in their first and second years after solidifying their foundation of student success in the first couple of weeks in college. However, when it came time to find internships and other opportunities that introduced them to their careers, the lack of connections presented a new barrier for the participants. As 90 plus credit students, participants were faced with a new challenge to develop their social and career engagements. Based on the findings, the creation of a model (Figure 2) depicts the process of how the Latino male students in my study experienced college success.

Relation To Research Question

This study was guided by the following research question: How do Latino male students enrolled in an urban, research university make meaning of the support they have received to succeed in college? The triangulated approach strengthened the trustworthiness of my study by comparing three sources to uncover parallels in

observations which contribute credibility to the findings (Kornuta & Germaine, 2019). In addition, the triangulated approach validated the voices of the participants. Through multiple interview sources, participants were able to share their experiences, thoughts, and feelings to describe the processes of how they developed their understanding of success in college.

Hasta en las Mejores Familias

Before discussing college experiences, many of the participants stated their postsecondary journey started with familial influences. *"Hasta en las mejores familias"* translates to "even in the best families" and is often used to normalize what may be perceived "abnormal" family behaviors or occurrences. This expression represents Latino male participants' experiences uncovering which family values best supported their postsecondary journey, and speaks to Theme #1 in Chapter IV. The expression also alludes to the challenges they overcame with their families to succeed as a college student. This discovery process also included different levels of judgement and analysis by the participants regarding their family's support and understanding in their postsecondary journey.

Navigating Gender Role Expectations

At the beginning of the group interviews, participants were asked a series of questions: a) define the term student success; b) discuss the choices that led them to choose the institution; and c) describe their connection with campus life. From their responses on student success, I found participants positioned their family at the center of several experiences. One common family impact identified by the participants included cultural expectations related to the concept of "machismo." I found Latino male

participants' parents imparted a sociocultural value of machismo which then compelled the Latino male participants to disentangle, for their own understanding and application, how to comprehend their masculinity as they navigated their postsecondary journey. Alejandro shared his thoughts on machismo as he sorted out his own definition of machismo, which he described as a man who can:

> "make decisions responsibly... stick to their guns, you know, knows what they believe, that kind of stuff. I think that's not exactly... it's not – it's not machismo, because it doesn't have the bad elements... being sort of men here and the women, you know, come second or whatever."

I concluded participants had to discover what their machismo roles were in their family, while uncovering specific functions and expectations connected to that role. Through this discovery, participants' choices of identity were either challenged or supported by their family (or household). This experience impacted their steps towards their decision to enroll in a postsecondary education. When families show types of social support (emotional, informational, companionship, tangible/intangible), Latino males were better equipped in making informed decisions that directly benefit their educational progress instead of making decisions based on unclear family roles and expectations. This level of open communication and intentional interaction between family members can lead to an open discussion between Latino males and their father's expectations which have typically relied on sociocultural expectations, i.e. machismo.

Maintaining Familial Ties

Participants shared the impact location, finances, and siblings had on their decision to pursue a postsecondary education. I found participants decided to stay close

to home or live in their parents' home to reduce financial expenses for themselves and their families. Both off-campus living and institutional attendance considerations alleviated financial pressures, such as opting out of on-campus housing (which comes with a mandatory selection of an on-campus meal plan) and having access to co-curricular and career-readiness opportunities through walking-distance internships. Seven of the ten participants chose to live at home with their parents instead of living on-campus due to finances but they also expressed not wanting to be away or separated from their family. They described not being ready to "leave the nest" for emotional reasons tied to family. Vicente shared leaving home was his biggest barrier at the start of his postsecondary journey. He stated,

> I think the big barrier for me was leaving home like, leaving the nest. I knew this, like, in a Latino household... it was always, you know, family was the most important thing. It's [like] you're always trying to be as close to your family as possible. And at a young age, you know, it was always instilled that family comes before everything.

The majority of the participants had younger siblings and felt responsible for guiding them down a similar path as their own towards a high school graduation and (likely) postsecondary enrollment. Roberto, Jose, Vicente, and Felipe placed a great deal of importance on being actively present in their younger siblings lives to serve as an example of educational success and to be of assistance. In particular, Jose knew he had to "make it all the way through [college] and set the example for my siblings." Latino males described the process of choosing an institution that was relatively close to home so they could commute back to their parent's home as necessary. Manuel shared:

> I grew up around the state of Georgia for, basically, most of my life. I lived in Florida for a few years before that but being from Miami and then being in Georgia, like I've been surrounded by Latino people my entire life. And so, I felt that Georgia State was, one, close enough to where my family lives. My family, we still live in Gwinnett County um and so it was close enough for me to get there.

While they have completed at least three years of college, a few of their at-home responsibilities remained and they felt compelled to continue fulfilling at-home needs after their college enrollment as a result of machismo expectations.

Building Social Capital

Participants described GSU as an ideal location because of its central position in the state and the infinite resources in the surrounding area due to its urban setting. In correlation to the existing literature, their social growth came with being a student in an institution located in an urban city. GSU, positioned in the center of a major city, presented opportunities to network on and off campus with various career-oriented people and organizations. The social growth reference is also known as social capital and was defined by Lin and Smith (2001) as an "investment in social relations with expected returns in the marketplace" [social setting] (p. 19). Johnson (2013) asserted the increase of connections between multiple associations builds social capital and relationships in social groups, social spaces, and social order. Participants felt their opportunities and connection in their professional, social, and academic circles was greater in their third year than before they enrolled. This realization inspired a spirit of "if they can do it, I

can do it, too." For example, Bernardo shared how he would like to serve his younger Latinx community based on the experiences he had and stated:

> So, when we graduate and get our degree then people [will] see that – hopefully, younger people [will] see that somewhere or some way or form. So, when they – when younger people see that professionals of their own, same background [are] graduating I think that's enough for them to be like "if they can do it... so can I." Hopefully, that's the mindset.

Therefore, I conclude Latino males were encouraged and motivated to succeed as a result of seeing numerous professional learning experience opportunities available due to the close proximity of businesses, organizations, and other practical work-related industries.

The findings also highlight the importance of higher education professionals and K-12 professional staff support in Latino males' academic interest before starting their postsecondary journey. I found the lack of professional support hindered Latino males' decision-making abilities as they heavily contemplated different factors like costs, close access to support networks and resources to various groups (family, professional, social, etc.), and travel time between their campus to family. It is essential that higher education professionals understand the challenges Latino male students face prior to beginning college. Understanding these challenges will lead to better ways of supporting the students (e.g. mentorship, organizations, and grants) once they enter college. In addition to higher education professionals, professionals working with pre-college programs, such as TRIO and Upward Bound, work closely with first-generation and students of color while they are in high school. College administrators must recognize and support the

need for pre-college outreach programs or summer bridge programs to support Latino males.

Crossing the Postsecondary Bridge Together

Participants commonly shared the need to bridge their parents' understanding with the participants' intended career goals. Latino male participants also shared a common occurrence of educating their parents' about the college experience and what it meant to be a college student in the United States. Moments of frustration for the participants included having to explain to their parents the need to stay on campus after class hours to participate or lead the student organizations they were a part of. The emerging discussions on family consisted of the legacy the Latino male participants felt they had to create or follow. Either their parents never attended a postsecondary institution, didn't complete their postsecondary journey, or earned their degree in another country. Stories of the participants' parents inspired the Latino males to pursue and complete their postsecondary education. A few of the Latino male participants believed completion of their degree was proof of appreciation of their parents' sacrifices and virtues. Pursuing a degree would not only begin a legacy of postsecondary degree attainment in the family but add a milestone to their parents' reputation and legacy of pride as well as validate their parents' hard-work. Participants commonly expressed awaiting their graduation to see their parents' face of fulfillment and self-gratification.

Mi Casa es Tu Casa: Importance of Cultural Space

Validation theory is defined as building social capital through in- and out-of-class agents enabling, confirming and creating a supportive process fostering academic and interpersonal development (Rendon, 1994). Rendon (1992) emphasized the importance

of having students' experiences validated as early as the first couple of weeks in college or within their first full year of college. The majority of the participants in this study experienced validating moments as early as their first week at Georgia State University from interactions within specific areas on campus which served to validate their social identities as Latino male students. This speaks to Themes #2 and 3 from Chapter IV. These validating spaces included: New Student Orientation, visiting the LASSO Office, or meeting other Hispanic/Latinx members in the GSU community. For Vicente, the LASSO Office encouraged him to get involved. After meeting a member from the LASSO office during the first week of school, he felt comfortable and motivated to seek out more experiences. After connecting with the LASSO Office in his first week, he said,

> Since then, freshman year, I got really involved... I'd go [to] any events that I would see, I would try to show up and go out and attend [programs]... And I sometimes hear and see things like flyers and posters that catch my attention.

From initial interactions in their first year of college, Latino male participants found more avenues of support towards their academic and social undertakings. The overall engaging experiences shared by the Latino male participants strongly support the culturally engaging campus environment model. The CECE model is the practice of space, people, and cultural initiatives that recognize, support, and create a foundation for students of non-Western identities (Museus, Zhang, & Kim, 2016). The Latino male participants found different starting points of engagement at GSU, yet they all shared very similar connections with the LASSO Office to help them towards their path of success. I found the LASSO Office served the participants by promoting an inclusive community that enhances the success of Latinx students. As a result of their validating

experiences at the LASSO Office, Latino males in the study received advice and information that benefited their progression towards graduation. For most, the LASSO office as a cultural space was welcoming due to familiar faces and the familial regard of the staff towards the students. For others, the cultural space was a hub of academic and social resources for students to better equip and navigate their first year of college. Collectively, participants from separate focus groups and one-on-one interviews described their lived experiences in the office as an essential part of their success due to the support from other students and staff. Half of the group expressed needing to step out of their comfort zones in order to gain insight on campus culture or navigate through academic decisions.

In retrospect, LASSO served as a safe space for participants to explore their Hispanic/Latinx identity which prompted participants' to support the Hispanic/Latinx community outside of GSU. One of the highlighting pieces participants also shared in regard to the LASSO Office was their increased engagement as they learned of social events, student organizations, academic support, and on-campus updates. The LASSO Office directly and indirectly offered a number of success opportunities and academically advanced resources for the Latino male participants in this study and positively impacted their success towards graduation. As mentioned before, the LASSO Office served as a beacon of support for Hispanic/Latinx students to join, build a community, and collectively share a number of resources to help answer their own student questions without having to compromise their identities or exploration thereof.

Implications

Implications for Practice

Several on-campus professionals and peers, as well as interactions in the LASSO Office, created a supportive environment for the Latino male participants. From both focus groups, participants suggested the university should take the same approach and initiative to support Hispanic/Latinx students as the LASSO office. Although the participants felt supported by other Latino/Hispanic community members and spaces created for support and engagement, they did not feel supported by the institution as a whole. One participant, Carlos, mentioned that institutions should "create more effective/efficient ways in which Latino/Hispanic people can learn more about opportunities, places, social events" to create a stronger "sense of community and home." Hector mentioned the institution should "help these [Hispanic/Latinx student] organizations, bring the word out there more – even using like their official Instagram account to post something because they have a larger audience." While the following issue did not directly impact Diego, he took notice of the language barrier and wanted equity for other Hispanic/Latinx peers to receive the same information he did and stated, "... maybe [offering] two workshops or events that are maybe either completely in Spanish, or at least have a translator in Spanish." This points out the need for colleges to understand Latinx families' needs and roles in the college process. As institutions continue to look for more inclusive ways to connect, engage, and support Latino males and other Hispanic/Latinx students, the findings show an opportunity for institutions to look inward and assess to whom their resources are being offered.

From the participant's feedback, the high-touch level of support they experienced in the LASSO Office is something they would like to see come from the institution as a whole for Hispanic/Latinx students. While the university identifies itself as a Minority

Serving Institution (MSI) due to the diverse enrollment population, perhaps the institution should offer programs and services in student affairs with a focus to their diverse student population. Departments such as financial aid, registrar, academic advising, and athletics should accommodate the Latinx/Hispanic population by collaborating with departments and organizations from the Latinx/Hispanic community. Accommodations such as Spanish-speaking learning communities, language immersion for supplemental instruction and tutoring, documents in Spanish, and parental resources in Spanish are all pivotal and overt methods for supporting Hispanic/Latinx students. LASSO's existence, for example, provided many of the participants with brief and introductory moments of emotional, social, academic, and cultural support as a community. The institution has opportunities to work with the LASSO office and other minority-specific offices to be more intentional with the population of students they serve.

In preparation for my research, I learned about the pressures Latino males experienced from their family members such as financial responsibility over the family and the need to acquire a stable trade before pursing academics (Clark et al., 2013). From this study, I found students had strong connections to family while also experiencing intense family pressures. Inadvertently, one of the pressures felt by Latino males was the need to explain their new, postsecondary experiences to their families. As a measure of support, student affairs professionals, practitioners, and faculty can actively apply methods to serve Hispanic/Latinx parents during new student orientations, including using email messages and other marketing tactics (social media, websites, etc.) to prepare them for changes in their student's interactive groups or communities (cultural shifts). This would provide the parents and families with information from official

institutional representatives to help them understand the importance of co-curricular experiences and alleviate the pressures of Hispanic/Latinx students from navigating new life-impacting changes while simultaneously explaining them. Overall, a high-level of communication with parents would highlight the importance of obtaining a higher education degree.

For recruitment of this study, emails were sent to students through university colleagues. In my excitement to start my study, a social media post was made on my personal account. All interested students shared being informed of this study through social media outlets such as Instagram and GroupMe from multiple users' social media posts. Although 10 students were needed for this study, fourteen Latino male students were interested in participating in this study. None of the interested students were informed of the study through emails. After initial contact, I continued to sustain the communication through text messages and phone calls. All interviews, focus group and one-on-one, were made through Zoom. This entire study was conducted through the use of virtual platforms of communications which indicate an implication of practice for institutions to consider for student communication. Email communication was ineffective and demonstrated to be an outdated method of communication for students. Further research can investigate the role social media plays in a student's use of communication in higher education and challenge institutions to migrate to new methods of student communication.

Implications for Research

An unexpected finding was that many of the participants used the term "machismo" when discussing sociocultural expectations, even though I, the researcher,

never used this phrase in my questions. Vazquez's (2015) study explored how Latino males identified what influenced their postsecondary success. She compared the cultural construct of machismo to help-seeking behaviors from the Latino male participants (Vazquez, 2015). Conducting a study to explore how Latino males make meaning of the sociocultural definition of machismo as it relates to their college student experience would be worth further investigation. In this study, Latino males did not relinquish the entire identity of machismo but rather discarded negative facets of it. More research can build on the concept of machismo and how the identity impacts Latino males in institutions of higher education. Additional research can also help explore why Latino male students choose certain components of machismo as an identity which can contribute to methods of support specific to Latino males. I did not expect to see machismo as a larger topic of conversation due to the constant evolution of gender roles, dating back to the 1500s (Mirandé, 1997). Although this theme was a dominant finding from the study, it was unexpected to hear participants discuss its impact and importance to their experience and identity as college students.

During this study, Latino males shared experiences of needing to put forth work and energy to help their parents have a better understanding of their college experience. Further research is needed to review the perception of college and purpose for degree attainment in parents, guardians, and siblings of Hispanic/Latinx students attending college. Even more so, identifying strategies towards supporting Hispanic/Latinx families with students in college could enhance and encourage the enrollment of Latino male students.

Sáenz (2018) conducted a longitudinal study of Latino males from 8th grade through college in Texas examining engagement strategies among themselves as participants. With the high level of Latino male peer-to-peer support presented from this study, I believe conducting a similar, longitudinal study to extend into participants' alumni status could help show sustainable patterns of engagement strategies. By happenstance, Latino male participants in this study found ways to indirectly form social groups among themselves. Exploration of Latino male-specific student groups could produce more tangible, applicable research for institutions to implement as a retention strategy.

Limitations

Overall, as a former member of the GSU community, I served the institution in various capacities of professional leadership roles. During my time at GSU, students saw me in various professional positions and roles. Of those roles, I mentored a high number of Latinx students, scholars from varied grant-funded scholarship programs, on-campus student organizations as well as served as a supervisor for federal work-study students in the Hispanic/Latinx office. My previous roles at the university may have limited the study because participants may not have been able to look beyond my direct relationships in the institution and connection with them, as students. Additionally, due to my departure from the institution, my direct access to student contact information was limited, leading to a smaller recruitment sample. This also limited my ability to potentially reserve spaces on campus to host focus groups or one-on-one interviews.

As a female, I recognize my gender may have limited how much the male participants were willing to share with me during the data collection process. Since all

the participants were males, they may have felt a level of discomfort and vulnerability in openly sharing challenges they experienced as Latino male college students. This may have also limited the amount of information they were willing to share regarding their relationships with their fathers.

Conclusion

Latino males continue to be underrepresented in the postsecondary educational level. One contributing factor to the low enrollment rate for Latino males in postsecondary degrees is known as the "vanishing Latino male" (Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2009). The problem this study addressed was the decreasing number of Latino male students from enrollment to graduation. Moreover, the study intended to examine how to engage Latino male students in their postsecondary degree experiences while focusing on their persistence towards graduation. Through a qualitative, phenomenological study, Latino male participants enrolled in an urban, research institution shared their lived experiences through a triangulated approach. This study sought to understand the strategies Latino males identified as supportive and engaging regarding their success towards graduation from a minority serving, postsecondary institution. Latino male participants shared a myriad of lived experiences ranging from personal, academic and career preparation. The study's results identified types of support necessary for Latino males from the start of their undergraduate career towards graduation and how to strengthen their support system for a positive postsecondary experience.

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APPENDIX A

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. In your own words, define student success.
2. From the Latino male perspective, what led you to choose Georgia State University?
3. Describe your connection with campus life.
4. Please share an experience where you felt Georgia State University supported Latino males.
    a) What type of help did you receive from professional employees (staff, faculty, graduate assistants, etc.), if any?
5. What programs and services, if any, did you find to be most valuable as a college student?
    a) How did you find these programs and services?
6. What type of experiences made you feel engaged?
    a) If any, which year did you feel most engaged? Why?
7. What non-campus influences, if any, played a role in your postsecondary education pursuit?
    a) Specify how these influences contributed.
    b) How did the support change, if it all, in your progress towards graduation?

APPENDIX B

ONE-PAGE REFLECTION WRITING PROMPT

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study and meeting with me for the initial focus group interview. A week after you meet with other participants in this study for the focus group, a maximum, one-page reflection will be collected from you.

The purpose of the reflective writing is to consider your personal viewpoint regarding any college experiences that have engaged you to your last year in college as a Latino male. Your feelings, opinions, attitudes, and/or reactions of your personal experiences at Georgia State University from the first day of college to today are welcomed.

Your one-page reflection is due: _____ and should be emailed to coleman.july@uwlax.edu. If you have any questions please contact coleman.july@uwlax.edu.

Thank you,

July P. Coleman, Doctoral Candidate

University of Wisconsin – La Crosse

APPENDIX C

ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How does the Latinx community encourage your success in college?
2. What initially compelled you to pursue a postsecondary degree?
3. Describe any barriers you foresaw, if any, before pursuing a postsecondary degree.
4. What role do you play in supporting other Latino males students at Georgia State University?
5. What advice would you give Latino males interested in pursuing a postsecondary education?
    a) What experiences would you share?
    b) What campus resources would you share?

APPENDIX D

OPTIONAL WRITTEN CONSENT FORM

EXAMINING LATINO MALE ENGAGEMENT AND SUCCESS AT A PUBLIC, URBAN, RESEARCH MINORITY SERVING INSTITUTION

Protocol Title: Examining Latino Male Engagement and Success at a Public, Urban, Research Minority Serving Institution

Principal Investigator: July P. Coleman
2734 Jordan Lane SE
Lithia Springs, GA 30122
(404) 345-6441– cell
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Purpose and Procedure

- The purpose of this study is to develop a comprehensive understanding of the critical influences shaping the experience of Latino male students positioned to graduate from a Minority Serving Institution (MSI).
- My participation will involve being in a focus group interview (approximately 2 hours) via an online platform (Zoom). The focus group will take place during the 2019-2020 academic year. I will submit a written reflection (not to exceed one-page). I will also participate in one follow-up individual interview lasting 30 minutes after the focus group recording has been transcribed.
- The total time requirement is approximately 3 hours.
- The focus group will take place in a virtual room (Zoom).
- During the focus group, the Principle Investigator (July P. Coleman) will ask a series of open-ended questions regarding student engagement experiences. The focus group interview will be recorded.

Potential Risks

- During the interviews, I may choose to voluntarily share private or sensitive information that may cause me to feel uncomfortable.
- Precautions will be taken to avoid questions that are unnecessarily sensitive.
- I may stop participating in this research project at any point.

Possible Benefits

- As a participant in this study, I may benefit by gaining a deeper understanding of what has engaged me in my postsecondary journey as a Latino male.

- Other higher education professionals, including student affairs practitioners, administrators, and faculty members may benefit by gaining a deeper understanding of how to support Latino males towards graduation.

Rights and Confidentiality

- My participation is voluntary. I can withdraw or refuse to answer any question without consequences at any time.
- I can withdraw from the study at any time for any reason without penalty.
- The results of this study may be published in academic journals and/or presented at professional conferences using grouped data only.
- All information regarding my participation in this study will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. The data will not be linked with personally identifiable information.
- All data for this study, including focus group recordings, transcriptions, written reflections, and notes, will be stored on the Principle Investigator's password protected personal computer for five years after which all data and identifiers will be permanently deleted.

Questions regarding study procedures may be directed to July P. Coleman (404-345-6441), the principal investigator. Questions regarding the protection of human subjects may be addressed to the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, (608-785-8044 or irb@uwlax.edu).

Participant: _____ Date: _____

Researcher: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX E

DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

Examining Latino Male Engagement and Success at a Public, Urban, Research Minority Serving Institution Survey

Name: _____ **Age**: _____

Email:_____

Ethnicity: _____

Generational status in U.S. (please circle): 1st 2nd 3rd 4th 5th or beyond

Bilingual (please circle): yes no

Describe your Spanish skills (circle one): Full proficient. Semi-proficient. Minimally proficient

High School Attended: _____

First-generational college student (neither of your parents attended college) (please circle): yes no

Completed at least 90+ credit hours (please circle): yes no

Current Living Arrangement (please circle): Residence Hall Off-campus House/apartment Fraternity/Sorority House Parent/Guardian's home Other: _____

Below is a list of common events you could be involved in or experienced. Please indicate involvement by either circling Yes or No based on your entire college experience up to this point

Organized sports (intercollegiate athletics, club team, or intramurals)

Yes No

Performed in theater, music, or arts programs or events

Yes No

Felt that you didn't belong or unwanted on campus as a Latino male

Yes No

Participated in discussions on campus engagement and success

Yes No

How many registered student organizations are you currently a member of

____ N/A

How many hours per week do you work for an on-campus job

____ N/A

How many hours per week do you work for an off-campus job

____ N/A

Approximately how many times do you interact with faculty and staff

____ N/A