

HISPANIC MALES AND THE FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THEIR DECISIONS
TO PURSUE AND COMPLETE A COLLEGE EDUCATION

by

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ABSTRACT

HISPANIC MALES AND THE FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THEIR DECISIONS TO PURSUE AND COMPLETE A COLLEGE EDUCATION

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The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the experiences and perceptions of Hispanic male students who have made plans to pursue and complete a college education. This study used two theoretical frameworks to enhance the understanding of the events that might lead Hispanic males to pursue a college education. The theoretical frameworks guiding this study are Bandura's (1977) social-cognitive theory and Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural constructivism theory. The research questions that guided the study were, a) What is the perceived importance of a college education to undergraduate, traditional and nontraditional-aged, Hispanic males enrolled in higher education? b) What perceptions do Hispanic males have about the impact of their lived experiences both within and external to the academic environment on their pursuit of a college education? and c) What perceptions do university staff have about Hispanic males seeking a higher education and what they must do in order to achieve a

university degree? A purposeful sample of the groups of participants, Hispanic male students and university staff were interviewed, and field notes were collected in order to provide a more in-depth understanding of the specific factors that affect the academic success of Hispanic males and their decisions to pursue and complete a college education. A constant comparative method was utilized to analyze the data. Conceptual categories emerged from the data analysis and these categories were then sorted into four emergent themes. The four emergent themes were a) support systems for Hispanic male students; b) unspoken cultural expectations; c) the feeling of “belonging” and d) perseverance, hope, and grit. The findings indicated that there were similarities among the participants in regard to the four emergent themes. The findings also showed a dissonance between what the Hispanic male participants experienced and what the university staff believed was going on in the university life of the Hispanic male students.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The existing research on Hispanics in higher education has often focused on the various factors that contribute to their low enrollment, persistence, and completion rates while pursuing a college degree (Perez & Taylor, 2016). Although this research is important, and it has often shone a light on the plight of Hispanics towards seeking a college degree, little is known about the specific factors that may contribute to Hispanic male success in higher education (Perez & Taylor, 2016). According to research, immigration status and acculturation, family traditions and responsibilities, a lack of role models, a lack of equal access to essential information and resources, compounded with gender, race, and class differences, are among the various factors that have been found to negatively affect the academic success, social mobility, and personal well-being of first-generation college students (Perez, 2017), also referred to as FGCSs. Despite ample studies about FGCSs, little is known about Hispanic males' academic determination in higher education (Pérez, 2017), thus, the importance of this qualitative study.

Despite the ever-growing need to produce college-educated individuals to ensure the economic growth of the nation, there is still very little known regarding the specific factors that influence the enrollment of Hispanic students in higher-learning institutions (Acevedo-Gil, Santos, Alonso, & Solórzano, 2015; Ovink, 2017; Stebleton & Aleixo, 2015). Hence, there is a need for more information about the various factors that may also contribute to the success of Hispanic males pursuing a university degree, based on their own experiences and perceptions. Consequently, this qualitative study added to the existing literature on the topic of Hispanic males in higher education, by focusing on the impact of their lived experiences, both within and external to their academic environment, while pursuing and completing a college education.

Research has shown that there is a growing academic achievement gap in the United States, based on gender and race/ethnicity, with regard to high school completion and college enrollment and retention rates (Clark, Ponjuan, Orrock, Wilson, & Flores, 2013; Ho & Kao, 2018). Despite the fact that the number of Hispanic men and women pursuing a college education has increased over the past few decades, the enrollment rates of Hispanic males have continued to be lower when compared to their female counterparts (Clark et al., 2013; Pérez, Zamora, & Pontious, 2018). Studies have also shown that Hispanic male students are not only underrepresented at various post-secondary institutions but have also been known to face more challenges throughout their academic careers than other mainstream groups (Perez & Taylor, 2016).

Included among some of the challenges Hispanic male students often face while attempting to pursue a college education, are a lack of college information, financial support, a lack of acculturation and supportive peer networks (Perez & Taylor, 2016; Pérez et al., 2018). These challenges can often lead to negative effects such as low-self-esteem, anxiety, and depression in Hispanic male students pursuing a higher education (Clark et al., 2013; Perez & Taylor, 2016). Consequently, according to a report by the U.S. Department of Education, there are significant differences between college-going Hispanic males and the majority group, or Anglo-Americans (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010; Urbina & Wright, 2015). For example, the poverty rate for Hispanic students is well above that of Anglo-Americans at 23% compared to 12%, respectively (Proctor, Semega, & Kollar, 2016). Also, the college completion rates of Hispanic students continue to lag behind that of Anglo-Americans at 37% completing a bachelor's degree or higher while only 18% of Hispanic students achieve that same goal (Cahalan, Perna, Yamashita, Wright-Kim, & Jiang, 2019). Lastly, acculturation levels of Hispanic males seem to affect their academic motivation, higher educational aspirations, and

overall academic success at post-secondary institutions (Aud et al., 2010; Holloway-Friesen, 2018; Perez & Taylor, 2016).

Hispanic students in higher education often experience specific stressors and challenges that include discrimination, Family responsibilities, cultural isolation, a lack of access to essential information and/or same-ethnicity role models, and low educational expectations which, when combined, may increase their risk of academic failure (Perreira, Marchante, Schwartz, Isasi, Carnethon, Corliss, & Delamater, 2019; Torres, Driscoll, & Voell, 2012). According to Perez and Taylor (2016), sociocultural factors, peer dynamics, and labor force demands may also contribute to the low numbers of Hispanic males in higher education. Additionally, Hispanic males, who have successfully enrolled in college, are likely to experience racial, gender, and class dynamics that may negatively affect their educational outcomes (Perez & Taylor, 2016; Torres et al., 2012). Thus, key stakeholders should be aware of the specific factors that affect Hispanic males who are making plans to pursue and complete a post-secondary education.

Perez and Taylor (2016) posited that for many of the Hispanic males, making the life-changing decision of going to college gives them the opportunity to become the first one in their family to attend a higher education institution. While other studies have examined institutional factors such as admissions processes, enrollment and retention, and graduation rates, this qualitative study focused on the specific experiences and perceptions of a group of Hispanic male students at a Hispanic-serving Institution and their personal successes and failures while pursuing a university degree. Therefore, while addressing the need to develop a college-going culture in the United States, it is also important to consider the various factors that impact a Hispanic male's decision to successfully pursue and complete a higher education (Corona, Rodríguez, McDonald, Velazquez, Rodríguez, & Fuentes, 2017).

Hispanic students, especially males who come from low socio-economic groups, are at greater risk of not graduating from high school and/or being able to attend college, due to the lack of academic and family support systems, equal access to important information, and educational resources (Clark et al., 2013; Roksa & Kinsley, 2019). Other factors that seem to affect the academic success of Hispanic males in higher education institutions included, but were not limited to, the lack of Hispanic role models, low levels of parental involvement, low grade point averages and standardized test scores, poor academic high school programs, and low acculturation levels (Perez & Taylor, 2016). Research studies have documented a correlation between monolingual Spanish-speaking parents, who work full-time and low levels of parental school involvement (Reaves, 2019; Toldson & Lemmons, 2013). Additionally, they found that if school systems are unaware of the specific socio-demographic characteristics of students, such as socio-economic status (SES) and parents' education levels, opportunities to increase home and school connections may be lost. An open line of communication between home and school is a type of support system that, when missing, can greatly affect the social, emotional, and academic development of all students (Reaves, 2019; Toldson & Lemmons, 2013).

As of 2017, Hispanic male students had the lowest high school completion rates across all male ethnic groups, and more than 60 percent of all associate's or bachelor's degrees earned by Hispanics were earned by female students (Quintanilla, 2017; Sáenz, Ponjuan, Segovia, & Del Real Viramontes, 2015). Although there are specific behaviors that allow Hispanic males to successfully transition from high school to college, there are still a great number of Hispanic males who need extra support and guidance throughout their academic careers (Clark et al., 2013). These numbers suggest that, when compared to their peers, Hispanic males continue to face challenges in achieving higher education

milestones (Sáenz et al., 2015). Unfortunately, Hispanic males who enroll in higher learning institutions are very likely to experience racial biases, gender biases, and socio-economic obstacles that may greatly diminish their academic success (Perez & Taylor, 2016). Hence, there is a need to focus on Hispanic male students who may face adversity as it pertains to immigration status and acculturation, family traditions and responsibilities, a lack of role models, socio-economic challenges, equal access to educational opportunities, and information available. Awareness, and understanding of the factors previously mentioned, are essential to support a post-secondary education.

Additionally, studies about Hispanics and higher education have generally focused on the following factors: (a) immigration status and acculturation levels of the students and their families; (b) parental involvement and family values in relation to higher education; (c) Hispanic role models and support systems available to Hispanic students seeking a college education; and (d) equal access to essential information and educational resources (Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013; Ceballo, Kennedy, Bregman, & Epstein-Ngo, 2012; Conchas, Oseguera, & Vigil, 2012; Dickson, Gindling, & Kitchin, 2017; Stebleton, & Aleixo, 2015; Toldson & Lemmons, 2013). This study was based on the factors previously mentioned, in addition to the perceptions of traditional and nontraditional-aged Hispanic male college students and focused on identifying and examining the specific internal and external factors, both positive and negative, affecting Hispanic males seeking a college education and the challenges they have encountered while doing so.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify and examine the specific experiences and perceptions of Hispanic male students that have contributed to and/or hindered their higher education pursuit and success while on their academic journey

toward a college education. Through a series of one-on-one interviews and focus groups, immigrant and U.S.-born Hispanic male students were given a safe platform to discuss their personal experiences and perceptions in relation to the pursuit and completion of a higher education. This topic is important because research studies have revealed that obtaining an education that goes beyond high school is essential if young adults are expected to be competitive in the ever-changing workforce of the 21st century (Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013; Aud et al., 2010; Elliott & Parks, 2018).

Although today's students might see college as a viable option, there are specific experiences and obstacles that Hispanic male students may face while making the very personal decision to attend college (Elliott & Parks, 2018; Museus, Yi, & Saelua, 2017). The hurdles that Hispanic male students experience can affect student persistence and degree completion (Elliott & Parks, 2018; Perez & Taylor, 2016). Hence, this qualitative study collected data from a group of undergraduate, traditional and nontraditional-aged, Hispanic male students to better understand how factors such as immigration status and acculturation levels, parental involvement and available support systems, role models, family values, expectations, and access to essential information and resources can have an impact on the attainment of a college degree. In this chapter, the researcher also presented the research problem, the significance of the study, the research purpose and questions, as well as definitions of key terms.

Statement of the Problem

For generations, a college education has consistently meant higher wages and job security (Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013; Elliott & Parks, 2018). According to the Texas Education Agency (TEA, 2017) being college-ready means that individuals who graduate from high school, do so with the skills and knowledge necessary to qualify for and succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing college courses without

the need for remedial coursework (TEA, 2017). However, based on the 2016-2017 Texas Academic Performance Report, only 73.3% of graduating Hispanic (male and female) students were considered “college-ready graduates” (TEA, 2017). Furthermore, the Hispanic community is the second largest growing minority in the U.S., with a total population of over 55 million (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014), which adds to the importance of this study. Therefore, creating a college-bound culture representative of the U.S. is important, especially when minority students exhibit lower rates of degree completion than the overall population (Elliott & Parks, 2018; Kena, Musu-Gillette, Robinson, Wang, Rathbun, Zhang ... & Velez, 2015). This study sought to empower all stakeholders to better understand and advocate for the needs of college-bound Hispanic male students who come from diverse socio-demographic groups, which, in itself, directly impacts their post-secondary academic options and success.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding about the various factors that affect Hispanic male students and their decisions to pursue and complete a college education. This understanding was derived from the perspective of the students and the university staff who served them while pursuing their higher education. Using what existing studies have discovered about immigration status and acculturation, family traditions and responsibilities, a lack of role models, equal access to essential information and resources, levels of parental involvement, the availability of support systems, and how Hispanic families may view higher education based on gender, this dissertation examined the experiences and perceptions of Hispanic male students at a Hispanic-serving Institution. To better understand the various, internal and external, factors related to the pursuit of a higher education by Hispanic males, the researcher used the following three research questions:

1. What is the perceived importance of a college education to undergraduate, traditional and nontraditional-aged, Hispanic males enrolled in higher education?
2. What perceptions do Hispanic males have about the impact of their lived experiences both within and external to the academic environment on their pursuit of a college education?
3. What perceptions do university staff have about Hispanic males seeking a higher education and what they must do in order to achieve a university degree?

Operational Definitions

For the purposes of the intended study, the following operational definitions were utilized throughout the document.

Acculturation: The process of cultural change that results from ongoing contact between two or more culturally different groups (Holloway-Friesen, 2018).

At-risk students: Students who have been identified as those at-risk of dropping out of school using state-defined criteria only (TEC §29.081, Compensatory and Accelerated Instruction). A student at-risk of dropping out of school includes any and all students under 21 years of age exhibiting one or more of the 13-criteria listed within the E0919 At-Risk-Indicator Code (TEA, 2014).

College-bound culture: The academic preparation of students in order to enroll and succeed in a credit-bearing post-secondary institution offering a baccalaureate degree (Toldson & Lemmons, 2013).

College-educated: Adults 25 years of age or older with a bachelor's degree or higher (Zong & Batalova, 2015).

College-readiness: The extent to which a student is prepared to take on introductory

college-level coursework, being able to perform well, persist, and complete a college program (Villavicencio, Bhattacharya, & Guidry, 2013).

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA): Executive order issued by President Obama and implemented by the Department of Homeland Security on June 15, 2012.

This deferred deportation policy provides a two-year employment authorization permit and a two-year halt to deportations of individuals who arrived in the United States before the age of 16; individuals must currently be under the age of 31, have maintained presence in the United States, and have not been convicted of a felony or significant misdemeanor. While currently renewable, DACA does not provide a pathway to permanent legal status (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2016).

Dominant culture: The dominant culture in a society refers to the established language, religion, behavior, values, rituals, and social customs of a specific group. These traits are often the norm for the society as a whole. The dominant culture is usually, but not always, in the majority and achieves its dominance by controlling social institutions such as communication, educational institutions, artistic expression, law, political processes, and business protocols. The concept is generally used in academic discourse in fields such as sociology, anthropology and cultural studies. In a multicultural society, various cultures are celebrated and respected equally. Dominant culture can be promoted with deliberation and by the suppression of other cultures or subcultures (Johnston, 2013).

Educational barriers/challenges: Income or socio-economic status (SES), level of education of the parents, and higher levels of linguistic acculturation are related to the perception of barriers to the academic success of Hispanic students. These types of barriers are defined as school-level issues with school teachers, administrators, and individual or family-level issues of Hispanic students and their families (Becerra, 2012).

Family involvement/support: An activity that serves to promote and support the social, emotional, physical, academic, and occupational growth of youth. Successful family involvement relies on meaningful collaboration among youth, families, schools, employers, and agencies; the definition of family must be inclusive of and respectful of each child's family structure, and therefore should not be limited to just parents or legal guardians and children in the home. For example, a family may also include new spouses and partners of parents, extended families (e.g., grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.), step-relatives, or any other person a youth or family unit considers a family member (Henderson & Berla, 1994).

First-generation immigrant children: Any foreign-born child with foreign-born parents (Zong & Batalova, 2015).

First-generation college student: Those who are the first in their family to attend college (Lubrano, 2003).

Hispanic: This term is interchangeably used with the term "Latino" and both may include people with a great variety of cultural and linguistic traditions from Spain, and from the Spanish-speaking nations in North, Central, and South America; these people may identify themselves as Latino, Hispanic, Spanish, Hispano, Hispanic-American, Honduran, Mexican, Salvadorian, etc. (United States Census Bureau, 2014).

Hispanic-serving Institution: A Hispanic-serving Institution (HSI) is defined as an institution of higher education that (a) is an eligible institution and (b) has an enrollment of undergraduate full-time equivalent students that is at least 25 percent Hispanic at the end of the award year immediately preceding the date of application (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

Nontraditional undergraduate student: The National Center for Educational Statistics (2015) has identified nontraditional students as being over the age of 24 and usually

having at least one, or more, of the following characteristics: (a) is independent for financial aid disbursement; (b) has one or more dependents; (c) is a single caregiver; (d) does not have a traditional high school diploma; (e) delayed postsecondary enrollment; (f) attends school part time; (g) is employed and works 20-40 hours per week (NCES, 2015).

Parental engagement: Refers to a shared responsibility in which schools and other community agencies and organizations are committed to reaching out to engage parents in meaningful ways, and parents are committed to actively supporting their children's and adolescents' learning and social development (Salas, 2016).

Role model: Role models are those who possess the qualities that we would like to have and those who have affected us in a way that makes us want to be better people. Role models inspire people to advocate for themselves and their goals and take leadership on the issues that they believe in (Cox, Yang, & Dicke-Bohmann, 2014).

Second-generation immigrant child: Any native-born child with at least one foreign-born parent (Zong & Batalova, 2015).

Self-efficacy: A person's perception of his/her capabilities and potential to manage, organize, and successfully complete any given task (Bandura, 1977).

Stakeholder: A person, group, or organization that has interest or concern in an organization; a stakeholder is an entity that can affect or be affected by the organization's actions, objectives and policies (Allison & Kaye, 2005).

Traditional students: Traditional students are those who become involved in the social and academic life of any higher-learning institution. These traditional students meet with their professors on a regular basis, join school clubs, and are genuinely excited about learning (Rendon, 1994).

Traditional undergraduate student: The commonly held definition of a traditional undergraduate student is one who enrolls in college immediately after graduation from high school, pursues college studies on a continuous full-time basis at least during the fall and spring semesters, and completes a bachelor's degree program in four or five years at the age of 22 or 23. Traditional students are also typically financially dependent on others, do not have children, consider their college career to be their primary responsibility, and are employed only on a part-time basis, if at all, during the academic year (Center for Institutional Effectiveness, 2004).

Summary

Ayala and Contreras (2019) stated that men of color, Hispanic males in particular, lag significantly behind their female peers in terms of both college access and degree attainment. Additionally, the educational experiences of Hispanic students in higher education have predominantly been investigated from a deficit point of view (Ayala & Contreras, 2019). The research data have also shown that Hispanic communities will continue to grow and to drive population and labor force growth in the near future. Thus, it is important for federal and state policymakers, higher education leaders, and communities across the U. S. to pay close attention to this demographic shift in order to advance the United States into a position of economic and social prosperity (Sáenz, García, Drake, & Guida, 2018).

This qualitative study sought to investigate the internal and external experiences and perceptions of a group of Hispanic male students at a Hispanic-serving Institution (HIS) to better understand how to improve the ratio of minority students, especially male Hispanic students, who are planning to access and complete a college education. Providing minority students, especially Hispanic male students, with the knowledge and skills to compete in the 21st century is of utmost importance (Sáenz et al., 2018), not only

for current, but for future Hispanic male students seeking a higher education. This is the result of one-on-one interviews, and focus groups that provided a platform for Hispanic males to openly talk about the impact of their lived experiences, both within and external to the academic environment on their pursuit of a college education?

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Research has shown that there is a growing gap between Hispanic male students and Hispanic females and/or other ethnic minorities who are seeking a higher education (Libassi, 2018; Riegle-Crumb, Kyte, & Morton, 2018). In fact, according to a report published by the National Center for Educational Statistics, (NCES, 2018) there seems to be an imbalance between college-going Hispanic males and the majority group or Anglo-Americans (Cataldi, Bennett, & Chen, 2018; Tajalli & Ortiz, 2018). Thus, while high school graduation rates and dropout prevention remain critical issues in today's educational arena, there is an ever-growing gap in relation to the outcomes between students who only obtain a high school diploma, and those who go on to pursue a college education (Tajalli & Ortiz, 2018; Villavicencio, Bhattacharya, & Guidry, 2013). Therefore, it is important that educators, community members, students and their families acknowledge the need for a better understanding of the factors that influence Hispanic males' decisions to seek and complete a college education (Pérez & Taylor, 2016). Furthermore, it has been suggested that to successfully create a college-bound culture and improve college-readiness rates among young men of color, school teachers and administrators, parents, and key community stakeholders must be cognizant of the specific factors that positively influence the Hispanic males' decisions to successfully pursue and complete a higher education degree (Tajalli & Ortiz, 2018; Villavicencio et al., 2013).

According to existing research, going through the actual college application process, getting accepted, and completing a higher education degree might be an entirely different reality that many first-generation college students (FGCSs) are simply not prepared for (Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013; Azmitia, Sumabat-Estrada,

Cheong, & Covarrubias, 2018). Additionally, many first-generation students who get accepted into a college eventually drop out, because they may not be able to afford tuition and books, may lack the necessary support systems, and/or find out that they are ill-prepared to keep up with the social and academic expectations set by the higher-learning institutions (Azmitia, Sumabat-Estrada, Cheong, & Covarrubias, 2018). Thus, in order to address the need to develop a well-prepared college-bound culture in the United States, it is important to consider the various factors that may impact Hispanic male students and their decisions to successfully pursue and complete a college education (Corona, Rodríguez, McDonald, Velazquez, Rodríguez, & Fuentes, 2017).

This literature review examined the experiences and perceptions of immigrant and U.S.-born Hispanic males in the United States and the factors that influenced their decisions to pursue and complete a college education. This qualitative study focused on the following factors, which seemed to continuously come up during the interviews and focus groups, affecting Hispanic males and their decisions to successfully pursue and complete a college education: (a) immigration status and acculturation levels of the students and their families; (b) family responsibilities versus the value given to higher education; (c) lack of role models and academic support systems available to the Hispanic male students seeking a college education; and (d) equal access to essential information and resources. Consequently, this study sought to reveal the various challenges that immigrant and U.S.-born Hispanic male students encountered while making plans to obtain a higher education.

Theoretical Framework

This study used two theoretical frameworks to enhance the understanding of the events that might lead Hispanic males to pursue a college education. The theoretical frameworks guiding this study are Bandura's (1977) social-cognitive theory and

Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural constructivism theory. This qualitative study utilized these theories to ascertain the specific reasons that might explain the disparity that exists between Hispanic male students who pursue and complete a college education and their Anglo-American counterparts. Although Hispanics are the fastest growing minority group in the U.S., 61.6 percent have a high school education or less, 23.9 percent possess a two-year degree or some college, and only 14.4 percent have a bachelor's degree or more (Pew Hispanic Research Center, 2016).

One possible cause of this disparity may be the Hispanic students' sense of self-efficacy. The concept of self-efficacy is an essential component in Albert Bandura's (1977) social-cognitive theory, which focuses on observational learning, life experiences, and reciprocal determinism as the vehicle to developing one's personality. According to Bandura (1977), an individual's attitudes, abilities, and cognitive skills make up what we now refer to as a self-system. The self-system plays a key role in how individuals perceive and react to specific situations. Additionally, self-efficacy is a central part of the self-system in that it allows individuals to organize and execute specific courses of action required to manage specific situations (Bandura, 1977). Stated differently, self-efficacy is an individual's belief in his or her ability to succeed in any situation, including higher education.

Although most people can identify and set specific goals they would like to accomplish, as well as the steps necessary to achieve these goals, Bandura (1977) found that self-efficacy plays an important role in how these goals are attained. By the time Hispanic students enter high school, they know that a college education can mean the difference between having a financially stable life and/or living from paycheck to paycheck. However, Hispanic male students are more likely to attend overcrowded schools, learn from undertrained teachers, and experience minimal educational support;

as a result, Hispanic male students are more likely than their peers to be placed in remedial classes or on a vocational educational path rather than a post-secondary academic plan (Clark et al., 2013; Manzano-Sanchez, Matarrita-Cascante, & Outley, 2019). Thus, their decision to attend and complete college is not as easy as it may be for other more affluent groups (Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013; Manzano-Sanchez, Matarrita-Cascante, & Outley, 2019). According to Bandura's social-cognitive theory, individuals with a strong sense of self-efficacy often view challenging problems as tasks to be mastered, form a stronger sense of commitment to their interests, and are resilient to setbacks and disappointment. On the other hand, individuals with a poor sense of self-efficacy often avoid difficult tasks, believe that challenging situations are beyond their capabilities, and often focus on personal failures and negative outcomes (Bandura, 1977).

It has been suggested that self-efficacy begins developing during early childhood and continues to grow throughout a person's life as individuals acquire new knowledge, are exposed to new experiences, and master new skills (Bandura, 1977). Bandura posited that there are at least four integral sources of self-efficacy: (a) mastery experiences, which involve the repeated and successful completion of a specific task; (b) social modeling, which entails witnessing other people, similar to oneself, successfully completing specific tasks; (c) social persuasion, which includes receiving encouraging and positive support from others; and (d) psychological responses, which include a person's mood, emotional state, type of reaction, and stress levels which can directly affect how individuals feel about their own capabilities in a particular situation. When people learn to react positively and master how specific situations affect their beliefs while facing difficult or challenging tasks, their sense of self-efficacy can be greatly improved (Bandura, 1977).

Edgar-Smith and Palmer (2015) posited that children must have ample opportunities to develop their specific talents and abilities through social and academic environments that are conducive to developing the whole child. According to Vygotsky (1978), the true purpose of the development of thinking is not from the individual to the social or group, but from the social or group to the individual. Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural constructivism theory emphasizes the importance of understanding the psychological development of competent individuals by providing, both children and adults, the cultural tools necessary to ensure that society is deliberately producing competent citizens. Thus, it is imperative that key stakeholders at the local and state level, identify, understand, and address the specific factors that contribute to the adequate preparation of college-bound Hispanic males to ensure a seamless transition into higher education. This is important because, according to Vygotsky (1978), the interaction between developing individuals and the society in which they live is integral in the production of well-rounded citizens.

Furthermore, Vygotsky's (1978) theory suggested that human learning is a social process that begins in early childhood and continues throughout the life of the individual. Vygotsky (1978) believed that children were born with basic cognitive biological constraints, and that through cultural and social interaction these children acquired key intellectual tools that helped with their adaptation within society. Consequently, Vygotsky (1978) believed that parents, caregivers, peers, teachers, and the culture in which the individuals lived were all responsible for developing a person's higher order thinking and/or functions. This theory not only focuses on how adults and peers can influence learning, but also on how cultural beliefs and attitudes can influence how learning occurs (Vygotsky, 1978), which is essential while creating a college-bound culture of Hispanic males.

Lastly, the concept of the zone of proximal development is an essential component in Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural constructivism theory, which focuses on individuals' actual development level and their level of potential development. The difference between an individual's actual and potential level of development can be directly impacted under adult guidance or through collaboration with more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978). Additionally, through social and cultural interaction, individuals who might lack the knowledge or skills necessary to reach their full potential can do so by observing someone who is slightly more advanced than they are or whose cultural values differ from their own. Cultures can vary dramatically, with each group of people possessing unique knowledge and skill sets. Nonetheless, social and cultural interaction must occur for individuals to be able to reach their highest social and intellectual levels within any society (Vygotsky, 1978).

First-Generation College Students

The academic success of Hispanic college students has become a very important topic in the United States, mostly because of their growing numbers and unique needs as a result of many being first-generation college students, also known as FGCSs (Azmitia, Sumabat-Estrada, & Covarrubias, 2018; Trevino & DeFreitas, 2014). In addition to being less likely to earn a college degree, FGCSs are also less likely than non-first-generation college students to remain enrolled in college (Baker & Robnett, 2012; Moore, 2018). Nonetheless, degree attainment for FGCSs in the United States is essential to meeting future workforce demands (Demetriou, Meece, Eaker-Rich, & Powell, 2017). As a result, the number of FGCSs enrolling at universities is on the rise; however, these students often struggle with the transition into university life due to the lack of knowledge about this new environment (Irlbeck, Adams, Akers, Burris, & Jones, 2014; Moore, 2018). Thus, as the numbers of FGCSs attending colleges and universities in the United States

increase, there is an urgent need for research on the retention, nurturing, and sustaining of this particular group of students (Demetriou et al., 2017).

According to Covarrubias and Fryberg (2015), FGCSs often feel guilt when they become the first one in their family to attend college. This life event can create uncertainty and conflict among FGCSs due to the economic and cultural differences between their working-class home environment and the middle-class college environment (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015; Moore, 2018). Nevertheless, these students are expected to successfully navigate between these two contrasting worlds--their home life and their academic life (Irlbeck et al., 2014). First-generation college students must often learn how to play the role of a college student, and many may even feel like impostors while learning this role (Demetriou et al., 2017). Due to the lack of support in the form of basic information about college survival and success, FGCSs are more than twice as likely, than non-first-generation students, to leave four-year institutions before their second year in college (Irlbeck et al., 2014; Moore, 2018). These events, combined with other stressors such as acculturative stress, discrimination, cultural values, and traditional gender roles, are related to Hispanic male students' symptoms of anxiety, depression, and psychological stress (Corona et al., 2017).

First-generation college students not only enter an academic and cultural environment that often has unspoken rules and a variety of cultural norms, but they may do so with limited encouragement from their parents (Irlbeck et al., 2014; Luis & Torres, 2018). According to Banks and Dohy (2019), Hispanic males' college enrollment and degree completion is affected by various social, family, structural, and systemic issues that perpetuate the gender gap in higher education. Additionally, existing research has generally focused on Hispanic males and higher education and their low enrollment, lack of persistence, and poor completion rates, rather than the Hispanic males' academic

determination while pursuing a higher education (Banks & Dohy, 2019; Clark et al., 2013). Nonetheless, the number of Hispanic male college students continues to decrease compared to that of Hispanic female students (Pérez, 2017).

It is for this reason that Hispanic students, males in particular, have recently attracted the attention of policymakers, researchers, and educational equity advocates, who suggest that there should be a sense of urgency related to this “vanishing” or “invisible” group within higher education (Garcia, Huerta, Ramírez, & Patrón, 2017). Although men and women are equally likely to develop their leadership abilities while in college, and despite the fact that there are nearly one million Hispanic males enrolled in colleges or universities, male Hispanic college students are almost invisible in some institutions of higher education (Garcia et al., 2017). Consequently, Pérez and Taylor (2016) posited the importance of cultivating the intellectual capital Hispanic males possess, while nurturing and supporting their decisions to pursue a higher education.

The Impact of Hispanic-serving Institutions

A Hispanic-serving Institution (HSI) is a higher-learning institution participating in a federal program designed to support colleges or universities in the United States that attempt to assist first-generation, low-income Hispanic students (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). In addition, an HSI is defined as an institution of higher education that (a) is an eligible institution and (b) has an enrollment of undergraduate full-time equivalent students that is at least 25 percent Hispanic students at the end of the award year immediately preceding the date of application (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). HSIs enroll the majority of Hispanic students pursuing higher education, making their existence integral in the academic success of Hispanics as a whole (Excelencia in Education, 2014). Furthermore, HSIs are different from other higher-learning institutions in that HSI designation is derived from their enrollment profile, not their founding

mission (Fosnacht & Nailos, 2016). Lastly, to help increase the students' sense of belonging, Hispanic faculty and administrators tend to be more common at HSIs (Arana, Castañeda-Sound, Blanchard, & Aguilar, 2011; Museus, & Saelua, 2017).

Since campus environment can have a profound impact on a student's sense of belonging and academic success, school funds have become increasingly focused on faculty development, curricular development, and student support services (Villareal & Santiago, 2012; Macdonald, Beane, Baer, Eddy, Emerson, Hodder, & Ormand, 2019). Minority students who feel supported in college are also more satisfied with their campus experience and are also more likely to be engaged in extra-curricular school activities (Hurtado, Cuellar, & Guillermo-Wann, 2011; Strayhorn, 2018). According to existing research studies, when examining college experiences, negative experiences related to a school campus' racial climate can negatively affect Hispanic students' academic self-concept (Cuellar, 2014; Lundberg, Kim, Andrade, & Bahner, 2018). It has also been suggested that Hispanic students often enter HSIs with lower self-perceptions of their academic abilities, compared to their peers attending other institutions; yet they develop a stronger sense of their academic potential by the end of year four (Roksa & Kinsley, 2019). As a result, Title V grant funds are being used to develop academic programs and advising services to help Hispanic students transition successfully into their new post-secondary environment (Cuellar, 2014; Lundberg et al., 2018).

According to a brief presented by Excelencia in Education (2016), about 60 percent of Hispanic students enrolled in higher education are enrolled at HSIs. As a result, the federal government has invested in the continued development of HSIs since 1995 to expand and enhance these institutions' capacity, quality, as well as the academic success of low-income Hispanics students (Santiago, Taylor, & Galdeano, 2016). Many Title V funds are used to develop academic programs and support services with the

potential to better equip Hispanic students with a strong academic self-confidence that will move them toward long-term success in higher education (Cuellar, 2014; Vargas, 2018). Additionally, in an effort to improve student success, the majority of HSIs may also use Title V funding to support faculty development and specific student support services through faculty and curriculum development, and/or administrative management (Santiago et al., 2016). Furthermore, as Hispanic students continue to matriculate in higher education in greater numbers, understanding how institutional contexts may positively impact outcomes will better serve these students during their college experience and improve their overall success (Cuellar, 2014; Vargas, 2018). Thus, the social and academic development of Hispanic students, demonstrated in the HSI context, shows the importance of continued support for Title V funding (Cuellar 2014; Santiago et al., 2016).

Immigration Statistics and Socio-Economic Status of Hispanic Families

Immigration statistics in the United States have always had an impact on society, from the workforce and school classrooms to the day-to-day government functions (Zong & Batalova, 2015). Based on the 2010 census, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) reported that an estimated 12.1 million unauthorized immigrants were living in the United States on January 1, 2014, up from an estimated 11.9 million on January 1, 2013 (Baker, 2016). However, estimates based on demographic modeling with data from 1990 to 2016, revealed a much higher number, 16.7 million undocumented immigrants, to be exact (Fazel-Zarandi, Feinstein, & Kaplan, 2018). An estimated 9.1 million (75 percent) of the total 12.1 million unauthorized immigrants living in the United States in 2014 were from North America, including Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central America (Baker, 2016).

According to Baker (2016), Mexico was the leading source country with 6.6 million unauthorized immigrants in 2014, representing 55 percent of the unauthorized population, followed by El Salvador (700,000), Guatemala (640,000), and Honduras (400,000). Data from the Pew Research Center showed estimates based on U.S. Census Bureau data, where California and Texas remained the leading two states of residence of the unauthorized immigrants in 2014, with 2.9 million unauthorized immigrants residing in California and 1.9 million unauthorized immigrants living in Texas (Baker, 2016; Passel & Cohn, 2016). After California and Texas, Florida (760,000), New York (640,000), and Illinois (550,000) followed with the greatest numbers of unauthorized immigrants (Baker, 2016). Additionally, 61 percent of unauthorized immigrants were ages 25 to 44 years, and 53 percent were male. Males accounted for 57 percent of the unauthorized population in the 18 to 34 age group in 2014 while females accounted for 54 percent of the 45 and older age groups (Baker, 2016).

According to data from the American Community Survey (ACS), and reported by the Migration Policy Institute, in 2015, the U.S. immigrant population stood at approximately 43.3 million or 13.5 percent of the total U.S. population. The immigrants that are currently living in the U.S. can be naturalized citizens, legal permanent residents, refugees, individuals on political asylum, international students, or unauthorized immigrants (Zong & Batalova, 2015; United States Census Bureau, 2014). School-aged children of immigrants account for one out of every five students in the United States. Additionally, U.S. immigrants and their U.S.-born children make up almost one quarter of the overall U.S. population (United States Census Bureau, 2014; Zong & Batalova, 2015), which means that nearly 80 million are either first or second-generation immigrants.

Although not all children of immigrants are undocumented, in 2013 there was a total of 17.4 million youth under the age of 18 who were living at home with at least one immigrant parent (Zong & Batalova, 2015). These first or second-generation immigrant children account for 25 percent of the nearly 70 million children in the U.S under the age of 18 (Zong & Batalova, 2015). Hispanics in the U.S. account for 56.6 million (17.6 percent) of the nation's total population that are native-born. However, in 2013, 46 percent of the nearly 57 million Hispanics identified themselves as immigrants (Zong & Batalova, 2015). The Hispanic population in the United States, regardless of immigration status or generational classification, continues to face many challenges while trying to become productive members of the dominant culture (Edgar-Smith & Palmer, 2015), with poverty being one of the most crippling challenges.

There are approximately 72.4 million children under the age of 18 in the U.S., of this number, 41 percent are considered low-income children and 19 percent are considered poor (Lopez & Velasco, 2011; United States Census Bureau, 2014; Zong & Batalova, 2015). According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Poverty Guidelines (2018), a family of four making less than \$25,100 is considered to be at the federal poverty level, while the same family making \$47,248 is considered low income. In 2015, the poverty rate (which is determined by the U.S. Census Bureau) was highest for Black children (36 percent), followed by American Indian/Alaska Native children (32 percent), and then Hispanic children (30 percent). Although, the combined percentages of low-income and poor children under the age of 18 vary by race and ethnicity, Hispanics make up the largest share of all low-income children, with 36 percent (Koball & Jiang, 2018). Since immigrant parents lead an ever-growing percentage of U.S. households, children of immigrants are more likely to be low-income than children of native-born parents. According to Koball and Jiang (2018), 51 percent of children with

immigrant parents live in low-income families, compared to 38 percent of children with native parents who live in a low-income household. As a result, a growing number of first and second-generation children have fallen under the low-income or poor category set by the U.S. Census Bureau (Koball & Jiang, 2018).

Additionally, these immigrant families might be more likely to be affected by more cycles of intergenerational poverty than their Anglo-American counterparts (Park, McHugh, & Katsiaficas, 2016), which can greatly affect the health, well-being, and economic stability of immigrant children and their parents. Immigration and socioeconomic status (SES) can have detrimental effects on the social and academic development of Hispanic students (Zarate & Pineda, 2014; Toyokawa & Toyokawa, 2019). Therefore, understanding the factors that influence immigrant and first or second-generation Hispanic students and their decisions to become productive members of society through the attainment of a higher education degree is essential while creating a college-bound culture (Zong & Batalova, 2015; Olivarez, 2018; Toyokawa & Toyokawa, 2019).

Factors such as the educational level of the child's parents, a family's SES, the structure of a family, and the lack of parental involvement have all been linked to the academic and social development of Hispanic children (Kam & Bámaca-Colbert, 2013; Kim, Curby, & Winsler, 2014; Olivarez, 2018; Toyokawa & Toyokawa, 2019). It has also been noted that Hispanic children are more likely to have immigrant parents who possess little to no formal schooling; in fact, 52 percent of immigrant parents are classified as English Language Learners (ELLs) and may lack a high school education or its equivalent (Park et al., 2016). However, it is important to point out that not all immigrant parents lack a formal education, and some may even hold a high school diploma, a bachelor's degree, or higher, but the majority of Hispanic immigrant parents

may still have less than a ninth-grade education (Park et al., 2016), in addition to being ELLs. These factors, coupled with their vague legal status in the host country, can greatly affect their ability to support their children's development of academic and social abilities (Kam & Bámaca-Colbert, 2013; Toyokawa & Toyokawa, 2019).

Support Programs for Hispanic Students and their Families

According to the Migration Policy Institute, in 2016, approximately 18 million children 18 years of age and under were living with at least one immigrant parent. These children account for 26 percent of the nearly 70 million children under the age of 18 living in the United States (Zong, Batalova, & Hallock, 2018). Studies show that second-generation children, that is, children born in the United States to at least one foreign-born parent, accounted for 88 percent (15.9 million) of all children under the age of 18 with immigrant parents (Zong, Batalova, & Hallock, 2018). These children are U.S. citizens at birth, which means that they are entitled to the same rights and privileges as any other U.S.-born citizen (Park et al., 2016; Zong & Batalova, 2015; Zong et al., 2018).

However, because of the fact that many of these children may have parents who are undocumented, and their immigration status might be in jeopardy, these family's access to most federal and local benefit programs such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Programs (SNAP), and the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program may be restricted (Park et al., 2016). Although programs such as Head Start and adult English as a Second Language (ESL) classes are void of immigration-status restrictions, a lack of access to essential information, coupled with the fear of potential consequences for taking advantage of these programs, has kept many Hispanic families from accessing these support systems (Park et al., 2016).

Lack of Support for Hispanics in Higher Education

According to the United States Census Bureau (2014), Hispanics are the fastest-growing minority group in the nation and are expected to make up 60 percent of the U.S. population by 2050 (Stebbleton & Aleixo, 2015). Nonetheless, Hispanics continue to be underrepresented in colleges and universities across the United States (Acevedo-Gil, Santos, Alonso, & Solórzano, 2015). Studies have shown that students of color, specifically Black and Hispanic males, are greatly underrepresented among those individuals who hold a college degree (Libassi, 2018; Villavicencio et al., 2013). Across the U.S., more than half of first-time Hispanic college students start their post-secondary education in community colleges, with the intent to transfer to a university or four-year college (Acevedo-Gil et al., 2015). As a result, the majority of Hispanic students who successfully transition into college, are often more likely to matriculate in local community colleges or four-year universities close to home (Contreras & Contreras, 2015). Unfortunately, many of these Hispanic students may not be able to complete a college degree due to factors such as financial burdens, lack of support systems, a lack of access to information, and high participation rates in non-credit bearing or “remedial” education courses (Acevedo-Gil et al., 2015), which may be a direct result of poorly-designed high school academic plans. Consequently, academic readiness has become the standard by which most institutions measure school success (Villavicencio et al., 2013; Edgerton & Desimone, 2018).

After students have been admitted to a higher-learning institution, most colleges generally require their students to take a placement test to measure the students’ academic readiness (Acevedo-Gil et al., 2015). Students who score poorly in math or English sections must enroll in non-credit bearing courses to improve their academic abilities before they can enroll in college-credit courses (Edgerton & Desimone, 2018;

Villavicencio et al., 2013). Acevedo-Gil et al. (2015) found that students who are placed in non-credit bearing courses are less likely to complete their higher education, mainly because these students do not receive graduation or transfer credits for such “remedial” classes. Furthermore, students who must take non-credit courses are often adding extra school time and financial expenses that can often delay their degree completion (Acevedo-Gil et al., 2015). Students’ self-efficacy and self-esteem can be negatively impacted by these “remedial” courses because most instructors may see “developmental” students as poor performers and may even lower their expectations for those who may lack academic readiness (Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Edgerton & Desimone, 2018).

Factors Affecting the Academic Success of Hispanic Students

Hispanic male students leave the education system at higher rates than their mainstream peers because they may have a misconception of what seeking a post-secondary education entails, and/or find out that they lack the college readiness necessary to keep up with the social and academic expectations set by higher-learning institutions (Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013). In addition, discrimination experiences related to race and ethnicity have been linked to poor academic performance, self-efficacy, and other detrimental symptoms among Hispanic students (Miller, 2018; Ponting, Lee, Escovar, Rapp, Camacho, Calderon, & Chavira, 2018; Santiago, Gudiño, Baweja, & Nadeem, 2014). Studies have found that Hispanic youth may experience additional stress due to family obligations and responsibilities that can interfere with their academic and social development (Santiago et al., 2014; Shen & Dennis, 2019; Sumner, Burrow, & Hill, 2018). Furthermore, at-risk students who are English Language Learners (ELLs), are often part of a lower SES, and may also belong to a marginalized culture that often encounters significant barriers while working towards academic success (Giraldo-García, Galletta, & Bagakas, 2019; Santiago et al., 2014).

Studies have also shown a lack of funding, as well as a shortage of qualified teachers in urban schools as additional barriers between these students and access to high-quality education (Giraldo et al., 2019; Sandoval, 2018; Yutzy, Benjamin, & Dickhoner, 2014). Consequently, some inner-city schools in the U.S. are graduating less than 60 percent of their senior classes and have been dubbed as “drop-out factories” (Valenzuela & Rubio, 2018; Yutzy et al., 2014); these are also the schools where at least 32 percent of their students belong to minority and/or marginalized groups. These are just some of the factors contributing to the number of Hispanic male students leave the education system at higher rates than their mainstream peers, a lack of support and crippling experiences that might make the pursuit of a college education a perilous journey.

Baumgartner (2017) found minority children among the students who may be less likely to be school-ready at the beginning of their educational career, which usually begins with Early Childhood Education. How well-prepared students are when they first start school could affect their chances of graduating from high school and may even increase their chances of dropping out (Atwell, Balfanz, Bridgeland, & Ingram, 2019; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2019). The importance of academic readiness, which may begin as early as pre-kindergarten, is a key factor in academic success. In fact, there is a strong connection between children participating in Early Childhood Education programs and school readiness (Baumgartner, 2017). Currently, and according to Walsh, Kemerer, and Maniotis (2014), Texas schools are required to provide free half or full-day pre-kindergarten programs if the child is at least three years old and: (1) is unable to speak and comprehend the English language; (2) is educationally disadvantaged; (3) is a homeless child; (4) is the child of an active duty member of the armed forces of the United States; (5) is a child of a member of the armed forces of the United States; (6) is

or has been in the care of the Department of Family and Protective Services; or (7) is the child of a first-responder, such as a police officer or a firefighter (Texas Education Code §29.153). The research also presents a strong correlation between students who participate in pre-kindergarten and more positive long-term academic results such as decreased probabilities of grade retention, higher achievement scores, and increased years of education (Baumgartner, 2017; Conger, Gibbs, Uchikoshi, & Winsler, 2019; López, 2019).

Improving the academic readiness of minority students will require a better understanding of all the challenges these students face throughout their academic careers (Mac Iver, Mac Iver, & Clark, 2019; Villavicencio et al., 2013). Studies suggest that most Hispanic male students may be entering school with social, cultural, structural, and academic pressures that may make it difficult to graduate from high school, much less graduate college-ready (Baumgartner, 2016; Urias & Wood, 2015; Villavicencio et al., 2013). For Hispanic male students to successfully navigate their way through high school and continue on to college, they must be provided with support systems and role models that can guide their social and academic development (Perez & Taylor, 2016; Villavicencio et al., 2013). According to Convertino and Graboski-Bauer (2018), high school completion, college readiness, and college enrollment are closely related parts of the transition into higher education. However, graduating from high school does not always mean that a student is ready to take on college-level courses (Schneider & Young, 2019)

Nonetheless, children who were part of Early Childhood Education programs, may have better long-term outcomes when it comes to academic success throughout their academic careers (Baumgartner, 2017). Although some outcomes may vary, a student's proficiency levels in math and English Language Arts (ELA) in the third and eighth grade

have been used to determine future academic success (Kelly, 2018; Villavicencio et al., 2013). According to Niessen, Meijer, and Tendeiro (2018), test scores are also a predictor of future academic success, especially in the middle grades and the first year of high school. Additionally, these data can be used to provide extra support to students who might need it (Niessen, Meijer, & Tendeiro, 2018), avoiding the need for “remedial” courses once they enroll in college. Lastly, Villavicencio et al. (2013) and Klevan and Villavicencio, (2016) posit three specific factors that have been found to impact high school graduation rates and overall academic success of Hispanic students: student attendance, grade retention, and on-track status.

Attendance rates have also been linked to long-term outcomes in the social and academic development of students (Gee, 2018; Klevan & Villavicencio, 2016; Villavicencio et al., 2013). According to Villavicencio et al. (2013) chronic absenteeism in middle and high school grades has been linked to negative long-term outcomes such as lower high school graduation rates and poor academic performance. In fact, students with chronic low levels of attendance from fourth to eighth grade had only a 43 percent chance of graduating from high school (Villavicencio et al., 2013; Gee, 2018; Klevan & Villavicencio, 2016). Regular school attendance is particularly important because, while some students may be absent from school from time to time, there are noticeable differences between specific groups of students and their attendance rates. For example, Hispanic students, as early as first grade, have shown attendance rates that are well below their Anglo-American counterparts (Villavicencio et al., 2013; Gee, 2018), a pattern that usually continues through eighth grade. Chronic absenteeism in Hispanic children may be related to specific causes, but children living in poverty are 25 percent more likely to miss school on a regular basis than any other racial group (Gee, 2018; Zong & Batalova, 2015), mostly because of unpredictable stressors out of their control.

The retention of students based on poor academic performance may be another factor that affects the academic success of Hispanic students (Villavicencio et al., 2013; Zong & Batalova, 2015). Social promotion may take the place of retention at times; however, social promotion allows for the advancement of students who might be struggling academically but who may be too old to be retained. Villavicencio et al. (2013) found that although some schools may opt for social promotion over retention, both practices may carry long-lasting effects. The retention of students seems to impact low-income and minority students more often than their Anglo-American peers (Zong & Batalova, 2015; Hughes, West, Kim, & Bauer, 2018), which can negatively affect the students' self-esteem and reduce their chances of graduating high school and eventually attending college (Hughes et al., 2018; Villavicencio et al., 2013). Thus, Hughes et al., (2018) suggest retention only be used as a last resort when all other resources have been exhausted and every support system has been implemented.

In addition to attendance and grade-level retention during elementary and middle school, the tracking of student achievement is another predictor of academic success (Ho & Kao, 2018; Villavicencio et al., 2013). Regular attendance and the successful completion of academic courses can greatly increase the “on-track” rate of students beginning in ninth grade, ensuring that students reach their full potential by the time they graduate from high school (Urias & Wood, 2015; Ho & Kao, 2018). According to Ho and Kao, (2018), the tracking system allows teachers, counselors, and other school staff to identify students who may need extra support, guidance and encouragement to decrease the likelihood that students will fall off track before graduating high school. This tracking system can also be used to identify students who might be at risk of not being promoted in the middle grades due to chronic absenteeism, being economically disadvantaged, or being ELLs (Ho & Kao, 2018; Perez & Taylor, 2016; Urias & Wood, 2015), which is an

important part of keeping students on a path toward high school graduation and college readiness.

Acculturation as an Academic Barrier

According to Holloway-Friesen (2018), acculturation can be defined as the process that occurs when different cultural groups interact with other more dominant cultural groups. Over time, the less dominant cultural group is said to undergo changes in cultural patterns, such as language preferences, beliefs, and sets of values (Holloway-Friesen, 2018). Although there are approximately 20 acculturation scales for Hispanics, with the number of items ranging from four to 69, researchers often look for acculturation-related factors to explain why specific groups have more problem behaviors and underperform in school settings (Palermo, Ispa, & Streit, 2018). The Acculturation Gap Conflicts Inventory (AGCI) is an instrument that is currently being used by researchers from a variety of disciplines who are interested in measuring acculturation-related and intergenerational conflicts among Hispanic youth. Those conflicts may be predictive of adjustment levels and academic performance (Basáñez et al., 2014; Elsaesser, Heath, Kim, & Bouris, 2018).

Additionally, there may also be acculturative stress, characterized by a decline in physical, psychological, or social functioning which can result from the acculturation process (Becerra, 2012; Ladum & Burkholder, 2019). The acculturation process can affect the academic achievement of Hispanic male students, which can be seen in their grade point average (GPA), standardized test scores, credits earned, and graduation rates (Ladum & Burkholder, 2019; Santiago et al., 2014). In fact, acculturation levels have been linked to lower psychosocial adjustment in the form of greater depressive symptoms, lower self-esteem, and lower academic motivation (Elsaesser et al., 2018; Zvolensky, Jardin, Rogers, Bakhshaie, Mayorga, Viana, & Garey, 2018). This is

important to point out since there is evidence showing an educational decline in immigrant Hispanic students based on their generational status (Charles, 2019; Conchas, Oseguera, & Vigil, 2012). Consequently, acculturative stress may affect Hispanic students throughout their academic journey, from elementary school on to their college years (Charles, 2019; Rodriguez & Ballesteros, 2019).

The generational status of Hispanic students is often defined according to their classification as first, second, or third generation (Becerra, 2012; Passel & Rohal, 2015). First-generation Hispanic immigrant students are those who live in the United States but were born outside the country (Passel & Rohal, 2015). Generally, first-generation students face English language proficiency difficulties, which can be a significant barrier in their academic and social success (Giraldo-García et al., 2019; Santiago et al., 2014). Second-generation Hispanics are those born in the United States who have at least one parent who was born outside of the country. Third-generation Hispanics include individuals who were born in the United States whose parents were also born in the United States (Becerra, 2012). The home language and generational status of Hispanic male students are said to be linked; thus, the acculturation level of Hispanic male students coupled with their generational status can also be a determining factor in their academic success (Giraldo-García et al., 2019; Passel & Rohal, 2015; Santiago et al., 2014).

Despite the fact that emerging immigrant communities differ from established communities in terms of needs and available resources (Gonzalez, Stein, & Huq, 2013; Negi, Maskell, Goodman, Hooper, & Roberts, 2018; Sáenz et al., 2018), first-generation Hispanic students are generally expected to succeed academically to improve the family's socio-economic status (Becerra, 2012; Carey, 2018; Covarrubias, Valle, Laiduc, & Azmitia, 2019; Eveland, 2019). In fact, studies have shown that immigrant Hispanic children often do better than their more acculturated or U.S.-born counterparts even

though they face more challenging situations (Miller, 2018; Santiago et al., 2014), such as extreme poverty and language barriers. In some cases, second and third-generation Hispanic students have exhibited lower academic aspirations, self-efficacy, and motivation than their immigrant counterparts (Miller, 2018; Santiago et al., 2014; Turcios-Cotto & Milan, 2013). It seems that high rates of acculturation to the dominant Anglo-American society were also associated with lower levels of college self-efficacy (Miller, 2018), which could negatively affect the sense of belonging and/or academic success of more acculturated Hispanic male students.

Although early acculturation of Hispanic males and their families can be beneficial for some, it can also interfere with Hispanic students' traditional values, such as establishing their ethnic identities (Garcia, Patrón, Ramirez, & Hudson, 2018; Turcios-Cotto & Milan, 2013). Based on the gender, acculturation levels, and college environment, early acculturation may also impact the ability of students to engage in planning for the future, especially when studies have shown more instances of discrimination and academic barriers for Hispanic students in negative college environments (Holloway-Friesen, 2018). Additionally, as the children of recently immigrated families enter U.S. schools, college-educated role models may not be present to encourage and inspire them, translated materials may not be provided to inform families and enable them to plan for college, and mentors or guides may not be available to explain the unfamiliar U.S. educational system (Elliott, Salinas, Torrens, & Camacho, 2018; Gonzalez, Stein, & Huq, 2013). The importance of mentoring by role models, and the effect that it may have on minority students has been noted on existing research, where HSI students reported greater levels of validation as well as an increased sense of belonging (Elliott et al., 2018).

Hispanic male students need support systems while they overcome educational barriers that are often exacerbated by gender, race, ethnicity, and other identities (Elliott et al., 2018). However, according to Gonzalez et al. (2013), students and their families often receive biased or discouraging messages regarding higher education for Hispanic students. In fact, minority students have reported negative experiences with faculty, staff, and administrators where the students were misinformed, ignored, treated differently than other students, or were given conflicting information (Elliott et al., 2018). Nonetheless, Hispanic parents continue to instill in their own children the importance of hard work and perseverance, the value of education, character development, respect for others, and a sense of responsibility as part of their traditional and cultural values (Ceballo, Kennedy, Bregman, & Epstein-Ngo, 2012; Sáenz, García-Louis, De Las Mercédez, & Rodriguez, 2018; Santiago et al., 2014; Turcios-Cotto & Milan, 2013;).

Immigrant Hispanic students often acculturate with difficulty because they must navigate between a commitment to their beliefs and social networks and the adoption of new values and communities from the dominant culture (Carranza, 2019; Santiago et al., 2014; Staklis & Horn, 2012; Turcios-Cotto & Milan, 2013). Immigrant students may adopt different cultural orientations, which can range from language use to Hispanic-oriented beliefs related to family obligations, depending upon the level of acculturation (Roche, Ghazarian, & Fernández-Esquer, 2012; Sáenz et al., 2018). Two of the most salient factors related to Hispanic students' acculturation are *familismo*, or familism, and traditional gender roles, which may include *machismo* in Hispanic males (Wang, Scalise, Barajas-Muñoz, Julio, & Gómez, 2016). Despite the multiple roles and responsibilities Hispanic males hold within their family units, such characteristics can either be at odds with Hispanic males and their pursuit of a college education (Medina & Posadas, 2012),

or they can motivate Hispanic male students by providing them with support that strengthens their aspirations to persist on to graduation (Sáenz et al., 2018).

Familism refers to family attachment, loyalty, and solidarity in addition to shared responsibilities that value close family ties that encourage males to work to provide for their families (Davis, Carlo, Schwartz, Zamboanga, Armenta, Kim, & Streit, 2018; Roche et al., 2012). According to Sáenz et al. (2018), conflicts between family and academic responsibilities are commonly found in Hispanic households and form part of the daily struggles and challenges often seen throughout Hispanic student populations in higher education. Despite the fact that familism may be seen as an honorable attribute in the Hispanic culture, it may also be one with profound implications for Hispanic males (Sáenz et al., 2018; Torres & Santiago, 2018). Through time, these characteristics may be reinforced, modified, or completely changed through acculturation (Wang et al., 2016). Additionally, there are traditional gender roles that depict men as strong, dominant, and stoic and women as submissive, nurturing, selfless, and self-sacrificing (Wang et al., 2016). Gender roles may also influence the pursuit of higher education by Hispanic students in general. For example, a strong culture of *machismo* can discourage Hispanic males from seeking help when they struggle academically, and even condition them in ways that may lead them into the work force instead of college (Roche et al., 2012; Sáenz et al., 2018; Torres & Santiago, 2018 Wang et al., 2016).

The acculturation of Hispanic students is a complex process that may negatively affect Hispanic students' academic success when they must navigate between their Hispanic and American cultural orientations (Holloway-Friesen, 2018; Roche et al., 2012; Rodriguez & Ballesteros, 2019). Consequently, it is essential to understand how the rejection and adaptation of specific cultural beliefs and behaviors based on familism and traditional gender roles may relate to acculturation difficulties and academic success

of Hispanic male students (Wang et al., 2016). Language use, acculturation levels, familism, and traditional gender roles, among other cultural traditional values, all may affect the academic and social success of Hispanic immigrant students (Holloway-Friesen, 2018; Roche et al., 2012; Rodriguez & Ballesteros, 2019; Wang et al., 2016). According to several studies, the difficulties experienced by Hispanic college students suggest that acculturation into the dominant group can be perceived as an academic barrier between Hispanic students and their social and academic success in higher education because familism (the high value, respect, and loyalty given to family unity and traditions) is a core characteristic in the Hispanic culture that may decrease with higher levels of acculturation (Becerra, 2012; Ceballo et al., 2012; Holloway-Friesen, 2018; Roche et al., 2012; Santiago et al., 2014; Rodriguez & Ballesteros, 2019; Staklis & Horn, 2012; Turcios-Cotto & Milan, 2013; Wang et al., 2016), causing more acculturated Hispanic students to face self-identification issues.

Financial Aid and Higher Education

Many children, mostly from minority groups, may be reaching the end of their formal schooling lacking the skill sets necessary to earn a decent living in an economy that is being shaped by technology and globalization (Duncan & Murnane, 2014; Ho & Kao, 2018). High-income parents usually have a college degree and are aware of the importance of investing in the education of their children. Thus, college-educated parents often plan where they will live, the schools their children will attend, and effectively use their financial resources and knowledge to ensure that their children obtain skill sets that go beyond formal schooling (Duncan & Murnane, 2014; Ho & Kao, 2018). Most low-income parents, on the other hand, lack a post-secondary education and/or social capital that could greatly improve opportunities for upward mobility which may be obtained through relationships that enhance their children's education, provide advice, contacts,

and encouragement to get ahead (Cooper, Domínguez, Cooper Jr, Higgins, & Lipka, 2018; Duncan & Murnane, 2014). As a result, children from low-income families often must rely on financial aid to ensure access to higher education (Flores & Shepherd, 2014; Cheslock, Hughes, Cardelle, & Heller, 2018), making financial aid a determining factor in college choice and completion (Roksa & Kinsley, 2019).

Flores and Shepherd (2014) found that higher learning institutions that have higher tuition rates also have lower enrollment numbers from minority or low-income groups. The enrollment of low-income students may be negatively affected by increases in college tuition due to varying levels of awareness and understanding of higher education costs and financial aid options, as well as a reluctance to take on debt to help pay for college (Cortes & Lincove, 2019; Flores & Shepherd, 2014). The federal definition of financial aid includes scholarships, grants, loans, work-study, tuition remission, and loan-forgiveness programs (Venegas, 2015). Financial aid is a tool often used to counter the negative effects of increased tuition rates in higher education which directly affect the enrollment rates of minority groups (Cortes & Lincove, 2019). However, most low-income families lack parents with a post-secondary education, and as a result, they may also lack the knowledge necessary to seek financial aid in the form of grants, tuition discounts, and scholarships (Duncan & Murnane, 2014; Flores & Shepherd, 2014). Thus, the decision to invest in higher education can be influenced by socio-economic status, race, and level of awareness related to higher education expenses (Flores & Shepherd, 2014).

Flores and Shepard (2014) posit the positive impact of financial aid, on the college enrollment of minority students throughout the nation. It has been noted that students who receive financial aid are less likely to drop out of college than similar students without this type of financial support (Flores & Shepherd, 2014; Gross,

Williams-Wyche, & Williams, 2019). However, financial aid is not enough to ensure access to higher education because, although financial aid is an essential part of supporting students throughout their college career, financial aid offices are not required to offer outreach services to students (Venegas, 2015). Financial aid in the form of grants, as opposed to student loans, seems to positively increase higher education attainment in Hispanic students across multiple institutions throughout the nation (Gross, Torres, & Zerquera, 2013, Gross et al., 2019).

Lastly, because Hispanic male students are the most likely, out of all racial or ethnic groups, to be first-generation college students (FGCSs), they are also the least likely to persist out of all racial or ethnic backgrounds (Latino, Stegmann, Radunzel, Way, Sanchez, & Casillas, 2018). Research showed that financial aid plays an important factor in closing the achievement gap and in retention rates for Hispanic FGCS (Latino et al., 2018). Thus, it seems that the academic success of Hispanic students is often contingent on financial aid and family support. However, although Hispanic students often apply for financial aid in higher numbers than their Anglo-American and Asian counterparts, they do not receive as much aid despite having lower than expected family contributions because most financial aid policies tend to award monies based on academic achievement rather than financial need (Santiago, 2013) This is of great importance, especially when it has been shown that Hispanic students are the least likely to persevere, while seeking a higher education, out of all racial or ethnic backgrounds (Latino et al., 2018).

Undocumented Students and Higher Education

An estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants live in the United States, many of which arrived as children, attended school in the U.S. and now consider this country their home (Hines, 2018). Although undocumented students are generally

welcomed in U.S. secondary classrooms, that welcome may be short-lived once they graduate from high school (O'Neal, Espino, Goldthrite, Morin, Weston, Hernandez, & Fuhrmann, 2016). There are close to 100,000 undocumented students who graduate from U.S. high schools annually (Zong & Batalova, 2019). After graduating from high school, these undocumented students deal with substantial barriers while attempting to pursue a higher education, due to their legal status (Hines, 2018), which is another factor influencing the academic success of some Hispanic males pursuing a college education.

According to Zong and Batalova (2019), undocumented high school graduates may apply for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) classification program. The DACA program is an immigration policy that has benefitted approximately 1.5 to 2 million young immigrants who were brought into the United States, without documentation, before the age of 16 (Anaya, Del Rosario, Doyle, & Hayes-Bautista, 2014; Lim, 2018). Under DACA, many of these young immigrants have received permission to reside in the United States, qualify for work permits, Social Security numbers, and, in most states, are able to obtain a driver's license (Lim, 2018). However, although these privileges have diminished the barriers undocumented students traditionally have faced while pursuing a higher education, they are still unable to receive financial aid (Nguyen & Kebede, 2017). Federal law prohibits states from giving unlawful residents post-secondary education benefits in the form of financial aid (Amuedo-Dorantes & Sparber, 2014).

Many of these young undocumented individuals have not only been raised and educated in the United States but may also have educational aspirations and plans similar to those of their native-born peers (Anaya et al., 2014; Macías, 2018). Despite the fact that their undocumented status prevents them from receiving financial support in the form of federal aid, several states have passed legislation that allows undocumented

immigrants to pay in-state tuition rates (Amuedo-Dorantes & Sparber, 2014; Borjian, 2018), which has been helpful and well-received. Although DACA students are ineligible for federal financial aid programs, as of March 2017, 20 of 50 U.S. states have implemented policies that allow undocumented immigrants to qualify for in-state resident tuition (ISRT) at public colleges and universities (Dickson, Gindling, & Kitchin, 2017; Harney, 2018). California, Minnesota, New Mexico, Oregon, Texas, and Washington are among the 20 states that, not only offer in-state tuition to DACA recipients, but are also offering state financial aid (Nunez, & Holthaus, 2017).

Nevertheless, and despite the fact that at least 20 states have passed laws allowing undocumented students to pay in-state tuition fees, many of these individuals continue to be excluded from higher education solely because of their immigration status (Flores, 2016; Martinez, 2014). Thus, although DACA increases the opportunities for undocumented immigrant students to pursue higher education, it neither provides financial assistance for all low-income undocumented immigrant students, nor allows them to apply for federal aid (Gonzales et al., 2014). The documented “undocumented” status of DACA students hinders their pursuit of higher education due to the limited number of resources and programs available to them after they graduate from high school. Barriers such as these, may be even higher in institutions where there are no undocumented student programs and states where there is no access to in-state tuition and/or financial aid. (Enriquez, Burciaga, Cardenas, Cha, Delgado, Perez, & Ro, 2019). As a result, some individuals may be relying on private school’s merit-based financial aid as their alternate pathway to higher education (Flores, 2016).

Therefore, while the DACA program can retain the most talented, hardworking undocumented immigrants who would gladly contribute their knowledge and skills to the nation’s wealth, it still falls short in relation to equal access to higher education (Nguyen

& Kebede, 2017). Currently, DACA-granted individuals are able to complete two or three-year college degrees, which may allow them to pursue higher-paying jobs and more stable careers (Gonzales, Terriquez, & Ruszczyk, 2014). However, and despite the implementation of programs by some states created to ease the financial burden of undocumented students seeking a higher education, the rest of the undocumented immigrant population is still required to pay expensive international student fees (Enriquez et al., 2019). Additionally, undocumented Hispanic youth who do not receive financial aid, or cannot meet a private institution's high standards of continued excellence in order to receive merit-based financial aid, may never experience institutional or civic inclusion (Flores, 2016).

Without financial assistance from the government, the attainment of a college degree becomes that much more difficult for thousands of DACA recipients (Nguyen & Kebede, 2017), as well as undocumented youth. Despite the fact that DACA has eliminated many of the barriers that were keeping undocumented Hispanic immigrants from attending college, the barriers of paying for college have remained for many students who may struggle to afford basic living and educational expenses, resulting in negative consequences for academic performance (Enriquez et al., 2019). In addition, DACA recipients reported experiencing more freedom and independence, during the Obama administration, thanks to the benefits provided through DACA, including access to post-secondary educational institutions (Nguyen & Kebede, 2017). However, many now fear the possibility that the information provided by DACA applicants can be used against them and their families under the current presidential administration which has attempted to dismantle programs that were meant to help them (Enriquez et al., 2019).

Lastly, DACA recipients are only given legal presence, but not lawful status, which means that their deferred status is valid only as long as the policy is in place

(Martinez, 2014). As a result, “documented” undocumented students are often distracted from their academic responsibilities by issues such as their immigration status, deportation threats to themselves and their family members, immigration-related appointments, and anticipated or actual changes to immigration policy (Enriquez et al., 2019). According to Enriquez et al., (2019) these worries can hinder their academic engagement in and outside of the classroom and result in poorer academic performance. Many of these students often wonder if they will be able to use their college degrees to get a job, access economic stability, and/or gain civic inclusion after their DACA status expires (Gonzales, Terriquez, & Ruszczyk, 2014; Nguyen, & Kebede, 2017). On account of this uncertainty, they lack the necessary confidence to pursue their career goals and are anxious about life after graduation from a higher-learning institution (Enriquez et al., 2019).

The Role of Grit, Perseverance, and Tenacity

Cognitive ability and academic preparation are essential in achieving success in higher education; however, traits such as grit, perseverance, and tenacity also seem to play an important role in college completion (Almeida, 2016). Although achievement tests are the primary means of gaining entry into college or four-year university programs, factors such as grit, perseverance, and tenacity may also be predictive of academic success (Ray & Brown, 2015). In fact, grit, perseverance, and tenacity have been identified as key non-cognitive attributes that can positively impact student engagement, attendance, completion of assignments, the ability to learn from failure, and academic endurance (Anderson, Turner, Heath, & Payne, 2016). According to Laursen (2015), schools must provide ample opportunities for students to develop cognitive and non-cognitive skills to encourage the development of competent citizens.

According to Almeida (2016), the concept of grit can be represented through the convergence of three specific components: (a) having interest or passion in any given area; (b) preferring long-term over short-term goals; and (c) overcoming obstacles or setbacks. In fact, grit not only significantly increases successful outcomes, but it has been found to be a reliable predictor of high school graduation and overall academic success (Muenks, Yang, & Wigfield, 2018; Tough, 2012). Nonetheless, these personal characteristics must be developed and combined with appropriate college preparation coursework to improve the desired results (Almeida, 2016; Ray & Brown, 2015).

Additionally, perseverance, among Hispanic college students, seems to be directly influenced by the presence of meaning in their life, the search for meaning in life, happiness, hope, and family (Tuckwiller & Dardick, 2018; Vela, Lu, Lenz, & Hinojosa, 2015). According to Vela et al. (2015), meaning in life is a psychological strength that may lead to self-discovery, improved well-being, and the ability to select and pursue goals. Happiness due to the relationship with life satisfaction, psychological well-being, and academic motivation related to higher self-esteem may be related to greater career satisfaction and higher academic motivation among Hispanic college students (Vela et al., 2015). Therefore, regardless of the obstacles faced by Hispanic college students, they often work hard to complete their goals because their grit and perseverance may be fueled by the desire to resist stereotypes, overcome challenges, and make their families proud (O'Neal et al., 2016), especially when they would be the first in their families to graduate from college.

Tenacity is another non-cognitive attribute that may greatly influence the academic success of all students. According to Mittal (2020) academic tenacity relates to the mindsets and skills that allow students to look beyond short-term concerns to longer-term or higher-order goals, and to withstand challenges and setbacks to persevere toward

these goals. There are four key mindsets that contribute to successful academic results which include, a sense of belonging at school, a belief that ability and competence can grow with effort, that one can succeed, and that the work done is of value (Mittal, 2020). Students learn to be tenacious through personal experiences and self-reflection, that is to say that students adopt better attitudes as key beliefs that are necessary strategies that allow students to not only celebrate their successes, but which may also allow them to learn from their mistakes and/or failures (Mittal, 2020).

The Academic Success of Hispanic Male Students

Until recently, the issue of long-term educational success of Hispanic male students had gone unnoticed or under-examined by policy makers and education leaders (Sáenz, Ponjuan, Segovia, & Del Real Viramontes, 2015). However, it has been suggested that a lack of proactive efforts to address the unique needs of Hispanic males in the educational system may have rippling effects in the economic and social prosperity of the country and the well-being of the Hispanic community (Bray, Beer, & Calloway, 2019; Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2011). The lack of critical attention to the challenges of changing student demographics, coupled with the fact that Hispanic males continue to face various obstacles while attempting to achieve higher education milestones, have led to the creation of Project MALES (Mentoring to Achieve Latino Educational Success) at the University of Texas at Austin and across surrounding communities (Sáenz et al., 2015). According to Sáenz et al. (2015), Project MALES is a mentoring program specifically designed to help Hispanic males in local middle schools and high schools effectively navigate their own educational journeys through the education pipeline.

Project MALES was officially launched in the fall of 2010 as a new research and mentoring initiative within the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement (DDCE) at the University of Texas at Austin (Sáenz et al., 2015). This mentoring

program currently partners with the Austin Independent School District and serves four high schools and one middle school within the district, delivering over 1,600 hours of mentoring per year (Sáenz et al., 2015). The program, which pairs undergraduates with middle and high school students and graduate students with undergrads, has matched more than 50 mentors with over 50 males of color (Field, 2017). According to Sáenz et al. (2015), this qualitative research and mentoring initiative is unique because it is an ongoing research project that focuses on the experiences and perceptions of Hispanic males across the education pipeline, serves as a mentoring program that seeks to cultivate an engaged support network for males of color, and has created a pool of 14 education experts focused on leveraging shared strategies to ensure the success of males of color across Texas.

The mentoring part of the project focuses on near-peer (relationships with individuals who are a year or two older than their protégés) and intergenerational mentoring (the mentoring of an older adult by a younger person on topics like technology, current trends and social media) as strategies to leverage social capital among Hispanic males across multiple generations in both secondary and post-secondary contexts (Sáenz et al., 2015). The basic structure of the mentoring program uses near-peer group mentoring that allows for longer-term bonds to develop between the MALES undergraduate mentors and male middle school and high school students of color participating in the mentoring program (Sáenz et al., 2015). According to Sáenz et al. (2015), MALES mentors meet with local middle school and high school Hispanic male students throughout the academic year to mentor and discuss a variety of topics ranging from college preparation to financial literacy as well as the skills necessary to succeed in college and beyond. Sáenz et al. (2015) posit that their mentoring model is unique because: a) it explicitly focuses on Hispanic males; b) it is largely influenced by best

practices on mentoring males of color; c) it is informed by ongoing multi-year research efforts on Hispanic males; and d) it highlights a unique collaboration between a public research university and several local educational and community partners.

First, second, and third-generation Hispanic male students often come to a fork in the road that requires them to decide whether or not to go to college after high school. According to Walley and Knight (2018), when it comes to the academic success of Hispanic males, researchers have focused on the perception and understanding of high school counselors and administrators, school district leaders, and post-secondary administrators and the barriers and available resources related to improving Latino students' post-secondary degree aspirations. However, it is also important to focus on the formation of students' college-going identity which may affect their ability to not quit before they finish their higher education and establish a professional career (Huerta, McDonough, & Allen, 2018). Huerta et al. (2018) have challenged the narrative of young men of color in relation to how their own perceptions and experiences can determine whether they will be invested or interested in higher education after high school.

Although resources and programs are available for underrepresented students throughout secondary and post-secondary education, researchers have explored how each of these school agents uses these resources to improve the educational success of Hispanic males (Manzano-Sanchez, Matarrita-Cascante, & Outley, 2019). Thus, researchers have sought to answer the following questions: (a) What are the experiences related to educational pathways and motivation toward post-secondary education among Hispanic boys and young men in educational systems as perceived by counselors and administrators? (b) What resources exist at the high school and post-secondary levels to assist Hispanic male adolescents in successful high school graduation and college enrollment and retention? and (c) What are the perceptions of administrators and

counselors who work with Hispanic male adolescents regarding their academic performance and needs? (Clark et al., 2013; Manzano-Sanchez et al., 2019; Peña & Rhoads, 2019). Nevertheless, the personal experiences and perceptions of Hispanic males are just as important as the perceptions of the adults in charge of their education, because their experiences and perceptions, in the form of struggles and aspirations, shape the students' goals after high school (Huerta et al., 2018; Sue, Sue, Neville, & Smith, 2019).

As part of their findings, the researchers shared that Hispanic male students are more likely to be enrolled in overcrowded schools while often learning from undertrained or under-credentialed teachers and may also experience minimal educational support to address their specific learning styles (Clark et al., 2013; Manzano-Sanchez et al., 2019). In addition, researchers also found that school counselors are not prepared to work with the unique challenges associated with or related to Hispanic male students which may include, but are not limited to, language needs, immigration, and communication with non-English-speaking parents (Ballysingh, 2019; Clark et al., 2013; Cook, Hayden, Tyrrell, & McCann, 2018; Sue et al., 2019). Nonetheless, these challenges can often be overcome with the support of high school teachers, counselors, and other school staff who understand the difficult pre-college educational experiences and barriers of Hispanic male students, and how the right support may contribute to the success of these students (Ballysingh, 2019; Clark et al., 2013; Fleming, 2019). Lastly, the inclusion of Latino male teachers helps to encourage Latino male students in their educational pathways (Turner, Cosmé, Dinehart, Martí, McDonald, Ramirez, & Zamora, 2018). In fact, Hispanic students are more likely to perform better academically when their teachers are from an underrepresented racial/ethnic group (Alcocer & Martinez, 2018; Ballysingh, 2019; Clark et al., 2013).

Nonetheless, and despite the fact that various studies tend to focus on the underperformance of Hispanic males in higher education, Pérez and Sáenz, (2017) argue that Hispanic males are capable of thriving at selective U.S. colleges and universities. The American Association of Hispanics in Higher Education (AAHHE) commissioned this study to address how Hispanic male undergraduates conceptualized and embodied academic success at selective, predominantly Anglo-American institutions (Pérez, & Sáenz, 2017). Unfortunately, the existent literature published on Hispanic males in higher education has focused on factors that contribute to low enrollment, persistence, and completion rates in higher education (Clark et al., 2013; Gonzalez et al., 2013; Pérez, & Sáenz, 2017). By focusing on other important college outcomes such as engaged learning, academic determination, and social connectedness, this study makes an important contribution to research on student success by not only reporting but validating Hispanic males' conceptualizations of collegiate success (Pérez, & Sáenz, 2017).

In another study, Pérez and Taylor (2016) found that Hispanic male achievers were more likely to succeed at selective institutions when they were able to capitalize on the cultural wealth their parents transmitted to them in the form of familial, linguistic, and aspirational capital. Thus, fostering Latino males' success is dependent on maintaining strong familial and communal ties while pursuing a college education (Pérez & Sáenz, 2017). In both of their studies, Pérez and Taylor (2016) and Pérez and Sáenz (2017) show how Hispanic male students embodied academic success through engaged learning, academic determination, and social connectedness (Pérez & Taylor 2016; Pérez & Sáenz, 2017). Through structured engaged learning, teachers can inspire Hispanic males to take greater ownership of their educational experiences while in college (Pérez & Sáenz, 2017). Although many Hispanic males may enter college with unclear educational goals, they aspire to become ideal college students who can effectively balance personal,

academic, and social commitments (Pérez, 2017). According to Pérez and Sáenz (2017), Hispanic males may also achieve academic success through the relationships they have established with faculty and administrators on campus, which often help them to sustain their academic determination. Lastly, although Hispanic males' academic success can be attributed to cultural wealth and familial support, Pérez and Sáenz also emphasized how interactions with Hispanic peers enhanced their sense of social connectedness and belonging (Pérez & Sáenz, 2017).

Summary

The United States has been called “The Land of Opportunity” due to the fact that it offers opportunities that other less developed countries cannot offer (Chetty, Hendren, Kline, Saez, & Turner, 2014). For this reason, Hispanic immigrants have made the long journey to this country, looking for the opportunity to better their lives. Among the many students who plan to attend college after graduating from high school, there might be a group of undocumented or first/second-generation Hispanic males with similar aspirations (Martinez, 2014; Nguyen & Kebede, 2017). However, Hispanic male students encounter more obstacles on their journey to higher education than the majority group or Anglo-American students (Irlbeck et al., 2014; Pratt, Harwood, Cavazos, & Ditzfeld, 2019; Wilkins, 2014).

Studies have identified several factors contributing to the social and academic success of students (Cuellar, 2014; Santiago, Taylor, & Galdeano, 2016). However, for Hispanic males who are recent immigrants, or first/second generation students, there are specific factors that affect their success while attending school and making plans to attend college after graduating from high school (Clark, Ponjuan, Orrock, Wilson, & Flores, 2013; Pratt et al., 2019; Torres, Driscoll, & Voell, 2012). The immigration status of the students and their parents, the families' SES, the level of education of the parents,

and their acculturation level all have an effect on their aspirations to pursue and complete a college education (Perez & Taylor, 2016; Toldson & Lemmons, 2013). It is important that teachers, school counselors, administrators, policy makers, and other relevant stakeholders take the time to identify and understand the various challenges that Hispanic males encounter while making plans to pursue and complete a college education in order to provide the necessary support systems to create a strong and confident college-going culture within the Hispanic communities and throughout the United States.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding about the experiences and perceptions of immigrant and U.S.-born Hispanic male traditional and non-traditional undergraduate students at a Hispanic-serving university in relation to the factors that influenced their decisions to pursue and complete a college education. This qualitative case study focused on the following three specific areas affecting Hispanic males and their decisions to pursue and complete a college education: a) immigration status of the student participants and their families; b) family responsibilities versus the value given to a higher; c) lack of role models and academic support systems available to Hispanic male students seeking a higher education degree; and d) equal access to essential information and resources.

This study also sought to identify and understand the obstacles that immigrant and U.S.-born Hispanic male students encountered while pursuing a higher education, as well as the specific tools or resources they used to deal with these challenges. The qualitative data obtained sought to both add to and expand on the existing literature on Hispanic male students who aspire to not just attend college, but to actually complete a higher education degree. This information is important because it may provide stakeholders at the local and state level with information that can be utilized to implement appropriate support systems specific to the creation of a more robust college-going culture that includes more Hispanic male students. Additionally, this study added validation to the many Hispanic males who dream of attending a higher-learning institution, but who may feel that the odds are stacked against them. Thus, this dissertation examined the following research questions:

1. What is the perceived importance of a college education to undergraduate, traditional and non-traditional-aged Hispanic males enrolled in higher education?
2. What perceptions do Hispanic males hold about the impact of their lived experiences both within and external to the academic environment on their pursuit of a college education?
3. What perceptions do university staff have about Hispanic males seeking a higher education and what Hispanic males must do in order to achieve their goal?

Research Design

This qualitative case study utilized a research design that focused on investigating the internal and external experiences and perceptions of Hispanic male students and their pursuit of higher education. This case study also used various qualitative research methodologies that included, but were not limited to, focus groups and structured one-on-one interviews with Hispanic male students and university support staff. The focus groups and structured interviews gave participants various opportunities to discuss, explain, and compare their personal experiences in relation to Hispanic males and higher education. The focus groups and interviews focused on the academic, social, and cultural perceptions and experiences of each study participant. The researcher also conducted a thorough review of available support programs for Hispanic male students and the marketing tools used to target this specific group of students. The researcher also collected detailed field notes on any information related to the various challenges and successes that Hispanic male students may have experienced while attending a higher-learning institution.

Case study research investigates a real-life phenomenon in-depth and within its environmental context (Ridder, 2017). Thus, a case study design was used in this project to allow the researcher to explore the individuals' particular experiences and perceptions in order to carry out a more in-depth analysis of the factors associated with the pursuit of a higher education by Hispanic males attempting to complete a college education (Yin, 2014). Therefore, the purpose of the qualitative design was to seek, identify, and analyze the specific factors that contributed to the pursuit and completion of a higher education by Hispanic males. By using this research design, the researcher sought to obtain valuable information that allowed for the identification and comparison of challenging and successful situations that Hispanic male students may face while pursuing a higher education degree as well as the various outcomes of each of their decisions.

Setting

At the time of the study, Santuario University (pseudonym) was a non-residential campus surrounded by a small number of student apartments. This university is composed of the colleges of Business (BUS), Education (COE), Human Science and Humanities (HSH), and Science and Engineering (CSE). Santuario University broke ground on a new 80, 000 square foot Residence Hall in June 2018, which opened in the fall of 2019. However, Santuario University does not have any recognized intercollegiate sports teams. Prior to 2014, this school campus was an upper division higher-learning institution for "transfer" students in their junior and senior years. Nonetheless, in the fall of 2014, Santuario University welcomed its first group of freshmen, which increased the number of students in all racial and ethnic categories.

Based on data obtained from the university's Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE), Santuario University experienced a gradual and steady increase in the enrollment of Hispanic students between the academic years of 2013 and 2017, in comparison with

other ethnic groups (See Table 1). However, since students at Santuario University were not required to report their ethnicity until recently, these figures were only based on those students who chose to self-identify while enrolled at this university. Thus, the number of all first-generation college students (FGCS) enrolled at Santuario University since the fall of 2013 has remained at 40.2 percent or higher (See Table 2). According to the university's OIE, in the fall of 2017, there were a total of 1,196 Hispanic first-generation college students at Santuario University. However, from those 1,196 first-generation Hispanic students 871 (73 percent) were labeled as first-generation Hispanic female college students, while only 325 (27 percent) were identified as first-generation Hispanic male college students (See Table 3).

Table 1

Santuario University Undergraduate Student Population (Based on Voluntary Self-Report)

| Ethnicity | spring 2013 | spring 2014 | spring 2015 | spring 2016 | spring 2017 |
|------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| White | 47.3% | 46% | 43.9% | 43.4% | 42.2% |
| Black | 8.6% | 8.6% | 9.4% | 8.9% | 8.3% |
| Hispanic | 31.8% | 33.3% | 34.2% | 35.3% | 36.9% |
| Asian | 5.9% | 6.0% | 6.0% | 6.3% | 6.5% |
| Am. Indian | 0.2% | 0.3% | 0.4% | 0.2% | 0.3% |
| International | 1.9% | 1.7% | 1.7% | 1.6% | 1.6% |
| Unknown | 1.6% | 1.5% | 1.5% | 1.2% | 1.3% |
| Hawaiian/Pacific Islander | 0.1% | 0.1% | 0.1% | 0.2% | 0.2% |
| Multi-Racial | 2.4% | 2.4% | 2.8% | 2.8% | 2.7% |

Table 2

Santuario University First Generation Undergraduate Students (2013-2017)

| School Term | Undergraduate Students | First Generation | *FGCS |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------|
| Fall 2012 | 4,541 | 2,258 | 49.7% |
| Fall 2013 | 4,619 | 2,168 | 46.9% |
| Fall 2014 | 5,077 | 2,185 | 43.0% |
| Fall 2015 | 5,427 | 2,357 | 43.4% |
| Fall 2016 | 5,570 | 2,523 | 45.3% |
| Fall 2017 | 6,094 | 2,448 | 40.2% |

* FGCS (First Generation College Student)

Table 3

Santuario University Hispanic FGCS by Gender (Fall 2017)

| School Term | Total FGCS* | Male FGCS* | Female FGCS* |
|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| Fall 2017 | 1,196 | 325 (27 %) | 871 (73 %) |

* FGCS (First Generation College Student)

Based on the university's OIE, the latest university enrollment trends by college and student level showed a disparity in the number of students enrolled based on gender, ethnicity, and the career of their choice during the 2017 spring semester. In the College of

Business, there were a total of 1,647 undergraduate students; however, there were only 648 (39.3 percent) Hispanic undergraduate students from which 230 (35 percent) were male and 418 (65 percent) were female students. In the College of Education, out of 928 undergraduate students, 471 (50.7 percent) were Hispanic undergraduate students from which 27 (5.7 percent) were male and 444 (94.3 percent) were female students. There were 1,684 undergraduate students in the College of Human Science and Humanities, but only 639 (37.9 percent) were Hispanic undergraduate students from which 187 (29.2 percent) were males and 452 (70.7 percent) were females. Lastly, the College of Science and Engineering had a total of 1,304 undergraduate students, where 501 (38.4 percent) were Hispanic undergraduate students from which 273 (54 percent) were males and 228 (46 percent) were female students (See Table 4).

Table 4

Santuario University Undergraduates' Trends by College and Gender (Spring 2017)

| College and Total | Hispanic Total | Hispanic Males | Hispanic Females |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| BUS 1,647 | 648 (39.3%) | 230 (35%) | 418 (65%) |
| COE 928 | 471 (50.7%) | 27 (5.7%) | 444 (94%) |
| HSH 1,684 | 639 (37.9%) | 187 (29%) | 452 (71%) |
| CSE 1,304 | 501 (38.4%) | 273 (54%) | 228 (46%) |

Although Santuario University is a Hispanic-serving Institution, its faculty demographics did not seem to reflect the student body it served at the time of this study. According to OIE data, in the fall of 2016, 432 (48.5 percent) faculty members were White, 42 (4.7 percent) were Black, 74 (8.3 percent) were Hispanic, 76 (8.5 percent) were

Asian, 1 (0.1 percent) were American Indian or Alaskan Native, 246 (27.6 percent) were International, 6 (0.7 percent) were Unknown, 1 (0.1 percent) were Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and 13 (1.5 percent) were Multi-Racial (See Table 5). These data included all part-time and full-time Santuario University faculty members, who at the time of the report were classified as professors, associate professors, assistant professors, or instructors. However, it is important to point out that although these numbers represent all persons at Santuario University classified as faculty, their classification was given to them regardless of whether they taught or not during the 2016 fall semester (University OIE, 2017).

Table 5

Santuario University Faculty Demographics

| Ethnicity | Total | Percentage |
|------------------------------|--------------|-------------------|
| White | 432 | 49% |
| Black | 42 | 4.7% |
| Hispanic | 74 | 8.3% |
| Asian | 76 | 8.5% |
| Am. Indian | 1 | 0.1% |
| International | 246 | 28% |
| Unknown | 6 | 0.7% |
| Hawaiian/Pacific Islander | 1 | 0.1% |
| Multi-Racial | 13 | 1.5% |

Participants

Once approval was granted from the University's Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (CPHS), the researcher reached out to all qualifying study participants through an email letter that was distributed by the university's Diversity Program Coordinator. Through the use of focus groups and/or one-on-one structured interviews, the participants' personal experiences and perceptions with regards to Hispanic males pursuing a higher education were used to carry out this qualitative study. The study included traditional and non-traditional Hispanic male undergraduate students and university staff who worked with Hispanic students on a regular basis. Every single participant was given a pseudonym to help protect their privacy and anonymity.

The undergraduate student enrollment at Santuario University in the spring of 2017 when data were collected was 5,657 students, out of which 2,066 (36.5 percent) were males, and 3,591 (63.5 percent) were females. The university primarily serves students from three nearby geographical areas. The majority, 56 percent come from the county in which the university is located, (University OIE, 2017). During the spring of 2017, there were 2,665 (47 percent) undergraduate full-time students and 2,992 (53 percent) undergraduate part-time students, (University OIE, 2017). At the time of the study, the demographics of the overall student population at Santuario University were as follows: 42.2 percent White, 8.3 percent Black, 36.9 percent Hispanic, 6.5 percent Asian, 0.3 percent American Indian, 1.6 percent International, 1.3 percent Unknown, 0.2 percent Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and 2.7 percent Multiracial (See Table 6). The great majority of the students at this university (73.2 percent) were "transfer" students, while the rest (26.8 percent) were first-time college students.

Table 6

Santuario University Spring 2017 Ethnic Composition of Student Population

| Ethnicity | Percentage |
|---------------------------|-------------------|
| White | 42.2% |
| Black | 8.3% |
| Hispanic | 36.9% |
| Asian | 6.5% |
| American Indian | 0.3% |
| International | 1.6% |
| Unknown | 1.3% |
| Hawaiian/Pacific Islander | 0.2% |

Population and Sample

The participants in this case study consisted of freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior traditional and non-traditional-aged Hispanic male students from a four-year Hispanic-serving university in a suburban area located in southeast Texas. A Hispanic-serving Institution (HSI) is defined as an institution of higher education that (a) is an eligible institution and (b) has an enrollment of undergraduate full-time equivalent students that is at least 25 percent Hispanic at the end of the award year immediately preceding the date of application. (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). The researcher also reached out to university staff, who may or may not have been Hispanic, but who came in contact with Hispanic male students, to invite them to form part of the study. The university staff was also asked to help in the identification of potential participants, based

on their experiences with traditional and non-traditional-aged, Hispanic male students at this particular institution.

The researcher attempted to recruit Hispanic male students from the College of Business (BUS), the College of Education (COE), the College of Human Science and Humanities (HSH), and the College of Science and Engineering (CSE). In the end, there were a total of five Hispanic male students from the College of Business, zero from the College of Education, four Hispanic male students from the College of Human Science and Humanities, and four Hispanic male students from the College of Science and Engineering. The group of 13 study participants was composed of two freshmen, one sophomore, six juniors, and four seniors. All 13 participants were first to third generation immigrant or U.S.-born males of Hispanic descent who may or may not have been the first in their family to pursue a college education. Since the study focused on traditional and non-traditional-aged students, the participants' ages ranged between 18 to 33 years of age.

Student Participants

The case study utilized a purposeful sampling method to select the student participants who were immigrants or U.S.-born males of Hispanic descent, may have been the first in their family to pursue higher education, and have experienced various personal struggles and successes while attempting to complete a college degree. The participants were part or full-time Hispanic male students pursuing a university degree at Santuario University with the intention of graduating with a four-year degree. A full-time student generally takes a minimum of twelve credits, or about four classes, while a part-time student usually takes between six and eleven credits or two to three classes (OIE). The sample included a total of 13 traditional and non-traditional-aged, undergraduate, Hispanic male university students between the ages of 18 and 33. The sample group was

made up of two freshmen students, one sophomore student, six junior students, and four senior students. The student participants may or may not have been “transfer” students. The student participants were either first-generation Hispanic male immigrants or second/third-generation U.S.-born males of Hispanic descent (See Table 7).

In order to identify and recruit potential student participants for this qualitative study, the researcher contacted the university’s Diversity Program Coordinator. The Diversity Program Coordinator had access to the contact information for all the Hispanic males that were attending Santuario University at the time of the study and was able to locate qualifying students through the university’s database. In order to respect the privacy and confidentiality of the potential candidates, and once the students had been identified as part of the target population, the Diversity Program Coordinator sent out an e-mail to potential Hispanic male students, inviting them to participate in this particular study. From the pool of willing participants, the researcher interviewed 20 participants before selecting the final 13 study subjects needed for the study (See Table 8). By interviewing more than the 13 needed study participants, the researcher was able to address any attrition in the number of participants, which may happen due to unforeseen circumstances. In order to encourage the participation of Hispanic male students needed for this study, the researcher offered and provided an incentive. Each potential student participant that participated in a one-on-one interview, or formed part of a focus group, was given a \$10.00 UHCL bookstore gift card.

Table 7

Study Student Participants

| Pseudonym | Classification | Age |
|------------------|-----------------------|------------|
| Diego | Freshman | 18 |
| Francisco | Freshman | 19 |
| Sergio | Sophomore | 21 |
| Luis | Junior | 21 |
| Andres | Junior | 23 |
| Arturo | Junior | 23 |
| José | Junior | 25 |
| Javier | Junior | 26 |
| Alex | Junior | 28 |
| Paul | Senior | 23 |
| Daniel | Senior | 25 |
| Miguel | Senior | 27 |
| Brayan | Senior | 33 |

University Staff Participants

In addition to the group of Hispanic male student participants, the researcher also identified and recruited several university employees to be interviewed individually and/or form part of focus groups that were conducted on the university campus (See Table 8). The employee participants eligible to participate in this study were those, who through their professional contact with Hispanic male students on a regular basis, served as mentors, provided academic instruction, academic support services, and/or valued the academic success of students in general at this particular Hispanic-serving Institution (HSI). In order to protect the employees' privacy and confidentiality, two separate employee focus groups were conducted.

Since the university staff participants that participated in the study were selected if they came in contact with Hispanic male students on a regular basis, they were also given pseudonyms to protect their identity. Some of the university staff were Anglo, some were African American, and some were Hispanic. The researcher visited several departments at the university where the study took place and introduced himself as a doctoral student. Once the acquaintance was made, the university staff were personally invited to participate in the study. Other university staff heard about the study by word of mouth, and simply showed up to the first focus group. It was obvious that they wanted to participate and had something to contribute to the study.

Table 8

University Staff Participants

| Pseudonym | Ethnicity | Gender | Department |
|------------------|------------------|---------------|--------------------------------|
| Sonia | Hispanic | Female | Academic Advising |
| Anna | Hispanic | Female | MAP* |
| Missy | African-American | Female | Disability Services |
| Max | Hispanic | Male | Title V Hispanic STEM Grant |
| Leo | Anglo | Male | Career Services |
| Bob | Anglo | Male | Counseling Services |
| Tina | Hispanic | Female | Veteran Services |
| Sam | Hispanic | Male | Writing Center |
| Kai | Hispanic | Male | Veteran Services |
| Ian | Anglo | Male | Math Center |
| Al | Anglo | Male | Disability Services |
| Amy | Anglo | Female | Sponsored Programs |
| Joe | Anglo | Male | Student Success Center |
| Ed | Hispanic | Male | Academic Advising |

* Mandatory Advising Program (MAP)

University Staff Participants

Academic and Support Staff

The first group of employees was composed of university staff who either provided academic counseling and/or guidance, academic support services, and/or oversaw special programs or departments. This group of participants included individuals from the Academic Advising Center, the Student Success Center, the Writing Center, the Math Center, the Career Center, Veteran Services, and Disabilities Services. The Academic Advising Center specifically focuses on the needs of freshman, sophomore, and “first-time-in-college” students. Through the Mandatory Advising Program (MAP), students are assigned an advisor that will help the students choose a major, select classes, research career paths and acclimate to college life at this local university. The Student Success Center offers three programs: subject matter tutoring, supplemental instruction, academic coaching (time/task management, note taking, and reading strategies or organization), and academic skills workshops. The Writing Center offers face-to-face and online help to undergraduate and graduate students (regardless of skill level and at any stage of the writing process), online and workshop-based writing consultations for undergraduates and graduate students. The Math Center provides tutoring, supplemental instruction, and resources for students in math and physics courses. The Disability Services Office provides reasonable accommodations to qualified students with disabilities to ensure they can fully participate and have equal access to everything the university has to offer. These employee participants were able to provide information related to the challenges that Hispanic male students may face while attempting to complete a college education, as well as the various support systems available to meet these students’ needs.

Student Life Support Staff

This group of university employees was made up of support services staff who not just came in contact with Hispanic male students, but who also provided academic support services that are commonly found in, but not limited to, the Student Services Center, the Student Life Office, the Student Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Office, the Counseling Center, and the Dean of Students. The Student Services Center offers resources related to everyday living, academic planning, university living, career planning, and healthy living. The Student Life Office creates a supportive environment and provides university students with opportunities for personal, social, and intellectual development to help enhance their college experience. The Student Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Office strives to further the retention and empowerment of diverse student populations, which includes various racial/ethnic groups, first-generation students, LGBTQ students, international students, and all other typically underrepresented student populations, to foster the growth of culturally competent and respectful global citizens. The counseling center affirms the unique identities of students, including gender, age, race, national origin, marital status, sexual orientation, romantic orientation, religion, gender identity, or different physical or mental ability through the development of their ability to address emotional and psychological challenges. The Dean of Students' Office serves as the "Central Hub" of campus for all student-related issues. The Dean of Students serves as an advocate and liaison for students while assisting faculty, staff and parents when needed.

This group of employee participants was selected based on their regular interactions with Hispanic male students pursuing a higher education, as well as additional information provided by the Academic Support Services office. These employee participants were contacted via-email and invited to participate in this study

because they may be able to provide different information related to specific areas in which Hispanic male students may struggle while attempting to pursue and complete a college education. Through an email, the researcher introduced himself as a doctoral student and personally invited each of the individuals to participate in this qualitative study. The participants were encouraged to express their own perceptions related to the academic and social success of Hispanic male students attending the university, at the time the study took place, in which they served as mentors, advisors, and/or role models.

Data Collection and Procedures

The researcher obtained approval from the University's Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (CPHS) before identifying potential participants and/or before any data were collected. The data collection for this qualitative case study was obtained through two different methods: individual semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Through the use of these two data collection methods, the researcher obtained information related to the internal and external factors that might influence, negatively or positively, students' decisions to pursue and complete a college education. The participants' cultural backgrounds were kept in mind during data collection to ensure the genuine aspect of their individual experiences and perceptions in higher education. In an attempt to increase participation, the interviews and focus groups took place in a private study room in the university's library or at the university's student services building on campus, both places provided a natural environment in which participants felt safe and more uninhibited to speak candidly.

With the participants' permission, the semi-structured interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded and later transcribed by the researcher. Each participant had the opportunity to approve the data collected through member checking before it was used in the study. Although there were specific topics that were discussed during the one-

on-one interviews and focus groups, the researcher mainly facilitated the dialogue taking place during the interviews and focus groups to encourage natural conversations based on personal experiences and perceptions related to the higher education of Hispanic males. Nonetheless, questions used during the interview and focus group included specific as well as open-ended questions to allow participants to add/share additional information during the one-on-one interviews as well as the focus groups in relation to their positive or negative experiences in higher education. The researcher took detailed field notes throughout the data collection process.

Student Data Collection

The researcher individually interviewed 20 potential Hispanic male student candidates, from which only 13 traditional and non-traditional-aged, undergraduate, Hispanic male university students 18 to 33 years old were selected. Every attempt was made to create a sample group composed of at least five freshmen students, five sophomore students, five junior students, and five senior students. However, the students' interest to participate in this study was limited, and the researcher was only able to secure the participation of two freshmen students, one sophomore student, six junior students, and four senior students.

The semi-structured interview questions were piloted with individuals who possessed the same qualifying characteristics as the study subjects needed for this particular study, but who would not form part of the actual study. The piloting of the semi-structured interview questions took place before they were used with all qualifying participants. By piloting the interview questions, the researcher aimed to identify any flaws in the semi-structured interview protocol to be able to revise and adjust questions before the actual data collection took place. The student interviews lasted between 45-60 minutes, and the researcher used the same set of revised questions with each student

participant, after they have been piloted, to increase validity and to discuss the participants' thoughts about attending the university as traditional or non-traditional-aged, Hispanic male undergraduate (Student Interview Protocol in Appendix A).

The researcher conducted the semi-structured interviews first to gather data that would be used to answer the research questions and to formulate the follow-up questions that would be utilized during the student focus group. By conducting the individual interviews first, the researcher had the opportunity to gain each of the participants' trust in a setting where student participants would be able to discuss personal and delicate information. The student participants were invited to participate in one of two separate focus groups with other students, who participated in the one-on-one interviews, to share their experiences in a group setting. The researcher invited all 13 Hispanic male undergraduate students to also participate in the focus group, but only nine student participants attended the focus group. Nonetheless, special focus was placed on those who had had challenging experiences and had persevered while pursuing a higher education as members of a minority group. In the end, two focus groups with different dates and times were created to split the student participants. The first focus group had four student participants, and the second focus group had five participants. Through their participation in the focus group, the students had the opportunity to add any additional information about their own experiences that may not have been discussed during the semi-structured interviews. Lastly, the individual interviews and the focus groups were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim, with the participants' permission.

Student Interviews

The individual semi-structured interviews utilized open-ended questions to collect information from the study participants. Open-ended questions were used to encourage full and meaningful answers from the participants. Open-ended questions are important

while collecting specific data from participants because they often allow individuals to use their own knowledge, personal experiences, and feelings while answering interview questions (Merriam, & Tisdell, 2016). The one-on-one interviews lasted between 45-60 minutes each, and every participant was asked the same set of questions (Student Interview Protocol in Appendix A). Additionally, the one-on-one interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, with the participants' permission, and field notes were taken immediately afterwards to capture impressions of the individual interviews (See Table 9).

Table 9

Student Participant Demographics

| Pseudonym | Interview | Focus Group | Classification | Generation | Age |
|------------------|------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|------------|
| Diego | X | X | Freshman | 2 nd | 18 |
| Francisco | X | X | Freshman | 1 st | 19 |
| Sergio | X | X | Sophomore | 2 nd | 21 |
| Luis | X | | Junior | 2 nd | 21 |
| Andres | X | X | Junior | 3 rd | 23 |
| Arturo | X | X | Junior | 3 rd | 23 |
| José | X | | Junior | 1 st | 25 |
| Javier | X | X | Junior | 2 nd | 26 |
| Alex | X | | Junior | 2 nd | 28 |
| Paul | X | | Senior | 1 st | 23 |
| Daniel | X | | Senior | 1 st | 25 |
| Miguel | X | X | Senior | 1 st | 27 |
| Brayan | X | | Senior | 1 st | 33 |

Student Focus Groups

Another method of data collection that was used during this study was that of focus groups. This method of data collection was selected because focus groups can create lines of communication between the researcher and the participants that often allow the researcher to learn about topics or groups of people that may be poorly understood (Morgan, Krueger, & King, 1998). Before the focus group questions were utilized, they were piloted with several Hispanic male university students who were not involved in the actual qualitative study. According to research, focus groups may be effective when there might be a gap between what professionals may already know about their target audience and what their target audience actually needs (Morgan et al., 1998). Thus, through the use of focus groups, the researcher was able to collect data on the experiences and perceptions of Hispanic male students seeking a higher education, and the services provided to this specific group of individuals. Through the focus group, the researcher was also able to provide a platform for the participants to hear each other's views, understand the way they behave, and the motivations underlying their specific behaviors (Morgan et al., 1998).

The initial semi-structured student interviews were used to select the focus groups composed of Hispanic male students. All 13 student participants were invited to participate in the focus groups and their participation in the focus group was completely voluntary, however, only nine attended. Attrition was reported as part of the study. Nonetheless, participants with extraordinary experiences while pursuing higher education were highly encouraged to form part of at least one of the two focus groups focus group. Based on the number of individuals willing to participate in the focus group, two focus groups with no more than five participants in each group resulted in the end. The focus group participants that were invited were given two sets of dates with a specific time

based on their availability. Thus, they attended the focus group based on the date and time that was most convenient for them. The first focus group had four participants, while the second focus group had five. Once the focus groups were finalized, the Hispanic male students belonging to each focus group were asked a revised set of questions derived from those listed in Appendix A. The revised set of questions was used to further examine the specific factors contributing to Hispanic male students' decisions to pursue and complete a college, or a four-year university, degree. Each of the focus group sessions, which lasted between 45-60 minutes, was audio-recorded and immediately transcribed by the researcher after he carefully listened to each recording in an attempt to capture the participants' true perceptions and experiences. The transcribed data was member-checked and approved before it was added to the study.

Staff Data Collection

The researcher met with several university academic and support services staff to gather data on the experiences they have had while interacting with Hispanic male students. The data collection procedures were reversed for the university staff, the focus groups took place first (See Table 10). By interviewing the employee participants in a group setting first, the researcher sought to understand their collective level of knowledge, comfort, and commitment while supporting Hispanic male students pursuing a higher education. To gather data from various points of view, the university staff that were invited to participate in the focus groups were individuals from both genders, who may or may not have been Hispanic, but who came in contact with Hispanic male university students on a regular basis. These individuals, as part of their job description, must value the social and academic success of all students, must be able to provide academic and/or psychological support, encouragement, guidance, and/or any resources needed to succeed in school, and/or must personally believe in the importance of

supporting this specific group of students. The interview protocol for the university staff focus group appears in Appendix C.

Staff Focus Groups

The selected qualifying university staff members formed part of one of two focus groups that discussed the specific support systems available to Hispanic males, as well as the means through which these services are marketed to this specific group of students (See Appendix C). The researcher invited university staff participants based on their experience and level of daily contact with Hispanic males, as well as their commitment to improving the status of the university as a Hispanic-serving Institution. Although all qualifying university staff were invited to form part of at least one focus group, and participation was completely voluntary. The participants who responded to the invite were divided into two separate focus groups with at least six participants in each group.

However, the first focus group ended up with 12 participants because the news spread about the focus group and more people showed up than the ones who had already been invited. After accommodating the additional study participants, the appropriate forms were signed, and the focus group took place. The researcher conducted follow-up semi-structured interviews with 10 school staff members, depending on the types of information each participant shared during the focus group, in relation to their involvement with Hispanic male students, or if additional information and/or further clarification was needed after the focus group data had been transcribed by the researcher.

Table 10

University Staff Demographics

| Pseudonym | Interview | Focus Group | Ethnicity | Gender | Department |
|------------------|------------------|--------------------|------------------|---------------|--------------------------------|
| Sonia | X | X | Hispanic | Female | Academic Advising |
| Anna | X | X | Hispanic | Female | MAP* |
| Missy | X | X | African-American | Female | Disability Services |
| Max | X | | Hispanic | Male | Title V Hispanic STEM Grant |
| Leo | | X | Anglo | Male | Career Services |
| Bob | X | X | Anglo | Male | Counseling Services |
| Tina | X | X | Hispanic | Female | Veteran Services |
| Sam | X | X | Hispanic | Male | Writing Center |
| Kai | X | X | Hispanic | Male | Veteran Services |
| Ian | | X | Anglo | Male | Math Center |
| Al | X | X | Anglo | Male | Disability Services |
| Amy | | X | Anglo | Female | Sponsored Programs |
| Joe | | X | Anglo | Male | Student Success Center |
| Ed | X | | Hispanic | Male | Academic Advising |

* Mandatory Advising Program (MAP)

Staff Interviews

The researcher used a semi-structured interview protocol to gather additional data from individual university staff (See Appendix C). Open-ended questions were used to encourage full and meaningful answers from the participants. The open-ended questions were formulated from the focus group protocol, with an emphasis on any and all areas affecting Hispanic males in higher education. The one-on-one interviews lasted between 30-60 minutes each, and every group of participants was asked the same set of questions pertaining to their group (See Appendix D). Each of the follow-up interviews with qualifying university staff members was immediately transcribed by the researcher after he carefully listened to each recording in an attempt to capture the participants' true perceptions and experiences.

Data Analysis Procedures

As a way of analyzing the data collected for this case study, the researcher listened to the one-on-one interviews, as well as the focus group recordings in order to transcribe what the participants said in the most accurate way possible. The transcribed data was also member-checked, and corrections were made before it was added to the study. After the transcribed data had been member-checked, the researcher organized and categorized the data into emerging themes for further analysis (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). The data analysis was concurrent with the data collection to help generate new and often better strategies for data collection and transcription (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). The researcher read through all the transcripts to be able to note common themes, topics, and any other relevant information in the data from what people said, as well as the topics they mentioned during the one-on-one interviews and focus groups.

The data analysis was done using a constant comparative analysis approach (Boeije, 2002). Through a constant comparative analysis approach, the researcher was

able to do what was necessary to develop a theory more or less inductively, namely categorizing, coding, delineating categories, and connecting them through the use of abbreviations to code field notes, observations, and transcriptions (Boeije, 2002; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Specific codes and abbreviations were used to also identify the following possible a-priori themes, which were derived from the literature review conducted for this study. Although additional themes resulted at the end of each interview or focus group, the a-priori themes were the following: a) immigration status and acculturation level; b) parental involvement and other support systems; c) equal access to information and resources; d) family values in relation to higher education; and e) available role models. Once the themes had been coded, the researcher was able to compare across and within participant groups to identify common patterns and outliers.

The comparative analysis approach was used because this method allowed the researcher to compare data within and across participant responses and categories of codes, which facilitated the identification of themes and/or categories. The researcher also analyzed the written and printed documentation that connects Hispanic male students and the resources specifically designed to meet their social and academic needs at their higher-learning institution to note themes present in these sources. Additionally, a thorough review of data obtained from the students and staff participants, the support services staff's experiences, and the documents used to market specific services to Hispanic male students, was done to promote accuracy and consistency. Data triangulation enabled the researcher to focus on the "macro coding" of one paragraph at time, which according to Lichtman (2013), allows the researcher to focus on words, phrases, or segments that lead to a common theme. Once emergent themes had been identified, the data was transferred into written summaries to better explain the

experiences of Hispanic male students and their perceived experiences while deciding to pursue college as members of a minority group.

Lastly, the researcher used analytic induction to facilitate examination of scenarios and/or situations that may not fit within the typical categories of codes or themes, but that after careful examination, a possible hypothesis may be offered (Bogolyubov, 2019). The data analysis process included all audio-recorded and transcribed interviews, meeting minutes, detailed notes taken during focus groups and one-on-one interviews, as well as any other research notes written and analyzed immediately following each interview and/or focus group or derived from the transcription of each focus group and/or one-on-one interview.

Validity

To ensure validity while collecting data and during the data analysis, the transcribed data was member-checked before it was added to the study and thus provided the researcher with the ability to further organize and categorize the data into emerging themes (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). Furthermore, the triangulation of student interviews, university staff focus groups/interviews, and specific marketing documents enhanced the study's validity as well as reduced researcher biases. To further enhance the validity of the study, the researcher only interviewed traditional and non-traditional-aged, Hispanic male undergraduate university students pursuing a higher education degree at this specific university campus, as well as university staff who come in contact with Hispanic male students on a regular basis as part of their job description and/or because they value the social and academic success of Hispanic males as a minority group.

Reliability

The researcher piloted the interview and focus group protocols with individuals representing each of the groups that formed part of the study. However, the stakeholders

with whom the protocols were piloted did not form part of the actual study. These individuals with whom the protocols were piloted included traditional and non-traditional-aged Hispanic male students and school support staff that may or may not have been attending or were employed at the university where the study took place. Piloting the protocols with each stakeholder group helped the researcher in updating and/or refining the questions that were used to collect data in addition to adding reliability to the study. To increase reliability in the study and minimize the possibility of errors, the same protocols were used with each group participating in the study (i.e., Hispanic male students, and school support staff). Finally, the researcher informed the participants that he is a Hispanic male doctoral student at the institution where the study took place and that their participation in the study would be strictly voluntary.

Ethical Considerations

To protect the participants' privacy and confidentiality, approval was obtained from the University's Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (CPHS) before proceeding with the study. Before qualifying participants took part in the study, students and staff were invited to complete and sign an Informed Consent form which informed them about the study and their rights within the study. The participants' names and any other identifying features that arose in the interviews and focus groups were masked to preserve their anonymity. The participants were given special codes and/or pseudonyms when the use of codes was not feasible.

Additionally, all data collected for this qualitative study were saved in a password-protected computer, and all hard copies of data will remain in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home office. The researcher will be the only individual with full access to the data stored on his personal computer, as well as the hard copies which will remain locked in the file cabinet. All data will be safely guarded for five years after

the completion of this study before it is completely destroyed. Lastly, to avoid bias on the part of the researcher, who is a Hispanic male and identified himself as such to all the study participants, special attention was paid to the way in which the researcher interacted with the participants to minimize a conflict of interest while gathering accurate data.

Limitations

This study presents several limitations due to the small number of Hispanic male students forming part of the study. Since the sample group was rather small with a total of 13 participants, it must be noted that a larger group might yield different results. Due to a lack of interest on the part of the student participants, the researcher was only able to interview a limited number of Hispanic male undergraduate students, which included traditional and non-traditional-aged freshmen to senior Hispanic male university students. Thus, the study only presents a depiction of the successes and challenges this group of Hispanic male students experienced, as portrayed through the personal accounts of each of their academic journeys. Furthermore, the results of the study only reflected the experiences and perceptions of this specific group of 13 undergraduate, traditional and non-traditional-aged, Hispanic male students, from a four-year Hispanic-serving university in a suburban area located in southeast Texas.

The Hispanic male participants came from a variety of Hispanic groups, but not all Hispanic groups were represented in the sample. Since the Hispanic male participants did not represent every Hispanic/Latino group from every Hispanic-serving Institution in the United States, the findings may not be easily generalizable. It is possible that a larger sample group could have yielded significantly different results. Additionally, the presence of older students or non-traditional-aged students is a major limitation, particularly because these Hispanic male students may only attend HSIs part-time due to

family and/or work responsibilities, which may render different experiences and/or perceptions related to each of their academic journeys in higher education. Lastly, the experiences and perceptions from each of the student participants were different based on specific characteristics that included, but were not limited to, their generational status, whether they were FGCSs, their Hispanic descent, and/or their level of acculturation. Nonetheless, the information obtained may help others, who are working with similar populations, to better understand the various factors that influence Hispanic males' decisions to pursue and complete a higher education degree in the United States.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to better understand how the perceived experiences of immigrant and U.S.-born Hispanic males in the United States, as well as specific internal/external factors, influenced their decisions to pursue and complete a college education. Through the use of one-on-one interviews and focus groups, the researcher attempted to identify the specific factors contributing to Hispanic males' decisions to seek, and complete, a higher education degree. One of the goals of this research study was that these results be used at the local and state level to create additional support systems that can help more Hispanic male students in seeking a post-secondary education after they graduate from high school. The results may also provide a window into the role that Hispanic families play while their children become the first ones in their family to obtain a college education.

CHAPTER IV:

RESULTS

Existing research has shown that there is a growing gap between Hispanic male students and Hispanic females and/or other ethnic minorities who are seeking a higher education (Libassi, 2018; Riegle-Crumb, Kyte, & Morton, 2018). According to a report published by the National Center for Educational Statistics, (NCES, 2018) there seems to be an imbalance between college-going Hispanic males and the majority group or Anglo-Americans (Cataldi, Bennett, & Chen, 2018; Tajalli & Ortiz, 2018). While high school graduation rates and dropout prevention remain critical issues in today's educational arena, there is an ever-growing gap in relation to the outcomes between students who only obtain a high school diploma, and those who go on to pursue a higher-education degree (Tajalli & Ortiz, 2018; Villavicencio, Bhattacharya, & Guidry, 2013).

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the perceptions and experiences of Hispanic male students and university staff in relation to the factors that contribute to the pursuit and completion of a higher education by Hispanic male students. To capture the participants' experiences, and personal stories, the researcher conducted focus groups and one-on-one interviews with Hispanic male students and university staff, using interview protocols specific for each group.

This study is important because, based on the literature review, there is a disparity in the number of Hispanic male students pursuing a higher education, compared to their Anglo counterparts (Pew Hispanic Research Center, 2016). The study sought to investigate the specific factors that may hinder or help Hispanic males while seeking a higher education. The findings could help higher education institutions, as well as policy makers, in creating specific support programs that may increase the number of Hispanic males who may be planning to successfully pursue and complete a college or university

degree. This chapter delivers the results of the data collected, transcribed, and analyzed during the study. The data were gathered through the shared experiences and perspectives of university Hispanic male students and university staff who formed part of focus groups and/or one-on-one interviews. The research questions that guided this qualitative study are as follow:

1. What is the perceived importance of a college education to undergraduate, traditional and non-traditional-aged Hispanic males enrolled in higher education?
2. What perceptions do Hispanic males have about the impact of their lived experiences both within and external to the academic environment on their pursuit of a college education?
3. What perceptions do university staff have about Hispanic males seeking a higher education and what Hispanic males must do in order to achieve their goal?

Theoretical Framework

This study used two theoretical frameworks to enhance the understanding of the experiences and perceptions that might lead Hispanic males to pursue and complete a college education. The theoretical frameworks used to guide this study were Bandura's (1977) social-cognitive theory and Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural constructivism theory. This qualitative study utilized these theories to ascertain the specific reasons that might explain the disparity that exists between Hispanic male students who successfully pursue and complete a college education and their Anglo counterparts. Although Hispanics are the fastest growing minority group in the U.S., 61.6 percent have a high school education or less, 23.9 percent possess a two-year degree or some college, and

only 14.4 percent have a bachelor's degree or more (Pew Hispanic Research Center, 2016).

Albert Bandura's (1977) social-cognitive theory focuses on observational learning, life experiences, and reciprocal determinism as the vehicle to developing one's personality. According to Bandura (1977) an individual's attitudes, abilities, and cognitive skills make up what we now refer to as a self-system. Self-efficacy is a central part of the self-system in that it allows individuals to organize and execute specific courses of action required to manage specific situations. Stated differently, self-efficacy is an individual's belief in his or her ability to succeed in any situation, including higher education.

According to Vygotsky (1978), the true purpose of the development of thinking is not from the individual to the social or group, but from the social or group to the individual. Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural constructivism theory emphasizes the importance of understanding the psychological development of competent individuals by providing, both children and adults, the cultural tools necessary to ensure that society is deliberately producing competent citizens. This theory not only focuses on how adults and peers can influence learning, but also on how cultural beliefs and attitudes can influence how learning occurs (Vygotsky, 1978), which is essential while creating a college-bound culture among Hispanic males.

Hispanic male students may be more likely to attend overcrowded public schools, learn from undertrained teachers, and experience minimal educational support; as a result, Hispanic males are more likely than their peers to be placed in remedial classes or on a vocational educational path rather than a post-secondary academic plan (Atwell et al., 2019; Clark et al., 2013). Although most people can identify and set specific goals they would like to accomplish, Bandura (1977) found that self-efficacy plays an

important role in how these goals are attained. Additionally, through social and cultural interaction, individuals who might lack the knowledge or skills necessary to reach their goals, or their full potential, can do so by observing someone who is slightly more advanced than they are or whose cultural values differ from their own. Thus, social and cultural interaction must occur for individuals to be able to reach their highest social and intellectual levels within any society (Vygotsky, 1978).

Student Participant Demographics

A total of 13 traditional and non-traditional university students of Hispanic descent were selected to participate in the study. The student participants were attending the Hispanic-serving Institution where the study took place. The Hispanic male students represented a variety of Spanish-speaking countries, including Mexico, Venezuela, Guatemala, and El Salvador. The Hispanic male participants were part of a first, second, or third generation of Hispanics living in the United States. All 13 participants were Hispanic male students who were classified as either freshmen, sophomores, juniors, or seniors at the time the study took place. The participants were pursuing degrees in either Biology, Computer Engineering, Business, Anthropology, Earth Science, Physics, or Chemistry. The student participants' ages ranged from 18 to 33 years of age, at the time of the study.

Since this qualitative study sought to understand the perceptions and personal experiences of Hispanic male students pursuing a higher-education degree, the researcher thought it would be best to provide additional information about the student participants. Thus, in addition to the pseudonym given to the student participants, they were also grouped by generational status. In this study, generational status refers to what generation the participant is while living in the United States. First-generation in the U.S. refers to the participants who were born outside of the U.S., but immigrated to, and are now living

in, the United States. Second-generation in the U.S. refers to the participants who were born in the U.S. to at least one parent from another country, other than the U.S. Third-generation in the U.S. refers to the participants who were born in the U.S., and whose parents were also born on the U.S. The names that follow are all pseudonyms given to each student participant to protect their identity and to respect their privacy.

First-Generation Students

Francisco was a freshman and José was a junior at the time the study took place. Paul, Daniel, Miguel and Brayan were seniors at the time the data were collected. All six of these student participants were first-generation immigrants to the United States.

Francisco

Francisco, a freshman, was 19 years-old at the time of the study, and he immigrated to the U.S. from México. Francisco's dad only finished middle school while living in México, but his mom attended high school through the 10th grade, before dropping out. Francisco works full-time at his family's landscaping company and attends school at night. Francisco is a Business Management major and plans to open his own landscaping business after he graduates. Although he was not told he should go to college, he decided to do so on his own. Francisco stated that his "Parents did not enforce the idea of going to college after he graduated from high school ... However, I grew up with the idea that I wanted to go to college, and I just kind of decided for myself that I would do just that."

José

José was a 25-year-old junior pursuing a Business degree at the time the data were collected. José is a first-generation immigrant who came to the United States from Venezuela due to "The horrible economic and political situation that is currently crippling the country" according to José. Both of José's parents were college-educated

professionals in Venezuela, where dad was a family doctor and mother worked as a teacher. However, here in the United States, dad is working as a waiter, and mom stays at home to take care of his younger siblings. One of José's younger brothers is a child with special needs and needs extra care. José works part-time to be able to help his family with finances. He also only attends school part-time, at night.

Paul

Paul was a 23-year-old senior at the time of the study, and a first-generation immigrant when the data were collected. Paul is a Biology major and stated that his parents and his older sister often encouraged him to pursue a college education after high school. Both of Paul's parents attended school in México. Paul's mom finished high school, and his dad only attended school through fourth grade. According to Paul, his family often told him that having a college education would "Make things easier and would provide more opportunities for his future ... it would also bring more stability to his life."

Daniel

Daniel was a 25-year-old senior student, and a first-generation immigrant when this study took place. Daniel and his parents immigrated to the United States from México in search of work and better opportunities. Both of Daniel's parents attended school in México, where his mother completed a bachelor's and his dad finished high school. Daniel is an Anthropology major and plans to pursue a Master's in the same field in order to teach at the high school or college level. While growing up, in the U.S., Daniel's family moved around quite often in order to find work. Daniel fell behind in his studies, and as a high school senior, found out that he was in danger of not graduating until a year later. Daniel remembered saying: "I don't want to do that, and knew that if I moved again ... I would miss out on graduating with the rest of my class." After speaking

with his high school counselor, he decided to take the General Education Development Test (GED). He recalled, “Once I passed the GED, I graduated early from high school and started looking into a community college on my own.”

Miguel

Miguel was a 27-year-old senior student at the time the data were collected. He’s also a first-generation immigrant from Mexico. Both of Miguel’s parents attended school in México, where his mom completed high school and his dad finished sixth grade. Miguel immigrated to the U.S. on his own, works a full-time job to help his parents in Mexico, and attends school part-time to pursue a Business major. Miguel chose Business Management after he was made manager at his current job and stated: “After I became manager at my job, while attending college, I realized that that’s what I liked to do, that’s what I am good at. I eventually want to open my own business.” He is the youngest of six siblings, and the first one to pursue a higher education.

Brayan

The last member of this first-generation immigrant group was Brayan, who was a 33-year-old senior student at the time this study took place. Brayan is originally from Guatemala and moved to the United states in search of better job opportunities. He works full-time and sends money to his parents on a regular basis. Brayan’s parents still live in Guatemala, where they were able to complete elementary school before dropping out. Brayan attends school part-time, and usually takes most of his classes in the evening. Brayan got his GED after his community college ESL teacher recommended it. His ESL teacher taught adult ESL classes at a community college where Brayan had enrolled, and thanks to that teacher, Brayan is now a senior. Brayan stated, “After I get my bachelor’s in Accounting, I want to get a Master’s in Business Finance because I want to run my own business.”

Second-Generation Students

Diego was a freshman, Sergio was a sophomore and Luis, Javier, and Alex were juniors at the time the data were collected. All five of them are classified as second-generation U.S. citizens, which means that they were born in the United States, and that at least one of their parents immigrated to the United States from another country, while the other parent was already a U.S. citizen.

Diego

Diego was an 18-year-old freshman pursuing a degree in Computer Engineering at the time these data were collected. Diego's mom was born in California, and his dad was born in Mexico. Both of Diego's parents encouraged him to go to college by saying it would make his life much easier. Diego remembers thinking:

My dad works at a refinery in 100 degrees-plus weather, where it's dangerous and he must work 12-hour shifts to earn the money necessary to take care of his family. I also want that kind of money, but under different conditions ... so that's the main reason why I decided to listen to my parents and started college right after high school. It is not that I am ashamed of what my parents do for a living, but I just know that I can do more with my life if I go to college.

Sergio

Sergio was a 21-year-old sophomore pursuing a degree in Computer Engineering when the data were collected. Sergio's mom was born in Texas, and his dad was born in Mexico. Sergio is an only child and credits his participation in the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) throughout high school for his college readiness. AVID is a non-profit program that helps schools shift to a more equitable and student-centered approach through trainings geared towards closing the opportunity gap. AVID

teachers prepare students for college readiness, careers, and life (www.avid.org). Sergio stated:

From the very beginning, our AVID teachers wanted to know what we wanted to be as adults, so I remember doing all types of research about what I was interested in, the types of degree plans, and stuff like that. I've always loved being around computers, so from my freshman year ... I already knew what I wanted to do once I got to college.

Luis

Luis was a 21-year-old, junior student pursuing a career in Biology (pre-med) at the time of this study. Luis was born in the United States, and so was his father. Luis's mom was born in Mexico, which means that Luis is a second-generation son of a U.S citizen, and a Mexican immigrant. Luis's mother has taken some college classes, and his dad completed an Associate's degree from a community college in Illinois. Luis stated:

My dad raised me as a single parent, and I remember while I was growing up how he was going to college ... I actually saw him graduate! I guess that's the reason why I am also pursuing a higher education ... I said to myself, if my dad did it, so can I.

Javier

Javier was a 26-year-old junior and was pursuing a degree in Physics while this study took place. Javier's mom was born in Mexico and his dad is from an Indian Reservation in Washington State. Javier's mom earned an Associate's in Nursing, and his dad completed his GED but ended up becoming a college "drop-out." Javier remembers not having a good experience the first time he attended college. He stated that:

Although my entire family, on my mom's side, encouraged me to go to college, I allowed myself to fall between the cracks by not having good studying habits and

by partying too much ... so much that I left the university with a very low Grade Point Average (GPA).

Javier mentioned that he did not want to be like his father, so he returned to higher education via-community college. He also stated:

I wasn't able to get into the Engineering Program because of my low GPA, but I was able to start studying Physics. I always wanted to be a Mechanical Engineer, but I also loved Physics. I guess I am still on the fence about which route to take. All I know is that I want to keep bettering myself, inside or outside the university setting ... it really doesn't matter.

Alex

The last of the, second-generation, students from immigrant descent is Alex. Alex was a 28-year-old junior pursuing a degree in Earth Science at the time this study took place. Alex's mom is from Texas, and his dad immigrated from El Salvador. Alex is the youngest of six siblings, and the only one to pursue a higher education. Alex first thought about pursuing a higher education after he heard his peers talking about it. He noted how:

I was one of the few Hispanic 'transfer' students at a high school where the majority belonged to a higher socio-economic status. As a result, they were all talking about going away to college or a university that catered to their major. Although I did not go away to a fancy university, being surrounded by those students got me to at least go to a community college because that is all I could afford, since I was the one paying for my own higher education.

Third-Generation Students

Andres and Arturo formed part of the last group, which was composed of only third-generation students. A third-generation U.S. citizen refers to those who were born in the United States from parents who were also born in the United states. Third-

generation U.S. citizens may still maintain Hispanic ties to their Hispanic culture and ethnicity, but these ties may not as strong as those of first or second-generation U.S. citizens. Nevertheless, they still identify as Hispanic-American, or Latin-American which means that they identify with aspects from their two cultures.

Andres

Andres was a 23-year-old junior pursuing a degree in Chemistry at the time this study took place. Both of Andres's parents are from Texas, and although both of his parents are bilingual, Andres only speaks English. Andres credits his desire to go to college to several people, as he stated:

Ever since I can remember, my grandparents, on both sides, my parents, my uncles, my siblings, my teachers, and The National Hispanic Institute, all of them always encouraged me to pursue a higher education. It just became a topic that was discussed around me on a regular basis ... so I did.

Arturo

Arturo was a 23-year-old pursuing a degree in Business when this study took place. Arturo is the oldest of three siblings. Arturo chose not to talk about his father, but he did share that his mom was always sick and that unfortunately ended up taking her own life. Arturo remembers how he always liked school: "I've been going to school since I was three, and never stopped ... until my mother passed, and I had to take over the house." He also remembers how his high school teachers and counselors always encouraged him to go to college ... "There were a lot of resources there to get us to go to college or information on how to sign up for college and get financial aid and stuff like that." Although Arturo graduated from high school at the age of 17 and went straight to college, he admitted that it wasn't the same as high school. He stated:

I wasn't taking it seriously ... then my mom got really sick...well, she was always sick until she killed herself. That's why I stopped going to college, because I had to take over the house ... so it took me a good while to come back.

Student Perspectives and Experiences

There were various emergent themes that were identified through the data analysis of the participants' one-on-one interviews and focus group data. The themes varied based on whether the student participants were first, second, or third-generation, traditional-aged or non-traditional-aged students. Nonetheless, there were four emergent themes that were present in almost all of the participants' stories regarding their perceptions and experiences while pursuing a university degree as a Hispanic male attending a Hispanic-serving Institution. The emergent themes that were discussed the most during the one-on-one interviews and focus groups included: a) support systems for Hispanic males; b) unspoken cultural expectations; c) the feeling of "belonging" and d) perseverance, hope, and grit. The following are the themes that permeated the study.

Support Systems for Hispanic Male Students

Seven out of the 13 study participants agreed that, "Hispanic males are usually expected to figure things out on their own before asking for any type of help from their family or any outside support systems." (First Student Focus Group, 9-15-18). One of the Hispanic male students, Daniel, shared his "Painful desire to be heard and helped when things got really difficult, but without the stigma of being seen as less of a man." More than half of the Hispanic males that formed part of this study expressed how they had to go against the cultural expectations of their Hispanic families when they decided to seek a higher education.

The struggle in relation to support systems for some Hispanic male students might begin as early as high school. According to 11 of the 13 study participants, their school

counselors and teachers seldom took the time to ask them about their plans after high school. One participant said that the “higher education” conversations that took place between him and his high school counselors and/or teachers were vague and superficial. As Daniel shared, “Teachers always seemed to be in a hurry, or busy with their lesson plans and grades ... so, I felt like I should not bother them with my questions about going to college.” Daniel also stated, “There are so many students in most high schools, that it feels as if there is no time to truly develop good relationships with teachers or school counselors.”

According to Daniel, the school personnel would often just say, “Know what you want to do ... figure out what you want to do with your life.” However, they would never truly follow up to find out if the student had actually “figured out” what he wanted to do after high school. Due to this vague approach, the student remarked:

I could never really develop any relationship with a counselor or teacher for them to substantially help me. So, I decided to figure things out on my own, even if it would take me longer ... and it did take me longer, but I wasn’t going to give up.

After Daniel started college, he had to drop out to get a job and support himself because his family was not able to support him financially. Daniel stated, “I stopped going to college when I was 19 or 20 ... I remember that I did not have a car, and I did not know anyone who could give me a ride to my college classes.” According to Daniel, working full time was the only way he could afford his apartment, and save money to go back to college. He also remembered thinking, “I have to pick an apartment close to the college, so I can just walk to class.” Daniel tried to make friends with people from his apartment complex, who were also students, hoping they would give him a ride to class or the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to get a license and eventually drive, but

“Everyone I tried to become friends with ...they were just hanging out with people they went to high school with, so I didn’t have a friend system either.” As Daniel recalls:

It wasn’t so much that I did not have the support of my family, because as a man, I knew that it would eventually come down to me having to work to support myself, and to get an education. It’s just that I had never worked so much and so hard in my life ... but at least it gave me the work ethic necessary to get and hold a job.

Other participants had different experiences when it came to the pursuit of a higher education and having support systems or role models to depend on. Brayan, for example, might not have had the support of his family due to their economic situation, but he certainly found a support system in his English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher and all the contacts that came along with the fact that the ESL teacher was also an academic advisor at a local community college. After Brayan could not attend college in his native Guatemala, at the age of 19, he immigrated to the United States to find work. Once in the U.S., he enrolled in evening adult ESL classes at a community college near his apartment complex. It was there that Brayan met the ESL teacher that would encourage and support him while learning English and preparing to take the GED. This role model stuck around long enough to see Brayan get better with each passing year. As Brayan stated:

My ESL teacher taught me English and helped me get ready to take my GED test for nearly five years. After I passed the GED test, he also helped me get into the community college where he was an academic advisor. I spent five years at the community college before I completed my associate’s degree, but I did it.

Brayan smiles as he retells the story of his academic journey. After looking up to the ceiling, and taking a deep breath, he stated:

This is now my second year at this university, and I am now a senior. I smile because I am so happy because a higher education was something that was very important to me ... it was a dream that I wanted to see become a reality.

It was clear that Brayan saw his ESL teacher as a support system, and Brayan truly appreciated his support and guidance to get him to this point in his academic journey. Brayan feels indebted to his, now, role model and friend, and has decided to honor him by pursuing a master's degree in Business Management after he completes his bachelor's degree. However, Brayan might not have been able to continue his higher education as he has, if his boss had not been so flexible with Brayan. As Brayan stated, "Sometimes I can't sleep because I know I have a class project or presentation, and I also can't take time off from work." According to Brayan, "if you don't work, you don't make any money." However, Brayan has been very lucky at his job when it comes to being supported by his boss while pursuing a university degree. As Brayan stated:

I work at a Chinese restaurant, and my boss is a lady and her husband. They are very understanding. Sometimes, when I have a project, or a test that I need to study for, I ask for a day off or permission to leave early. My job, well my boss, lets me leave early or take days off because they know I need that time for my school responsibilities ... they know that I am not wasting time. Then, they give me extra hours on the weekends so I can recuperate the money that I lost for not working, so I can continue helping my parents in Guatemala.

Brayan knows that his family was never in the position to support him financially, but he also knows that they are there for him emotionally. Brayan has also found emotional support while he is away from his Guatemalan family. He has joined a local church where when asked about who inspires him to keep going, he replied:

Well, I see my church as a support group of people who inspire me and where I have made most of my friends. At church, most of the people that attend have degrees. They are engineers, doctors, lawyers, etc. Most of them are also Hispanic, and they are the people that support my goals and dreams and they are my friends, too. I often think that if they can do it, I can do it too.

As can be seen, it seems that starting college after high school can be a daunting experience for Hispanic males who lack support systems and who may also lack a plan in general. However, when support systems and role models are part of the equation, things may still be challenging because of other factors such as finances, and a language barrier. Nevertheless, the presence of a role model made a huge difference in Brayan's situation. Planning to attend a college or a university must start in high school in order to align the resources and support systems necessary for a successful transition. However, for some Hispanic males who lacked the support from their high school counselors and/or teachers, this experience might be even more challenging.

Planning to attend college may also be particularly difficult for those Hispanic male students who may be the first ones in their family to seek a higher education. For these students, it may be more challenging because they might often lack the emotional and financial support of their family who may know little to nothing about higher education. Lacking this type of planning and support might explain why so many Hispanic males may not be seeking a higher education, and if they do, it may also explain why it is taking some students longer to finish; It may also explain why they might not stay in college long enough to graduate. As Daniel commented:

I started college when I was 17 and stopped after two years because I did not have the money to pay for everything. I had never worked so much in my life, and I did not have anyone to rely on because my mom had moved to another state to be

with my stepdad and I did not want to go live with them, so I had to get my own apartment. These are the little things that no one really pays attention to, like having someone give you a car or letting you drive their car so you can go to class. I did not even have anyone to give me a ride, because I was living all alone. I had to get a job to pay for my own apartment, all the bills, and no one to help me out. So, I had to choose between paying for everything or going to college ... because I did not have a support system to rely on.

According to the first student focus group, the family size in which Hispanic males live and their parents' backgrounds and experiences seem to play an important role on how some Hispanic male students see higher education. It seems that when the Hispanic family is small, and the parents are educated at a high school level or higher, the expectations placed on the Hispanic male change and may often include the pursuit of an education past high school. When the Hispanic family is not small, and the parents did not have an opportunity to pursue a higher education, the expectations for the Hispanic male may be different and these expectations may or may not include the pursuit of a higher education. Although the expectations seem to be affected by the size of the family in which the Hispanic male lives, the lack of family and economic support systems seem to cause the individual to struggle with his decision to pursue and complete a college education. Lack of family and economic support systems can be seen through the comments made which seem to paint a "higher education" as something meant for "other cultures" or something that is carefully guarded and only meant for a special few. As one participant, Sergio, stated:

My mother did not go to college because her family was very poor and could not afford it. My father dropped out of college because he was expected to help out his family with their financial responsibilities, so he had to choose work and

family over a higher education. I am an only child, and I do not want to follow in the footsteps of my parents, especially when I see how hard they work to make ends meet. However, things have not been easy because seeing my dad work so much and so hard at a refinery has made me want to get a college education even more, but it is easier said than done.

Sergio believes that it is hard to find support in the extended family, especially when his decision to pursue a higher education goes against what the rest of his cousins are doing. According to Sergio:

It is hard because as a Hispanic culture, I don't think we value higher education like other cultures do. Most of my cousins enter the workforce or start a family as soon as they graduate from high school, and sometimes even before then. It has been ingrained in our brains that higher education is something not worth investing in, money or timewise. It is as if it is only for some, but not for everyone ... so people in my culture do what comes easy or what has been done for generations. In my opinion, Hispanics see higher education as a type of Holy Grail ... not everyone can drink from it. I believe that the majority of Hispanics who choose work or family over a college degree, do so because they don't believe they can do anything else or because they have been made to believe they can't afford to invest time and/or money on it. It is true in a sense, because money has been my greatest obstacle while going to college, and although I am seen as "strange" by other family members because I am pursuing a higher education instead of working or starting a family, and I am always doing homework, I don't care because I know that it will be worth it in the long run. I also think that the fact that I am an only child makes a huge difference because my parents don't expect me to help as much, or at all, with the family's financial responsibilities.

Sergio also found a support system in his AVID classes, which he attended all throughout high school years. Through the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) classes that Sergio took, he was exposed to what it means to be college ready. Sergio recalled how from day one, his AVID teachers asked the students to research what careers were interesting to them. According to Sergio, he started doing “All types of research on the jobs he was interested in, the degree plans that would help him get that specific job, and the salaries that came along with those jobs.” Sergio benefited from AVID because they were able to take “Field trips to places such as A&M, Lamar University, Sam Houston University ... and many other places that the entire AVID class got to experience.” Sergio mentioned, “Having that type of support, and experiences, gave me a really big boost of confidence, and made me really want to go to college.”

There seem to be some commonalities when it comes to these Hispanic male students not knowing what to do, other than start a family or enter the workforce, after they graduate from high school. These are just the ways things have been for their relatives, for generations on end. Although these males know that a college education is important, whether this is a result of their parents saying so, being part of a college readiness program, or seeing their friends making plans to attend college, some Hispanic males are not receiving the necessary support from their families and/or their high school counselors to successfully transition into higher education.

Twelve, out of the 13 participants, stated that they lacked the knowledge related to college-preparation classes, financial aid types, and/or attending school out of the state on a scholarship or grant. One participant, Arturo, said that he applied to a local junior college because he “Did not think that he would be accepted anywhere else.” Another participant, Alex, shared how he learned about college as an option after high school because he transferred to a high school where the majority of the students belonged to a

higher socio-economic status (SES) and going away to college was a “normal” thing for them. As Alex stated:

When I was in high school, I was not aware that going to college was something that people did after finishing high school because no one in my family ever talked about it. No one at home was telling me that I should go to college. I only learned about it, and that it was expected of most of the students I spoke to, because of the high school that I had transferred to. Going to high school with students of a higher economic level, actually being around them, is what drove me to want to go to college. After I finished high school, I went straight to community college, but it was tough because I had to pay for it myself. I did not know anything about financial aid or about taking out a student loan.

Alex is the youngest of six siblings, and the only one to pursue a university degree despite the lack of financial support or guidance from his family. In fact, the only thing that Alex remembers hearing from his family about pursuing a college or university degree was that he should not get into any kind of debt. As Alex stated:

My mother always told me to never take out a loan because I would always owe more than I took out, and I that I should never owe anyone money like that. So, since I wanted to go to college, and my family could not help me pay for it, it took me four years to complete my associate’s degree in Computer Science ... but I never gave up!

Alex was able to complete an associate’s degree in Computer Science, and soon found a well-paying job, which made his family proud and happy. However, Alex always knew he wanted to do more with his life but could still remember his mother’s advice about taking out loans. For four years, Alex worked as a computer analyst, which was a

desk job. According to Alex, he had a practical job that paid well but, “I knew I wanted to do something more.” He added:

I did not want to be behind a computer all day. I wanted to actually take this opportunity now that I could actually pay for college myself, and I was also more educated on how to take out student loans and things like that. I wanted to pursue something that I had always liked, and I’ve always had an interest in environmental regulations. So that’s the path I took, and that’s why I went back to college ... even though my parents did not understand why I did it, especially because I already had an associate’s degree, and a well-paying job.

Even though Alex had already shown his family that getting a higher education, in the form of an associate’s degree, was worth the time and money spent, they did not support his decision to go back to get a bachelor’s degree. According to him, although it is not openly said:

The Hispanic male is there to work and provide as soon as he can, anything different and you’re seen as strange or undesirable. My family did not support my decision to go back to school after I already had an associate’s degree and a “good” job that paid well. They thought it was crazy to spend more money, and more time in school when I had already graduated with a two-year degree.

Summary

Seeing a higher education as an option after completing high school may be a topic that is seldom discussed in Hispanic families with a low SES. Instead, some Hispanic males may be often encouraged to start a family and/or join the workforce as part of their future after completing high school. In fact, it seems that the sooner a Hispanic male joins the workforce, the sooner he may be able to help out with the family’s financial responsibilities, and this is what a “man” is supposed to do ... help his

parents as soon as he can. For those Hispanic males who lack essential role models or support systems that could guide their journey onto higher education, the struggle may be frustrating and tedious, especially when the only guidance they get comes in the phrase: “figure out what you want to do, and just do it.” It appears that high school teachers and counselors may also be adding to the lack of support systems and roles models through a lack of meaningful interactions that would lead Hispanic males to see a higher education as a viable option. However, figuring out what to do is not as easy as it seems, and the lack of help and guidance can make this process that much more difficult. Additionally, some Hispanic males may be discouraged from asking for help, because in the Hispanic culture this may be seen as being “weak” ... as being less of a man. Instead, some Hispanic males opt for what previous generations in their families have done, without daring to question the status quo.

However, there are some Hispanic males whose perseverance, hope, and grit seems to be paying off. Those Hispanic males that have dared questioned the status quo, have encountered role models and support systems, later in life, that have made the pursuit of a higher education a possibility. For some of these non-traditional college students, the journey has taken longer, but they are not giving up on their dream of a college or university degree. Some of these non-traditional college students are working full-time jobs to take care of their own life expenses, to help out their families with some financial responsibilities, all while they pursue a higher education because they know that in the long run, it will be worth it.

For some Hispanic males, the dream of a higher education never died, it just laid dormant until the right people came into their life. For some, it required a long journey to another country where the opportunities would be better. Once the right people and support systems fell into place, their perseverance, hope, and grit did the rest. Some of

these Hispanic male students are close to finishing their higher education degree and are already making plans to continue with post-graduate work.

Although it seems like the size of the family, the SES, and the level of education of the parents play a role on how challenging the journey on to higher education may be, there are Hispanic males, and role models, as well as support systems that are changing the status quo. These Hispanic males did not conform to what their families expected of them, they embraced it and their own dreams all at the same time. These Hispanic males did not have to choose the workforce over their own education, they seem to be strong enough to do both. They no longer think that a higher education is just for a selected few, they know that a higher education is for everyone, regardless of how difficult the journey might be.

Unspoken Cultural Expectations

Cultural expectations have followed 11 out of the 13 Hispanic males that were interviewed for this study, regardless of their family's country of origin. Since the student participants were Hispanic male students, if they already had a job, they said they were expected to not only provide for themselves, but to also help out their parents. As one participant, Diego, shared: "Slowly, my parents have been sneaking more financial responsibilities on me by saying things like...Ay mijó, you're not paying the light bill, so please turn the light off when you're not in the room! or my mom will simply say: Ay mijó, you need to start paying your own phone bill."

Diego is the oldest of two children in his family. His little sister is only nine years old, but he can already tell that the expectations for both of them are different. As, the older brother, he is expected to be a "good example" to his little sister. Thus, he is expected to do everything his parents tell him to, without questioning their authority. However, he feels that the expectations are equally fair for him and his sister. Diego is a

second-generation son of a U.S. citizen and a Mexican citizen but being born in the U.S. has allowed him to enjoy more liberties than most first-generation Hispanic males. As he stated, “Other than being a good example to my little sister, my parents have the same rules, the same expectations, and the same responsibilities for the two of us.” Nevertheless, Diego knows that he is expected to look after his little sister, and that everything he does, will be seen “As an example for my little sister to follow.” According to Diego, this is an honor, and a nuisance because that means that he has to “Be perfect most of the time.” Being born a Hispanic male, comes with several unspoken expectations, that whether they like it or not, will follow them for the rest of their life no matter which generation they belong to. As Diego put it, “When it comes to everything else going on in my life, my parents have always stressed that family always comes first ... even when we are talking about school.” Diego stated how they always make him feel guilty by saying things like, “School will always be there, but your family will be gone someday ... in the future, so you better appreciate us.”

Another participant, Sergio, mentioned how he felt pressured to help his parents financially when he got a job and started college because they would often say things such as: “Algún día, tú nos vas a sacar de la pobreza” which translates to: “Someday, you will take us out of poverty.” Sergio also expressed how this made him feel honored and stressed out all at the same time. Diego and Sergio, who formed part of the first focus group, agreed that, culturally speaking, Hispanic males are expected to be the “breadwinners” in their families while Hispanic women are often expected to become housewives. Diego remarked, “Perhaps, this is why so many Hispanic males only think about making money as soon as they can, instead of seeing college as another possible and even better option.” He added, “Personally, I decided that I would not choose one

thing over the other and that I would go to college to get a degree in something I liked, and that degree would get me the money necessary to support my family.”

Although Sergio was 21 years old at the time the data were collected, he still lived with his grandparents and his mom. As an only child, he feels that it would be disrespectful to move out of the house, especially when his aging grandparents and his mom depend so much on him. Sergio mentioned how “Family must always come first when he has to choose between school, work, or anything else.” It goes without saying, the unspoken expectation that a Hispanic male must put everything else on hold when it comes to the family. According to Sergio, his family has asked him to “Drive them to the hospital when they don’t feel well, to pay for certain bills when money is short, or to stay home and look after them when they are sick ... and you just do it”

These unspoken cultural expectations usually fall on the older males in Hispanic families. Such was the case with Brayan, who when he could not afford to pay for university classes in his native Guatemala, he was urged to immigrate to the United States in search of better job opportunities. Brayan immigrated to the United States at the age of 19, and soon found a job as a busboy at a Chinese restaurant. At the same time, Brayan recalls, “I did not want to give up on my dream of getting a higher education, so I decided to enroll in evening ESL adult classes to learn English.” Brayan has since completed a GED, an associate’s degree, and is currently a senior at the university. However, the reason why he came to the U.S. was not to get an education and so ... “I still have to work full-time to take care of my expenses, to pay for classes, and to send money to my parents in Guatemala so they can take care of the rest of the family ... It’s just the right thing to do.”

Although Brayan is the youngest of six brothers, he is still expected to help out his family in Guatemala. He does so without questioning this unspoken cultural

expectation. According to him, “Guatemala’s economy is really bad, and jobs are scarce, which means that there is a lot of poverty.” Once a month, Brayan sends money to his native Guatemala for his parents to survive, and to help pay for the college tuition of a younger brother. Brayan stated how he has always been told that when “You’re a man, education is not that important, what is important is being able to provide for your loved ones.” However, Brayan knows that if he gets an education, he will be able to make more money, and as a result ... “I will be able to help my parents and my siblings with anything they need.”

Another participant, José, grew up in a middle-class family where both parents had well-paying jobs. However, due to political and government changes in his native Venezuela, they all immigrated to the United States. José is the oldest of three siblings, and because of that, he is also the one tasked with helping the rest of the family. According to José, “My parents provided for me and my siblings while we lived in Venezuela, and we never lacked anything because my parents were financially stable.” José’s dad was a family doctor, and his mom worked as a teacher before they immigrated to the United States. Currently, his dad is working as a waiter, and his mom stays at home to take care of the family.

José recalled how the first five years as an immigrant family in the United States were full of challenges. José remembered how:

My dad was unemployed for a few years when we first arrived in the United States. So, we, my brothers and I ... we all worked and tried to help out at home. I just took fewer classes in college, so I could work full-time. Sometimes, I had to put work before school in order to make more money, but I never stopped going to college. I thought about taking a break to work more and make more money, but instead I would just take one or two classes a semester.

Although José's family is of Hispanic descent and José is a Hispanic male, the fact that both of José's parents are educated made a big difference when it came to choosing a higher education over work and helping the family financially. José's parents knew the value of a higher education and have encouraged him to continue going to school. Although José's dad is now working, José continues to work full-time to take care of his own expenses and help the family with their financial responsibilities. When asked why he was still living at home at the age of 25 and helping the family, he replied:

I need to help my family with finances, not because they expect it from me, but because I expect it from myself. It's a cultural and a personal thing. Even if my family did not want me to, even if I needed the money for school, I would still find a way to help out. It's just something that is built into our culture. You help those you love.

At first, according to José, things seemed very unfair. As José recalled, "I mean, just because I was the older of three males, learned English faster, and I had a job, I was always used as an example to my then 17-year-old brothers." Now, José stated that he does not mind because the entire family is doing much better. Things are a bit easier now that José's younger siblings are 22 years of age and can work full-time jobs to help the family. José is now working part-time and attending the university full-time. The brunt of the family's financial responsibilities is now divided among all four of the males in the family. José continues to attend school and should be graduating soon with a bachelor's in Business. He continued by saying:

I don't think I understood what was going on back then when I was the one who spoke more English in the family and the responsibility of being the "translator" just fell on me ... I felt angry, especially when we went places or the neighbor

came over to knock on our door, but now I do. We are a family, and we only have each other... and I am glad I have been able to help all of my family.

When asked what graduating from the university with a university degree mean to José, he immediately mentioned his parents again, and how much he appreciated the fact that they brought the entire family to the United States to have a better life. In fact, José stated:

When I graduate, and my brothers graduate, we will be better prepared to help our parents more because they are getting older and they don't have a 401K or any other type of retirement fund. Graduating from the university will allow me and my brothers to take care of the family when our parents can't no longer work. I am not sure if it's cultural or not, but where we come from ... that's just what you're expected to do.

Summary

Some Hispanic males are expected to get a job before they graduate from high school, or very soon after that. This seems to be more common in first and second-generation Hispanic families. At first, the Hispanic males will only take care of their own living expenses but may soon be asked to help out with other financial responsibilities related to the household. However, it seemed that if the parents are educated past high school, the son or sons may also be encouraged to pursue a higher education while working part-time. The college-educated parents of these participants valued a higher education, and although they appreciated the financial support of their children, they do not make them choose one over the other. Nevertheless, for some Hispanic households, a third income is of great help, thus getting a job takes priority over getting a higher education when the family belongs to lower SES. As a result, when a Hispanic male is

able to provide for himself, and for the family that raised him, a feeling of gratitude and honor is normal when this unspoken cultural expectation is fulfilled.

The Feeling of “Belonging”

According to research, feeling like you “belong” plays an important role on how successful a student may be while pursuing a higher education (Museus & Saelua, 2017). Although this study took place at a Hispanic-serving Institution (HSI), the overall feeling of not belonging was a common theme among more than half all the Hispanic males that were interviewed for this project. In fact, 12 out of the 13 of the student participants did not even know that they were attending an institution that has had the Hispanic-serving Institution designation since 2010. Some participants expressed how not seeing more people that looked like them, especially in their professors, really seemed to make a difference in whether or not the Hispanic male students sought out help when things got tough. Creating a strong sense of belonging is important, especially when the number of Hispanic males seeking a higher education is lower than those of their counterparts (Villareal & Santiago, 2012).

Luis, a second-generation immigrant and a traditional-aged junior when this study took place, stated:

While I was at the community college, I really felt like I fit in because there were a lot of Hispanic students everywhere. Not so much now, though. At this university, I don’t even see that many Hispanic students in my classes, which are harder classes because they are pre-med courses.

Luis also commented on the lack of Hispanic instructors and how he felt as if he could not ask anyone for any help. He stated how he was “Not used to this type of environment, and how he was struggling with classes and time-management skills but did not know who to ask about helping out.”

Although Luis is attending a Hispanic-serving Institution, and there are support systems and resources in place for him, he did not know anything about the classification of the university or the resources available to him. This may be a direct result of not feeling like he belongs because he does not even know where to turn for help, be it with peers or any other adult. As Luis recalled:

When I walk the hallways, I always see groups of students that are either Indian, Asian, White, or Black, but they keep to themselves. It's almost as if they don't want to help you, if you need help. This is a very competitive program I am in, you know, pre-med, and other students don't want you to be successful because they want to do better than you. Sometimes, I feel down, because I don't see that many Hispanics in the program, and I would love to feel like I also have my own group. When I walk past the elevators, it's the same thing when looking at all the pictures of former alumni ... I don't see anyone that looks like me, or whose name sounds like those in my culture.

José, a first-generation immigrant, was another student participant that felt as if he did not belong at the university he was attending. He also stated:

I came from a local community college, where you could hear other Hispanic students speaking Spanish in the hallways and in the classrooms. He also shared how it was hard to relate to other students who did not look like him. More than once, they laughed at my accent, which made me feel completely embarrassed and out of place ... that's a reason why I started coming to school at night, to be less "seen."

José seemed very aware of the treatment that he got from other students, and attributed it to the language barrier, his culture, and how he looked older than most students in his classes. He stated, "It's been hard to relate to other classmates because as

soon as they notice I have an accent, they act differently.” When asked what his biggest challenge was while becoming acculturated or used to the U.S. culture, he stated:

I can’t seem to relate to other students because my culture is different from theirs. The language barrier has also made it somewhat of a challenge, even though I speak more English now than I did five years ago ... I think it’s the accent that makes them approach me differently or not at all. The first time I noticed it, it made me feel very small ... I remember the first time I asked a question to a classmate in class, and she just laughed in my face. She said that he could not understand me because my accent was so strong. She was very rude, and I felt so embarrassed and out of place.

Although José did not mention it at first, he later shared how much it bothered him to feel as an “outsider” ... Someone who just does not belong where he is. He said, “I don’t think that I belong here yet, but it’s ok because that makes me want to pursue my goals even more. ... I just want to get done with school and get out of here.” José seemed to resent how he has been made to feel by other students. He also recalled how he felt like he “belonged at the community college he attended, but not here.” He added:

This school is great when it comes to meeting my academic needs, but not so much my social needs. I really want to feel like I am a part of this university, like I belong, but it’s just a bit harder. I don’t even know what makes it harder ... I am still trying to figure it out.

José continued to make comparisons to the community colleges he attended before transferring to the university where he is now:

Every time I go to see an advisor, I didn’t feel the same warm welcome I felt when I was at the community college. It’s funny because now that I understand more English, I should be able to fit in more. I still remember when I first noticed

that I did not belong ... it was the Open House held by the Business School, and I remember how the academic advisors were just in the middle of the school, but they did not engage with that many students. I thought it was sad because that is their job, and we are their customers ... At the community college, we were like a family, but not here.

Alex, a second-generation student, also shared how he did not feel like he fit in with the student body at this university and even had a list of reasons: “

I feel that I don't belong for several reasons ... I am Hispanic, but I don't speak Spanish, I am also older than most students in my classes and that causes them to stare at me more than usual, and lastly ... I am not popular or dress like everyone else, so I just don't fit in.

Alex was not bothered that he did not feel like he belonged until he got a job as STEM mentor at the university. He knew that other students, especially Hispanic students, would not embrace him the same unless he really connected with them and with their personal stories. As Alex stated:

It matters that I belong or fit in, much more now than before. I've always felt like I am a half-breed, you know, never a complete Hispanic. I mean, I need to be culturally whole as a Hispanic, but I am only half, I need to be fully bilingual, but I only speak English, I'm also a student that has taken two extra years to get to be a junior, so I am older than most “traditional” students. I don't really belong to one group or the other, I always feel like I am always halfway to ... whatever and whenever. Therefore, as a mentor, when I try to approach Hispanic males in the STEM program, which targets Hispanics, well ... I don't think I am taken seriously because I am not fully like them, so I don't belong.

Daniel is another first-generation immigrant student who thinks that because he never had any role models to teach him how to act within settings that have large numbers of people, he was often seen as odd. As he recalls, “I am not your “macho” Hispanic type of guy because I identify with the LGBTQ community, which is another reason why I am almost sure doesn’t help when it comes to fitting in or feeling like I belong here.”

It seemed that Daniel was not aware that the university’s Student Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Office is there to support people just like him. In fact, the LGBTQ Programming fosters cross-campus collaborations, and advocating for the needs and concerns of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer individuals. This office serves as a resource and support system for the LGBTQ students, staff, and faculty while educating the larger UHCL community about LGBT identities.

Unfortunately, feeling like he does not belong, has driven Daniel to completely away from the university life by just taking his classes online. Not truly engaging with other people at the university level seemed to be taking a toll on Daniel and his future plans. As he stated:

Since I’ve never really had any role models in my life, I’m confused as to what is next after I graduate from the university. Although I’ve had great teachers and advisors, I don’t think there are a lot of resources when it comes to post-college jobs and opportunities. So, I’ve kind of had to figure that out on my own. It is confusing not knowing what comes after I graduate ... do I pursue a master’s; do I apply for an internship? I feel lost.

Brayan, a first-generation immigrant, felt as if he did not belong because of several reasons. As he stated:

I feel like I don't belong because of my accent. I also stand out because I am older than most students in class, I mean, I'm a 33-year-old senior! I also feel like I don't belong because I usually come to class in the evening right after I get off from work, so I don't always look my best, and I often look tired. Also, there are all kinds of cliques, you know ... people who are young, hip, popular ... and I just don't fit into any of them.

Although Brayan was a senior at the time the data were collected, he was still feeling as if he was just another student, but not one that truly belonged. He added:

When I come to class after work, I just walk from the parking lot to my class, and from the class to the parking lot and go home. I honestly don't feel comfortable sticking around, maybe because I feel like people see me differently because I am from another country. I don't even talk, because I don't want them to notice my accent. I mean, I have noticed other people with accents, but I also feel that I am too old to still be a student at the university.

Brayan has noticed that other students are younger than he and that when they work in groups or prepare for class discussions, they often do so without including him or even acknowledging that he is part of their group. He remarked, "Most students are in their early twenties, and although they talk about school stuff, they never direct any comments towards me or ask me anything about myself." Brayan has tried to engage, but he also thinks that such disconnect has to do with the fact that he is an immigrant from a Latin American country. As he remarked, "I know that they know that I am not from this country because of my accent, and that my culture or Hispanics are not well-liked at this moment."

Based on his body language, Brayan seemed really uncomfortable talking about not belonging, but he felt it was important to discuss how he was made to feel, and even compared it to how he feels when he goes to church. According to Brayan:

When I go to church, there are people from many different cultures that attend the services, and I hear many different accents, but I always feel welcomed there. I always feel connected there, and I even feel more comfortable speaking in English with other people there, but at school ... I don't know how to explain it, people are just cold and distant.

Andres and Arturo were two, third-generation students, who also shared how they did not feel like they belonged. By now, it seemed as if this trend of “not fitting in” or “belonging” could be directly related to the fact that these students were either first or second-generation students who may be traditional or non-traditional pupils, but such was not the case. Andres and Arturo also stated, “I don't feel like I belong because although you see some Hispanics students in the hallways or in your classes, you don't hear or see your Hispanic culture.” Andres stated:

I grew up in a community, which is a very Hispanic place, and if this is a Hispanic-serving Institution, then it should reflect that, right? However, when I come to this university, I see more Arabic students than Hispanic ones. I mean, I don't speak Spanish myself, but I kind of want to hear it in the hallways or in the classroom once in a while to truly feel like this is a Hispanic-serving Institution.

Arturo agreed with Andres by adding, “I've taken a couple of classes at another university that was an HSI, and you could tell right away that it was a Hispanic-serving Institution.” He also agreed that at this university, Middle Eastern students were more noticeable than Hispanic students. Arturo added:

When I am out and about in my community, almost all the businesses have signs that are written in two languages ... English and Spanish. It tells me that my culture is valued, and so am I. However, coming to this university, well, let's just say that at first it was definitely a culture shock. It's ok, though ... I've learned to adapt.

Sergio and Diego were the only two, second-generation immigrant student participants, that felt like they belonged. However, they were traditional-aged students, and formed part of more than one school club and/or organization. They simply stated, "Yeah, I feel like I belong here."

Sergio was 21 years old at the time the data were collected and was very involved with several university organizations. He also did not experience any major obstacles while pursuing a higher education. Sergio stated:

When I was in high school, I was very involved in clubs, organizations, sports, etc. After high school, I went to a community college, and wasn't as involved as I had been in high school and missed it. So, once I transferred to this university, I decided to get involved again, and it has been fine. I felt like since I had done it in high school, that I should do it again, it was like an obligation.

Sergio was receiving financial aid while at the community college, but he is now on student loans. He is a full-time student and works part-time to make extra money. He spends most of his time at the university, and that has allowed him to get involved in student life, which has made him feel like he truly belongs at this university. After, he thought about it for a few seconds, he replied, "Yeah, I definitely feel like I belong here."

Diego was 18 years old at the time the study took place, and he actually started his freshman year at this university. He is the older of two siblings and his parents are currently supporting him with his education. Diego does not work, and he is a full-time

student at this university. Since Diego's parents pay for his education, and the apartment where he lives, he spends most of the time at the university. This has allowed Diego to become involved in several school organizations, and clubs. Diego is actually the president of a couple of clubs/organizations, which gives him a sense of school pride. As he stated, "I really like being involved in school because it gives me the opportunity to advocate for other students, and that feels amazing."

Summary

Although not all the students said that they did not feel like they belonged at their higher-learning institution, more than half of the total group expressed their feeling of not belonging. The reasons varied, and they did not necessarily have to do with whether they were first, second, or third-generation students of Hispanic descent. It had to do more with the fact that they were either non-traditional-aged students, or they spoke English with an accent, and even with how they looked. They did want to belong but felt as though their Hispanic culture was not even present at their university to make them feel welcomed or proud to be Hispanic. Thus, they just went about their business, attending classes face to face, online, and blending into the background.

It also seemed that when the students were younger, traditional-aged students, and had few or zero financial obstacles to overcome, they had more time to spend at the university because they did not have to work as much. Sergio and Diego had always had the support of their family, were involved in school activities since high school, and truly enjoyed the university life. They were young, spoke English perfectly, and had always seen a higher education as a normal step after graduating from high school. Thus, their experiences allowed them to not only fit in as traditional students, but to thrive and to take advantage of clubs and organizations that really enhanced their feeling of belonging

at their university. The university was like their second home, and as such, they “truly felt like they belonged there.”

Perseverance, Hope, and Grit

According to researchers at the University of Pennsylvania, grit is defined as “perseverance and passion for long-term goals” (Bashant, 2014). All of the study participants agreed that in order to pursue a higher education they had to have hope, grit, and in more than one occasion, they had to persevere. Hope is part of who they are, especially if they are religious. Perseverance was always encouraged by the adults in each of the participants’ lives, specifically when they did not succeed the first time. Grit, in the form of sustainable motivation, has been essential in the goal-setting process of each of the Hispanic male students in this study; a behavior that continues to get stronger with each class they take.

Thus, making the decision to pursue a higher education can be exciting, nerve-wrecking, and life-changing all at the same time (Tuckwiller & Dardick, 2018). However, when this decision is made without support systems, it can also be daunting and confusing (Moore, 2018; Mottet, 2019). For Hispanic males who may be the first one in their family to seek a higher education after graduating from high school, such decision usually comes with many mixed messages. It is true that the student’s family would like for their child to have a college education, but sometimes the family is not be able to assist with financial support. Additionally, because economic well-being is so important to the family and the son will no longer be able to work to help out the family, the college student may be asked about the financial benefits of the chosen college degree before he even starts. This type of pressure can negatively affect the Hispanic male student’s social and academic development while seeking a higher education.

Nonetheless, there are Hispanic males who through perseverance, hope, and grit, dared to change the status quo. For Alex, the first time he heard about higher education, as an option after high school, was when he transferred to a high school where most of the students belonged to a higher SES than his. “I am the youngest of six siblings, but the first one in the family to pursue a higher education.” Alex recalled:

No one at home ever said I’d have to go to college after high school, not my siblings, nor my parents. I learned about it by hearing other students talk about it at my new high school, and how they were all expected to pursue a higher education. These students did not have another choice, they were going to college or a university no matter what.

Alex also remembers how stressful it was to go through the application process because he knew very little about it. Alex remembered:

After high school, I went straight to community college, and I paid for it myself because I did not know that there were different types of financial aid programs that I could have applied for. I had also been told that I should never take out loans ... to avoid getting into debt. Instead, I worked, and took only the classes that I could pay for ... it was a very slow process. In fact, what should have taken me two years to complete, took me four years to achieve ... but I got my associate’s degree.

Alex was able to get a well-paying job with his associate’s degree and worked as a computer analyst for four years before he had enough money to return to school. Although he could have worked full-time, and attend school part-time, he decided to just save money for four years to avoid incurring any kind of debt. Alex added, “I am more knowledgeable about the financial aid system, as well as the higher education process, so I should be done with my bachelor’s in two years or so.”

Alex is definitely an example of someone who not only has hope that good things come to those who wait, and persevere, but he also displayed grit while working on his associate's degree for four years. Going through the process on his own, has taught him what to do now that he is back in school, as a junior, pursuing a degree in Environmental Science. Although he is more comfortable with the higher education process, the same cannot be said about how his parents feel about his decision to go back to school. As Alex stated:

My parents think that because I already have a degree in Computer Science, and a job that pays me well, that I should stop going to school. I had to convince my parents that a bachelor's degree would make me a more marketable employee down the road and would also allow me to make more money, all while enjoying greater job security. They just don't agree with the fact that I have to spend more money and time to get another degree. I think they will understand it once I am done, and they see how many more doors the new degree will open. I am determined, and that is half the battle ... right?

Another participant that has shown perseverance, hope and grit is Brayan. This gentleman is a 33-year-old senior pursuing a Business degree. He is originally from Guatemala and works full-time as a manager at a Chinese restaurant during the day so he can attend classes at night. Brayan has an older brother who also lives in the U.S. and three younger siblings that still live in Guatemala. Brayan remembers how he always wanted to attend a university, "In my own country I tried to enter the university after I graduated from high school, but the cost was too high, and I simply could not afford it." After immigrating to the U.S., he got a job at a Chinese restaurant as a busboy. He was soon promoted to waiter and was eventually made manager. Brayan always knew that

living in the U.S. would give him more opportunities to get ahead in life, but that required learning the language and more education.

Having hope is very important for Brayan, especially when he has to juggle work, school, and family responsibilities. Brayan never lost hope that one day he would fulfill his dream of attending a university and getting a degree. As he recalls, “I was 19 years old when I immigrated to the U.S. and I did not know the language, so I started ESL classes and it took me five years to learn enough English to take the GED and pass it.” Brayan not only learned English while working a full-time job, but he also took college classes part-time. As he stated, “I continued working on my associate’s degree, which also took me five years to complete, and eventually transferred to where I am now.” As Brayan pauses to take a deep breath, he continues ... “Thinking about how long it’s taken me, but the fact that I have come so far, makes me smile ... makes me proud of myself.”

Brayan’s journey has not been an easy one, and anyone else would have given up on pursuing a higher education as soon as they realized the cost and time that it would take to do so. However, Brayan hoped that by living and working in the United States, his chances of realizing his dream would be much greater. Thus, through hard work, perseverance, and grit, Brayan plans on finishing a Bachelor’s in Accounting and Business Management, and also plans on continuing with his education. As he stated:

My major is Accounting right now, but I would also like to get a master’s degree in Business Finance so I can open and run my own business. That’s the degree that I wanted to study in Guatemala, but it just wasn’t possible because of my financial situation. Now that I’ve worked so hard, and have accomplished so much, I know that I can achieve the rest of my dreams, no matter how long it takes.

Daniel was another student participant who displayed hope, grit, and perseverance despite everything that he endured starting back in high school. Daniel's family first moved to the U.S. from Mexico in search of a better life. As a first-generation immigrant, Daniel had to learn English as his second language, and become acculturated enough to succeed in school. By his senior year in high school, Daniel and his family had moved around so much that he was in danger of not graduating with the rest of his senior class. Daniel's stepdad was a supervisor for a construction company, and that required moving from job site to job site, after each project was completed. Daniel recalls, "The lack of stability in my family almost caused me to not graduate high school, and I was not okay with that." Daniel hoped that things would get better, but eventually he had to leave his family to get his own apartment and be able to attend college without any interruptions.

Daniel has two older sisters, and although he is the youngest male, he was expected to enter the workforce as soon as he finished high school to be able to help the rest of his family. He remembers how his mom "Kept pushing for him to get a job, even if it was part-time, so he could contribute to the family." After moving out on his own, Daniel had to work very hard to provide for himself, and to pay for college classes. Daniel recalls thinking, "I'd never worked so much in my life, and I am not even making ends meet." Nevertheless, he did not lose hope and persevered when things became even more challenging. Daniel did not have a car at the time of the study but decided to not give up. He stated:

I would go to school part-time or online so I could work full-time and make enough money to pay for my own apartment, take care of personal expenses, and pay for university classes ... I was determined to make things work out.

Although Daniel is a non-traditional-aged student and does not know what he is going to do with a degree in Anthropology, he hopes to continue with his education and

eventually complete a master's and a Ph.D. so he can teach at the university level. Daniel feels that he has the "Most demanding expectations from the Anglo and the Hispanic cultures, but kind of the worst support systems from both cultures as well." Nevertheless, Daniel continues to push through everything that is going on in his life, and although he knows that his family would support him a lot more "If I did what they wanted me to do I will continue to do what I feel is right for me, even if it takes me twice as long to accomplish my goals."

José immigrated to the U.S. with his parents and two younger siblings. They left their native Venezuela because of the many political and economic changes that were affecting the country's citizens. Although José and his family lived a comfortable life in Venezuela, they had to start from zero when they arrived in the U.S. José had to work full-time to help with their finances because his dad remained unemployed for five years. José stated:

My dad was a doctor in Venezuela and my mom was a teacher. However, and although my parents knew the value of a higher education, I had to start working to help with the family's finances. At that time my younger brothers were still too young to help out, so the responsibility fell on me. I continued going to class, but just for one or two classes a semester because most of my time was spent working. I always knew, and hoped, that things would get better ... and they did. My dad works as a waiter now, and my mom is working at a daycare center. My younger brothers are also working, so we all help with the finances of the family now.

José might have put his higher education on a slower track, but he never thought about stopping completely. He jokes about the possibility of his younger brothers passing

him up, but that would just make him even more proud of where they were and where they are now. According to José:

At one point, work become too much and I even thought about taking a break from school, but I did not. Instead, I just took fewer classes, but I never gave up. I am glad that I have continued with my education, and so have my younger brothers ... even if they graduate before me because they never had to just take one or two classes. That would make me very happy if they graduated before me, because they are very smart, and I expect them to do well. When one of us succeeds, the entire family succeeds ... you know, because we never gave up together.

Luis was another participant who showed perseverance, hope and grit through his actions as a student. As it is expected of Hispanic males, Luis was also tasked with the responsibility of helping his family as soon as he could. However, he refused to choose work over his higher education and instead tried working part-time and taking online classes. According to Luis, things did not go as expected ...

During one semester, I moved in with my mom to help her financially. I was working full-time, and taking classes online, but I was unable to keep up with my classes and just dropped out. My mom had lost income, and I had to choose work over college.

As soon as Luis's mom was able to get back on her feet, Luis moved back in with his dad. Luis recalled, "My dad was always more stable than my mom, and that's why I chose to live with him. It's not that I love him more, I just needed more stability." Luis seemed to still feel guilty about choosing school, over work, but knows that a degree will allow him to better help both of his parents in the future, and that's what keep him going. Luis stated:

I'm now living with my dad, and he doesn't really expect me to help out with any financial responsibilities ... as long as I am in school and I'm passing all my classes. I work part-time, but that is just because I want to at least be able to pay for my own personal things.

Luis did not always know what he would do after graduating from high school. In fact, he admitted applying to this university because he did not know if he could get into any other higher-learning institutions. Nevertheless, he seems to have a better idea as far as what he needs to do next. As he stated:

My ultimate goal is to get into medical school. After I graduate, which I know will take a long time, I want to work for Doctors Without Borders. My dad also wants to open a homeless shelter, so I also want to help there as a doctor. I know that that may sound naïve, especially when I am only 21 years of age, but I have always wanted to be a doctor ... since I was little. I also know that it takes a lot of money and time, but once I set a goal, I stick with it until I accomplish it.

Summary

Although most of the participants have had to deal with many obstacles, they always kept "hope" alive. They hoped, and prayed that things would get better with time, and they did. Also, when some of the participants had to take fewer classes, or completely drop out because of financial issues, they knew that it would only be temporary, and persevered until things got better. The fact that they were all still in school at the time of the study, shows their grit and determination to see a completion of a bachelor's degree as part of their future. They have invested so much money and time to just give up now. Some of them, took a small break, some lowered the number of classes they were taking, but none of them gave up.

The student participants shared their own personal stories with honesty, emotion, and pride. They were happy to be heard, to be seen. It was important for them to know that their plight was recognized, and that there are people who really cared about their experiences as students. Thus, it was important to hear from the adults who are part of these students' educational journey, the university staff. The focus groups and one-on-one interviews that took place with university staff, demonstrated the dedication, empathy, and support necessary to help students succeed. These focus groups also showed a disconnect between what they did as a Hispanic-serving Institution staff member and the students they were supposed to be providing services for. University staff participants spoke with candor, honesty, emotion, and at times, even felt validated as integral parts of the education system. The following data were collected through two separate focus groups, and there were follow-up one-on-one interviews with selected university staff.

University Staff Perspectives and Experiences

As a researcher, I wanted to find out if the perspectives and experiences of the university staff, in relation to the pursuit of higher education by Hispanic males, would be different from those of the students. Since the student participants were the ones in need of support and guidance, and the university staff were the ones offering the guidance and support, perhaps their perceptions and experiences were different when it came to available help. University staff participants were selected because they worked for the same Hispanic-serving Institution the Hispanic male student participants were attending. Another factor was that the university staff came in contact with Hispanic male students in a direct or indirect form on a regular basis.

A total of five female university staff participants, and nine male university staff participants formed the 14-university staff group that were interviewed for this study. The

group of university staff participants included seven participants who identified themselves as Hispanic, one participant who identified herself as African American, and six participants who identified themselves as Anglo or White. The data from the university staff were obtained mainly through focus groups. Through the focus groups, I was able to notice how every single participant was more than willing to provide support, guidance, and encouragement to any student that needed it. However, the university staff perspectives and/or experiences were different from those of the student participants, who often felt as if they should not ask for help due to the fact that they are Hispanic males or because they “Did not want to bother anyone.”

Although the university staff participants identified as Anglo, Hispanic, and African American, the focus was only on their experiences with Hispanic male students at this Hispanic-serving Institution and no comparisons were made to any other ethnic or racial group attending this particular Hispanic-serving Institution. The university staff participants simply worked for the Hispanic-serving Institution in a capacity that allowed them to interact with students from various races and ethnic groups that included Hispanic males. University staff were selected based on their willingness to form part of a focus group and/or participate in a one-on-one interview.

All university staff participants selected for this study have had various opportunities to interact with Hispanic male students at this higher-learning institution. Although the degrees of interaction varied according to their department, the comfort level of the student, and/or the student’s degree plan, not all university staff have had the same experiences or perceptions related to how Hispanic male students seek out help when needed. According to the two focus groups that took place, from their perspective, Hispanic males feel somewhat comfortable seeking out assistance from some of the Academic Support Services and/or programs, but not all.

In order to better understand the types of interactions, experiences, and/or perceptions that each of the university staff had with Hispanic males at this university, the researcher separated the university staff by gender. Each university staff member was given a pseudonym to protect their identity, and their privacy. A brief job description, related to their work responsibilities and services offered, was also provided to help the reader understand the capacity with which they each could help Hispanic male students seeking advice and support while pursuing a higher education. The following are the university staff member pseudonyms, and brief job descriptions.

Female University Staff

Tina was the Director of the Veteran Services Office (VSO) at the time the study took place. Tina was responsible for coordinating veteran services in the form of essential help, advice, educational support and career counseling geared towards veterans and their families. The Office of Veteran Services (VSO) is staffed by veterans who are committed to providing assistance with securing VA benefits, as well as creating a veteran-friendly campus so that their transition back to civilian life can be safe, healthy and productive.

Anna was the Director of Academic Advising for freshmen and sophomores, at the time the study took place. The Freshman and Sophomore Advising Center focuses on the needs of freshman and sophomore students, which includes those with college credit earned before high school graduation through Advanced Placement (AP), dual credit, or early college programs. Through the Proactive Advising Session (PAS) program, an assigned adviser is available to guide the student through the major and career exploration process, select classes, research career paths, and acclimate to college life.

Missy was the Coordinator of Disability Services at the time the study took place. The Disability Services Office provides institution-wide advisement, consultation, and training on disability-related topics, collaborates with partners to identify and remove

barriers to foster an all-inclusive campus, and provides individual services and facilitates accommodations to students with disabilities.

Sonia was the Senior Academic Advisor for the College of Education at the time of the data collection for the study. As one of two senior academic advisors, her office is responsible for helping students explore their options and achieving their academic, career and personal goals through the use of the full range of university and community resources. The senior academic advisers help all undergraduates and post-degree students seeking teacher education degrees and certificates, they also ensure they stay on course through tailored, one-on-one guidance and direction.

Amy was the Coordinator for the Office of Sponsored Programs at the time the data were collected. The Office of Sponsored Programs provides support for a wide range of faculty interests and projects, in addition to research. The Office of Sponsored Programs encourages all scholarly activity at the university that could benefit from external funding. They provide support and guidance from project concept through proposal preparation and submission, receipt of award, and management of account, to project closeout.

Male University Staff

Ed was a Senior Academic Transfer Advisor at the time the data were collected. As an Academic Transfer Advisor, Ed was tasked with advising and guiding students through their current and/or previous college courses for an easy, straightforward transfer when they were ready to transition to a university campus. By meeting with a transfer academic advisor, students can learn how their courses apply toward their intended major and avoid wasting time and money on unnecessary courses.

Al was the Director of Disability Services at the time of this study. As a Director of Disability Services, his office assists in meeting the legal obligation to students with

disabilities and helps the students become more familiar with disability issues, adaptive equipment, and accommodations. As a Director of Disability Services, Al is also responsible for making sure that other university staff know about useful definitions and information like what to do when a student has been given an accommodation letter, how to talk to a student with a disability, and how to arrange accommodations. Al stated, “You have responsibilities when responding to requests for disability accommodations. This involves having a dialogue with the student about their disability needs, working with them and our office to establish reasonable accommodations.”

Joe was the Director of Student Success Services Center at the time the data were collected. The Student Success Services Center is a comprehensive academic support department that offers Tutoring, Academic Coaching, and Academic Skills Workshops. Tutoring covers many of the classes from all four of the colleges at this university. Academic Coaching provides students with one-on-one, personalized skill building in areas like reading strategies, time and task management, note taking strategies, public speaking, test strategies and organization. Lastly, Academic Skills Workshops are an interactive 50-minute overview of topics like public speaking, apps and sites for student success, test-taking strategies, note taking, organization, time and task management, and reading strategies.

Sam was a Writing Consultant at the university’s Writing Center when the data were collected. Through online, face-to-face and workshop-based consultations, the Writing Center staff works with students regardless of skill level and at any stage of the writing process. The center also supports dynamic, progressive and inclusive consulting principles. Their work is grounded in best practices from the field of rhetoric and composition for university-level writing centers and programs.

Bob was the university's Psychologist and Director of the Counseling and Outreach Group Therapy Services at the time the data were collected. The counseling staff strive to help students fulfill their goals by fostering connections with and among members of the university community. They also facilitate the discovery and realization of power in their strengths and help with developing the ability to address emotional and psychological challenges. All enrolled students are eligible to receive counseling services, and most services are free of charge. In addition, all faculty and staff are eligible for a consultation session and referral for continued services. All services are strictly confidential.

Leo was the Director of the Office of Career Services at the time of the study. Career Services professionals are available to provide crucial guidance with integrating the skills and experience the students acquire at the university into their pursuit of a fulfilling career. Additionally, they can help students understand how the student's interests, values, goals and strengths greatly impact their career decision-making process and career readiness.

Ian was the university's Director of the Math Center at the time the data were collected. Some of the services offered by the Math Center include drop-in tutoring, one-on-one tutoring, online tutoring and supplemental instruction options. They also offer first-generation support, which are services and events for first-generation college students. Additionally, the Math Center has various resources available for checkout. Such items available for checkout include calculators, course textbooks, desktop computers, whiteboards and markers, and laptops.

Kai was the Veteran Services Coordinator at the time the data were collected. As a coordinator, Kai was responsible for the recruitment and advising of new students with regard to admissions, financial aid, registration and HB 269 military service credit. The

coordinator is also the certifying officer for state and federal educational benefits. As the certifying officer, the coordinator is responsible for state and federal reporting in collaboration with the Office of Financial Aid. The coordinator also serves as an information and referral source for veteran students to various offices on campus and assisting veterans with problem resolution. The coordinator is also responsible for effective leadership and quality customer services of the VSO (Veteran Services Office) and coordinates and provides training to student workers to help ensure veteran services.

Max was the university's Pathways to STEM Program Director at the time of the study. This program enables the university to develop and enhance support services and strategies to increase student success among Hispanic and other low-income students in STEM fields. It also allows the university to develop model programs for Hispanic students' successful transfer from two-year Hispanic institutions to four-year institutions in STEM fields of study.

Services and Resources Awareness

Just like many other universities, this higher-learning institution has a plethora of services and resources for students to take advantage of. The staff participants mentioned how some Hispanic students would access some of those services, but their experiences were different from one staff participant to the next. The following information shows a disparity between the awareness of the services and/or resources available to students at this Hispanic-serving Institution, and the frequency with which Hispanic males students accessed specific services and resources, if at all. As Sonia stated:

When students call our advising office, there is already a “situation” and there is nowhere else to turn, except our office. To me, this translates into the possibility that they are not aware of all the services that our university provides. We have

the services that the students need, but they're just not comfortable enough to reach out and share more of themselves and what's going on.

There were several reasons the participants mentioned for having fewer opportunities to interact with Hispanic male students. It was concluded that this was mostly due to the degree plan of the students, their needs as university students, a lack of communication between departments, and/or comfort level of the students while asking for a specific type of help. For example, Sonia, Academic Advisor, mentioned that they did not see very many Hispanic males because the number of Hispanic males in education is generally low. However, according to Sonia, who shared, "I am one of two Hispanic academic advisors, we're Latinas, and just by that identification, we're able to connect with our Hispanic males when they do seek help. Additionally, it was mentioned that very few Hispanic males seek help in areas that reveal their vulnerability as students. Furthermore, it was posited that some students may not feel comfortable seeking out help in places where "They don't see themselves, or where they don't see another Hispanic face that would understand their culture and/or their journey."

Upon further analysis, it was discovered that the four different colleges at this Hispanic-serving Institution were disproportionally staffed in terms of diversity and equal cultural representation. For example, The College of Sciences and Engineering (CSE) only had 3 Hispanics as members of its 90-member faculty and staff. The College of Human Sciences and Humanities (HSH) had a faculty and staff of 98 members, where only four were Hispanic. The College of Business (COB) had a faculty and staff of 67, with only one Hispanic staff member. Lastly, the College of Education (COE) had a faculty and staff of 48 members, with only 7 Hispanics staff members.

Anna, Academic Advisor, agreed with Sonia in that she mostly worked with freshmen and sophomores, but that the number of males that she saw were "A mixture of

different races, which included Hispanic males, coming in in a variety of majors.” She added, “However, there are few to none Hispanic males that come in with an Education major.”

Bob, from the Office of Counseling Services, mentioned how they have always tried to be there for everyone, regardless of gender or ethnicity. It is important that the students feel welcomed, and at ease while reaching out for the services we can provide. As Bob noted:

We have this conversation about diversity quite often. We try to make our office as open and as accessible as possible. We’re always looking at things like what photographs appear on our brochures, and things like that. We also offer Spanish-speaking services that are geared towards the Hispanic population. So, we’re always looking at “what’s our message” and how we are putting that message out there in a way that feels inclusive to everybody.

While some university staff participants were aware that some Hispanic male students were not taking advantage of the university’s services and resources, other participants mentioned a different experience. It is also important to point out that not everyone in the focus group knew that the Office of Counseling Services offered Spanish-speaking therapy services, which is another factor that could explain how the departments are experiencing different things when it comes to Hispanic males reaching out to them and their services. It must be noted that the participants that thought that the Hispanic males were not taking advantage of all the services and resources, that their tuition pays for, were Hispanic. The participants whose perceptions showed Hispanic males accessing services and resources, on a regular basis, were White or Anglo. As one participant, Ian, Director of the Math Center mentioned:

Hispanic males come in for various services at the Math Center. We see a lot of Hispanic males in the Math Center. In fact, approximately 15 percent of all our visits are from Hispanic males, which amounts to 675 students out of about 4,500 visits per semester.

Ian's experience and perception related to Hispanic males accessing the Math Center and all the services and resources it provides, might in fact be telling a different story. Perhaps, the number of Hispanic males accessing the Math Center relates to their deficiency in Math that could have started in their earlier years of academic instruction. Unfortunately, this could not be corroborated with Ian, nor with the students.

Joe, Director of Student Services expressed that Hispanic students were the majority when seeking academic support services, in at least three of the four academic service departments, (Student Success Center, Math Center, and Writing Center). As Joe stated:

In working with our Latino students, and our data is overwhelmingly clear that they are the majority of the students that come in to seek our services in all four of our centers, or at least in the three of them that have direct services in tutoring ... which include: the Student Success Center, the Math Center, and the Writing Center.

Another participant, Tina from the VSO office, felt very proud of the services they provided to Hispanic males, and the rest of the student body at this university. Tina shared, "We oversee all of the enrollment for the four colleges, so we do see Hispanic males. They tend to do well, and we retain them very well, but in proportion to other ethnicities ... it's lower." Tina added:

When I think of the Hispanic males, the undergrads that I work with, one thing that comes to mind is how I've seen them balancing being a parent and having

that financial responsibility toward their spouse and children, all while going to school full-time. This is quite challenging, especially as the institution's academic schedule changes to bring us more into an 8:00 to 5:00 school. So, the evening classes that used to be available for this specific group of students, students who would attend university classes after work or after spending time with their family, are no longer available. These are also "PCP" students, that is to say that they go from the "Parking lot" to "Class" and then back to the "Parking lot" to be on their way to their job or their family responsibilities. So, their family usually bears the brunt of those sacrifices being made by the Hispanic male students pursuing a higher education while working a full-time job and being a parent and/or a spouse.

Summary

There seemed to be a disconnect between the university staff, and what they each experienced or perceived. It seemed that the Hispanic females had a stronger bond, and commitment to Hispanic males and their needs. The Hispanic staff members were well aware of the fact that some Hispanic male students have a difficult time when it comes to reaching out for help in a safe and comfortable way. It was mostly the white university staff who thought that they, and their department, were doing a fine job. In fact, some of the university staff felt that as long as the university provided support systems in the form of available resources and services, that the rest was up to the students, if they really wanted "extra" support. Others even stated that "you can take the horse to the water, but you cannot make him drink it." Perhaps this is a result of a lack of understanding of the Hispanic culture and all of the traditions that have been passed down to these young Hispanic males.

Machismo: Asking for Help as a Hispanic Male

Eight university staff members mentioned that some of the Hispanic male students that came into their offices felt “strange” while asking for help. When they asked for help, these Hispanic males felt as if this was their last resort, and that they had nothing left to lose. In a sense, it was their “machismo” that was being hurt, in the sense that Hispanic men are supposed to be self-reliant. The students felt “guilty” about not being able to figure things out by themselves. These Hispanic males felt as if there was something “wrong” with them, or worse, as if they were not “man enough” which is a known characteristic of the machismo mentality that is prevalent in the Hispanic culture (Roche et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2016). As Anna, Director of Academic Advising, stated:

One of my advisees told me once that he did not want to be treated differently just because he was Hispanic. He actually shared how “in high school they would pull the Black kids and the Hispanic kids into this one room to help them, and he didn’t like it one bit.” However, this is the same student that, when I first met him, knew nothing about higher education or about financial aid. So, it’s about how the information or support is delivered to them that’s key. You’ve got to get it to them, like hiding the vegetables in your kids’ food. In other words, you’ve got to get it to them somehow, but without robbing them of their identity that says, “I’m not only a man, but a Hispanic male who’s strong and don’t want to be seen as weak while asking for help.”

Sonia, Academic Advisor from the College of Education (COE), has also noticed the same situation when it came to Hispanic male students asking for help and related it to their cultural background. As Sonia shared:

While asking for help, culturally, I think that’s somewhat embarrassing and they might register it as “I feel like a failure because I can’t control these things.”

However, we often tell them, “No one can. It doesn’t matter who you are. In order for you to be successful as a student, you have to reach out, ask for help, and have a team of people helping you.” So, I would say that’s a struggle our Hispanic male students are dealing with, the fact that they don’t realize what they have access to and then they internalize their struggles by saying “I am the problem.”

Ed, a university Academic Advisor agreed, and added that “For some Hispanic male students, seeking out help when needed may begin as early as making the decision to pursue a higher education and meeting with an academic advisor to discuss a degree plan.” According to Ed, “Meeting with an academic advisor is especially important for those students who might be the first ones in their family to attend a higher-learning institution because they may lack the necessary knowledge to navigate this academic journey successfully.” Additionally, time away from other non-academic responsibilities, such as family or job responsibilities, seems to be a challenge that keeps Hispanic males from reaching out to academic advisors, and that may eventually become a deciding factor on whether they persevere or give up while pursuing a university degree. As Ed mentioned:

I found that I’ve had to work harder to get my Hispanic males to come in for advising. I’ve also had to work harder to keep them focused and on track because they had so many other distractors going on in their lives, whether it was a family commitment, or having to work a full-time job in addition to going to school, whatever it was, there were just too many distractors that made it hard to get them to come in for advising or even take the advice that would help them stay on track and provide them with opportunities to truly enjoy their academic journey as college or university students. I found that they were, of all the groups that I’ve worked with, the least likely to participate in campus activities. I would assume

that it also had to do with the same reasons I mentioned earlier, too many outside distractions that kept them from truly taking advantage of all the things a university experience can provide.

Sam, a Writing Consultant, agreed with Sonia and Ed in that most Hispanic males feel embarrassed while asking for help because they might have been taught that “men” should never show their weaknesses. According to Sam, the moment that a Hispanic male admits that he needs help, he loses control. Sam also stated:

The Hispanic males, that come in for help at the Writing Center, are typically a little reserved about opening up about their writing, so I am only able to help those students based on their level of comfort while seeking out academic support. However, their level of comfort can only get better with time, but they usually don’t come back after our first session. I think that a lot of the reservation of opening up, comes from that kind of “machismo” value ...which is a very sensitive topic to them, if ever questioned. Writing is very personal, and opening that up to criticism to another male, or anyone else for that matter, is kind of very sensitive and vulnerable-like.

Kai, a Veteran Services Coordinator, spoke as a participant and as a former Hispanic male student. He agreed with Sam, in the fact that some Hispanic males feel like their “machismo” will be questioned if they ever ask for help, and that whatever situation they may be in, is to be figured out just like any other situation in their life ... by themselves. As Kai mentioned:

The role models in my life were field workers who worked from sunup to sundown, in the heat. So, when I would come into campus, you know, being indoors with A/C ... when I needed help, I would say to myself, at least I am inside, and not outside in 100 degree plus weather ... that’s hard, this shouldn’t

be. So, I would make that comparison, and I would just try to figure things out by telling myself that things were not as tough as they could be or had been for my ancestors. Now, as a veteran, it is the same as saying ... they don't know the hardships I've been through and survived, so why should I ask for help when my life doesn't depend on it. Which if you really look at it, it's another form of machismo, saying that I don't need help and that I can figure things out on my own because I've done before and I can do it again. It is almost as if we don't want to make things easier for ourselves because we've already had it rough, and that's the way life is.

Another participant, Bob, mentioned how in Counseling Services the number of Hispanic males seeking help is rather low. He attributed this to the negative stigma that comes with seeking help from anyone in the fields of psychology or psychiatry. As Bob shared:

Working in counseling services, we are not college-specific, so thinking across the university as a whole, I've seen a number of Hispanic males come through counseling. However, I would say that if I were to estimate percentages, it's not as high as some of the other ethnicities, but I have certainly seen a number of Hispanic males.

Although newer generations of Hispanic males are more open to sharing their feelings, there are still those who have not acculturated completely. According to Bob: Sometimes, by the time some of our Hispanic male students get to us, in the counseling office, something is usually going on. So, the way that presents in our offices, depending on which generation they are, sometimes has to do with acculturation and learning to adjust to their new environment. They need to learn to put words on the feelings they are feeling, which more often than not, revolves

around feeling disconnected, depressed, or homesick. So, we help them with normalizing that process. Once the student makes it to our office, if they can even give voice to what they are feeling, which is often wrapped in a lot of what appears to be shame.

For Hispanic males, Bob added, “The shame and the inability to talk about their emotions stems from a lack of role models or they just don’t have the words.” However, through multiple sessions, we are often able to “Normalize what they are feeling, we move into figuring out what resources we do have on campus to help support their psychological development.”

Missy and Al, staff participants from the Office of Disability Services, agreed with the “shame” and the negative stigma that come along with admitting the need for help, support, or guidance. According to Missy:

The interactions that personnel from the disability office have had with Hispanic males revealed that having a disability, in addition to being a Hispanic male, already carried a negative stigma. As a result, the intersectionality of a Hispanic identity and a disability make it even more difficult for Hispanic male students to seek out help when they need it. Many of these students are on the fence when it comes to seeking help as Hispanic males, but the situation is exacerbated when the reason they must seek out help is the fact that they might have a disability in addition to being an ethnic minority who is struggling to succeed on their own.

Missy added that some Hispanic males might not “Want to come to the Office of Disability Services, so a lot of what they get to see are students that show up when things have gotten really bad.” Missy added that “That’s when the students realize they have a problem, and they have to come to disability services. So, there’s this dual fight of identity that leads to dual identity issues.” Missy stated:

I believe this intersectionality of gender and race is quite unique in the sense that when Hispanic male students come into the Disability Office, they already carry the negative stigma that they are asking for help. Additionally, they might have a disability that will add to how they are seen, but it is something that they can't help, just like they can't help being Hispanic, or male. Also, a lot of these students come from families where they're the first person to go to college. So, that level of knowledge of how to navigate the university life just isn't there ... and a lot of them are on the fence on whether to ask for help or not, because they want to avoid the double stigma.

According to Al, Director of Disability Services, as far as how culture views disability, there are certain cultures that are more willing to self-identify and seek out services. He also stated:

I think that might be one of the reasons why the Latino or Hispanic population, with disability services, is not as large as it might be in some of the other departments that I work closely with. But I'm hoping that when these students are able to see that we have a number of other Latino or Hispanic students that are using the services that we have, as well as other staff members that actually have disabilities that are also working in our office, that that can also be a positive influence for those individuals to self-identify and step forward.

Summary

For Hispanic males, asking for help may be seen as "wrong" or even being less of a man. When the help needed is a specific type, such as counseling services, or disability services, the negative stigma is even worse. Nevertheless, it is important that university staff are always on the look-out for any and all students who might need extra help, but who would have a difficult time asking for it. Seeking help is specifically important in

Hispanic males, who as it has already been mentioned, would rather figure things out on their own, before letting a professional help. In some cases, when Hispanic male students do seek help, they may already have a “situation” where things are out of their control, and where the consequences can be detrimental to their social and academic well-being.

Lack of Roles Models and Mentors

As far as the career planning aspect, Leo, Director of Career Services, shared his perception that “Hispanic male students, because of a lack of mentors and role models, don’t know a lot about professional career paths other than maybe blue-collar kinds of positions.” Additionally, according to Leo:

These students’ learning curve and their knowledge of professional development in terms of career planning, writing résumés, interviewing and things like that, is a little bit further behind than some of their other counterparts. One of the other things that I’ve noticed, at least with the young Hispanic men I’ve worked with, is the fact that most of them are working. They are paying their way through here, a higher-learning institution. So, as a result of that, it is harder for them to be able to take on experiential education opportunities because they can’t afford to be able to do that, which probably means that they are missing out on some really cool and life-changing internships.

Ed, the university’s Academic Advisor also noted that very few Hispanic males come into his office to seek help because no one, such as a mentor, has consistently told them that they can, or that they should. As Ed noted:

Many Hispanic male students might not even realize the importance of making the time to meet with an academic advisor to design a degree plan that will carry them through their academic journey in the most efficacious and smooth way because they may lack the role models that often provide this type of guidance.

Another staff participant, Max, Director of the STEM Program, agreed with Ed and mentioned how he “Focuses on increasing the number of Hispanic Males in STEM careers. So, he has made it a priority to hire peer mentors that were also Hispanic males in order to sort of help with that.” According to Max:

One of the many challenges that Hispanic males face while seeking a university degree is the lack of role models in higher education institutions. They may have role models for other parts of their lives, but as far as higher education is concerned, they lack those role models. So, if they do have an issue, they have a hard time asking for help because they don’t have that trusted mentor that they can go to for guidance and/or reassurance. So, if we, as a university, could provide the mentors they need to help them with everything related to higher-education, I think that would be very helpful with all the issues that our Hispanic male students might currently be dealing with.

It was noted more than once that Hispanic males are “loners” or people who often just blend into the crowd for safety and survival. As Amy shared: “Hispanic males are or tend to be more independent, more self-reliant, I don’t want to say they’re loners, but they just rather work independently and don’t really mix in with the fray.” It is especially important, then, that if Hispanic males often tend to work alone, that a mentor or role model be readily available before things get tough. It has already been established that some Hispanic males have a very hard time reaching out for help, thus it is the place of the adult mentor or role model to reach out and to lend a helping hand.

Summary

Role models, and mentors are a very important part of anyone’s life. Hispanic males, specifically, would greatly benefit from having a trusted adult with whom they can talk about anything they are unsure of, according to these staff participants. Since

Hispanic males seem to have a hard time asking for help, guidance, and/or support, having someone they can trust would make this process that much easier to bear. According to these staff participants, understanding the concept of “machismo” would also help in reaching out to these young Hispanic men in a safe, and respectful manner, without jeopardizing the cultural values of the Hispanic culture.

Chapter Summary

From the beginning, the researcher wondered if the themes from the student participants and the staff participants would be the same, or at least similar. However, the themes from the student participants were different, and they seemed to come from a deeper place, especially when it affected them personally. By now it was clear that Hispanic males had a difficult time asking for help due to several factors related to their culture, upbringing, and personal experiences. The majority of the staff participants, eight, also agreed that Hispanic males had a difficult time asking for help but did not quite understand how deeply this “machismo” value runs in the Hispanic male students. It was also discussed that perhaps the students are not aware of the protocols or steps that should be followed when they need assistance, and that by the time they reach out for help, there is already a “situation” that has placed them in a dilemma where they have no control over what is happening. It was also discovered that another issue that may also play a factor in how comfortable they might feel while seeking out guidance or support, could be the lack of role models or mentors.

While it was discussed that Hispanic male students have some unspoken cultural expectations that cannot be avoided, it was also discussed how the presence of a mentor or role model could help make things easier for Hispanic males seeking help, and doing so without having their identity robbed of their “machismo.” Hispanic males know that they have to work to provide for themselves, and for their parents and younger siblings,

but they should also know that there are many resources and services available to help them deal with personal and university life in a more bearable way. However, for this to happen, according to student participants, Hispanic male students have to feel comfortable, and like they “belong” in order to feel that it is all right to reach out and ask for help. Nevertheless, with or without help, they have persevered, and are hopeful that things will get better with time. Lastly, for many of these students, attending a higher-education institution is something that no one else in their family has done before, and as a result they have had to learn to navigate this uncharted territory all on their own. The fact that these Hispanic male students were still pursuing a higher-education degree, showed their perseverance, unquestionable hope, and grit.

CHAPTER V: SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

This research study was conducted to discover the experiences and perceptions of Hispanic male students seeking to pursue and complete a higher education. There were three research questions that guided this study. The first question asked, “What is the perceived importance of a college education to undergraduate, traditional and non-traditional-aged Hispanic males enrolled in higher education?” The second question asked, “What perceptions do Hispanic males have about the impact of their lived experiences both within and external to the academic environment on their pursuit of a college education?” The third question asked, “What perceptions do university staff have about Hispanic males seeking a higher education and what Hispanic males must do in order to achieve their goal?”

For this research study, the researcher used two theoretical frameworks to enhance the understanding of the experiences and perceptions that might lead Hispanic males to pursue and complete a college education. The theoretical frameworks used to guide this study were Bandura’s (1977) social-cognitive theory and Vygotsky’s (1978) socio-cultural constructivism theory. This qualitative study utilized these theories to ascertain the specific reasons that might explain the disparity that exists between Hispanic male students who successfully pursue and complete a college education and their Anglo counterparts.

Albert Bandura’s (1977) social-cognitive theory focuses on observational learning, life experiences, and reciprocal determinism as the vehicle to developing one’s personality. According to Bandura (1977) an individual’s attitudes, abilities, and cognitive skills make up what we now refer to as a self-system. Self-efficacy is a central

part of the self-system in that it allows individuals to organize and execute specific courses of action required to manage specific situations. Stated differently, self-efficacy is an individual's belief in his or her ability to succeed in any situation, including higher education.

According to Vygotsky (1978), the true purpose of the development of thinking is not from the individual to the social or group, but from the social or group to the individual. Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural constructivism theory emphasizes the importance of understanding the psychological development of competent individuals by providing, both children and adults, the cultural tools necessary to ensure that society is deliberately producing competent citizens. This theory not only focuses on how adults and peers can influence learning, but also on how cultural beliefs and attitudes can influence how learning occurs (Vygotsky, 1978), which is essential while creating a college-bound culture among Hispanic males.

A constant comparison analysis (Lichtman, 2010) was used in this study to constantly compare the data obtained from the 27 participants, 13 Hispanic male students and 14 university staff members. The student participants group was composed of 13 male students, all from Hispanic descent, that included two freshmen, one sophomore, six juniors, and four seniors. The university staff group was composed of 14 professional adults from both genders, where seven adults identified as Hispanic, six adults identified as Anglo, and one adult identified as African American. The results of the study are based on the perceptions and experiences of all the participants, the Hispanic male students, and the university staff. From the interview data, the researcher identified four emergent themes from the Hispanic male students, and three emergent themes from the university staff. In the following section of this chapter, all seven themes will be discussed.

Summary of Findings

The summary of findings from this study addressed the four themes that emerged from the Hispanic male students through the data that were collected via focus groups and/or one-on-one-interviews. These themes included, support systems for Hispanic males, unspoken cultural expectations for Hispanic males, the feeling of “belonging” and perseverance, hope, and grit. The researcher also discussed and compared the three emergent themes that resulted from the focus groups and/or one-on-one interviews that included the 14-university staff participants. The themes were compared and contrasted in relation to the research questions that guided this study, which are as follow:

What is the Perceived Importance of a College Education to Undergraduate, Traditional and Non-traditional-aged Hispanic Males Enrolled in Higher Education?

Support Systems for Hispanic Male Students

One of the emergent themes from the male student participants was that of a lack of support systems for Hispanic males, which are essential in the successful completion of a higher-education degree. In fact, 11 of the 13 student interviews reported a lack of support systems from home, and even from the higher-education institution they were attending at the time of the study. Some of the students expressed how they were the first ones in their family to seek a higher education, which showed that they valued a higher education, but that their families had no idea how to support them, psychologically nor financially.

Such was Brayan’s case, who was unable to benefit from a support system in his family, who was not able to financially support his higher education goals. After not being able to pursue a higher education in his native Guatemala, Brayan immigrated to the United States to look for work, and be able to help his family back in Guatemala.

However, and with little guidance, Brayan enrolled in ESL classes at a local community college while also getting ready to take the GED exam. Brayan is now a senior at a local university and continues to work a full-time job to support himself, pay for his higher education, and send money to his parents and siblings back in Guatemala. Brayan's story paints a picture where he had to figure things out on his own, especially when it came to higher education. Brayan did not have the luxury of attending high school in the United States, so he did not have high school counselors to guide him while applying for college or financial aid. Nevertheless, Brayan has pursued a higher education, and plans on getting a master's after he finishes his bachelor's. Having this type of plan for his future, definitely shows that Brayan sees a higher education as an important part of his life.

Brayan's case is also an example of Bandura's (1977) social-cognitive theory, which focuses on observational learning, life experiences, and reciprocal determinism as the vehicle to developing one's personality. Brayan observed, in his own family and surroundings, how a lack of a higher education made it that much more difficult to have a better life. After experiencing disappointment in not being able to pursue a higher education in his native Guatemala, Brayan decided to immigrate to the United States, where getting a job and having more opportunities in life are two of the factors that continue to encourage immigrants to leave their own country. Brayan's determination to change the status quo in his life and the environment in which he grew up, also show reciprocal determinism.

Brayan's academic journey could and should have been smoother. Teachers at any academic level should be on the lookout for students just like Brayan. Students who come from home situations where there is little to zero support and guidance when it comes to pursuing a higher education. But, who just like Brayan, yearn to complete a higher education at any cost. Brayan is a 33-year-old nontraditional student that could

have benefited from the support of his teachers and university counselors, had they taken the time to get to know him better. Due to the fact that Brayan had to figure out almost everything on his own, he missed out on many opportunities to take advantage of resources and services that would have made his academic journey so much easier.

Daniel was another student who lacked a support system at home, but that did not keep him from taking matters into his own hands. While growing up in the U.S., Daniel's family moved around quite often in order to find work. Daniel fell behind in his studies, and as a high school senior, and found out that he was in danger of not graduating until a year later. Daniel could have easily given up on his higher education, but he did not. Fortunately, for Daniel, his high school counselor suggested he take the GED test and graduate early. Sadly, that was all the support that Daniel received from his teachers and his high school counselor. After getting his GED, Daniel started looking into a community college on his own. Daniel's actions showed that he also valued higher education and was willing to do whatever was necessary to ensure his transition from high school on to college.

Daniel's actions, after he found out that he might graduate a year later, after his classmates, prompted him to take a different course of action. Based on Bandura's (1977) social-cognitive theory, which focuses on observational learning, life experiences, and reciprocal determinism, there is a component known as "self-efficacy." It was through "self-efficacy" that Daniel determined that going the route of a GED program would be more efficacious than to stay with his, then current, classmates and as a result graduate a year later. Thus, Daniel opted for a more personal approach to his personal needs and case and managed a situation taking matters into his own hands. This goes in line with how Bandura's (1977) theory posits that it is through observational learning and life

experiences that individuals develop their own personality and how they react to specific situations.

Daniel's transition from high school to college should have been much easier than what it was. There is a disconnect between what teachers think that students know about higher education and what students like Daniel and Brayan actually know. Also, the support systems, although they may be available, are not always easily accessible to young Hispanic men such as Daniel and Brayan. This is mainly because they are the first ones in their family to venture out and seek a higher education, they discover what they can all on their own, and they do so while working a full-time job. Thus, it is the responsibility of the teachers to identify this type of students, and to point them in the right direction. Otherwise, resources and services may be wasted or go unused by the very people that they were created for.

The majority of the Hispanic male students were working part or full-time jobs, in addition to attending higher education classes, which showed their commitment to their higher education journey. Due to these students' many responsibilities outside of school they had fewer opportunities to become involved in the university life, which could possibly explain why they knew so little about all the support systems that their university offered. Although these students did take advantage of some services, this mostly happened when things were already "out of control" or when they had no other choice but to ask for help. Since education was important to them, they put "pride" on the side, and asked for help. Nevertheless, the Hispanic males were shocked to find out that there were plenty more support systems at the university level, readily available to them. They also expressed their uneasiness with "getting help" from people other than their family.

The implications that could be derived from the experiences lived by Brayan and Daniel are two-fold. The first implication has to do with just how “difficult” the pursuit of higher education can be, especially when the person is the first one in their family to attempt it. The second implication relates to the amount of financial effort and sacrifice that is needed to persevere through such a long and “difficult” academic journey.

However, when the right support systems are in place, the academic journey from high school to a higher education institution can be seamless and enjoyable. However, not every student in this study had a seamless transition from high school to college, nor an enjoyable experience. Perhaps that could also explain the low numbers of Hispanic male students who actually attempt to pursue and finish a university degree.

From the university staff participants’ point of view, they knew that some of these students were working part or full-time jobs, and were the first ones in their family to seek a higher education, but did not see the need to reach out to them to see if they needed additional support or services. Some of the university staff felt that as long as the university provided support systems in the form of available resources and services, that the rest was up to the students, if they really wanted “extra” support. Not all staff agreed with this statement. Ed, a Hispanic staff participant and university Academic Advisor disagreed, and added that “For some Hispanic male students, seeking out help when needed may begin as early as making the decision to pursue a higher education and meeting with an academic advisor to discuss a degree plan.” According to Ed, “Meeting with an academic advisor is especially important for those students who might be the first ones in their family to attend a higher-learning institution because they may lack the necessary knowledge to navigate this academic journey successfully.”

Some Hispanic university staff also brought up the “machismo” term and explained to the rest of the university staff participants that asking for help as a Hispanic

male is not as easy as it sounds. In fact, one of the participants, Max, STEM Program Director, mentioned how he always tried to hire Hispanic male mentors who could provide support to Hispanic males who might be having a difficult time with school, but who refused to ask for help because of their cultural “machismo.” Max also mentioned how he “Focuses on increasing the number of Hispanic Males in STEM careers. So, he has made it a priority to hire peer mentors that were also Hispanic males in order to sort of help with that.” In this particular case, Vygotsky’s (1978) socio-cultural constructivism theory, which focuses on how adults and peers can influence learning, but also on how cultural beliefs and attitudes can influence how learning occurs, can be applied to explain how some Hispanic male students may refuse to ask for help, while other adults do what they can to provide the help via-Hispanic mentors that can better understand the culture of the Hispanic male students.

In summary, it was evident that the Hispanic male students that participated in this study, not only knew the value of a higher education, but also knew that all the extra personal and school responsibilities would make it a real challenge. Nevertheless, just as they had always been told, they tried to figure things out on their own, despite the fact that there were available resources and services readily available to them. It was also obvious, that not all of the university staff were aware of just how difficult it can be for a Hispanic male to reach out and ask for help. Some even suggested that “you can take the horse to the water, but you cannot make him drink it.” These comments were seen as insensitive by other staff members, especially those who were of Hispanic descent. As Anna, a Hispanic university staff mentioned: “Things have to be done differently. It has to be done in a way they can take it, just like hiding the vegetables in your kids’ food.”

Unspoken Cultural Expectations for Hispanic Male Students

In addition to having a difficult time asking for help, Hispanic males are also expected to fulfill specific, but unspoken cultural expectations as the “men” in their family. These unspoken cultural expectations are never to be questioned and formed part of every Hispanic male student participant’s home life. According to research, it is customary for Hispanic males to enter the workforce as soon as they can, and most of them do so before they even graduate from high school (Medina & Posadas, 2012; Roche et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2016). A study participant, Sergio, mentioned how he felt pressured to help his parents financially when he got a job and started college because they would often say things such as: “Algún día, tú nos vas a sacar de la pobreza” which translates to: “Someday, you will take us out of poverty.” Sergio also expressed how this made him feel honored and stressed out all at the same time.

Diego and Sergio, who formed part of the first focus group, agreed that, culturally speaking, Hispanic males are expected to be the “breadwinners” in their families while Hispanic women are often expected to become housewives. Diego remarked, “Perhaps, this is why so many Hispanic males only think about making money as soon as they can, instead of seeing college as another possible and even better option.” Hispanic families often support their children’s decisions to get a full-time job, because this means that their children might be able to help out the family with everyday finances and responsibilities (Roche et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2016). However, if the Hispanic males decide to only work part-time or postpone getting a job in order to seek a higher education, their family may not show the same support (Wang et al., 2016).

Having to choose between school and family responsibilities can create a dilemma for Hispanic males who may feel obligated to fulfill their cultural expectations as men, and who also know the value of a higher education degree, even if their family

does not understand that concept. Choosing school over family can mean that Hispanic males who decide to be the first ones in their family to attend college after high school may do so with fewer support systems, but far more family responsibilities, than other male college students whose families might see higher education differently (Becerra, 2012; Ceballo et al., 2012; Roche et al., 2012; Santiago et al., 2014; Turcios-Cotto & Milan, 2013; Wang et al., 2016). Fortunately, Diego decided that he would not postpone his higher education in order to get a full-time job and help his family. He saw the value that a higher education had, and knew that in the long run, he would be able to make more money with a college degree and thus be able to help his family then.

These unspoken cultural expectations have been instilled in the way of thinking and living of some Hispanic males as part of their cultural upbringing (Roche, Ghazarian, & Fernández-Esquer, 2012). Thus, it can be seen that Hispanic males are often held to different expectations when compared to Hispanic females. Family responsibilities are important, and Hispanic children are expected to remain part of the nuclear family as long as possible all the while helping out and figuring out their own life decisions. (Roche et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2016). For many Hispanic males, being able to help their immediate family is an honor and a responsibility because it shows that they are now grown men. (Becerra, 2012; Santiago et al., 2014). Such was the case with Brayan, who came to the U.S. to find a job that would allow him to support his parents and siblings back in Guatemala. Brayan has fulfilled that responsibility while also pursuing a university degree ... “I still have to work full-time to take care of my expenses, to pay for classes, and to send money to my parents in Guatemala so they can take care of the rest of the family ... It’s just the right thing to do.”

As it can be seen, one of the implications of being born a male in a Hispanic family is the ambivalence some Hispanic males feel about committing to pursuing a

university degree for the next four years, or just getting a job to support their family as soon as they graduate from high school. Being able to provide financial support to the family that raised you is especially important when it is a cultural expectation that has been passed down for many generations. (Roche et al., 2012). Deviating from the “family comes first” expectation, although the family may be happy their son is going to college, may also be frowned upon when a Hispanic male puts “college” before “family” (Santiago et al., 2014; Staklis & Horn, 2012; Turcios-Cotto & Milan, 2013). Here, too, one can see how Vygotsky’s theory can explain how the people and culture Hispanic males are surrounded by, end up becoming the very influencers on whether as Hispanic men they put school or family first. Culturally speaking, the family should come first, but many Hispanic males are managing to find the happy medium between these two very important life decisions.

Finally, it seems that one of the roles of a male in a Hispanic family is to provide social and financial support as soon as he can, whether he may want to or not. However, when a Hispanic male may be the one who needs this type of support from the adults in his life, especially while he may be thinking about pursuing a college education, the choice may become much more difficult to make (Wang, Scalise, Barajas-Muñoz, Julio, & Gómez, 2016). Some Hispanic males choose to pursue a higher education, while still working to help support their family, even if they are not the only male in such family. Thus, although Brayan is the youngest of six brothers, he is still expected to help out his family in Guatemala. He does so without questioning this unspoken cultural expectation. According to Brayan, “Guatemala’s economy is really bad, and jobs are scarce, which means that there is a lot of poverty.”

The Hispanic male students, that shared how they were already contributing, financially to their families, did so without really complaining. They also saw these

unspoken expectations as part of their culture, which is also what they have seen since they were little. This goes along with Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory, which states that the true purpose of the development of thinking is not from the individual to the social or group, but from the social or group to the individual. Thus, the student's family is the social or group that has influenced the way of thinking of the Hispanic males in their family. Vygotsky also stated that the people and culture that surrounds the individual, influences their higher order thinking, cultural beliefs and attitudes. Thus, when Hispanic male students think of themselves as "breadwinners" it is because their family, as a group, have influenced this cultural belief.

The university staff were aware that some of these Hispanic males also held jobs while attending university classes. However, not every staff member knew that it was part of the unspoken cultural expectations to which most Hispanic males are held, whether they like it or not. Discussing how these unspoken cultural expectations may affect the amount of time that the students spend at the university, and/or enjoying the university life, helped some university staff members understand why these Hispanic males are not as involved in school clubs or organizations as other students might be.

This discussion, about the unspoken cultural expectations, may have also shed a light on why the Hispanic male students may not be aware of the many resources and services that the university has available for them. As one of the university staff members stated, "We are dealing with "PCP" students here, that is to say that they go from the "Parking lot" to "Class" and then back to the "Parking lot" to be on their way to their job or their family responsibilities.

In summary, it may be not that the Hispanic males do not want to take advantage of the services and resources provided by their university, but rather it must be the awareness of such resources and services, and their availability at times that work better

for “PCP” students. Also, if these Hispanic males did not have other “responsibilities” outside of their university life, perhaps they might spend more time at the university and thus take advantage of the many services, resources, and organizations created just for them. It must also be noted, that not everyone has a choice of whether they will work and attend higher education classes, or just go to school and not work. This is an unspoken expectation that has caused some Hispanic males to make very difficult decisions when it comes to their family life, and their personal life. More discussions need to take place in order to help more Hispanic male students who might be on the “fence” about whether to just join the workforce, attend college, or do both.

The Feeling of “Belonging” for Hispanic Males

The academic environment that students are in may have a profound impact on a student’s sense of belonging and academic success (Villareal & Santiago, 2012). Minority students who feel supported in college are more satisfied with their campus experience and are also more likely to engage in extra-curricular school activities because they feel like they “belong.” (Hurtado, Cuellar, & Guillermo-Wann, 2011). According to Cuellar (2014) when it comes to college experiences, negative experiences related to a school campus’ climate can negatively affect Hispanic students’ academic self-concept. It has been suggested that Hispanic students often enter Hispanic-serving Institutions (HSIs) with lower self-perceptions of their academic abilities, compared to their peers attending other institutions (Cuellar, 2014). Hence, it is important for university staff to make every effort possible to ensure that their students feel like they truly “belong” at the university in which they are matriculated. Luis, a second-generation immigrant and a traditional-aged junior when this study took place, pointed out how his experience at the local junior college had been a great one. Luis felt like he really “belonged” because

there were a lot of Hispanic students everywhere. Not so much now, though. At this university, Luis mentioned that he does not even see that many Hispanic students in his classes, which are harder classes because they are pre-med courses.

Unfortunately, the majority of the Hispanic male participants, that were interviewed for this study, expressed that they felt as if they did not “belong” at this university for several reasons. Some of the reasons included the faculty, which was not representative of the Hispanic male students as part of the student body. Luis also commented on the lack of Hispanic instructors and how he felt as if he could not ask anyone for any help. He stated how he was “Not used to this type of environment, and how he was struggling with classes and time-management skills but did not know who to ask about helping out.”

Although Luis is attending a Hispanic-serving Institution, and there are support systems and resources in place for him, he did not know anything about the classification of the university or the resources available to him. This may be a direct result of not feeling like he belongs because he does not even know where to turn for help, be it with peers or any other adult. When Luis walks the hallways, he always sees groups of students that are either Indian, Asian, White, or Black, but they keep to themselves. According to Luis, it is almost as if they do not want to be associated with anyone who is not part of their race or ethnic group. The program Luis is in is a very competitive pre-med program, and the students there seldom want their peers to be successful because they want to do better than everybody else. Luis has experienced feeling down, isolated, and even depressed because he does not see that many Hispanics in the program. Luis yearned for a “group” of students that “looked” like him, a group that he could “belong” to and call his own group. Luis also mentioned that when he walks past the elevators, he

gets the same message while looking at all the pictures of former alumni ... “I don’t see anyone that looks like me, or whose name sounds like those in my culture.”

Another reason was the fact that if a Hispanic male student looked or sounded “different” then they were often excluded from classroom conversations, and/or activities. One student participant, in particular, expressed how much it hurt to have classmates laugh at his accent when he was simply asking a question. Such was the case with José, a first-generation immigrant, who felt as if he did not belong at the university he was attending, because of how diverse the student population was when compared to the community college from which he transferred. José transferred from a local community college where he could hear other Hispanic students speaking Spanish in the hallways and in the classrooms. José also had a difficult time relating to other students who did not look like him. More than once, they laughed at his accent, which made José feel completely embarrassed and out of place ... “that’s a reason why I started coming to school at night, to be less “seen.”

Although the university is a diverse mecca of students from all walks of life and races, perhaps more activities need to take place that would address how José and others like him might feel when they do not see themselves in the student body. The challenge would be to offer these activities through the colleges or clubs and at the times that would be appealing to Hispanic male students who may also be working full-time jobs and only have time to go to the university for their classes, and nothing else. Another point that was discovered was how the number of Hispanic males was larger at local community colleges, but then got smaller at local universities. This could also mean that Hispanic males are only pursuing careers that only take two years to complete, or who are not continuing their higher education due to factors related to time, money, or “outside” responsibilities.

José also mentioned the community college that he came from, and how Spanish was always heard and seen everywhere he walked, something that he has not seen nor heard since he transferred to his new university. Situations where students are excluded, are made to feel different and excluded, or laughed at because they have an accent should not be taking place anywhere, especially at a higher-learning institution that has been designated as a Hispanic-serving Institution (HSI) since 2010. Although José did not mention it at first, he later shared how much it bothered him to feel as an “outsider” ... Someone who just does not belong where he is. He said, “I don’t think that I belong here yet, but it’s ok because that makes me want to pursue my goals even more. ... I just want to get done with school and get out of here.” José seemed to resent how he has been made to feel by other students. He also recalled how he felt like he “belonged at the community college he attended, but not here.” José shared how a higher education was very important for to him and to his family. José agreed that this school was great when it came to meeting his academic needs, but not so much his social needs. José really wants to feel like he is a part of this university, like he belongs, but it’s just a bit harder. He shared that he did not even know what made it harder ... he was still trying to figure it out.

Being designated as a Hispanic-serving Institution (HSI) means that these colleges and universities should provide essential support services, inclusive learning environments and engaging experiences for Hispanic students on campus to ensure the completion of a college degree in a timely and enjoyable manner. Once the researcher explained that being an HSI entails more than just enrolling Hispanic students; it was agreed that more needs to be done to improve the communication between departments, and in turn be able to service this particular student population more effectively. The university should also take the time to understand why Hispanic males feel the way they

feel when they feel like they do not “belong” at a university that specifically caters to Hispanics. Perhaps if everyone who participated in this study understood a bit better the fact that the Hispanic culture, and Hispanic males in general, tend to be very private with their own struggles and personal lives, have had a different cultural upbringing, and often feel like they do not “belong”... things might be a lot better for these young Hispanic men.

From the perspective of the university staff, Anna and Sonia from academic advising, were aware that some of the Hispanic males did not feel welcomed at their offices, but other university staff did not even know that this was a Hispanic-serving Institution (HSI). Joe, from student success services, Leo, from career services, and Amy, from the office of sponsored programs, just thought that perhaps Hispanic male students were “introverts” by nature and that is why they did not engage in university life as much as other student groups. Ed, Anna, and Sonia, from academic advising, also noted that a lot of these Hispanic male students held jobs, and only came to the university to attend classes before leaving to go home or to go to work. Amy, from the office of sponsored programs, and Ian, from the math center, failed to even make the connection that perhaps these Hispanic male students did not “hang around” because they did not feel welcomed and did not feel comfortable in the environment in which they took their classes.

Not feeling like one belongs at their own university could have detrimental consequences, especially if, based on Bandura’s (1977) social-cognitive theory, the observational learning, life experiences, and reciprocal determinism will have an impact on one’s personality. Here the life experiences of Hispanic male students who do not feel like they belong, could negatively impact the individual’s attitudes, abilities, and cognitive skills necessary to successfully complete a university degree. According to Albert Bandura (1977) self-efficacy is an individual’s belief in his or her ability to

succeed in any situation, including higher education, but if the students are feeling like they do not belong at their own university, then they might soon start thinking that they are not capable of succeeding at a social or academic level, and could actually think about even dropping out of school.

In summary, a Hispanic-serving Institution should do a great deal more to make its Hispanic students feel welcomed and valued. Perhaps more focus groups need to take place, where Hispanics students are asked how they feel as a student at their university, and what else can be done to ensure that they truly feel like they belong at an institution designated as a Hispanic-serving Institution. As a minority group, Hispanics are a majority in terms of numbers in the local area. However, they often feel as “second-class” citizens and awkward in situations where they might feel as if they do not belong. Lastly, the “private” demeanor of the Hispanic community in a university setting, might be seen as “complacent” and even acceptable. However, just because the Hispanic males are not voicing their feelings it does not mean that everything is alright, and that nothing needs to change ... or improve.

Perseverance, Hope, and Grit in Hispanic Males

The Hispanic males that were interviewed for this study, all showed perseverance, hope and grit. Although some Hispanic males were traditional-aged Hispanic male students, the fact that they had decided to become the first ones in their family to pursue a higher-education degree showed their perseverance. This also showed that although the adults in their family might not have gone on to college, they still recognized the value of a college education and decided to pursue one after completing high school. Being the first one in their family to pursue a college education, and perhaps even lacking the support of role models and mentors, left these Hispanic male students with nothing else

but “hope” while they embarked on a journey that would take them through uncharted waters.

Such was the case for Alex whose only advice from his family was a warning to never borrow any money or incur any type of debt. After the lack of support from his family, Alex was left with no other choice but to work to pay his own way through college. Working full-time, and only paying for the classes that he could afford, meant that it would take Alex longer to finish his academic career. In fact, the two-year associate’s degree that Alex pursued, took him four years to complete, but he persevered and accomplished his goal. Alex’s experience would have been different if he had received more support from his family, his school counselors, and even his professors. If only Alex had known about the financial aid process, perhaps he would have finished sooner. Unfortunately, Alex had neither support nor guidance from the adults in his life, but thanks to his determination and grit, he obtained an associate’s degree that would allow him to make a decent living.

The Hispanic males in this study have all struggled through their academic journey but have always kept “hope” alive. If a semester was tough, and they had to drop classes, or take fewer classes because of financial restraints or poor performance, they always hoped that the following semester would be better. If these Hispanic males did not make enough money, for the month, to take back home to their families, they always hoped that the next work week would be better. If these Hispanic males endured ridicule, and racism because of the way they looked or their accent, they always hoped that the next person they met, would be more respectful and open-minded. Hope is always what these Hispanic males have all hung on to, especially when they felt that it would be easier to just give up. However, through the strength of their character, their “grit” ... they have all decided to defy the odds and continued on their pursuit of a higher education.

Such was Brayan's case, who as a 33-year-old senior pursuing a Business degree, is still working full-time to pay his way through college and send money to his family back in Guatemala. Brayan is, not only an example of hope, perseverance and grit, but also an example to his younger siblings who might one day see a higher education as a possibility, thanks to Brayan's sacrifices. Although Brayan immigrated to the United States to find a job, he also found the opportunity learn enough English to attend college and pursue his own dream of earning a college degree. It has not been easy, but through hard work, and unwavering grit, he has managed to live his dream and to make his family proud. As he stated: "In my own country I tried to enter the university after I graduated from high school, but the cost was too high, and I simply could not afford it."

Brayan has persevered for several years, and always hoped that "things" would get better. Having hope is very important for Brayan, especially when he has had to juggle work, school, and family responsibilities. Brayan has never lost hope that one day he will be a university graduate. He has not forgotten how he felt when he first realized that he would not be able to attend the university in his native Guatemala. However, immigrating to the U.S. not only provided Brayan with a job, but it also gave him the opportunity to learn English, and pursue his dream of attending a higher-learning institution. It has taken him longer than it usually takes, and even though he is a non-traditional student, the only thing that matters to Brayan is the fact that he will soon graduate with a Bachelor's in Business. As Brayan recalls ... "Thinking about how long it's taken me, but the fact that I have come so far, makes me smile ... makes me proud of myself."

Grit, the courage to overcome any obstacles and to achieve the set goal is what has also kept these Hispanic male students on their paths. For these Hispanic male students, becoming the first one in their family to graduate with a university degree, or to

be a first-generation immigrant with a U.S. higher education degree is what has kept them focused and determined. Such was Daniel's story. According to Daniel, his family immigrated to the U.S. from Mexico in search of a better life. As a first-generation immigrant, Daniel had to learn English as his second language, and he soon became acculturated enough to succeed in school. However, the lack of work caused Daniel's family to move around quite often, and this eventually affected Daniel's academic journey. So much so that by his senior year in high school, Daniel was in danger or not graduating with the rest of his senior class. The lack of stability in Daniel's life did not keep Daniel from persevering and taking matters into his own hands. Daniel hoped that things would get better, but eventually he had to leave his family, at the age of 17, to get his own apartment and be able to attend college without any interruptions caused by his family.

These Hispanic male students knew it would not be easy, but they also knew that they would do everything within their power to achieve the goal of a higher education. They have doubted themselves; they have fallen but always got back up, they have also failed ... but they have never thought about giving in and quitting. Thus, through the strength of their character, they know that they will one day achieve the goal they set out to achieve, a higher-education degree. As José recounts how he once put his higher education on a slower track, but he never thought about stopping completely. He jokes about the possibility of his younger brothers passing him up, but that would just make him even more proud of where they were and where they are now. According to José, there was a point in his life when work became too much and he even thought about taking a break from school but did not. Instead, José just took fewer classes, but he persevered. José is glad that he pushed through with his education, because while doing so, he was also setting a good example for his younger siblings. José's younger siblings

did not have to work, like José, to help the family out. They simply finished high school and went straight into college ... they might even graduate before José because they never had to just take one or two classes, like José did. José expressed how seeing his younger siblings graduate with a university degree would make him and his parents very happy, even if they graduate before him, because they are very smart, and he expect them to do well. As José stated, “When one of us succeeds, the entire family succeeds ... you know, because we never gave up together.”

Although not every Hispanic male student had a support system in their family, those who did were grateful about it. The Hispanic males knew that their family was proud of them, no matter what, and they also knew that they were setting a precedence for others in their families to follow. According to Vygotsky (1978), the true purpose of the development of thinking is not from the individual to the social or group, but from the social or group to the individual. Thus, when these Hispanic male students were thinking about their success, they were thinking as a unit because it truly would affect the entire family when they graduated with a university degree. The family either falls apart or stays together through whatever life may bring, but they do so as a family. This way of thinking is what provides these Hispanic male students with the extra bit of grit and perseverance needed to achieve their goal of attaining a university degree.

From the university staff point of view, they have all seen the determination and hard work that Hispanics, especially Hispanic males, put into each of their classes. They know that they are dedicated, and that even if it takes them longer than other students, that they will eventually “get it done.” However, it is not about how these students show perseverance, hope, and grit; it is about how the university staff can proactively reach out to these Hispanic male students so that they succeed the first time around. Having perseverance, having, hope, and having grit are three great personal attributes to have, but

only when all the other resources and services have been exhausted. Otherwise, resources and services are being wasted due to the lack of awareness and/or use. Additionally, there might be Hispanic males who may lack these personal traits, but who really want to attend college and obtain a university degree. Should they not have the same opportunities as other students? This is why the services and resources that the university provides were created to help those who need the “extra” help.

In summary, Hispanic male students know that a higher education is important, and that achieving a university degree will make them more marketable in a global economy. However, having an awareness of the support systems available to students is of utmost importance if these students are to be successful while completing a university degree. This is especially important because, as it has already been noted, most Hispanic male students are also expected to fulfill specific “family” expectations due to their culture and their gender. Also, it is important that these Hispanic males feel like they truly “belong” at the higher-learning institution in which they have matriculated. Feeling like they “belong” will positively impact their academic journey and increase their social and academic development. Additionally, we should not confuse perseverance, hope, and grit as support systems that Hispanic males can always rely on. The actual support systems must be provided in order to make these students’ academic journey as seamless and as enjoyable as possible.

Lastly, the university staff should truly take the time to reach out to those students who might lack support systems in their life. This is especially important, now that we know more about Hispanic male students, for staff members in positions where they can create programs to “reach-out” and deliberately target the students that need the extra “push” but who have a difficult time asking for help and might eventually just give up. Cultural sensitivity could also be developed to a higher level in order to see more than

just a student in the classroom, staff should also see a human being with a personal story that might either hinder their academic success or just make it that much more meaningful. An accent when one person speaks, should not be seen as a negative factor, but as the fact that that person has made an effort to learn a second language to better their life. In the end, revisiting how we see Hispanic male students is a win-win situation for we would be providing the support and guidance that these students need, and we would also be contributing to the graduation rates of the institution the students attend.

What perceptions do Hispanic males have about the impact of their lived experiences both within and external to the academic environment on their pursuit of a college education?

Support Systems for Hispanic Males

Although most university degrees take four to five years to complete, not every Hispanic male student interviewed for this qualitative study seemed to be within that time frame, due to various lived experiences. Initially, the researcher thought that it was normal for any student to not finish a university degree within four to five years, but soon found out that a possible factor contributing to this situation was, perhaps, a lack of available support systems for Hispanic males. At first, the researcher had only sought to interview traditional-aged undergraduate Hispanic male students. A traditional-aged undergraduate student is one who enrolls in college immediately after graduation from high school, pursues college studies on a continuous full-time basis, at least during the fall and spring semesters, and completes a bachelor's degree program in four or five years at the age of 22 or 23 (Center for Institutional Effectiveness, 2004). However, after it was discovered that not all the Hispanic male student participants in this study fell under the traditional-aged undergraduate student category, the study was expanded to include non-traditional-aged students. Generally, non-traditional-aged students are those

who are 24 years of age and older, who are still pursuing a university degree, who are attending classes on a part-time or full-time basis and might also be working a part of full-time job (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015).

The majority of the Hispanic male students interviewed for this study revealed personal experiences where they were always expected to figure things out for themselves, if they were men. This was the case with Alex, who was the youngest of six siblings, but who never had any type of support systems, neither at home nor at school, where college was mentioned as a viable option after high school. Alex first thought about pursuing a higher education after he heard his peers talking about it. Based on Alex's experience of attending a high school where the majority of the students were part of a higher SES than him, and thus college bound, Alex first heard about college as an option after completing high school.

According to Alex's experience, it seemed that the lack of support systems, for Hispanic males, started even before they finished high school. Some support systems were missing at their own home, and some at their high schools. Such was also the case with Francisco, who works full-time at his family's landscaping company and attends school at night. Francisco is a Business Management major and plans to open his own landscaping business after he graduates. Although he was not told he should go to college by his high school counselors or his family, he decided to do so on his own. Francisco's parents are not college-educated, and they never enforced the idea of going to college after graduating from high school. Francisco's high school teachers just suggested he should go to college, but never really offered to help with the application process which was very intimidating for Francisco.

The implications of not having specific support systems, or mentors to guide Hispanic males on to seeking a higher education can be long-lasting. Not having any type

of guidance can hinder the transition between high school and college for Hispanic males who may want to pursue an education beyond high school. Thus, it is important for adults and students to engage in conversations where the young Hispanic males may see a higher education as not only an option, but an expectation in order to reach their full potential. Parents do not need to have a college education to encourage their children to pursue a higher education. The simple sharing of their financial struggles due to a lack of a college education could be enough to encourage their child to want to do better. As educators, it is our job and our duty to also encourage all students to seek a higher education, regardless of gender, cultural background, and/or SES. Developing a mentor-like relationship with Hispanic male students would be greatly beneficial for these young men, before and after they graduate from high school.

Some study participants did have a support system at home, and it made a big difference as far as being a traditional-aged student and on track to finish a university degree by the age of 24. Such was the case with Paul, who was a 23-year-old senior at the time of the study, and a first-generation immigrant when the data were collected. Paul is a Biology major and stated that his parents and his older sister often encouraged him to pursue a college education after high school. According to Paul, his family often told him that having a college education would “Make things easier and would provide more opportunities for his future ... it would also bring more stability to his life.”

Another student participant whose lived experiences drove him to see a higher education as an option to explore was Diego. As a young 18-year-old freshmen, Diego was pursuing a degree in Computer Engineering at the time these data were collected. Both of Diego’s parents encouraged him to go to college by saying it would make his life much easier. Diego remembers thinking: “My dad works at a refinery in 100 degrees-plus weather, where it’s dangerous and he must work 12-hour shifts to earn the money

necessary to take care of his family.” Diego stated that he also wants to make enough money to take care of his family someday, but he definitely wants to do it through a career that is safer than that of his dad’s.

Another student who greatly benefited from having a strong support system in his entire family was Andres. Andres was a 23-year-old junior pursuing a degree in Chemistry at the time this study took place. Andres credits his desire to go to college to several people in his family. According to Andres, ever since he was very young, everyone in his family always told him that he would go to college. He was also a member of The National Hispanic Institute, which also encouraged him to pursue a higher education after high school. Discussing higher education was a normal topic all around Andres, so eventually it was just a matter of “when” and not “if” he went to college.

Last, there was Sergio, who was a 21-year-old sophomore pursuing a degree in Computer Engineering when the data were collected. Sergio is an only child and credits his participation in the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) throughout high school for his college readiness. AVID is a non-profit program that helps schools shift to a more equitable and student-centered approach through trainings geared towards closing the opportunity gap. AVID teachers prepare students for college readiness, careers, and life (www.avid.org). Sergio felt very lucky to have supportive teachers who, from the very beginning, asked him what his plans were after he graduated from high school. The same teachers went even further than just asking the “question.” Sergio’s AVID teachers required that he research the career and specific path that would get him to where he wanted to be in five years after graduating from high school.

As it can be seen, the results are far more beneficial for Hispanic male students when there are support systems and mentors available to discuss the attainment of a

college education. Talking about it, both at home and at school, made the topic less taboo and more “normal.” Also, the stress of applying for college, applying for financial aid, deciding on a degree and the corresponding steps to achieve such degree, are all dealt with in a productive and safer manner. The implications for students who have a support system, a mentor, or a program such as AVID, are not only better but also long-lasting. These Hispanic male students may pass on their own knowledge and experiences to other family members and friends. All in all, it just required people to take the time to “talk” about higher education as a viable option, and the rest of the pieces fell into place.

Unspoken Expectations for Hispanic Males

The Hispanic males, that participated in this study, felt that life had already prepared them for “challenging” situations. It is not that they enjoyed having “challenges” in their lives, but they had already endured plenty of things and knew that things always “got better.” They knew that all the men in their families had always been held to different standards and expectations just because they were men and thus did not expect to be treated any differently now. However, they also knew that seeking a higher education would entail an extra set of responsibilities in addition to the ones that their family would impose on them. As a result, these Hispanic males learned to “juggle” with their personal/family expectations and responsibilities, as well as their university responsibilities.

According to the first student focus group, the family size in which Hispanic males live and their parents’ backgrounds and experiences seem to play an important role on how some Hispanic male students see higher education. It seems that when the Hispanic family is small, and the parents are educated at a high school level or higher, the expectations placed on the Hispanic male change and may often include the pursuit of an education past high school. When the Hispanic family is not small, and the parents did

not have an opportunity to pursue a higher education, the expectations for the Hispanic male may be different and these expectations may or may not include the pursuit of a higher education. Although the expectations seem to be affected by the size of the family in which the Hispanic male lives, the lack of family and economic support systems seem to cause the individual to struggle with his decision to pursue and complete a college education. Lack of family and economic support systems can be seen through the comments made which seem to paint a “higher education” as something meant for “other cultures” or something that is carefully guarded and only meant for a special few.

It seems, based on the responses of the Hispanic male participants, that the size and educational level of their family directly dictates whether they can pursue a higher education or not. However, this is also the same way of thinking reflected on how some Hispanic males think that a higher education is only meant for other cultures or people who have the economic means. Having this type of mentality, is not only wrong, but it also perpetuates the belief that education is only for those who are “smart” or have money. The right to an education is a civil right, and as a minority group, Hispanics need to collectively start claiming their right to advance through the attainment of a college degree. Every single family member in a Hispanic household should talk about higher education, their right to a higher education, and the ways in which they will support each other to achieve this goal.

So, if the parents did not go to college, it is unfortunate. This does not mean that their children have to follow in their same footsteps. So, a family member started going to college but dropped out because it was too difficult and very expensive. That is also unfortunate, but it does not mean that the same will happen to them, or that financial aid will not be provided through programs specifically created for Hispanic students. So, according to Sergio, it is hard to find support in the extended family, especially when the

decision to pursue a higher education goes against what the rest of his cousins are doing. That is also unfortunate, but the family is not the only place where a support system can be found. Based on Sergio's experiences, it is hard to pursue a higher education because as a Hispanic culture, we do not value higher education like other cultures do. That is unfortunate, but the students can be the first one to value higher education enough to make it a priority and question the status quo in which you grew up. So, it has been ingrained in our brains that higher education is something not worth investing in, money or timewise. It is as if it is only for some, but not for everyone. So be it, but at least start the process and set small achievable goals until you find out for yourself if what has been ingrained in your brain is actually true. Lastly, Hispanics see higher education as a type of Holy Grail ... not everyone can drink from it. That is a lie.

So, as long as these Hispanic men are part of their culture, little will ever change. That is not the same as accepting the status quo. Not at all. Hispanic men need to give a "voice" to what they are feeling when specific expectations are placed on them, especially if these expectations are getting in the way of their personal and academic life. A Hispanic male is not a "superhero" who can do it all. A Hispanic male is just like any other human being, with needs, wants, dreams, and limits. This paradigm shift will take time to execute, but it needs to happen if we want more Hispanic males to pursue a higher education without feeling like they have to choose family over their own education. The families of these Hispanic men, siblings, parents, and significant others, must also recognize that Hispanic males have the right to put themselves first, in order to later be better able to take care of their loved ones. Again, this is going to necessitate a deep look into the Hispanic culture, and how Hispanic men are seen, but it can be done.

Feeling of Belonging for Hispanic Males

The majority of the Hispanic males that were interviewed for this study all came from close-knit families where they felt like they “belonged.” They knew that they were an integral part of the family, and that because they are men, they had a special place. The same was not the case when it came to their experiences at the college or university level. Due to various reasons, they just felt as if they did not “belong” as members of the student body at their school. It is not that they did not want to belong, it was just difficult to commit the time to enjoy the university life, especially when they had other family and job responsibilities to take care of. They expressed that they wished they felt more like a family, almost like some of them did while they were attending community college and classes and buildings were smaller.

Andres and Arturo were two third-generation students who shared how they did not feel like they belonged. By now, it seemed as if this trend of “not fitting in” or “belonging” could be directly related to the fact that these students were either first or second-generation students who may be traditional or non-traditional pupils, but such was not the case. Andres and Arturo also stated, “I don’t feel like I belong because although you see some Hispanics students in the hallways or in your classes, you don’t hear or see your Hispanic culture.” Andres shared how he grew up in a local community, which is a very Hispanic place, and added that if his university was in fact a Hispanic-serving Institution, then it should reflect that. However, when Andres comes to this university, he sees more Arabic students than Hispanic ones. Although Andres does not speak Spanish himself, he stated that he would want to hear it in the hallways or in the classroom once in a while to truly feel like this is a Hispanic-serving Institution.

Arturo agreed with Andres by mentioning how he has taken a couple of classes at another university that was an HSI, and how he could tell right away that it was a

Hispanic-serving Institution. He also agreed that at this university, Middle Eastern students were more noticeable than Hispanic students. Arturo also shared how when he is out and about in community, almost all the businesses have signs that are written in two languages ... English and Spanish. It tells him that his culture is valued, and so is he. However, coming to this university, according to Arturo, has been definitely more than a culture shock.

For the Hispanic males who participated in this study, venturing out of their communities to attend the university was a challenge and uncomfortable experience. They often felt like a “fish out of water” and thought they would be fine once they were surrounded by more people that looked like them. However, they did not see themselves in their professors, nor in the rest of the student body. They also looked for signs that would tell them they were welcomed ... signs written in English and Spanish, or at least bulletin boards with a representation of their culture. They did not find either and decided to just “blend” in and just go to class. What this means is that as a Hispanic-serving Institution, this university could do more to “lift” the Hispanic presence and validate them as an important customer. Feeling like we belong somewhere, usually makes us want to go back and become “repeat” customers.

On the other hand, if as a Hispanic male student, who may already be beating the odds of attending a higher education institution, you do not feel like you belong ... the entire academic experience changes and may even become a factor for dropping out. Additionally, if Hispanic males do not feel welcomed, and they just go to the university to attend classes and then leave to go home immediately after, then they are not going to form part of any school organizations. As a result, they will miss out on the opportunity to not only network with other people, but also on the opportunity to find out about all the great services and programs this university has to offer. As it was mentioned before, a

lack of awareness about the services and programs available to students in general, but specifically to Hispanic males, is very important in assuring the social and academic success of the student body while they complete their education.

Perseverance, Hope, and Grit in Hispanic Males

The Hispanic males that formed part of this study were truly remarkable. Each of their stories was not only engaging, but also inspiring. The majority of the students were first-generation college students, and some were also first-generation immigrants in the United States. All of the students had had to persevere at one point or another in their life, and it had made them that much stronger as human beings. For those that were first-generation immigrants in the United States, “hope” had always played an important role in their life. They had left their native country because of economic and political turmoil and had always “hoped” life would be better in their new country, the United States. They were all ready to work as hard as it was necessary to make sure their life would be better. For all of them, this included seeking and completing a higher education. The journey has not been easy for any of them, but all of them know that they have made the right decision and will make sure they do not stop until they graduate with a university degree.

For some Hispanic males, when things get “tough” and they feel like giving up, they find inspiration and hope in the example and experiences of their parents. As Luis stated how he will always remember how his dad raised him as a single parent, and how his dad continued going to college so Luis could see him graduate. The lesson in perseverance has stuck with Luis ever since and that is the reason why Luis is also pursuing a higher education. He often tells himself ... “If my dad did it, so can I.” So far, things have gone fairly well for Luis. However, not all of the students had an easy time while going to college the first time around. Nevertheless, and because they had already

seen their parents struggle in life, they decided to persevere. As Javier stated how his dad had only completed his GED but ended up becoming a college ‘drop-out’ soon after attempting to get a higher education. Although Javier’s entire family, on his mom’s side, encouraged him to go to college, he allowed himself to fall between the cracks by not having good studying habits and by partying too much. Javier mentioned that he did not want to be like his father, so he returned to higher education via-community college. He hoped he would do better the second time around and promised himself he would persevere and take his school responsibilities more seriously this time.

Hope, for Hispanic males, is more about faith and the belief that things will only get better. Without hope, they would be missing a very important part of their cultural upbringing and of their identity. Perseverance, in the form of not giving up, is what has kept these Hispanic males from quitting altogether when their academic journey seems to be taking so long. They persevere when they are too tired from working a full-time job and still have to stay up late to study or complete school assignments. What perseverance means to these Hispanic males is respecting the commitment they have made to better themselves. Lastly, grit is just how strong their character is while pursuing a specific goal ... a university degree. They hope they make it from one class to the next, they persevere through exhaustion and frustration, and their grit is what keeps their eyes fixed on the final goal, a university degree.

The university staff were aware that some of these Hispanic male students were first-generation college students, but fewer university staff members knew that some were first-generation immigrant students or even the reasons why they had immigrated. Immigrating to another country or deciding to be the first ones in the family to pursue a higher education takes perseverance, hope, and definitely grit. The researcher believes that if university staff knew how much some of these students have already persevered,

their perceptions about their work, performance, and personality would be greatly impacted, allowing them to provide better services to these students.

This is an area where there is an abysmal disconnect between the services and resources available to Hispanic male students, and these two groups of students, the first-generation college students and the first-generation immigrant students. The needs of the first-generation immigrant students are different from the needs of the first-generation college students. Both Hispanic male students have specific needs, but the way these services and resources are delivered should be different in terms of availability and outreach processes. Also, this type of information, being aware of what students are recent immigrants and what students are first-generation college students, should be available to all university staff that come in contact with Hispanic male students to ensure that specific groups such as these, do not fall between the cracks.

In summary, Hispanic males' decision to pursue a higher education can be affected by the right support systems, or the lack thereof. The unspoken cultural expectations placed on Hispanic males can also have a detrimental effect on whether they pursue and complete a college education. Additionally, while pursuing a college education, feeling like you "belong" can make the difference on how involved you are in school and all that the university has to offer. Lastly, for Hispanic males, having hope that things always get better, persevering through difficult times, and having grit while you reach your goal will be essential personal attributes needed to successfully graduate with a university degree. The experiences of the student participants have played a very important role on how they will eventually graduate with a university degree. Albert Bandura's (1977) social-cognitive theory, which focuses on observational learning, life experiences, and reciprocal determinism can definitely be seen throughout the life experiences of the study participants. They have learned valuable lessons, they have

persevered, but most importantly, they have remained determined as they reach their goal of graduating with a university degree.

What perceptions do university staff have about Hispanic males seeking a higher education and what Hispanic males must do in order to achieve their goal?

Support Systems

Unfortunately, the majority of the university staff felt that they were already doing enough in relation to helping Hispanic male students pursuing and completing a higher education and the support needed to achieve this goal. The university staff thought that by having resources and services available through the university, that the rest was up to the students in order to be successful, academically and socially. However, there were also university staff members who thought that more could and should be done. As Al, Director of Disability Services, shared how he believed that as a staff we need to first recognize and understand what it means to be a Hispanic-serving Institution.

Unfortunately, there is not a whole lot of information on what a Hispanic-serving Institution is supposed to look like. Until we understand what a Hispanic-serving Institution is, we are doing a disservice to our Hispanic student population. As a staff, we also need to become knowledgeable about the services and programs that are available in each department to address and institute what is missing.

Another university staff that thought that more could and should be done was of Hispanic descent and understood the Hispanic culture much better than the rest of the university staff study participants. Sonia, a Senior Academic Advisor, alluded to how the staff needs to approach Hispanic students with “the type of empathy necessary to see “beyond” where our students are, and what they need to get them to where they need to be.” Al agreed with Sonia and added how communication between departments has been a challenge and that the departments seemed to be working as separate silos with their

own services and programs. Al also added how he believed that as a university, we need to create more cross collaboration, have more communication, to make sure that all of us are on the same page.

Not knowing what a Hispanic-serving Institution is, or what it is supposed to look like really poses a problem for the staff and the Hispanic students who could be benefitting from the university at a higher level. As long as the staff continue to work as separate silos, the lines of communication between departments will continue to be fragmented and many services and programs will be underused. Also, the sentiments expressed about the university already doing enough could be regarded as disdain or indifference towards a population that has been at-risk of failing in their academic journey since they were first enrolled in their education. Cultural diversity seminars, as well as monthly cross-department meetings could greatly improve the way the staff members felt about what is already being done, or what needs to be done. A quarterly report should be produced and shared with every staff and faculty members ...beginning with the president of the university, to ensure collaboration, awareness, and accountability.

Unspoken Expectations

The Hispanic staff were well aware of how the Hispanic culture has different expectations for Hispanic males than it does for Hispanic females. They knew that Hispanic males are raised to keep their feelings “hidden” and to never seem weak by asking for too much help. They knew exactly what the term machismo was all about, and how it can sometimes get in the way of Hispanic males and their social and academic success. As Ed, a Hispanic Academic Advisor, shared the terms “machismo” and “familism” were very familiar to him and that that knowledge helped him understand Hispanic males better when it came to their decisions to pursue a higher education. In

fact, Ed stated how “familism” is always one of the reasons why Hispanic students choose to be commuters and come to this local university ... because they want to stay close to their family ... they are expected to help the family out, and thus ...stay close.

The rest of the university staff, unfortunately, did not comprehend how the Hispanic culture can have such a strong effect on Hispanic males, and what they are expected to do, even if it is not voiced or said out loud. The university staff that were not Hispanic simply thought that Hispanic males were doing “just fine” because they did not always seek out help or visited their offices on a regular basis. The implications of not fully understanding a cultural group of people we are supposed to be providing services for are serious. For one, if we do not understand the Hispanic male students who happen to be our “customers” then we cannot ensure their complete satisfaction with the services they are receiving. Secondly, unhappy “customers” tends to tell other potential customers about the institution they are attending and how unhappy they are, which would deter any future “customers” from even considering this Hispanic-serving Institution. Lastly, it could very easily escalate into the students not attending classes and eventually dropping out, all due to not having their needs met.

Feeling of “Belonging”

All of the university staff members agreed that Hispanic males should reach out and seek help any and all the time they felt “lost.” However, things are easier said than done, especially when Hispanic students have already stated that they felt as if they did not “belong.” Also, making the Hispanic students feel like they “belong” was seen differently by some of the staff participants. As Al, Director of Disability Services, stated how he thought that their Hispanic students felt like they belong because half the professional staff that worked in his department are Hispanic or Latino ... other individuals who look just like them.

To Al, having Hispanic or Latino staff was a way to make Hispanic male students feel as if they “belonged” but failed to realize that it takes more than seeing others who might look just like them. Unfortunately, most of the university staff were not aware that some of the Hispanic males felt as if they did not “belong” and just attributed their “indifference” towards the university life as being “introverts.” Although the university, where this study took place, is a Hispanic-serving Institution, several of the university staff members did not know that fact or what it actually meant. Not knowing that your place of work is a Hispanic-serving Institution says plenty about your commitment to your greatest customer ... the students. Another staff participant was a bit more candid with his response when it came to Hispanic students and feeling like they “belonged.” As Joe, Director of Student Success Services, noted how there are various departments in a cluster, or even throughout the university, that do not have an overarching program that looks to support the Latino students, male or female. Some departments, such as the Office of Student Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion might have some outreach programs for Latino students, but it is not present in every department. We just have a very diverse staff, and that provides the ethnic representation that creates a conduit for more comfort and support, Joe stated.

Al added that he understood the feeling of “belonging” as the ability to integrate well. Al added that to him, feeling like you belong somewhere is “not a matter of how you feel, but more of the ... do they integrate well.” Amy, from the Office of Sponsored Programs, added that she saw Hispanics as being “more independent, and more as loners who work best independently and didn’t mix in with the fray.” Joe, from Student Success Services, added that it is difficult for these students to “belong” when “they don’t stay on campus.” Joe added how these Hispanic males have other responsibilities, so they might be joining our massive population of PCP (parking lot, class, parking lot) students. They

just come here to go to class, and then they walk out. “Belonging” might not be the top thing on their list. They need to work. They need to do other things.

In the end, it was agreed that there was room for improvement when it came to helping Hispanic male students feel like they “belonged.” The first thing that needs to happen, though, is to stop thinking of Hispanics as a submissive and a group of introverts because that is a misconception that can lead to nothing being done to help Hispanic male students feel more welcomed and more comfortable while attending the university and asking for help. Second, things are not always what they seem ... so just because the students are not visiting their offices, or asking for help, does not mean that everything is “just fine.” A concerted effort must be made to rid ourselves of the notion that “everything” is just fine with the Hispanic male students attending this university, especially now that we have more information via-this study.

Perseverance, Hope and Grit

All of the university staff study participants agreed that Hispanic males, in general, possessed the characteristics of perseverance, hope and grit. However, and once again, they seemed to think of these characteristics as part of the primary support system that students would need to rely on first. The researcher felt that although some of the university staff knew that their Hispanic males needed more support and guidance, the majority of the university staff attributed the success of the Hispanic male students on their “work ethic” and perseverance. However, the researcher felt that perseverance, hope, and grit should be part of a secondary support system, and not their only support system available to these Hispanic male students. This is especially important because not every single individual may possess these human characteristics, which are necessary to successfully pursue and complete a university degree.

The researcher interviewed several Hispanic male students, and all of them showed different levels of hope, perseverance and grit. However, just like anything else, these human characteristics have limits and more needs to be available in the form of support and services to ensure that these students reach their full academic and full potential before they have to repeat the same class multiple times before their perseverance runs out and they give up. An implication closely related to hope, perseverance and grit is the financial burden of attending a university for longer than four years. A person may have hope, may persevere, and have grit like no one else on earth, but if the same person is taking a financial hit because he is not being socially and academically successful, they will eventually just give up and drop out altogether.

According to Vygotsky (1978), the true purpose of the development of thinking is not from the individual to the social or group, but from the social or group to the individual. When it comes to the university staff, Vygotsky's theory is very important and relevant. Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural constructivism theory emphasizes the importance of understanding the psychological development of competent individuals by providing, both children and adults, the cultural tools necessary to ensure that society is deliberately producing competent citizens. As university staff, the adults should continue to provide the tools necessary for Hispanic male students to succeed while they pursue a college education. This theory not only focuses on how adults and peers can influence learning, but also on how cultural beliefs and attitudes can influence how learning occurs (Vygotsky, 1978), which is essential while understanding and creating a robust college-bound culture among Hispanic males.

Implications and Recommendations

The implications and recommendations of this study included four emergent themes. Support systems for Hispanic males, unspoken cultural expectations, the feeling

of “belonging” and the importance of perseverance, hope and grit. All four of these emergent themes were examined in order to offer the implications and recommendations. The fact that some university staff did not know that they were working for a Hispanic-serving Institution means that there are more staff that may also be in the dark about the university’s classification. To deal with this issue, it is imperative that the staff undergo a training to explain how this designation was earned and what it means for Hispanic students. This type of information also needs to be shared with the rest of the local communities in which all the university students may reside so that it becomes common knowledge from one end of the spectrum to the next.

The university staff should also receive training in cultural diversity, specifically when it relates to Hispanic males and the cultural “unspoken” expectations to which they are subjected. This would allow the staff to be more empathetic and inclusive when they notice Hispanic male students not engaging with other students. Also, the university staff should undergo training related to how they can do more to help make traditional and nontraditional-aged Hispanic male students feel more “welcomed.” The additional trainings should be based on focus groups where Hispanic male students are actually given the opportunity to express how they feel and how their university can truly make them feel like they “belong.” Not doing so, could drive current and future Hispanic male students away from this Hispanic-serving Institution. Additionally, it is important for university staff and their departments to recognize that not every Hispanic male student possesses the “hope,” perseverance, or grit necessary to complete a college degree all on their own. Thus, outreach programs should be made available for day and nighttime students who may be at-risk of failing academically.

The university’s Student Involvement and Leadership department should also develop specific student and staff activities to increase the awareness of Hispanic

students and their culture at this Hispanic-serving Institution. In fact, the Office of Student Life could spearhead the launch of its first Hispanic Club modeled after the MALES program currently being implemented at Texas A&M University, which not only validates Hispanic students, but also to show its commitment to the Hispanic community. This Hispanic Club would send a strong message, and addition to adding visibility, to the Hispanic students at this institution about their presence and value as a minority group. The Hispanic Club would be a step in the right direction, and would also attract Hispanic, and non-Hispanic, students who might want to learn more about their culture and/or share what they are already proud about.

The university should also reach out to local and state colleges and universities that are designated as Hispanic-serving Institutions to learn about the ways they ensure that the community and the students know that they are a Hispanic-serving Institution. Reaching out to other Hispanic-serving Institutions could also help in the development of new or current programs that can cater to the specific needs of first-generation Hispanic male students, first-generation Hispanic immigrant students, and/or Hispanic students in general. Not reaching out to colleges or universities that have been designated as Hispanic-serving Institutions would create an ever bigger gap between the Hispanic community and the number of Hispanic students that could transfer to this university because it is a commuter campus, but also because its designation as a Hispanic-serving Institution would mean that Hispanic students are not only welcomed, but valued as part of the school community.

Lastly, the university should partner with local high schools to develop mentoring programs where university students and/or instructors can become “friends” with high school juniors and seniors. Developing this type of bond between the high school students and the university students and staff could provide the knowledge needed to

make the transition between these two school that much easier and enjoyable. Perhaps this is something that school counselors and academic advisors and start, and then pass off to the Office of Diversity and Inclusion as their own outreach program. The benefits would include a possible increase and retention of Hispanic male students. Otherwise, the 25 percent number required to be recognized as a Hispanic-serving Institution might continue to dwindle down with the passing years. The university should, in this case, be proactive and do everything possible to increase the enrollment of Hispanic students.

Implications for Future Research

The research study was conducted to provide insight on the experiences and perceptions of Hispanic male students pursuing and completing a higher education degree. This research leaves further considerations in other areas related to the experiences and perceptions of Hispanic male students pursuing and completing a higher education. Since this study mainly focused on the students' perceptions and personal experiences, further research studies should focus on the perceptions and personal experiences of their families, which should include the parents and any sibling(s) that are witnessing the academic journey of the Hispanic male in their family, who is pursuing a higher education.

Additionally, the need for open dialogue between faculty members who teach Hispanic males and their observations and perceptions of their Hispanic male students. This open dialogue could fill in the gaps between what the faculty knows about Hispanic male students and the cultural expectations that these males are subjected to. This open and continuous dialogue could also increase what we know about Hispanic male students and their university life. Through the Student Life Office, faculty and Hispanic students could share how their experiences can help others in better understanding the Hispanic culture, especially when it comes to Hispanic students who may be first-generation

college students, and/or Hispanic students who may be first-generation immigrants in the United States.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study was conducted to examine the perceptions and personal experiences of traditional and non-traditional-aged Hispanic male university students seeking and completing a university degree. The results are based on the students' perceptions and personal experiences. After analyzing the data, four emergent themes were discovered: support systems, unspoken cultural expectations, the feeling of "belonging" and perseverance, hope, and grit. It was discovered that there is a disconnect between what some university staff know about the Hispanic culture and how this culture affects Hispanic male students pursuing a higher education. Additionally, some university staff seem to think that the university is already doing enough to provide resources and support systems to Hispanic male students, when in fact, the Hispanic male students did not even know that these services and resources were even available.

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APPENDIX A:
STUDENTS-INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Participant's Demographic Information

1. What is your full name?
2. What is your current age?
3. Where were you born?
4. In what places have you lived?
5. If you have lived in more than one place, why did you move each time?
6. Where were your parents born?

Mother:

Father:

7. What languages do you speak fluently?
8. What language(s) is/are spoken at your home?
9. Are your parents bilingual and if so, what languages do they speak?

Mother:

Father:

10. What is the level of education of each of your parents?

Mother:

Father:

11. Do you have any siblings? If so, what are their ages?

Sibling 1:

Sibling 2:

Sibling 3:

Sibling 4:

Sibling 5:

12. What is the level of education of each of your siblings?
13. Have any of your siblings pursued higher education?
14. Are your siblings bilingual?
15. Have you pursued higher education in the past, and stopped?
16. Who, if anyone, helped you explore college options?
17. What is your major?
18. How did you select your current major and/or why?
19. What is your ultimate goal in regard to higher education?
20. Why did you select UHCL?
21. Are you a “transfer” student?
22. How has your experience as a Hispanic male at UHCL been different compared to your experience in the college you attended prior to transferring to UHCL?
23. Are you aware that UHCL is a Hispanic-serving Institution (HSI)?
24. Did you feel academically prepared when you arrived to UHCL?
25. What is your awareness of all the support services available to you?
26. Are you a part-time or full-time student?
27. Are you receiving any form of financial aid to attend UHCL?
28. Are you currently employed?
29. Do you live on your own or with your family?
30. Are you aware of your generational status?

Family and Culture

1. Tell me about the people in your immediate family that have attended, and finished college?
2. What are some of the reasons, family members have pursued and finished college?

3. What are some of the reasons that family members did not pursue a college education?
4. Does your family have different expectations for you, specifically, as a Hispanic male? If so, what are some of those expectations?
5. What are some of the support systems (family/home) that made or continue to make a difference while you are pursuing a higher education?
6. Tell me more about how your family supported your decision to pursue a higher education.
7. Based on your (Hispanic) family expectations, describe a typical day as a Hispanic male student in relation to your family responsibilities and your higher education responsibilities.
8. How will graduating with a university degree impact your family now and in the future?

Non-Family Factors/Influences

9. Tell me about the people that inspired you to see a university degree as a viable possibility. When did this happen & how old were you?
10. What are some of the support systems (faculty/school) that made or continue to make a difference while you are pursuing a higher education?
11. Describe your perception(s) of the Hispanic community in relation to higher education.

Personal Perceptions and/or Feelings

12. How has gender played a role in which immediate family members pursue and complete a higher education?
13. What are the reasons you have decided to pursue a higher education?

14. How have your experiences as a Hispanic male affected the way you see higher education?
15. Tell me about how your culture values higher education, in general, based on gender and/or family expectations.
16. What are some of the obstacles that you have had to deal with while pursuing a higher education as a Hispanic male?
17. Tell me about your experiences with “belonging” in relation to Hispanic males as a minority group at a higher education institution?
18. What was the most difficult challenge you have faced so far in relation to pursuing your dreams of a higher education and how did you overcome this challenge?
19. What methods or practices do you use to help you cope with the any stresses of being a college student?
20. Describe how you work through difficult days or weeks when the academic responsibilities seem overwhelming.
21. Have you ever thought about giving up? Why or why not?
22. What recommendations would you make to university professors or other school staff in relation to how they can best support students like you?
23. Do you think you will be setting a good example for other Hispanic males to follow once you graduate with a college degree? Why?
24. Do you think things will get easier for Hispanic males attempting to pursue higher education as time goes by? How?
25. Is there anything else that you would like to share or add that is important for others to know about? Why is it important?

APPENDIX B:
STUDENTS-FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

1. Tell me about the people in your immediate family that have attended, and finished college?
2. What are some of the reasons, family members have pursued and finished college?
3. What are some of the reasons that family members did not pursue a college education?
4. Does your family have different expectations for you, specifically, as a Hispanic male? If so, what are some of those expectations?
5. What are some of the support systems (family/home) that made or continue to make a difference while you are pursuing a higher education?
6. Tell me more about how your family supported your decision to pursue a higher education.
7. Based on your (Hispanic) family expectations, describe a typical day as a Hispanic male student in relation to your family responsibilities and your higher education responsibilities.
8. How will graduating with a university degree impact your family now and in the future?
9. Tell me about the people that inspired you to see a university degree as a viable possibility. When did this happen & how old were you?
10. What are some of the support systems (faculty/school) that made or continue to make a difference while you are pursuing a higher education?
11. Describe your perception(s) of the Hispanic community in relation to higher education.

12. How has gender played a role in which immediate family members pursue and complete a higher education?
13. What are the reasons you have decided to pursue a higher education?
14. How have your experiences as a Hispanic male affected the way you see higher education?
15. Tell me about how your culture values higher education, in general, based on gender and/or family expectations.
16. What are some of the obstacles that you have had to deal with while pursuing a higher education as a Hispanic male?
17. Tell me about your experiences with “belonging” in relation to Hispanic males as a minority group at a higher education institution?
18. What was the most difficult challenge you have faced so far in relation to pursuing your dreams of a higher education and how did you overcome this challenge?
19. What methods or practices do you use to help you cope with the any stresses of being a college student?
20. Describe how you work through difficult days or weeks when the academic responsibilities seem overwhelming.
21. Have you ever thought about giving up? Why or why not?
22. What recommendations would you make to university professors or other school staff in relation to how they can best support students like you?
23. Do you think you will be setting a good example for other Hispanic males to follow once you graduate with a college degree? Why?
24. Do you think things will get easier for Hispanic males attempting to pursue higher education as time goes by? How?

APPENDIX C:
STAFF-FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

1. Tell me about your position at the university.
2. Tell me about your experiences with Hispanic male students over the years.
3. What are some of the most salient cultural, academic, and social challenges you have noticed in relation to Hispanic males and higher education?
4. How does this university provide “culturally-specific” support to Hispanic male students?
5. Describe some stories of resiliency, grit, and/or perseverance in Hispanic male students.
6. How, if at all, do Hispanic male students interact with their peers or university staff?
7. What are some of the academic and/or social resources readily available for Hispanic males struggling to succeed while pursuing a higher education?
8. How does the university reach out to Hispanic male students who may be the first in their family to attend a college or university?
9. How does the university reach out to the families of Hispanic male students pursuing a college education?
10. How does being a Hispanic-serving Institution (HSI) impact your job as an employee?
11. What type(s) of training do you feel you/other school staff can benefit from in order to better meet the needs of Hispanic male students at this institution?
12. How would you describe the sense of “belonging” among Hispanic male students and the rest of the students at this institution?

13. How much of your time is spent helping Hispanic male students in relation to the rest of the student body or other minority groups?
14. What can faculty and/or school support staff do to create a more welcoming feeling or environment that would make it easier for Hispanic male students to seek guidance or support?
15. Describe your perception of the challenges that Hispanic male students may face while pursuing a higher education degree.
16. In general, what challenges do you perceive for Hispanic male students that are the first in the family to attend college (FGCS) in the academic setting?
17. Describe the process that you believe Hispanic male students follow when they face academic, financial, or social challenges while pursuing a college education.
18. What do you feel are the key components of a Hispanic-serving Institution?
19. What type of training(s) does the school provide you so you can better serve Hispanic male students?
20. Describe the emotional needs of a First-Generation College Student (FGCS).
21. In an ideal world, describe how a Hispanic-serving Institution would function.
22. What future goals do you envision for this Hispanic-serving Institution?
23. What would need to happen for this vision to become a reality?
24. What prompted you to form part of this study?
25. Is there anything else that you would like to share or add?

APPENDIX D:
STAFF-INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Tell me about your experiences with Hispanic male students over the years.
2. What are some of the most salient cultural, academic, and social challenges you have noticed in relation to Hispanic males and higher education?
3. How does this university provide “culturally-specific” support to Hispanic male students?
4. Describe some stories of resiliency, grit, and/or perseverance in Hispanic male students.
5. How, if at all, do Hispanic male students interact with their peers or university staff?
6. What are some of the academic and/or social resources readily available for Hispanic males struggling to succeed while pursuing a higher education?
7. How does the university reach out to Hispanic male students who may be the first in their family to attend a college or university?
8. How does the university reach out to the families of Hispanic male students pursuing a college education?
9. How does being a Hispanic-serving Institution (HSI) impact your job as an employee?
10. What type(s) of training do you feel you/other school staff can benefit from in order to better meet the needs of Hispanic male students at this institution?
11. How would you describe the sense of “belonging” among Hispanic male students and the rest of the students at this institution?

12. What can faculty and/or school support staff do to create a more welcoming feeling or environment that would make it easier for Hispanic male students to seek guidance or support?
13. Describe your perception of the challenges that Hispanic male students may face while pursuing a higher education degree.
14. In general, what challenges do you perceive for Hispanic male students that are the first in the family to attend college (FGCS) in the academic setting?
15. Describe the process that you believe Hispanic male students follow when they face academic, financial, or social challenges while pursuing a college education.
16. Describe the emotional needs of a First-Generation College Student (FGCS).
17. What future goals do you envision for this Hispanic-serving Institution?
18. What would need to happen for this vision to become a reality?
19. What prompted you to form part of this study?