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**THE INFLUENCE OF PENTECOSTAL SOCIAL NETWORKS ON
LATINO STUDENT COLLEGE CHOICE**

by

Michael J. Farrow

A Dissertation

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College of Education
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Dissertation Advisor: James Coaxum, III, Ph.D.

Dedications

I dedicate this dissertation to my wife, Natalie Farrow, and to our baby, Jamie Eleanor Farrow. God has given me a wonderful family. I further dedicate this work to my late father, James "Steel" Farrow, and to my mother, Eleanor Farrow, for encouraging their children to read and seek wisdom.

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Abstract

Michael J. Farrow
THE INFLUENCE OF PENTECOSTAL SOCIAL NETWORKS ON
LATINO COLLEGE CHOICE
2018-2019
James Coaxum, III, Ph.D.
Doctor of Education

This dissertation describes the experiences of Latino Pentecostal students of

traditional college age with regard to their college decisions, along with the influence of

Pentecostal social networks on Latinos' college choice. Much research has focused on

Latino students' college choice processes but Latino Pentecostal students as a specific

subgroup have received little attention. This dissertation provides a more nuanced

approach to the college decisions of the increasing number of Latino Pentecostal students

in the United States. Applying a phenomenological research design, I conducted semi-

structured interviews in which participants described their Pentecostal social network's

role in their college choice process. In contrast to the traditional Pentecostal anti-college

attitude suggested by previous research, I found that students had substantial college

aspirations and received strong community support for them, suggesting a paradigm shift

among the younger generation. The study suggests that Latino Pentecostal students are

acquiring socio-religious capital from their religious social networks and using it to

achieve successful transitions into college. Moreover, students' desire to maintain

participation in religious rituals results in a tendency for Latino Pentecostal students to

choose colleges located close to their churches.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Many researchers have recently raised awareness of the unequal education experiences of the Latino community (Gonzalez, Stein, & Huq, 2013; Harper, Williams, Pérez, & Morgan, 2012; Pérez & McDonough, 2008; Terriquez, 2014). Latino students are academically underperforming at virtually every level of education when compared to their white counterparts (Gándara, 2015; Gándara & Contreras, 2009), beginning at kindergarten and increasingly falling behind with age (Gándara, 2015). Latino students experience poorer academic programs as they move into high school (Miller, 2005), as more than one-third of Latino children live in poverty (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014) and attend schools located in impoverished communities (Gándara, 2015). Students living in poverty tend to experience a lack of educational resources along with poorer teacher quality, curriculum, and counseling (Gándara, 2015; Orfield & Lee, 2005). Researchers and community leaders remain concerned about the failure of the contemporary education system to offer an equitable educational experience for Latinos in the United States.

The effects of the achievement gap in Latino education can be seen when one considers Latinos' enrollment in higher education. Despite being the fastest-growing racial/ethnic group in the United States (Fry & Taylor, 2013), Latino students are underrepresented at U.S. colleges and universities (Aud et al., Liu, 2011; Perna, 2000). National research found that whereas 19% of African Americans, 39% of non-Hispanic Whites, and 50% of Asians were earning bachelor's degrees by age 29, the rate among Latinos was only 14% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). Few Latinos

enroll in four-year colleges and universities, and for those Latino students who manage to matriculate, the rate of successful completion of a four-year college degree is low; only 36% of first-time, full-time Latino students earn their college degree within six years (Liu, 2011). Even though Latinos have greatly increased their presence in two-year community colleges (Gonzalez, 2012; Kurlaender, 2006), some have argued that they are pushed toward attending community colleges by a K-12 school system that systematic-ally underestimates the capabilities of Latino students (Cooper & Liou, 2007; Gonzalez, 2012; Hallinan, 2000; Kurlaender, 2006; Ovink, 2017). Achinstein, Curry, and Ogawa (2015) found that the low representation of Latinos in four-year college programs was in part the result of schools' failure to provide a college-going culture for Latino students.

A disproportionate amount of Latinos experience the effects of being undereducated in America. This reality impacts the economic opportunities and social capital available to Latinos (Pérez, 2016; Pérez & Ceja, 2015; Pérez & McDonough, 2008), as they continue to be one of the lowest-paid ethnic groups in the country (Noguera, Hurtado, & Fergus, 2012). Even though the cycle of poverty impacts the Latino community (Gándara & Contreras, 2009), however, poverty does not sufficiently explain what Gándara and Contreras (2009) called the Latino education crisis (Gonzalez, 2012; McDonough, Calderone, & Venegas, 2015). As part of examining this education crisis, researchers have focused on the college decision-making process of Latino students (Gonzalez, 2012; Nora, 2004; Pérez & McDonough 2008; Rizzo, 2014; Rosas & Hamrick, 2002).

Latino College Choice

To effectively examine Latino college choice, one must understand that the decision to attend college is not an arbitrary, isolated decision made at one particular moment in a person's life. On the contrary, college choice is part of a transitional process affected by community influences. Gonzalez (2012) asserted that college choice is a developmental transition built on the student's social experiences with school, family, and community. Research has described college choice as a three-stage process (predisposition, search, and choice), in which students' attitudes toward attending college can vary within each stage or between stages. This dissertation applies Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) three-stage framework, which has been widely used by college choice researchers (Andrew, Martinez, & Flavell, 2016; Nora, 2004; Rizzo, 2014; Rosas & Hamrick, 2002; Smith & Fleming, 2006).

Although many different factors affect Latinos' college choice process, social networks have been emphasized as having a positive impact (Nora, 2004; Pérez & McDonough 2008; Person & Rosenbaum, 2006). Latino social networks, made up primarily of family and friends, have been shown to exert profound influence and provide resources for college success (Cooper & Liou, 2007; Hallett & Venegas, 2015; Pahl & Way, 2006). Successful Latino students have consistently attributed their success to the support received from social networks (Ceballo, 2004; Liou, Antrop-González, & Cooper, 2009; Lopez, 2005; Pérez, 2016; Pérez & McDonough, 2008; Person & Rosenbaum, 2006; Rodriguez, Bingham, Myers, Morris, & Cardoza, 2003; Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2005). Moreover, Latino students are more likely to identify social

networks as a major influence in their college choice process than other racial/ethnic

groups (Marin, 1993; Pérez & McDonough, 2008).

The Influence of Religious Social Networks on Latino Students

Although social networks can take many forms (e.g., family, friends, colleagues,

sports activities, club organizations), one type of social network that has been shown to

be of particular influence to students of color is religious social networks (Dallavis, 2011;

Glanville, Sikkink, & Hernández, 2008; Jeynes, 2010; Liou et al., 2009; Sikkink &

Hernández, 2003; Skerritt, 2016).

Hallett and Veneers (2015) argued that in our postmodern era, multiple identities,

including religious identities, should be explored when investigating the experiences of

Latino students. More than 80% of Latinos consider themselves a part of a religious

group, and more than half of Latinos receive "a great deal of guidance" from their

religion (Espinosa et al., 2003; Pew Research Center, 2014). A growing number of

students identify with religious culture, and it has even been suggested that a religious

revival is occurring among younger generations (Barrett, 2010; Dallavis, 2011; Platt,

2014; Skerritt, 2016).

Research has found that Latino religious communities positively impact the

education process and college access (Antrop-González, Velez, & Garrett, 2005; Irizarry

& Antrop-González, 2008; Liou et al., 2009; Nevárez-La Torre, 1997; Rendón, Nora, &

Kanagala, 2014; Sikkink & Hernández, 2003). Rendón et al. (2014) identified spirituality

and faith as a specific asset offered by the Latino community and one on which students

frequently draw to help them succeed in education. Similarly, Nevárez-La Torre (1997)

reported that religious networks improve the academic and social conditions of Latinos,

stating that they help to bridge the communication gap between schools and the Latino community, which often perceives the schools as unresponsive and uncaring. These findings are consistent with other research according to which successful Latino students tend to view their church membership as contributing to their academic success. Antrop-González et al. (2005), Irizarry & Antrop-González (2008), Liou et al., (2009) and Glanville, Sikkink & Hernández (2008) all suggested that Latino religious networks provide access to forms of social capital, such as mentoring relationships and intergenerational experiences, that drive student success and access to college.

Although several studies have examined Latino religious networks in general (Antrop-González et al., 2005; Irizarry & Antrop-González, 2008; Liou et al., 2009; Nevárez-La Torre, 1997; Sikkink & Hernández, 2003), only one previous study has focused specifically on the growing Latino Pentecostal subculture and its attitude toward education (Sanchez et al., 2016). The present study extends research on the influence of social networks and religiosity on Latinos' college choices by looking at the role of Latino Pentecostalism.

Pentecostalism has been growing in Latino communities across the United States as members of the traditionally Catholic Latino community continue to convert to Protestantism (Espinoza, 2014; Mulder et al., 2017). Pew Research (2014) found a 12% decrease in Latino adults identifying as Catholic in just the three-year period from 2010 to 2013. Pentecostal communities are expanding more than other Protestant group according to Hispanic Churches in American Public Life (HCAPL), which found that 64 percent of all Latino Protestants self-identified as Pentecostal/Charismatic and that 12 percent of the entire U.S. Latino population was Pentecostal (Espinosa, Elizondo, &

Miranda, 2003). If the expansion of Latino Pentecostalism continues as projected, then Pentecostal communities will be an increasingly significant factor in Latinos' college choice.

Problem Statement

No previous studies have directly examined the college choice process of Latino Pentecostal students. However, some general understanding can be obtained from existing studies of Latino religiosity and education or of Pentecostalism and education, and one study considered the impact of Latino Pentecostalism on educational expectations (Sanchez et al., 2016).

Although much research has suggested the positive impact of Latino religiosity on education (Antrop-González et al, 2005; Irizarry & Antrop-González, 2008; Liou et al., 2009; Nevárez-La Torre, 1997; Sikkink & Hernández, 2003), Pentecostalism and other conservative religious networks have been shown to have a negative influence on education (Beyerlein, 2004; Darnell & Sherkat, 1997; Evans, 2013; Garneau & Schwadel, 2013; Lehrer, 1999). Pentecostal students have generally had relatively low levels of education and have been less likely than other Christian groups to attend college or earn a college degree (Beyerlein, 2004; Garneau & Schwadel; 2013; Hackett & Lindsay, 2008). Kosmin et al. (1992) found that "the outlook of Pentecostals … appears to make their followers hostile to scientific rationalism and therefore disinterested in secular studies, particularly college" (p. 513). Moreover, Sanchez-Walsh (2012) expressed concerns that "the protective shield of faith that Pentecostals cover themselves often descends into anti-intellectualism, legalism, and insularity" (p. 193). Accordingly, it

would be logical to suspect that Pentecostal attitudes could be exacerbating the Latino educational crisis.

Latino Pentecostalism has a unique cultural tradition with regard to education, distinct from that of other religious groups. Beyerlein (2004) contended that Pentecostal underachievement is due to Pentecostal communities cultivating a "defensive separatist" disposition that fosters hostility towards formal education. By defensive separatism, Beyerlein meant a tendency to limit contact with the broader culture and find refuge in enclaves that focus on the miraculous and on emotional worship experiences. Beyerlein sharply distinguished Pentecostal hostility toward education from an "evangelical disposition" that views secular educational institutions as an opportunity to represent Christianity and to evangelize outsiders. Pentecostal students were viewed as distinct from their evangelical counterparts, having less interest in secular institutions and being inclined to isolation. Sanchez et al. (2016) also found that Latino Pentecostals tended to have lower educational expectations than Latino evangelicals. Also, Latino Pentecostals are more likely to identify with their religion and more actively committed to their religious social network, and they spend more time in church-related activities than other religious groups (Marti, 2015). Their unique tradition toward education, in conjunction with a strong religious identity, suggests that religious social networks may play a prominent role in the college choice process of Latino Pentecostal students.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the influence of religious social networks on college choice processes within the growing Latino Pentecostal subculture. As more and more Latinos are embracing a Pentecostal identity (Espinoza,

2014; Lorentzen & Mira, 2005; Sanchez-Walsh, 2012), this dissertation sought to describe the experiences of Latino Pentecostal students with regard to pursuing college and how they are affected by the allegedly deep-seated Pentecostal "defensive separatism" and hostility toward education (Beyerlein, 2004; Garneau & Schwadel; 2013). As previously mentioned, much research has focused on Latino students' college choice process (Gonzalez et al., 2013; Nora, 2004; Pérez, 2016; Pérez & McDonough 2008; Person & Rosenbaum, 2006). However, this dissertation is the first study to focus specifically on Latino Pentecostal students and the influence of their religious social networks on their college choice process. Scholars have called for more research on the influence of religious social networks and religious identity on Latino education (Hallett & Venegas, 2015; Sanchez et al., 2016). This study's focus on a growing religious subculture of Latino students can provide a more nuanced approach than previous research that encompassed a wider range of Latino subcultures (Hallett & Venegas, 2015).

This research applies the traditional three-stage college choice framework (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987) to describe the influence of Latino Pentecostal religious communities. The positive influence of social networks has been identified as influential in the Latino college choice process (Nora, 2004; Pérez, 2016; Pérez & McDonough, 2008; Person & Rosenbaum, 2006). However, an anti-education hostility cultivated by Pentecostal social networks has also been posited (Beyerlein, 2004; Garneau & Schwadel, 2013), and such an environment could have a negative influence on the college choice process of Latino Pentecostals. A study by Sanchez et al. (2016) is the only prior work to have considered Pentecostal hostility toward education and its effect

on Latino Pentecostal students. That study found that Latino Pentecostals were more likely to have low educational expectations than Latino evangelicals. However, this research did not find significant evidence of negative effects of Pentecostal hostility toward education on Latinos, as research on White Pentecostalism would suggest (Beyerlein, 2004; Garneau & Schwadel, 2013). Sanchez et al. (2016) used quantitative measures and did not focus on Latino Pentecostal college choice. In contrast, this dissertation provides qualitative descriptions of the college choice process as perceived by traditionally college-age Latino Pentecostal students; in doing so, it makes a practical and original contribution to understanding of the influence of this religious group.

Harper et al. (2012) noted that people of color are rarely asked to speak for themselves concerning their education; instead, many others seek to speak for them. This dissertation attempts to give a voice to Latino Pentecostal students through their descriptions of their own college choice experiences. It takes into account the minority status of the Latino community and highlights Latino Pentecostal students' own personal opinions, in an effort to achieve a deeper understanding of Latinos' college choices.

The research sample consisted of traditionally college-age adults who attended religious services at Spanish-speaking, Latino Christian churches with Pentecostal characteristics. This dissertation follows the traditional classification of Pentecostalism as a branch of conservative Protestantism, distinct from evangelical Christianity primarily in its emphasis on miracles, supernatural gifts, and speaking in tongues (Beyerlein, 2004; Garneau & Schwadel, 2013; Marsden, 1980; Smith & Sikkink, 2000; Woodberry & Smith, 1998). By applying a qualitative research design and a phenomenological approach, I explore the experiences of Latino Pentecostal students, collecting data on

how religious social networks influence their college choice process. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do traditionally college-age Latino Pentecostals describe the influence of religious social networks on their college choice process?

2. How do the experiences of traditionally college-age Latino Pentecostals facilitate the predisposition, search, and choice process?

3. How do traditionally college-age Latino Pentecostals describe their perceptions of the attitudes of church leaders and members about attending college?

Significance of the Study

Hallett and Venegas (2015) called upon future researchers to take into account the religious identities of Latino students when considering college attendance decisions. Other scholars also recommended additional research on how the role of social networks impacted Latinos' college choice (Nora, 2004; Pérez & McDonough, 2008), and Sanchez et al. (2016) called for more research on the influence of Latino churches on students and whether they "contribute to or ameliorate the educational challenges facing Latino youth" (p. 188). A qualitative approach has been suggested as the most thorough and rigorous means of investigating the Latino college choice process (Pérez & McDonough, 2008). The present qualitative study responds to these calls.

This research aims to aid schools in improving collaboration with the strengths of their local community to increase their effectiveness. Liu et al. (2009) argued that "school reform needs to integrate what is being referred to as students' funds of knowledge into the cultural processes of schooling" (p. 536). In applying this idea, I seek to describe how students use the resources available in Pentecostal religious communities. This

understanding could be used to assist school-community partnerships designed to promote academic success.

Effective educational professionals continually seek to develop their craft. Many efforts have been made to promote a more culturally responsive pedagogy within our school communities (Gay, 1999; Sleeter, 2012). As the number of students with religious identities increases, a more responsive pedagogy that considers this identity has been called for (Dallavis, 2011; Skerritt, 2016). The present research will benefit practitioners and educational leaders who seek to make accommodations and foster academic success for diverse populations, including students who identify with religious groups.

Social justice causes have motivated researchers, educational practitioners, and community leaders to provide a more equitable educational experience for Latino students. Cultural pluralism within American society requires a continual evaluation of social justice principles (Glover-Blackwell, Kwoh, & Pastor, 2010). Minority students remain marginalized and are frequently not adequately represented in higher education, and this problem negatively impacts their economic opportunities and social mobility (Pérez & Ceja, 2015; Pérez & McDonough 2008). Moreover, an ineffective transition into society by Latino youth leads to many other serious social problems, such as poverty and the school-to-prison pipeline. It has been theorized that Latino youth tend to fall into the school-to-prison pipeline due to both their low socioeconomic status and the effects of the Latino educational crisis in America (Hewitt & Tuzzolo, 2006; Nicholson-Crotty, Birchmeier, & Valentine, 2009, Rubin, 2014). Pursuing higher education is a profound vehicle of enabling social equality that provides economic and social resources for the

Latino community (Contreras, 2011). By contributing to Latino college choice research, this dissertation seeks to advance that social justice effort.

The increasing number of Latinos in the United States makes the issue of Latino underrepresentation in four-year colleges even more critical (Aud et al., 2012; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Liu, 2011; Perna, 2000). Many factors have been identified as affecting Latinos' college choice process, such as ethnicity, gender, immigration status, parental education, and socioeconomic status (McDonough, Nuñez, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2004; Nora, 2004; Pérez & McDonough, 2008). However, the influence of Pentecostal social networks has been underexamined to date. I hope to expand the conversation about Latinos' college decisions to encompass thoughtful consideration of the Latino Pentecostal phenomenon.

It might be unwise to write off Latino Pentecostal students as a fringe group simply due to their minority status in school communities at this time. If the current trajectory continues, students who identify with Latino Pentecostalism will grow significantly in numbers. This research represents an effort to accommodate these students, promote their academic success, better understand their unique subculture of students, and confront the Latino achievement gap.

Summary

This dissertation examines the influence of Pentecostal social networks on Latino students' college choices. Even though social networks have already been shown to have a positive influence on Latino college choice (Pérez & McDonough, 2008), no prior studies have considered the influence of Pentecostal religious social networks on these decisions. Research has been mixed concerning the influence of Latino Pentecostal

religiosity on education. Pentecostalism, in general, has historically been viewed as having a negative impact on educational achievement and has cultivated hostility toward formal education (Beyerlein, 2004; Hackett & Lindsay, 2008; Kosmin et al., 1992). However, other research on Latino churches in general has suggested that they exert a positive influence on the pursuit of educational success (Antrop-González et al., 2005; Irizarry & Antrop-González, 2008; Liou et al., 2009; Nevárez-La Torre, 1997; Sikkink & Hernández, 2003). Latino Pentecostalism is a growing subculture within the Latino community (Calvillo & Bailey, 2015; Espinoza, 2014; Marti, 2015, Sanchez-Walsh, 2012) and may continue to expand its influence on Latino youth. If the trajectory of the Latino Pentecostal community continues, this religious network will have increasingly significant implications for Latino college choices. Chapter 2 will review relevant research concerning the topic and will provide a conceptual framework for the present research.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

Research has suggested that our national education system is systematically failing to provide Latino students with an equitable education (Gándara, 2015; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Gonzalez et al., 2013; Harper et al., 2012; Pérez & McDonough, 2008; Terriquez, 2014). Latino students underachieve relative to White students starting in kindergarten, with 42% of Latino children scoring in the lowest quartile of performance on reading readiness, compared to just 18% of White children (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Among Latino fourth graders, only 16% are proficient in reading compared to 41% of White students, and only 15% of Latino eighth graders are proficient in reading compared to 39% of Whites (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). In high school, Achinstein et al. (2015) found a systematic failure to provide a college-going culture for Latino students. They argued that Latino students are labeled as deficient by their school communities and internalize a sense of being devalued, thereby concluding that higher education opportunities were never meant for them. As a result, many Latino students drop out emotionally and psychologically, even before they actually quit school, and withdraw from academic engagement at an early age.

Latino students who live in poverty tend to experience a lack of educational resources and teaching services (Gándara, 2015; Orfield & Lee, 2005). More than one-third of Latino children live below the poverty line (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014), often in some of the poorest communities in the country; accordingly, they suffer from a lack of educational resources such as qualified teachers, adequate curriculum, and counseling services (Gándara, 2015; Orfield & Lee, 2005). Miller (2005) contended that

the low quality of academic programs offered to Latino high-school students is largely responsible for their poor performance on standardized tests. Reform efforts to address the K-12 crisis in the Latino community have had minimal results, and further research and action are needed (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). A severe achievement gap remains as Latino students continue to underperform academically at virtually every level of education when compared to White students (Gándara, 2015; Gándara & Contreras, 2009).

This chapter will review literature relevant to Latino college decisions, starting with the experience of Latino students in the educational pipeline and then considering Latinos' college choices and Latino social networks. Further, it will review religious social networks and their positive relationship with education before considering the unique, negative relationship between Pentecostalism and education. After a review of research on Latino Pentecostalism and education, I will conclude the chapter by presenting the conceptual framework for this research.

Latino Students in the United States

The severity of the Latino educational crisis appears more urgent when one considers that Latinos are the fastest-growing demographic in the United States (Fry & Taylor, 2013) and the largest racial/ethnic minority group in the country, comprising 17% of the total population (Excelencia in Education, 2015). Almost one of every five high-school students nationally is Latino (Fry & Lopez, 2012). By 2030, the Latino population in the United States will exceed that of all other minority groups combined (Glover-Blackwell et al., 2010); by 2020, 25% of all traditionally college-age students in the United States will be Latino (Liu, 2011).

The Latino population growth does not depend on future immigration; most of it is resulting from births that take place in the Unites States. Brown and Patton (2014) reported that 90% of Latinos under age 18 living in the United States are U.S. citizens. Therefore, it is doubtful that any changes in U.S. immigration policy would dramatically diminish the rate of Latino population growth.

Despite this population boom, traditionally college-age Latino students remain underrepresented at four-year colleges and universities across the country (Aud et al., 2012; Liu, 2011; Perna, 2000). Latino students are obtaining four-year degrees at lower rates that Whites, African-Americans, or Asian-Americans (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). Moreover, the numbers of Latino collegians continues to decrease in two major states with substantial Latino populations. In California, 45% of Whites of traditional college age are enrolled in college, but only 27% of Latinos; in Texas, 39% of White students and 24% of Latinos are in college (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2008). Since 2000, the national Latino four-year college enrollment and completion rates have improved somewhat; however, a gap persists between U.S. Latinos and Whites in bachelor's degree completion (Aud et al., 2012). The successful completion of a college degree remains statistically unlikely for Latino students, with only 36% of first-time, full-time college students completing all the requirements for a degree within a six-year time span (Liu, 2011).

There has been an increased presence of Latino students at two-year community colleges. In fact, Latinos are the most likely racial/ethnic subgroup to enroll at a community college (Kurlaender, 2006) and the only one to select two-year programs more often than four-year programs (Gonzalez, 2012). However, researchers have

suggested that the choice to attend a two-year community college has much to do with the influences of a K-12 school system that systematically identifies Latinos as deficient in academic ability, steering them into less ambitious community college programs (Cooper & Liou, 2007; Gonzalez, 2012; Hallinan, 2000; Kurlaender, 2006; Ovink, 2017). Even though many Latino students who start at a community college express a desire to transfer or move on to a four-year school, very few actually do (Fry, 2002; Moore & Shulock, 2010; Núñez & Elizondo, 2013). Moreover, Fry (2002) reported that more than half of Latino students who initially enrolled in a two-year college program never completed any postsecondary degree. Latinos tend to pursue college education through elongated pathways that lessen the chances of degree completion, such as enrolling in community colleges, attending college only part-time, and delaying college until their mid-twenties (Fry, 2002; Ovink, 2017). Though much attention has been given to the increased enrollment of Latino students in two-year programs, this achievement remains an inadequate response to the Latino educational crisis.

Latino Students' College Choices

Perez and Ceja (2015) argued that further research on Latino students' college choices is critical. Nearly two-thirds of jobs require an advanced degree (Carnevale, 2010), and support for enrolling in college and degree completion remains a leading policy concern. According to Perez and Ceja (2015), Latino student college choice can be understood as a dynamic process in which educational conditions interact with organizational structures to create a system of opportunity that is less than advantageous for the Latino community. Hurtado, Inkelas, Briggs, and Rhee (1997) and Swail, Cabrera, and Lee (2004) both found that Latino students were less likely to engage in an extensive

college choice process. Latinos "are still less likely to prepare for, apply for, enroll in, and persist through post-secondary education" (Swail et al., 2005, p. iv). Since student college choice has a direct impact on students' social mobility, identity development, and aspiration fulfillment (Gonzalez, 2012; Perna, 2005), these findings underscore the importance of researching the college decision-making process of Latino students.

Scholars have made progress in studying the transition of Latino students into adulthood by utilizing college choice models (Perez & McDonough, 2008). Notably, Hossler and Gallagher (1987) provided a model that divided the college choice process into three stages: predisposition, search, and choice. The framework is derived from Jackson (1982) and Litten (1982) and is an interactive model that highlights individual and organizational factors working together harmoniously for favorable outcomes (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). The predisposition stage, where students form their initial desire to attend college or pursue other occupational aspirations, is concerned with the student's preference or attitude regarding college enrollment. Research on the establishment of this preference takes into account the particular students' cultural background, influences, and values. Those students who decide to pursue higher education enter into the search phase, gathering information about different college programs. In this phase, the student assembles a "choice set" composed of colleges and programs the student is interested in pursuing. Finally, in the choice phase, the student makes a decision to matriculate into a particular college program.

Many factors have been identified as influential in the student college choice process; such as, "parents, the college's size, location, academic program, reputation, prestige, selectivity, and alumni, the student's peers, friends, guidance counselor, and

availability of financial aid" (McDonough, 1997, p. 4). Concerning Latino students'

college decisions, research has focused on social networks as a major theme (Nora, 2004;

Pérez & McDonough, 2008; Person & Rosenbaum, 2006). Despite the insights of prior

research, Perez and McDonough (2008) stated that "there is still much more to be

learned" (p. 252), noting that it was unclear how Latino students use information from

their social networks.

The Influence of Social Networks on Latino Students

Studies have indicated that social networks are a critical component of Latino

students' efforts to overcome documented disadvantages that hinder their pathway to

higher education. In contrast to American egalitarian ideals, not all individuals have

access to the same resources to make an informed college decision (McDonough, 1997;

Pérez & Ceja, 2015). The Latino student experience is characterized by significant

challenges, such as a lack of preparation for college, poverty, and perceived

discrimination (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Obstacles to Latino academic success have

received much attention, but Pérez and Taylor (2016) argued that the disadvantages of

pursuing college achievement has been documented in a misleading way that could lead

Latinos to conclude that their success in college is unlikely. Their research has promoted

a shift in conversation from a *deficit-based* perspective to an *asset-based* point of view

that recognizes the resources offered by the Latino community. The following discussion

reviews research on how Latino students use the social networks available to them to aid

their pursuit of academic success.

For Latino students, social networks composed of family and peers have been

shown to positively influence college choice. Researchers have theorized that the high

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value placed on family and friends in Latino communities is a result of the influential role that *familism* plays for Latinos transitioning out of adolescence (Desmond & Lopez-Turley, 2009; Fuligni & Pedersen, 2002; Gonzalez, 2012; Pérez & McDonough, 2008; Stein, Rivas-Drake, & Camacho, 2017). The Latino community places high value on relationships with immediate and extended family members (Marin, 1993; Pérez, 2017; Torres, 2004).

Some researchers, such as Desmond and Lopez-Turley (2009), have seen Latino familism as hindering Latinos' college choice. They found that Latinos were more likely than other racial/ethnic groups to indicate that it is important to stay at home during their college years and were significantly less likely to apply to college as a result. However, other research has viewed familism as a community asset that aids Latino students in achieving higher education. Pérez and McDonough (2008) found that Latino students tended to be driven by purposes beyond the self and were motivated to succeed by a sense of duty toward their family that promoted college success. Stein et al. (2017) and Fuligni and Pedersen (2002) contended that Latino students, when making college decisions, tended to consider their family members' desires and to seek ways to provide financial and emotional support for them. These family obligations increase as students transition out of adolescence and family needs become more salient, enhancing motivation for academic growth and college entry. Similarly, Ceballo (2004) found that Latino parents communicated the value of education to their children and desired a successful enculturation within their school communities. Although Latino parents appeared to lack confidence in their ability to help their children achieve academic success, they tended to encourage their children to seek mentors and other outside help.

Fry (2002) also claimed there that Latino families strongly valued their children's education and that Latino students expressed a desire for academic success.

Pérez and McDonough (2008) stated that it is critical to examine qualitatively how both family and friends influence Latino students' navigation through the college choice process and what college advice Latinos actually receive from the social networks that they depend upon. Although Latino parents play a central role in nurturing their children's educational aspirations, Latino students also rely on peer social networks for help in their college choice. Keefe and Padilla (1987) found that Latinos expressed their familism by exhibiting a pattern of identifying close friends as kin, and that they attributed a high level of influence to their friends.

Later research has confirmed the role of peer social networks in Latino students' college choices. Person and Rosenbaum (2006) and Pérez and McDonough (2008) both noted this influence, finding that Latino students relied on peer social networks to gather information and considered them a valuable resource in their pursuit of college admission. According to Rodriguez et al. (2003), Latino students viewed peer social networks as even more valuable than parental support and frequently depended on them to overcome challenges to educational achievement. Latino students tend to be influenced by older peers in forming a desire to go to college and in the college selection process (Perez, 2010). In addition, Cabrera and Padilla's (2004) study of two Mexican-American students also suggested that family support was not as valuable as peer social networks. Torres, Reiser, LePeau, Davis, and Ruder (2006) suggested a possible explanation for this heavy reliance on peers, noting that Latino students tend to mistrust their academic advisors and, since their parents often lack college experience, are more likely to seek

academic information from their own peer social networks. Cooper and Liou (2007) found that well-intentioned counselors consistently demonstrated low expectations for students of color, and Ovink (2017) and Lin (2001) suggested that when they lack adequate social networks, Latino students are overly dependent on high-school counselors who often do not provide proper support.

Pérez and Taylor (2016) have highlighted the fact that even though family social networks provide a major influence in Latino students' entry into college, the support they receive from peer social networks is more influential in helping them weather the challenges they experience on campus. Pérez (2016) studied male Latino collegians using the cultural wealth framework and found that social capital was activated through Latino social networks by students who served in leadership positions in Latino organizations. Moreover, Latino students consistently rely on peers as a source of social capital (Pérez, 2017). Students who indicate a lack of support from their social networks are more likely to engage in reckless behaviors, adding to the impediments to their college entrance and completion. Zaleski, Levey-Thors, and Schiaffino (1998) studied college freshmen and found that those who perceived less social support from their peers had a greater tendency to abuse alcohol and engage in risky sexual behaviors.

Moreover, Latino social networks provide guidance that deters the Latino collegian from choosing convoluted pathways to college graduation. Lin (2001) emphasized that major life events can provoke stress-related anxieties that hinder college completion. Latino social networks can combat these stresses by providing emotional support to college students who experience challenges and to prevent them from being distracted from the best path toward their goal of college completion. Similarly, Ovink

(2017) contended that without assistance from social networks, many Latino students repeatedly revise their college plans and engage in prolonged pathways; adding more obstacles to their path to degree completion.

Alvarado and López-Turley (2012) argued that minority status and culture must be continually considered as a point of reference when examining the college choice process. However, all too often minority status, culture, and community are limited to broad racial or ethnic identities. Pinning down the way in which individuals self-identify can promote a better understanding of communities of color and their view of education (Sung, 2015). Veneers and Hallett (2013) contended that multiple identities, including religious identity, should be explored in research on the experiences of Latino students. The developing sense of identity and the psychological quest for belonging are not limited only to racial or ethnic identity; rather, highlighting religious identity can add to the understanding of Latinos' college choices. This dissertation extends the Latino college choice discussion beyond ethnic identity and Latino social networks and considers Latino students who also identify with religious community networks.

Religious Social Networks and Their Positive Relationship with Education

In an influential study, Coleman (1988) found a positive relationship between religiosity and academic achievement. Coleman found that social capital gained through church membership was positively associated with completion of high school. Coleman defined social capital as similar to other forms of capital, in that it is productive and allows ends to be achieved. A later definition broadened the concept of social capital to "features of social organization, such as networks, norms, and trust, that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" (Putnam, 1993, p. 36). Most research

that has applied Coleman's religious social capital theory has focused on African-American students (Al-Fadhli & Kersen, 2010; Barrett, 2010; Freeman, 1986; Jeynes, 2010). These studies have supported Coleman's claim that religiosity positively impacts academic success. For example, Jeynes (2010) found that personal faith and commitment to religious social networks consistently reduced the African-American achievement gap.

Studies of Latino students have also suggested that religious social networks positively influence academic achievement. Irizarry and Antrop-González (2008) and Liou et al. (2009) both used the cultural wealth framework (Yosso, 2005) to identify different forms of capital that churches offer to Latino students. Both studies found that successful students described ways in which their churches facilitated the development of cultural capital. Similar findings were reported by Antrop-González et al. (2005), who studied successful Latino high-school students and found that many of them expressed religious sentiments and attributed their success to support from their churches. Antrop-González et al. (2005) further suggested that many successful Latino students are less motivated by individual goals than most students and see their own success as community-driven. This view is consistent with Aldana's (2016) findings that a sense of brotherhood and concern for social justice motivated success among Latino high-school students within a religious cultural context. These studies of Latino students indicate that Latino church membership not only promotes positive attitudes and values but provides a network of community assets used to support academic success.

Glanville et al. (2008) focused on possible explanations of why religious social networks improve educational outcomes. Recognizing social capital as a mechanism used by religious networks, Glanville et al. (2008) identified intergenerational learning

experiences as producing social capital that positively impacts students. They surmised

that religious networks foster intergenerational learning experiences because "it is one of

the few settings in which American adolescents regularly interact with adults outside of

the family" (Glanville et al., 2008, p. 108). Moreover, religious social networks cultivate

"norms that encourage active efforts to create such ties because religious groups

encourage adult commitment to the socialization of children" (Glanville et al., 2008, p.

108).

   Likewise, Muller and Ellison (2001) wrote that many religious activities within

churches involve multiple generations, encouraging students to form relationships with

older adults. Muller and Ellison observed that participants in these intergenerational

relationships express a high level of mutual trust toward each other. This type of

socialization among multiple generations results in the formation of intergenerational

mentoring relationships that foster positive attitudes, values, and behaviors (Antrop-

González et al., 2005; Glanville et al., 2008). Intergenerational mentoring allows students

to share ideas and experiences that promote individual and collective achievement

(Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007) while bolstering self-esteem "through positive reflected

appraisals" that influence how students perceive outside opinions of themselves (Muller

& Ellison, 2001, p. 159). Intergenerational mentoring relationships also help students to

avoid hindrances to academic success by specifically discouraging negative youth

behaviors like gang membership, suicide, drug use, and truancy in youth (Antrop-

González et al., 2005; Donahue & Benson, 1995; Freeman, 1986; Muller & Ellison,

2001). Because of the multigenerational dimension of religious networks, they "serve as

sources of information and can influence and monitor students' behavior more effectively

than a network that lacks closure or the presence of adult reinforcement" (Barrett, 2010, pp. 465–466). The intergenerational friendships encouraged by churches are a powerful example of the "psychosocial preparation" produced "from available social capital in these more intimate, long-term relationships, such as those found in families and communities" (Muller & Ellison, 2001, p. 160).

Even though religious networks have a profound influence on educational pursuits, churches in communities of color are largely ignored by educational institutions for various reasons. First, Skerrett (2016) explained that public school systems have historically avoided acknowledgement of religiosity due to fears of religious controversy. Skerritt suggested that many education professionals have misinterpreted the mandates that prevent them from endorsing a particular religion. As a result, they ignore religious identities and cultures altogether. Second, religious networks in communities of color have been traditionally dismissed by the dominant culture, which has failed to recognize the cultural wealth of Latino students, instead stereotyping Latino religiosity as another extension of a culturally deficient people (Irizarry & Antron-González, 2008; Yosso, 2005). Irizarry and Antrop-González (2008) believed that education communities have devalued religious social networks as resources for minority students precisely because they are located in communities of color. Moreover, Jeynes (2010) suggested that the lack of school policies that support religious families could be a form of institutional racism, given the high level of religiosity present in communities of color. Although Latino churches are often considered as having nothing to do with school, these findings suggest that religious communities play an influential role in promoting academic achievement.

This tendency to ignore religious culture and devalue minority religious organizations hinders effective pedagogy that could engage diverse students. Dallavis (2010) and Skerritt (2016) both suggested that understanding students' religious influences can provide a more cultural responsive pedagogy and promote academic success in high school and beyond. Dallavis (2010) argued that since culture is central to education, consideration of religious communities as a critical dimension of student culture can increase the competence of school systems. Brinkerhoff (2016) found that religious networks play an important role in maintaining cultural identity and helping students navigate the tensions and pressures of mainstream culture assimilation. Likewise, Harttgen and Opfinger (2014) suggested that individuals use religious social networks to identify with other people and thereby generate feelings of belonging. Cohan and Garcia (2008) seconded this view, stating that "religious affiliation can be important sources of social identity and social belongingness and so provide powerful motives of achievement" (p. 365).

Ignoring religious social networks within communities of color becomes increasingly problematic when one considers the extent of religious networks across the nation. Recent research has indicated that the number of traditionally college-age students who identify with religious social networks is increasing, suggesting that religious social networks will have even more influence on the next generation of students (Barrett, 2010; Dallavis, 2011; Espinoza, 2014; Jeynes, 2010; Platt, 2014; Sarroub, 2002). In contrast to these findings, some assimilation theorists have predicted the breakdown of religious identities in future generations in favor of an increasingly shared national identity, in what is commonly referred to as the "melting pot" phenomenon (Alba & Nee, 2003;

Haller, Portes, & Lynch, 2010; Hansen, 1952). However, Platt (2014) disagreed with this view, finding a rise in reactionary religious identity and signs of increased religious vigor among younger generations of minority religious cultures. The present study takes into account this rise of religiosity among students of color by analyzing Pentecostalism's influence on Latino college choice.

The Negative Impact of Pentecostalism on Education

Although much research has demonstrated the positive influence of religious social networks on academic achievement, Pentecostalism has been shown to have a negative impact. Several studies have found lower levels of education among certain conservative Christian groups, including Pentecostals (Darnell & Sherkat, 1997; Evans, 2011; 2013; Gauchet, 2012; Hackett & Lindsay, 2008; Lehrer, 1999); more specifically, scholars have found a negative impact of Pentecostal affiliation on educational advancement (Beyerlein, 2004; Garneau & Schwadel, 2013; Hackett & Lindsay, 2008; Keysar & Kosmin, 1995; Kosmin et al., 1992).

Pentecostals, though globally diverse, are classified as a distinct branch of conservative Christianity (Beyerlein, 2004; Cox, 1995; Garneau & Schwadel, 2013; Woodberry & Smith, 1998). Sociologists have suggested that conservative Christian groups in general are increasingly hostile toward scientific authority (Gauchat, 2012; Mooney, 2007). Gauchat (2012) found that conservative religious groups doubt the legitimacy of science and that conservative Christians displayed distrust toward the academic and scientific communities. Similarly, Evans (2011) used General Social Survey quantitative data to contend that conservative Christian groups are less likely to achieve educational advancement than mainline Protestant Christians. Evans (2011)

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found that among Christian students overall, only conservative Christian groups

(including Pentecostal communities) were likely to have significant conflicts with the

legitimacy of science, academic authority, and public education.

Several perceived challenges to Christian beliefs have been identified as causal

factors helping to create this hostile relationship. These challenges include the

undermining of creationism, as understood through a fundamentalist interpretation of the

biblical book of Genesis, as well as other threats to literal interpretations of Christian

scripture (Darnell & Sherkat, 1997). Conservative Christians, like Pentecostals, view

academic institutions as championing a Darwinist philosophy and permitting proponents

of evolutionary theory to attack traditional human anthropology, rejecting the spiritual

and moral dimensions of humanity (Evans, 2013). Gauchat's (2012) work might suggest

that conservative Christian groups, such as Pentecostal communities, socially influence

their members to avoid higher education by exhibiting a mistrust of secular education as a

threat to their cultural tradition. For example, the idea of "family values" is a

foundational part of Pentecostal communities, and Gauchat suggested that threats to

conservative religiosity might be perceived in the increasingly progressive direction of

campuses and universities. Religious conservatives have disagreed with progressives on

social issues like same-sex marriage, abortion or female reproductive rights, and female

emancipation from patriarchal societies or from the authoritative role of males in

traditional families. This 50-year-old hostility between religiously conservative

communities and academic communities continues to intensify (Gauchat, 2012).

Beyerlein (2004) and Garneau and Schwadel (2013) focused specifically on

Pentecostals and how they compared to other conservative religious groups. They found

that conservative Christian evangelicals do not show a significant lower education rate when they are treated separately from fundamentalists and Pentecostal subgroups. In contrast, they found that the Pentecostal subgroup exhibited a significantly lower level of education than other conservative Christians. Likewise, Keysar and Kosmin (1995) found that Pentecostal women were substantially less likely to go to college than other religious women, and Kosmin et al. (1992) reported that Pentecostals had the lowest college graduation rates of any religious group.

Research on Pentecostalism has emphasized the distinction between evangelical Christians and Pentecostals (Beyerlein, 2004; Garneau & Schwadel, 2013). Garneau and Schwadel (2013) contend that Pentecostals should be studied separately from other Protestant evangelicals. Pentecostals are distinguished from evangelical Protestants by their emphasis on the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit and their practice of speaking in tongues (Garneau & Schwadel, 2013; Wacker, 2001; Woodberry & Smith, 1998). Other Pentecostal characteristics include an emphasis on divine healing, exorcism, and prophesy, as well as passing out (being "slain in the Spirit") due to miraculously experiencing God's power or dancing in public under a divine influence (Nel, 2015; Peterson, 2009). According to Garneau and Schwadel (2013), "the historical, social, and theological distinctiveness of Pentecostalism suggests that Pentecostals' beliefs, attitudes, and actions often differ from other evangelicals (p. 340).

Beyerlein (2004) coined the term "defensive separatism" to describe the Pentecostal subculture's interaction with education institutions and outsiders, and "engaged orthodoxy" for the more positive evangelical disposition toward institutions of higher education. Whereas evangelical Christians view higher education as an

opportunity to evangelize and redeem public institutions from their "fallen" nature, Pentecostals tend to limit their exposure to outsiders. Beyerlein (2004) reported that religious authority is rooted in personal experience of God for the Pentecostal community, and that therefore secular education is not seen as in their interest. Due to the cultural tradition of defensive separatism, "institutions of public education, especially public higher education, threaten Pentecostals' religious interests, leading them to abandon these institutions" (Beyerlein, 2004, p. 507) in an effort to preserve an emphasis on the miraculous and protect emotional their religious experiences within distinct cultural enclaves (Beyerlein, 2004; Garneau & Schwadel, 2013). In contrast to the evangelical disposition of valuing college and engaging with unbelievers, Pentecostalism allegedly fosters hostility toward secular education, and the Pentecostal tendency to isolate has been identified as a contributing factor to the low education level of Pentecostal students (Beyerlein, 2004; Garneau & Schwadel, 2013).

Pentecostal Hostility Toward Education and the Latino Community

While research has documented the negative impact of conservative Christianity on attitudes toward education (Darnell & Sherkat, 1997; Evans, 2013; Gauchat, 2012; Lehrer, 1999), especially Pentecostal hostility toward education (Beyerlein, 2004; Garneau & Schwadel, 2013), other studies have determined that religious Latinos distrust secular education. Bolger and Ecklund (2018) found that religious Latino parents distrusted science education and teachers significantly more than Black religious parents. Forty-three percent of Latinos interviewed for their study believed that science education negativity impacts the religious faith of their children, whereas only 8% of Black religious parents shared that opinion. Although Bolger and Ecklund (2018) did not focus

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specifically focus on Latino Pentecostal parents, this study supports the suggestion by Sanchez et al. (2016) that Pentecostalism might be influencing Latino religious communities to view higher education as a threat to their religiosity.

Pentecostalism, in particular, has been gaining members in Latino communities across the United States, with many Latinos converting from their traditional Catholic roots. Pew Research (2014) found a 12% decrease in the percentage of Latino adults identifying as Catholic from 2010 to 2013 (67% to 55%). Latino Pentecostal communities are gaining more newcomers than other Protestant groups from the mass defections occurring within Catholicism, and Latino Christianity is developing a strong, fervent Pentecostal identity. The Hispanic Churches in American Public Life (HCAPL) study found that 12% of the entire U.S. Latino population identified as Pentecostal and that 64% of all Latino Protestants self-identified as Pentecostal or charismatic (Espinoza et al., 2003). Ruano (2011) referred to these statistics as "astonishing," given that most Hispanic U.S. immigrants have come from Mexico, one of the most Catholic countries in Latin America. Ruano contended that "Pentecostalism (not taking into consideration the Catholic Charismatic movement) is growing dramatically and becoming an influential force in Latino barrios throughout the country" (p. 4). Latino Pentecostals are more likely to identify with their religion than other Latinos or other racial/ethnic religious groups. According to Marti (2015), Latino Pentecostals identify more strongly with religion than Latino Catholics, White Protestants, or Black Protestants. Marti reported that Latino Pentecostals are more actively committed to their religious social network and spend more time in church-related activities than other religious groups. The negative effects of Pentecostalism on education could thus have a significant impact on Latino college

choice, especially in view of the growth and dedication of the expanding Latino Pentecostal subculture.

Only one study has specifically taken the anti-educational aspects of Pentecostal communities into consideration when researching Latino education. Sanchez et al. (2016) quantitatively studied Latino religious congregants and educational expectations. They specifically examined Latino Pentecostal students as a distinct group, finding that Pentecostals were more likely to have low educational expectations than Latino evangelicals. However, they did not find significant evidence of religious hostility toward education within their Latino Pentecostal sample. Sanchez et al. (2016) relied on a Likert survey question, "My pastor emphasizes the need for young people to stay in school and get a good education," to investigate Pentecostal hostility toward education. Their results suggested that the lower socioeconomic status found in most Latino Pentecostal communities, not an anti-education cultural sentiment, is responsible for the negative impact on attitudes toward college. Earlier research found that high poverty rates were substantially impacting Latinos' education (Gándara & Contreras, 2009); however, poverty alone does not sufficiently explain the Latino education crisis (Gonzalez, 2012; McDonough et al., 2015). Sanchez et al. (2016) acknowledged that further research was needed to understand how Latino Pentecostals interact with their education processes. I agree with Sanchez et al. (2016) that the complex relationship between Pentecostals and education has not been sufficiently examined. Accordingly, the present study pursues a qualitative approach to make a further contribution to our understanding of Latino Pentecostal students.

Conceptual Framework

This research has used Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) three-part framework (predisposition, search, and choice) to describe the experiences and background characteristics of students pursuing a college decision (Andrew et al., 2016; Nora, 2004; Rizzo, 2014; Rosas & Hamrick, 2002; Smith & Fleming, 2006). I applied this framework first to consider how Pentecostal social networks influence students' desire for college enrollment in the *predisposition stage.* At the *search stage*, I focused on how Latino Pentecostal religious networks help students gather information and acquire a "choice set." Lastly, I sought to determine how Latino Pentecostal religious networks influenced students' decisions to matriculate into a particular program during the *choice stage.*

This dissertation was also informed by research that has distinguished Pentecostalism from other conservative Christian groups and has suggested that Pentecostals have greater hostility toward secular education (Beyerlein, 2004; Garneau & Schwadel, 2013). This research explored Pentecostal hostility towards education based on Beyerlein's (2004) concept of Pentecostal "defensive separatism" and students' "tendency to isolate" themselves, both of which might be motivating factors in Latino Pentecostals' decision to avoid college education. Applying Beyerlein's (2004) research on White Pentecostalism to Latino Pentecostal students, I treat Pentecostal distrust of secular education as distinct from evangelical dispositions. Evangelical Christians generally employ an "engaged orthodoxy" approach and are encouraged to pursue college education; in fact, evangelicals view interactions with non-Christians in college settings as an opportunity to evangelize (Beyerlein, 2004). Some perceptions of Latino Pentecostal students have suggested that they tend to view educational authority as a

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threat to religious authority and academic communities as a threat to personal holiness (Beyerlein, 2004; Ellison & Shercat, 1993; Gauchat, 2012; Mooney, 2007). However, others have perceived Latino Pentecostals as influenced by the evangelical "engaged orthodoxy," such as in their emphasis on evangelizing public institutions and finding social and spiritual benefits through interaction with non-Pentecostals (Beyerlein, 2004; Smith & Sikkink, 2000).

Using this conceptual framework, I conducted semi-structured interviews with Latino Pentecostal students and engaged in interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to describe how Pentecostal social networks influence the predisposition, search, and choice stages of Latino students' college decisions.

The conceptual framework diagram (Figure 1) demonstrates potential manifestations of Pentecostal hostility toward education and how they interact with Pentecostal social networks. Likewise, manifestations of evangelical "engaged orthodoxy" are considered as potentially interacting with Pentecostal social networks. This study approached the phenomenon of Latino Pentecostals' college choices by organizing data with the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) three-part framework in mind.

Summary

Latinos are the least likely racial or cultural group in the United States to enroll in a four-year program at a higher education institution (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). A growing part of the Latino community fervently identifies as Latino Pentecostal, which is a growing Latino subculture (Calvillo & Bailey, 2015; Espinosa et al., 2003; Marti, 2015). Research has found that participation in Latino social networks is
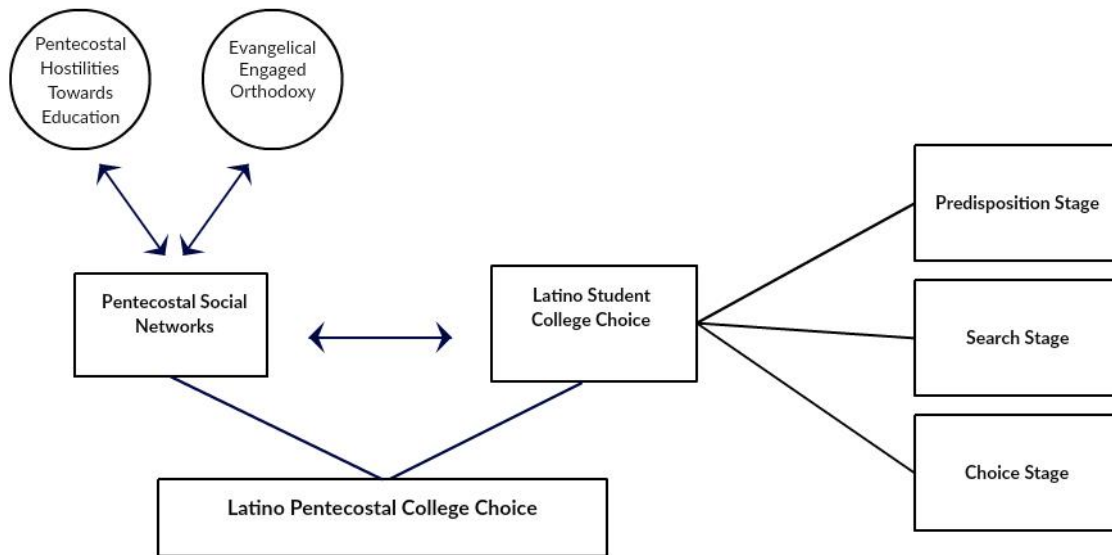
Figure 1. Diagram of the conceptual framework.

positively associated with Latinos' college choice (Nora, 2004; Pérez & McDonough 2008; Person & Rosenbaum, 2006), and religious social networks in general have been identified as having a positive influence on educational success (Antrop-González et al., 2005, Irizarry & Antrop-González, 2008; Liou et al., 2009; Nevárez-La Torre, 1997; Sikkink & Hernández, 2003). However, a negative relationship between Pentecostalism and education has also been demonstrated (Beyerlein, 2004; Garneau & Schwadel, 2013; Keysar & Kosmin, 1995; Kosmin et al., 1992), and the Latino Pentecostal community is growing rapidly (Deininger, 2014; Espinoza et al., 2003; Pew Research, 2014). Despite these developments, there has been no known research on the influence of Pentecostal social networks on Latinos' college choices. The influential nature of social networks

generally in Latino college decisions (Pérez & McDonough, 2008; Person & Rosenbaum, 2006), coupled with the growing Latino Pentecostal community, suggests that research on Latino Pentecostal religious networks and their impact on college decisions could make a valuable contribution to the research literature. The next chapter describes the methodology and design used for this research.

Chapter 3

Research Design and Methodology

Education is a profound means of achieving social equality that can facilitate economic and social improvement for the Latino community (Contreras, 2011; Gonzalez et al., 2013). More specifically, the Latino college choice process has substantial implications for young Latinos' the attainment of social capital and a more equitable future for the Latino community, which has been traditionally marginalized and underprivileged (Contreras, 2011; Harper et al., 2012; Terriquez, 2014). The Latino educational crisis is alarming not only for Latino communities but for the broader national effort to foster opportunity for all people. Research on Latino college choice not only contributes toward our understanding of the Latino educational crisis, but can potentially have positive implications for society at large (Contreras, 2011; Harper et al., 2012; Pérez & McDonough, 2008).

Pentecostalism has been increasing its influence on Latino youth (Deininger; 2014; Espinoza et al., 2003; Pew Research, 2014) and has a cultural tradition that discourages its adherents from pursuing higher education (Beyerlein, 2004). However, Latino churches in general have been found to support academic success and provide social and cultural capital to their members (Antrop-González et al., 2005, Irizarry & Antrop-González, 2008; Liou et al., 2009; Nevárez-La Torre, 1997; Sikkink & Hernández, 2003). An investigation of how Pentecostal social networks influence Latinos' college choices could be beneficial to educational institutions that seek to address the Latino educational crisis.

Aims of the Study

　　The purpose of this dissertation was to describe the perceptions of traditionally college-age Latino Pentecostal students and to investigate the influence of their religious social network on their college choice. A phenomenological approach was used to give voice to what young Latino Pentecostal students, as they grappled with their college choice, had to say about the influences of their religious communities. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do college-age Latino Pentecostals describe the influence of religious social networks on their college choice process?

2. How do the experiences of traditionally college-age Latino Pentecostals facilitate the predisposition, search, and choice process?

3. How do college-age Latino Pentecostals describe their perceptions of the attitudes of church leaders and members about attending college?

Research Design

　　Qualitative research serves as a scientifically legitimate means of revealing meanings constructed through experiential knowledge (Creswell, 2014; Maxwell, 2004). According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research is distinguished from quantitative research by its use of different philosophical presuppositions, as well as different data collection, analysis, and interpretation procedures. In contrast to the *positivist* approach found in most quantitative research, qualitative research adheres to the *interpretive constructionist* approach, drawing on different philosophical paradigms that focus on a naturalistic process of discovery (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). A main characteristic of qualitative research is a focus on participants' meanings while using inductive analysis

within an emergent design. The researcher, as the main research instrument, analyzes the meanings constructed by participants, searching for patterns and seeking to give a holistic account of the topic of interest (Creswell, 2014).

A qualitative research design is a beneficial approach to understanding the Latino Pentecostal student experience for two main reasons. First, there exists no known previous qualitative research focusing on Latino Pentecostal students. Quantitative studies have been conducted regarding Pentecostal (and specifically Latino Pentecostal) students and their attitudes toward education (Beyerlein, 2004; Garneau & Schwadel, 2013; Sanchez et al., 2016). Collectively, these studies have found that Latino Pentecostal students, and Pentecostal students in general, are less likely to attend college than other groups not associated with Pentecostalism. The research to date, however, does not provide an adequate understanding of Latino Pentecostal students and their college choice process. Moreover, no studies have examined the meanings formed surrounding the topic of education within Latino Pentecostal communities. This dissertation focuses qualitatively on understanding the Latino Pentecostal experience of college decision making by exploring the meanings constructed within these communities.

Second, a qualitative research design gives a voice to a seldom heard, frequently marginalized community. Listening to the experiences of those impacted by the Latino educational crisis is a valuable, revealing way to gain an understanding of this complex issue (Harper, 2007; Pérez & McDonough, 2008). With so many voices and studies seeking to understand students of color, giving a voice to traditionally marginalized students can enable a deeper understanding of how an underprivileged community builds meaning and interacts with college choice issues.

In sum, qualitative research that sensitively probes the perceptions of Latino Pentecostal students and provides a voice to students of color who are actually experiencing the phenomenon of college choice can provide a better understanding of Latinos' college decisions.

The Phenomenological Approach

According to Manen (2017), phenomenology is distinguished from other qualitative approaches by the method of epoché and reduction. These terms refer to the suspension of judgements or hypotheses, studying pre-reflected lived experiences, and deriving structural themes from the textural descriptions (Manen, 1997; Moustakas, 1994). Husserl (2014) defined phenomenology as studying an experience in its primordial essence, and Heidegger (1962) described ontological phenomenology as "to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself" (p. 58). In phenomenology, meaning is neither constructed nor attributed; rather, it arises from methodically allowing the "what is" to surface (Manen, 2017).

Phenomenology prioritizes the voice of the individual who experiences a phenomenon and uses qualitative data as a means to gain understanding (Harper et al., 2012). Its approach to research focuses on people's lived experiences while providing insights and generating qualitative evidence. The present research applied the phenomenological approach to exploring college choice experiences and how Latino Pentecostal students "perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others" (Patton, 2002, p. 104). The phenomenological approach seeks to understand and translate how those experiencing the phenomenon interpret the embedded meanings that underlie experiential information through

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conducting interviews (Smith & Osborn, 2015). According to Bruyn (1966),

"Phenomenology serves as a rationale behind efforts to understand individuals by

entering into their field of perception in order to see life as these individuals see it" (p.

90). This dissertation, which details the experiences of Latino Pentecostal students, used

the phenomenological approach to "access into the inner experiences of research

subjects" (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p. 105). My role as researcher was to listen to

experiences and, in doing so, to garner the essence of lived experiences through analysis.

My research was based on two main tenets of the phenomenological perspective.

First, I adhered to the phenomenological notion that experience remains temporal and

cultural. By allowing the philosophical underpinnings of social constructionism to drive

this research (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Husserl, 1965), I recognized that communities

develop their own meanings to explain their lived experiences (Cuba & Lincoln, 1994).

Social constructionism embodies the idea that individuals seek to make sense of their

everyday experiences and formulate meanings through interacting with their social

networks. Lived experience does not require judgments and validity tests based on

universal principles to discover meanings. Rather, a phenomenological lens can provide

an understanding of how people negotiate and make sense of their experiences in their

own lives and from their own cultural perspectives.

The second tenet of phenomenology applied in my research presupposes that

experience is the source of knowledge and the basis for behavior (Cohen, Mannion, &

Morrison, 2007). Experience is used to build understandings and perceptions that are then

manifested in actions (Sloan & Bowe, 2013). As previously noted, the college choice

process is not simply a decision, but a result of social interactions and community

influences (Gonzalez, 2012). This dissertation focused on the roots of the experienced social interactions that influenced the meanings that were constructed, with the purpose of seeking to discover motivating factors for college choice behavior. Accordingly, I uncovered the constructs that underpin the experiences of Latino Pentecostal students with regard to their college choice. As typically occurs in an endeavor of phenomenological research, this research provides an understanding of how learned attitudes are translated into action.

Phenomenologists believe that the experiences of a particular community will be perceived through a specific lens according to the position of the lived space, lived human relationships, and the lived time of the individual (Manen, 1997; Moustakas, 1994). As stated previously, Latino Pentecostalism is a growing Latino subculture that, according to prior research is less likely to attend college; not only when compared to White counterparts (Aud et al., 2012; Liu, 2011; Perna, 2000), but also when compared to other religious groups (Beyerlein, 2004; Garneau & Schwadel, 2013; Sanchez et al., 2016). Latino Pentecostals' lived experiences, cultural expectations, and guiding social interactions all serve as the context underlying the relevant perceptions. Phenomenology allows outsiders access to see a particular phenomenon through the eyes of the individuals experiencing it (Swinton & Mowat, 2006). To gain a deeper understanding of Latino college choice, it is beneficial to hear directly from Latino Pentecostal students and discover the realities they have constructed based on their own unique traditions and social perspectives.

This research utilized interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as its specific phenomenological method to explore how Latino Pentecostal students make

sense of their college choice process. "IPA is a suitable approach when one is trying to find out how individuals are perceiving the particular situations they are facing, how they are making sense of their personal and social world" (Smith & Osborn, 2015, p. 55). IPA is rooted in the epistemological conviction that participant narratives can provide information on how particular people understand their own experiences (Snelgrove, 2014). It connects practical acts of living, revealed through the narratives, to the meaning-making processes of the individual (Crist & Tanner, 2003). IPA is phenomenological because it focuses on consciousness, and it is interpretative because it acknowledges the role of interpretation in negotiating meaning (Smith et al., 2009).

The researcher who conducts IPA makes meaning out of participants' efforts to make sense of their experiences and perceptions (Smith et al., 2009). The approach emphasizes the researcher himself (or herself) as the research instrument, gathering and filtering data in a dynamic process of interpretive activity (Smith & Osborn, 2015). Therefore, the researcher should describe his role or the relevant aspects of his work that impact his ability to conduct the research (Greenbank, 2003).

Role of the Researcher

My research position was that of an outsider engaging with participants who belong to Latino Pentecostal churches, which are not my own religious community. I had no prior relationship with any of the participants and received permission to begin recruiting participants with the help of a Latino Pentecostal pastor who shares a mutual friend with me. I had no personal experience of Latino Pentecostal social networks influencing my own college choice process, but I did have some common experience by which to build rapport with participants. Munkejord (2009) wrote that when a researcher

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takes on a passive outsider role, this can cause discomfort for participants. Finding opportunities to connect emotionally and build rapport supports the naturalistic atmosphere that enables rich data collection (Munkejord, 2009). Even though I conducted research from outside the Latino Pentecostal student experience, I identify with the Pentecostal movement and have attended Spanish-speaking Pentecostal churches. This prior experience presented an opportunity to connect with participants and create a comfortable setting for the subjects' lived experiences to surface.

Denzin and Lincoln (2010) stressed that the researcher should strive for less social distance while maintaining a neutral presence that does not interfere with the authentic descriptions of participants. Studies have shown that Latino Pentecostals tend to distrust outsiders and that their communities can foster anti-education feelings (Beyerlein, 2004; Lorentzen & Mira, 2005; Sanchez-Walsh; 2012). Sanchez-Walsh (2012) described the resistance she encountered as a researcher interviewing Latino Pentecostals: "The historic anti-intellectual strains that run deep in Pentecostalism make such exchanges [formal interviews] nearly impossible. … People in the subculture [Latino Pentecostalism] are guided by the need to protect their faith—from the unorthodox, from the critic, and from doubt" (pp. 192–193). Having a Pentecostal background and personal friendships within the Latino Pentecostal community not only allowed me to gain access to participants, but also promoted feelings of trust and understanding.

Research Site and Participants

Consistent with recent research, I treated Latino Pentecostal students as a distinct group from evangelical and mainline Protestant students (Beyerlein, 2004; Garneau & Schwadel, 2013; Lorentzen & Mira, 2005; Sanchez et al., 2016; Wacker, 2001;

Woodbury & Smith, 1998) and sought specifically to interact with who attended Latino

Christian congregations within the Pentecostal tradition. This study defines Pentecostals

as Protestant Christians who practice speaking in tongues, prophecy, and divine healing

and emphasize the exercise of miraculous gifts as described by religious research

(Beyerlein, 2004; Garneau & Schwadel, 2013; Lorentzen & Mira, 2005; Nel, 2015;

Peterson, 2009; Wacker, 2001; Woodbury & Smith, 1998).

Five participants were recruited from three different places of worship (Table 1).

The five participants were an appropriate sample size for an in-depth evaluation seeking

to capture a robust description of multiple voices experiencing this phenomenon.

According to Morse (2000, 2015), a phenomenological approach entails obtaining a large

amount of data on each participant and therefore needs fewer participants than other

methods. Moreover, Smith and Osborn (2015) suggested that IPA should be conducted

with a small group of participants to ensure a suitably in-depth engagement with each

individual. Although Smith and Osborn (2015) recommended using only three

participants, this study reached data saturation after five participants were interviewed.

The primary research location was a Spanish-speaking church with more than 150

members, located in a rural area one hour outside a major U.S. city. The church is

independent and operated by the pastor, who uses the word *Pentecostal* to describe the

congregation. The pastor previously had ties with a large international federation of

Pentecostal churches but had recently separated from that organization due to financial

issues, not theological issues. The second research location was a small church of 25

members, associated with an international federation of Spanish-speaking Pentecostal

churches that broke away from the Assemblies of God. The third church I visited was an

independent congregation of 35 members who prefer to use the term *Christian* when describing themselves. The pastor calls the church nondenominational while acknowledging that it is rooted in the Pentecostal tradition, and it exhibited Pentecostal characteristics such as speaking in tongues, prophetic rituals, an emphasis on divine miracles, and congregation members dancing while believing that they are under divine influence (Garneau & Schwadel, 2013; Nel, 2015; Peterson, 2009). Researchers have classified these characteristics as Pentecostal and as distinct from the practices of evangelical and mainline Protestants (Beyerlein, 2004; Garneau & Schwadel, 2013; Lorentzen & Mira, 2005; Wacker, 2001; Woodbury & Smith, 1998), even though "at the individual level, Pentecostal and evangelical identities are not necessarily mutually exclusive" (Sanchez et al., 2016, p. 176). Many Pentecostals prefer the term *Christian* when identifying themselves and see themselves as beyond denominational classifications and as practicing an authentic Christianity (Sanchez-Walsh, 2001).

I recruited participants by engaging in criterion and snowball sampling. Criterion sampling involves selecting participants who meet a specific, predetermined criterion (Patton, 2002), and is typically used by IPA researchers (Smith et al., 2009). This approach primarily involved identifying and selecting individuals who had experienced the phenomena of interest. The following criteria were used for participant recruitment: (1) having regularly attended Spanish-speaking Latino Christian churches within the Pentecostal tradition from infancy through their high-school years; (2) of traditional college age (i.e., age 18 to 24); and (3) current students or graduates of a two- or four-year college program. To ensure that all participants had experienced the phenomenon of the college choice process with the influence of a Latino Pentecostal social network,

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regular participation in a Latino Pentecostal community since infancy was required; I wanted to study young people who had been born into the Pentecostal tradition, rather than converts. I defined regular participation as habitually attending services at least weekly throughout childhood and throughout the high-school years. I also used the age range of 18 to 24, which aligns with the established definition of "traditionally college-age" (Fry, 2002; Liu, 2011).

I combined criterion sampling with snowball sampling (Given, 2008) to assist the recruitment process. Snowball sampling refers to asking participants to recommend additional prospective participants, causing a chain effect that facilitates recruitment. Starting with a referral from a Latino Pentecostal pastor, I recruited additional participants in this snowball method.

Table 1

Latino Pentecostal Student Participants

Name	Age	Student Status	Degree Type	Church Size
Romona	24	Graduate	4-year	25
Lupe	19	Current student	4-year	40
Josias	21	Current student	2-year	150
Alberto	21	Graduate	2-year	150
Angelina	23	Graduate	4-year	150

Note. Church sizes are approximations provided by participants.

Data Collection

This research followed standard IPA guidelines. Research data were collected primarily through in-depth and semi-structured interviews (Smith & Osborn, 2015) with Latino Pentecostal students. Each interview took place at a location of the participants' choosing, which included churches, restaurants, and private residences.

Semi-structured interviews are a flexible data collection instrument that is commonly used by IPA researchers (Smith & Osborn, 2015), since the IPA objective is to "analyse in detail how participants perceive and make sense of things which are happening to them" (Smith & Osborn, 2015, p. 57). Given the emergent nature of phenomenology research, this type of interviewing provides a framework that allows the essence of the participants' experiential knowledge to surface and tends to provide rich data (Smith & Osborn, 2015). "With semi-structured interviews, the investigator will have a set of questions on an interview schedule, but the interview will be guided by the schedule rather than dictated by it" (Smith & Osborn, 2015, p. 59). This is done to establish rapport with the participant and to probe areas of interest that might emerge. Rapport is a necessary component and can be enhanced by making participants fully aware of the research and its purpose (Lichtman, 2013). These strategies promoted a relaxed atmosphere that encouraged the participants to reveal their constructed meanings in interviewer-interviewee relationships that supported naturalistic conversations. Moreover, the participants chose the interview locations to promote a relaxed and comfortable setting, as is appropriate for IPA research.

Appendix A contains the questions that guided the interview process. All questions were open-ended and covered two main topic areas: (1) student perceptions of

the value placed on college education by Latino Pentecostals and (2) the influences of their Pentecostal social groups during their college choice process. The first question posed was a so-called "grand tour" question, a non-directive and very general inquiry: "How did your church help you at the end of high school?" Grand tour questions help to further build rapport and give participants the freedom to elaborate their answers in their own way (Lichtman, 2013). Throughout the interview process, I looked for opportunities to interject follow-up questions and prompts, following Smith and Osborn's (2015) suggestion to be flexible with previously composed interview questions while allowing for improvisation. As is usual in semi-structured interviews and IPA research, a naturalistic conversation was encouraged by guiding the discussion to the topics of interest in order to achieve detailed, in-depth descriptions.

The interview protocol that guided the questioning was divided into four sections. The first section contained a series of questions about the predisposition stage and was informed by research that revealed the different dispositions associated with the Pentecostal and evangelical cultural traditions (Beyerlein, 2004; Garneau & Schwadel, 2013; Keysar & Kosmin, 1995; Kosmin et al., 1992). The second and third sections covered the search and choice stages of college choice, respectively and allowed participants to share their stories of college decision making and to discuss their social influences. The final section of questioning was designed to prompt the participant to comment further on any topic covered or to share information that they considered especially important. Interviews were digitally recorded, stored on a working laptop, and copied onto an external hard drive, after which I personally transcribed them within one week after each interview.

Data Analysis

The data analysis followed the guidelines of IPA as described by Smith and Osborn (2015), and further guidance was incorporated from Moustakas's (1994) approach to phenomenological research. The initial stage involved taking the raw data in the form of transcribed interviews and identifying significant statements for analysis (Smith & Osborn, 2015). These statements were given codes, with each statement being granted equal worth, and a list of statements was compiled. The statements were organized in a manner that avoided repetition and overlapping meanings.

The compiled list of statements was then grouped into meaning units, and concise phrases were assigned to capture the essence of the lived experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2015). Participant statements were grouped into distinct categories, and duplicate statements were eliminated through a process called textual description, which seeks to determine the texture of meaning from the significant statements (Moustakas, 1994). This process acted as the piecing together of the "what is" or the "what happened" of the experience. From the significant statements, formulated meanings were constructed, so as to clarify the context behind the statements (Moustakas, 1994; Smith & Osborn, 2015).

The next step compiled the formulated meaning units into themes through a process of structural description. The meaning units were first listed in chronological order as they appeared in the text and were then clustered into themes and reordered in a manner that made sense of their connections. Guided by Moustakas (1994) and Smith and Osborn's (2015) method of analysis, this stage enabled the "how" of the experience to emerge by identifying themes that were common to all the participants' descriptions.

A final table of themes was produced from the initial transcript, and the process was repeated with further transcripts following the guidelines of Smith and Osborn (2015). The theme list from the first transcript was used to inform the analysis of subsequent transcripts while identifying new and different themes. When the analysis of all transcripts was complete, a final table of superordinate themes was produced and I wrote an overall description that highlighted the meanings inherent in the participants' experience.

Phenomenological analysis is a recursive process, in which any emergent clusters of themes are referenced as the researcher reads and rereads the transcripts. In recursive fashion, the analysis continues to seek out the texture of meaning and allows the lived themes to become more fully manifested. These steps are repeated as necessary throughout the analysis process. The analysis ends with the construction of an overall essence and invariant structure of the participants' experiences, or, in the words of Moustakas (1994), "a unified statement of the essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole" (p. 100).

In IPA, the construction of hypotheses is suspended to avoid hindering the process of understanding the lived experiences of the participants. My role, as a researcher outside the Latino Pentecostal college choice experience, included recognizing that my participants' descriptions were perceived through their own background and experiences. Finley (2003) suggested that researchers should employ a self-awareness of their own motivations, thoughts, and beliefs in an effort to clearly comprehend and analyze the perceptions of others. I avoided projecting my own perceptions, experiences, or thoughts on the research and analyzed the voices of my participants as distinct from

my own. Husserl (1965) believed that the researcher should "bracket" and isolate his or

her opinions from the analysis for further consideration in the analysis process. Likewise,

Lichtman (2013) stated that phenomenology researchers should make known their biases

and bracket their preconceptions so as to allow the participants' voices to be accurately

transmitted. Modern researchers have acknowledged that although it is impossible to

isolate one's own biases completely, a researcher can engage in authentic reflection

practices that enhance self-awareness when interpreting data (Litchman, 2013; Sloan &

Bowe, 2014). Authentic reflection or "reflexibility" refers to the process by which

"researchers are conscious of and reflective about the ways in which their questions,

methods and subject position might impact the data or the psychological knowledge

produced in a study" (Sloan & Bowe, 2013, p. 1297). Reflexivity generates a self-

awareness that aids in the understanding of the researcher's own motivations, thoughts,

and beliefs so that he or she can more clearly comprehend and analyze the worldview of

others (Finlay, 2003). Throughout the research process, I engaged in reflexibility and

bracketed my own responses to participants' descriptions of their experiences. Engaging

in an authentic reflective process when analyzing the data supported the effort to clearly

understand the phenomena as described by the participants.

Trustworthiness

The philosophical commitments of qualitative research require distinct standards

of trustworthiness. The legitimacy of qualitative research depends on the presentation of

rich descriptive data to provide the reader with an understanding of the meaning

constructed by those experiencing the issue under examination (Kelliher, 2005; Stake,

1995). The criteria for evaluating qualitative research differ from those used in

quantitative research, in that they focus on the researcher's ability to provide evidence

that the descriptions and analysis represent the reality of the situation as presented by the

participants (Litchman, 2013; Rossman & Rallis, 2012). This dissertation used strategies

that increased *credibility, dependability, transferability,* and *confirmability* so as to

enhance the overall trustworthiness of this research.

Credibility refers to the validity of the researcher's portrayal of the participants'

perspectives and experiences (Creswell, 2007; Shenton, 2004). The researcher must

ensure accurate representation of the participants' views, and accordingly a fundamental

means of providing credibility is the adherence to a systematic data collection procedure.

In this chapter, I have described and given examples of the methods used to collect and

analyze data. The adoption of established research methods supports the credibility of

qualitative research (Shenton, 2004; Yin, 1994). Moreover, site triangulation, another

strategy that promotes credibility, was also used to reduce the effect of local factors upon

the data (Shenton, 2004).

Dependability in qualitative research refers to whether one can track the

procedures and processes used to collect and interpret data (Shenton, 2004). Lincoln and

Guba (1985) stressed that credibility is connected to dependability and that strategies

used to enhance credibility also support dependability. The methods used were in close

alignment with those generally applied in phenomenological research, and they provide

assurances of dependability even to those who are not familiar with qualitative research

methods.

Transferability refers to how well the researcher has provided enough insight into

the experience so that the reader can properly judge whether the findings could be

applicable to another setting (Shenton, 2004). In this dissertation, I have clearly detailed

the experiences of Latino Pentecostal students in their college choice process by

methodically following qualitative procedures. The individual narratives and detailed

descriptions can be used to piece together an overall, unifying description of the

experience and to assess whether those descriptions would be transferable to other

contexts.

Finally, confirmability refers to the likelihood that the research findings could be

replicated with other participants and how the interpretations of the data have been

rigorously derived (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Although a single dissertation is not

sufficient to enable robust generalizations, like other phenomenological studies it can

establish the existence of phenomena that would be likely to recur in similar communities

(Kelliher, 2005). As for the rigor of interpreted data, the researcher should be aware of

his or her own biases and presuppositions (Kelliher, 2005; Litchman, 2013; Ritchie &

Lewis; 2003). Ritchie and Lewis (2003) argued that although researchers strive to be

objective, complete objectivity is impossible in social research. They indicated that

researchers should study not only their participants' interpretations but also their own

personal interpretations in order to effectively understand their data. The following

strategies promoted the confirmability of my data interpretation.

I exhibited caution in understanding the participants' perspectives by deploying

open-ended questioning techniques during in-depth, semi-structured interviews that gave

the participants freedom to direct the discussion toward what they considered most

important to say. Furthermore, I engaged in member checking, or asking participants to

check and confirm the data collected (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016;

Lichtman, 2013) and conducted follow-up interviews. According to Birt et al. (2016), confirmability can be increased by actively involving participants in checking and confirming results. All participants were given copies of their transcriptions and were invited to review them and modify anything that they felt did not capture their intended meaning.

In my follow-up interviews, the participants discussed another round of topics based on emerging themes. Lewis and Ritchie (2003) stated that follow-up interviews should be designed to "allow intensive study of particular groups or issues, returning to a purposively selected sub-sample of those interviewed at the first stage" (p. 55). Although one round of interviews can be sufficient in phenomenological research (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003), follow-up interviews are a useful means to explore identified themes and provide further data for research. Follow-up interviews were also transcribed and made available to participants for clarification and additions.

Throughout the research process, I engaged in bracketing and reflexibility, as discussed above, as a means of enhancing confirmability and allowing me to properly represent the collective experience of participants (Kelliher, 2005; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Bracketing and reflexibility assisted me in maintaining awareness that my participants' descriptions are perceived through their own background and are distinct from my own.

Ethical Considerations

The ethical protection of participants was supported by the research approval process at the Institutional Review Board of Rowan University. All participants were age 18 or over, and each participant was given two informed consent sheets: one for

participation and the other for permission to be digitally recorded (see Appendix B). The

two forms contained detailed information about the research and its purpose and nature,

enabling participants to make an informed decision about their contribution to the project.

The participants were informed of their rights and told that they could contact me or my

dissertation advisor at any time with questions or concerns. In addition, during interviews

the participant was permitted to refuse to answer any question or stop the interview at any

time. Participants were reminded that they could discontinue their participation at any

time and that if they did so, their data would not be used in this research and would be

immediately destroyed. Moreover, the consent forms supported the privacy and

confidentiality of participants, and the individual identities of all participants were

achieved through the use of pseudonyms and the censoring of any data that might betray

their anonymity.

No external rewards were offered for participation. The subjects' participation

was driven by their willingness to contribute to a broader understanding of Latino

Pentecostal students. Offering no external rewards in this scenario avoided any risk of

perceived coercion or manipulation and supported the participants' free decision whether

to remain involved in the research.

Limitations

The generalizability of this dissertation's findings is limited. The nature of

qualitative research does not lead to broad generalizations, but it allows for inferences to

be made to larger communities. There are methodological limitations in qualitative

research, as with other forms of research. Williams (2000) coined the term *modertum*

generalization to refer to qualitative research, arguing that it provides a "broader

recognizable set of features" (p. 215). In this study, I designed the participant sample criteria to allow for inferences to the wider Latino Pentecostal community. While not providing sufficient evidence that all Latino Pentecostal students experience this phenomenon in the same manner, this research offers an understanding that may be attributed to similar communities. The participant sample was limited to only five individuals who fit the desired criteria in an effort to provide detailed descriptions and truthful insights into the experiences of this small group. Although this dissertation describes the experience of the sample group with confidence, it does not make broad generalizations to all Latino Pentecostal students. Rather, these findings provide a meaningful description of the type of experiences that influence Latino Pentecostals' college choices.

Summary

The purpose of this dissertation was to describe the perceptions of traditionally college-age Latino Pentecostal students and the influence of their religious social network. Giving a voice to traditionally marginalized students can provide an understanding of how a community of color builds meaning and interacts with college choice issues, in this case through an acknowledged religious identity. A phenomenological approach best fit the purpose of this study because it emphasizes the voices of those who have actually experienced the phenomenon of interest and utilizes it as a means towards deeper understanding (Harper et al., 2012). This research utilized criterion sampling, identifying and selecting Latino individuals who had experienced a Pentecostal influence on their college choice. Research data were collected through semi-structured interviews in accordance with established guidelines (Lichtman, 2013; Smith

& Osborn, 2015). The data analysis followed the methodology of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as described by Smith and Osborn (2015). Moreover, to ensure the trustworthiness of this dissertation, strategies were used to enhance trustworthiness. Throughout the research process, I engaged in strategies that supported trustworthiness, including bracketing and reflexibility, as well as conducting member checks and follow-up interviews. Although it is not possible to claim that the findings are broadly generalizable to the diverse Latino Pentecostal community, this dissertation provides a meaningful description of the types of experiences that influence Latino Pentecostal students during their college choice process.

Chapter 4

Participant Narratives

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to provide an understanding of the influence of religious social networks on the college choice process of Latino Pentecostal students. A phenomenological approach (Moustakas, 1994; Smith & Osborn, 2015) was used to bring the stories of each participant to the foreground. By methodically allowing the essence of college choice experiences to surface, this dissertation highlights the voices of individuals who have actually experienced being a Latino Pentecostal student and navigating the college decision process. Harper (2007) and Pérez and McDonough (2008) both contended that researchers should listen to voices within the Latino community when studying the plight of Latino education. The phenomenological research design employed by this dissertation gives a voice to traditionally marginalized students in an effort to understand how a particular Latino subculture engages with college choice issues. The aim of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is to provide rich descriptions of lived experiences. By focusing on a particular homogenous group, we can understand individuals within a situated setting (Smith et al., 2009). The narratives presented in this chapter help to provide a meaningful understanding of how these students make meaning and how they managed their college choice processes.

The individual narratives of five study participants are presented: Romona, Lupe, Josias, Alberto, and Angelina (see Table 1 in chapter 3 for their background information). These participants provided thoughts, opinions, and stories that were relevant in answering the research questions of this dissertation. All five have attended Spanish-speaking Pentecostal religious services since their infancy and habitually join with their

church communities three to five days a week, for activities that are approximately three hours long. The participants encompassed both genders. All five subjects fit the research criteria and were assigned pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality.

The interviews were designed to promote a relaxed atmosphere in which the participants would feel comfortable. Sanchez-Walsh (2012) described the unique challenges involved in researching Latino Pentecostal church members due to their suspicion of the academic community and a tendency toward defensiveness against outside influences perceived as threatening. The semi-structured interview format (Smith & Osborn, 2015) was used to encourage conversation, build rapport, and thus elicit deep, rich material that could be used to depict the participants' experiences.

My goal in this chapter was to clearly describe the lived experiences of these five Latino Pentecostal students in their own words, with their own anecdotes, and to express their own understandings. Phenomenology is the study of the essence of lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994); accordingly, this presentation of participant voices provides authenticity to the lived experiences of these Latino Pentecostal students. The following selected portions of narratives are relevant to the research questions and provide a glimpse into the lives of Latino Pentecostal students making college decisions. To understand the phenomenon more clearly, the narratives are organized into two broad topical sections: (1) Religious Social Networks, which presents participant descriptions of how their religious communities influenced their lives; (2) College Choice, on their college decision experiences and their relation to the Pentecostal tradition. The voices of participants display the means by which each individual is oriented within their lived experiences (Crist & Tanner, 2003). IPA aims to uncover the essence of the lived

experience of individuals and provide in-depth understanding of particular persons that may be transferable to similar groups experiencing the same phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009). By listening to the words of Latino Pentecostal students, the reader may see how common themes emerged. This chapter presents the stories of all five participants so as to show where the individual voices diverge or coalesce and how the research arrived at a unifying description of their experiences.

Romona

> The Pastor would sit down with us, talk to us, and do different presentations to make sure that we didn't let anybody change what we believe, and that we didn't get into bad groups who might give us the wrong thing in college.

> Romona was 24 years old at the time of the interview, recently married and two months pregnant with her first child. She lived with her husband and her mother, both of whom were fellow members of her small church of about 25 people. She attended services three or more days a week and taught Bible studies for the children of the local community. Romona has completed a four-year degree in early childhood education and was in her first year of working at a local public school.

> **Religious social networks.** Romona looks to her pastor for information as to how to navigate various situations:

> Any time I have any question, or I want to talk to him about something, I can just text him or call him. I can say something like "Pastor, whenever you get some time, can you let me know, so that when we are at church, we can both sit down." Then I ask him for advice or talk with him about something. So he'd always call me.

Romona credits her pastor with supporting her aspirations to obtain her degree as well as helping her overcome challenges while in college:

There were times when I felt like I wanted to give up, because there were some courses that were a little hard for me. So I would close my book and go on my knees and pray and cry. I would say, "God, without your help, I don't think I'm going to be able to pass this. I don't understand this." And I would be so frustrated sometimes and feel like giving up. And then I'd get a call from the pastor, telling me that "I know that you are sad. I know that you're going through hard times in college," without him even knowing and without me even telling him. … My pastor would say, "I was praying for you and the Holy Spirit made me feel that I should call you and pray for you." And he would pray for me and then say, "That class that you were worrying about, God is going to help you. You are going to come out of this with a good grade. You are going to pass that class, and you are going to call me, and you are going to tell me that you passed that class." So I would cry and stuff like that. I would say, "Oh, thank you, God, because I knew that you were going to help me." And that lifted me up. He reminded me that God was going to help me and I needed those words of encouragement from my pastor.

Romona perceives that God supported her throughout college and made her success possible:

Before every test, I would just put my head down and pray, and God helped me with every test. He even helped me walk through that stage when I got my diploma. Every class when I saw that I got an A or a B or even a C, I said "Thank

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you, God." I was so grateful because he [God] was there helping me and giving me the knowledge I needed to complete the course. When I had to do presentations in class, I felt like I had to throw up. And I would pray, "God, please give me the words I need and please give me the knowledge." It was very hard for me to speak to my other classmates. And my presentations always ended up being some of the best ones. There were papers that I would love to describe. I would see the disappointment in some of my classmates and I was like "Oh my God, I did great." When I received my papers back and they had great comments on the bottom, I knew God helped me. God helped me graduate from college and that's it.

Romona sees college friendships as a challenge for Pentecostals who want to be faithful to the rules of their church:

We wear skirts all the time and we have to dress a certain way. So I have Pentecostal friends that when they went from high school to college, their parents were very strict about making them wear their skirts. They got involved with new friends in college and they would do their makeup for them in college. The girls from church would ask their friends to bring them pants to wear in school and change back into their skirts when their parents came to pick them up, or when they took the bus they would change. We had young people from our church do that, so our pastor started talking to us more and focusing on the young people who were going to college.

Romona understands the distinction between conservative and liberal Pentecostals to be based on their differences in dress code: "They are able to wear pants. And that is

my understanding of Pentecostals who are liberal. We are more modest. We don't wear

any jewelry, makeup, or stuff like that." Viewing her church as more conservative, she

adheres to a traditional Pentecostal dress code. Romona believes that getting permission

from her pastor is necessary if her dress code obligations cannot be met:

> I do follow the rules of the church. And if there is a time that I am not able to
>
> follow the rules, it's because of work regulations—like pants at my workplace are
>
> necessary. I let my pastor know and he is aware of it.

Romona also perceives that breaking the church's rules would cause her to lose

favor with God:

> I was always afraid that I would do something that is wrong and God would
>
> punish me. So I never did things wrong. … Being separated from the world is not
>
> following what the world does. For example, we don't believe in drinking
>
> alcohol, so we don't do that. So if I were to go to a party, even if I just sat there
>
> and didn't drink, the church taught me that I would still be a part of that party
>
> because I was there. They [the church] told me that the Holy Spirit leaves you and
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> is not with you anymore when you are in a place where God can't be a part of.
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> Because at that moment, God is not being praised and you are in an environment
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> where you are not supposed to be. … My mom always used to tell me that
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> "Remember, if you get in someone else's car, you might have a car accident. That
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> would be God punishing you for not obeying me." Anything can happen to you,
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> somebody might take you away. So something bad can happen to you because
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> you are hiding stuff from me. My mom would say, "Remember, if you do
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> something behind my back, God is watching and he's going to reveal it to me that

you are doing something you're not supposed to be doing." So I had those experiences behind me.

Romona was also influenced by her pastor to view dating non-Pentecostals as a threat to Pentecostal holiness:

I had feelings for somebody. So I told my pastor, "There's this guy and I have feelings for him, but he doesn't go to church." My pastor would give me advice. He said, "Don't you know that the relationship is *desigual* [unequal]?" You know, when you marry a person who isn't Christian or when you are with someone who isn't Christian. So he would give me advice about that. He would say, "What if that person doesn't want to go to church? And you don't go to church and you start following this guy instead of him following you?" He said this because sometimes girls think that they can convince their boyfriends to come to church and that doesn't always happen. My pastor warned me that I should not allow anyone to take me away from my relationship with God. So I felt like, yes, my pastor is right. Then I started seeing things. The pastor said, "Don't jump into like a relationship like that."

Romona expressed dissatisfaction with her church's isolation and a desire for more evangelistic activity and ministry directed toward outsiders:

It is unfortunate, but Pentecostals should have a bigger heart to help others. We keep an image that we're Christians and we are so concerned with leadership positions at church that we forget that there is more out there—that people outside the church need our help and they need our advice. We forget that people need us out there to give them a hand. I feel that non-Pentecostal churches do this

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better than us. I feel that we are becoming a group that doesn't want to get involved. I'm not saying we should get involved to follow what the world is doing, but to help the world by reaching out to the community. I feel like we are not doing that enough.

College choice. Romona discusses her college choice:

I have seen a lot of church members who really want to see their kids go to college. They want more for their children than finishing high school and getting a job. They want them to succeed more. The people that I know, from church, are really encouraging their kids to continue their education. … My pastor sat down with us, with all the kids who are going to college, and he gave us advice. He told us that college is a great opportunity, and that you guys can make it and become doctors and big people.

Romona's experiences teaching children in her religious community directly influenced her decision to pursue a degree in education:

My pastor would always say, "Do what you know, and do what you want to do."
… I wanted to act, it was a dream of mine. I really wanted to act and I did acting in high school by doing the plays. But I decided not to do that because only pretty people go on TV and I'm shy. So I started to go to school for radiology. I got that idea when I went to the hospital and I had an X-ray done and I saw how interesting their job was. But then I got a little scared because I started that major in college and had second thoughts. If I started my career in the emergency room and came into contact with people with their bones out or something disturbing, it would be difficult for me. I couldn't do that. I couldn't handle seeing blood. So,

I was a little afraid. Then I started working in child care and I thought, "Oh, I can

go for education because I do like teaching." I like kids. I was involved with

children at church and I enjoy having my classes at church and teaching.

Romona perceives that older Pentecostals are hostile toward college compared to

the younger generation:

I feel like people might think that college isn't for Pentecostals, because I have

heard comments from people who say that college students drink, and if you go

to church you shouldn't be going there. More older people, I hear them saying

stuff like that.

Romona was guided by her pastor to view college going as an opportunity to evangelize

by being an example of authentic Christianity to others:

My pastor was always having *estudios* [studies] about peer pressure because

when you are in high school and you transition out of high school into college,

you have more freedom. So he used to give *estudios* about peer pressure and

doing the right thing. He encouraged us to always be an example to others.

Romona sees herself as an example of authentic Christianity to her fellow college

students and non-Pentecostal friends:

I had a lot of friends tell me, "I really like you because I had a lot of Christian

friends, people that I met, and the first thing they did is judge me. And you don't

judge me. You're a really good friend and you always give me good advice and I

feel that when I really need good advice from a really good friend, I can always

come to you." So I always received those compliments from my friends. … Most

of my friends in college, they didn't go to church. I had different friends.

Sometimes they came to church with me because we have a judgment play that is played every year here in the church. … I had a best friend at college. She did not go to church and she had a birthday party. And she said to me, "I am having this birthday party. I'm going to be playing music, and there will be drinking and stuff like that. Can you come?" And I had to tell her that I was sorry but I wouldn't be able to go. Then she said, "You know what, because I know that you go to church, this time I won't have any music or alcohol so you can come. However, after you leave, I'm going to put on my music on and we're going to take the alcohol out." So, I went and my mom waited for me outside. I was able to go to her party and take her a gift, and be there for her.

Romona chose a school close to her home in order to commute. One reason for this decision was that she wanted to keep her commitments and responsibilities to her church:

When I was in college, I was able to keep my responsibility, like the things I was supposed to do in church. For example, I was a teacher for Bible study and I was able to teach the children and I could attend adult Bible studies. There were times when my classes would be on Tuesday nights. So my pastor would change Bible studies to Thursday so I could be there. … It was very important to me because I felt like if my college class ended early, I would be able to go to church for at least an hour and a half and be there. I felt like I was giving God some time because I made it through college with his help.

One reason why Romona commuted to college was to limit her exposure to parts of campus life that might threaten her Pentecostal lifestyle:

I went to a college where I could drive back and forth from my house to campus. Now, they're [church members] more afraid to send their children to … a university where you can stay there and live. They have dorms for the students at our local university and my pastor works in lawn care at that campus and he sees how they party. The students can party in their dorms, but they're not allowed to. Sometimes students drink alcohol. So I can understand how some parents do worry about their children and how they might get involved in stuff like that. As long as their students commute from home, they can study. But living on campus, maybe on the weekends, they might be in a group where they are influenced to party and drink.

Romona understands her community's concern with outsiders, and she values living a separated lifestyle. She recalled how her pastor prepared young people for college:

The pastor would sit down with us, talk to us, and do different presentations to make sure that we didn't let anybody change what we believe and that we didn't get into bad groups that might give us the wrong thing in college.

Throughout her interviews, Romona stressed her faithfulness to her pastor, Pentecostal rules, and her church obligations. She consistently expressed gratitude to God, her pastor, and her church for their support throughout her college choice process and her college experience. Romona emphasizes evangelizing outsiders and feels that her church should engage with the community more. She recognizes that older Pentecostals are uncomfortable with college and attributes their attitudes to a protectiveness that

desires to shield younger church members from vices and prohibited activities like alcohol use, dress code violations, and dancing.

Lupe

> Some of the churches around here make the girls wear long skirts and be covered up, and they can't raise their voices to a man. And, I'm just like—this is America. But in their minds, they say, our church, our religion, this is what we believe in. I feel that these girls are being trained to be wives [after high school].

Lupe was 19 years old and a member of a small church of about 40 people. She had recently begun her first year at a four-year university. Lupe was majoring in musical theater and had broken from traditional Pentecostal customs by wearing makeup and pants, dancing, and singing non-Christian music. Lupe preferred the term *Christian* to *Pentecostal* even though her church incorporates the Pentecostal characteristics of emotional worship, mysticism, divine healing, exorcism, prophecy, dancing in a mystical trance, passing out after being touched by a minister (slain in the Holy Spirit), and speaking in tongues (Garneau & Schwadel, 2013; Lorentzen & Mira, 2005; Nel, 2015; Peterson, 2009).

Religious social networks. Lupe is sensitive to judgmentalism in church congregations due to her childhood experience:

> When I was in school, my parents separated. Because they were pastors, they were judged a lot. The church fell apart because they got a divorce and it was all out of nowhere. Afterwards, my mom decided to establish another church and I was just in a really bad place spiritually and mentally because my whole world was falling apart. I can say that still to this day, I lived a very innocent life

because I've been raised in a Christian household. So when I was like hitting rock

bottom, doing musical theater made me feel like God was there. I knew God was

there.

Lupe explained how she believed that a Christian's authenticity is displayed through

conduct and not through avoiding secular activities:

A lot of people think of a Christian as a person with the Bible in their hand or the

Jehovah's Witness knocking at your door, or the Mormons. Other people put

religious people in a box and give us a certain appearance. You know, like an

image. But when my friends are like, "Hey, come to my party," I go to their

parties and I sit there the entire time eating chips. I will be the designated driver

and I will take all of them home. I will not dance, I will not sing, and I will not

drink. But I will be here for them when they need me to be. I show other people

that I can have fun and believe in God.

Lupe takes issue with Christians who judge, shun, or avoid non-Pentecostals. Lupe

explained her experience with an LGBTQ friend:

Actually in my school, I had never met a gay person. And it was really scary for

me being a 15-year-old in high school and being surrounded by so many gay

people. And I say it like that because they were so open about it. And in my

church, like in so many other churches, you learn that they are wrong and all

these things. And I didn't know how to react. I was preaching at church earlier

tonight, and I said that I learned how to communicate with people at my school

and not in church. Because in church, we put labels on people even though we

are Christian. We shouldn't judge others. I feel really comfortable with all my

friends. In fact, they are all coming over tomorrow for my going-away party. My friends always ask for mom and they ask, "Is your mom going to pray again?" We had pictures at my house for prom and my mom prayed for all of us. … I'm like planting seeds in them. They might not believe yet, but I know that one day they will, or one day they will need to. And they will remember these memories I made for them.

College choice. When Lupe expressed the desire to major in musical theater, her mother (who is her pastor) initially tried to persuade her against it:

I talked to my mom about it [going to college for theater] and she would just be like, "No, I don't think you should do that. That world is very dangerous spiritually." But I thought, "What if I go in and change that? It doesn't have to be dangerous for me if I am committed to God." … Being a Christian doesn't mean that I can't perform on a stage.

Lupe's social experiences with her religious community influenced her predisposition to pursue singing:

I was raised in the church, my parents are both pastors. So I grew up singing, and for as long as I can remember, my whole family would be in the church. So it always gave me something to do and something to kind of lean on in case I had tough times. Believing in God was my strength. Now I am a theater performance major; I am minoring in writing because I want to be a playwright and I like to write songs and poems. I write little plays and a lot of those feelings grew here in the church, and it all just kind of fell in place.

Lupe recognizes another member of her church as a "prophet" with the ability to foresee the future. This person supported her aspirations to pursue a college degree in musical theater:

> A prophet told me that I would sing to the nations. So I just always assumed that I would sing Christian music—and don't get me wrong, there is nothing wrong with it. I love Christian music. I will sing to God forever. But after my experience with choosing a college, and because I know that I am part of the 6% of the population [of Latinos who achieve a four-year degree], it kind of just made sense. In my program, there are only 3% percent of us [who are Latino]. It kind of just dawned on me, I am destined to do this. And I'm destined to sing to the nations—maybe it's Christian music or maybe it's Broadway music. … I know that God has a plan for everybody and I already know the plan that God has for my life. So in February I asked God and I told him, "God, I want to go to this school." I wanted to go to the school that I am at now and I asked him to please give me this school. Let me be the light in the middle of the darkness. Let me do this and do what you want me to do at the same time. It is his plan for me to go sing to the nations, and why can't I do that through Broadway? What can't I do that through musical theater? … I went to church [another time] and this prophet was like, "God is saying yes to this school." I had applied to two schools, the one I'm at now and another school. And, he [the prophet] told me I was going to go to the school that I'm at now. I was praying about which school to choose and exactly what I said in my prayer is what the prophet told me. So that has been what's keeping me strong.

Lupe perceives her mother, the pastor of the community, as supporting her

decision to attend college so that the next generation can advance:

> My mom always talked about how her mom said, if I could raise a child to
>
> become a teacher then she needs to raise someone to be a principal. So it was kind
>
> of like a generation-to-generation thing.

Lupe interpreted traditional Pentecostal hostility towards education as misogyny within

the Christian church:

> It's frustrating, I don't know how to explain it, but it's kind of like they [some
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> Latino Pentecostals] bring these roots here and they plant them. They tell young
>
> people that this is how you should live your life. You get raised to be a housewife
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> and you go to church, so you're kind of like the perfect person for marriage. So
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> when the time is right, they are like pushing you to do it. And, they are like,
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> "You need to be a housewife and you need to be Christian and take the kids to
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> the church" and we don't learn that we have to go to college. … Some of the
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> churches around here make the girls wear long skirts, and be covered up, and
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> they can't raise their voices to a man. And, I'm just like—this is America. But in
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> their minds, they say, our church, our religion, this is what we believe in. I feel
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> that these girls are being trained to be wives [after high school]. … I don't need to
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> be wearing these long dresses to my ankles to prove that God loves me. That's
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> not love. Certain churches won't let you cut your hair because if you do, you're a
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> lesbian. There are so many little things, so many religious things, when believing
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> in God and being a good Christian is what I think is really important. Believing

in God, and loving him, and letting him love you. That's what being a Christian
is to me, not like being super-religious.

Lupe's church encouraged her to commute to school or choose a school close to
home so that she could maintain her church responsibilities:

They [the church] said, "You can't do that to your mom," and "Think about
what's going to happen to her and what might happen to the church." They told
me to think about the young people at church because I was a youth leader in the
church. … Residing on campus was a big factor because I knew if I was only 40
minutes from home or if I lived closer to home, I knew that my mom would be
like, "Come down every single weekend for church." She would be like, "Come,
you better come, you better come." And not that I didn't want to go to church, but
college is about meeting new people and learning who you are. Even though I
already knew part of who I was, I wanted to discover new things about myself and
see how strong my relationship is with God. I don't believe it's necessary to go to
church every single day to be a good Christian. Just because you go to church
everyday doesn't mean your relationship with God is stronger than someone who
maybe only goes once a week to church. I think that my community of Christians
are very religious and they believe that you have to go to church every day and
that if you don't go to church every day it's a sin. I personally don't believe that
because God understands that we have work and school and all these obligations.

Lupe made the final decision to live on campus against her church's wishes:

I ended up choosing my college because it is highly ranked. Their program is
extremely competitive to get into. I was wait-listed at first, so when I was finally

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off that list, there was no way I could go to some local school in my home state that has some new program when there's this amazing program that wants me in their school. So my mom, my mom was just like (*pause*) hesitant. I don't know how to explain it, but she was just like "You are going to an urban area" and she hates urban areas. She just says there are so many things there that she is not ready for me to see. She didn't want me being exposed to the city. It was just too much for her … but my mom couldn't argue with me or anyone because I told her, "Mom, this is what I'm doing with my life whether you support me or not. Whether you give me money or not to go to school, I'm still going to do what I want because this is my choice." I always believed, and I told her, that God wasn't going to put me in a place where he didn't want me. If he didn't want me at my school, he would have given me a better offer somewhere else. She [Lupe's mom] would just argue and she thought that my college was too far away. However, I feel like she's coming around slowly … because I told my mom, "Well, you heard the prophet. I understand I'm your kid and you don't want me to go far away. I know you want to keep me close so that you can protect me from what the world is." I told her that because I've lived such an innocent life, there's going to be a moment in my life where I have to make my own choice and my own decision. … My advice to Latino Christians who want to go to college is not to be afraid of what your mom and dad might say and don't be afraid of what the church might say. Because at the end of the day, even if you go into the police academy, they are still going to be mad that you're holding a gun. And if you study to be a business major, they'll still be mad. People are always going to talk.

Do what makes you happy and make sure that what you're doing doesn't take you away from the path of God.

Lupe reported that toward the end of her college choice process, her community became supportive:

Well, at first the church said "Don't leave your mom because she is a pastor who needs you." They questioned what was going to happen with the praise and worship team without me. And they questioned me, asking me why I was even going into theater. But then they watched me perform. Some of them [church members] came to one of my shows back in June for my high school. They watched me perform and said, "Wow, you're very talented and you should do this." The last service I went to before I started college, they threw me a mini-going-away party. They prayed for me and told me that that they were going to miss me. I went back three weeks ago to church when I came home and surprised everyone at church including my mom. They all told me that they were so happy I was there. They're very supportive. They text me all the time and tell me that they miss me. They ask me when I am coming home. I have a show in November and the church is going to travel up to see me in the performance. At least that's what they're saying that they're going to do. So far they have been very supportive. They always remind me to protect yourself and stay faith-centered.

Lupe believes that God has guided her and has directed her college choice process, and her spiritual life remains a source of strength:

I was planning on going to community college because I had a full ride there. I thought "maybe I shouldn't go away to college" because you do read those

articles about people dropping out because it was awful. I figured out that it would be a bad decision if I kept working at the restaurant. And after doing all the math, I knew it was better to go to college. Going away to college was more like a natural decision, like a natural choice. After getting all the callbacks from the schools, I kind of realized, "I'm good at this. I should do this." I thought that maybe it would be easy for me to get into school. And I promised God that if he put me in the right school, and he gave me the right money, that I would be the light in the dark—that I would go and I would make a difference in the arts. And then it all happened. So it was all really him. It was all really God. … I made my decision and it was God who placed everything where it was supposed to be. And I knew that he was always going to put me in the right place.

Lupe understands herself as an example of Christianity to her fellow collegians:

I would pray to God and tell him, "Send me where you want me to be light." I can be light especially in a theatrical program, where religion is seen as something negative. When I was writing my essays to go into college, I talked a lot about being Christian and being Latino.

Lupe also aspires to succeed at college to be an example to other members of her church community:

A big influence was really the church. Everyone in the church looks to me and questions what I do, because a lot of people look up to you at church when you're young and you believe in God. They see how passionate I am about God and they want young people to go down the right path. … Now that I'm in college, I need to prove to myself, and to my family, and to the people who questioned all this.

Lupe spoke with confidence in both of her interviews and expressed a conviction that her life has a purpose. She expressed how her church and pastor/mother supported her in her college choice process. Lupe was more vocal about her disagreements with traditional Pentecostal attitudes and customs than the other participants. She considers part of her college choice experience to be a process of overcoming resistance from Pentecostal traditions with which she disagrees. Lupe envisions herself as changing church members' attitudes and helping them progress toward a better understanding of Christianity. Viewing herself as a change agent, she also emphasizes evangelism by considering herself a model of Christianity to non-Christians through her ability to engage with them in secular settings and maintain friendships.

Josias

> Being Pentecostal, we're way different. … They [non-Pentecostals] are kind of reckless, because they don't have a certain perspective and a leadership to follow.

Josias was the 21-year-old bandleader at his church of more than 150 members. He had recently finished a two-year degree in a major city and aspired to open his own auto mechanic business. He was attending services four or five times a week and praying to find the right woman to marry.

Religious social networks. Josias believes that following the leadership of the pastor and accepting his guidance defines him as a Pentecostal:

> Being Pentecostal, we're way different. The rules that we follow and how we act. I don't want to say it in a bad way or a good way, and I don't want to be mean. They [non-Pentecostals] are kind of reckless, because they don't have a certain perspective and a leadership to follow. They're kind of like all up in the world and

partying. They have that emptiness inside. Being a Christian, you still have that

emptiness that they have, but God fills it up. We actually have a certain leader or

a certain direction that we follow, and it helps us improve our spiritual lives. …

The pastor sits down with you and tells you what you did wrong and that you

know the rules. You have to follow certain rules and doctrines. It's just a matter

of discipline, and so he sits you down and tells you what you did wrong.

Josias's resolve to follow the church rules of abstaining from drinking, smoking, and

dancing results in a separation from non-Pentecostals or "the world":

Separating myself from the world is like a constant battle. Not only with me, but I

guess with everybody trying to stay on the right path of God. Making decisions in

high school, I was kind of neutral. My friends wanted me to go out. But I

couldn't. I would tell them I can't drink, I can't smoke, and I can't go to that

party. They would ask me why. And they give me that excuse that "Oh, but Jesus

drank wine." And, I would say no, no.

Josias considers his pastors and the church influential in his life:

I feel like he's my second dad, or even a first dad if your dad wasn't there in your

life. With him, you have a pastor to back you up. He says stuff like "Oh, I'm

proud of you" and things that you wished your dad would have said. You always

have the pastor to back you up, and it always feels nice to have someone who is

proud of you and happy for you. … The youth pastor helped me out a lot. We

would have prayers on Fridays and we would do things that feed the spiritual stuff

more, because if you feed the spiritual stuff more, then God will back you up and

you will have more self-control. If I were to slack off, then I would start going

toward the world. … They [the pastors] were just everything, my source of strength, my guideline, and my one true path to doing the right thing and staying spiritually good. … If it weren't for the church, I wouldn't be here alive. Who knows where I would have been without the church. … It [the church] helps me with everything. It helps me when I'm overthinking. It helps me when sometimes I get a little angry inside. It helps me with spiritual support and helps me to think first before speaking. It helps me with being merciful with people because I know that some people don't think the same way we do and we can't go straight at them with ignorance.

College choice. Josias believes that his pastors supported his aspirations to pursue college. He provided these comments on his head pastor's view:

I do remember my pastor guiding me and telling me how to pray for college. The pastor told me that God knows everything. God knows what he wants you to do and he'll put it in your path. It will be straightforward and it won't be a bumpy road. If it's real, then everything will turn out exactly the way it should without any trouble. … He [my pastor] is all for college and he's all for studies. He's all for doing things you want to do and succeeding. He's a very positive man. He will guide you if you need any help or references. He's totally helpful when it comes to college and studying and pursuing your career or something that you want to do.

Josias considered other careers before deciding to attend community college and pursue a career that would not interfere with his church attendance:

There was a school out of state. It was nice and everything, and I wanted to be an aeronautic technician and go study airplanes. I also was thinking about being a firefighter. Those were my two things I wanted to do. So I was thinking and thinking—if I were to live out of state, then I would have to leave a lot of responsibility in this church. I know the church wouldn't object but it still kind of affects me because I would be leaving my high position, since I'm the bandleader here. I would be leaving my position to go somewhere else. And who knows, there was talk of firefighters being on call and if anything were to happen, I would have to leave the service. What if God wanted to talk to me at that certain moment, and the enemy [the devil] uses that call to get me to leave church? It's just something I wasn't really sure I was ready for. … My pastor asked God to guide me because there were things that I wanted to do, but it wasn't in his will. If I were to work on an ambulance, as an EMT, then I would have to be on call. Since I am worship leader in my church, it's kind of troubling if my job calls me during a service. I would have to leave church to do that real quick and come back, if I even have time to come back. Any of those jobs where you have to be on call, I had to be very careful. … But they [the pastors] gave me the free will to make my decision. I talked to my youth pastor and he explained to me that school is school, and you can do whatever you want to do. You can follow your dream, but just talk with God about it and make sure that it's his will. Because if you don't, we don't know what will happen. God knows everything, so God knows what could have happened in one of the fire buildings, like where two firefighters died. So he told me a lot. He told me to at least pray and seek guidance. He told

me to think about what the Spirit is telling me and if I feel comfortable with it. But if I make a decision and something goes wrong, then it means that it might not have been the word of God.

Josias chose to commute to the same college and obtained the same degree as another member of the church:

I wanted to be with my best friend after high school and he was studying auto technology. So everything seemed right. We went to go to school and we were thinking about opening our own shop together. We thought we could be our own bosses and come in and go as we wanted and take off for church and have Sundays off. We could leave before 6:00 so that we can get to church on time. So we just had that idea in mind. And we kind of went for it and went to school. It was nice because we are both musicians and we could talk about music stuff and things we wanted to do in church. Sometimes we would just straight-talk about the Bible. Well, at least one time we did, and we could talk about certain things. We didn't always have the same class, but it was nice just to have someone there saying "Hey, I know you, and you're not alone."

Josias's decision to commute to college was also related to the perceived protection provided by his spiritual life:

We didn't want to live on campus over there. One reason was the money. It was too much money. And again, if we were to live near campus we would end up driving back here on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays for church services. We just decided that it was better to just stay here in church. I ended up staying here and commuting over there, I guess because of money. By commuting, gas was the

only thing we had to pay. And we were more comfortable here. And trying to go

somewhere new, who knows what would happen? It's not that college was a

temptation, but at least spiritually, I think it helped a lot more that we stayed here

rather than live over there. For us, it is tough because we have talks with people

who have been in church and got out for certain reasons and we have arguments.

We didn't want to have that trouble. I don't like to talk unless I know what I'm

talking about, because I don't want to give the wrong information. I have to read

the Bible more. … We felt stronger here than going over there.

Even though Josias desires to limit his exposure to "worldly" people, he rejects

anti-education attitudes within the Pentecostal church:

We do have to get serious with the Bible and God, but it's not telling us not to go

to college. The Bible doesn't say not to pursue something after high school, or

that pursuing your career is bad, because the Bible doesn't say when he [Jesus

Christ] is coming or what time. So it doesn't mean you have to give up college or

stop pursuing your career because someone tells you to. At some point you do.

But contamination and being tempted are going to happen all throughout your

life. So for me, if you are staying on top of reading the Bible and praying, you can

also go to college. You can do both. … In my eyes, when they [Pentecostal

church members] are a little older, they go back to the Old Testament. And the

Old Testament is strictly, strictly, like *strictly* strict.

Josias sees his college success as an example to other members of his community.

There's always that percentage of people, let's say Hispanics, who don't finish

high school or continue after high school. So I could be one of those motivators

who could tell them that it's not easy but it's worth it in the end.

Josias also sees his spiritual relationship with God as enabling him to complete his

college choice process and education:

So after high school, you know, it's a hard decision what you want to be and

you're not sure. At least I wasn't sure what I wanted to do. There were so many

options. There were so many things that I wanted to do. I just didn't know what to

do. So I asked God to guide me. I asked God if he could do some things and guide

me to what his purpose for me was, and to lead me to the career that I wanted to

choose and that I liked, but also be in line with his will. … He [God] did help me

with my life and my education. There was always that guidance.

Josias indicated that he felt very nervous in the interview and was uncomfortable

speaking about himself. Nevertheless, he felt driven to assist this research so as to

provide a better understanding of Latino Pentecostals to educational institutions. In the

Latino Pentecostal church, where confident and charismatic public speaking is

appreciated, Josias was insecure about his knowledge of the Bible and principles of the

faith. Throughout his interviews, he stressed his reliance on his pastors to help him with

his college choice and life in general. His college choice process was significantly

influence by his desire to maintain his routine of attending church services four or five

days a week throughout college and into his career. Josias believes that God has a

particular pathway for his life, and his pastors help him to maintain that pathway by

advising his decisions.

Alberto

I used to be a really messed-up kid. I used to sit a lot with them [the pastors] or

they would sit a lot with me and talk to me. They would try to get me to do things

right, try to get me to understand that if I kept doing what I was doing, I was

going to end up in two places: either prison or dead.

Alberto was, when interviewed, a 21-year-old member at the same church as

Josias. Alberto liked to play the guitar for religious services, but rotated in and out of that

role due to the number of guitar players in the congregation. Alberto was in his final

semester of his two-year college degree program and was looking forward to starting a

career in hair design. He saw his life as a story of transformation; stressing how

dysfunctional he was before the intervention of his pastors.

Religious social networks. Alberto discusses his religious social network:

I didn't really grow up with my dad. It was just my mom. After having that rough

childhood, I used to get in a lot of trouble at school and I did a lot of crazy things.

When I really started going to church—well, I always been at church, but even

though I used to go to church, I never had that commitment. There is a difference

between *going* to church and being a *part* of the church. So, when I was in school,

and I was having all this trouble, having this hard time, it was because I didn't

have my dad to teach me a lot of stuff. My mom tried to teach me a lot of stuff,

but she was my mom. She wasn't my dad. So I started going to church and I

started that commitment. Now, when I was in high school, I used to be bad before

I started going to church. I used to be a really bad student. Because my family,

they distorted me. I had a bad family at the time when I started going to church.

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The pastors really helped me out with my anger management, and the church

encouraged me to respect others. They taught me it was important to respect the

rules at school because I didn't respect anyone or anything. I used to be wild but

the church started working with me and my character. They led me to improve

how I interact with others, respect others, love others, and treat others the same

way that I wanted to be treated. That's how the church helped me a lot. I have

changed. My teachers started to see that change. My mom and my family started

to see that change and they started going to church as well because they were like,

"How is this possible when we have tried for years?" My family started going to

church and they really saw how the church was helping the other young children

at church. And the church continues to help me. … The church played a big role

with college, bigger than my own family, because when I began to go to church, I

loved it. I love music and the pastors know I love music. They told me if you

can't get your act straight, you cannot be a musician here. They told me that I had

to become separate, I had to become holy, and I have to become different. They

told me that I had to change, and once I realized that I had to change, it hit me so

hard. I was like "yes, I do have to change." So they used the smallest things, like

playing music, to get through to me. The pastors were seeing the bigger picture.

So they played a big role in my life.

Alberto also received social support from an older woman in his church and

considers her family as well:

The mom of the pastor's wife—she's one of the older ladies in the church. … she

just loved me from the very first time she saw me. She knew that I was bad

because she had heard about me. I reminded her of the pastor, her son-in-law, because he used to fight a lot before he was a pastor. She knew how her daughter had a struggle with a husband who had a temper when she was first married. It was even hard for her daughter to get the pastor to go to church. So this older lady had already had an experience with someone like me already. So when she saw me, she was like, "I need to talk to him. I need to encourage him." She knew that my attitude wasn't going to take me anywhere because she had seen the same attitude in her daughter's husband. He used to be a drug addict before being a pastor. So she experienced that with her son-in-law and she started talking to me … as well as my pastor and my youth pastor always talked with me. And she tried to get me to realize that I had to change, that I had to be more responsible, and that I had to be more careful. She was there most of the time when maybe my family wasn't there for me or because my dad wasn't there for me. She became like my grandmom or like my mom. I could always sit with and chat, and cry if I needed to cry.

Alberto sees the church as a team and is driven to contribute to it:

They [the pastors] taught me that the church is very important in the community because it teaches us to be a team, not just self-sufficient. It's bigger than everyone having their own opinions, because most of our mistakes are made because of our opinions and thinking that we can do it alone and that we are self-sufficient. We think we can do it ourselves and that's not the case. This is why the church is so important in the community, because it teaches us to be a team, not that you're left on your own.

Alberto views the Pentecostal church as different today and more open to education. He understands that "old Pentecostals" were hostile toward education, due to their belief that they would see the second coming of Jesus Christ in their lifetimes:

It [anti-education attitudes] has always been a problem in the Pentecostal church, because way back they had the manifestation of the Holy Spirit. They could see miracles and all that. The old Pentecostals didn't have what we have now. Today, we have new technology and new revelation of the word. Now, we can read the word instead of just doing miracles. So that's one of the biggest contributions of the change from old Pentecostal to new Pentecostal. Now we have both the word and miracles. Before, they only had miracles because they couldn't read the word. So that's why many people made mistakes in their attitudes with education. They were like, "Jesus Christ is already coming so why waste your time with school? Why waste your time building a career, or building a better life for yourself in the future, if Jesus Christ is almost here?" But they didn't know that in the scriptures it tells you to submit to all these things that can make a better future for yourself, even though you're preparing for Jesus Christ when he comes again. You also have to prepare your life. You have to build your life because it's not only about waiting for Jesus Christ. There's also helping out your community with the gifts that you have.

Alberto redefined the Pentecostal tradition of separating from outsiders as more of a spiritual separation and not a physical one. He used a biblical story to describe his position:

He [Jesus] spent a lot of time with people in need, people who needed a miracle in their life. People who were lost and in a real struggle, like Peter. Peter was a guy who didn't think about accomplishing things. He didn't run away when the soldiers took Jesus away. Peter cut the ear off one of the soldiers. Then Jesus corrected Peter and told him that this is not the way. We all have to change as Peter did. We can see the change in Peter's life. He started preaching and telling people how Jesus helped him to be a better man and a better minister. So, when we talk about holiness, my church—I can only speak for my church—teaches us that you have to be holy and that you have to be separate. But it is a separation that shows others that you've cleaned up yourself. It is how you represent yourself that is important. We don't want to imitate other people, but we are not separated from others like a cult or like a community that separates from the world. We don't want to avoid talking to the world, because we want to save lives and win them for Jesus. We have to interact with others … it's not really physically separating from people. It's really separating spiritually and mentally, and not thinking like any other man thinks.

In fact, Alberto depicted Pentecostals who are hostile toward education as not having an authentic conversion of Christianity:

There are people who haven't had a real encounter with God. I believe this because if you have had a real encounter with God or Jesus, your whole perspective on everything changes. You no longer see a sinner when you look at another person, but you can see a life that can be changed, just as God has changed you when you were in sin. He can do the same with others. So I don't

believe that being with the world or interacting with the world contaminates you. You get contaminated if you *choose* the world. People are contaminated by what comes out of them, not through what might come in front of them. It really bothers me when I hear Pentecostals talk like this, because how can you say that interacting with the world contaminates you when Jesus says that we have to go into the world so sinners can change? It doesn't make any sense. We have to talk with others so that they can see our fruits and really see that Jesus is Lord. When God chose us, he didn't choose us because of our faults; he chose us because we could be changed. So that's why I'm saying that these Christians haven't had a real encounter with God or with the Word of God, because if you have that encounter, you realize that we are called to interact with others. They [the pastors] teach us this. I'm not saying this because it's my own opinion, but because that's how they have taught me, and I have seen it with my own eyes.

College choice. Alberto indicated that his pastors were more influential than his family in his college choice process:

My pastor saw how I was doing poorly at school. So he sat down with me a couple of times and started listening to me. He wanted to see what was going on so that he could help me. So I told him what was going on, and he started counseling me. My pastor started telling me how to go about life and making decisions, and how different decisions have consequences. He told me that a lot of times, I wasn't going to see the consequences until later. He said, "When you see the consequences in the future, it's going to be too late, because you can't go back in time and fix your mistakes." They used to sit with me a lot. They used to ask

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me, "What do you like to do?" I told them I like to do this and I like to do that. They helped me see that when I started life, after high school, my grades were going to matter, and that's how they started encouraging me to go to college. … They told me that nowadays you need a diploma, so you should study and finish your school. At my church, they always try to encourage us to be responsible, to look ahead, and not be overwhelmed by the present. They teach us to look ahead and to see that one day we will get our [own] family and our sons or daughters, and we will have to be responsible for them.

Alberto sees education as a necessary means to prevent a dysfunctional lifestyle:

A lot of people think that because we have Jesus who can teach us, we don't need school and we can only learn from him. We do learn a lot of things from him. But the Bible also says that we have to go about it with institutions. We have to achieve all the knowledge we can. We have to know basically anything and everything. … A lot of kids are going to jail for not going to school. A lot of kids are in the streets doing bad stuff instead of going to school. They're doing bad things because they think they have to. That's why education is so important.

Alberto decided to enter a two-year program for hair design:

At first, I wanted to be a surgeon. But it wasn't possible because of my high-school record. My grades were so bad, I wasn't going be able to do that. So I decided to go with the barber studies because I lost a lot of time when I was in high school. I lost time because I was just thinking of myself, as other young kids do nowadays, and I thought I could just screw around in high school. I thought I could play around and it wasn't going to matter. I didn't know that it was going to

matter when I started life after high school. I didn't realize that my academic

record was going to matter. They [the pastors] taught me that.

Alberto perceived that his college classmates recognized that he was different from them, and he felt that he has left a favorable impression on them by his example of Christianity:

At first, it was a little difficult, because everybody was, I guess you could say,

normal. And we are abnormal—we go to church and try our best not to sin.

Everybody basically was against me at first, but when they saw my fruits, how I

behaved and interacted with people and how I wasn't making the same decisions

as other people, they were like, "You've got something different that we don't

have. Everything that you do, it prospers. Everything that you say, it comes true."

Later I was able to start talking with them and I told them how I go to church and

how the church and the Bible have taught me many things. I still go to school,

and my classmates aren't going to church yet, but they saw something different

in me that they respect. Now they have an example of a certain thing that is

different.

Alberto sees his own success as a source of inspiration that benefits the rest of his religious social network:

There's not a lot of young people, as of now in 2018, working toward that

professionalism or having careers. They are taking a very easy way out, working

at Applebee's or somewhere else, and not having their own career. So what I am

saying is that I would like the [Latino Pentecostal] adults to see that there are still

some young people who are striving for that career. I want them to see that

today's youth are striving for that professionalism. The way I see it, people, by seeing me, can still have hope in the next generation to come back together and be restored. They can see that not everything is lost. That's one of my biggest motivations that helps me to do what I do. That helps me to keep going. That helps me to wake up every day and be like "I can make a change." … When they see me in college, it gives younger members of my church hope. They can see that light. They can see that if I did it, they can do it as well. I was a troubled kid who many people said wasn't going anywhere in life, who was going to become a criminal, who was going to end up in jail or dead. Young people in the church seeing that kind of person being restored and changing—that's what I'm doing right now for them. I think that's a big hope for a lot of young people. That's a big hope even for adults. The church can see and compare how I was before and what I am now. It also gives them motivation. I've seen people like me today when I was young, and they motivated me. Nowadays, you see a lot people doing activities like walks for cancer or other walks. They walk because it gives them hope and motivation. I still have people who are supporting me, saying, "I know you can change. I know something great can in your life." So that's the way I see it. To me, college helps me personally and it also helps the community get together.

Alberto, more than the other participants, presented his experiences as a story of conversion. Alberto wanted to communicate how God and the church changed him for the better and used his narratives to reinforce Pentecostal beliefs. This characteristic of Latino Pentecostal members has been noted by researchers (Lorentzen & Mira, 2005;

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Sanchez-Walsh, 2012). Alberto enjoyed steering the conversation toward the Bible and his perception of divine transformative power in his life. He spoke with an animation and reverence that are typically associated with Pentecostal preaching. Alberto perceives himself as an inspiration to his church as well as an evangelist to non-Christians, and he credits his transformation to God and his pastor's support.

Angelina

> There are a lot of ways that I can use my career field to bless the church, and that's really what we go for.

> Angelina, age 23, attended the same church of approximately 150 members as Josias and Alberto. She had recently completed a four-year degree and started her medical career. She attended services three or four times a week, acting as a translator for young Latino members who do not speak Spanish. Angelina follows the dress code rules of her church, always wears skirts in public, and refrains from piercings and makeup. She commuted to college while living at home with her parents.

> **Religious social networks.** Angelina sees the church as a social network, facilitated by the pastor, where students are supported and exposed to different career fields:

> The church allows for different opportunities for students to do community hours. They can help setting up sets for our dramas or set up decorations and clean the church for our many special events. They can help with our daycare, and we do have a biblical institute here at the church where they can help. There are a lot of ways for us to get community hours. And because there is a big array of different people in different fields, if I have any questions, I know that I can ask the pastors

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and he will be like, "Well, this person works in this field; you can go talk to them

and get more information about it if you're choosing to go in that career path.

Angelina considers her church a system of support and information that helps young

church members to continue working toward goals when faced with challenges:

> They do give a lot of classes and conferences for the young people at church.
>
> They address things and talk about issues in the real world. For example, they
>
> help new people and tell them, "You know your studies, but here's the real deal."
>
> They will help the young ladies to cook and do different everyday chores that
>
> maybe we haven't been taught at home. They do help us out with that. They also
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> help us with the Word [i.e., understanding the Bible]. Since the older members
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> have been here a little longer, they can help us whenever we have a little
>
> weakness. We can tell them what we are going through and they will tell us,
>
> "Oh, don't worry. I've been through that. You're going to make it. If I did it,
>
> you're definitely going to do it."

Angelina sees college attendance as an opportunity to evangelize and be an example of

Christianity to outsiders:

> The whole thing is that we have to make a difference. We have to meet other
>
> people and spread the gospel. They [the pastors] always say, "This is your way to
>
> meet other people to spread the gospel." In the ways that I live, I'm separated. But
>
> I also have to realize that's not what I came into the world for. What the Lord
>
> wants us to do [is] spread his word to other people, not to be completely
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> physically separate and like, "because you don't believe what I believe, I can't
>
> hang out with you." That's not the case. They [the pastors] strongly teach us, "Do

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not judge; our job is to lift those who have fallen. … Your attitude should be that

we can do it and I am here for you." … Some people don't understand how can

you can believe in God; they don't understand us, and it can be a little tricky. But

at the same time, when you go to college you are able to see the way other people

behave and how others think. It's very interesting because I can use that to

improve the way I share the gospel.

College choice. Angelina was influenced by her experience of working with

children at church and followed the college pathway of another church member:

There is another sister in the church who [completed] her medical assistant

[degree] in January. I knew of her and I really like the medical field. In fact, I

enjoy anything that I can do to help others. I really like children, and the church

gave me opportunities to branch out and try working in different departments. So

I experienced working with the children at church and I knew that was exactly

what I wanted to do. So it was very easy. They [the pastors] connected me with

the young lady who worked in the medical field already, and I asked her about her

college. Then, she told me what school she went to and I followed her example

and did exactly what she did.

Angelina described the ongoing support that the head pastor offers to young people

throughout their college experience:

I'm the first person to get a college degree in my family. So it's very challenging

when there are closed-minded people who are like, "Well, your family never went

to school so you are definitely not." … The church was very supportive. If you

were to go to a different college anywhere, let's say out of state, we have their

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phone numbers, and especially the pastor's number. They give out their numbers and tell us to call if we ever need anything. They're basically available 24 hours a day and seven days a week. It's crazy. And if they're not or if they are on vacation, they will refer you to another minister who has been here for a long time. … The pastors say, "If you ever need help, never be afraid to reach out to anyone—pastors, ministers, and elders of the church. Always reach out and never drown yourself with your problems. Because you are going to feel like you're being drowned by a half a cup of water, when really you just have to come up for air."

Angelina was conscious of traditional Pentecostal hostility toward college:

We try to [think of] the church as a hospital. So there are sick people here and you know you are going to find the gossipers and hypocrites. But where aren't you going to find it? So you do find that [anti-education] attitude. … Christ is coming and we have to be ready, and we have to live like God is coming today, but we still need to prepare like he isn't coming for a couple of years. … Young Latino Pentecostals shouldn't be afraid of college. They are going to regret not taking advantage of this adventure.

Angelina was driven to complete her college education by a desire to serve her religious community:

My medical training is also a way that I can give to the church. … So if anything were to occur in church, and we hope it doesn't, I can assist and perform CPR. I am trained to do that. If a parent has a question about their child's health, I can assist in that. I can come to the vacation Bible school and perform as the nurse.

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There are a lot of ways that I can use my career field to bless the church. And

that's really what we go for.

Upon reflection, it seems that Angelina was somewhat defensive despite my best

efforts to build rapport and provide a relaxed atmosphere. Angelina provided shorter

answers than other participants and steered the conversation away from her own

experiences and toward positive attributes of her church in general. Angelina continually

wanted to express her high opinion of her church and pastors and seemed reserved when

providing details about her experiences. Unfortunately, she was not available for follow-

up interviews. Her apparent defensiveness might be a manifestation of the Pentecostal

tendency to protect the church from outside influences and the academic community

(Sanchez-Walsh, 2012).

Angelina's narrative, though briefer than those of other participants, provides

insight into her perception of her church as a system of student support facilitated by her

pastor. Notably, the pastor orchestrated the chain of connections that influenced her

college choice. Also, relative to the research questions, Angelina associated anti-

education attitudes with Pentecostal eschatology before defending her church as a

hospital under the care of her pastor.

Summary

In their own words, five participants—Romona, Lupe, Josias, Alberto, and

Angelina—provided their thoughts, opinions, and stories. These students participated

voluntarily, with the permission of their pastors, to contribute to a better understanding of

Latino Pentecostalism among academic institutions. To deliver an authentic essence of

the lived experiences, this dissertation gives a voice to students who personally

experienced the phenomena of being Latino Pentecostals and transitioning to college. The five students, from three different places of worship, provided detailed descriptions of how they made sense of their college choice process and how Pentecostal social groups influenced their educational experience. Each narrative was organized into two broad sections, on religious social networks and college choice, and they cumulatively provided a rich set of data for analysis. Initial and follow-up interviews with the five subjects attained data saturation. The next chapter will analyze the interview data and present the findings.

Chapter 5

Findings and Data Analysis

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of traditionally college-age Latino Pentecostal students and to offer an understanding of the influence of Latino Pentecostal social networks on the college choice processes of their members. A growing part of the U.S. Latino community identifies with the Latino Pentecostal movement (Espinoza et al., 2003; Marti, 2015; Ruano, 2011). Although Latino social networks have a positive relationship with Latino college choice (Nora, 2004; Pérez, 2016; Pérez & McDonough, 2008; Person & Rosenbaum, 2006) and religious social networks positively influence educational success (Coleman, 1998; Irizarry & Antrop-González, 2008; Glanville et al., 2008; Jeynes, 2010; Liou et al., 2009), the unique cultural tradition of Pentecostalism has historically been hostile to college education and other secular institutions (Beyerlein, 2004; Garneau & Schwadel, 2013; Keysar & Kosmin, 1995; Kosmin et al., 1992). A study by Sanchez et al. (2016) is the sole instance of previous research on Latino Pentecostals' educational expectations as compared to other religious groups. Although they reported lower educational expectations within the Latino Pentecostal community, they found no evidence that traditional Pentecostal hostility toward education was a factor in this result.

As a conceptual framework, this study applied Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) three-phase description of the college choice process and Beyerlein's (2004) findings about Pentecostal hostilities towards education as compared to evangelicals (see chapter 2, Figure 1). The data for this study were collected through semi-structured interviews in which participants were encouraged to share their perceptions and to describe their

college choice experiences. While conducting these interviews, I concentrated on creating a comfortable setting and building rapport, not only because doing so is appropriate for phenomenological research generally but because Latino Pentecostals have been traditionally withdrawn from outsiders and suspicious of academics (Beyerlein, 2004; Sanchez-Walsh, 2012). I was flexible in my interview method, in accordance with interpretative phenomenological analysis (Smith & Osborn, 2015), and I encouraged descriptive conversations about how Pentecostal social networks influenced their college choice. The participants provided rich descriptions of their religious social networks influences and their college choice experiences. After a series of follow-up interviews, the data reached a level of saturation and were ready for analysis.

In the model of traditional phenomenological research, I sought to analyze the lived experiences of participants, searching for the essence of what was experienced before making individual interpretations by deriving structural themes from textural descriptions (Manen, 1997; Moustakas, 1994). IPA (Smith & Osborn, 2015) was implemented as a method of analysis and was supplemented by Moustakas's (1994) guidelines for research analysis. The IPA procedure, as outlined in Chapter 3, is a dynamic process of interpretive activity that reviews data recursively. I personally conducted all interviews and transcribed all the data. The recursive analytic process allowed the voices of Romona, Lupe, Josias, Alberto, and Angelina to bring forth common themes and provide an understanding of the essence of the lived experiences of Latino Pentecostal students undergoing college decisions. This dissertation thus provides a coherent description of the college choice phenomenon as experienced by Latino Pentecostal participants.

The findings revealed four major themes, which are presented in this chapter:

1. Breaking with tradition: redefining Pentecostal values

2. Promoting educational aspirations

3. Socio-religious capital acquired

4. Going to college while remaining in church: avoiding church-college culture
   collisions

Theme 1: Breaking with Tradition: Redefining Pentecostal Values

One major theme emerging from the data concerned Latino Pentecostals breaking

with their cultural traditions and redefining what it means to be Pentecostal. Beyerlein,

who coined the term "defensive separatist" to describe the disposition of Pentecostals,

contended that the Pentecostal emphasis on the authority of the Holy Spirit, as

foundational to their church leadership structure, resulted in hostility towards secular

education because the underpinnings of academic authority "threaten Pentecostals'

religious interests, causing them to abandon these [college] institutions" (p. 507).

Because leaders within Pentecostalism claim authority from a divine source of spiritual

anointing, it has been suggested that the authority structure is cautious about academic

authority influencing their members (Beyerlein, 2004; Sanchez-Walsh, 2012). These

religious interests result in a tendency for members of Pentecostal social networks to

isolate themselves and limit contact with the outside, "worldly" culture so as to more

fully experience the gifts of the Holy Spirit (Beyerlein, 2004; Garneau & Schwadel,

2013).

Beyerlein (2004) highlighted the sharp difference between Pentecostals and

evangelicals concerning their relations with mainstream culture: "Pentecostal

Protestantism advocates withdrawing from the broader culture; the cultural tradition of evangelical Protestantism generally stresses engaging the broader culture" (p. 506). Because of the value they have placed on withdrawing from outsiders and fostering a holy separation, Pentecostal communities have traditionally held a negative attitude toward college education, which has been viewed as contributing to the low education levels and low educational expectations of Pentecostals relative to other Christians (Beyerlein, 2004; Garneau & Schwadel, 2013; Keysar & Kosmin, 1995; Kosmin et al., 1992; Sanchez et al., 2016), even beyond the low education levels of conservative Protestants in general (Darnell & Sherkat, 1997; Evans; 2013; Lehrer, 1999). However, the interviews conducted for this dissertation suggest that within contemporary Latino Pentecostal communities, a paradigm shift has taken place among members of the younger generation. Pentecostal separation is being redefined while the community reinterprets its anti-education history. In contrast to previous findings concerning Pentecostalism, this research indicates that contemporary Latino students have redefined the Pentecostal virtue of separation, emphasizing a spiritual separation through personal conduct and rejecting elements of traditional Pentecostalism that promote avoidance of the broader culture and of college education.

Josias, for example, perceived the essence of Pentecostal separation as maintaining codes of conduct and not bending to peer pressure:

Separating myself from the world is like a constant battle. Not only with me, but I guess with everybody trying to stay on the right path of God. Making decisions in high school, I was kind of neutral. My friends wanted me to go out. But I

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couldn't. I would tell them I can't drink, I can't smoke, and I can't go to that

party.

Likewise, Alberto redefined traditional separation within an emphasis on evangelizing

others:

They [my pastors] told me that you have to become separate, you have to become

holy and you have to become different. … So, when we talk about holiness, my

church—I can only speak for my church—teaches us that you have to be holy and

that you have to be separate. But it is a separation that shows others that you've

cleaned up yourself. It is how you represent yourself that is important. We don't

want to imitate other people, but we are not separated from others like a cult or

like a community that separates from the world. We don't want to avoid talking to

the world, because we want to save lives and win them for Jesus. … It's not really

physically separating from people. It's really separating spiritually and mentally,

and not thinking like any other man thinks.

Unlike other participants, Romona has been influenced to maintain some degree of

physical separation from outsiders. However, she engages in physical separation

primarily from those who are engaging in conduct contrary to her beliefs at a specific

moment; she does not avoid outside influences in general.

Being separated from the world is not following what the world does. For

example, we don't believe in drinking alcohol, so we don't do that. So if I were

to go to a party, even if I just sat there and didn't drink, the church taught me that

I would still be a part of that party because I was there. They [the church] told me

that the Holy Spirit leaves you and is not with you anymore when you are in a

place where God can't be a part of. Because at that moment, God is not being

praise and you are in an environment where you are not supposed to be.

Lupe maintains her Pentecostal identity by maintaining her religious code of
conduct at non-Pentecostal social events and emphasizes evangelization instead of the
traditional physical separation of Pentecostals.

When my friends are like, "Hey, come to my party," I go to their parties and I sit

there the entire time eating chips. I will be the designated driver and I will take all

of them home. I will not dance, I will not sing, and I will not drink. But I will be

here for them when they need me to be. I show other people that I can have fun

and believe in God.

Angelina emphasizes evangelizing others through her outside interactions and
redefines Pentecostal separation as an individual code of conduct that she "lives":

In the ways that I live, I'm separated. But I also have to realize that's not what I

came into the world for. What the Lord wants us to do [is] spread his word to

other people, not to be completely physically separate and like, "because you

don't believe what I believe, I can't hang out with you." That's not the case. They

[the pastors] strongly teach us, "Do not judge; our job is to lift those who have

fallen.

The participants' descriptions present an understanding of how Latino Pentecostal
communities reconcile their cultural tradition of anti-intellectualism and hostility towards
education with their recent embrace of college education. Participants distinguish
themselves from older Pentecostal members, especially first-generation immigrant Latino
Pentecostals, who are perceived as maintaining these attitudes towards college. The

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participants' characteristics show similarities to the findings of Sanchez-Walsh (2012), who viewed younger generations of Latino Pentecostals as redefining their religious identity and diverging from older generations. For example, Josias made this observation as to the strictness of older Pentecostals relative to younger Pentecostals: "In my eyes, when they [Pentecostal church members] are a little older, they go back to the Old Testament. And the Old Testament is strictly, strictly, like *strictly* strict."

Romona also surmised that older Pentecostal members are more inclined to be hostile toward college education:

> I feel like older people might think that college is not for Pentecostals, because I have heard comments from people who say that college students drink, and if you go to church you shouldn't be going there. More older people, I hear them saying stuff like that.

Lupe felt that older people and immigrants from South America tend to promote hostility toward college:

> It hasn't necessarily happened to me, where they [church members] tell me "Don't go to college," because my parents always said in this country you need to be educated and you need to go to college. But older people coming from other place—definitely. They bring those roots here and try to plant the roots and make them grow in people.

Participants of this study expressed the view that older members were wrongly influenced by a faulty "end times" Pentecostal teaching. Alberto referred to the "old" Pentecostal church as being opposed to college due to a misunderstanding of Christian eschatology. Pentecostal teaching has traditionally anticipated Jesus' return to earth in the

near future, due to the contemporary outpouring of miracles that Pentecostals claim to experience (Garneau & Schwadel, 2013; Nel, 2015). The miracles are perceived as taking place precisely because the end times are near. This cultural tradition has spawned anti-college attitudes, according to the study participants. For example, Alberto perceived that because Pentecostal members believed that Jesus was coming to earth so soon, they viewed education as unnecessary:

> Before, they only had miracles because they couldn't read the word. So that's why many people made mistakes in their attitudes with education. They were like, "Jesus Christ is already coming so why waste your time with school? Why waste your time building a career, or building a better life for yourself in the future, if Jesus Christ is almost here?" But they didn't know that in the scriptures it tells you to submit to all these things that can make a better future for yourself, even though you're preparing for Jesus Christ when he comes again. You also have to prepare your life. You have to build your life because it's not only about waiting for Jesus Christ. There's also helping out your community with the gifts that you have.

Josias also identified this dubious end-times teaching as the source of traditional Pentecostal hostility toward education. Josias believed that one can eagerly expect Jesus' return to earth while also pursuing a college degree.

> We do have to get serious with the Bible and God, but it's not telling us not to go to college. The Bible doesn't say not to pursue something after high school, or that pursuing your career is bad, because the Bible doesn't say when he [Jesus Christ] is coming or what time. So it doesn't mean you have to give up college or stop pursuing your career because someone tells you to. At some point you do. But

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contamination and being tempted are going to happen all throughout your life. So

for me, if you are staying on top of reading the Bible and praying, you can also go

to college. You can do both.

Angelina similarly rejected traditional Pentecostal eschatology that found college

unnecessary, citing a slogan that applies Pentecostal end-times teaching in a manner that

supports college education: "Christ is coming and we have to be ready, and we have to

live like God is coming today, but we still need to prepare like he isn't coming for a

couple of years."

Lupe perceived that older Latino Pentecostals are uncomfortable with college

education. She identified misogyny and homophobia, two characteristics also noted by

Latino Pentecostal researchers Sanchez-Walsh (2012) and Machado (2016) as

traditionally present within Latino Pentecostal communities, as playing a role in this

deep-seated suspicion of education and outsiders in general. Lupe clearly articulated her

break with what she perceived to be misguided elements of her religious tradition.

It's frustrating, I don't know how to explain it, but it's kind of like they [some

Latino Pentecostals] bring these roots here and they plant them. They tell young

people that this is how you should live your life. You get raised to be a housewife

and you go to church, so you're kind of like the perfect person for marriage. So

when the time is right, they are like pushing you to do it. And, they are like, "You

need to be a housewife and you need to be Christian and take the kids to the

church" and we don't learn that we have to go to college.

Some of the churches around here make the girls wear long skirts, and be

covered up, and they can't raise their voices to a man. And, I'm just like—this is

America. But in their minds, they say, our church, our religion, this is what we believe in. I feel that these girls are being trained to be wives [after high school]. … I don't need to be wearing these long dresses to my ankles to prove that God loves me. That's not love. Certain churches won't let you cut your hair because if you do, you're a lesbian. There are so many little things, so many religious things, when believing in God and being a good Christian is what I think is really important. Believing in God, and loving him, and letting him love you. That's what being a Christian is to me, not like being super-religious.

Actually in my school, I had never met a gay person. And it was really scary for me being a 15-year-old in high school and being surrounded by so many gay people. And I say it like that because they were so open about it. And in my church, like in so many other churches, you learn that they are wrong and all these things.

Lupe dismissed this traditional hostility toward education and did not allow her college aspirations to be deterred nor her college choice decision altered: "People are always going to talk. Do what makes you happy and make sure that what you're doing doesn't take you away from the path of God."

Like Lupe, Angelina noted that she was encouraged to attend college by her pastor, and she generally rejected the voices of community members who dissented from her pastors' leadership:

We try to [think of] the church as a hospital. So there are sick people here and you know you are going to find the gossipers and hypocrites. But where aren't you going to find it? So you do find that [anti-education] attitude.

Similarly, Alberto made a distinction between people who have had a "real" encounter with Jesus Christ and church members who have not. Alberto inferred that many expression of hostility toward the outside world and secular education institutions stem from voices that are not authentically Christian:

There are people who haven't had a real encounter with God. I believe this because if you have had a real encounter with God or Jesus, your whole perspective on everything changes. You no longer see a sinner when you look at another person, but you can see a life that can be changed, just as God has changed you when you were in sin. He can do the same with others. So I don't believe that being with the world or interacting with the world contaminates you.

Alberto also identified a tendency to find college education unnecessary among Pentecostals who emphasize the power of Jesus as teacher and transformer:

A lot of people think that because we have Jesus who can teach us, we don't need school and we can only learn from him. We do learn a lot of things from him. But the Bible also says that we have to go about it with institutions. We have to achieve all the knowledge we can. We have to know basically anything and everything. … A lot of kids are going to jail for not going to school. A lot of kids are in the streets doing bad stuff instead of going to school. They're doing bad things because they think they have to. That's why education is so important.

All the participants received support from their pastors in resisting anti-education attitudes and pursuing higher education, suggesting a break with Pentecostal tradition. The data suggest that this shift is being ushered into the Latino community by a new generation of pastors who exercise an influence over the younger members of the

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community. Alberto stressed his pastors' role as teachers and guides: "They [the pastors] teach us this. I'm not saying this because it's my own opinion, but because that's how they have taught me, and I have seen it with my own eyes."

To summarize this theme, traditionally college-age Latino Pentecostal students are breaking away from their cultural traditions, redefining Pentecostal separation, and rejecting traditional hostility toward education. They identified older Pentecostal church members, specifically first-generation immigrants, as more hostile toward college. Participants also reinterpreted the Pentecostal movement's anti-education past in the light of their generational change. Most notably, they addressed Pentecostal eschatology, which not only asserts that Jesus Christ is coming again but sees the present era as the end-times due to the miraculous happenings that members have experienced. Theologian Nel (2015) argued that Pentecostal theology is at its heart founded on the idea that Pentecostals believe that they have a role to play in the second coming of Jesus Christ:

> [Miraculous] manifestations of tongues, healing, exorcism, and prophecy are interpreted as signs that they are bringing in the *last days*. The theological centre of Pentecostal spirituality is for this reason not Spirit baptism or speaking in tongues, but the *Gestalt* of apocalyptic narrative of which Pentecostals saw themselves as being a significant part (Nel, 2015, p. 4).

The shift away from suspicion of college might suggest a major theological adjustment in eschatology that could significantly redefine Pentecostalism for contemporary Latino communities, causing them to diverge from the movement's historical Anglo-American roots. Some support for this suggestion can be found in Sanchez-Walsh (2012), who reported increasingly progressive trends among Mexican-American Pentecostals. She

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concluded that newer generations of Latino Pentecostals were redefining and reinventing their faith. Likewise, this research has also shown that younger generations of Latino Pentecostal students are reinventing their Pentecostal identities, specifically redefining Pentecostal separatism and perhaps also the relationship between group-based miraculous experiences and Pentecostal eschatology.

Theme 2: Promoting Educational Aspirations, Shifting Toward Evangelicalism

This major theme suggests that a new generation of Latino Pentecostal students is embracing college education and receiving support from their communities. This finding is consistent with other research concerning religious social networks in general and education. Researchers have found broad evidence that intergenerational bonds in churches encourage better educational outcomes (Coleman, 1998; Glanville et al., 2008; Jeynes, 2010). More specifically, Latino churches have been found to promote educational success (Irizarry & Antrop-González, 2008; Liou et al., 2009; Nevárez-La Torre, 1997). Contrary to these findings, however, other researchers have asserted that Pentecostalism deters its members from pursuing secular education (Beyerlein, 2004; Garneau & Schwadel, 2013; Keysar & Kosmin, 1995; Kosmin et al., 1992).

The interviews conducted for this study indicated a generational shift away from the Pentecostal cultural tradition of opposition and toward recognizing the value of college. Romona stated:

> I have seen a lot of church members who really want to see their kids go to college. They want more for their children than finishing high school and getting a job. They want them to succeed more. The people I know, from church, are really encouraging their kids to continue their education.

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Romona wanted to affirm clearly that her church values education. I interpreted her speaking as one religious person talking to another and wanting to assure me that her community was not anti-intellectual as people familiar with Pentecostalism might expect. I perceived that she wanted me to have a positive view of her community as accepting college graduates like herself and me.

Josias also described his pastor as encouraging younger members of his church to strive for a college education:

He [my pastor] is all for college and he's all for studies. He's all for doing things you want to do and succeeding. He's a very positive man. He will guide you if you need any help or references. He's totally helpful when it comes to college and studying and pursuing your career or something that you want to do.

Lupe described her mother and pastor as encouraging greater prosperity for the next generation through education: "My mom always talked about how her mom said, if I could raise a child to become a teacher then she needs to raise someone to be a principal. So it was kind of like a generation-to-generation thing."

Rather than displaying characteristics of traditional Pentecostal defensive separatism that leads to rejection of college, as Beyerlein (2004) suggested, contemporary Latino Pentecostal students are embracing education and emphasizing being a Christian example for fellow collegians. Contemporary Latino Pentecostal participants show characteristics that have been defined as an "evangelical disposition" in place of the traditional Pentecostal "defensive separatism" toward college education and outsiders. These findings indicate a shift away from traditional Pentecostal attitudes and toward mainstream evangelical Christianity within the Latino Pentecostal community. Beyerlein

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(2004) asserted that whereas Pentecostals were hostile and disinterested in secular education, evangelicals viewed college as an opportunity to spread their religious beliefs and represent Christianity to unbelievers. "Instead of withdrawing from it [secular education]," Beyerlein wrote, "evangelical Protestants' strategy emphasizes maintaining Christian orthodoxy while actively engaging and transforming the larger society," feeling a sense of duty to redeem "fallen" or secular institutions, (p. 508). Participants in this study, however, were cultivating an "engaged orthodoxy" disposition toward college, the position more commonly found within evangelical communities according to Beyerlein. An "engaged orthodoxy" approach views interacting with secular institutions and non-Christians as an opportunity to evangelize and participate in the redemption of secular individuals and organizations.

For example, Alberto described his experience at college as a victory in transforming anti-Christian sentiments for the purposes of Christian evangelism:

At first, it was a little difficult, because everybody was, I guess you could say, normal. And we are abnormal—we go to church and try our best not to sin. Everybody basically was against me at first, but when they saw my fruits, how I behaved and interacted with people and how I wasn't making the same decisions as other people, they were like, "You've got something different that we don't have. Everything that you do, it prospers. Everything that you say, it comes true." Later I was able to start talking with them and I told them how I go to church and how the church and the Bible have taught me many things. I still go to school, and my classmates aren't going to church yet, but they saw something different

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in me that they respect. Now they have an example of a certain thing that is

different.

Also exemplifying this shift towards an evangelical disposition, Romona described

herself as a good example of a Christian to people who have experienced bad examples

of Christianity:

I had a lot of friends tell me, "I really like you because I had a lot of Christian

friends, people that I met, and the first thing they did is judge me. And you don't

judge me. You're a really good friend and you always give me good advice and I

feel that when I really need good advice from a really good friend, I can always

come to you." So I always received those compliments from my friends.

Romona emphasized evangelism, believing that Pentecostals should be move involved

with ministering to outsiders. Her feelings suggest a shift away from the Pentecostal

tendency to form enclaves.

It is unfortunate, but Pentecostals should have a bigger heart to help others. We

keep an image that we're Christians and we are so concerned with leadership

positions at church that we forget that there is more out there—that people

outside the church need our help and they need our advice. We forget that people

need us out there to give them a hand. I feel that non-Pentecostal churches do this

better than us. I feel that we are becoming a group that doesn't want to get

involved. I'm not saying we should get involved to follow what the world is

doing, but to help the world by reaching out to the community. I feel like we are

not doing that enough.

Lupe also feels a responsibility to represent the "light" of her Christianity in a "dark" secular college: "I would pray to God and tell him, "Send me where you want me to be light." I can be light especially in a theatrical program, where religion is seen as something negative."

Likewise, Angelina dismissed traditional hostility towards education because of her concern for Christian evangelism:

The whole thing is that we have to make a difference. We have to meet other people and spread the gospel. So with this, they [the pastors] always say, "This is your way to meet other people to spread the gospel."

The participants consistently considered themselves examples of authentic Christianity at a secular institution that was either outright anti-Christian or had a poor opinion of Christianity. Participants sought to convert members of the college body to Christianity through their distinct code of conduct and even their dress code. Students perceived themselves as gaining attention and favorable reputations due to their Pentecostal identity and also felt they were inspiring the beginnings of religious conversations among their fellow collegians.

The diversity of global Pentecostalism has been noted by researchers (Albrecht, 1999; Deininger, 2014; Nel, 2015; Sanchez-Walsh, 2012; Walker, 2001) and presents a difficulty in defining the movement and attributing common characteristics to such a diverse population. However, Garneau and Schwadel (2013) claimed to have "demonstrate[d] the usefulness of a measure of religious affiliation that clearly distinguishes Pentecostals from other evangelical Protestants" (p. 349). In view of this widely accepted distinction between Pentecostals and evangelicals (Beyerlein, 2004;

Garneau & Schwadel, 2013; Marsden, 1980; Smith & Sikkink, 2000; Woodberry & Smith, 1998), this study suggests an interesting addition to studies of Latino education and Pentecostals: contemporary Latino Pentecostals are shifting away from traditional Pentecostal thinking and toward evangelical characteristics concerning higher education.

Theme 3: Socio-Religious Capital Acquired by Latino Pentecostal Students

I use the term *socio-religious capital* to describe the distinct form of cultural wealth offered to students within Latino Pentecostal communities. Yosso (2005) identified six forms of community cultural wealth within communities of color: familial, social, linguistic, navigational, aspirational, and resistance. Additionally, Rendón, Nora, and Kanagala (2014) included a spiritual or faith-based category as an additional part of Latino community wealth. Like Yosso (2005), Rendón et al. (2014) contended that Latino communities provide assets that are not necessarily accumulated through formal education, but "are developed strengths through lived experiences, cultural traditions and life challenges which help them" to excel in education (p. 4). The addition of spiritual or faith-based capital to Yosso's framework highlights a distinct community strength that supports Latino collegians with life transitions and in difficult situations. This addition to the framework was informed by Nora and Anderson's (2002) definition of spirituality as a positive worldview and a basic ethical interaction with others, governed by a sense of spiritual nobility. The spiritual or faith-based area is intended to act as a broad category that encompasses diverse Latino spiritualities, including those associated with religious traditions, a belief in a higher power, and a positivity associated with a broad sense of spiritual nobility.

Romona expressed a sense of having a spiritual asset that supported her at college: "Before every test, I would just put my head down and pray, and God helped me with every test. He even helped me walk through that stage when I got my diploma." Lupe similarly commented, "Believing in God, it was my strength."

These participants' comments hint at but do not fully describe the spiritual form of community wealth provided by this Latino subculture. The spiritual assets of Latino Pentecostal participants are rooted in social experiences that reinforce religious ideas of divine purpose and produce a sense of divine empowerment. This capital attained is more specific than general spiritual capital, due to the pronounced social dimensions of Latino Pentecostal spirituality, which is deeply connected to social experience because church members are perceived to speak for God and participate in divine occurrences within ritual space. This is why I refer to the faith-based capital these young people receive from their church involvement as socio-religious capital.

Other researchers have noted that social capital can be acquired though church membership (Coleman, 1988; Glanville et al., 2008). However, to describe what the Latino Pentecostals receive from their communities simply as social capital would neglect the overt religiosity and perceived mystical dimensions of Latino Pentecostal relationships. Whereas social capital may be an appropriate broad term for religious communities in general, and whereas spiritual or faith-based capital may be an appropriate broad term for Latino Community wealth, both fall short in describing students within the distinct subculture of Latino Pentecostalism. Therefore, this unique overlap of spiritual and social assets is best described as socio-religious capital, as it is

attained through social experiences and socio-religious rituals that promote a belief in divine purpose and provide a perceived sense of divine empowerment.

For example, Romona's relationship with her pastor as a religious authority with mystical abilities supported her belief in her own divine purpose and empowered her. The capital that she acquired and directed toward her college success is best defined as socio-religious capital, distinct from both spiritual and social capital.

> There were times when I felt like I wanted to give up, because there were some courses that were a little hard for me. So I would close my book and go on my knees and pray and cry. I would say, "God, without your help, I don't think I'm going to be able to pass this. I don't understand this." And I would be so frustrated sometimes and feel like giving up. And then I'd get a call from the pastor, telling me that "I know that you are sad. I know that you're going through hard times in college," *without him even knowing and without me even telling him.*

Romona felt that the emotional ritual of physically dropping to a kneeling position and crying provoked a divine experience. When she perceived that her pastor was mystically receiving knowledge about her, it reinforced her religious belief that her pastor has a mystical connection with God as his spokesman. The experience led to her perception that divine power was assisting her, providing a socio-religious asset used to accomplish educational goals.

> My pastor would say, "I was praying for you and the Holy Spirit made me feel that I should call you and pray for you." And he would pray for me and then say, "That class that you were worrying about, God is going to help you. You are

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going to come out of this with a good grade. You are going to pass that class, and you are going to call me, and you are going to tell me that you passed that class." So I would cry and stuff like that. I would say, "Oh, thank you, God, because I knew that you were going to help me."

The identity of Romona's pastor as a spokesman for God was reinforced through the socio-religious ritual of praying together over the phone and his prediction of Romona's future success. Due to his perceived status as possessing mystical abilities, this experience provided her with confidence in her own divine purpose. It led her to perceive divine assistance in accomplishing goals and strengthened her resolve to overcome challenges.

Lupe acquired socio-religious capital through the Pentecostal ritual of prophecy, in which a church member publicly claims to speak for God and often reveals future events. Garneau and Schwadel (2013) found that Pentecostals are "especially likely to believe in miracles" as compared to other Christian groups. Nel (2015) explained prophecy rituals as a perceived charismatic manifestation that reinforces the perception of God's ordained plan for Pentecostals. Lupe's experience reflected these findings through her belief that miraculous speaking for God occurs in a public social setting. Pentecostals place great emphasis on the gifts of the Holy Spirit (Garneau & Schwadel, 2013; Lorentzen & Mira, 2005). Lupe emphasized her experience with the prophet as an encounter with someone who had a miraculous gift. During a service in which prophecy was taking place, Lupe was publicly addressed and a prediction of her divine purpose was announced: "A prophet told me that I would sing to the nations. So I just always assumed that I would sing Christian music."

At another point in her decision-making process, the prophet told Lupe that God was saying yes to the school she was considering:

I went to church [another time] and this prophet was like, "God is saying yes to this school." I had applied to two schools, the one I'm at now and another school. And, he [the prophet] told me I was going to go to the school that I'm at now. I was praying about which school to choose and exactly what I said in my prayer is what the prophet told me. So that has been what's keeping me strong.

The idea of the prophet speaking for God was reinforced through the ritual, and Lupe acquired support in transitioning into college through the community's shared belief in her divine purpose. The prophecy ritual had a major influence on supporting her final decision at the choice stage and helped her overcome resistance from her mother toward her college endeavors: "She [Lupe's mom] would just argue and she thought that my college was too far away. However, I feel like she's coming around slowly … because I told my mom, "Well, you heard the prophet.""

All participants stressed heavily that they credited their pastors with providing support and guidance throughout their college choice process. Analyzing the data in conjunction with existing literature on and by Pentecostals (Garneau & Schwadel, 2013; Lorentzen, & Mira, 2005; Nel, 2015; Prince, 2003; 2007), suggests that the social asset of pastoral and prophetic guidance was enhanced precisely due to the Pentecostal religious belief that pastors speak for God. Students' relationships with their pastors provide an asset that is distinguishable from traditional social capital by reaffirming their divine purpose and their belief in a divine path for them.

As they navigated their college choice, participants searched for God's path. The pastor's approval reaffirmed their religious belief that they were following their divine destiny, thus providing an asset that assisted them in their college choice process. Josias emphasized his pastor's guidance as a means of finding his divine direction: "The pastor told me that God knows everything. God knows what he wants you to do and he'll put it in your path." Moreover, Josias referred to his pastors as his "source of strength and his "one true path to doing the right thing and staying spiritually good."

Lupe recognized that church members want young people to be on God's path, and she desires that others would find God's path for them too: "They [church members] want young people to go down the right path. … I would advise Latino Pentecostal students to make sure that what you're doing doe1sn't take you away from the path of God."

Participants explained how their church leaders guided students through the common Latino Pentecostal "sit-down" ritual, in which the pastor acts as the religious authority figure. Sit-down meetings can be arranged by the pastor or another church member to communicate pastoral directions or for disciplinary purposes; they are, and understood as a means for church members to maintain what is perceived to be their divinely ordained path. Josias described the ritual of sitting down with the pastor and its implications:

> A sit-down with a pastor could be a good thing or a bad thing. Most of the time, at least for me, it's not in a bad way. He [the pastor] just wants to talk to me separately and give me advice, or asks me if I'm okay and if I need any help or anything. And then there's the bad one when the pastor sits down with you and

tells you what you did wrong and that you know the rules. You have to follow

certain rules and doctrines. It's just a matter of discipline, and so he sits you down

and tells you what you did wrong. But a sit-down could be good or bad.

Pastors sat with students and guided them in their college choice decisions. Alberto

shared that through one-on-one sit-downs his pastors influenced him to go to college:

They used to ask me, "What do you like to do?" I told them I like to do this and I

like to do that. They helped me see that when I started life, after high school, my

grades were going to matter, and that's how they started encouraging me to go to

college.

Romona's Pentecostal community influenced her and other high-school students

in the same manner through sit-down meetings:

My pastor sat down with us, with all the kids who are going to college, and he

gave us advice. … I can say something like "Pastor, whenever you get some time,

can you let me know so that when we are at church, we can both sit down?"

The sit-down ritual ultimately provides socio-religious capital for students by

reaffirming their belief that they are on the correct pathway leading toward their divine

purpose. Without the pastor's approval, the divine pathway is perceived to be in question.

As Josias observed, "But if I make a decision and something goes wrong, then it means

that it might not have been the word of God." To keep things from going wrong, and to

confirm the proper pathway to fulfilling one divine destiny, the socio-religious ritual of

the sit-down provided Latino Pentecostal students with a reassurance that helped them to

overcome hardships as they transitioned into college.

Latino Pentecostal participants desired to be role models and sources of inspiration for their religious communities. This desire to receive social recognition within a religious context drove students to succeed and become a community asset. Participants were influenced to desire a college education not only for their own benefit, but as a means of contributing to their religious community. The students derived strength from a desire to inspire other members of their community and support the communal belief in divine purpose. This community asset, rooted in the desire to reinforce religious beliefs, is again best identified as socio-religious capital attained by Latino Pentecostal students.

Lupe saw her recent matriculation into a four-year program as an inspiration to her religious social network: "A big influence was really the church. Everyone in the church looks to me and questions what I do, because a lot of people look up to you at church when you're young and you believe in God."

Alberto viewed himself as a role model for other young people and a source of hope to older Latino Pentecostals who are pessimistic about the future of their community:

There's not a lot of young people, as of now in 2018, working toward that professionalism or having careers. They are taking a very easy way out, working at Applebee's or somewhere else, and not having their own career. So what I am saying is that I would like the [Latino Pentecostal] adults to see that there are still some young people who are striving for that career. I want them to see that today's youth are striving for that professionalism. The way I see it, people, by seeing me, can still have hope in the next generation to come back together and be

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restored. They can see that not everything is lost. That's one of my biggest

motivations that helps me to do what I do. That helps me to keep going. That

helps me to wake up every day and be like "I can make a change." … When they

see me in college, it gives younger members of my church hope.

Likewise, Josias seeks to inspire others through his college achievements: "I could be one

of those motivators who could tell them that it's not easy but it's worth it in the end."

This major finding regarding socio-religious capital suggests that the cultural

wealth offered by Latino Pentecostal communities might not fit into the traditional

frameworks and categories applied to communities of color. As researchers study this

new community of students, their community assets could be best understood as socio-

religious capital that socially reinforces the perception of divine purpose and divine

empowerment. However, Latino Pentecostal students are also using forms of community

wealth that could be described in traditional terms. Such forms were present in my data,

although they did not emerge as major themes. For example, Angela described her

Pentecostal social network as a resource for students to consider different professions and

seek information from fellow church members; this comment is consistent with other

research that highlights the social capital rendered by the intergenerational bonds formed

in religious communities (Glanville et al., 2008; Liou et al., 2009).

Because there is a big array of different people in different fields, if I have any

questions, I know that I can ask the pastors and he will be like, "Well, this person

works in this field; you can go talk to them and get more information about it if

you're choosing to go in that career path."

Some participants were exposed to different professions within their religious communities and incorporated them as college program options when constructing their choice-set compilations. For example, Romona provided children with Bible classes and credited that experience with influencing her decision to pursue an education degree:

> My pastor would always say, "Do what you know, and do what you want to do."
> … I thought, "Oh, I can go for education because I do like teaching." I like kids. I was involved with children at church, and I enjoy having my classes at church and teaching.

Likewise, Lupe grew up having experiences with singing at church and performing Bible dramatizations, which influenced her decision to pursue a degree in musical theater:

> Now I am a theater performance major; I am minoring in writing because I want to be a playwright and I like to write songs and poems. I write little plays and a lot of those feelings grew here in the church, and it all just kind of fell in place.

> Along with providing social assets through intergenerational activities, other church members acted as chain migration contacts and social supports. Two participants were influenced in this way by members within their religious network. Angelina was directed to a social resource during her search stage and ended up following that person's college pathway.

> They [the pastors] connected me with the young lady who worked in the medical field already, and I asked her about her college. Then, she told me what school she went to and I followed her example and did exactly what she did.

Similarly, Josias matriculated into college with another member of his church and received support through this relationship:

> It was nice because we are both musicians and we could talk about music stuff and things we wanted to do in church. Sometimes we would just straight-talk about the Bible. Well, at least one time we did, and we could talk about certain things. We didn't always have the same class, but it was nice just to have someone there saying "Hey, I know you, and you're not alone."

Pérez and McDonough (2008) found that for Latinos navigating the college choice process, chain migration contacts serve as information sources and social supports that influence their decisions. Students who attend college with previously known peers depend on this social support to confront issues of loneliness and distance from their home community (Pérez & McDonough, 2008). Consistent with this prior study, the present data suggest that chain migration contacts found within Latino Pentecostal religious social networks provided community wealth for these participants. The evidence of the availability of traditional forms of community wealth that fall outside this study's definition of socio-religious capital support previous research on religious communities and education (Coleman, 1998; Glanville et al., 2008; Irizarry & Antrop-González, 2008; Liou et al. 2009) as well as research on Latino social communities and education (Pérez & McDonough, 2008). The participants described their religious social networks in similar fashion to what Glanville et al. (2008, p. 108) observed, namely as cultivating "norms that encourage active efforts to create such ties because religious groups encourage adult commitment to the socialization of children." However, this was not a major theme in the data. The major theme in this regard was the influence of socio-

religious capital as a community resource used to support successful transitions to college. Latino Pentecostals carve out social space to reinforce religious ideas about their own specialness and affirm their own miraculous "anointing" or God-ordained purpose (Sanchez-Walsh, 2012).

Albrecht (1999), a theologian, took a ritual studies approach to describing Pentecostal spirituality. He explained that Pentecostals engage in ritualistic group-based activities in which other members act as a sort of religious icons, provoking divine intervention and emotional spiritual experiences. This socio-ritual space is achieved through communal activities so that one can reenter the world with a renewed confidence in divine purpose and perceived divine empowerment. Latino Pentecostal communities create "an ethos of revivalistic, participatory, and populist-oriented spirituality" where members "are called and empowered" (Nel, 2015, p. 4). This perceived empowerment and reinforced sense of divine purpose serves as a form of cultural capital utilized by Latino Pentecostal students in successful college choice transitions.

This finding regarding socio-religious capital suggests that the pastor and other leaders in Pentecostal communities play an influential role throughout the college choice process of student members. This finding receives some support from Marti (2015), who found that Latino Pentecostals identify more closely with their religion than other religious groups. He also found that they spend more time engaged in religious activities and demonstrate a deeper commitment to their churches. It follows that religious leadership would be perceived as influential, given this level of dedication to the church. This is especially true within the Pentecostal worldview, which is extremely open to spiritual power and has a tradition of pastors, leaders, and prophets exercising

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supernatural gifts (Nel, 2014; Peterson, 2009), thereby emphasizing the respect to be granted to religious authority. Beyerlein (2004, p. 507) stated, "Pentecostals have a centered religious authority that focuses on encounters with the Holy Spirit and emotional religious practices." My data suggest that the perceived mystical dimension of the pastor-relationship not only reveals the Latino Pentecostal pastor as influential, but also acts as a profound source of socio-religious capital available to students.

These findings are consistent with other academic literature that debunks the "deficiency myth" of communities of color (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007; Hill, 2003; Pérez, 2016; Yosso, 2005). On the contrary, Pentecostal churches are another valuable Latino community organization providing cultural wealth for Latino students. Moreover, this study's findings are consistent with other research that depicted Latino religious students as driven to succeed academically to strengthen the reputation of their religious communities (Aldana, 2016; Antrop-González et al., 2005).

Theme 4: Going to College While Remaining in Church: Avoiding Church-College Culture Collisions

Latino students experience complex issues when transitioning into college and face cultural collisions when navigating between different social worlds. Rendón et al. (2014) suggested that a psychological challenge can confront Latino students as they negotiate their academic, family, peer, and spiritual frames of reference. In dealing with their college transitions, Latino Pentecostal students made decisions influenced by their desire to stay connected to their spiritual world while completing a college education. For most participants, commuting to school and maintaining church attendance was the

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selected strategy. For their part, Latino Pentecostal churches encouraged students to attend college locally and maintain participation is religious rituals and social activities.

Josias decided to commute and maintain his participation in church services:

So, I was thinking, if I were to live out of state, then I would have to leave a lot of responsibility in this church. … We were more comfortable here. And trying to go somewhere new, who knows what would happen? It's not that college was a temptation, but at least spiritually, I think it helped a lot more that we stayed here rather than live over there.

Josias prioritized his attendance at church as a way to prevent outside cultural clashes with his socio-religious world and rejected career options that would interfere with his ability to engage in religious activities:

My pastor asked God to guide me because there were things that I wanted to do, but it wasn't in his will. If I were to work on an ambulance, as an EMT, then I would have to be on call. Since I am worship leader in my church, it's kind of troubling if my job calls me during a service. I would have to leave church to do that real quick and come back, if I even have time to come back. Any of those jobs where you have to be on call, I had to be very careful. … What if God wanted to talk to me at that certain moment, and the enemy [the devil] uses that call to get me to leave church?

Romona chose to commute to school and maintained her attendance at church activities with her pastor's help:

I went to a college that I could drive back and forth from my house to campus. Now, they're [church members] more afraid to send their children to a university

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where you can stay there and live. … When I was in college, I was able to keep

my responsibility, like the things I was supposed to do in church. For example, I

was a teacher for Bible study and I was able to teach the children and I could

attend adult Bible studies. There were times when my classes would be on

Tuesday nights. So my pastor would change Bible studies to Thursday so I could

be there. … It was very important to me because I felt like if my college class

ended early, I would be able to go to church for at least an hour and a half and be

there. I felt like I was giving God some time because I made it through college

with his help.

Alberto chose to commute to his college and never considered being a resident

student. However, he suspected that other Latino Pentecostal churches might object to the

idea of Pentecostal students living on campus:

With my church, if I were to live at a school and have one or two days where I

can't go to church service, it would not be wrong because that's my future. So my

church tries to help me with my future, but some other churches won't.

Lupe was the only participant who chose to live on campus even though her

religious social network encouraged her to commute. Lupe negotiated and made meaning

of her participation in both her college social world and her spiritual world.

They [the church] said, "You can't do that to your mom," and "Think about

what's going to happen to her and what might happen to the church." They told

me to think about the young people at church because I was a youth leader in the

church. … Residing on campus was a big factor because I knew if I was only 40

minutes from home or if I lived closer to home, I knew that my mom would be

like, "Come down every single weekend for church." She would be like, "Come, you better come, you better come." And not that I didn't want to go to church, but college is about meeting new people and learning who you are. Even though I already knew part of who I was, I wanted to discover new things about myself and see how strong my relationship is with God. I don't believe it's necessary to go to church every single day to be a good Christian. Just because you go to church everyday doesn't mean your relationship with God is stronger than someone who maybe only goes once a week to church. I think that my community of Christians are very religious and they believe that you have to go to church every day and that if you don't go to church every day it's a sin. I personally don't believe that because God understands that we have work and school and all these obligations.

Lupe deals with the separation by keeping in contact with her church community and planning events for them to visit her.

The last service I went to before I started college, they threw me a mini-going-away party. They prayed for me and told me that that they were going to miss me. I went back three weeks ago to church when I came home and surprised everyone at church including my mom. They all told me that they were so happy I was there. They're very supportive. They text me all the time and tell me that they miss me. They ask me when I am coming home. I have a show in November and the church is going to travel up to see me in the performance.

This finding bears some similarities to those of Fuligni, Tseng, and Lam (1999) and Fuligni and Anderson (2002), who reported that Latino students experience more family obligations than White students when transitioning into adulthood. Latino

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Pentecostal students in this study perceived similar obligations to their church families. However, my findings diverge from those of Fuligni et al. (1999) with regard to the avoidance of cultural collision. The experience of liminality, when one faces conflicts between different cultures or social worlds, can result in the breaking down of identity coherence. Latino Pentecostal students face challenges of liminality and separation anxiety when their unique church world (a socio-ritualistic space of mysticism and an exclusive enclave that reinforces specialness) is confronted by college culture. Students navigating multiple worlds are prone to psychological stresses and identity crises, feeling that they are an "in-between" space, dislocated, and fully in neither one social world nor the other (Rendón et al., 2014). This study suggests that although Latino Pentecostal students do perceive obligations to their church communities, their primary motivation for socio-religious participation in their church throughout college is to maintain their identity coherence and receive support in navigating multiple social worlds. Latino Pentecostals used their social group as a means to participate in group experiences of divinity that reinforced their cultural and religious identity (Sanchez-Walsh, 2012). Socio-ritualistic engagement is a means to identity reinforcement, avoidance of cultural collision, and perceived spiritual empowerment for Latino Pentecostal students; for these reasons, maintaining social connections with their religious community is an influential part of their college choice decision-making process.

Summary

This chapter has presented the major themes arising from my interviews of five Latino Pentecostal students who described their college choice experiences and the influence of their religious social networks. First, a generational break with the cultural

tradition of Pentecostal separation is occurring among Latino Pentecostal students. The younger generation is redefining Pentecostalism and dismissing hostility toward education and the tradition of forming enclaves that limit contact with outsiders. Participants made meaning of this break with tradition in a variety of ways. Most notably, multiple members cited a mistaken end-times teaching, which they have redefined with the guidance of their pastors so as to view college favorably. Other participants perceived false Christians within churches, and one participant associated anti-education attitudes with misogyny and homophobia, endorsing a break with all identified negatives of the Pentecostal tradition.

Second, traditional college-age Latino Pentecostal students are embracing college education and shifting toward mainstream Evangelical dispositions concerning college, again with guidance and support from their pastors. In the predisposition stage, participants described being predisposed to a favorable view of college education by their pastors and other members of their religious social networks. Instead of the traditional Pentecostal attitudes towards college, all Latino Pentecostal participants described themselves and their pastors as taking what resembled a mainstream evangelical approach when interacting with the broader culture and approaching college education.

Third, students acquired socio-religious community wealth from their religious social networks and used it as cultural capital throughout their college choice process. Latino Pentecostal students' spirituality has a unique social dimension due to their emphasis on the miraculous and their attribution of supernatural gifts to church leaders. These group-based spiritual experiences reinforce a sense of divine purpose through socio-religious rituals and provide a distinctive community asset to Latino Pentecostal

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students. Although the data indicated that the students also accumulated community wealth in more traditional categories, the term *socio-religious capital* best describes the unique asset on which they drew during their college choice process.

Fourth, Latino Pentecostal students generally deal with cultural collision threats when transitioning to college by choosing to commute to college and to maintain participation in socio-religious rituals. The participants in this study tended to choose colleges in close proximity to their homes so that they could maintain their church involvement throughout college, a practice that their home churches encouraged. Avoiding cultural collision and separation anxiety was suggested as a motivating factor in these decisions.

Overall, the strong influence of Latino Pentecostal pastors was present throughout all four themes, suggesting that further research on their influence as compared to other groups of religious clergy would be warranted. In the final chapter, I will discuss the thematic findings, address the research questions, and offer recommendations and concluding observations.

Chapter 6

Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusion

The Latino educational experience continues to be a topic of research, driven largely by a concern to promote equitable education opportunities for Latinos in America. Pentecostalism has been a growing phenomenon within Latino communities across the United States (Espinoza, 2014; Mulder et al., 2017), and if this trajectory continues, the numbers of Latino Pentecostal students in schools throughout the United States could grow substantially. The purpose of the present qualitative study was to examine the influence of religious social networks on college choice within the expanding Latino Pentecostal subculture. According to education research, the decision to go to college is not an isolated event, but an accumulation of social influences in a process (Gonzalez, 2012; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Pérez & McDonough, 2008). This dissertation has presented an understanding of Pentecostal influences on the college choice process of Latino students, taking into consideration traditional Pentecostal hostility toward secular education (Beyerlein, 2004).

The data analysis revealed four major findings. First, students are breaking with tradition and redefining Pentecostal values. Participants redefined traditional Pentecostal separatism while making new meanings from their cultural history of skepticism toward higher education. Whereas Beyerlein (2004) identified defensive separatism as a reason for White Pentecostals to reject college education altogether, this dissertation suggests a paradigm shift within younger members of contemporary Latino Pentecostal communities. Traditional college-age Latino Pentecostals are redefining Pentecostal separation and do not find spiritual value in avoiding the broader culture and secular

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institutions, as previous generations of their community did. This finding is supported by Sanchez-Walsh (2012), who asserted the fluidness of Latino Pentecostal identity and highlighted the divide between younger and older generations.

Second, Pentecostal social networks are promoting college aspirations. Instead of the traditional Pentecostal negative attitude toward college, I found aspects of what Beyerlein (2004) called an evangelical disposition, which views college education as an opportunity to evangelize the broader culture. Sanchez et al. (2016) found no significant relationship between hostility toward education and low educational expectations among Pentecostals. Likewise, I found no evidence that hostility toward education was deterring students from pursuing college, suggesting that Latino Pentecostal communities are shifting toward evangelical characteristics when approaching college education.

Third, this study found that Latino Pentecostal students are acquiring socio-religious capital from their religious social networks. Socio-religious capital is a Latino Pentecostal community asset that is attained through social experiences and socio-religious rituals that promote a belief in divine purpose and provide a perceived divine empowerment. This finding is supported by other research that finds community wealth within Latino religious communities in general (Irizarry & Antrop-González, 2008; Liou et al., 2009).

Fourthly, the Latino Pentecostal students tended to commute to school and choose a college program in close proximity to their churches. For participants, the desire to maintain socio-ritualistic participation with their religious communities was a motivating factor, perhaps due to a desire to avoid cultural collision.

Discussion of the Findings

This research used Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) framework to make a meaningful addition to Latino college choice research by stressing the unique cultural factors that influence the predisposition stage of Latino Pentecostals' college choices. I also relied on Beyerlein's (2004) research on Pentecostal hostility towards education in conjunction with the traditional three-phase college choice framework (see Figure 2). Hossler and Gallagher's work has been widely used to study how students make their college decisions (Andrew et al., 2016; Nora, 2004; Rizzo, 2014; Rosas & Hamrick, 2002; Smith & Fleming, 2006). Fundamentally, the college choice framework treats the decision to go to college as a three-stage process (predisposition, search, and choice) in which the individual student interacts with social influences. This framework provided a suitable frame of reference by which to examine the influence of Pentecostal social networks on Latino college choice. Moreover, utilizing Beyerlein's (2004) distinction between evangelical and Pentecostal dispositions toward college proved useful in understanding these students' behavior during the predisposition stage, which has been relatively underexamined. Hossler and Gallagher (1987) noted that not much was understood about the predisposition stage and how peers, family, and communities influence college enrollment. Understanding how this unique subculture within the Latino community fosters college attitudes requires attention to the Pentecostal cultural tradition of forming enclaves that value separation from the broader culture (Beyerlein, 2004; Garneau & Schwadel, 2013; Sanchez-Walsh, 2012) and the conservative Protestant tendency to be hostile toward scientific authorities (Gauchat, 2012; Mooney, 2007). Beyerlein's articulation of varying Christian attitudes toward education contributed to an

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in-depth understanding of the predisposition stage and allowed major themes to surface

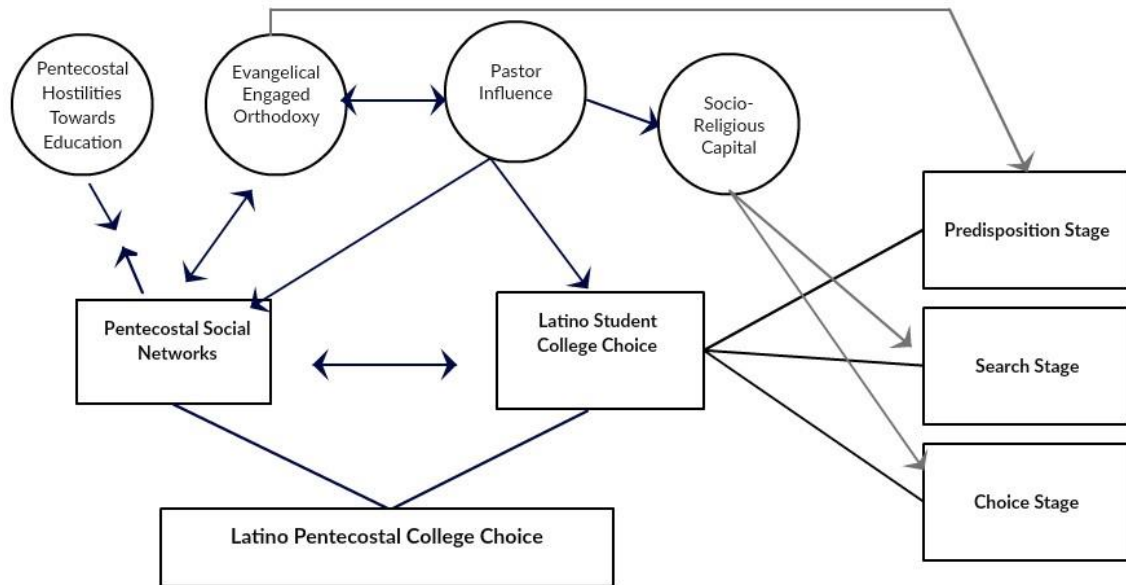concerning the generational shift within Latino Pentecostalism.

Figure 2. Diagram of research findings.

Although the two sources provided an understanding of the predisposition stage

for Latino Pentecostal students, the nature of Beyerlein's research made it not applicable

to the search and choice stages. Hossler and Gallagher (1987) referred to a "choice set"

being compiled during the search stage before the final evaluation and decision take place

during the choice stage. These stages are highly interactive, according to Hossler and

Gallagher (1987), because students frequently communicate with parents, peers, and

influential community members when choosing colleges. Pentecostal social networks

influence these stages by offering community assets that the students examined in this

dissertation utilized. Socio-religious capital, a resource by which a sense of divine purpose and divine empowerment is socially reinforced, enhanced students' resolve to accomplish educational goals and helped them navigate the search and choice stages.

Community wealth models and Latino Pentecostal college choice. This study found that community wealth models provided important means of understanding the search and choice stages among Latino Pentecostal students. The data revealed that Pentecostal social networks are a means of community wealth that guides students who identity with the Pentecostal religious movement. This study suggests the importance of understanding the college choice process of Latino Pentecostals in conjunction with community wealth theories concerning students of color. It further suggests viewing Latino Pentecostal religiosity as a type of socio-religious community capital that students use during their college choice process.

With regard to the community wealth of students of color, Yosso (2005) provided a framework that has informed education researchers studying the Latino community (Irizarry & Antrop-González, 2008; Liou et al., 2009; Pérez & Taylor, 2016; Rendón et al., 2014). Yosso's community wealth framework debunked the "deficiency myth" of previous notions of cultural capital. Bourdieu (1977), recognized as the traditional founder of cultural capital theory, established that cultural capital can be transmitted through social networks. Bourdieu theorized that those who lack social capital could access social mobility and be endowed with culture through education. This view, however, has been challenged as promoting the narrative that communities of color are somehow lacking in culture and need to assimilate into the dominant culture to acquire capital (Pérez & Taylor, 2016; Yosso, 2005). Many researchers have sought to debunk

the deficiency myth (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007; Gregory & Williams, 2000; Heath, 1983; Hill, 2003; Pérez, 2016), but Yosso (2005) confronted the deficiency myth within the cultural capital framework by asserting that community wealth is found within communities of color. Yosso rejected the presumption that minority students are intrinsically disadvantaged by a lack of culture and instead presented a conceptualization of minority cultural resources that act as cultural capital and can be activated to promote college achievement. Yosso (2005) contended that the cultural wealth of minority communities has been written off by dominant culture as deficient and subordinate to European-American culture, but that when communities of color are properly recognized as distinct, valuable, and rendering capital to their members, a more appropriate research method can be applied.

Yosso (2005) identified six traditional categories of cultural capital found in communities of color: aspirational, familial, linguistic, navigational, social, and resistance. Although these categories have been useful to researchers, Rendón et al. (2014) made a valuable addition to understanding the community wealth that exists within the Latino community, emphasizing that Latino students acquire a spiritual form of community wealth that can be applied toward college success. The Pew Research Center (2014) noted that Latinos tend to be more religious than other groups, with more than 80 percent of Latinos considering themselves religious and perceiving a great deal of guidance from their faith. The idea of spirituality has been broadly defined as consisting of a positive worldview and ethical interactions (Nora & Anderson, 2002); however, spiritual capital is a relatively new concept that has been defined as the individual application of social resources toward issues of social justice (Lucey, 2019; Rima, 2013).

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According to Rima (2013), spiritual capital is an individual's "metaphysical impulse that animates and leverages other forms of capital to build capacity for advancing the common good" (p. 172).

Previous categories of spirituality as a form of capital and community wealth did not adequately describe the community asset found within the Latino Pentecostal community by this study. Although some of the community assets acquired by Latino Pentecostal students could be interpreted within traditional categories, the framework falls short in providing a meaningful understanding of Latino Pentecostal community wealth. As education researchers study this group's college choices, expanded frameworks and new categories are needed. Toward that end, this study proposes a Latino Pentecostal community wealth category of socio-religious capital.

This major community asset acquired by Pentecostal students takes a unique form due to the Pentecostal religious belief that pastors, prophets, and other members have miraculous abilities, coupled with an emphasis on mystical experiences within a social group context. The praxis of engaging in socio-religious rituals that initiate perceived group experiences of the miraculous ultimately results in community wealth as one's sense of divine purpose and empowerment is reinforced by the community. This finding bears some similarity to the research by Anderson (2001), who found that religiosity promoted persistence among minority and nontraditional college students. Although religiosity has been widely viewed as having a positive relationship with educational success (Coleman, 1998; Glanville et al., 2008; Henderson, 2003; Jeynes, 2010), it is more precisely described with regard to the Latino Pentecostal community as a form of socio-religious capital, transmitted through ritualistic community reinforcement that

routinely provides social experiences of a religious nature. These socio-religious experiences renew resolve and provide a psychological resource that can be utilized to overcome challenges and combat the anxiety of life decisions. Latino Pentecostal religiosity can thus be understood as a form of socio-religious capital used during the college choice process that overlaps with traditional spiritual, social, and cultural capital categories. The concept of socio-religious capital, as a distinct category of community wealth, is useful in clarifying our understanding of this group's college choice experiences.

Latino Pentecostal religiosity is intimately connected with social experience, thereby making the socio-religious category of cultural wealth particularly salient in this case. The distinction between individual spiritual resources and social capital is not pronounced in the Latino Pentecostal community due to the emphasis on group-based, public religious experiences within Latino Pentecostalism. Whereas other religious rituals utilize objects, statues, chants, or physical spaces as means to perceive a connection with the divine, Pentecostalism emphasizes social relationships and individuals with supernatural gifts in its religious rituals (Albrecht, 1999; Nel, 2015). This unique means of merging the social with the spiritual can be understood as a socio-religious type of community wealth within this Latino subculture.

The influential role of Latino Pentecostal pastors. Throughout all three stages of college choice, all participants highlighted their pastors as a major influence. The data indicate that a new generation of Latino Pentecostal pastors is serving as the chief facilitators of a shift toward evangelical attitudes toward education, as well as the chief deliverers of the socio-religious capital that students use in their college choice process.

The strong influence of Latino Pentecostal pastors on their student members is consistent with inferences from earlier research. Barrett (2010) and Wald, Owen, and Hill (1988) reported that Latino parents were more influenced by authority figures, such as pastors and priests, than other ethnic groups. Also, Marti (2015) found that Latino Pentecostal members were more dedicated to their churches than other groups; providing grounds for the inference that their pastors might hold greater influence. Most significantly, studies of Pentecostalism have highlighted Pentecostals' belief in the miraculous gifts and supernatural abilities of their church leaders (Albrecht, 1999; Deininger, 2014; Nel, 2015; Sanchez-Walsh, 2012; Walker, 2001). If, unlike other religious groups, Latino Pentecostals believe that their pastors have miraculous abilities, one could expect that these pastors would have a greater amount of influence on their congregants. Supported by these research-based inferences, the present study provides qualitative evidence that Latino Pentecostal students are highly influenced by their pastors during their college choice process. Considering the role of pastors as authoritative and influential throughout the stages in the college choice framework (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987) allowed the research to identify the different roles that Latino Pentecostal pastors play. The study showed how Latino Pentecostal pastors shape dispositions, facilitate community wealth, and influence final decisions through sit-down rituals.

During my research, Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) traditional framework was a useful means in understanding the college decision making of Latino Pentecostal students. Notably, the predisposition stage of the framework coupled with Pentecostal literature highlighting the unique cultural tradition of anti-education attitudes was effective in understanding Latino Pentecostals' college choice (Beyerlein, 2004; Garneau

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& Schwadel, 2013). During data analysis, themes emerged that called for application and reconsideration of community wealth theories (Rendón et al., 2014; Yosso, 2005). Finding better-informed ways of describing how different communities provide cultural wealth was a crucial consideration in understanding the college choice process for the Latino Pentecostal subculture. The conceptual framework for research, which was originally informed by a traditional three-stage model of college choice and literature on Pentecostalism, was further informed by community wealth research, thereby providing an effective means for data analysis.

Addressing the Research Questions

This study examined how Latino Pentecostal students described their college choice experiences, and it makes a unique contribution to our understanding of Latino college choice by focusing on the Latino Pentecostal subculture. Applying Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis allowed the essence of student experiences to surface through the voices of five participants. Three research questions guided this study and were answered by the themes revealed through the analysis process.

Research Question 1: How do college-age Latino Pentecostals describe the influence of religious social networks on their college choice process? A major finding that emerged through the analysis process was that a new generation of Latino Pentecostal students is embracing college education with the support of their pastors and religious social networks. Traditionally college-age Latino Pentecostal participants described their pastors and community members as predisposing them to view college favorably and actively encouraging members to pursue a college education. This theme addresses how Pentecostal social networks influence the predisposition stage of college

choice. At this stage, the student's attitude toward college is considered in conjunction with community and organizational influences (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Hossler and Gallagher (1987) described this initial stage as "a developmental phase in which students determine whether or not they would like to continue their education beyond high school" (p. 209). Positive or negative attitudes that students perceive among their peers, family members, and influential community members can affect this initial decision whether to continue education after high school. The predisposition stage, like the other two stages, is influenced by how the individual interacts with his or her community. Latino Pentecostal students described their religious social networks, especially their pastors, as a positive influence predisposing them to a positive attitude toward college education.

Research Question 2: How do the experiences of college-age Latino Pentecostals facilitate the predisposition, search, and choice stages? The participants' predisposition towards college was influenced by people in their communities who viewed college as an opportunity for prosperity. The participants experienced encouragement to go to college and to value a secular education as useful preparation for Christian adulthood. During the search phase, some participants were influenced by social experiences provided in their church, such as teaching classes to children, singing in public, or communicating with chain migration contacts. During the choice phase, one major emerging theme was that Latino Pentecostal students tended to avoid cultural collisions by choosing nearby colleges so that church activities and connections could be maintained throughout their schooling. This finding suggests that students experienced the desire to stay connected to the social and religious activities of their church as a way

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to avoid college-church cultural collisions. Many Latino Pentecostal students chose to commute to school and were influenced by their communities to remain actively involved in church activities. Moreover, socio-religious capital was acquired by Latino Pentecostal students as a form of community wealth and utilized throughout the search and choice stages of college selection.

Research Question 3: How do college-age Latino Pentecostals describe their perceptions of the attitudes of church leaders and members about attending college? As previously stated, participants described their religious communities as having a positive attitude toward college. All participants rejected traditional Pentecostal hostility toward college and embraced college education, following the guidance provided by their pastors. Many participants described the support of their religious social networks, especially their pastors, as encouraging them to attend college and persist on their college pathways. Latino Pentecostal churches were perceived as valuing college education as an avenue to greater prosperity for the community and a noble preparation for Christian family life.

Implications for Practice

The Latino community continues to experience unequal educational opportunity in the United States. In particular, the inordinately low numbers of Latino students who enroll in four-year college programs and complete academic degrees have been called a crisis in Latino education (Aud et al., 2012; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Liu, 2011; Perna, 2000). Responding to these findings is even more urgent in view of the rapid population growth of Latinos in the United States (Fry & Taylor, 2013). This dissertation has responded to the alleged education crisis within Latino communities by presenting

findings that offer a more nuanced understanding of Latino Pentecostals' college decisions, which could contribute positively to how these students are viewed, instructed, and researched by educational institutions.

This dissertation adds to the academic conversation regarding Latino college choice by considering Latino Pentecostals, a previously underexamined group. Social influences have been found to impact Latinos' college choice (Nora, 2004; Pérez & McDonough, 2008; Person & Rosenbaum, 2006); more specifically, religious communities have been shown to exert a positive influence on Latino education (Antrop-González et al., 2005; Irizarry & Antrop-González, 2008; Liou et al., 2009; Nevárez-La Torre, 1997; Sikkink & Hernández, 2003). Focusing on the Latino Pentecostal community and utilizing a conceptual framework informed by traditional college choice theory (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987) and sociological research on Pentecostalism and education (Beyerlein 2004; Garneau & Schwadel, 2013; Sanchez et al., 2016) enabled this phenomenological research to add to our understanding of the college choice experience of Latino Pentecostal students.

The major finding that traditionally college-age Latino Pentecostal students are experiencing a culture shift, embracing college education, and abandoning a cultural tradition of suspicion of secular education provides valuable insight to the academic community and education institutions. Sanchez-Walsh (2012) documented a Latino Pentecostal leader's declaration, "We want people filled with the Holy Spirit, not people with Ph.D.'s" (p. 192), to illustrate the anti-intellectualism traditionally found within Latino Pentecostalism. However, a younger generation of students is reinventing what it means to be Pentecostal and are renegotiating what it means to be separate and holy.

Recognizing this trend among Latino Pentecostal students allows education practitioners to understand the cultural tradition and current transitions that students are facing, and it may provide insights that can assist their efforts to support Latino Pentecostal students. This group of students, who are disproportionately from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Garneau & Schwadel, 2013), are "college pioneers" in their communities and, as such, face unique challenges, but they have also acquired unique assets from their socio-religious background. The education community can apply knowledge of this group's cultural traditions and its current transitional state to promote the college success of Latinos who identify with the Pentecostal movement.

Latino community wealth has been a platform used by researchers to debunk the deficiency myth and provide an understanding of how Latino communities support educational success (Irizarry & Antrop-González, 2008; Pérez, 2016; Rendón et al., 2014). Types of assets offered to Latino students by their communities and documented by prior research have included spiritual capital (Rendón et al., 2014), as well as social capital from their religious social groups (Antrop-González et al., 2005; Liou et al., 2009). This study provides fuller understanding of the type of capital that Latino Pentecostal students receive from their religious communities. Latino Pentecostal spirituality is deeply tied to social relationships and socio-religious rituals that induce perceived experiences of a miraculous nature. I have proposed using the term *socio-religious capital* to refer to the community asset that is offered to students when religious ideas of divine purpose are reinforced and a sense of divine empowerment is socially cultivated so as to strengthen students' resolve to overcome challenges. This study offers an understanding of how Latino Pentecostal communities offer social and spiritual

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resources through socio-religious rituals and relationships, and it adds to our understanding of Latino community wealth and how it supports educational achievement.

Supporting students as they undergo the experience of psychological disorientation has been an area of interest for the education field (Rendón et al., 2014; Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000; Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, & Covarrubias, 2012). Understanding cultural identity reinforcement and the psychological stresses of Latino students will assist practitioners and institutions who support these students. Continuing to understanding the importance of identity reinforcement and the need to avoid cultural collisions can help the academic community to support Latino students through college decision making and transitions. Students who operate from a spiritual context may struggle when navigating a distinctly secular college community. These students may feel pulled from one psychological frame of reference to another and experience a liminality, feeling estranged from both contexts (Rendón et al., 2014). This *pluriversal* outlook that requires the maintenance of multiple meaning-making systems simultaneously adds a profound stressor to the Latino Pentecostal college transition (Rendón et al., 2014). Educational institutions can benefit by being aware of this psychological process, as well as by having a greater understanding of Latino Pentecostals' college choice mechanisms, and can explore possibilities to support this particular group of students. Academic counselors can incorporate their knowledge of Latino Pentecostals' preference to remain in close proximity to their churches when offering guidance. Moreover, colleges and universities can consider the Latino Pentecostal experience when constructing policy that might impact or support Latino

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students. This study promotes a deeper understanding of the Latino Pentecostal community, including the challenges involved in navigating two distinct social worlds.

Recommendations for Future Study

Hallett and Venegas (2015, p. 100) stated, "We encourage future researchers to continue exploring how the intersection of identities frames college-going for Latino students, including issues related to religion." This study took into consideration the intersection of cultural and religious identities by focusing on a distinct Latino subculture and considering the social influences of that community on college choice. I recommend further research on how religious identities, experiences, and relationships influence Latinos' college choice.

The data in this study revealed the strong influence of Latino Pentecostal pastors on their members' college choice process. Sanchez et al. (2016) encouraged "future research to continue exploring whether and how clergy and congregational dynamics bear influence on Latina/o youths' educational outcomes." This study consistently found Latino Pentecostal pastors influencing students throughout their college choices and (somewhat surprisingly) promoting their college aspirations. Taking into consideration the distinct cultural tradition of mysticism and centered religious authority within the Pentecostal movement, I recommend more research on the extent of Latino Pentecostal pastors and leaders' influence on college choice, educational expectations, and outcomes as compared to that of other religious traditions.

The findings of this dissertation also have implications for research on religion, as they suggest that Latino Pentecostal attitudes and beliefs are moving toward those of mainstream evangelicalism even though Pentecostals maintain their traditional worship,

rituals, and emphasis on the mystical. Continuing to understand the global Pentecostal movement assists in providing insight as to its social influences, and in particular its impact on student college choice. More research is encouraged in defining the global Pentecostal phenomenon and distinguishing its diverse subcultures.

A better understanding of how Latino Pentecostal students are experiencing education would provide further contributions to the education community. This study takes one important step by deepening our understanding of how Latino Pentecostalism influences college choice. Much remains to be learned, however, about the influence of Latino Pentecostalism on students. Further studies could examine the shift of Latino Pentecostalism away from its anti-education attitudes and how evangelical and progressive Protestant perspectives are transforming the ways in which Latino Pentecostals engage with education.

Leadership Reflection

As an education leader and researcher, I have been driven by social justice principles and a desire to bridge the cultural gaps that exist between education professionals and the diverse students we seek to serve. My experience coupled with my review of research literature has given me a deep awareness of the challenges that educational institutions face in understanding the diverse cultures of traditionally marginalized students, especially those from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Students experience difficulties when ways of knowing and communicating in their home or community clash with those inside the classroom (Boutte, 2012; Gay, 1999; Heath, 1983). When teacher and student cultures are disconnected, a negative impact on education can be expected (Gay, 1999). With so many students experiencing

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estrangement from education due to their cultural background, understanding the religious influences of students can provide school-community connections that promote academic success (Dallavis, 2011; Skerritt, 2016). This research promoting a better understanding of a particular culture is a manifestation of my responsibility as an academic leader. My leadership role is founded on promoting social justice for students, and this research seeks to encourage a school-community partnership that can assist in providing Latinos who identify with the Pentecostal movement with a more equitable educational experience.

Glover-Blackwell et al. (2010) wrote that "minority concerns are no longer strictly minority concerns" (p. 35) and that the wider culture has a duty and an interest in supporting the growing Latino population as part of ensuring social justice for the entire country. As education leaders continue to reflect on social justice principles, this study can help them to better understand religious culture and specifically Pentecostal religiosity, which influences many Latino communities of low socioeconomic status. Latino Pentecostals encounter a large cultural gap relative to education professionals, given the shortage of Latino teachers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2008), the tendency of Pentecostalism to attract members of low socioeconomic status (Garneau & Schwadel; 2013; Sanchez et al. 2016; Sanchez-Walsh, 2012), and the low levels of education within the Pentecostal community (Beyerlein, 2004; Garneau & Schwadel; 2013; Hackett & Lindsay, 2008). This research draws on the education, religious, sociological, and psychological literature to assist education leaders in achieving fundamental objectives like supporting students, bridging home and school communities, and providing an equitable education experience for all.

I found myself having the same conversations again and again as I traveled to and worshiped at three different churches—with pastors who required me to speak with them before granting me access to their members, intermediaries who connected me to pastors, potential participants, and other congregants. All of them wanted to know the intentions of this academic who called himself Pentecostal. Looking for a succinct and accurate way to describe my work, I settled on this sentence: *I'm helping schools understand Pentecostals.* Something about this statement connected with the communities I visited. The idea of being understood, not having to change or conform, not having to defend beliefs or rituals, but being served as Latino Pentecostal students by a foreign school system resonated with the people with whom I spoke. Latino Pentecostals are a subculture of people who recognize themselves as different, and who take pride in being different from other Latinos and the broader culture. These people want to go to college too. My deepest hope is that my work may assist the Latino Pentecostal community, benefit the academic community, and make me a more effective leader.

Rigor and Limitations

With full knowledge that the legitimacy of qualitative research depends on its rigor, I have presented rich descriptions and methodical results of data analysis in an effort to provide an understanding of a marginalized community and their college choice experience. Strategies were implemented that enhanced the overall trustworthiness of this research. I was rigorous in striving to represent participants accurately through systematic phenomenological research procedures. The methods described in chapter 3 were employed in close alignment with the procedures expected in phenomenological research. I used open-ended questioning techniques during in-depth semi-structured interviews that

gave participants freedom to carry the discussion toward what they considered important to say. Also, I recursively engaged in self-reflection and identified my own biases and presuppositions through bracketing procedures that supported my analysis. Furthermore, member checking and follow-up interviews added to the reliability of the study. The detailed portrayal of my participants allows for prudent generalization and suggests a reoccurrence in similar communities.

As noted in chapter 3, qualitative research is limited with regard to the extent to which generalizations may be made. The methodological constraints of this research do not permit bold claims that neglect the diversity of global Latino Pentecostalism. This is an important limitation of the study.

Many follow-up interviews took place to achieve data saturation and thorough analysis. However, one participant, Angelina, was unavailable for further interviews. This should be noted as another limitation of the research.

The study sample of participants consisted of collegians who have matriculated in both two-year and four-year programs. Although other Latino college choice studies have followed the same practice of using samples of students in college programs of various lengths (Gonzalez, 2012; Rizzo, 2014; Rosas & Hamrick, 2002), there has been some discussion about the distinction between these types of degrees within the Latino community. Whereas a shortage of Latino students enrolling in four-year programs has been identified, there has been an increase in Latinos entering two-year programs (Kurlaender, 2006). I contend that the sample is appropriate not only due to its similarity with previous studies of Latino college choices, but also due to the increasing partnerships between two-year and four-year institutions that support seamless transitions

(Hope, 2015). However, the breadth of the participation criterion regarding college programs is noted as a possible limitation.

Conclusion

"Negotiating life with a dichotomous prism that Pentecostalism offers is made easier by defining parameters: What is good/evil, godly/ungodly, acceptable/and unacceptable behavior? Often these parameters are defined and redefined by church members themselves. … Religious identities change and adapt to cultural shifts and generational changes" (Sanchez-Walsh, 2012, pp. 100, 193).

Pentecostalism offers its members a sharp dichotomy between the holy and the sinful, between the separated and the worldly. Although secular colleges and universities have been traditionally viewed with suspicion or rejected altogether by the Pentecostal community, younger generations are redefining these parameters and accepting college education as a valuable preparation for Christian adulthood and as an opportunity to evangelize. In particular, young Latino Pentecostals in America are aspiring to earn college degrees as never before, and their churches offer community assets that can be utilized to enhance educational success.

Romona, Lupe, Josias, Alberto, and Angelina, as representatives of traditional college-age Latino Pentecostal students, have told their stories and provided their perceptions as to how their religious social networks influenced their college choice. Their stories make a meaningful contribution to our understanding Latino college choice by focusing on a distinct subculture within the Latino community and providing an understanding of a religious movement that is impacting Latino students, especially those of lower socioeconomic status. This study's in-depth description of these five students

has yielded a deeper understanding of how Latino Pentecostal students experience the

college choice process. This understanding can help education researchers, leaders, and

practitioners to support the college aspirations of a historically marginalized community.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol and Questions

Before we begin, I would like to thank you for taking the time to share your life stories. Your participation is voluntary, and you may decline to participate at any point during the interview. The interview will take about an hour to complete and will be recorded in order to keep a record of your life stories. Your name will remain confidential on any reports that may be produced from this study. Do you have any questions before we begin? Is there a fictitious name that you would prefer I use during this interview? If so, what name would you like to use?

Name:_____

1. How did your church help you when you were finishing high school?

a. Tell me a story that represents how your church helped you.

Predisposition

1. How do Latino Pentecostals feel about college education?

a. Is going to college a challenge to maintaining your Christian way of life? How?

b. Tell me a story about a church member's attitude toward college.

2. Tell me the story about when you first decided to attend college.

3. Do you believe that the church influenced your desire to go to college? Why or why

not?

a. If applicable, ask for a description or story.

4. How did the church attitudes influenced your decision to attend college?

a. Ask for a story that embodies the influence(s).

Search

1. Did you discuss their college "choice sets" with church members? If so, what did your discussion include? (Explain "choice sets" as the colleges that individual students have selected to apply to or wish to increase their knowledge about before making a decision.)

a. Ask for a story that describes the discussion about "choice sets."

2. Explain how you gained knowledge or developed a better understanding of cost and the application process during your search phase.

Choice

1. Tell me the story about when you made a college selection.

2. Tell me the story about how you arrived at your choice in the college decision-making process.

3. Tell me the story about when you enrolled in college.

4. Where did the information and motivation for your choice come from?

Concluding Questions

1. Overall, what was the church's role in your college choice process?

2. What recommendations might you have for educators in helping to facilitate the college decision-making process for Latino Pentecostal students?

3. If you could speak to other Latino Pentecostals, what would you recommend to them as they engage in college search and selection?

4. Is there anything else you'd like to add that I haven't asked you about? What could the university do to make you feel more connected to the major? What could the major department do to make you feel more connected to the major?

Informed Consent to Participate in This Research Study

TITLE OF STUDY: The Influence of Pentecostal Social Networks on Latino College

Choice

Principal Investigator: Dr. James Coaxum III

This consent form is part of an informed consent process for a research study and it will provide information that will help you to decide whether you wish to volunteer for this research study. It will help you to understand what the study is about and what will happen in the course of the study.

If you have questions at any time during the research study, you should feel free to ask them and should expect to be given answers that you completely understand.

After all of your questions have been answered, if you still wish to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign this informed consent form.

Dr. James Coaxum III or another member of the study team will also be asked to sign this informed consent. You will be given a copy of the signed consent form to keep.

You are not giving up any of your legal rights by volunteering for this research study or by signing this consent form.

   FINANCIAL INTERESTS:
   None

A.   Why is this study being done?
The purpose of this dissertation is to research the influence of religious social networks on the college choice process of Latino Pentecostal students.

B.   Why have you been asked to take part in this study?
The participant fits the following criteria:

- Self-identifies as Latino Pentecostal
- Attended Pentecostal services regularly during high school
- Is between the ages of 18 and 26

C. Who may take part in this study? And who may not?

Anyone who fits the above criteria may participate in the study.

D. How many subjects will be enrolled in the study?

The study is limited to three to six participants.

E. How long will my participation in this study take?

The study will take place over a period of three months. As a participant, we ask you to participate in no more than two rounds of interviews and to review written transcriptions. The interviews will last approximately sixty minutes.

F. Where will the study take place?

The interviews will take place at a location of the participant's choosing.

G. What will you be asked to do if you take part in this research study?

The participant will be asked to be digitally recorded for two interview sessions and to review the written transcriptions of their interviews for accuracy.

H. What are the risks and/or discomforts you might experience if you take part in this study?

This study does not involve physical risk of harm. However, there may be a possibility of a breach of confidential information that was collected. In order to ensure privacy and confidentiality, your identity will be protected through the use of a pseudonym (or a fake name) that will be assigned to you. You will be able to refuse to answer any question or stop the interview at any time. If you decide that you would like to discontinue your participation at any time, all records of your data will not be used in this research and will be immediately destroyed.

I. Are there any benefits for you if you choose to take part in this research study?

It is possible that you might receive no direct personal benefit from taking part in this study. However, your participation may help us understand information that can benefit you directly, and it may help to contribute to the discussion on the Latino educational crisis.

J. What are your alternatives if you don't want to take part in this study?

Your alternative is not to take part in this study.

K. How will you know if new information is learned that may affect whether you are willing to stay in this research study?

During the course of the study, you will be updated about any new information that may affect whether you are willing to continue taking part in the study. If new information is learned that may affect you, you will be contacted.

L.   Will there be any cost to you to take part in this study?
None

M.   Will you be paid to take part in this study?
You will not be paid for your participation in this research study.

N.   How will information about you be kept private or confidential?
All efforts will be made to keep your personal information in your research record confidential, but total confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Your personal information may be given out, if required by law. Presentations and publications to the public and at scientific conferences and meetings will not use your name and other personal information. In order to ensure privacy and confidentiality, your identity will be protected through the use of pseudonyms (or a fake name) assigned to you. Your telephone number will be stored under the pseudonym assigned to you.

O.   What will happen if you are injured during this study?
If you are injured in this study and need treatment, contact *(Input Counseling Services, Healthcare provider, Wellness Center, etc. here)* and seek treatment.

We will offer the care needed to treat injuries directly resulting from taking part in this study. Rowan University may bill your insurance company or other third parties, if appropriate, for the costs of the care you get for the injury. However, you may be responsible for some of those costs. Rowan University does not plan to pay you or provide compensation for the injury. You do not give up your legal rights by signing this form.

If at any time during your participation and conduct in the study you have been or are injured, you should communicate those injuries to the research staff present at the time of injury and to the Principal Investigator, whose name and contact information are on this consent form.

P.   What will happen if you do not wish to take part in the study or if you later decide not to stay in the study?
Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or you may change your mind at any time.

If you do not want to enter the study or decide to stop participating, your relationship with the study staff will not change, and you may do so without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

You may also withdraw your consent for the use of data already collected about you, but you must do this in writing to:

Dr. James Coaxum III
coaxum@rowan.edu

Rowan University
201 Mullica Hill Rd, Glassboro, NJ 08028

If you decide to withdraw from the study for any reason, you may be asked to participate in one meeting with the Principal Investigator.

Q.   **Whom can you call if you have any questions?**
If you have any questions about taking part in this study or if you feel you may have suffered a research related injury, you can call the Principal Investigator:

Dr. James Coaxum III
Department of Education
856-256-4779

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you can call:

Office of Research Compliance
(856) 256-4078– Glassboro/CMSRU

What are your rights if you decide to take part in this research study?
You have the right to ask questions about any part of the study at any time. You should not sign this form unless you have had a chance to ask questions and have been given answers to all of your questions.

ROWAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
AUDIO/VIDEOTAPE ADDENDUM TO CONSENT FORM

You have already agreed to participate in a research study conducted by Dr. James Coaxum III. We are asking for your permission to allow us to digitally record you as part of that research study. You do not have to agree to be recorded in order to participate in the main part of the study.

The recording(s) will be used for by the research team.

The recording(s) will include the pseudonym assigned to you.

The recording(s) will be stored on an external hard drive in a locked file cabinet with no link to subjects' identity and retained for six years after the publication of results.

Your signature on this form grants the investigator named above permission to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE

I have read this entire form, or it has been read to me, and I believe that I understand what has been discussed. All of my questions about this form or this study have been answered.

Subject Name: _____

Subject Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator/Individual Obtaining Consent:

To the best of my ability, I have explained and discussed the full contents of the study including all of the information contained in this consent form. All questions of the research subject and those of his/her parent or legal guardian have been accurately answered.

Investigator/Person Obtaining Consent: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____