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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Zaragosa Jesus Diaz-Espinoza entitled "I'm Here for a Reason: Motivational Factors of First-Generation Latino Males to Attend College." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Higher Education Administration.

Patrick Biddix, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Dorian McCoy, Karen Boyd, Frank Cuevas

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**I'm Here for a Reason: Motivational Factors of
First-Generation Latino Males to Attend College**

A Dissertation Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Zaragosa Jesus Diaz-Espinoza
May 2017

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the loving memory of my brother John Paul Gonzales and his continued encouragement, inspiration, and support. To my wife Crystal, I simply could not have done this without you. To my family, mom, dad, and my brother Alma Canales, Steve Espinoza, and Paz Espinoza, your support and inspiration has always helped in times of struggle. I also dedicate this degree to the Thriving Metropolis of Waco, Texas, a place that has shaped me and raised me, and will always be home. To my extended family and friends all across the country, thank you for the support and encouragement. To the Brothers of Lambda Theta Phi Latin Fraternity Inc., this is a testament to our values and creed. This is also dedicated to family and friends that passed away but stay with me. Finally, I dedicate this dissertation and work to Chicanos everywhere in hopes that we continue to shape the future of this nation.

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I also want to say thank you to my family for their support, encouragement, belief, and patience through this process. My wife, Crystal, I would not have been able to do this without you. Your guidance and willingness to support me through my frustrations allowed me to finish. I am so fortunate to have you with me in this process and look forward to years and years of mutual support, friendship, and love. To my parents, Alma and Steve, thank you for supporting and encouraging me through this time even from half-way across the country knowing you were there to support me was a deep comfort. To my brother, Paz, thank you for being an inspiration and taking care of mom and dad while I was away. I also have to keep in mind all the family that I lost before I was able to complete this journey.

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Abstract

This intrinsic case study explored the motivational factors to attend college of first-generation Latino males enrolled at a mid-sized institution in the Mid-Atlantic using Self-Determination Theory of motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000) as a theoretical lens. Data included individual interviews and focus group interviews with 15 participants as well as a review of Web pages and University materials. Data analysis resulted in ten themes with extrinsic and intrinsic motivational factors in congruence with Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self-Determination Theory of motivation. Findings also revealed barriers hindering these participants from pursuing college. Implications suggest the importance of administrators, teachers, family, and friends involved to inspire, encourage, and support first-generation Latino males as they work to succeed in college.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Population numbers from the 2010 Census revealed that one in six people in the United States were of Hispanic or Latino origin. Humes, Jones, and Ramirez (2011) summarized the growth of Hispanic or Latino people noting there were 50.5 million Hispanics in the United States in 2010 and that between 2000 and 2010, the Hispanic population grew by 43 percent, up from 35.3 million in 2000. National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2015) data show that enrolled in colleges and universities in 2000, were 15,312,289 total students, and enrolled in 2010, were 21,016,126 total students. Of those populations, in 2000, 56.1 percent of the college enrollment were women and in 2010, 57 percent were women (NCES, 2015). At all levels of postsecondary education Latino males were underrepresented, despite the growth in population in the United States and growth in college enrollment (Swail, Cabrera, & Lee, 2004; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2008).

Latino males were absent from higher education, but the gaps in the educational pipeline started earlier than postsecondary schools. According to National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2014) data, Latino students between the ages of 16 to 24 years old had the highest dropout percentage rate when compared by ethnicity. Approximately 11.7 percent of Latino students drop out compared to 7.3 percent of black students and 5.1 percent of white students. Latino males in this age range also had the highest dropout rate when compared to other male ethnicities: 12.6 percent for Latino males, 8.2 percent for black males, and 5.5 percent for white males (NCES, 2014). In 2007, Rivas, Perez, Alvarez, and Solorzano found that across all ethnicities, Latino males have the lowest number of graduates at all levels of the educational pipeline specifically in high school, college, and doctoral degree programs.

This study sought to learn more about what motivated Latino males to pursue college degrees. By asking Latinos males, who were the first in their family to pursue a college education, I gained a better understanding of their journey, why they made the decision to go to college, and how we can use that information to assist others in pursuing college degrees.

Impact of Diversity on College Campuses

Diversity on college campuses has shown positive impacts on student growth in various areas and enhanced the educational experience for all students. Researchers demonstrated the value in interactions at diversity-related curricular and co-curricular activities related to awareness and appreciation (Astin, 1993); an increased empathy for others and reduced prejudice (Denson, 2009; Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez, 2004); an increased civic interest (Chang, Astin, & Kim, 2004); openness to diversity and challenge; (Ryder, Reason, Mitchell, Gillon, & Hemer, 2015); and social action and engaged citizenship (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Laird, Engberg, & Hurtado, 2005). Researchers also demonstrated the long-term positive effects of college diversity experiences post-graduation (Bowman, Brandenberger, Hill, & Lapsley, 2011; Smith, Parr, Woods, Bauer, & Abraham, 2010).

Increased diversity on college campuses also has shown to have an impact on the educational experience. Bowman (2010) analyzed 17 studies focused on diversity and found cognitive growth for students who reported interactions with diverse peers. The greatest cognitive benefits were among students who had sustained interaction with peers of reportedly different races (Bowman, 2012). The increased cognition and understanding was impactful on its own, but also translated to academic performance. Research has shown that interactions with diverse individuals positively affected students' academic self-confidence (Laird, 2005). There was also evidence that suggested diversity experiences had a positive impact on critical thinking

skills (Bowman, 2009, 2010; Loes, Pascarella, & Umbach, 2012; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Finally, Parker and Pascarella's (2013) research showed that diversity positively impacts student leadership development.

First-Generation College Student Experiences

First-generation college students entered college with anxiety as they grappled with all the new experiences attending a school brings, but also with experiences of navigating campus itself. Issues of adaptation and adjustment were found to impact persistence and success (McCrea, 2015; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). The new environment also came with a distinct culture that students had to learn and understand (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Mehta, Newbold, & O'Rourke, 2011; Ward, Siegel, Davenport, 2012). Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, and Covarrubias (2012) revealed that the university's focus on independence was not congruent with the interdependent mindset of first-generation college students, which led to academic difficulties. First-generation college students not only had to learn the culture of an institution of higher education, but also the culture of the population that has historically attended colleges and universities. First-generation college students often had to deal with issues of belonging because of class differences they faced with their new peers (Kingston, 2000). Strayhorn (2012) found that the sense of belonging for first-generation college students with this new peer group impacted their academic and emotional well-being. The adaptation to their surroundings, both the college landscape and their new peers, also contended with other issues of being first in their family to attend college.

First-generation college students experienced stressful situations attributed to their status as first-generation college students. The concept of family achievement guilt, or the feeling associated with being the lone person in the family to surpass the achievements of all other

family members has been studied in context of college students (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015; O'Connor, Berry, Weis, Schweitzer, & Sevier, 2000; Piorkowski, 1983). Family achievement guilt was found to be a significant source of stress and reported more by first-generation college students than other students (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015). The experience of stress among college students may be considered fairly common but does pose specific challenges for first-generation college students. Barry, Hudley, Kelly, and Cho (2009) discovered that first-generation college students were less likely to disclose and discuss stress, which led them to experience even higher levels of stress.

Experiences of Latino Students in Higher Education

Issues of persistence and retention for Latino students have been the focus of several research studies (Arellano & Padilla, 1996; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solorzano, 2009). The intersection of being a first-generation college student and being Latino has shown to negatively impact persistence (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015; Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005). As institutions of higher education sought to increase the diversity of their populations, they also sought to increase degree attainment, success, and retention in most cases. The institutional response to Latino students took many forms, and institutional commitment and student persistence are shown to be strongly associated (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999). Even with the institutional commitment to Latino students at many universities, Latino students still experienced unsupportive environments. Latino students looked for support in navigating these unsupportive environments whether it was the correct pronunciation of their names or dealing with feelings of alienation on campus (Harper, 2006; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Santiago, 2008). Financial aid and family financial resources were strong influences among Latino students (Davis-Kean, Mendoza, & Susperreguy, 2012; Singell,

2004). The financial influences and family influences mixed with the influences Latinos students have to pursue higher education. Researchers have shown that Latino students received input about college and careers from parents, friends, teachers and others (Ceja, 2004; Perez & McDonough, 2008). These influences contributed to a Latino student's ability to succeed or as a source of anxiety that prevented them from completing their degree.

Researchers advocate for special attention to be paid to the educational experiences of Latino males at all levels (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2008). Latino and Latina students navigated various experiences as they consider and persist through higher education and these experiences positively and negatively impact their retention and completion rates (Crisp & Nora, 2010; Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996). Where improvements in access to higher education have led to an increase in enrollment, it is typically the Latina female enrollment that rises while the number of men enrolling in higher education is lacking. Of particular importance for Latino students, gender roles and the concept of *machismo* impact how they experience college (Feliz-Ortiz, Ankney, Brodie & Rodinsky, 2012; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2008).

Additionally, studies have been done examining Latina females and their aspirations for higher education (Ceja, 2004), but are lacking for the specific motivations of Latino males who are first-generation college students. The gender gap in knowledge about and the presence of this college sub-population in college supports enhanced scholarly attention.

Understanding the motivations of Latino first-generation college males would allow administrators and educators to get a better understanding of why these individuals attend college. Administrators and educators could use this information to formulate programs to increase the number of Latino first-generation college males and supplement programs designed to promote retention.

Statement of the Problem

Hurtado (2007) stated, “a key impetus for linking diversity with central educational and civic goals is to better position the next generation of leaders for the project of advancing social progress” (p. 186). Developmental theorists take the position that social interaction is necessary to create cognitive disequilibria, which initiates growth and development among college-age individuals (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Perry, 1970; Piaget, 1977). If these social interactions are with students from a variety of experiences and worldviews, it can provide more opportunities for growth. Researchers have shown the educational benefits of a diverse student body on all students (Antonio, 2001; Gurin, Lehman, Lewis, Dey, Gurin, & Hurtado, 2004). With increases in the diversity of college campuses come opportunities for students to interact with and discuss ideas from various perspectives.

The diversity students experience at college does not reflect society. Latino males remain underrepresented at four-year universities, despite the growing Latino population in the United States. Research detailing the experiences of males in college has largely focused on African Americans and little on Latinos (CPEC, 2005; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2008; Trevino & DeFreitas, 2014). What is known is that a high percentage of the Latino male population comes from households where neither parent has completed a college degree (Cavazos et. al., 2010; Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005); but more focus on academic aspirations and motivation of male, Latino, first-generation college students is needed (Olive, 2008; Phinney, Dennis, & Osorio, 2006; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2008; Sanchez, 2011; Trevino & DeFreitas, 2014). This study will offer an in-depth view of why some first-generation Latino males chose to pursue higher education.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the motivational factors contributing of first-generation Latino males pursue higher education. Understanding why Latino males who are first in their family to attend college can help administrators provide opportunities to inspire more Latino males to attend colleges and increase the diversity of students on campuses. If we can understand how to motivate a more diverse student body to attend college, we can enhance the overall learning experience of all students.

Research Questions

1. What motivational factors influence first-generation Latino males at a mid-size public university in the Mid-Atlantic region to attend college?
2. How did extrinsic, or intrinsic factors influence first-generation Latino males at a mid-size public university in the Mid-Atlantic region to attend college?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used to consider the motivational factors for first-generation Latino males was the Self-Determination Theory of motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). The theory further described an individual's motivation along a spectrum starting with *amotivation*, moving to *extrinsic motivation*, and ending with *intrinsic motivation*. The theory explains how decisions made using intrinsic motivation demonstrate a person's self-determination because "rewards are inherent in the activity, and even though there may be secondary gains, the primary motivators are the spontaneous, internal experiences that accompany the behavior" (Deci & Ryan, p. 11, 1985).

In addition to the spectrum moving to self-determination, Self-Determination Theory also describes motivation at various levels. These levels include Behavior, Motivation, Regulatory

Styles, Perceived Locus of Causality, and Relevant Regulatory Processes. At the behavioral level, the continuum begins with 'nonself-determined' and concludes with 'self-determined.' Each of the other levels has stations that move along the spectrum as demonstrated in figure 1.1 (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Self-Determination Theory identified three types of motivation at the motivational level: *amotivation*, *extrinsic motivation*, and *intrinsic motivation*. *Amotivation* was the absence of any satisfaction; *Extrinsic* motivation referred to satisfaction coming from an external source in the form of a reward; and *Intrinsic* motivation was that which comes from within, the satisfaction of the action or feat (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The authors posited that self-determined behavior derived from personal independence or autonomy, and competence to meet expectations successfully and to feel a sense of belonging, or relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). These elements were present in several of the themes identified in this study.

Within the Self-Determination Theory of motivation, there are elements of well-established student development theory that state students develop competency, establish identity, and develop purpose (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). This theoretical framework served as the basis for establishing how male Latino first-generation college students developed the motivation and desire to attend colleges and universities as well as assisted in the analysis of the experiences and motivation of participants. Interview questions were created using Self-Determination Theory and driven by the concepts of extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation.

Other researchers utilized Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self-Determination Theory to study motivation in different contexts (Gagne & Deci, 2005; Hollembeak & Amorose, 2005; Reeve, 2002; Trevino & DeFreitas, 2014; Vansteenkiste & Deci, 2006).

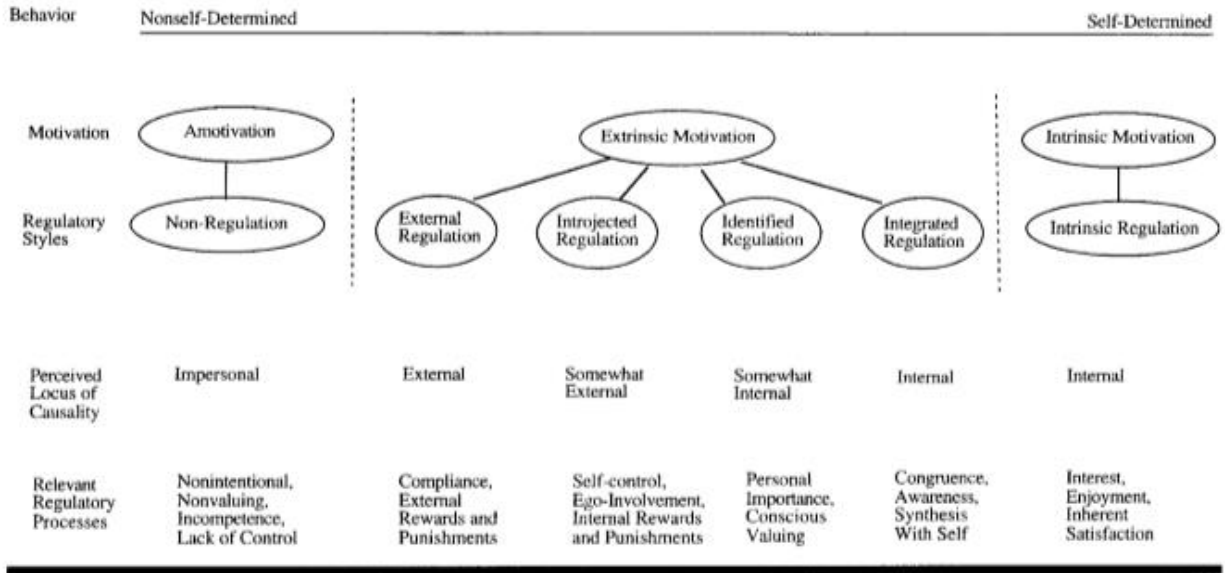


Figure 1.1 The Self-Determination Continuum Showing Types of Motivation with their Regulatory Styles

Examining motivation in an educational setting, Vansteenkiste and Deci (2006) found that intrinsic goal setting demonstrated deeper engagement and higher persistence at learning activities. Reeve (2002) also applied Self-Determination Theory to an educational setting researching autonomously-motivated students and found that teachers could learn how to be more supportive of a student's autonomy which leads to educational improvements. Self-Determination Theory has also been used to study motivation in the workforce (Gagne & Deci, 2005) as well as coaching behaviors and intrinsic motivation (Hollembek & Amorose, 2005). These studies demonstrate examples of using Self-Determination Theory to study motivation in different areas.

Determining the types of motivation the participants' exhibited for pursuing college degrees may inform institutions, agencies, and people how to cultivate and recognize different forms of motivation. The results from this study provide examples and recommendations for increasing the number of male, Latino first-generation college students attending our colleges and universities.

Methodology

Using the methodology of the intrinsic case study, findings from this study contribute knowledge regarding the motivations of male, Latino, first-generation college students (Merriam, 2009). The case study included document analysis of university marketing materials, individual interviews, and focus groups with currently enrolled Latino males that are first-generation college students. Individuals were invited to participate from information provided by the Office of Undergraduate Admissions and through student organizations with a high concentration of Latino membership. There were no restrictions based on major or year of study classification. Yin (2009) stated that case study could be used in many situations to contribute to the knowledge

of groups or individuals and holistic and details of actual events. Merriam (2009) noted that qualitative case studies seek to produce a descriptive meaning and understanding of what is studied. This rich understanding and meaning demonstrated in detail what has motivated these first-generation Latino males to pursue college degrees and will use those findings to help aide others to pursue higher education.

The site for this study was a mid-size public university in the Mid-Atlantic region. The institution's classification was as a research university with high research activity (Carnegie, 2014). In fall 2015, the university had 11,243 undergraduate students and 2,596 graduate students. The university had a six percent Hispanic undergraduate population and is 59 percent male. It offered 48 options for major fields of study and placed a high emphasis on undergraduate research.

Significance of the Study

Bowen (1977) stated that it is the responsibility of higher education to advance social progress. These advancements in social progress not only come from discoveries and inventions but also through the education of citizens and future generations (Gutmann, & Ben-Porath, 1987). A diverse college campus has been shown to have long-term, positive impacts on students (Bowman, Brandenberger, Hill, & Lapsley, 2011; Smith, Parr, Woods, Bauer, & Abraham, 2010). Understanding and advancing the educational achievements of male, Latino first-generation college students, therefore, coincides with the goals of higher education. The increased number of Latino first-generation college males will further the educational experiences of all students in higher education (Bowman, 2009, 2010, 2012; Loes, Pascarella, & Umbach, 2012). On a broader level, the information provided by studying the motivation of this population can assist parents and family members as they seek to encourage their students to

attain college degrees. Federal, state, and local education agencies and community organizations can also utilize this information to increase the number of Latino first-generation college males and their pursuit of higher education.

Studies show that students who attend racially diverse institutions and engage with peers from different backgrounds in educationally purposeful activities demonstrated cognitive, psychosocial, and interpersonal gains during college and beyond (Chang, Astin, & Kim, 2004; Chang, Denson, Saenz, & Misa, 2006; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Pike & Kuh, 2006). Recognizing the value of diversity on campus for all students can support the need for institutions to increase the diversity on their campuses. Pike and Kuh (2006) analyzed data from 45,000 college seniors from 321 institutions gathered from the National Survey of Student Engagement's (NSSE) *The College Student Report* and concluded "...that experiences with diversity are more likely to occur as the heterogeneity of the student population increases" (p. 443)." This research focused on the student population, but institutions should also consider the value in diversifying the campus in multiple areas.

This study explored motivational factors that have led to first-generation Latino males to attend institutions of higher education. The research allowed first-generation Latino males to describe factors leading to their pursuit of higher education. These results will allow institutions of higher education, state and federal agencies, and families to promote these motivational factors and help more first-generation Latino males to attend institutions of higher education.

Terminology

Key terms to be pointed out in the use of this study include Latino, Hispanic, First-Generation, and Motivation.

Latino. The term *Latino* is an all-encompassing term describing the cultural heritage of people from Mexico, Puerto-Rico, Cuba, and Spanish-speaking South and Central America (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Many individuals of the same ethnic background with the common native language of Spanish, embrace the term, Latino. *Latina/o* is a term used to be gender inclusive with the *Latina* and *Latino* both represented.

Hispanic. *Hispanic* is also used to refer to people with a heritage from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Spanish-speaking countries of Central and South America (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). The term *Hispanic* originated as a way to refer to individuals that were descendant from the island of Hispaniola (Zinn, 2003). Hispaniola was an island in the Caribbean and now is better known as the two countries of Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Hispaniola was the site of the first European colonies founded by Christopher Columbus. The term Hispanic, in essence, refers to all those that came from the influence of the Spanish conquest of the “New World” (Zinn, 2003).

For the sake of this study, the terms *Hispanic*, *Latino*, and *Latina/o* were used interchangeably based on previous researchers’ use of the term.

First-Generation College Student. The term *first-generation college student* refers a college student who had neither parent attend a four-year college or university (Olive, 2008). Other researchers have narrowed this definition to include students from households where neither parent received a bachelor’s degree (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Prospero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007). For this study, First-Generation College Student referred to students from households where neither parent received a bachelor’s degree. Parents who attended some college, received a 2-year degree, or technical training beyond high school equivalency, were considered not having completed a bachelor’s degree.

Motivation. The definition of the term *motivation* is the internal drive directing behavior towards some end. Also, “to move someone to do something” is a definition of *motivation* (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The most common concepts of motivation are those of self-motivation, internal motivation, or intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). All of these terms were used interchangeably to describe the same motivational factors that come from within a person.

Organization of the Study

Chapter one introduced the need for research on the motivation of male, Latino, first-generation college students to pursue higher education and related the purpose, research questions, theoretical framework, methodology, significance, and key terms for this study. Chapter Two examined information from the existing literature and research about first-generation college students and Latinos in higher education. Chapter Three described the study’s research design, data collection, and the methods used to analyze the data collected. Chapter Four exhibited the findings of the collected data and detailed themes that emerge from the data. Chapter Five provided conclusions, a discussion of the findings and implications for the future of Latino male students who are first in their families to attend college. The Appendix includes instruments used in data collection and information related to the data collection of the study.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

The purpose of this case study was to explore the motivation to pursue higher education of Latino males who are first-generation college students. To provide a background of topics related to first generation Latino males, I examined issues related to first-generation college students and the Latino experience in higher education. First-generation college students face issues of adapting and adjusting to college life since they are not familiar with the collegiate system. First-generation college students often have a strong parental influence. There is also evidence of issues with, access, persistence and retention among first-generation college students.

The Latino experience in higher education literature includes a look at how gender played a role in education and among Latinos, which leads to the concept of *machismo*. Latino students also factor in financial considerations when considering higher education. Along with the financial considerations, there are varying influences on pursuing higher education, as well as, issues of access, persistence, and retention. With these multiple factors, institutional responses to Latino students need to be explored as does the support needed by Latino students to navigate unsupportive environments. All of these elements provided an understanding of the unique needs of this group of students.

First-Generation College Students

First-generation college students are commonly defined as either students whose parents never attended college or students with neither parent completing a bachelor's degree (Chen & Carroll 2005; Horn & Nunez, 2000; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Prospero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007; Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez,

2001). I will use the latter definition of students whose parents never completed a bachelor's degree. The educational experiences of the parents limit the understanding of the available and necessary resources for their children to be successful in college which makes the population of first-generation college students distinct (Attinasi, 1989; Chen & Carroll, 2005; McDonough, 1997; Olive, 2008; Tierney & Auerbach, 2005; Torrez, 2004). First-generation college students may be at a deficit compared to their peers who have parents with college degrees.

An overarching concern for first-generation college students is that their parents do not understand how to navigate the processes of such things as the admissions process, financial aid, semester structure, class schedules, or the different types of institutions within higher education (Chen & Carroll, 2005; McDonough, 1997, 1999, Olive, 2008; Tornatzky, Cutler, & Lee, 2002; Torrez, 2004; Zarate & Pachón, 2006). Also, being a first-generation college student is a strong predictor of college grade point average (GPA) when controlling for other demographic factors (Strayhorn, 2006). Colleges have distinct cultures and environments to which students have to adapt and adjust.

Adaptation and Adjustment

Researchers have examined adaptation and adjustment issues along with the influence of parents that contribute to the persistence and retention of first-generation college students. The adjustment and integration to the environment have been shown to have an impact on the persistence of first-generation college students (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). In this section, I offer various studies focused on adaptation and adjustment issues of first-generation college students.

Culture. For first-generation college students understanding about campus culture can impact their success.

Low-income, first-generation students not only face barriers to their academic and social integration, but they also confront obstacles on cultural adaptation. This is due to differences between the culture (i.e. norms, values, expectations) of their families and communities and the culture that exists on college campuses (Engle & Tinto, 2008, p. 21).

First-generation college students may not have been exposed to the culture of college by their parents or families and therefore have to learn this as they experience college life. Norms, values, and expectations are examples of differences seen between the culture of a college campus and those coming from families without a college-going culture (London, 1992; Housel & Harvey, 2010; Ostrove & Long, 2007; Phelan, Yu, & Davidson, 1994). A cultural adjustment adds another layer of concern for first-generation college students.

Adapting and adjusting to the culture of a new environment for first-generation students can be a concern because it is different from what they understand. Rendon, Jalomo, and Nora (2000) stated that retention among underrepresented, first-generation college students is a struggle because these students are forced to disengage from past norms and culture to embrace the values of the academy which are not congruent with their experiences. If first-generation college students fail to understand the values of higher education, the adjustment period may be amplified compared to students with an understanding of the college-going culture.

Background and belonging. School performance, regarding grades and standardized tests, has been shown to correlate strongly with social class (Mantsios, 2007). Additionally, Kingston (2000) stated that first-generation college students tend to be on the lower end of the social class because their parents lack college degrees whereas students whose parents did complete college degrees or post high school training tend to be in a higher social class. The

disparity could be because college degree completion or post high school training can lead to jobs with higher salaries. The higher class standing or economic standing may result in providing different opportunities. American society does not typically acknowledge the role social class plays in shaping a person's opportunity to succeed (Kingston, 2000; Mantsios, 2007). It is likely that first-generation college students assume other students from higher social classes have more success because of their social class standing.

A positive sense of belonging can impact the college experience and success of first-generation college students. Ostrove and Long (2007) found that "social-class background was strongly related to a sense of belonging at college, which in turn predicted social and academic adjustment to college, quality of experience at college, and academic performance" (pp. 379-381). First-generation college students need to feel as if they belong in college, especially when so many around them come from a different background. Strayhorn (2012) found that a sense of belonging has a real impact for all college students in the areas of happiness, comfort, college completion and academic success.

Parental Influence

Influence of parents was a key factor in the aspiration of first-generation college students to pursue higher education (Engle, 2007; Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Vargas, 2004). Even though the parents did not graduate from college, their influence may still be the ultimate factor in inspiring students to pursue higher education. Students who are considered first-generation college students can exhibit characteristics distinct from other students. The aspirations and desire to attend college for first-generation college students have been shown to be different from college students whose parents received four-year degrees (Dennis, 2005; Olive, 2008; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996).

Students who come from families with parents who graduated from college may feel they were expected to go to college without giving it any thought whereas first-generation college students may have to consider and research what it takes to go to college.

The parents or families of first-generation college students did not always support the college aspirations and abilities of first-generation college students. Terenzini et al. (1996) noted that first-generation students tended to have lower educational aspirations when compared to students with college-educated parents. First-generation college students were discouraged by their families to attend college, which led to feelings of alienation and created doubts about their academic abilities (Striplin, 1999). The feelings of alienation and doubt could create the idea they are not college ready. Byrd and MacDonlad (2005) similarly found that “students whose parents did not go to college may view themselves as less than adequate for college (p.33).” These results further suggested, “first-generation students may internalize the view that they are inadequate for college” (p. 33). Specific attention toward first-generation college students was important for various reasons and from various people.

Parental influence among first-generation Latino students has been seen to be a positive influence. Zalaquett (2006) conducted a qualitative study of 12 Latino college students, ten of which were first-generation students, and found that family played a key role in their academic success. Parents of Latino first-generation college students often do want to help their students, but encounter barriers because of a lack of understanding of the collegiate system (Zalaquett, 2006). While the collegiate system itself may be difficult to understand, being part of an underrepresented population can create another layer of barriers to overcome for student persistence and success.

Access, Persistence, and Retention

Researchers often seek to understand how to increase access, persistence, and retention among first-generation college students. Studies explored college access for low-income and first-generation college students and stated the need for a multi-faceted approach that included financial support, academic preparation, and college planning. Access for first-generation college students is seen as larger than just financial and academic, it also includes social and emotional barriers as well (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013; Rondini, 2016; Wilbur & Roscigno, 2016). Wilbur and Roscigno (2016) found that “those of low socioeconomic and first-generation status are surely at the greatest disadvantage, but even as SES increases, the first-generation disadvantage is not eliminated” (p. 9). The first-generation college student population faces unique barriers to college that may hinder them enrolling in college, even before facing issues of persistence and retention.

Studies show differences in degree attainment, academic progression, and course planning between first-generation college students and students whose parents have completed a four-year degree (Chen & Carroll, 2005; Horn & Nunez, 2000; Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001). These differences can lead to a negative impact on students. Engle and Tinto (2008) described how low-income, first-generation students left after their first year of higher education between 25 and 27 percent more than students with neither risk factor. According to data from the National Center for Education Statistics’ Digest of Statistics (2015), 40.4 percent of first-generation students left school before completing their degrees after six years. Understanding the needs and services necessary for the persistence of first-generation college students may help institutions bolster their completion rates. Warburton et al. (2001) found that when compared to non-first-generation students, even when controlling for high school academic preparation, first-

generation students were almost twice as likely to either stop out or transfer to another institution, 14 percent versus 8 percent. Finding root causes for these early departures can help create interventions to assist this population.

Other researchers have worked to reveal further issues hindering persistence and success. Parent educational has been a strong predictor of persistence among college students (Choy, 2001; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, & Covarrubias, 2012). Identifying first-generation college students may help colleges and universities to develop programs to help them complete their degrees. Choy (2001) concluded that parental education levels strongly associated with student access to college, persistence toward educational goals, and bachelor degree attainment at four-year institutions when controlling for academic preparation, income, educational expectations, peer influence and parental involvement. The educational level of parents can limit the understanding of the resources available and necessary for their children to be successful in college (Attinasi, 1989; McDonough, 1997; Olive, 2008; Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, & Covarrubias, 2012; Tierney & Auerbach, 2005; Torrez, 2004). If students do not understand how to navigate the system of higher education, it can lead to poor decisions and choices which may negatively impact their academic success.

Chen and Carroll's (2005) findings indicated, "first-generation students consistently remained disadvantaged after entering postsecondary education; they completed fewer credits, took fewer academic courses, earned lower grades, needed more remedial assistance, and were more likely to withdraw from or repeat courses they attempted (pg. ix)." These issues reinforce the idea that these students do not have the ability to succeed in college. First-generation students also frequently lack knowledge about how to select a major, find an internship, or create a

resume (Reay, Crozier, & Clayton, 2009). Many of these actions are considered ways to maximize post-graduation success.

Successful Strategies to Support First-Generation College Students

Researchers have identified several support strategies which help first-generation students succeed. The belief that they deserve to attend and be successful in college is an important need of first-generation students (Oyserman & Destin, 2010; Steele, 2010; Stephens, Markus, & Fryberg, 2012). Providing examples of success can empower and encourage potential and current first-generation college students. Stephens, Hamedani, and Destin (2014) conducted a difference-education intervention study of first-generation college students and found a 63 percent reduction in the social class achievement gap. The study divided first-generation college students into two groups, and both groups heard from a panel of successful seniors. The researchers then shared with only one group that the panelists were also first-generation college students. They found their “intervention provided students with the critical insight that people’s different backgrounds matter and that people with backgrounds like theirs can succeed when they use the right kinds of tools and strategies” (Stephens, et al., 2014, p. 7).

When first-generation students understand they have the skills to impact the outcomes of their lives, it contributes to their ability to be successful (Ochroch & Dugan, 1986). Believing in themselves and their ability to be successful can be empowering for these students. Byrd and MacDonald (2005) concluded that self-advocacy among first-generation college students also contributes to success. Their conclusions from phenomenological interviews with eight first-generation college students indicated, “work experience and family motivations gave students the time management, goal focus, and self-advocacy skills that prepared them for the demands of college” (pg. 32). Not understanding these concepts can undermine the academic performance or

the opportunity to succeed (Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, & Covarrubias, 2012; Stephens, Townsend, Markus, & Phillips, 2012; Strayhorn, 2006). A focus on first-generation college students as a special population will help first to understand the needs of the population and second, hopefully, lead to more strategies for success.

Latino Student Experience in Higher Education

Latinos in the United States as a group have a long and varied history. The broad term “Latino” includes individuals of Mexican descent and individuals from over 20 countries in Central and South America and islands throughout the Caribbean (Torres & Delgado-Romero, 2008). The research reviewed in this section encompasses the various groups covered by this broad definition. The research focused on gender as a factor, the role of *machismo*, financial considerations among Latinos, the influences to pursue higher education, persistence and retention, support in unsupportive environments, the institution response by higher education, and current best practices are all presented.

Role of Gender in Education and Among Latinos

Corbett, Hill, and St. Rose (2008) found that while there has been an increase in both males and females who have entered college, women have made greater gains than men. Their report also noted that males might now be more at a disadvantage than females regarding educational gains. Although Diaz-Espinoza (2015) found issues of gender macroaggressions negatively impacting women in engineering and computer science majors. Reyes, Kobus, and Gillock (1999) established that females, more than males, had higher GPAs, held higher educational expectations and a greater awareness of the steps to achieve their career goals. This gender discrepancy is especially amplified for Latinos, as Saenz and Ponjuan (2008) stated that Latino males are declining proportionally to their female peers in recent decades. The National

Center for Education Statistics (2010) showed that females earned three in five degrees earned by Latinos in 2009. Researching the different experiences of Latino men and women may lead to better understanding of why there is a discrepancy in these numbers.

Even before issues of retention and completion can be analyzed, promoting college enrollment for males is a concern. A study using national data from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program Freshman Survey based on 261,737 Latino respondents from 1975 to 2006 found a decline in relative participation of Latino males entering four-year institutions when compared to Latina females (Hurtado, Santos, Saenz, & Cabrera, 2011). Zarate and Gallimore (2005) conducted a 15-year longitudinal study using interviews and achievement data with 83 students, parents, and teachers. They found that Latina females enrolled in college more than Latino males and that Latina females sought out college counselors more than Latino males. Zarate and Gallimore (2005) also concluded that for females, the relationship with college counselors and teachers had an impact on enrolling in college.

A cultural perspective can be used to examine these differences. Hurtado and Sinha (2005) found that Latino males were often granted independence at a younger age than their female peers. This independence placed males in situations and positions they were not ready to handle and led to feelings of loneliness and alienation. Hurtado and Sinha (2005) also noted that special treatment and less stringent adherence to rules or curfew afforded to the young men is considered male privilege in most cases. The treatment of males, as opposed to females, may be an unconscious response to their social interactions. Hurtado (2003) found families are aware of the external pressures, and surveillance men must endure, leading them to want to compensate with relaxed rules at home and therefore granted them certain freedoms. In turn, the distinct treatment of women can provide space for some of the liberties awarded to men. As Valenzuela

(1999) found, Latino families are unyielding in their expectations of females to follow rules. Placing value on following rules may allow females to more easily succeed in the education system, which rewards good behavior, following of instructions, and meeting deadlines.

Yowell (2000) found that Latina females placed a higher priority on education while Latino males placed a higher priority on an occupation. The focus and priority on education for females may make them more inclined to look at different career options. Yowell's (2000) research also revealed that Latina females were interested in careers that required graduate degrees. These career options and choices can result in females' discussion career options with their parents. Ceja (2004) interviewed Latina females and discovered that parents influence college and career decisions by telling their daughters stories of their careers. For Latinos families, the different treatment based on gender is often perpetuated by a larger cultural concept.

Role of Machismo

In Latino culture, the term "machismo" plays a role how males are perceived and also in how they act. Machismo has a variety of definitions, origin stories, and implications in multiple contexts (Felix-Ortiz, Abreu, Briano, & Bowen, 2001; Feliz-Ortiz, Ankney, Brodie, & Rodinsky, 2012). The term has been used to define Latino, specifically Mexican, masculinity as an extreme gender role which reflects an ambivalence toward women but a deep respect for the mother (Diaz-Guerrero, 1955; Penalosa, 1968). The concept of machismo is not only about how males interact with others, but also about internalization. Diaz-Guerrero (1955) explained that machismo, in psychoanalytic terms, is a defense mechanism used to combat feelings of inadequacy or low self-esteem. For Latino males interested in pursuing higher education, the role of machismo may push students to embrace the challenge of going to college or cause them to avoid the risk of pursuing higher education.

The concept of machismo may be transmitted from generation to generation as a part of the Latino culture. Social modeling theories present machismo as an exaggerated gender script that is passed down and reinforced through socialization (Mosher & Tomkins, 1988). Through this socialization, males are taught to hide feelings of fear, be proud of attempting a daring action, and to not show distress. These learned behaviors can leave college males afraid to seek help or admit they are having problems. Older Spanish definitions of machismo included elements of power, overcoming obstacles, chivalry, coping with or adapting to situations, and military prowess (Feliz-Ortiz et al., 2012). The challenges of today include changing gender roles in society, a harsh job market, and bleak economic realities.

Other definitions of machismo contribute to a pattern of Latino male behavior. Cultural theorist De La Cancel's (1986) description of machismo includes stoicism, an inclination to avoid shame, and the pursuit or attempt to gain respect for oneself and the family. These behaviors may manifest themselves in an academic setting by putting pressure on males to avoid bad grades and contribute to the family's reputation in a positive way. When students struggle academically, it may lead to a feeling of bringing shame on themselves or their family.

The concept of machismo also includes elements of financial concern among Latino men. A common theme within definitions of machismo is the role as financial provider for the family (Sobralke, 2006; Stobbe, 2005). What it means to be the financial provider can vary from varying perspectives. The role of the financial provider associated with machismo is in the literature as a position that controls the family and solidifies the position of power; versus the responsibility to care and provide for the families' prosperity and well-being (De La Cancela, 1986; Diaz-Guerrero, 1955; Sobralke, 2006; Stobbe, 2005). Regardless of how the role of

financial provider manifests, Latino males who are socialized and conditioned within the concept of machismo tend to be aware and concerned with money and finances for the family as a whole.

Financial Considerations

Research has found that financial aid has a positive impact on all students regarding persistence and retention (DesJardins, Ahlburg, & McCall, 1999; Singell, 2004). For students receiving some aid or support, the help may relieve stress or mean less of a need to work, granting more time to dedicate to their studies. For low-income and underrepresented student populations, the positive impact of financial aid has been found to be even more pronounced (Paulsen & St. John, 2002; St. John, Paulsen, & Carter, 2005). Students often need assistance in many areas, but the financial funding is a key form of support. Even with emotional support and motivation to pursue higher education, the availability of financial resources is a large factor in access and success for Latino students (Davis-Kean, Mendoza, & Susperreguy, 2012; Sanchez, Esparza, Colon, & Davis, 2010). The rising costs of higher education and thought of large amounts of debt can be a significant influence among Latino students when making academic decisions. Latino students have been found to be more likely than other groups to pay for their education and also be responsible for contributing to the family as well (Cejda & Stick, 2008; Fuligni & Witkow, 2004). The aversion to accumulating debt could be related to the role Latino students play in the greater family financial plan, or it could be their association with the value of the investment for degree completion. Research has concluded that Latino students may stop accruing debt for college if they do not see a real benefit in the degree attainment (Gross, Zerquera, Inge, & Berry, 2014).

With Latino students having to balance both their place in contributing to family finances and accumulating debt for their educational goals, cost and availability of financial aid can

become key factors. Santiago and Cunningham (2005) found Latino students received a lower average financial award than any other racial or ethnic group and that the proportion of institutional aid remained unchanged from 1995 to 2005. Receiving a lower award amount may be because Latino students do not want to incur debt as previously stated. According to the National Center for Education Statistics' *Student Financing of Undergraduate Education: 2011-12* report (2014), 72.3 percent of Latino undergraduate students received some form of financial aid in the 2011-2012 academic year. This large percentage demonstrates the importance of financial assistance for Latino students that aspire to complete an undergraduate degree. In their first year of enrollment, Latino students applied for financial aid at a lower rate than any other racial or ethnic group (Gross, Zerquera, Inge, & Berry, 2014). The lower rate of first-year financial aid and the lower amounts when compared to other racial or ethnic groups can also be factors leading to academic issues.

Research has shown the effects of financial aid are related to academic factors such as GPA and the number of credits attempted (Gross, Torres, & Zerquera, 2013; Hossler, Ziskin, Gross, Kim, & Cekic, 2009). While academic issues can affect all students, there can be a distinct concern for Latino students. Gross, Torres, and Zerquera (2013) further found financial aid directly affected whether or not a Latino student stops out of school for the first time. Low GPA, lower number of credits attempted, and stopping out of school may all make it even more difficult for Latino students to finish their undergraduate studies. Gross et al. (2014) found that among underrepresented students as a whole and Latino students specifically, there was a correlation between receiving financial aid and degree attainment.

Influences to Pursue Higher Education

As Latino students struggle with financial concerns, they also must sort through information about higher education from multiple sources. Studies have found that students receive input about college and career aspirations from parents, friends, teachers, counselors, or college representatives (Alfaro, Umana-Taylor, & Bamaca, 2006; Azmitia, Cooper, & Brown, 2009; Bullington & Arbona, 2001; Ceja, 2004; Keller & Whiston, 2008; Perez & McDonough, 2008; Plunkett, Henry, Houlbert, Sands, & Abarca-Mortensen, 2008; Zarate & Gallimore, 2005). Perez and McDonough's (2008) study of 106 Latino eleventh and twelfth-grade males and females, 63 high school counselors, and 87 parents using focus groups and interviews revealed that parents influenced students, as did counselors, other relatives, and peers. The multiple sources of information can contribute in different ways. Bullington and Arbona (2001) conducted a case study and found that students depended on school personnel for career information while parents and siblings provided encouragement that was influential in college and career choices. Perez and McDonough (2008) stated that the advice students received regarding college choice was often based on the personal experience of the individual giving the advice and at times the advice was biased. The advice and information may also influence more than just college and career choices. Using surveys and GPA analysis, Plunkett, Henry, Houlbert, Sanda, and Abarca-Mortensen (2008) found that parent and teacher influence was important to academic success.

Advice and information can be impactful whether it is directly communicated or modeled by others. Cornelius-White, Garza, and Hoey (2004) concluded that a father's education, family support in a child's interests and a student's openness to experiences had the highest correlations with academic achievement among 122 high-achieving Latino high school seniors from seven

schools in South Texas. This multi-faceted influence on academic achievement was evident when looking at educational aspirations also. A study of 186 Latino high school students at two separate Texas high schools found that gender significantly predicted educational aspirations, parents' education level and perceived educational barriers (Ojeda & Flores, 2008). Family can be a key for student success and college aspirations. Zalaquett's (2006) qualitative research study of 12 successful Latino students, ten of which were also first-generation college students, concluded that family support helped them to succeed in school and to pursue a college education.

While these positive family influences are present in some areas, there may also be conflicts between family roles and academic goals. Researchers concluded that for Latino students, family obligations conflicted with school goals and resulted in a cultural dilemma (Sy & Romero, 2008). When exploring traditional gender roles combined with the Latino culture, this cultural dilemma can be amplified. Espinoza's (2010) study of Latina doctoral graduate students provided insight into the roles Latina students play while navigating multiple social spheres and trying to maintain a "good daughter" status. These doctoral students revealed the pressures associated with maintaining multiple roles and the use of integration and separation as techniques to navigate both being an academic and the family role. This added cultural component and burden may be an influence for Latinos and be a factor when pursuing academic success and degree completion.

Access, Persistence, and Retention

Several studies have focused on Latino students access to college, their persistence rate in college, and in retention efforts made by institutions (Arellano & Padilla, 1996; Gloria & Kurpius, 1996; Haro, Rodriguez, & Gonzales, 1994; Hurtado, 1994b; Hurtado & Carter, 1997;

Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Nora, 2003; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009). Nunez (2014) explored the impact of educational opportunities for students dealing with intersecting identities, specifically being Latino and immigrants, and how each separate identity or both affected students. Nunez and Crisp (2012) found that factors that could impede or help Mexican American and Puerto Rican high school students enrolling in college included, immigration status, geographic location, age, cultural and academic capital. Other studies have focused specifically on the application process for Hispanic students and how the process of applying to college influenced access (Hurtado, Inkelas, Briggs, & Rhee, 1997). These studies and how identities impact one another demonstrate the complexity of access to high education for Latinos, but retention and persistence are studied once students do enroll in colleges.

Specifically, retention efforts are described as “efforts implemented by institutions toward the goal of graduating students” (Oseguera, Locks, & Vega, 2008, p. 47). While all institutions seek to graduate students, special populations of students may require special considerations. When considering retention and persistence among Latino students, family plays a strong role. Overall, family connections have demonstrated to be a significant part of academic success (Fuligni & Pederson, 2002; Sy, 2006).

Latinos as an ethnic group become of particular interest because of the growth in the population. Oseguera, Locks, and Vega (2008) indicated that retention issues of Latino students should be considered an urgent issue because of how fast the population is growing in the United States. When considering persistence rates, correlations between student characteristics and family history can be noted. Lohfink and Paulsen (2005) found that “being Hispanic and being first-generation is an example of how race and ethnicity intersect with parental education to negatively impact persistence” (p. 418).

Other factors influence retention among Latino students. Hurtado and Ponjuan (2005) examined conditions of Latino success such as intergroup communication, institutional support, and sense of belonging. Their research also suggested that additional research is needed to understand and serve the Latino population while on campus. The call to understand issues that lead to academic success may show what causes Latino students to drop out or quit their studies. Nora (2003) explored attrition rates among Latino students by studying three groups of students; a group between their first and second year at community colleges, a group between their first to second year at a four-year institution if they began their college career there, and a group between their first to second semester of their first transfer year. All three groups exhibited a high dropout rate and low degree attainment when compared to other racial and ethnic groups. Studying these populations to find trends and characteristics could reveal issues that can be corrected or improved.

Searching for positive influences on degree attainment may also contribute to ways of increasing persistence and retention. For Latino students who begin their college education at four-year universities, their experiences during their college years were prominent factors in degree attainment (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Fry, 2002). Building on these positive experiences can add strategies to improve campus climate. Additionally, Gloria and Kurpius (1996) found that negative perceptions of the campus climate affected the persistence of Latino students. How Latino students feel while on campus and whether they feel included and supported can make a difference when the pressures of academic study increase. Nora and Cabrera (1996) concluded that prejudice and discrimination indirectly affect the persistence of students of color. Other researchers focused on indicators that influence retention before students enroll at colleges and universities. Among Latino students who start at four-year universities, Arbona and Nora (2007)

found that parental education and having friends who intended on enrolling in four-year universities after high school was significant predictors of degree completion.

Gloria and Castellanos (2003) reviewed research and evaluated programmatic efforts from a psychological, social, and cultural perspective to examine the persistence of Latino students at predominately white institutions. When reviewing literature specifically for student voices, they found several examples of feelings of isolation and alienation which contributed to students' questioning if they belong or if the schools wanted them. Hurtado and Kamimura (2003) stated that retention and, ultimately, degree attainment for Latinos was contingent on institutional support and the student experience in college. Their research highlighted seven principles needed to increase Latino retention: a larger presence of Latinos on campus by increasing participation rates, identifying ways to help students navigate the college system, increased monitoring of academic progress, creating a system of peer support, increased interaction among racial groups, increased faculty and staff representation to support students, and a deeper understanding of retention issues through increased research. Highlighted in the following section are several strategies, and others, being implemented by institutions.

Institutional Responses to Latino Students

Strongly associated with institutional commitment was student persistence (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999). Being committed to change and implementing strategies based on research to meet the needs of the students may pay substantial dividends for institutions regarding student success. Gloria and Castellanos (2003) found since students expressed feelings of isolation, alienation, marginalization, and academic challenges; universities must address the academic experiences of Latino students to bolster degree attainment and

retention. Paying attention to the needs of students is necessary for success and understanding the intricacies of special populations adds an element to institutional responses.

Noguera and Wing (2006) found cultural issues limited institutions from being able to communicate with parents of Latino first-generation students effectively. Since the population of Latino first-generation students is nuanced, approaching the students using the same techniques as other ethnic groups may not yield the same results. Based on research, institutions can create programs and interventions that purposefully target the needs and avenues to reach these students effectively. Fann, Jarsky, and McDonough (2009) examined a collaborative effort between a university and group of local schools to encourage parents to participate in the college process even though the parents did not attend college. This program demonstrated an active attempt to get families involved in the development of a college-going culture.

Other institutions have also developed programs at area high schools to help educate the parents on college processes (Fann et. al., 2009). These programs can start to change the college-going culture and may develop a path to pursuing college degrees. Saunders and Serna (2004) studied first-generation Latino students that entered four-year institutions immediately after high school graduation and concluded that participation in high school college access programs had an impact on the development of a pro-school ethos that helped promote enrollment in four-year universities. While these programs are attempting to develop a college-going culture, institutions can also be exploring techniques to help support these students once they are on campus. Stanton-Salazar (1997) found that caring adults on school campuses positively influenced Latino students to apply to colleges and served as a connection to higher education. These connections to individuals may be a broader replication of an inclusive, supportive, community that Latinos exhibit in their culture.

Torres (2006) studied commuter students at urban campuses and found that having a Latino culture represented on campus among students, faculty, and staff was significant in students' persistence rate. Having people and personnel available to help support Latino students or students that otherwise were not aware of how the higher education system works may be a strategy that institutions implement that could help bolster degree completion. Research shows that underrepresented students and first-generation college students are not as familiar with higher education, and they rely on schools, staff, and programs to provide support networks for them to be able to navigate the university system (Gonzalez, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003). The intersection of multiple identities with a lack of understanding of the college system compounds the need for institutions to implement programs for first-generation Latino students as they seek support navigating unsupportive environments.

Navigating Unsupportive Environments

The feeling of being in an unsupportive environment may take many forms or shown in many different ways. Latino students on college campuses often encounter alienation and microaggressions due to their underrepresented status (Yosso, 2005). Microaggressions are subtle indications that students are in a hostile or unsupportive environment. Microaggressions may be subtle and can go unnoticed by the individuals in the dominant or majority culture, but be an issue for marginalized students. Microaggressions can lead to feelings of alienation which negative impact underrepresented students including Latinos (Harper, 2006; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hurtado, 1992; Hurtado, 1994a; Hurtado, 1994b). Institutions should be aware of how Latino students may feel when they enter their schools to help create help as they adjust to the college environment.

Hurtado, Carter, and Spuler (1996) studied Latino student transition to college and stated, “Even the most talented Latinos are likely to have difficulty adjusting if they perceive a climate where majority students think all minorities are special admits, and Hispanics feel like they do not ‘fit in’ (p. 152). Entering the new environment and feeling like they are not equal to others in their classes can be unsettling but also being placed into an environment where they feel foreign to the other students can also create feelings of anxiety. In a study researching the climate for talented Latino students, 68 percent of the high-achieving participants stated they did not think their peers knew about Hispanic culture, which raised the feelings of racial tension and resulted in discriminatory experiences on campus (Hurtado, 1994b). Feeling discriminated against or experiencing racial tension can cause Latino students additional pressures on top of the academic demands of their academic requirements so they may need to find spaces on campus where they feel welcome.

Students of color, including Latino students, seek out places on campus that feel supportive or create spaces where they feel comfortable to combat these feelings of alienation or perceived hostility (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Some intuitions recognize the value in supportive spaces, whether they are physical places on campus or groups on campus focused on various cultures. Racial or ethnic culture centers and underrepresented focused student organizations have been shown to have positive effects on addressing racial microaggressions and psychological harm among underrepresented racial and ethnic students (Guiffrida, 2003; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Patton, 2006). These spaces and organizations may recreate environments familiar to students and can mimic their home culture or families. Guardia and Evans (2008) found that membership in a Latino fraternity enhanced students’ ethnic identity development and “that members of Latino fraternities seek out such organizations because

Latino Greek Letter Organizations embrace the Latino culture and provide a familial atmosphere, which in some cases may not be found in the general campus environment” (p. 177). They also suggest that promoting Latino student organizations can be a way to support Latino students and to help foster their college experience.

Increasing the number of students of color on college campuses requires creating a supportive community of peers. Institutions may also find it necessary to hire faculty and staff who are racially and ethnically diverse to serve as potential mentors. Research findings suggest that any mentor can connect with a student of color, but institutions should invest in efforts to recruit racially and ethnically diverse faculty and administrators to serve as mentors when possible (Griffin, Nichols, Perez, & Tuttle, 2008). Mentors of similar racial and ethnic backgrounds can provide students with individuals to connect with or feel more comfortable with because of real or perceived shared experiences. Students of color have reported feeling more comfortable with and seeking help from members of their own racial and ethnic group because of the shared culture and experiences (Cole & Barber, 2009; Tan, 1995; Tinto, 1993). Supportive racially and ethnically similar faculty can be a resource to help students as they navigate the college landscape. Cole and Barber (2009) found that faculty of color could provide support and encouragement that students of color need to succeed. Understanding the need for diverse faculty and staff on campus can be more difficult to achieve for all institutions.

A report by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (2004) indicated that the majority of the Latino administrators are concentrated at a small number of colleges in Texas. Colleges and universities that focus on the recruitment and retention of Latino faculty and staff could create a lasting impact on diversifying campuses. Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, and Rosales (2005) suggested that “Recruiting and retaining Latina/o faculty and staff to serve as role models

will affect the University demography, and as a beginning point to enhance Latina/o students university connections” (p. 216). These connections and individuals can provide students with a familiar culture in an unfamiliar environment. By utilizing Latina/o faculty and staff as mentors Santiago-Rivera, Arredondo, and Gallardo-Cooper (2002) found that the concepts of *familismo* or feeling of family, and *personalismo* or a sense of caring, genuineness, and welcoming, could be utilized as interaction styles to connect with students.

First-Generation Latino Research

With existing literature examining issues specific to both first-generation college students and Latino college students, it is important to discuss research studying both populations simultaneously. Studies exist about first-generation Latino college students as a population in regards to accessing information about college in general, college preparedness, pursuing higher education, and motivation for academic achievement. These studies are examples of how research explores topics specific to the intersection of the Latino and first-generation college populations.

Studies of first-generation Latino students have found that this population does not know where to find information about college (Torres, Reiser, LePeau, Davis, & Ruder, 2006). Once at college these students may often run into academic trouble and need guidance. Torres et al. (2006) reported that first-generation Latino students do not seek help until they are in serious academic trouble. When looking specifically at predictors for enrolling in a four-year university among Latino students, Arbona and Nora (2007) found that college preparedness, a rigorous academic program in high school and a saturation of friends planning to attend college are extremely important factors. These nuances demonstrate the need to study this population further.

Previous studies have shown that for first-generation college students, gaining respect, honoring their family, and contributing financially to the family post-graduation are all motivating factors to pursue higher education (Bui, 2002). These students want to create a path for themselves that is different from what they see in their families in many cases. Olive (2008) studied first-generation Latino students and found this population was aware of the restrictions associated with a lack of education and that they wanted to pursue college degrees to find careers that were more rewarding and less dangerous than those of their peers and family members. Olive also pointed out a clear lack of research addressing first-generation Latino students' motivation for pursuing higher education.

Recently, Trevino and DeFreitas (2014) studied existing research focused on first generation Latino students and examined their findings using the theoretical framework of Self-Determination Theory. The research examined studies by Bui (2002), Prospero, Russell, and Vohra-Gupta, (2012), and Strage, (1999), which all included academic achievement in various college populations. Trevino and DeFreitas (2014) probed the findings of those research studies and targeted the responses of the Latino first-generation college students and elements of motivation. After finding a positive connection between the two factors of motivation and academic achievement, the researchers suggested ways to increase intrinsic motivation and recommended the need for further research on first-generation Latino college students (Trevino & Freitas, 2014).

Summary

The literature reviewed in this chapter revealed issues facing first-generation college students as they adapt and adjust to an unfamiliar college environment. These students carry with them influences of their parents and attempt to utilize various resources to persist and complete

their degrees. Latino students in higher education also experience the college environment in different ways. Gender roles and the cultural concept of *machismo* add layers to their educational journeys. Latino students also spend considerable time thinking about the financial implications of being a college student. Institutional responses to Latino students and the support needed to navigate often unsupportive environments demonstrate how having more Latino students, faculty, and staff are a benefit to higher education.

According to Creswell (2003), “a qualitative study may fill a void in existing literature, establish a new line of thinking, or assess an issue with an understudied group or population” (p. 94). Researchers such as Olive (2008) as well as Trevino and DeFreitas (2014) both emphasized the void in existing literature when it comes to first-generation Latino college students as previously stated. My study sought to address the motivation of Latino males specifically who were first-generation college students by providing new empirical research through an intrinsic case study to better understand these issues from the participants’ perspective.

Chapter 3

Design and Methodology

In this section, I describe the design and methodology of this case study and include critiques of case study. I then discuss the site selection, as well as the data collection and analysis plan. I conclude with a discussion of my subjectivity and readiness to engage in an intrinsic case study.

This study is an intrinsic case study qualitatively exploring the motivation of first-generation Latino males to pursue higher education at a particular institution. The unit of analysis was the motivational factors to pursue higher education. The research question(s) guiding this study were:

1. What motivational factors influence first-generation Latino males at a mid-size public university in the Mid-Atlantic region to attend college?
2. How did extrinsic or intrinsic factors influence first-generation Latino males at a mid-size public university in the Mid-Atlantic region to attend college?

Merriam (2009) defined case study as “an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system,” and noted “the single most defining characteristic of case study research lies in delimiting the object of study, the case” (p. 40). Stake (1995) also placed an emphasis in a case study on the ‘what’ that is to be studied. The bounded system in my particular study will be students attending a particular university who are the first in their family to pursue higher education and identify themselves as male and Latino. Merriam (2009) pointed out that if the system is bounded, there is a finite number of participants interviewed or a limit to the length of observations. The bounded system, or case, in this study, is the community of individuals who share a set of demographic traits, establishing the parameters for what is to be studied.

Six percent of the 11,243 undergraduate students identified as Hispanic or Latino at this particular mid-size university located in the Middle-Atlantic region of the United States. The exact number of Latino students is 721, with 356 identifying as male. In this study, I sought to interview as many Latino males pursuing bachelor's degrees at the University. I included all majors and classifications, as long as the participant was currently enrolled and neither of their parents had completed a bachelor's degree.

An intrinsic case study is one where the researcher has a particular interest in that case (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995). As a Latino male and the first in my family to pursue a bachelor's degree, I have a particular interest in learning why this population is motivated to pursue higher education. The result of analyzing the information shared by the participants of this study produced an in-depth description of what motivated these Latino males who are first-generation college students at the study institution to seek degrees in higher education. These findings will help others as they consider pursuing higher education and help administrators and faculty be able to support more students to pursue college degrees.

Yin (2009) stated, "as a research method, the case study is used in many situations, to contribute to our knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political, and related phenomena" (p. 4). Yin went on to describe how the case study method allows for researchers to capture holistic and detailed characteristics of actual events. Merriam (2009) argued that qualitative case studies look for meaning and understanding, and they produce a result that is abundantly descriptive. Merriam continued her description of qualitative studies to point out that the researcher is the principal instrument of data collection and analysis.

Case Studies of Latino Populations

There are several examples of case study research similar to this type of study. Ceja (2004) interviewed high school seniors to determine what role parents played in shaping the college aspirations of Chicana students and what forms this influence took. Ceja used one-on-one semi-structured interviews to gain insight from the participants in their words. The researcher found that Chicana students felt their parents placed a high value on gaining a college education whether they stated it explicitly or indirectly through actions (Ceja, 2004). The direct or indirect messages demonstrating value in a college education were motivational tools (Ceja, 2004). Through the individual interviews, Ceja (2004) noted it was evident in all 20 participants that parents influenced college thoughts and aspirations. Allowing this special population of Chicana students to tell their stories revealed a source of motivation to pursue higher education.

Cavazos and Cavazos Jr. (2010) conducted a qualitative study with nine Latina and Latino college students to understand their relationships with their high school teachers. They initiated each interview with one question and asked to follow up questions to obtain details of the participants' experiences. Each of the researchers created a thematic hierarchy and was able to establish four themes from their data analysis. Cavazos and Cavazos Jr. (2010) noted the following themes: Latino students receive high expectations; some receive low expectations; low expectations for non-AP (Advance Placement) students exist; and some Latino students receive mentoring and others do not. From this, they presented implications for practice for high school teachers who work with Latina/o students. Some of these implications included presenting current Latino students with examples of other successful Latino students; stressing high expectations; and utilizing personal and cultural experiences to inspire students (Cavazos & Cavazos Jr., 2010).

Ceballo (2004) investigated the role of parents and home characteristics of first-generation, U.S. born, Latino students attending Yale University. Five were male, and five were female. The students were either from Puerto Rican or Mexican-American families. Ceballo (2004) had students complete a demographic survey, then used semi-structured and open-ended questionnaires to collect information on parental involvement in academics and participation in extracurricular activities by the students. Four common themes emerged from the research, and she was able to identify similarities among the students' path from impoverished homes to the Ivy League institution. These four themes included: parental commitment to education; parents supporting autonomy during teenage years; nonverbal expressions of support for educational goals; and the presence of faculty mentors (Ceballo, 2004). These findings were able to confirm issues about Latina/o students from similar socioeconomic backgrounds and demonstrate the role parents and mentors played in the lives of these students as they persisted to Yale.

Site Selection

The site for this study was a mid-size public university in the Mid-Atlantic region. It is classified as a research university with high research activity (Carnegie, 2014). In fall 2015, the university had 11,243 undergraduate students and 2,596 graduate students. It offered 48 options for major fields of study and places a high emphasis on undergraduate research. There were several specialty scholarship programs marketed to underrepresented populations.

The university has a reputation of having a diverse student body. It was founded in 1966 with inclusivity as part of the goal from the beginning. Even with a reputation for being a very diverse campus, it has a very small Latino student population when compared to students with other ethnic backgrounds. The latest enrollment numbers, reflecting 2014, detailed the ethnic breakdown of twenty percent Asian American, sixteen percent African American, but only six

percent Latino. The overall gender breakdown for undergraduate students is 59 percent male and 41 percent female.

The exact number of Latino students on campus is 721, with 356 of them identifying as males. The university does not report the population of first-generation college students. The selected number of potential participants from the study were from the 356 undergraduate students that identify as Latino and male.

Participant Selection

Merriam (2009) argued that purposive sampling is the most suitable method when conducting case study research. A “purposeful sample” dictates that researchers choose participants that provide an in-depth understanding of the research problem being investigated (Creswell, 2007). Merriam (2009) further stated that “qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 5). Using a qualitative approach provided an opportunity to document the experiences of first-generation college students who identify as both male and Latino at this mid-sized university in the Mid-Atlantic region.

Regarding the population, there was not an all-encompassing mechanism or database to identify students as first-generation college students, but there are two places where the information is requested, on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and the application for admission. The study institution does collect the first-generation status as part of the FAFSA and maintains information for students in the financial aid office, but only if students complete a FAFSA form. The application for admissions also asked students about the educational history of their parents. Individuals may have been unaware if their parents received bachelor’s degrees or not so there may have contributed to the low number of qualified

participants. To find participants who meet the qualifications, I detailed the parameters of the study when I invited students to participate. I also asked participants to complete a demographic survey before beginning the interviews to reiterate the criteria and confirm their information. Requesting the survey could have led to a smaller pool and an overall smaller number of participants.

To identify participants that fit my population requirements, I emailed all Latino males in the university database, (Appendix B), in addition to contacting student organizations on campus with a concentrated number of Latino students. Merriam (2009) described a case study as examining a bounded system. The boundaries for this study will be first-generation Latino males at this particular institution. The study was open to any major and any classification. I requested a list of email addresses from the admissions office for any student currently enrolled at this university as a degree seeking student, and who identified as both male and Latino. I then invited students to participate in the study via email. I also attended the general body meetings of Latino-based student organizations such as the Hispanic and Latino Student Union, Lambda Theta Phi Latin Fraternity Inc., and the Spanish Club to solicit participation. I then completed the necessary procedures at my degree granting institution and study institution to obtain Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to conduct my interviews.

Merriam (2009) stated there is not a target number of interviews required to conduct a case study, but an adequate number of participants to answer the initial research questions was needed. My goal was to interview enough participants within the demographic parameters to reach a point of saturation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I was interested in understanding the motivation of any first-generation Latino male at this university, so I sought to interview as many possible participants as I could. The demographics of my participants are displayed in table 3.1.

Table 3.1

Participant Demographics

Name	Year	Major	Nationality	Status
Alfonso	Sophomore	Psychology	Peruvian	Transfer-CC
Antonio	Junior	Spanish/Linguistics	Mexican	Transfer-CC
Arnold	Junior	Computer Science	Salvadorian	Transfer-CC
Felipe	Junior	Media & Communication	Mexican	Transfer-CC
Frank	Junior	Animation	Mexican	Transfer-CC
Hector	Senior	Computer Engineering	Puerto Rican	Transfer
Jason	Junior	Mechanical Engineering	Mexican	Traditional
Jimmy	Sophomore	Computer Engineering	Honduran	Traditional
Jon	Senior	Mathematics, Applied Math	Dominican	Traditional
Larry	Junior	Business	Mexican	Transfer-CC
Maxwell	Freshmen	Computer Engineering	Ecuadorian	Traditional
Pablo	Junior	Chemistry	Bolivian	Transfer-CC
Red	Freshman	Graphic Design	Mexican	Traditional
Santiago	Freshman	Mechanical Engineering	Salvadorian	Traditional
Momtepeque	Senior	Social Work	Salvadorian	Transfer- CC

Data Collection and Procedures

The instrumentation or course of action for this study consisted of document analysis, semi-structured individual interviews, and focus group interviews. The use of multiple data sources in case study research enhances data credibility (Yin, 2003).

Data collection for this intrinsic case study investigation was started April of 2016 and concluded data collection in August of 2016. I began with a document analysis to look at materials and programs used by the university to get students interested in applying. Individual interviews with participants and focus group interviews after the document analysis allowed me to hear directly from participants about their motivations for pursuing college degrees. Responses from the individual interviews helped guide the questions for the focus group interviews. A description of each method follows.

Analysis of University Materials

The initial method of data collection was document analysis. I focused on public information, such as marketing material, university Web pages, and programs presented to prospective students by the University. Some of the marketing material included admissions materials, brochures, email communications, university marketing materials, postcards, information sheets, and information from university websites. To examine the materials, I used a document analysis worksheet, adapted from one developed by the National Archives and Records Administration (2015).

Individual Interviews

In-depth interviews allowed participants to provide information and rich data about their individual experiences. Patton (1990) noted that “qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowledgeable, and able to be made

explicit” (p. 278). By utilizing interviews, the researcher can explore several topics and participants can share their experiences in their words (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Patton, 2002). These interviews provided insight and examples of what motivational factors led these Latino males to pursue degrees in higher education.

The interviews were approximately one hour long and were audio-taped with the participants’ permission to allow for detailed transcription. I transcribed all of the interviews in detail. The locations for the interviews were convenient for both the participants and me. These settings were conducive to a meaningful interview process and seen as a formal conversation between the participant and interviewer (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

In developing the interview questions, I relied on my review of existing literature, the Self-Determination Theory developed by Deci and Ryan (1985), and the results of the analysis of University materials to craft thought provoking questions. These questions served as an interview guide, or schedule, which is described by Merriam (2009) as a “list of questions you intend on asking during an interview” (p. 95). The interviews followed a semi-structured format seeking specific information but also allow for the researcher to probe and respond to the information or new ideas presented during the interview (Merriam, 2009). Once the individual interviews were complete, I invited the interviewees to focus groups.

The individual interview questions followed a particular order. Preparing a script of questions in a purposeful way was key in creating an effective interview (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). A script of the questions began with a brief of the study, use of recording equipment, and the purpose of the study (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). This briefing was followed by demographic questions to confirm the identity of the targeted population. Next, the interview script used open-ended questions to follow what Merriam (2009) stated were good questions.

Open-ended questions allow for probing and follow-up questions based on the answers provided by the participants (Merriam, 2009). The interview protocols for both individual interviews and focus-group interviews helped to develop rich, descriptive research.

Focus Group Interviews

Focus groups with some participants also took place. Morgan (1997) described a focus group as a moderated group interview that occurs with six to eight participants with similar backgrounds. The goal of a focus group is to allow for a group discussion between participants using scripted questions to begin the dialogue (Morgan, 1997). Similar to the individual interview section, the script of the questions, began with a brief of the study and information about the use of recording equipment, followed by the purpose of the study (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Creswell (2009) also contended that focus groups create an environment that allows for information to arise from the exchange of comments and ideas among the group. Participants in this study were able to interact and discuss their thoughts about what motivated them to pursue their bachelor's degrees with one another.

Merriam (2009) stated that the make-up of a focus group should include people who are knowledgeable about the topic at hand. In this case, the participants all had a knowledge of the topic because they were a part of the targeted population at this university and their stories were the focus of the study. Before each session, I detailed the structure of the focus group and created ground rules to encourage each participant to share their experiences. I worked around the participants' schedules and found a location that was as convenient as possible. The location was private, so the participants felt comfortable sharing their personal stories and thoughts.

The focus group was digitally recorded and lasted about an hour and a half. The semi-structured format of the focus group interviews allowed participants to respond to specific

questions but also provided the opportunity to share other information they felt was pertinent that the questions may not have addressed (Merriam, 2009). The initial questions posed to the group included information used to develop the individual interview questions as well as information that emerged from individual interview responses from.

Data Analysis Process

I used Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self-Determination Theory as a lens to gain meaning and insight when analyzing findings from this study. Self-Determination Theory charts the development of motivation from nonself-determined to self-determination. Focusing at the motivational level on three sets of motivational processes—amotivational, extrinsic, and intrinsic—and their relationship to the concept of self-determination. The initial interview script for both the semi-structured individual interviews as well as the focus group interviews were inspired by the elements of Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self-Determination Theory and the results of the analysis of the University materials.

After collecting and transcribing the data from the individual interviews and focus group interviews, as well as materials from the document analysis, I analyzed the data. Data analysis of qualitative research can describe an individual instance or a collection of instances that can be grouped (Stake, 1995). The researcher categorizes information collected from participants of the study and then groups the instances together. Stake (1995) noted that the researcher focuses on an instance and utilizes "synthesis in direct interpretation" to deconstruct and reconstruct the instance in a meaningful way (p. 75). I used open-coding to begin the data analysis.

Merriam (2009) described analysis of open-coded qualitative data in three stages: category construction, category sorting, and category naming. Open coding was the first step in categorizing the data collected. I used the information collected during the notes taken from

analyzing the University materials, the transcripts from the individual interviews, and the transcripts from the focus groups. After I had collected all the information, I read through each set of notes and interview transcripts looking for recurring ideas, phrases, or pivotal statements regarding a motivation to attend college.

After identifying any recurring information from the interviews or notes, I assigned the information to various categories (Merriam, 2009). I used Information from my review of the literature, Ryan and Deci's (1985) Self-Determination Theory, and the analysis of the University materials to create the categories. Because I used existing categories from an established theory, I also engaged in *a priori* coding, a more deductive approach (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). Each category was assigned a distinguishing numerical marker, and I wrote the corresponding marker next to the statement or paragraph. I then arranged each of the statements in the numerical groups into an electronic spreadsheet.

Finally, I arranged all the statements into categories on the spreadsheet, I then generated a final name for the group of statements, which then established my themes. The themes included information from both types of interview transcripts. I reported the themes in chapter four.

As Yin (2009) pointed out, the multiple sources of data can provide opportunities for overlap and convergence among data collected. Collecting multiple forms of data and comparing the information gave me the opportunity to examine messages sent by the university and hear directly from participants.

Each document type was examined using the document analysis tool inspired by the document analysis worksheets created by the Education Staff of the National Archives and Records Administration (2015). The questions posed in the form reflect information that coincided with Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self-Determination Theory and concepts of motivation.

The tool also asked questions which pertain to the characteristics of the studied population. Admissions marketing emails and admissions marketing publications from the study intuition were examined using the document analysis tool.

Reporting Data

The presentation of the data should be in a coherent manner after it has been analyzed and assessed to convey the research to targeted audiences (White, Woodfield, & Ritchie, 2003). The presentation of the data sought to convey the ideas and stories of the participants interviewed and the materials analyzed. Stake (1995) stated that a case study report was somewhere between a traditional research report and telling a story. The presentation of the data was in a descriptive format, with my analysis and description (Yin, 2009). Supported by a thick and rich description of the data, the descriptive format supported the previously described themes (Merriam, 2009). The data was presented with the description of the university Web pages and materials first, followed by the themes in order of frequency.

There have been some critiques about the presentation of case study findings. Specifically, the results have been described as troublesome to summarize into tidy theories or general propositions (Roth, 1989; White, 1987). While I summarized the findings into themes, I did not seek to create general propositions or sacrifice pertinent information for the sake of tidiness. Stake (1995) asserted that descriptive narratives allow a reader to gain a better understanding of the case. My intention was to report findings that allowed my dissertation committee, college faculty and staff, and others interested in understanding better the motivation of these first-generation Latino males to pursue college degrees.

Trustworthiness

As Merriam (2009) put it, “Every researcher wants to contribute knowledge to the field that is believable and trustworthy” (p. 234). I utilized three techniques to aid in the trustworthiness of my study: data method triangulation, member checking, and thick description. Triangulation is a technique described by Merriam (2009) as using data collected from multiple sources. Data collected from interviews, focus groups and document analysis will serve as the multiple data sources to provide triangulation. I also utilized member checking of my interview findings. I used member checking by sharing findings with participants to control for researcher bias or misinterpretation (Merriam, 2009). After completing the individual interviews, I presented the participants with copies of the transcript and confirmed it reflected their words. Finally, based on my proposed methodology of an intrinsic case study, I used thick description throughout my research. According to Stake (1995), “Qualitative research uses these narratives to optimize the opportunity of the reader to gain an experiential understanding of the case” (p. 40). By detailing what participants said during interviews and focus groups, I was able better paint a detailed picture and describe the stories told by participants. Information from the University materials and other documents also provided an opportunity to demonstrate convergence between collected data.

Limitations

Several limitations existed in this study. These included researcher bias, and procedural limitations encompassing a lack of a defined population to recruit from and issues of self-selection to participate in the study. The concept of generalizability was another limitation of this study. In this section, I describe each of these limitations and explain how addressed them.

I am a member of the population that I studied. I identify as Latino, as male, and I was the first in my family to pursue higher education. Because I am a member of the target population studied there are instances where I anticipated or assumed facts that were not offered by the participants. To combat this issue, I used member checking not to misinterpret an interviewee's response and to try and control my bias (Merriam, 2007). Member checking, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), is the process of sharing data with the participants so they can confirm the information gathered. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that member checking is a critical technique to establish credibility. Member checking, therefore, helped establish trustworthiness and credibility with the study.

Regarding the population, there was not an all-encompassing mechanism or database to identify students as first-generation college students, but there were two places where the information is requested, on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and the application for admission. The study institution does collect the first-generation status as part of the FAFSA and maintains information for students in the financial aid office, but only if students completed a FAFSA form. The application for admissions also asks students about the educational history of their parents. To find participants who met the qualifications, I detailed the parameters of the study when I invited students to participate. I also asked participants to complete a demographic survey before beginning the interviews to reiterate the criteria and confirm their information. Having participants self-identify as part of the population may have led to a smaller number of participants, which could provide limitations in the way of transferability.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) claimed generalizability in qualitative research would be difficult because individual studies differ from others in ways that, while seemingly small, could

alter the study drastically as opposed to those using empirical, testable, and replicable research approaches. Despite these possible differences, those viewing the data charge researchers with developing a basis for future judgments. External validity cannot be specified, but the researcher can provide a thick description so someone could transfer the findings to their situation (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). When considering transferability, “it is about how well the study has made it possible for the reader to decide whether similar processes will be at work in their settings” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 78). It was necessary to implement safeguards and be cognizant of these limitations when approaching the research.

Ethical Considerations

Patton (2002) created a checklist for ethical issues to use in qualitative research that includes items such as confidentiality, informed consent, and data collection boundaries. To conduct this study, I used several techniques to ensure the study was carried out ethically including anonymity, confidentiality, and informed consent. I describe those techniques in this section.

Before the collection of any data, I submitted documentation and required forms to the University of Tennessee Knoxville’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) requesting approval of the study. I then worked in collaboration with the IRB of the study institution to ensure the approval of all necessary documentation and forms. Having all research procedures meet the standards of both institution’s IRB offices allowed for the adherence to appropriate research standards and was in the best interest of participants involved. Attached in Appendix A are the informed consent forms.

I requested participants share personal stories and experiences which may not be easy for everyone and therefore I implemented procedures to ensure confidentiality. Each participant was

assigned a pseudonym, and all information was kept confidential and stored in individual folders that are password protected. An information sheet detailing the requirements of the study, the right to confidentiality, right to withdraw from the study, and the purpose of information was given to each participant before they answered any questions. Finally, each participant was asked to read and sign an informed consent form to demonstrate they were made fully aware of the components of the study and their rights as participants.

Some of the participants involved in the study may have never considered what it meant to be a Latino male, a first-generation college student, or considered why they are pursuing a college degree. Reflecting on this information or answering questions about their life history, aspirations, and family did not evoke feelings of discomfort or pain; but as a member of the population, I relied on my personal knowledge and tried to minimize any risk of trauma. I followed the sequence of my interview questions and progressed through questions slowly and skipped any questions if participants demonstrated uneasiness. I also had the questions reviewed by another peer who identified as a first-generation Latino male to ensure the wording of the questions does not negatively label any of the participants. I also collected contact information for the university's counseling services and offered the information to the students in case they felt distressed during or after the interviews. Finally, I reiterated to the students that the information provided in this study may lead to increased support for other students with their same background and that their participation may help change higher education and society for the better.

Reflexivity and Positionality

As a first-generation college student who identifies as male and Latino and current college administrator at the institution where I conducted this study, I understand that I needed to

be aware of my personal experiences and biases. I tried to combat any issues that arose by using a research journal to detail any instances of personal bias. Identifying my biases allowed me to be transparent about my assumptions and experiences with the topic (Merriam, 2009). My experiences as a member of this population led me to seek out reasons why I was motivated to pursue higher education and have driven my desire to research this topic. Merriam (2009) asserted that interest and passion for the case could carry a researcher through difficult times. My interest and passion for this subject matter has and will continue to drive me to contribute to the over-all knowledge for others to experience.

Growing up as a Latino male myself, I can identify with different aspects of the culture that many, if not all, of these men. Understanding and experiencing first-hand what it means to be a Latino male in the family, community, and in non-familiar settings gives me insight into many of the experiences these men shared. In listening to the stories these men shared, I connected to experiences in my past and life. Being aware of my place in the community and the culture I was able to grow up in made me want to pursue this study, but also allowed me to position myself in the stories they told.

Through my life, I had often asked myself why I chose to pursue a bachelor's degree and have continued to pursue other degrees when no one else in my family pursued an undergraduate education. I have also asked others, friends, and colleagues in a casual way about their experiences as first-generation college students why they pursued college degrees. Since many of these conversations were with people that identified as female and were not Latino, it has given me anecdotal background knowledge of what other populations have experienced. My interest in hearing what others have experienced is also a strength that drove me to want to find out as much as I can about this subject.

To confront issues of subjectivity throughout the study, I kept a research journal containing subjective opinions and thoughts for self-reflection and awareness throughout the data collection process to help limit subjective bias. When transcribing the interviews and analyzing the data, I made notes about my reactions, feelings, or perceptions as recommended by Saldana (2009). Using a reflective journal allowed me to understand how my personal feelings influenced research and interpretation of the data collected. Ortlipp (2008) stated that the use of a reflective journal “can make the messiness of the research process visible to the researcher who can then make it visible for those who read the research” (p. 704). Utilizing a research journal allowed me to demonstrate transparency while also providing insight on the subjective influence on the study.

Researcher Readiness for Conducting a Case Study

I have previous experience conducting an intrinsic case study. I collaborated with a colleague on a research project while pursuing my master’s degree in student affairs and higher education. Our research sought to understand how being a member of a traditionally multicultural, Greek letter organization impacted the participants’ college experience. We presented findings from this study at the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) conference. I conducted semi-structured individual interviews and focus group interviews with a population, similar to the one in this study.

I have various strengths and weakness related to this methodology. Some of the strengths related to this methodology include my knowledge of the subject matter, my experiences as a member of the population, and my interest in the subject. Some weaknesses related to this methodology to consider are my limited experiences with doing a study of this size alone and my ability to secure enough subjects because of the limited population available. Qualitative

research produces a large amount of data and information to be collected, sorted, and analyzed. Since I was working alone, I needed to be careful to make sure procedures are followed step by step for each part of the case study. In this area, I enhanced my readiness by learning from other case study projects and qualitative researchers on good practices when conducting studies of this nature and size. Finally, there was a limited amount of potential subjects for this study in my geographic location, so this was another weakness when using this methodology. To enhance my readiness in this area, I utilized information provided by the Office of Undergraduate Admissions to contact my potential participants, as well as, requesting participants from student organization with a high percentage of Latino males.

Chapter 4

Presentation of Findings

I began this intrinsic case study investigation of the motivation to pursue college by Latino males who were first in their family to go to college in April of 2016 and concluded data collection in August of 2016. I collected data from a single University as well as from 15 students who identified as first generation college students and Latino males. To examine the data, I used Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self-Determination Theory of motivation as a theoretical framework to identify a spectrum of motivation moving from external rewards, or extrinsic motivation, to internal rewards, or intrinsic motivation.

Using this framework, I coded data from the interviews and found 10 themes. Figure 1.1 is a visual representation. The image depicts the levels from Motivation to Relevant Regulatory Processes and the continuum from Amotivation, to Extrinsic Motivation, on to Intrinsic Motivation. This three-part Motivation continuum served as a framework for the data analysis presented in this chapter. In chapter five, I will discuss these themes and instances in relation to subsequent levels of the Self-Determination Theory.

Initial coding was done using *in vivo* coding to label examples of motivation in the interview transcripts. The second and third rounds of coding involved an in-depth analysis of the data for the 10 themes and to provide a thick description of instances shared by the participants. The review of the university Web pages and marketing materials triangulated several of the themes and ideas shared during the interviews.

Two major sections comprise this chapter. In the first, I present results from analysis of both the university's Web pages and marketing materials. The second major section includes an in-depth description of the 10 themes derived from individual interviews and focus

group interviews as related to motivation. I intentionally placed the analysis of the marketing materials before the results of the interviews in this chapter to provide a frame of reference to what is emphasized by the institution before what is expressed by the students.

Analysis of University Materials

The following section is an analysis of university Web pages, recruitment materials, and a program aimed at increasing enrollment. I present a view of what prospective students or interested individuals see from a review of the university's Web page and specifically the Web pages of the Office of Admissions. This section also includes a presentation of findings from the marketing materials sent to prospective students and students that make inquiries about the University. Finally, this section reviews a transfer program aimed at increasing enrollment of transfer students from community colleges and a program designed to recruit Hispanic and Latino students. The analysis uncovered examples of instances complementing several of the themes identified in this study.

Web Pages

In April of 2016, I reviewed the University's homepage and the University's Admissions homepage. This analysis is a surface level review of these Web sites, but it does reveal several instances of the themes identified in the Self-Determination Theory framework. These Web pages are visible to the general public and advertised through marketing materials at public events. The text and images from these homepages are a characterization of how the University represents itself to the public. Presenting the descriptions of these Web sites allowed me to use images from the University to frame the setting of NEU.

University Homepage

Large images that scroll to another image dominated the main Web page of the University. Each image highlighted different stories of interest. Above the image was a bar in the school colors with links to various departments at the University as well as a search bar. The main pictures scrolled to a different story every six seconds. The first image was of five women, four white and one black, and the story was about alumni mentorship. The second image highlighted a dissertation support program for minorities in STEM fields. There was a picture of three black women and one man of Southeast Asian descent. The third photograph in the scroll of pictures was a building on campus and was a story about a department in that building.

The next photo was a male Middle Eastern swimmer in the university pool. The story associated with the photo was of two students who competed in the Olympics. The next picture was an aerial view of several buildings on campus and linked to a story about the University's anniversary. The sixth photograph was of two college students leaned over a grade-school aged student and the photograph connected to a story about the education program at the University. There were one male black student and one female white student in the photograph. The final image was of three people observing a model in a lab. There was a white male instructor, an Asian female student, and a black male student. Below the scrolling pictures was a section that had six tabs for specific areas of the University. One tab was marked "Prospective" which provided options for the admissions office, campus life, and visiting the campus.

Undergraduate Admissions Page

The undergraduate admissions main page followed the same layout as the University's main page. There was a title bar with a search box and beneath that was a navigation bar that had

links to seven other areas. Below the navigation bar was seven scrolling photographs with phrases beneath the pictures and photographs with links to other pages.

The first picture displayed what look like students walking around the campus. The students' faces were not clearly defined because the picture was from a distance. The phrase beneath the first photograph was "Rich Experience, Exceptional Value." The page did not link to any additional pages.

The next picture was a composite of six individual student photographs. There were three women and three men; two of the six appeared to be black, and the other four appeared to be white. The words beneath the photograph said, "In a Class of Their Own." The link connected to a series of stories about the class of 2016, the most recent graduates, and specific activities these selected students were involved in while at the University.

The following image was a photograph of an orchestra giving a performance. The faces were not clear in the picture because of the distance. The phrase beneath this picture was "Explore Your Interests." There was no link to another page. The next picture that scrolled by was a male student who appeared white talking to a female professor that appeared white. Both were dressed in lab coats and were looking at a beaker with some fluid. There were also several other glass containers hanging on the wall next to them. Beneath the picture were the words "Follow Your Passions."

The sixth image in the scroll was an image of the university mascot inside of a crest with a banner that read "The House of Grit." The phrase below this asked, "What Kind of [Mascot] Are You?" This image linked to a page that hosted a quiz for students to take which determined which of five categories of student they fit. The options stated were: "Makers, create; Explorers, seek; Thinkers, discover; Uniter, network; Solvers, fix." Beneath the link to begin the quiz was

a statement about how and why the school chose the mascot and an explanation of the university's mascot. The seventh photograph was another picture of students on campus from a zoomed out perspective. The phrase underneath the photograph was a slogan encouraging people to be their best selves at the University.

Beyond this homepage, the navigation bar's six other links pointed to different areas of the admissions process, ways to visit the campus, or other resources on campus. The admissions link was labeled "Apply" and listed fourteen different categories of students and the steps for them to follow for admission to the University. The link titled "Visit Us" provided four different ways for individuals to schedule a visit to campus or engage with current students through social media. The "Quick Links" provided a shortcut to pages with information such as the cost of college, financial aid, fast facts about the University, and majors offered.

The next link was titled "Our Community" and listed connections to seven areas of campus and city activities for students. These areas included housing, dining, student organizations, athletics, a section of highlighted professors, information about specific students, and the surrounding metropolitan areas. The next section was titled "Resources" and included ways to get information directed at parents and family; transfer students; counselors, transfer coordinators from other schools; veterans, international students, and stories about university alumni. Finally, there was a link named "Connect With Us" which provided ways to reach out to faculty, staff, current students, and alumni. These Web pages were one way of connecting with prospective students, but the admissions office also used traditional mail pieces to connect with potential students.

Recruitment Materials and Transfer Program

The University and Undergraduate Admissions Web pages were for public consumption, and anyone could visit those pages. The admissions office also sent specific mail and email recruitment materials to potential students. These materials included letters or brochures that advertised aspects of the University or certain programs. The materials included information that matched the “House of Grit” Web page mentioned earlier and a specific recruitment program that targeted potential transfer students. The materials for the transfer program detailed what a student could gain from participating in the program.

House of Grit

The Web-based quiz coincided with a full-color brochure that was sent to prospective students. This brochure defined and described each of the five categories that correspond to the previously mentioned Web page. Each category highlighted a student and described how that student related to each title. The students highlighted included what appeared to be a black female who was a theater major. Next was what looked like a white male biochemistry major, followed by a white male economics major. After that was a white female psychology major. The piece concluded with a Latina female biology major.

Different aspects of the University and how these students embodied these five distinct categories were titled and described in subsequent sections. The section titled “Makers” highlighted the community of the University and how being a part of a scholarship program allowed the student to meet others with similar interests. The area labeled “Explorers” detailed undergraduate research and how the student tied together theory and practice learned from original research. The section of “Thinkers” described a student’s internship experience and what they encountered while being a paralegal in a law firm. The “Uniters” section featured a student-

athlete and discussed the support she felt from other students at the University during athletic performances. Finally, the “Solvers” section of the brochure stated how the student embraced her Hispanic/Latino culture and discovered other cultures while being involved in various organizations on campus. Each of these categories challenged the reader to visit the campus and experience these areas for themselves as they were making their college choices.

Transfer Student Program

A large outreach campaign for the University was targeted to transfer students coming specifically from a community college. The University created a Transfer Student Program (TSP) with five specific community colleges in the area. The program encouraged students to complete their associate's degrees before they transferred to the University. The program offered benefits to students while they were attending the community college and when they transferred to the University. These benefits included financial scholarship money and other benefits not awarded to other transfer students.

The information included a letter and brochure detailing the TSP. The information was sent to prospective transfer students while they were attending community colleges after they established a specific grade point average that made them eligible for transfer to the University. The letter detailed why the completion of the associate's degree was important to their overall graduation success and how this program supported their transition to the University. The letter also invited students to visit the Web page for resources specifically for transfer students for more information about the University.

The brochure for the TSP was a two-fold, six-panel brochure. The brochure was printed in the University's school colors and contained no photographs. Specific instructions detailed how to apply to the University and included contact information if individuals had additional

questions. The brochure and program addressed items such as the financial scholarship associated with a program, an application fee waiver for the University, guaranteed access to the earliest orientation program, guaranteed housing on campus, and the opportunity to be a part of student programs and activities at the University while they were community college students. These benefits were specific to the TSP and only offered to individuals who met the grade qualifications at the five partner institutions.

Hispanic Directed Recruitment Materials

The University also created targeted information and programs for the Hispanic population. These materials included directed materials such as emails and brochures sent directly to students who were a part of the National Hispanic Recognition Program through The College Board. The College Board is the umbrella organization that administers the SAT exams and provides other resources for individuals about colleges and universities. The marketing materials were not very different from materials sent to all students, except for the source of names and ethnicities.

Marketing Materials

The admissions office sent a series of emails and physical materials to prospective students based on their indicated level of interest. Once students responded, it indicated a raised level of interest and subsequent material matched that level of interest. The Latino population identified also received two additional emails and physical pieces of material. One of the additional pieces listed information in Spanish. The information in one of the additional brochures and email was the same except translated into Spanish. The second unique brochure and email to Latino students was an invitation to a specific event.

The marketing materials followed a specific calendar and evolution depending on the student's level of interest in the University. The materials started out broad and discussed the University from an overall perspective. The emails and mail pieces were designed to introduce the students to the reputation of the institution and programs offered. Then, if a student replied or expressed interest, the materials became more focused on what the student indicated they were interested in and how the University could accommodate those interests. The materials also detailed to the students when and what they should do if they were interested in applying for financial aid and scholarships. The information depended on the grade level of the students when contacted.

As a student indicated more specific interest, such as research, majors, study abroad, student organizations and others; the materials detailed how those items tied with the goal of preparing students for careers or advanced studies. These materials also connected interested individuals to scholarship programs or events on campus and invited potential students and families to apply to programs or attend those events. The major or vocational goals of students were the targets of specific scholarship programs. The events either targeted a major or vocational interest, a period of time in the student's progression to college, or affiliation with special interest group.

The scholarship programs and events that targeted major or vocational interests included events for individuals who were considering specific careers such as engineering or medical school. The scholarship programs had advertised goals of getting more women in engineering programs, providing opportunities for students interested in public service, or for aiding individuals interested in performance-based careers. There were other programs or events aimed at students in different grade levels such as the "Just for Juniors" program for juniors in high

school as well as a program named “New Student Day” for students admitted to the University. Finally, programs and events such as the “Reception for Academically Talented African American Students” and the “Reception for Academically Talented Hispanic Students” were directly tied to racial or ethnic group affiliations.

Academically Talented Hispanic Reception

The marketing materials and program for academically talented Hispanic students highlighted information about cultural groups on campus and introduced current Hispanic students. The materials, both emails and letter invitations, indicated that the students were selected because of the academic achievements and were encouraged to attend the program to meet with faculty, staff, and students of Hispanic heritage. The materials, both print and email, also included ways to read information in Spanish on a specific Web page. The materials highlighted the University’s commitment to academic excellence, care for students, and emphasis on the community at the University.

The reception for these students followed a specific format. Students and families were invited to come early and received a tour of the campus led by current students. When students arrived or returned from their tours, the admissions staff presented them with individual certificates of achievement for outstanding academic accomplishments. They were provided with food and drinks while they mingled with current and former students, faculty, and staff. A majority of those faculty, students, and staff were also of Hispanic heritage or represented key student service areas on campus. Offices such as financial aid, housing, dining, academic advising, and student activities were among the groups represented. The program then began with remarks from the Director of Admissions, followed by the head of the Hispanic and Latino

Faculty committee, then remarks given by current Hispanic students who described their experiences at the University. These remarks were followed by an invitation to ask questions.

Another key aspect of the event was an invitation to spend the night with a current student living on campus. If students chose the option, they had the opportunity to experience what was like to sleep in a residence hall. The admissions office selected student hosts from the Hispanic Student Organization on campus, and the prospective students were matched based on the major they were considering. The student hosts then took the prospective students back to their residence halls and engaged in various activities around campus. Whether the marketing materials to potential students was on a Web page, in an email, a physical piece of mail, or an event on campus; all used consistent language and themes to communicate to students what the University would hope to provide to them if they enrolled at the University.

Interview Analysis

Over a period of four weeks, I interviewed 15 Latino males who were first generation college students and conducted two focus groups, one with three individuals and the other with four individuals. Table 3.1, in chapter three, displayed the self-identified ethnicity, classification, academic major, and academic status (i.e. community college transfer or native to a four-year institution) of the participants. All names listed in the chart and study are pseudonyms.

I identified 10 distinct themes from the interviews. Within the statements given by participants, I classified some into multiple themes. Statements that fit into multiple themes are discussed in the analysis. I arranged the themes by the number of instances appearing throughout the participants' interviews and interactions. Table 4.1 presents each unique theme along with a brief description and the number of instances coded.

Table 4.1

Ten Themes Related to Motivation

Theme	Description	Specific Incidences
Confidence	Participants described situations when they felt confidence as it pertained to education, specific subjects, or the pursuit of college in general.	44
Normalcy	Participants detailed how they felt like going to college was not normal for them and how that encouraged or discouraged them from pursuing college degrees. They also aspired to be more than what they viewed as the traditional story or path of Latinos/Hispanics.	35
Career/Better Pay	Students indicated that they were hoping their college degrees or experiences would lead to careers they wanted or higher paying jobs to help support themselves and/or their family.	17
Lack of Support	Participants shared situations where their family did not understand the steps or procedures for enrolling in college or college in general. They also talked about where they found support outside of their family.	18
Mom as Motivator	Participants shared how their mothers were a motivation for pursuing college degrees and the roles their mothers played in their college journeys.	16
More than a Job	Participants described outcomes of a college degree that were something other than a job or career.	16
Financial Barriers	Participants recalled how not having the means to afford college or not knowing where the money for college would come from was a barrier.	14
Being an Example	Participants communicated that they pursued college degrees to one day become role models for their children, family, or others.	11
Helping Others	Participants explained how going to college provided an opportunity to help others and make a lasting, positive impact on the world, society, or their community.	8
Fulfillment of Promise	Participants described the fulfillment of their family's reasons for making sacrifices and risking the trip to the United States.	7

Throughout the analysis, I referenced Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (1985). I described at the motivational level how the themes related specifically to extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Deci and Ryan (1985) described behavior moving from being inspired by external rewards, or extrinsic motivation, to internal rewards, or intrinsic behavior. According to Self-Determination Theory, once a person's actions are motivated intrinsically, they move to a state of self-determination. Discussed in detail in chapter 5 is where the themes fit on the spectrum from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation.

This interview analysis section contains detailed descriptions of the themes that emerged from the 186 total incidences I identified from the interviews and focus groups. Direct quotations from the participants demonstrated instances of the specific themes.

Confidence

All of the participants described examples of feeling confident by directly stating they were confident or by providing examples that expressed the feeling of confidence. The participants shared varied sources and types of the confidence. Five sub-themes emerged including Confidence in academic abilities; Confidence in a particular subject; Confidence in college, Loss of confidence and intimidation; and Expectation of college. The following examples related to a deeper level of intrinsic motivation as discussed in Self-Determination Theory.

Confidence in academic abilities. Participants shared messages they received which made them feel secure in their academic abilities. This feeling of confidence made them believe college was possible and therefore encouraged them to pursue their college aspirations. The messages came from family and sources at their schools. For example, Alfonso and Red both described how their mothers trusted them to do their homework which made them feel confident

in their academic abilities. Both said their parents did not check their homework or ask about the status of their school work because their parents believed they would complete and do well in school.

Red demonstrated this with the comment about his parents and the trust they showed him when it came to schoolwork. He stated,

They, they, trusted me enough to where I didn't tell them my grades. Um, it got to a point that after 8th grade they stopped checking my report card. Stopped checking my progress reports and just let me be me. Um, because they trust me well enough, and I wasn't going to, to, break their trust and fail a class. And um, when it was sort of, they knew that, if I came to college I'd be okay.

That trust led to the belief that they could succeed and do well in school and college.

Alfonso and Red also discussed how in their family they were seen as being intelligent and intellectually capable. They both received messages from their family that led them to have confidence in their academic abilities. Alfonso expressed, "I always, was, um, the intellectual in my family. They always told me I was the one to go to college." Red also iterated the same sentiment, "I don't wanna say I'm the prodigy, but I'm the most academically successful out of the whole family." Participants mentioned other messages, similar to those stated by their families, coming from school sources.

Alfonso, Arnold, Hector, Momtepeque, and Jimmy all indicated different classes or honors societies they were a part of that provided confidence for their academic abilities.

Momtepeque stated,

I been in GT, then honors, all AP courses, and even magnet courses. Um, or at certain grade levels I'd either be taking three math or three science courses at the same time which is very unusual, but, because of my academic level I was very confident and cocky, and thought that I could just do anything.

Jimmy described how being invited to an honors society by a teacher helped him. He shared,

They [specific teachers] taught history, but they were also part of the national, I think, some type of honors society for middle school. Even though I was in honors but I guess I was smart or something, I don't know. Some test that we took or something like that, that's what we did, and they invited me, and I was like, okay I'll just go, and I enjoyed it because it's cool being smart.

Being in these classes and being encouraged by teachers provided sources of confidence for these participants.

Felipe, Hector, and Arnold also talked about confidence from different messages. Felipe said teachers and his parents described him as a good student. Hector talked about how he felt good about going to college because he felt academically prepared for college by the high school courses he took. Arnold described rising to the challenge of a teacher which made him feel good. He stated,

There was a teacher in high school that, um, she really inspired me to pursue college I guess. Like, um, well the first week I got there we were supposed to do summer reading, and I didn't do it because I didn't know about it. So, like the first week she kinda hated me, well not hated me but you know what I mean. Um, after that I tried to get to the same level as the class because I was behind because I

didn't do the summer reading, so I did like cliff notes on the summer reading, and like, she sparked my love for reading in general. Well you know she made it look like whoever was, was at the level she wanted us to be, they were like cool I guess, so, I kind of wanted to be cool.

This inspiration led to a desire to want to continue learning and succeeding. Participants also detailed having confidence in a particular subject which propelled their college desires.

Confidence in a particular subject. Hector, Maxwell, Arnold, Frank, Momtepeque, Jimmy, Santiago, and Alfonso all provided examples of specific subjects and success in particular subjects that helped to develop their confidence. Hector and Maxwell mentioned family members as sources. Hector talked about his parents giving him engineering-themed toys, which helped to develop his interest in engineering. Maxwell described how his cousin instilled a love for computers and inspired him to pursue a college degree,

My cousin, and he's kinda of like more of a distant cousin, he's somebody I look up to really, um, and he was, like, out of my extended family he was the first person, here in the United States that actually tried to go for a degree... I used to go to his house every weekend, but he was always into computers and like he taught me everything I know right now, and I'm so happy of that, because if I didn't ever learn from him that oh, you know, you can do this with a computer that like, it blew my mind, when I was a kid it inspired me to really go to college, and I want to do the same thing that he does like, he showed me, like, oh you can

use your computer for this, I had no idea what a computer was until like he really showed me. And I think that really hit the spark for me.

Arnold, Momtepeque, and Frank each had positive experiences with specific classes in school, which helped them figure out a direction for possible college major choices. Arnold discussed his exposure and success in a Web design class that got him interested in computers as a possible major. Momtepeque discussed two units of science classes in middle school that made him believe he could be a teacher and major in education. Frank's experience was with an elective course taken late in his high school career that opened a path for him. He shared,

I took an art class, uh, drawing and painting class one. I took it for fun, for an easy "A", thinking that you know, just, I wanted to relax for my senior year. And I discovered a talent I didn't know I had, and so, I discovered that I was pretty good with drawing/sketching, somewhat painting. But I was also, I wasn't really sure what to do with that talent, not that it was my only talent that, it was my favorite. It was the talent that I that I felt good doing. It felt really good to do it; it felt good to show others, um, it's a sense of accomplishment when you're, when you make a decent piece of art and, and I knew I wanted to pursue that ... That's where I kind of got the idea of this is what I want to do, game design and animation.

Finally, Santiago, Jimmy, and Alfonso shared experiences with certain subjects, which gave them confidence and momentum toward their college journeys. Jimmy said the praise he received about his math abilities led him to continue with the subject. He stated, "when I was a kid I was good in math, even though I didn't actually assume I was, everyone told me I was, so I kept taking math, and now I am minoring in math." Santiago also described how he enjoyed

math and when asked what it was about math he enjoyed so much, his answer was, “getting the answers right.” Alfonso stated that the momentum of completing a course led him to continue to college. He said, “I started going to community college and, and finished English as a Second Language, and then I decided, okay, you know, I finished this, so I can just keep on going, and decided to go, you know, university, college.” The feeling of doing well in certain areas allowed these students to continue with these subjects and gave them confidence to do well in college.

Confidence in college. Participants described their confidence in being able to go to college in various ways. Maxwell and Antonio shared different examples. The same cousin Maxwell said exposed him to computers also invited him to stay in his dorm room on campus for a while Maxwell was in high school. He said being on campus all week made him feel confident and comfortable with the idea of college. Antonio described a person with a similar life story to his as someone that provided the confidence to try for more. He stated,

Seeing someone, seeing that, someone already did something, makes it you know, much easier for someone to do the same thing. Um, once, something that can't be done finally you know is done, lots of people start believing that they themselves can, and it's much more likely to happen. For me, that was an undocumented immigrant from California that went to community college, then college, and finally medical school and became a neurosurgeon. He is me, and that made me believe I could do the same thing.

This statement is just one instance of how participants described the development of confidence by seeing what was possible.

For many students, the ability to pay for college was intimidating and it limited the belief that college was possible. For Antonio, Maxwell, and Arnold the cost of college and their

financial situations appeared as barriers they would not be able to overcome at first, but once they found a way they felt confident they could complete their college goals. Antonio was limited by his immigration status and was not eligible for many forms of financial aid. Once his immigration status changed he felt doors open for him. Maxwell felt he could not go to college because of the financial burden but stated that a mentor gave him the confidence that his major choice would provide him with the financial ability to pay for school. Arnold received word that he received a scholarship, which led him to pursue college. He stated,

I came here in my 9th grade so, so I didn't really know much about what happens after high school. So when 12th grade came, I found out that, okay, there's college. I didn't know where I was going after high school. I started thinking about what am I going to, to do next, and, I applied to some scholarships, and I got one, so, that's when I decided to go to Community College Two (CCT).

Arnold also continued to the four-year university because of a scholarship program he learned about from his community college. While he explained that the scholarship did not actually pay for his university classes, the knowledge of the program and potential propelled him toward the four-year university. He stated,

I applied to here[NEU] only because, well I knew I had, I knew I wanted to go somewhere else, I didn't just want to have community college, but, I wasn't, I hadn't really applied anywhere because I didn't know how I was going to pay for it. So at CCT they had the Transfer Alliance Program, but um, they sent email saying they would pay for it, but, I did the application, and when I finished I found out that I had to go through some hoops to actually get them to pay for, so I said you know what, I'll just pay for it.

Even though the scholarship did not pay for school, it provided the confidence to be able to continue.

Lastly, several participants described feelings of excitement and confidence in just getting into college. Arnold, Alfonso, and Felipe each described these emotions. Arnold mentioned that since community college was an open admission school, he felt good about knowing he would be accepted before applying. Alfonso recalled being excited that he was accepted to a university and how it made him feel like he could accomplish his goals. Felipe shared how it felt for him to be accepted to college when he stated, “I mean at the end, in getting all this positive feedback from multiple colleges, was like, to accept you, it’s a good feeling.”

Loss of confidence and intimidation. Confidence can be a reassuring feeling, but it can also be the cause of uneasiness as well. For some participants the loss of confidence was experienced during their college journey and before. Some also gave examples of intimidation that hindered their pursuit of college initially. The loss or absence of confidence demonstrates how the internal desire to push forward can be hampered.

Pablo, Felipe, and Hector each described situations in college where their confidence was shaken. For Pablo and Felipe, struggles in certain classes caused them to change their majors. Pablo initially started out pursuing engineering as a major but stated that both math and physics were too hard and it caused him to change his major to chemistry. Felipe showed how his lack of confidence in a subject led him to pursue a different major when he described his attempt at his first major, “I wanted to do architecture but since I don't really have big enough brains for that I decided to go communication studies.” For Hector, his confidence was shaken before he started

college. Hector described a situation where counselors discouraged students from pursuing college degrees when he shared,

We had counselors that would push us toward ... VoTech [vocational technology]. They would kind of push some folks to VoTech and there were issues cause they were pushing like um Hispanic kids, pretty much non-white kids, to go to VoTech or just go to a tech school rather than college. It made me think twice about whether I should follow this path or not.

For Arnold, Felipe, Momtepeque and Frank, intimidation came in different forms and from different sources. Arnold described his first-generation college status as an intimidating factor because he felt that other students had better chances. Felipe mentioned that all of his classmates had ambitions of going to highly respected state schools and their college preparations made him fear he would never be able to compete and would therefore not be accepted to a college. Momtepeque described being scared and not preparing for college because of the fear, although he stated he was unsure about the source of the fear. For Frank, specifically college was a source of intimidation and he expressed a lack of confidence of being able to be a college student. He shared that,

College was kind of like a vague, mystical place, where only really smart people go to. And um, I guess there is a, well at least for me anyways, I felt that it was very difficult to get into an institution, um, a good one, anyways. And um, at least it always seemed um, a cool place to go to if you actually got in. Um, I always found it difficult for me to see myself at a college, even though eventually during high school, I did know I wanted to go, but I always found it hard to picture me at a university... I think it is because you don't really see many Hispanics, or I didn't

see many Hispanic people go to college, you know, the common perception of college students is, um, the Caucasian person or a black person.

Despite this lack of confidence, Frank and the others pushed forward to attend college. For some participants, this push was an expectation of their family.

Expectation of college. Later I discuss in detail how participants felt that completing the college journey was the goal of their families. For several participants, this expectation also impacted their confidence. Santiago's success in high school led to expectation and confidence from his family. He stated,

I mean, yea, I've always been, I was, pretty well rounded I was valedictorian of my high school. So, yea, I took history courses and everything, science, biology, chemistry and all that but overall, I took engineering courses, in high school.

Those were my favorite, so that is what I stuck with. I was always good in those and knew I could do that in college. My family also knew that I would succeed if I put my mind to it.

Pablo's family enrolled him in private school in the hope that would improve his college options. He said,

I always thought I would go to college... it was just, I went to private school, so like, my parents paid good money, 'cause they thought this is gonna give him[me] a better chance to like, move along the process, getting into a decent college to get a degree. That's always been the end game.

Pablo also said that going to college in his household was, "non-negotiable, I really don't have a say in the matter, it is unfortunate, they pay for my food, they pay for my home, so, I'll go through the process for them." Maxwell expressed a similar point about the assumption of

college for him. He shared, "I think, there's always been like, a predisposition, like a thought, overlying, underlying that, it's kinda felt like I was always going to go college. It wasn't, it never felt like I wasn't going, it was always a definitely."

Defining what is Normal

Participants detailed how they feel like going to college was not normal for them and how that encouraged or discouraged them from pursuing college degrees. Within this theme are four sub-themes; each involves a component of normalcy as expressed by the participants. These subthemes include: messages of what is normal for Latinos; the types of jobs seen as normal for Latinos; the internalization of what is normal for Latinos; and finally, what is seen as normal on college campuses for Latinos. Many of the participants declared wanting to break these ideas of what is normal and become more than was expected as reasons for wanting to go to college.

Messages of Latino normalcy. Participants described what they understood to be normal for Latinos and where these messages came from. Maxwell, Momtepeque, Hector, Alfonso and Arnold all discussed various messages they perceived or received. Maxwell and Momtepeque mentioned messages from their family. Maxwell described how for his family going to college was not the normal route. He said,

I think, there is, that there is like, it's like, um, there's social pressures I think, like my family, ever since I was young they had like their own image for me, they kinda put my life in stone before I had chance to live my life, they had this like this predisposition like, oh, my son will be a soccer player and he will work hard, and he will not go to school, and that's not right, I don't think it's right.

Momtepeque noted that there was a lack of role models for him among the Hispanic population he was familiar with which caused him identity issues and struggles with his ethnicity. He recalled,

Originally I was ashamed of being Hispanic because I didn't have any positive role models that I looked up to. My dad and a bunch of his family members and their friends, a lot of them back in the day, some of the behavior has changed now, but back in the day a lot of them were drunk a lot. Would cat call all the time in front of my mom and me. Me and brothers we were also treated like trophies, 'this is my wife these are my kids, and that's it.' So, I was almost ashamed of being Hispanic, not almost, I was ashamed of being Hispanic because I didn't have any positive role models.

Alfonso discussed his thoughts on where these messages may come from. He shared,

Parents don't encourage their kids to go to college; they encourage their kids to go to work, to help em. It's not bad helping family because you know I understand. I know we as Latino, we are, we are a coming from a collectivistic society. That means we see what is better for the group, instead of what is better for me, you know. Like here is individualistic society so I think, it's you know, I'm not saying it's bad, or wrong, we are just like that you know.

Other participants in this theme and future themes referenced their family members as examples, which also provided messages of what was normal. These messages resonated and provided a catalyst for a change for some.

Both Arnold and Hector referenced these ideas of what is normal for Latinos as motivation to make changes. Arnold described what he saw other Latinos doing. He said, "If I

hadn't come to college I probably would have been like the other Hispanics, you know what I'm saying, like the other Hispanics in the streets and stuff like that." Hector also cited not wanting to be like other Hispanics as a part of what pushed him to serve as a role model for others in general. He shared,

I want to, one of the, I want to, pretty much not be a statistic 'cause I know a lot of Hispanic, 'cause I consciously think about it, the fact that, especially in my major there are not a lot of people like me... so I just like going out and kind of like, kind of serving like a testament or role model.

Expressing these ideas of how they see other Latinos demonstrated the messages participants have received. These messages also played out in how they viewed other Latinos around them and the types of jobs they were doing.

Types of jobs that are seen as normal for Latinos. Jobs and opportunities were a reason for the pursuit of college degrees and part of the story of some of the participants' families. This subtheme shows how participants viewed the types of jobs Latinos were associated with and how that perception helped participants push them to want more. Felipe, Frank, Santiago, Alfonso, Arnold, Jason, and Hector described what they saw as the types of jobs that were normal for Latinos.

Felipe, Arnold, Frank, Santiago, and Alfonso all discussed seeing their uncles and fathers doing construction work and their mothers doing custodial work. Felipe received a lesson from an uncle on what someone can expect to see if they do not pursue a college degree. He recalled that,

My uncles, each one of them were working in factories or working in the fields, or like, some sort of hard labor job, and each time I went to go visit one, actually

one, he invited me to go with him to go to work, and like you know, okay fine, and, then it was the toughest job I ever did for one day. It was like if you don't want to do this for the rest of your life, make sure you get that education you get that degree so you don't have to be here you can be the boss you can be the CEO instead of being the worker.

Arnold had experience as a construction worker himself, and his father worked as a construction worker. He stated that he did not see himself in that same position, "I feel like, yea I can do that but, that's not, that's not me, I want to be like in a better position." These are examples of how the exposure to these jobs created an internal desire to do more.

Hector and Jason shared stories about how the types of jobs for Latinos perpetuated messages of normalcy. Jason recalled working a summer job in construction with his uncle and how one of the guys on their crew joked that jobs sites are always full of Latinos. Hector stated his desire to let customers know it was not normal for him as a Latino to be working retail. He said, "I don't want it to be normal that I work at a retail store. I do this on the side, I don't want them to think, I'm expected to be here." These examples show how consistently seeing people that looked like them working certain jobs led to expectation from others, but those expectations also became internalized for some of the participants.

Internalization of what is normal. The expectation of what types of jobs or what is normal for Latinos is the perpetuation of these messages they see or hear. Antonio, Jimmy, and Maxwell described the impact of the internalization has on them. Antonio discussed the impact when he stated,

Lots of times we, we, have beliefs about ourselves, self-limiting beliefs, we're not capable about doing things, like we're not good enough, we're not smart enough,

um, you know we, we're, workers, and that's what we come to do. And that kinda motivates me to prove that belief wrong, and just, be one of, one more who, you know, goes to college and does something different than what everyone else believes.

For Maxwell, the internalization of these messages led him to think of himself as being at a disadvantage in college as a Hispanic student. He shared that he felt like he was at a disadvantage when he compared himself to his other non-Hispanic friends because they were able to rely on the experiences of other family members who had attended college before. This instance establishes a recurring cycle of what people are supposed to do because of what their family or parents have traditionally done.

Jimmy discussed how information coming in created a stereotyped vision for some, but he was able to decipher it. He stated,

I think the hardest part about being a minority is we feel we are inferior, and we think that. Oh, the media portrays it too. We think hey, we should all, or there are a lot of black people that go to jail, or Hispanics are being incarcerated because they are doing some drug dealing and, what happens with that we assume, we relate that picture, to what we are eventually going to do, it's not true. You really can do what you want.

Changing the normal of Latinos on college campuses. With the general ideas of what is normal in terms of messages and jobs, there was also discussion of what is normal for Latinos on college campuses. Participants discussed what they noticed and felt on campus and how they wanted to change those ideas of what was normal. Antonio, Felipe, Santiago, and Maxwell all

described the lack of Latinos on college campuses. Hector, Jon, Antonio, and Frank each specifically discussed how they want to change the look of college campuses.

Antonio, Felipe, Santiago, and Maxwell specifically noted the lack of Latinos on campus. Antonio noticed the lack of Latinos on campus and had seen it as a trend. He pointed out, "Most of my classes are, um, everything but Hispanic or Latino, I see very few coming from, starting from middle school up to high school, community college, classes has been by myself in a way. Maybe it's just, Baltimore, but I've seen it, um, for the most part, my career as a student."

Felipe and Santiago stated they were surprised they did not see more Latinos on campus because they came from high schools with larger Latino populations. Maxwell questioned why this was not a bigger issue and wonder what the experience of other Latinos is like. He stated,

"I'm always wondering like; why don't more Latino people go to college... I think that's the only thing that has really affected me... like, wow, I'm, this is so little amount of people that are Latino that go to college and like that's always, like always been, like my motivation. To prove people wrong. I wanna tell them that I can do this. I'm here for a reason."

Hector, Jon, Frank, Antonio, Felipe, and Santiago all stated in various ways they want to change what is normal. Hector and Santiago both mentioned getting more Latinos into STEM majors as a way to change what is normal for Latinos on college campuses. Antonio and Felipe both discussed how changing what is normal for college students was a motivation for them to continue their college education. Jon wanted to be an example that refutes the negative image people have about Hispanic students. He said, "I definitely wanted to remove any stigma of the ability of Hispanic students, or minority students in general."

Felipe and Frank both described a lack of Latinos on college campuses. Frank summed up the thoughts when he stated,

The idea that being a Hispanic college student, um, I don't find it to be a very common thing, um, I guess statistically there are a good amount maybe, but um, at least to my visual eye, I don't see many and so, and so that pushes me to, to, continue to pursue my educational career, my academic career, um, in order to like, not kill that stigma, but just change it just shape it differently into more positive image for a Hispanic American.

The lack of representation motivated these students to want to do more and make a change.

Arnold made a comment that summed up what the idea of normalcy would be for Latino students. Arnold said originally he felt extraordinary, but now felt normal about going to college. He recalled, “the First few years I felt like a special cookie, but now I just feel like more normal. I’m going to college, but that's just a part of the experience, it doesn't make me any better or anything like that.” When asked what it would be like for him to complete his college degree, Arnold continued with the idea of it being normal. He said, “I don't know I guess, I just want to be a normal person. I don't really want it to be a big thing in my life. I just want it to be something normal. It's just a normal part of life.”

Careers/Better Pay

Participants indicated that they hoped their college degrees or college experiences would lead to careers or jobs. They discussed the salaries and the types of work that could come from a college education. For most, the salaries and types of work described would be different from what they saw from members of their family or other Latinos.

Antonio and Jon both specifically mentioned well-paying jobs when they described what they hoped to achieve with a college degree. Antonio described several reasons for pursuing a college degree, but he also included his desire for a career with a high salary. He said he wanted “to inspire my family, my community those around me to continue or to even start pursuing a degree or you know higher education in general, and to get a good paying high paying job.” Jon also echoed the sentiment of wanting to help others but also expressed a desire to use his college education to get a well-paying job.

Momtepeque, Red, and Santiago each indicated that obtaining a job that earned income as desires for their college degree outcomes. Momtepeque focused on paying off his debts and said, “Honestly, any job that would take me at the bachelor's level, I would consider in order to pay off my bills and my debt.” Red stated he wanted to financially support himself and not have to worry about being able to pay his bills. He believed that a career might give him the ability to “financially support myself without having to worry about the next bill, or having to worry about, my parents having to pay.” Frank also stated that feeling of financial independence. Santiago mentioned that his parents were most interested in him getting a job to be able to contribute financially to the family. For these students, the income from their college degrees serves as a motivator, but for others, the types of jobs they could get without a degree also concerned them.

Antonio and Felipe both used their uncles as examples of the types of work they wanted to avoid. Antonio discussed his uncles and the work they did and how he wanted something more. He shared,

Speaking to my uncles who work in construction and just um, them telling me of their experience of work every day having to get up before the sun comes up to

drive two hours to a work site where you often have no air conditioning in the summer or heating in the winter. Um, you know the hard work, you know, that you had to do. That they have to do every day. Kind of, you know that all, kind of, they told us, telling me about that, kind of um, reinforced the, um, the idea of getting an education so we wouldn't have to do all that.

Felipe referenced his uncles and the work they did as well, specifically recalling an experience he had with an uncle at a certain job site that gave him the experience of the type of hard work that he associated with not having a college education. For other participants, working conditions were also a factor in the types of careers they wanted.

Felipe, Frank, and Jimmy described how they did not want difficult or arduous labor-intensive jobs after college. Arnold went a step forward and described the type of position he was interested in the long-term. Frank echoed up the sentiments of Felipe and Jimmy of not wanting to work in similar capacities as family members in low-paying, stressful jobs. He stated,

I don't want to work forever; I don't want to work a low wage minimum wage job, like my mom did, or does, and um, like a lot of other Hispanics do as well. I wanted to go beyond what the generalization of the image of a Hispanic is, and in a sense, that also was my motivation. To basically break that image that so many, um, particularly Americans have about Hispanics, that a lot of times, you know they, and a lot of times it is true, but you know that they work minimum wage jobs or dirty jobs, unwanted jobs basically. And I wanted to; I personally want to break that thought by at least doing something with my own life.

Arnold talked about a career from the sense of a long-term outlook. He stated, "First I want to be a programmer, but after that, I would like to go to the management positions, and um, and like,

have a team and be in charge of a team.” Later he followed that up with, “I want to be like in a better position, you know, if you're working and, like um, like in construction, people will look down on you, sometimes. But, but like having, like having an office job, you get more opportunities, stuff like that.”

Support with Enrolling in College

Lack of support emerged as a theme among the participants, which acted as a barrier for pursuing college. Students shared situations where they did not feel prepared for college for various reasons and stated their family did not help or understand the process of going to college. There were also examples of lack of support in different ways and situations which lead participants to be motivated to help themselves. Finally, teachers and counselors were mentioned as assisting some students with the college process.

Students described different reasons for not feeling prepared to apply to college. Momtepeque also described a lack of preparation and understanding of the process. Antonio cited his immigration status as the reason he did not prepare as he should have for college. Specifically, Antonio discussed being an undocumented immigrant in high school and not seeing an opportunity to go to college in the United States. Because of that, he did not make the necessary preparations for college initially. He described his thought process when asked about the process of applying to college, “I hadn't even taken the SATs because I was thinking about going back [to Mexico] you know. There weren't any opportunities in my mind of continuing here so I could have rationalized it that way. Momtepeque stated that he was unaware of what he needed for the college application process because “nothing was mentioned about college, not until tenth and eleventh grade when we had to take the PSATs, um, other than that, nothing at all.” Jon also mentioned the lack of direction or instruction when it came to preparing for college

and stated how he felt his first generation college status might have contributed to his unpreparedness. He expressed, “being a first gen college student, it’s um, I guess, a little bit of stress and frustration. Just knowing that, at least in my immediate family, there isn't much in terms of help.”

For other students, the inability to ask their family at home came up again. Red, Pablo, Felipe, and Arnold all stated that their family did not understand the college process, so they were unable to ask for help. Red mentioned that he did not tell his parents about his decision to attend until after he paid his housing deposit. Red did mention he attempted to speak to his parents about the process but was unable to get them to understand fully. He recalled,

I’ve tried, explaining it to them, they just, they just happen to don't get it. I really wish they were able to understand how the college process works here because neither of them went beyond, my father went to, never got his high school degree, the equivalent in Mexico. My mom never beyond the equivalent of middle school or even grade school. She never got beyond that, so they just, they don't know how the education process is like here.

Pablo also cited his mother’s education level from her home country as the reason she did not understand the college process in the United States. Felipe discussed his parent's lack of understanding and, as described later, said he wanted to be able to help his children with the process in the future. Arnold expressed a similar situation with his family not understanding. He stated, “I mean, I didn't really have someone at home to ask for help, so that was a bit harder.”

Two other participants also mentioned their inability to talk about these experiences. Felipe and Maxwell both discussed how they did not have anyone to talk to about the college process. Felipe pointed out that he had no peers that were going to college and was unable to talk with anyone. Maxwell noted his lack of support came from not having anyone close to him that he could talk with and discuss his collegiate plans. He described how that impacted his relationship with his family and how it felt for him,

If I ever have an issue I always find myself, it's always, I guess, when I have problems, like in school or in life, I have trouble finding people to talk to.... I think that's definitely one thing that I've kinda been lacking. I've always been lacking like a mentor; ... I want to talk about these things, about what I'm doing. I want to talk about the research I'm doing, I want to talk about the papers I'm doing, but it just doesn't hit them, the way it hits me.

Again mentioned were isolation and lack of a peer group, but this time more as a motivator for the participants. Alfonso, Frank, and Red all said that because they did not have any help from peers or their families, they took it upon themselves to search and find the information they needed. Alfonso mentioned how he had to do for himself as well and the use of online research to help as he said, "I did everything by myself. Online, everything online." Frank also stated he used the Internet for help with finding what he needed to do. For Antonio, the lack of help served as motivation. Antonio mentioned that not having anyone to help him with the process hindered him initially, but he used that as motivation to learn more for himself. He stated,

I would say not having, um, someone to guide me to tell me how to do things is a disadvantage in away but can also be an advantage because it forces you to look

for things by yourself. To, um, learn how to reach out, look around campus resources to take advantage of everything that is, you know, available and it just I guess it teaches you to be to be a go-getter, forces you to do these things.... I guess just, related to that, is not knowing you know what's available in terms of opportunities um, um, not knowing you know what's, what to do next.

These students found the information for themselves, but others found help. Santiago, Momtepeque, and Red each described teachers or counselors who helped them with the college admissions process. Santiago stated, "I had people in my school, like my career counselor, um, teachers that helped me out." Red mentioned help and support from a teacher and a program designed to prepare students for the college process. He said about his teacher, "She is sort of like my second mother, sorta way; she's really helped me through a lot. She's always, like, secretly said, like, 'Hey, don't forget about college'."

Momtepeque also specifically cited the help from a counselor who took note of his academic record and pushed him to consider college. He stated, "The only reason that I ever went college was because of my counselor, my eleventh-grade counselor...if it wasn't for her, I would not be where I am today." Momtepeque continued, he said he felt his situation would have been different if he had more support earlier in his high school career. He stated,

If I had a counselor in high school that caught me early, and guided me through the steps where ... I probably would have gone to the University of NE and graduated from their school of education there, and I would have been done four years ago.

Mom as Motivator

Participants shared how their mothers were their motivation for pursuing college degrees in various ways. Several shared examples of their mothers making sacrifices in support of their education and showing expressions of excitement in their accomplishments. Some instances also demonstrated, direct and indirect encouragement to pursue college degrees, or the potential to discourage the pursuit of a college degree.

Pablo, Felipe, and Jason all mentioned instances where their mothers made sacrifices to support their educational journeys. Pablo thought about his mother's sacrifices as a form of inspiration for him. He said, "If I ever feel down, it, that itself, that keeps me going, like, aw man, just think about your mom, how much she's gone through to get you to this point." He discussed how his mother wanted him to succeed in college to avoid the stereotype of being "a single mother, especially Latino mothers, they always like, stereotyped as like, as not as good parents." Felipe talked about how his mother would sacrifice to work overtime so that he could have money for college and Jason mentioned that his mother would trade shifts at work just to attend school functions.

Hector and Jimmy described how their mothers motivated them by discussing their future responsibilities to take care of themselves and future generations. Jimmy revealed advice his mother specifically gave him. He recalled,

My mom actually told me this; it may sound pessimistic, but it is realistic. So she told me, 'That one day, I'm going to die, and I am not going to be here to help.'

And ever since that day I realized, oh shit, I should probably make sure that I can take care of myself, and I can live without her because eventually, yea, she's

going to die or I am going to have to move out. I just realized, okay, I should probably get my shit together.

Hector's mother challenged him to do well in school so that he could be an example and take care of future generations. His mother informed him that each generation has to do well so that the next generation can do even better. He seemed to embrace this concept and the increased responsibility it carried, but participants also described the pride and joy their mothers expressed.

For Felipe, Jason, Jimmy, and Alfonso, the pride and excitement their mothers showed made a lasting impact on their motivation to pursue college degrees. Felipe pointed out the pride his mother showed him when he was accepted to college despite his reservations about the accomplishment. He said, "It doesn't really feel like I've accomplished anything huge, but, to my mom, it's like I'm accomplishing something amazing. Even though I don't feel it that way, she thinks it's one of the greatest feats ever." Felipe continued to talk about his mother's excitement and how far back it went. He recalled,

When I was first enrolled into the elementary school because my mom was really excited. I could see how excited she was for me to go to school. And since then, um, I kind of know, alright, if going to school and getting an education makes my mom happy then I want to go to whatever.

Jimmy also discussed how excited his mother was for him when he was accepted to college and how she reacted with elated screams and cheers. Alfonso also pointed out that his mother was the first person he told when he was accepted to college and how her reaction beamed with excitement.

Alfonso and Jason both described how their mothers were proud of them and how they encouraged them to pursue college. Alfonso detailed how his mother encouraged him and trusted him to do well in school which provided him with a sense of reassurance. He stated,

My mom, um, she, always told me, that um, you know, I should go to college, you know, and study something, she's like, go ahead and study something; she told me you, smart, go ahead and do it. She always encouraged me, and actually, she always trusted me because I mean, when I was a little kid, I remember that I, I always, you know, I always did my homework on time. Um, my mom she never checked my homework, and she was never worried about my grades because I knew I wanted to get good grades and um, um, you know she, she never, she never told, I mean, she was never worried about me. I mean about, you know, getting good grades and stuff like that.

Jason stated his mother “always took pictures and talked about how far I could go. My dad was always proud too, but it was my mom that would talk about you can do this or try that.” That encouragement propelled him to continue to push for his college degree.

Maxwell brought a different perspective. While he said his mother was happy for him and was proud of him, he worried what could happen if she lost faith in him or college. He recalled,

I've always had that fear that my mom is just going to say, 'this isn't working out you should just go work.' Like, that's just a fear I have a lot of the time... I feel like, um, my mother, kinda, she doesn't, it's like she likes that I am studying but there some, there's moments where she doubts me. And I think that yea, well not just doubting me but also like doubting, um, like college or the idea of college.

With each of these participants describing how strong of a force their mother was on their college journey, it is clear they had an external impact which later was internalized by the participants. Intrinsic motivation was also evident in the discussion of how the college degree would lead to more than just a job.

More Than a Job

Participants described outcomes of a college degree that were something other than a job or career. Some expressed that they craved education in general and the ability to be a critical thinker. Others cited the desire to achieve their dreams, be an inspiration to others or become stable in life. These participants and instances detail a longing to achieve more from their degrees than just an end goal of a career.

Jon, Alfonso, and Antonio indicated that they would like to be an inspiration to their families, but also they would like to earn the degrees because of the importance of education itself. Alfonso was aware that his ultimate goal career or job did not require him to complete a college degree but he still wanted to finish for other reasons. He stated,

I know that I don't need a degree for that, but I really want to have, the um, the instructions, to get me there... I think, um, it will help, like I said, to, you know make me a better, a better, citizen.... I want to be the motivation for my family... I want a degree because I totally believe education is very, very important.

Antonio echoed Alfonso's thinking stating he too wanted to be an inspiration to his family and increase his critical thinking skills. Antonio claimed he wanted to use the college experience to "find my strengths find my, my, sort of, um, purpose in life." Jon also stated a reason to pursue college was to gain knowledge. The value of the college degree for these three participants was in the education; for others, it included more.

Maxwell and Felipe saw the college degree as a way to define themselves within their families. Maxwell wanted to use the degree as a means to transcend his family's life course and establish himself and his story. He stated,

I want to be independent so badly. I want to live by myself. I want to like, because I'm definitely not like my family, and like, I definitely want to make my own story. Like right now, I'm kinda part of my family's story, oh, he's just another part of the family, and he's and he's you know, studying, you know, like, I don't want to be part of that story. I don't want to be part of their, kinda like, associated with them almost. I don't want people to think like, I don't want my kids to go to college. I don't want people thinking that I definitely, I think like, it's to the point where like our views are so different like, I kinda don't want to be associated with them, to like that point.

Felipe explained that an education carried a broad meaning as he recalled,

When I was growing up when they told me about college. It was more than an education, it was um, like, a status, per say. Cause not, like, almost nobody in my family had a college degree, nobody went to high school. So as soon as I graduated high school everybody was just excited and thrilled.

Jimmy, Hector, and Red all stated they wanted to pursue the college degree because they sought to improve their lives in various ways. Jimmy wanted to serve others, which is a theme to follow, and saw the degree as a way to have a complete life. He detailed his thoughts as, "how do I continue toward a path toward success where I am having a fruitful, full life. Where I am being a productive part of my society... how do I improve my society so that you leave a lasting impact." He continued and spoke about finding passion while in college and the process of

discovery. Red saw the college degree as an opportunity to be more stable and create a foundation for his future. Hector recalled a story of him and his co-workers making it known they were all trying to improve themselves when he mentioned,

All of us are going school. So none of us intend to be career employees for Retail Store. Even my boss is going to school and is trying to work for the government. We got other guys that are trying to join the military, or, or, in school and they want to work for the Department of Defense. Things like, we're all, we're kind of, a lot of camaraderie cause we're all trying to make it better for ourselves.

The college degree was a way to fulfill a dream for some participants. Frank talked about accomplishing his dreams through his college degree while mentioning possible careers, but the dream was more than just the job. Frank talked about how a college degree would help him achieve his dreams. When asked what accomplishing a college degree would mean for him, he declared,

Accomplishing your goals. Accomplishing your dreams. Being successful, the only person that really has any say in that is yourself and I think it was my decision as to, as to pursue what I wanted to do with my life, to pursue my goals, and actually say yes to them rather than put them aside or say I'm going to do it later, or maybe I'll do it eventually, is what really help shape my life as to what it is now.

Frank further described some of those dreams when he said, "I want to achieve my goals, um, to be a successful game animator, designer. I want to express my views through my career paths, both, um, both culturally and um, religiously, among other aspects." He also mentioned some other advantages to completing the degree as he stated, "Well the college degree shows how

much, that you been, um, educated to a high degree and um, it looks really well on your resume to say that you studied this at this institution and you succeeded.”

Antonio and Felipe discussed how a college degree was more than just a job because of the opportunities to choose a career and what that could mean. Antonio referenced how his family wanted him to be able to choose a career he wanted, instead of just having to work in a manual labor job like they were limited to since they did not have college educations. For Felipe the job option was part of his consideration when thinking about college. Felipe also considered college because he wanted to be able to create grand structures. He described thinking about his career option,

I came to Baltimore, like my junior year in high school and I saw all these huge buildings that were in the sky, the cityscape. And I asked one of my cousins, he's actually an architect, like how do they do this? Yea, you have to like design architecture, he just introduced me to the whole concept of architecture, and that is how I got interested. It influenced me big time that I wanted to go to college because, um, number one, not anyone can design a building, it can't just start building and it be looking like you know like an amateur, because it won't be acceptable and there's like laws or codes, um, so that was a big motivation for me. And not, it wasn't because of the pay, I really thought, wow, this is like amazing. Even this building, I look at it from every angle, um, so that's why I was, I was really motivated by that.

These participants described reasons beyond a career or job to pursue education, but some also mentioned the financial hardships they encountered when considering college.

Financial Barriers

Participants recalled how not having the means to afford college or not knowing where the money for college would come from discouraged them from pursuing college degrees. Some instances involved the immigration status of these students and how that impacted their decision. Others discussed unconventional financial concerns and support of their family as issues that concerned them even more than tuition. Also, understanding financial aid options for school and alternatives to college were mentioned by participants when discussing financial hardships as obstacles for college.

For two participants, immigration status was as an issue complicating their financial status for college. Both Antonio and Red mentioned that being undocumented immigrants made college seem like it was not an option for them. Antonio cited federal and state laws that were passed late in his high school year that gave him an option for college. Red also had similar issues with his immigration status throughout high school years and noted,

When I finally got my green card and, um, that it's very difficult to live beyond a certain stage without one. Um, it definitely makes one more appreciative and certainly more aware of the other people that don't have that opportunity and the opportunities that weren't open to me before I had one. I probably weren't have never went to college if I weren't able to get one because that is a lot of money I would have been charged.

Antonio replied, "being undocumented obviously raised the economic obstacles not being eligible for scholarships or financial aid. Um, I can't think of any other factors that um would prevent me from going to college." For these students, tuition was a primary concern, but for others, financial hardship meant more.

Santiago and Jon both discussed financial issues from aspects other than tuition. Santiago talked about his father's health issues and that if his father was unable to work, Santiago might have to drop out of college to help support the family financially. Jon's financial hardship and concerns included very specific issues but not traditional college tuition and fees. He detailed the following,

I've thought a lot about income right and everything that comes along with it.

Whether it be transportation or food, or just financial security, can be tough sometimes. My first couple of years I commuted via public transportation, that was a kinda like two hours one-way kind of deal. Like, yea, it was just not fun. [I] didn't have the means to get a car, now a day I borrow a car whenever available, and it's definitely helped but, um, yea, when a university isn't easily accessible to public transportation and there isn't any, much money in the house it is definitely hard.

Red, Maxwell, Arnold, and Hector all talked about affording college and the stress or fear they felt thinking about their options. Red was seeking to go out of state to college, but the reality of the costs prevented those options. He remembered, "I applied to so many out of state schools that I got accepted to, but money was a problem. I only applied to one in-state school...I didn't get in, and I started panicking." Maxwell was worried about the burden of tuition and feared taking out loans, but the help of a mentor led him to research the potential salaries in his chosen field, and he felt much better about his choice.

Arnold's father expressed concerns and issues with money as well. Arnold stated, "Um, he was, okay with it but he said that he couldn't help me financially. So it was pretty much... I would have to work to, go to college." After attending community college, Arnold was fortunate

to earn a scholarship, and that propelled him to enroll in the University even though the scholarship program did not work out. Hector's first attempt at college straight out of high school did not go as well as he wanted. He shared that he did not do well but knew he wanted to return to college and wanted to be sure that money would not be an issue for him. He stated,

I wasn't doing so hot... so I actually, one of the main reasons I ended up joining the military was because I didn't want money to be an excuse. I didn't want to have any other excuses so I can go back to school.

Other participants also discussed situations similar to Hector's example of considering alternatives and options. Pablo and Antonio discussed the possibility of returning to their home countries as an option for pursuing their college degree. Pablo stated that if he did not get admitted to what he considered a "really good in-state school" that he planned to go to Bolivia because college there was cheaper. As mentioned earlier, Antonio's immigration status made his college journey seem out of reach and he admitted to considering returning to Mexico to pursue his college dreams. Antonio discussed his fears of not being able to afford college because of his immigration status and how that changed because of federal and state policies. He described what it was like,

I was actually very nervous and unsure about what I was going to do about college. I had no way that that I saw of making it happen. I had no documentation, um, I was, um, I am undocumented, well I was undocumented, but you know back then. So I had no way of applying, or you know, I wasn't eligible for any financial aid, federal, state, and even some private scholarships weren't available to undocumented students. And they still aren't. So I had pretty much, um, a very limited and very slim kinda outlook of going to college. I wasn't going to be able

to afford it. My mother worked, but she wasn't you know going to be able to pay for it... I was considering going back to Mexico and continuing there because I always wanted to go to college, so I was thinking doing that and leaving everything here and going back over there to Guadalajara where I am from. Um, thankfully Obama passed the deferred action for childhood arrivals [DACA] and that kinda changed everything for me because it gave me a, um, work permit and it gave me protection from deportation and that, you know, allowed me to, to work, and to apply and go to community college. Also, the Dream Act that passed in Maryland, the Maryland Dream Act, gave undocumented students, um, children of immigrants in-state tuition; changed the whole game for me. Um, that was the turning point, so that's really what opened the doors for me.

For these participants, money was an obstacle for many reasons.

Being an Example

Students communicated that they were pursuing college degrees so that one day they might become role models for their children, family, or others in the future. They emphasized how going to college would serve as an example for younger family members. The students also noted how they wanted to be role models for others in their chosen fields.

Both Jimmy and Santiago specifically noted an aspiration to be role models for a population similar to their own background. Both participants discussed the need for role models within these populations and cited the lack of those role models in their own lives growing up. For them the desire to see more role models and to become role models helped push them to pursue college degrees. Santiago mentioned what the impact of a role model might do for others and how he wanted to impact the life of others that chose not to go to college. He explained that,

I feel like that has to do with they didn't have a role model. They don't have someone to look up to and had no one to encourage them so that motivates me to, so that one day I could possibly be that role model. So I could be, I could go to a school and see a little Latino kid, and they be like, 'Wow what does he do? He looks like me.' And I can tell them, and I can encourage them. I can show them to love math, show them to love engineering, building things, so they have better opportunities. So they're not in that same cycle their families came from. They came from struggling situations to struggle here and pass on the struggles to their family. So, I, I, I want them to know they can overcome that. They're here for a reason. Their parents came here for better opportunities and even though they may be struggling still, they're in a country where they gave you the opportunity to succeed, citizenship, and way more opportunity than they had in their original country.

Pablo and Maxwell also indicated they would like to be an example for others, specifically, the cousins in their families. Pablo noted that it made him feel empowered to be a good example to his younger cousins. Maxwell also specifically referenced his cousins and how he wanted to show a different path. He declared,

I kinda want to make, I kinda wanna show, that there is a difference. Because um, I have plenty of cousins that they haven't gone to college, and they are doing pretty bad right now, and I kinda want to be the difference, for like, at least for like, I want to set an example. Um, there been more than a few times where I've seen other people in my family, they kinda dropped out of it all and kinda, they kinda, they were doing good at one point then they kinda let it all go for

something else. I kinda want to be the difference, I guess. And it definitely, that definitely means a lot to me.

Alfonso, Hector, and Felipe desired to be examples for their families, specifically for their children and for future generations. Alfonso referenced his son and nephews as a motivation to show them what is possible. Hector wanted to set an example for his kids someday and to continue the generational progress of the family through academic achievements. Felipe also referenced the next generation continuing on the foundation he was setting and then building on that when he stated,

For now, it's just, focus on the bachelor's degree. Maybe the next generation can do the whole doctor or master's degree... It has helped me because I want to be able to say to my kids if I ever have kids, that you know, that, if I could do it, um, there is no reason they can't and maybe I could pass on some experience to them... So I want to provide at least some advice for like the next generation.

Helping Others

Some students explained how going to college provided an opportunity to help others that were similar to them, and the ability to make a lasting, positive impact on society or their community. These participants discussed how they saw themselves playing a role in the larger society with their college degrees. They were motivated to complete their degrees to be able to give to others.

Jimmy and Jason both specifically mentioned helping and serving the community as reasons for wanting to get a college degree. Jimmy felt his area of study and research could help resolve issues within his community. Jason indicated a desire to better his community out of a sense of responsibility. He stated,

For me, I feel like there are people back home that didn't get the same chance, for whatever reason. And, I, well, since I did, I feel like I need to make sure or try, to do something to help build them up. I want to make sure I never forget them because growing up they looked out for me and my family.

Jon, Red, and Santiago described how particular experiences in their lives motivated them to complete a college degree to help others going through similar situations. Each of them mentioned physical or emotional situations they had to endure and overcome. For them, the desire to help others incentivized the college degree. Jon discussed going through mental health issues when he was younger and how he wanted to help if others went through the same. Santiago decided he wanted to use his talents and focus his efforts on helping others because of his previous physical injuries. He stated,

Biomechanical and Biomedical would be more suitable because, yea, I was, I always thought about aerospace and stuff like that but I felt that I would make a bigger impact doing biomechanical or biomedical. Because I've had injuries and had surgery and it be great to, put my efforts into something that can help someone walk better one day or recover better, and have greater success in surgery.

Antonio and Jimmy discussed wanting to help society with their college degrees and the knowledge they gained. Jimmy expressed a desire to learn skills that would enable him to leave a lasting impact on society. Antonio mentioned that he found giving back to the greater good to be the main focus for him. He said,

My sort of, um, purpose in life is to kind of figure out what my skills are and what is needed in society. To kinda of find something, to create something to, um, to you know, make a living and give back to the community.

This desire to help others may not necessarily be able to be quantifiable or seen.

Ingrained in Larry by his grandmother was Larry's commitment to others. Larry declared,

She was always saying 'we need to think of we instead of me...if people cared about all people like family, the world would be better.' So I think if I can help others, it makes that real. I don't know what I will or can do, but I definitely, like, want to be better, or leave it better.

Fulfillment of a Promise

Participants also described the reasons their families made sacrifices and risked relocating to the United States. The promise of the family was to make sacrifices and risk relocating to the United States so their children could have a better life. These students discussed the plight of their family and how their choices led to opportunities for education and success. They also talked about fulfilling a sense of pride specific to their family.

Felipe, Larry, and Antonio described how their families sacrificed to come to the United States to provide them with the opportunity to have a better life. Antonio and Felipe related that they did not want their families to have to struggle with hardship, but rather to have options and choices. They talked about how the college degrees were the completion of the journey their parents started. Antonio stated,

That's one of the main reasons why my family came to the United States. They wanted to give us an opportunity to, um, be educated. To not have to work in construction like they have. Um, to give us you know a chance to pick something

that we liked to do instead of something that we have to do So they were very supportive, they were very happy, they were very, enthusiastic.

He continued to describe the sacrifices made for the chance to continue his education when he discussed his mother's job and how he,

Worked there over the summer, kinda gave me um, kinda opened my eyes to the sacrifice that she makes and that she has made for the past 12 years. Just to, you know, give me this opportunity, and it's, um, amazing to see that. When I went in and started working, and I saw that, the conditions and the hard work that, that, you know, that they do, you know, kinda of encouraged me to and inspired me to take advantage of the opportunity to go to college.

Santiago, Pablo, and Hector each expressed pride in being able to continue what their parents started and to carry their family story forward. For them, the fulfillment of the college degree would provide a sense of pride to honor their family and motivate them to push forward. Hector described how his family drove him. He stated,

My main motivation for it is to make my family proud. My mother always says, um, it is kind of a stretch of the saying but, 'a que mejor a la raza.' I mean there's some bad connotations to the saying, but my mother always says that the next generation has to be better off than the one before it. Even the fact that my mother is going to school right now and my father was going to school also, like, I have to do everything that they did and more so, so that my kids can do more than me and so on and so forth.

Summary

This chapter included an analysis of the University Materials, including Web pages, marketing material distributed by the institution to potential students, and specific recruitment programs. This information provided a frame of reference for the experiences shared by the 15 first generation Latino males interviewed. This chapter also described and provided support for ten themes: 1) Confidence, 2) Normalcy, 3) Career/Better Pay, 4) Lack of Support, 5) Mom as Motivator, 6) More than a Job, 7) Financial Barriers, 8) Being an Example, 9) Helping Others and 10) Fulfillment of a Promise. I presented these themes in order of prominence with instances provided by the participants supported through direct quotations. Despite each of these participants being self-identified first generation Latino males, each had varied backgrounds and stories. The convergence of instances of these themes by 15 individuals with different backgrounds demonstrated the pervasiveness of these experiences.

Chapter 5 includes analysis of these themes grounded in the theoretical framework and existing literature. It also includes instances of unexpected findings and provides implications for policy and practices for first-generation Latino males. Finally, chapter 5 includes suggestions for future research.

Chapter 5

Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

I conducted an intrinsic case study at a mid-sized public university in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States, referred to as NEU. I collected primary data from a review of University materials, individual interviews, and focus group interviews. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. What motivational factors influence first-generation Latino males at a mid-size public university in the Mid-Atlantic region to attend college?
2. How did extrinsic or intrinsic factors influence first-generation Latino males at a mid-size public university in the Mid-Atlantic region to attend college?

In Chapter four I discussed the results from my analysis of University materials and the 10 themes I found from individual and focus-group interviews. The 10 themes were, *Confidence*, *Normalcy*, *Career/Better Pay*, *Lack of Support*, *Mom as Motivator*, *More than a Job*, *Financial Barriers*, *Being an Example*, *Helping Others*, and *Fulfillment of Promise*. This chapter includes an analysis and discussion of the findings, a discussion of the position of this study, how it related to the results, and its congruence with current literature, unexpected findings, implications for policy and practice, and suggestions for future research.

Discussion and Analysis Linked to Self-Determination Theory

In this section, I describe details of Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self-Determination Theory of motivation. I also discuss and analyze the results of this study related specifically to extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation. The discussion and analysis of intrinsic motivation will also include information about the three components of intrinsic motivation which, according to Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000) are, competence, relatedness, and autonomy. Finally, this section will

examine the position of the themes found in this study along the spectrum of Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self-Determination Theory's continuum from nonself-determination to self-determination.

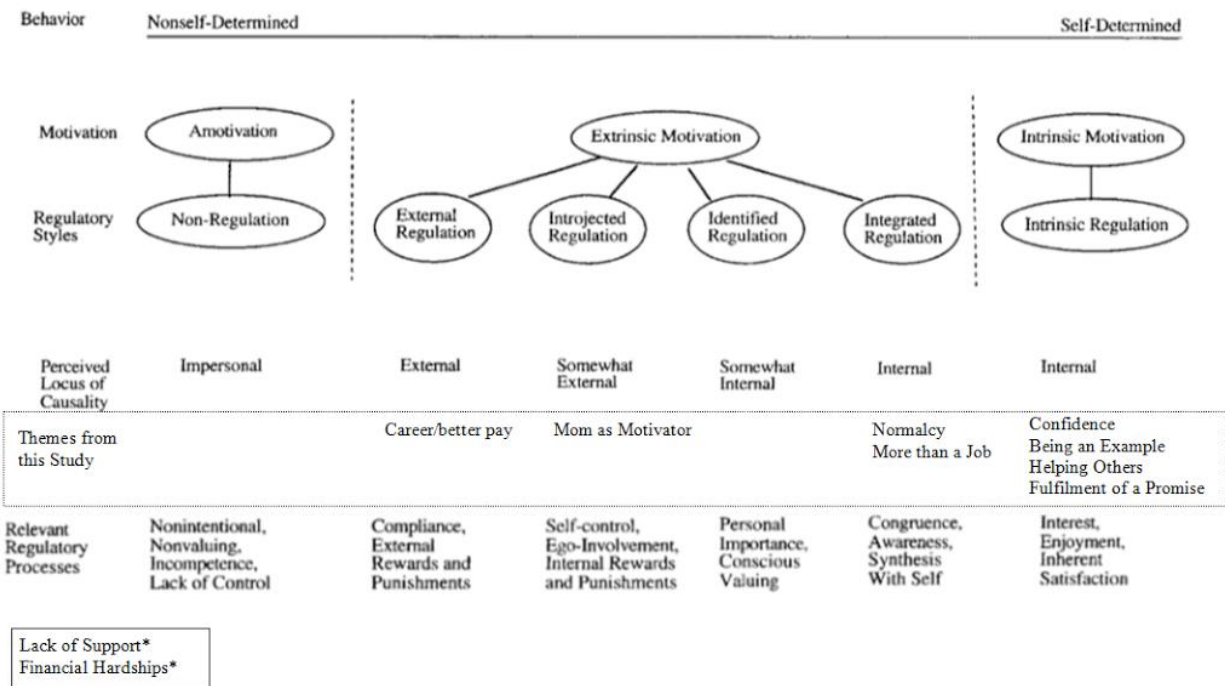
Position of Themes on Self-Determination Continuum

I placed the 10 themes found in this study on the Self-Determination Theory continuum in Figure 5.1. This image visually demonstrates how the findings of this study relate to the Self-Determination Theory and how the themes align on the spectrum of motivation. Next, I briefly describe the 10 themes and their position on the self-determination continuum.

Two of the themes, *Financial Hardships* and *Lack of Support*, were considered barriers and did not align with factors of extrinsic or intrinsic motivation. The other eight themes fit with different positions on the continuum. This diagram demonstrates the relationship of the themes found in this study to the Self-Determination Theory of motivation.

The theme, *Career/Better Pay*, because of external rewards, is positioned under extrinsic motivation and toward the more external boundary. *Mom as Motivator* is also a form of extrinsic motivation but considered somewhat external because there are some internal rewards described by participants in their relationships with their moms. Finally, under extrinsic motivation but closer to the internal boundary are the themes of *Normalcy* and *More than a Job*. These themes both have characteristics that align with congruence, awareness, and synthesis with self.

The remaining themes positioned on the self-determination continuum are under the area of intrinsic motivation. *Confidence*, *Being an Example*, *Helping Others*, and *Fulfilment of a Promise* each exhibit characteristics of interest, enjoyment, and inherent satisfaction. These themes and elements describing these themes are consistent with self-determined and internal behaviors.



**Themes identified in study but not on Self-Determination Continuum*

Figure 5.1 Self-Determination Continuum with 10 Themes Placed

Self-Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory presents motivation on a continuum beginning with amotivation, or the absence of motivation, moves along the continuum to extrinsic motivation, and culminates with intrinsic motivation. Deci and Ryan (1985) asserted that individuals who are motivated by intrinsic motivation factors are exercising self-determination whereas individuals that are motivated by extrinsic factors are closer to being nonself-determined. Figure 5.1 illustrates Deci and Ryan's continuum and includes the themes from this study positioned along the continuum.

One end of the spectrum of the Self-Determination Theory, labeled nonself-determined, is Amotivation. Amotivation is the absence of behavior or volition (Deci & Ryan, 1985). For this study, amotivation was not utilized to analyze or explore results. The purpose of the study was specifically to determine the motivations of first-generation Latino males, and therefore amotivation was not relevant.

The next area of the continuum is labeled extrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation involves sources of motivation from external sources and on the continuum is between nonself-determined behavior and self-determined behavior. External sources or extrinsic motivation factors involve external rewards and punishments, compliance on one end of the scale and moves toward congruence and awareness on the other end of the extrinsic scale. Deci and Ryan (1985) stated that children will often begin behaviors because they are required to do so, or to be compliant, but will then grow to enjoy the behaviors and continue to do them because of internal or intrinsic rewards. An example would be an individual practicing a musical instrument because their parents require them to, but then growing to enjoy playing the instrument or performing and therefore continuing with practice out of self-interest and to get better.

Finally, on the other end of the continuum is the area of intrinsic motivation or the self-determined behavior. Intrinsic motivation refers to internal motivations with characteristics such as enjoyment and inherent satisfaction. Deci and Ryan (1985) stated that behaviors motivated by intrinsic motivation factors demonstrate a person is self-determined to act. Deci and Ryan (2000) further specified that intrinsic motivation has three components, competence, relatedness, and autonomy. These three things “appear to be essential for facilitating optimal functioning of the natural propensities for growth and integration, as well as for constructive social development and personal well-being” (p.68).

Instances of Extrinsic Motivation

Extrinsic motivation factors in the Self-Determination Theory have characteristics of external rewards and consequences, compliance, self-control, internal rewards and punishments, personal importance, congruence, awareness, and synthesis with self (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). Even though some of these characteristics can be considered internal, they fall under the label extrinsic motivation factors because of the relation to self-determination. Several instances described in this study demonstrated extrinsic motivation factors.

The University Web pages offered some examples of extrinsic motivation such as highlighting alumni mentorship, a student competing in the Olympic games, and by stating the phrase “Exceptional Value” on an image in association with the University. These instances represented potential external rewards. Individuals seeking items these images and Web pages represent may see that as reason to want to enroll in NEU.

During the interviews, there were also several instances of extrinsic motivation. Participants cited an external reward in the form of jobs or careers. Momtepeque specifically stated that his desire was to obtain a job that would pay his debts. Frank stated, “I don't want to

work forever; I don't want to work a low wage minimum wage job, like my mom did, or does.” These were instances of an external reward motivating participants to pursue college degrees. Other examples of extrinsic motivation and external rewards included the feeling of pride or joy getting into college brought their mothers. Pablo and Antonio both talked about how their mothers reacted with screams of excitement when they learned about their college acceptance.

Participants also shared that they wanted to change what they saw as normal for Latinos and this is another example of extrinsic motivation. It is closer to an internal desire, but there are elements of congruence and awareness that position it under the area of extrinsic motivation. Frank summarized what several participants shared when he stated, “that pushes me to, continue to pursue my educational career, my academic career, um, in order to like, not kill that stigma, but just change it, just shape it differently into a more positive image for a Hispanic American.” This statement demonstrated an awareness of the impact that they as individuals can have on changing what was considered normal for Latinos. Several themes also carried characteristics of extrinsic motivation and will be discussed later in this chapter.

Instances of Intrinsic Motivation

Factors of intrinsic motivation are considered internal and described with words such as interest, enjoyment, and inherent satisfaction (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000) also further distinguished intrinsic motivation with three components, competence, relatedness, and autonomy. Instances from both the analysis of University Web pages and results of participant interviews provided occurrences of intrinsic motivation and the subsequent components specifically.

A pair of statements displayed on the Undergraduate Admissions Page were directly related to intrinsic motivation. The statements “Explore Your Interests” and “Follow Your

Passions” both call for individuals to seek out what is important to them. These interests and passions call for people to search inside themselves and pursue what they care about, which is a form of intrinsic motivation. Another phrase used on the Undergraduate Admissions Page was, “Class of Their Own,” and is a form of intrinsic motivation because it offers individuals a chance to be a part of that class and to define that class. These statements can be appealing to internal wants of individuals. The interviews also produced several instances of intrinsic motivations and examples of the three underlying components of intrinsic motivation: competence, relatedness, and autonomy.

Competence. Deci and Ryan (2000) stated, “social-contextual events that conduce toward feelings of competence during action can enhance intrinsic motivation” (p.70). These feelings of competence were demonstrated in instances discussed by participants during interviews. In particular, the participants described confidence in their academic abilities when given praise by others, such as teachers or family members for doing well in academic subjects.

Many participants stated teachers gave them praise for doing well in subject areas and the confidence they felt propelled them to succeed. Jimmy and Santiago both explained that doing well in math helped build their confidence in the subject and led to continued pursuits in math or math related subjects. When asked what he enjoyed about math specifically, Santiago replied, “getting the answers right.” Momtepeque described being inspired to pursue a career in teaching because of certain biology lessons in middle school. Arnold said he was inspired to catch up on the summer reading list by a teacher. He stated, “Well you know she made it look like whoever was, was at the level she wanted us to be, they were like cool I guess, so, I kind of wanted to be cool.”

The most frequent occurrences of all the themes were instances of confidence. Participants shared that the feeling of being competent in academic work led them to want to continue their academic pursuits. Antonio stated his success in learning English in elementary school gave him the confidence to want to do well and Alfonso said that as an adult learner, completing a course at his community college propelled him to continue his education. He shared, “I started going to community college and, and finished English as a Second Language, and then I decided, okay, you know, I finished this, so I can just keep on going, and decided to go, you know, university, college.” These instances of feeling like they were competent in academic areas enhanced their intrinsic motivation.

Relatedness. The component of relatedness refers to other people being connected to or impacted by the results of certain behaviors (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Participants in this study shared several instances of how other people were connected to their motivation to pursue a college degree. I already related some examples associated with mothers and teachers, but there were also other instances related to other people.

Through the two themes of *Helping Others* and *Being an Example*, participants shared instances which expressed concern for others. Alfonso gave an example that attributed his desire to help others to the worldview of Latinos. He said, “I know we as Latino, we are, we are a coming from a collectivistic society. That means we see what is better for the group, instead of what is better for me.” Jon, Antonio, and Jimmy also expressed wanting to help their community or society. Jimmy related these views as, “how do I continue toward a path toward success where I am having a fruitful, full life. Where I am being a productive part of my society, ... how do I improve my society so that you leave a lasting impact?”

Participants also expressed a desire to want to be an example for others. Pablo, Alfonso, and Maxwell all said they wanted to be examples for their children, nephews, or cousins. Hector also cited being an example to his family as an inspiration. He declared, “I have to do everything that they [my parents] did and more so, so that my kids can do more than me and so on and so forth.” Deci and Ryan (2000) asserted, “a secure relational base does seem to be important for the expression of intrinsic motivation” (p.71), as demonstrated in these examples.

Autonomy. The final component of intrinsic motivation is autonomy. Grolnick, Deci, and Ryan (1997) described the relationship between autonomy and intrinsic motivation as the desire to want to do an action without the control or interference of others. This further coincides with the Self-Determination Theory continuum by aligning self-determination with intrinsic motivation.

Participants expressed a desire for autonomy as they sought to accomplish their goals of a college degree and complete their dreams. Maxwell described his desire to be independent and to be able to support himself as a source of motivation. Arnold commented that his father invited him to work in construction, but that he wanted to pursue a career in computers because it was something he saw that aligned more with who he wanted to become. Alfonso and Red both summarized the concept of autonomy when they gave examples of how their parents trusted them to complete their homework and stopped checking on them. Red said, “They, they, trusted me enough to where I didn't tell them my grades...after 8th grade, they stopped checking my report card. Stopped checking my progress reports and just let me be me.”

Congruence with the Existing Research

Data in this study reinforced findings consistent with existing research. Research congruent with this study includes a study using the same theoretical framework with the same

target population but a different research method. Also other areas of congruence discussed in this section include influences to pursue higher education, finding information about college, and socio-economic background and the feeling of belonging.

Trevino and DeFreitas (2014) applied Self-Determination Theory to existing research and found a positive connection between motivation and academic achievement which is also consistent with findings in this study. Trevino and DeFreitas (2014) examined existing research on first-generation Latino students using the theoretical framework of Self-Determination Theory. Trevino and DeFreitas (2014) used research by Bui (2002), Prospero, Russell, and Vohra-Gupta, (2012) and Strage (1999) and isolated the Latino populations in those studies to explore motivation and academic achievement. Trevino and DeFreitas (2014) concluded a positive connection between Latino first-generation college students and motivation. These connections were consistent with findings in this study regarding motivations to pursue college degrees.

Previous research of first-generation college students concluded that the influence of parents was a key factor in college aspiration (Engle, 2007; Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Vargas, 2004). Participants in this study revealed that they were encouraged by their parents to pursue college degrees even though their parents did not graduate from college. Alfonso, Pablo, Antonio, Arnold, Jason, and Hector all referenced their parents as being influential in their decisions. Hector described how his parents gave him engineering themed toys to help inspire him to consider college and engineering as a possible major field of study.

For Latino students specifically, research has also concluded that parental influence and school personnel were contributing factors for students deciding to pursue college (Alfaro,

Umana-Taylor, & Bamaca, 2006; Azmitia, Cooper, & Brown, 2009; Bullington & Arbonna, 2001; Ceja, 2004; Keller & Whiston, 2008; Perez & McDonough, 2008; Plunkett, Henry, Houlbert, Sands, & Abarca-Mortensen, 2008; Zarate & Gallimore, 2005). Perez and McDonough (2008) interviewed Latino junior and seniors, high school counselors, and parents and linked the influence of parents to student desire to pursue college degrees. This research is congruent with the theme *Mom as Motivator* in this study. Participants such as Pablo depicted their mothers as a source of motivation for them as they sought college degrees. Pablo stated, “If I ever feel down, it, that itself; that keeps me going, like, aw man, just think about your mom, how much she's gone through to get you to this point.”

Participants in this study also discussed how teachers or counselors played a role in influencing their academic journeys consistent with previous research. Plunkett, Henry, Houlbert, Sanda, and Abarca-Mortensen (2008) used surveys and GPA analysis and found that both parent and teacher influence was key to the academic success of Latino students. Jimmy, Momtepeque, Antonio, Felipe, Frank, and Arnold, all cited teachers or counselors as individuals that influenced them to do better in school and encouraged them to pursue college. Momtepeque described middle school teachers as igniting his passion for education and credited counselors in both high school and college as motivating him to continue his education. Arnold described how a teacher in high school inspired him to do better when he said,

There was a teacher in high school that, um, she really inspired me to pursue college I guess. Like, um, well the first week I got there we were supposed to do summer reading, and I didn't do it because I didn't know about it. So, like the first week she kinda hated me, well not hated me but you know what I mean. Um, after that I tried to get to the same level as the class because I was behind because I

didn't do the summer reading, so I did like cliff notes on the summer reading, and like, she sparked my love for reading in general.

Participants in this study also stated they had to find information about college on their own which is congruent with existing research (Hurtado, Inkelas, Briggs, & Rhee, 1997; Torres, Reiser, Lepeau, Davis, & Ruder, 2006). Torres, Reiser, LePeau, Davis and Ruder (2006) found that first-generation Latino students did not know where to find information about college. Several participants also indicated not knowing where to find information and resorting to simply using Internet search engines. Frank and Alfonso specifically stated finding information online, as Alfonso recalled, "I did everything by myself. Online, everything online." Jimmy and Red also stated they had to find information by themselves and Momtepeque mentioned that he never received information about college until he took his PSAT exams. He said, "nothing was mentioned about college, not until tenth and eleventh grade when we had to take the PSATs, um, other than that, nothing at all."

Existing literature about Latino students and first-generation college students describes the impact of background and sense of belonging as risk factors or contributors to success among these populations which are consistent with instances found in this study. Mantsios (2007) and Kingston (2000) found that social class can be associated with the success of first-generation college students. Multiple participants, Santiago, Arnold, Alfonso, Frank, Antonio, Hector, and Jimmy, talked about their families and the types of jobs they held. They also talked about the struggles of their families working long hours, difficult or demanding jobs, and jobs in industries such as domestic service or construction. Jimmy stated,

I don't want to work forever; ... like a lot of other Hispanics do. I wanted to go beyond what the generalization of the image of a Hispanic is, and in a sense, that

also was my motivation. To basically break that image that so many, um, particularly Americans have about Hispanics, that a lot of times, you know they, and a lot of times it is true, but you know that they work minimum wage jobs or dirty jobs, unwanted jobs basically. And I wanted to; I personally want to break that thought by at least doing something with my own life.

The social class distinction was evident in jobs and industries their families worked, but the participants also reflected on the sense of belonging when discussing college as well. Ostrove and Long (2007) found that social class was strongly related to a student's sense of belonging and in turn associated with their academic and social adjustment to college and academic achievement. Strayhorn (2012) also found that sense of belonging had an impact on college students and their academic success and completion rates. Several participants described feeling different than their non-Latino peers such as Momtepeque, Jimmy, Red, Hector, Antonio, Arnold, and Frank. Frank specifically said,

Um, I always found it difficult for me to see myself at a college, even though eventually during high school, I did know I wanted to go, but I always found it hard to picture me at a university... I think it is because you don't really see many Hispanics, or I didn't see many Hispanic people go to college, you know, the common perception of college students is, um, the Caucasian person or a black person.

Unexpected Findings

Several findings in this study were unexpected and are discussed further in this section. The beginning of the section will explore how participants did not emphasize financial barriers preventing them from pursuing college, in contrast to existing literature. I then examine the

prevalence of instances and participants who discussed issues related to confidence and normalcy. I conclude this section with a discussion of the emphasis participants placed on others throughout the study.

There were only fourteen instances where participants declared financial barriers as a reason they were not considering pursuing college degrees. Of the ten themes identified in this study, only three other themes, *Being an Example*, *Helping Others*, and *Fulfillment of Promise*, had fewer instances mentioned than *Financial Barriers*. Several recent studies specifically cite lack of financial resources as a barrier specifically to first-generation college students (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013; Rondini, 2016; Wilbur & Roscigno, 2016). Specifically for Latino students, the availability of financial resources is considered a large factor that prevents access to higher education (Davis-Kean, Mendoza, & Susperreguy, 2012; Sanchez, Esparza, Colon, & Davis, 2010). Given these instances in the literature, I was surprised that lack of financial resources was not a more pervasive theme. Even when discussing financial barriers, five of the participants, Arnold, Pablo, Maxwell, Hector, and Antonio, stated money was an obstacle for them, but they were prepared to or did utilize alternative ways to secure funding. Pablo and Antonio considering returning to their native countries, Bolivia and Mexico respectively, to pursue college because it was less expensive. Hector enlisted in the military to eliminate the lack of money as a barrier; he stated, “one of the main reasons I ended up joining the military was because I didn’t want money to be an excuse.” While participants did indicate *Financial Barriers* enough to warrant a theme, it was not as frequent as expected based on the literature.

Participants, such as Antonio, Hector, Frank, Santiago, and Arnold all mentioned scholarships or financial aid programs when discussing financial barriers. Santiago, Arnold, and

Antonio stated receiving scholarships of some form and Hector indicated he received educational support through the military. Frank made a statement that he researched future earning potential for individuals in the same career field he was pursuing and was not worried about his ability to pay back any loans he may need. These statements showed confidence in the potential to overcome financial burdens that may be a result of a having more information. The University did include information regarding financial aid and scholarships with marketing materials and during recruitment programs. Therefore, the lack of concern about financial barriers may be a product of the awareness of financial aid programs.

The two most pervasive and consistent themes that emerged in the study were *Confidence* and *Normalcy*. The frequency of the instances involving confidence and normalcy (79) was almost half of the 186 total instances of all themes identified. Each of the 15 participants described instances of confidence that spanned from early ages in elementary school throughout instances in high school. Jimmy said the messages he heard at an early age about his math abilities propelled him to continue taking math courses. He stated, “when I was a kid I was good in math, even though I didn't actually assume I was, everyone told me I was, so I kept taking math, and now I am minoring in math.” For Alfonso, as an adult, he completed an English as a Second Language course at a community college which gave him the confidence to continue and take more courses at his community college. These instances of confidence and others are consistent with literature about building academic confidence to improve graduation rates among community college and university students (Bickerstaff & Rucks-Ahidiana, 2012; Ochoa & Sander, 2012).

The theme of *Normalcy* and the desire to change what participants perceived as normal for Latinos was also an unexpected discovery. The majority of participants (13) specifically

mentioned something about normalcy. Participants described instances that came from a lack of representation at college campuses, family, society, and school officials as ways they perceived what was normal for Latinos. Well documented in the literature is the lack of representation of Latinos in college (Hurtado, Santos, Saenz, & Cabrera, 2011; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009), and the statements made by participants reflected the impact. Several participants, Felipe, Santiago, Antonio, Pablo, Hector, and Maxwell, for example, stated a desire to change the representation of Latinos on college campuses. Maxwell encompassed the sentiment when he said,

I'm always wondering like; why don't more Latino people go to college... I think that's the only thing that has really affected me... like, wow, I'm, this is so little amount of people that are Latino that go to college and like that's always, like always been, like my motivation. To prove people wrong. I wanna tell them that I can do this. I'm here for a reason.

Family members and the types of jobs family members held also reinforced these messages. Antonio, Arnold, Maxwell, Santiago, and Hector all described different messages from family and the jobs they saw Latinos holding as ways that made them believe what was normal for Latinos. Hector also recalled guidance counselors directed he and other Latinos toward vocational technology. He stated,

We had counselors that would push us toward ... VoTech [vocational technology]. They would kind of push some folks to VoTech, and there were issues cause they were pushing like um Hispanic kids, pretty much non-white kids, to go to VoTech or just go to a tech school rather than college. It made me think twice about whether I should follow this path or not.

Literature details the involvement and influence school officials have on Latinos and first-generation college students (Alfaro, Umana-Taylor, & Bamaca, 2006; Azmitia, Cooper, & Brown, 2009; Zarate & Gallimore, 2005) so this is of particular interest because of the power of influence these individuals have over this population.

Finally, the instances where participants shared a concern for others more than themselves was an unexpected finding. Three of the themes, *Being an Example*, *Fulfillment of Promise*, and *Helping Others*, in this study revealed that participants were concerned with other people and that is why they were motivated to pursue a college degree. Combining all three themes would result in 26 instances where participants described they wanted to help others in some way. Hector shared that he liked, “going out and kind of like, kind of serving like a testament or a role model.” Santiago wanted to help other Latino kids that were like him and did not have role models; he stated, “They don’t have someone to look up to and had no one to encourage them so that motivates me to so that one day I could possibly be that role model.” Other participants also wanted to be role models for others including others in their family. Alfonso and Pablo both referenced wanting to be role models for their nephews or even kids as a motivation for pursuing the college degree. Also, participants wanted to serve others in various ways directly. Red, Jimmy, Jon, and Antonio all wanted to use their college degrees to help others. As an example, Antonio stated his, “purpose in life is to kind of figure out what my skills are and what is needed in society. To kinda of find something, to create something to, ...give back to the community.” This idea to want to have a lasting impact on others demonstrated the intrinsic motivation described earlier and is congruent with self-determination behavior.

Contributing to the Research

This section describes how this study contributes to existing research in different areas. This study explored a specific population to add to the research on motivation, it adds to the growing body of research on Latino males, and adds to the literature on first-generation college students. These contributions add information and understanding of a specific population and can help inform policies serving these students.

This study contributes to the body of Self-Determination Theory and motivation research. Davids, Ryan, Yassin, Hendrickse, and Roman (2016) studied Self-Determination Theory and the influence of psychological needs, goals, and aspirations of adolescents; Liu, Wang, and Ryan (2016) explored how to create autonomous learners using practices influenced by Self-Determination Theory; and Leke, Joussemet, Koestner, Taylor, Hope, and Gingras (2011) who researched the transmission of intrinsic values from mothers to teenagers and the influences of supportive family environments on motivation. Each of these studies targets a different population and this study adds another distinct population.

Trevino and DeFreitas (2014) studied existing research through the lens of Self-Determination Theory and isolated the populations of Latinos and first-generation college students. This study added to that research and answered the call for further research on Latino first-generation college students and intrinsic motivation (Trevino & DeFreitas, 2014). This study suggests an emphasis on intrinsic motivation factors which supports findings from Trevino and DeFreitas' (2014) study. This study also contributes to this research by adding empirical evidence specific to first-generation college students who identify as Latino males.

This study also adds to the growing body of literature focused on Latino males. Saenz and Ponjuan (2009) studied Latino males in higher education and the issues surrounding the low

number of Latino males enrolling and graduating. Also, Saenz and Ponjuan (2011) researched Latino males and graduation rates; Ponjuan, Clark, and Saenz (2012) explored Latino males and their motivation toward postsecondary education; and Clark, Ponjuan, Orrock, Wilson, and Flores (2013) studied barriers for Latino male students and their educational aspirations. This research study adds to the research on Latino males and their pursuits of higher education by detailing motivational factors and giving voice to Latino males who are also first-generation college students. This information can be used to help understand this specific subset of the Latino male population.

Finally, this study adds to the literature on first-generation college students. First-generation college students represent a distinct population on college campuses (Chen & Carroll, 2005; Prospero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007; Pascarella, Wolniak, Pierson & Terenzini, 2004). Studies such as Olive (2008) and Zarate and Pachon (2006) explored how first-generation college students navigate the college landscape and learn about specific processes. Housel and Harvey (2010) and Ostrove and Long (2007) studied differences in culture and the adaptation of first-generation college students as they join second or third-generation college students on campuses. This study adds to this literature of first-generation college students by focusing on motivation to pursue college degrees specifically for students that identify as Latino and males. This can lead to potentially understanding how the concerns or needs of these populations overlap and how they differ to possibly better serve their needs.

Implications for Practice and Policy

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of first-generation college students who identified as Latino males and examine their motivations to pursue college degrees.

This section offers implications for practice and policy that may help individuals inspire, encourage, and support first-generation Latino males as they work to succeed in college.

Deci and Ryan (2000) stated, “in the real world, motivation is highly valued because of its consequences: Motivation produces. It is therefore of preeminent concern to those in roles such as manager, teacher...coach...and parent that involve mobilizing others to act” (p. 69). This study found themes which revealed the motivations of first-generation college students who identified as Latino males. Confidence and the desire to want to change the narrative of what is normal for Latinos were the most prevalent items shared by the participants in this study. Also, referenced as sources of motivation for these participants was the concern for others and the types of careers available to them with a college degree. Finally, family influences and specifically mothers were strong sources of motivation for the individuals in this study. Many of these issues can be addressed through practices and policies.

School officials at all levels, community leaders, and parents should seek examples of other Latino males in college or who have graduated from college and promote them with potential Latino males. Beginning in elementary school and continuing through high school, examples of college educated Latino males should be celebrated and promoted so that others can see what is possible. On the collegiate level, colleges and universities can identify first-generation Latino males that are currently enrolled at their institutions and recruit them to counsel or mentor potential first-generation Latino males. Marketing materials and programs can be created to demonstrate that others in this population have enrolled in the institutions and completed college degrees. Being exposed to these individuals and hearing their success stories can demonstrate commonalities and provide a source of support as students navigate the new environment of the college landscape.

Furthermore, teachers and counselors, as shown by the results of this study, can have a profound impact on the confidence and motivation of first-generation Latino male students. Teachers and counselors were shown to raise motivation levels and confidence by encouraging, praising, and challenging students in particular subjects or academic endeavors. Using this information, teachers and counselors in middle schools and high schools can implement practices that praise students who have success in certain academic subjects or foster confidence early, which can then stimulate confidence. Programs highlighting the success of students, encouraging messages sent to students or their families members, or awards and rewards for academic successes may all increase levels of confidence and motivation.

Participants in this study referenced salary and jobs as motivating factors for pursuing college, but placed a greater emphasis on helping others and the types of jobs and careers available to them. Colleges and universities will often use the resulting career opportunities available to college graduates and the job placement rates of an institution to market to potential college students (Anctil 2008; Clark & Hossler, 1990; Han, 2014). While this may help motivate some potential students, the results of this study indicate that demonstrating the types of careers and the impact those careers have on others may be of greater importance for Latino males. A way colleges and universities can consider doing this is to have college alumni give testimonials describing their career fields, the impact those careers have on others, and detailed descriptions of the sense of satisfaction they feel while engaging in their chosen career paths. A further suggestion would be to utilize alumni that are also first-generation college students and Latino males to reinforce confidence and normalcy.

Finally, this study found instances of family influence in the motivation to pursue college degrees. Colleges and universities, as well as community-based organizations and schools at all

levels, should continue to promote the benefits of college to the students, but also to family members. Zalaquett's (2006) qualitative study of Latino college students found that parents do want to help their students as they seek information about college but often feel they do not understand college enough to give adequate support. Examples of ways to distribute consistent messages about the benefits of a college degree to family members are through existing networks such as churches, health agencies, and during programs designed to target family members. Colleges and universities also can create separate parent and family programs during college nights, recruitment events, and college orientations to help educate family members about the benefits of colleges. These messages delivered from multiple sources and reinforced over time can begin to give family members positive language and experiences to share with their students even if they do not have personal experiences attending college.

Creating a college-going culture among a group of individuals that do not have personal experience with college is difficult, and there is not a simple solution. Colleges and universities must work together with schools and the communities they serve to help generate interest in college as a whole. Often the focus is on getting potential students interested in a particular college in hopes to one day that student will enroll. Schools should work together to promote college as whole instead of universities only attempting to recruit students to their institutions to change perceptions cited in this study and motivate first-generation Latino males to pursue college degrees.

Future Research

My research question targeted a specific population of first-generation college students who identified as Latinos and males using Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self-Determination Theory to explore motivation. Studying this specific population resulted in ten themes related to the

population and their motivations for pursuing college degrees. These themes can now serve as empirical evidence to support the exploration of other populations using Self-Determination Theory. This empirical evidence can also be used to explore further first-generation Latino males and their motivation to pursue higher education at other campuses and using other research methods.

The criteria for participants in this study were that they identify as first-generation college students, Latinos, and males, but even with these parameters, some differences in the population exist and the data can be further explored. One area I hope to examine is the differences in motivation and responses from individuals who were born in the United States and those who were born in other countries. Another potential distinction to explore is differences in responses from those whose parents were born in the United States versus responses from those whose parents were born in other countries. A population difference to further analyze from this data could be the differences in responses from participants who transferred from community colleges and those who started at the University coming directly from high school.

Alternative populations and locations also could be studied to determine if there are differences or additional data from other college campus and other types of colleges. College campuses in areas with a higher or lower concentration of Latino students or varied majors and programs may yield different results. Since the location of this study was a university in the Mid-Atlantic region of the country, conducting future studies in other regions may reinforce the findings of this study or generate additional data. Finally, replicating this study at community colleges, technical colleges, or private universities may be useful to explore if there are differences in motivation associated with different institutions of higher education.

Utilizing information in this study may lead to research with varied data collection methods but the same target population. A future research project could be created using information collected from this study to generate survey questions with the responses to be examined using quantitative research designs. Distributing survey questions to a wider number of Latino males who identify as first-generation college students and could produce a larger data set for exploration. Many of the participants and instances in this study referenced experiences that occurred beginning as early as elementary school. Therefore, a longitudinal research study could be created to follow students as they matriculate from elementary school to middle school, then high school, and ultimately either enter college or not to explore the impact and changes in motivation.

In keeping with the same idea for studying varied populations of first-generation college students who identify as Latino males, future research may also include individuals that did not enroll in institutions of higher education. This study discussed a theme regarding what these participants felt was normal for Latinos that did not include pursuing college degrees and therefore can further be explored to find out the motivations to not pursue college degrees. The creation of future research studies regarding this population in various settings could generate data to use in comparative studies or to support findings from this study.

Concluding Thoughts

As a first-generation college student who identifies as a Latino male, I began this study wanting to explore reasons why people like me were motivated to pursue college degrees. I believe every individual is unique and those who want to obtain college degrees are motivated by reasons they feel are important to them. However, the themes and instances I found in this study demonstrated that many of us have similar factors that contribute to our motivations. Learning

more about what motivates others, specifically first-generation Latino males, to pursue college degrees will help inspire, encourage, and support others as they embark on their college journeys.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Informed Consent Form

Motivation of First Generation Latino Males to Pursue College Degrees

INTRODUCTION

You are being asked to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to explore the motivation of first generation Latino males to pursue college degrees at [REDACTED]. You are being asked to volunteer because you are a Latino male pursuing a college degree at [REDACTED]. This study is being conducted to complete requirements for a Ph.D. in Higher Education Administration at the University of Tennessee Knoxville.

INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY

As a participant in this study, you will be asked to participate in an individual interview with Zaraogsa "Mito" Espinoza. You will be asked to come to the agreed upon location. Your participation in this study will last for the duration of this one to one and a half hour interview with the possibility of follow up meetings for clarification of findings as well as potentially a focus group interview that will last approximately one to one and a half hours. These interviews will be recorded for audio and no identifying information will be written with responses to the questions. To try and minimize these risks, several steps will be taken during and after the study. Informational brochures and pamphlets about on-campus counseling services will be available at each interview. These services may help you with emotional or psychological stresses they may experience. You will be given a pseudonym to mask your identity when we complete the interview. The list of pseudonyms and corresponding names will be stored in an encrypted file and folder on the PI's computer which is also password protected. After the pseudonym is placed on the list with the actual name, all following discussion of data will use only the pseudonym. All audio recordings of interviews will be destroyed once the transcriptions are completed to prevent the possibility of someone recognizing a participant by the sound of their voice. The transcripts from each interview will also be kept in an encrypted folder in a separate location from the list of pseudonyms and on the PI's password protected computer.

RISKS

Your participation in this study does not involve any significant risks. There are several possible risks in this study. There is the potential for emotional distress from revealing information or the realization of the existence of issues related to your gender, ethnicity, or status as first generation college student. This may be the first time you are confronting these issues and that may cause discomfort or trigger discomfort. You may also potentially be revealing your identity by participating in the study which would be declaring that you are Latino, male, and a first-generation college student. Also, because the study will be acquiring a list of potential students from the Office of Admissions, your name will be on a list seen by any admissions staff members that compile the list.

BENEFITS

You have been informed that your participation in this research will not benefit you personally, but your participation will help inform changes to offer recommendations to improve the college

going rate of Latino males who are first in their family to pursue college degrees. The results of this study can be used to help staff and administrators as they seek to increase the enrollment of Latino males on college campuses and inspire other Latino males who are first generation college students to pursue college degrees.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Information in the study records will be kept confidential. Data will be stored securely and will be made available only to persons conducting the study unless participants specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link participants to the study.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study,) you may contact the researcher, Mito Diaz-Espinoza, at [REDACTED], and [REDACTED] 1616. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Office of Research Compliance Officer at (865) 974-3466.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

CONSENT

I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

Appendix B

Email to Recruit Participants

Greetings-

My name is Mito Diaz-Espinoza and I am completing my PhD in Higher Education and I am studying Latino males in college. I would like to interview you to try and learn more about the motivations of Latino males that are the first in their family to pursue college degrees who are attending [REDACTED]. I am interested in your motivations and your experiences and I believe learning about you can help understand more about other Latino males in college. If you are interested in participating in this individual interview, please contact me via email: mito@[REDACTED], phone: [REDACTED]. The should last about an hour and will be held here on campus and I can work around your schedule.

Sincerely,
Mito Diaz-Espinoza

Email #2: (5 days later)

A few days ago you were invited to participate in an individual interview as part of research to explore the motivations of Latino males that are the first in their family to pursue college degrees who are attending [REDACTED]. I am emailing to again invite you to be a part of this study. I believe your experiences and information will be very important and can help improve the college going rate of Latino males who are first-generation college students. The interview should last about an hour and will be held here on campus and I can work around your schedule.

If you are willing to be a part of this study, contact Mito Diaz-Espinoza, email: mito@[REDACTED] phone: [REDACTED].

Sincerely,
Mito Diaz-Espinoza

Final Email: 1 week later

Last week you were invited to participate in an individual interview as part of research study to explore the motivations of Latino males that are the first in their family to pursue college degrees who are attending [REDACTED]. I would like as many students as possible to share their experiences and I think you can help. If you have not already done so, please consider this interview, it should last about an hour and will be held here on campus and I can work around your schedule.

You may contact me directly, email: mito@[REDACTED] phone: [REDACTED].

Sincerely,

Mito Diaz-Espinoza

Vita

Zaragosa “Mito” Diaz-Espinoza is from Waco, Texas. He is the son of Alma Canales and Steve Espinoza. He graduated from University High School in 1994. After high school, Mito enrolled at Texas A&M University where he earned a Bachelor of Arts Degree in History. He began his career in student affairs working for the Office of the President at Texas A&M University. He soon returned home to Waco and began working at McLennan Community College as an Admissions Specialist, then a Recruitment Specialist working to help create the Frist Generation College Student Initiative program. He then began working for the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board as a Field Specialist for the P-16, *Education. Go Get It*, outreach program.

Mito returned to school to earn a Master of Science degree in Higher Education and Student Affairs from Baylor University. While at Baylor, he held a graduate assistantship in the Office of Greek Life as the Advisor for the Multi-cultural Greek Council (MGC) and the Pan-Hellenic Greek Council (NPHC). Mito’s career in higher education then shifted to the University of Tennessee Knoxville where he held a position as an Academic Advisor in the College of Business. Then continued his service at the University of Tennessee Knoxville as Coordinator of Diversity Programs in the College of Engineering. In 2013, Mito began working at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC), serving as the Assistant Director of Transfer Recruitment, Admissions, and Partnerships. He later became an Academic Advisor in the Honors College at UMBC and worked there until 2016. Currently, Mito is a full-time doctoral student and works part-time in the Admissions and Recruitment Office at McLennan Community College.