DISSERTATION

SENSE OF PLACE: LATINX/O MEN'S SENSE OF BELONGING IN A LATINX

CULTURAL CENTER AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study is to examine the role of a Latinx cultural center in facilitating the sense of belonging of Latinx/o men at a predominantly White institution. This study examines how Latinx/o men perceive, experience, and participate in cultural centers, specifically from an ecological viewpoint. This research examines the Latinx cultural center through a critical cultural ethnography. Using critical race theory and Latino critical theory (LatCrit) this study interrogates the hierarchy of learning environment purposes to understand the factors associated with sense of belonging for Latinx/o men at a predominantly White institution. Participant photo elicitation interviewing is employed to produce visual elements and in-depth participant interviews. Four themes emerged from this study: (a) political safety during the bad hombre era; (b) shedding machismo: emotional vulnerability; (c) person-environment congruence; and (d) Latinx cultural center as a counter narrative. Recommendations for Latinx cultural centers and institutions of higher education are discussed as well as recommendations for future study.

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DEDICATION

For my children

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Thank you for your motivation and patience as Papi finished his school paper.

To my loving partner, Erin

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background and Overview

Latinx (a gender-inclusive term of Latino/a) individuals accounted for 54% of the total population growth from 2000 to 2014 in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2016). While the population growth has slowed in recent years, the growing presence of Latinx/a/o students on college campuses across the country is evident (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2011), as Latinx/a/o students are enrolling at higher rates than any other time in history (Pew Hispanic Center, 2013). In 2014, 35% of Latinx/a/o individuals between the ages of 18-24 were enrolled in a two or four-year institution of higher education, an increase of 13% since 1993 (Krogstad, 2016). Despite growing numbers of Latinx students attending institutions of higher education, there is a gap in current literature examining how environmental factors impact and influence personal development, learning and sense of belonging of Latinx students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

A recent Pew Hispanic Center Report (2013) indicated the number of Latinx/a/o college students has reached a new high, with an estimated 2.4 million students enrolled. This accounts for 19% of all traditional college age students, a substantial increase from 2008, when Latinx/a/o student represented only the 12% of the traditional student population (Pew Hispanic Center, 2013). Despite steady increases in Latinx/a/o students entering colleges across the country, Bachelor's degree attainment remains low, with only 14.5% of Latinx/a/o students graduating (Pew Hispanic Center, 2013). This pales in comparison to degree attainment of other ethnicities, which finds 51% of Asian Americans, 34.5% of whites, and 21.2% of Blacks/African-Americans graduating (Pew Hispanic Center, 2013). By understanding the ecological factors and cultural centers using campus ecology frameworks, institutions may begin to better understand the impact of learning, campus climate and sense of belonging on student success.

Little empirical research has been conducted regarding Latinx/a/o students' interactions with campus ecology, specifically cultural centers. While there is much research on campus climate and Latinx/a/o students (Ancis, Sedlacek & Mohr, 2000; Hurtado, 1994; Hurtado & Carter, 1996; Rankin & Reason, 2005), little is focused on the physical aspects of sense of belonging, community and the systems that exist within institutions of higher education. The purpose of this research is to examine the ecology of Latinx cultural centers and their ability to facilitate sense of belonging for Latinx/o men.

Statement of Research Problem

The neo-liberal doctrine that promotes colorblindness and dominates notions of self-interest continues to permeate within institutions of higher education and positions the White middle-class student experience as the normative (Yosso & Lopez, 2010; Gillborn, 2014). This historical marginalization and uncritical perspective negatively impacts students of color, especially Latinx/a/o students who are entering institutions of higher education at rising rates. Although the number of Latinx/a/o students in college has increased in recent decades, Latinx/o men continue to be significantly under-represented compared to their Latinx/a women peers. Sixty-two percent of Latinx/a women earn degrees, accounting for an 8.8% higher graduation rate than their Latinx/o men counterparts (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2016).

Current research argues that Latinx/o men are vanishing from college campuses across the country (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009) as a result of societal issues and pressures. Factors that contribute to the inaccessibility of higher education for Latinx/o men include labeling, social, cultural, structural and familial pressures (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). There are also critical factors that impact persistence, learning, and development for those who do enroll (Saenz &

Ponjuan, 2009). One critical factor is the campus environment, experienced both in a physical and cultural construct and explored through campus ecology, the study of the relationship between college students and their environment (Barrett, 2014). For many decades, cultural centers within universities have assisted students of color and provided systems of support (Lozano, 2011). This support is especially important for Latinx students at predominantly White institutions.

To understand how Latinx/o men experience the Latinx cultural center as a place that influences sense of belonging, this study utilizes campus ecology theories and frameworks, critical race theory (CRT), and Latinx critical theory (LatCrit) as theoretical frameworks to understand cultural centers and their ability to facilitate a sense of belonging for undergraduate Latinx/o men. Through a critical ethnography, the researcher will build upon existing literature of campus ecology, specifically that of cultural centers and Latinx men.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the role of a Latinx cultural center in facilitating the sense of belonging of undergraduate Latinx/o men at a predominantly White institution. This study examined how Latinx/o men perceive, experience, and participate a Latinx cultural center, specifically from an ecological viewpoint. Given there is no prior ecological study of a Latinx cultural center, this research examines the Latinx cultural center through a critical cultural ethnography utilizing ecological frameworks. This research builds upon the work of Patton (2004, 2006, 2010) and Lozano (2011, 2014) in the pursuit of understanding cultural centers and the role they play in the college experience of students of color.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide and inform this study:

1. How do Latinx/o men experience sense of belonging in a Latinx cultural center at predominantly White institution?

   a. What role does race play in sense of belonging in the Latinx cultural center?

2. What ecological factors are associated with sense of belonging for Latinx/o men in the Latinx cultural center?

Significance of the Study

Creating campuses that are safe, inclusive, and encourage community are often espoused goals of campus administrators and leaders (Reason & Rankin, 2006; Williams & Clowney, 2007; Kezar & Carducci, 2009). Creating a safe and inclusive environment is crucial to the matriculation and retention of Latinx/o men because of the identified positive impacts such as a home away from home, a place to relax and a sense of mattering (Dey & Hurtado, 1995; Jones, Castellanos & Cole, 2002; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Valdés Ingelmo, 2012; Huerta & Fishman, 2014). This study will help inform Latinx cultural centers on the importance of creating an intentional space to serve the needs and wants of undergraduate Latinx/o men. Based on an extensive review of the literature, no study has been conducted on the environmental impact of Latinx cultural centers on Latinx/o men at predominantly White institutions. This study will assist in filling a research gap concerning the role of Latinx cultural centers at predominantly White institutions from a critical race theoretical perspective.

Theoretical Perspective

A critical theoretical framework is utilized to examine the relationship between environment and behavior. This research utilizes critical race theory and LatCrit epistemology to examine the ecology of the Latinx cultural center; the theoretical perspective allows for one to better understand the transitional relationship between the cultural center and Latinx/o men.

Critical race theory is a body of research and theoretical framework that calls into question and challenges the racial injustice and oppression that exist (Patton, 2006, Delgado, 2012, Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1997). There are five main tenets of CRT; 1) racism permeates all and is an ordinary component of society, 2) experiential knowledge in the form of storytelling, 3) interest convergence, 4) critique of liberalism, and 5) commitment to social justice (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, Ladson-Billings, 2010, Yosso & Lopez, 2010).

An early spin-off theoretical framework that emerged from CRT is that of Latino critical theory, known as LatCrit. LatCrit focuses on building coalitions and progress for the Latinx pan-ethnicity (Bernal, 2002, Hernandez-Truyol, Harris & Valdes, 1996). LatCrit extends beyond the White and Black racial binary to acknowledge the experiences of Latinx/a/o citizens, and address the intersections of sex, class, legal status, and gender (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001). LatCrit allows educators and administrators to understand practices from a cultural and historical context and to understand racism and racialized practices so that they might address inequalities that exist within institutions of higher education (Davila & Aviles de Bradley, 2010). Utilizing LatCrit allows Latinx/a/o students to be the holders and creators of valuable knowledge to inform policies and practices and to create the necessary paradigm shifts on college campuses.

To understand how Latinx/o men experience the Latinx cultural center as a place that fosters sense of belonging, this study utilizes the hierarchy of environmental design conceptual

framework (Strange & Banning, 2001). Through a critical ethnography, this study builds upon existing literature of campus ecology, specifically that related to cultural centers and Latinx/o men.

Definition of Terms

Latinx/a/o: The term Latinx is a gender-inclusive identifier of those who identify as Latina, Latino or non-gender conforming is a rather new term to academia. The term addresses the gender binary present in the Spanish language, and in an effort to account for those who are gender non-conforming, ensures inclusiveness and awareness (Logue, 2015). According to Salinas and Lozano (2017), Latinx came as a form of liberation form those within the non-gender binary and to represent gender intersections.

Cultural Centers: A physical location on a college campus with a mission and purpose to directly serve a specific student demographic (i.e. racially under-represented populations) (Young, 1991).

Campus Ecology: The transactional relationship between students and the college environment (Banning & Bryner, 2001).

Predominantly White Institution (PWI): a college or university at which the majority of the student population is White.

Researcher's Perspective

Interest in exploring the impact of Latinx cultural centers started when I reflected upon my undergraduate experience at a predominantly White institution. This reflection spurred the question of whether the existence of a dedicated Latinx cultural center would have changed the undergraduate experience of myself or my close friends and fraternity brothers, many of whom identified as Latinx/o men. Instead of cultural centers, my undergraduate institution had a

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Multicultural student affairs office that consisted of four offices and a reception area. From a student perspective, this environment was not conducive to building community or creating a sense of belonging.

The space outside the office of Multicultural student affairs was more engaging, as the office was located in a food court lined with rows of long dining hall tables. The table directly outside the office of Multicultural student services was claimed by students of color and served as a place of belonging to build community. It was not uncommon to see groups of students of color at this table throughout the day socializing, working on a group project or eating lunch. This environment served a purpose, but I cannot help but wonder if these students had had access to environments that fostered belonging other than a table in a food court, would their college experiences have been improved?

Cultural centers serve as crucial spaces for students, specifically Latinx/o men, and this study seeks to inform campus leaders and administrators on the ecological factors associated with sense of belonging for Latinx/o men.

Summary

The dissertation is divided into five chapters. Chapter one provides background and an overview of the topic. Chapter two examines literature specific to campus ecology, Latinx/a/o students and cultural centers. Methodology, data collection and data analysis are discussed in chapter three. Chapter four shares the analysis of the results and chapter five provides a summary of the study, along with discussion of the findings and implications.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the literature related to understanding the campus ecology and campus experiences of Latinx/o men at predominantly White institutions. The following literature review is organized utilizing Lewin's (2013) equation of B=f(P, E), which describes the transactional relationship between person and environment. The general premise of the equation is that this transactional relationship influences behavior. Specifically, *P* represents the person, *E* represents the environment and *B* represents the behavior. Following this formula, section one of the literature review focuses on the person, specifically men of color in higher education, Latinx/a/o students in higher education, with a focus on Latinx/o men. Section two focuses on college men and the intersections of race and gender on the colligate experience. Section three examines the environment, campus ecology, and cultural centers, with careful attention given to Black cultural centers, as the most researched cultural centers, and Latinx cultural centers. The final section investigates the behavior, community and sense of belonging for Latinx/o men. The chapter ends with a summation of these areas to provide a framework for understanding the ecological aspects of cultural centers that foster a sense of belonging for Latinx/o men at a predominantly White institution.

The role of physical space for Latinx/o men at a predominantly White institution is one area that is need of additional research. Specifically, how the Latinx cultural center facilitates sense of belonging for Latinx/o men at a predominantly White institution. Additionally, it informs how community is utilized as collective resistance to dominant environments and systemic oppression (Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998). The development of collective resistance, which includes identifying affirming counter-space, building community that affirms cultural

knowledge and challenges the dominant narrative, is a product of the environment and experiences (Ballon, 2015; Yosso, et. al, 2009). Despite engaging in collective resistance, many Latinx/a/o students continue to find institutions of higher education unsafe and hostile (Rankin & Reason, 2005; Yosso & Lopez, 2010). It is this environmental press and transactional relationship between undergraduate Latinx/o men and the campus environment that informs the study of Latinx cultural centers and their facilitation of sense of belonging for Latinx/o men.

Men of Color at Predominantly White Institutions

Men of color entering institutions of higher education continue to fall behind their female counterparts (Aud & Fox, 2010; Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998). In 2014, 41.1% of all male undergraduate students enrolled in degree-granting postsecondary institutions were men of color, compared to 44.2% of women who were women of color (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2015). In addition to lagging behind in enrollment, there exists a significant educational achievement gap between men and women of color (Pérez & Taylor, 2015; Turner, 2013). Although the number of men of color entering universities and colleges increases, the environments on these campuses are often slow to change. The campus climate experienced by students of color influences behavior, both inside and outside the classroom.

Tinto (1987) indicated that students must "physically as well as socially dissociate themselves from the communities of [their] past" (p.96) to become fully incorporated in the life of the academy, resulting in a conception of local community and culture. While Tinto's theory of student departure is well known, it also assumes White normative assimilation is necessary to be successful on a college campus (Tierney, 1999; Tinto, 1987). Given that as of 2014, White students comprised 57.3% of total undergraduate enrollment, the pressure to assimilate to the dominant culture and community norms remains, requiring students to disassociate from the

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culture in which they were raised and are familiar (Tierney, 1999). Failure to assimilate and subscribe to the dominant culture can substantially hinder the likelihood of student success (Tierney, 1999; Tinto, 1987). Students of color are forced to navigate these levels of academic and social integration that reinforce that the White male narrative is the norm which informs the campus climate.

Students of Color and Campus Climate

Campus climate is shaped by physical and psychosocial elements of the individual person and the collective institutional population. This study examined campus climate through a psychosocial lens on the overall racial environment of the campus (Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000). Campus climate differs from campus culture in that climate is based upon "perceptions, attitudes, and expectations" (Cress, 2002, p. 390; Hart & Fellabaum, 2008), whereas culture refers to behaviors and actions occurring as result of those perceptions and attitudes. Racial differences result in students experiencing the same institution in vastly different ways (Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003). Compared to their White counterparts, students of color experience a significantly higher number of racial-ethnic conflicts on predominantly White campuses, more pressure to conform to stereotypes and less than equitable treatment by faculty, staff and teaching assistants (Ancis, Sedlacek & Mohr, 2000). These experiences and environmental hostilities are often unrecognized by White students on predominantly White campuses (Ancis, Sedlacek & Mohr, 2000; Rankin & Reason, 2005). This persistent expreince contributes to the reinforcement of racial stereotypes and assumptions, which in turn influences both the campus environment and the personal experiences of students of color (Harper, 2006).

It is important to note the perceived and experienced campus climates for students of color are often at odds with institutional efforts and initiatives to promote diversity (Jones,

Castellanso & Cole, 2002). Perception of campus climate stems from the intersection of personal experience and the perception of how others are treated on campus (Rankin & Reason, 2005). These perceptions and experiences differ for students of color and White students. Research has shown that White students often perceive campus climate as welcoming and progressive in facilitating experiences of students of color; however, students of color perceive the climate as becoming more hostile and unwelcoming (Ancis, Sedlacek & Mohr, 2000, Jones, Castellanos & Cole, 2002; Rankin & Reason, 2005).

Students of color, specifically Black, Asian American and Latinx/a/o students, perceive the campus environment differently because each ethnic background has a deeply ingrained and unique set of cultural values and experiences (Ancis, Sedlacek & Mohr, 2000; Hurtado, Carter, Spuler, 1996; Minatoya & Sedlacek, 1993). While some research indicates that Latinx/a/o students perceive campuses to be less hostile than their Black peers, students of color on predominantly White campuses continue to experience hostile, intimidating and harassing environments (Rankin & Reason, 2005). Reid and Radhakrishan (2003) found that, outside of academic concerns, students of color were "not taken seriously as students, did not receive the same level of advising or mentoring, and were less self-confident than White students" (p. 271). The academic climate greatly impacts the perception of the general campus climate for students of color (Reid & Radhakrishan, 2003).

The campus climate of predominantly White institutions influences the environment, both the lived and perceived, for students of color. Student satisfaction has been positively linked to a campus environment that supports both the academic and social needs of students (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges & Hayek, 2006; Nelson Laird & Niskode-Dossett, 2010). Given

the decreasing number of men of color graduating from institutions of higher education, an academically and socially supportive environment could make all the difference.

Men of Color and Campus Climate

White heterosexual men tend to express more positive perceptions of campus climate compared to men of color (Worthington, 2008). The man of color experience at predominantly White institutions is exacerbated by the White narrative that see men of color as underachievers, disengaged and a product of affirmative action (Harper, 2009). This White deficit narrative causes many undergraduate men of color to question the university commitment and support for men of color at predominantly White institutions (Castellanos & Cole, 2002). Through the self-interest of the majority, an environment centered on the White narrative solidifies the campus racial climate experienced by men of color.

It is important to note that Reid and Radharkishnan (2003) found individual experience, as opposed to race, was a greater indication of how students perceived the university campus climate. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge the potential role of race and gender in the individual experience. Nelson Laird and Niskode-Dossett (2010) found that gender had little impact on perception of campus environment. Research on the effects of gender and race on perception of campus environment and climate has yielded inconsistent results (Nelson Laird & Niskode-Dossett, 2010; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Reid & Radharkishnan, 2003). Such inconsistencies may be attributed to the result of the study of interactions across racial difference. Interactions across difference for men of color may not affect perceived campus climate as men of color are constantly required to interact across racial differences at predominantly White institutions that continue to reinforce negative stereotypes for students of color.

Latinx/a/o Students in Higher Education

Understanding the experiences of Latinx/a/o students at predominantly White institutions can inform knowledge of how and why students of color engage in collective resistance to dominant environments and systemic oppression (Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998). Through critical navigation skills which includes oppositional behaviors to the White normative, Latinx/a/o students constantly interact and navigate with the largely White population, environment and culture (Solórzano & Villalpando, 2000). Despite the use of critical navigation skills, Latinx/a/o students often find institutions of higher education unsafe and hostile (Rankin & Reason, 2005; Yosso & Lopez, 2010).

Legislation and federal policies that sought to desegregate schools and colleges did so under the guise that it would increase access through revisions to institutional practices that in turn would positively alter the environment of institutions of higher education (Allen, 1992; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pendersen & Allen, 1998; Kupo, 2011). Predominantly White colleges and universities that historically limited and excluded students of color experienced a slow matriculation growth in students of color (Kupo, 2011). Due to the historical exclusion of students of color, institutions were steeped in policies and cultural practices that served the dominant White population and created a stifling and racist environment for students of color (Allen, 1992; Kupo, 2011). Instead of an insular focus on policies and procedures (Dey & Hurtado, 1995), the adoption of an ecological perspective allows research to focus on the dynamic transactional relationship between the student and the campus environment. It is through an ecological perspective that the historical and current dynamic relationship between undergraduate Latinx/o men and the Latinx cultural center can be better understood.

Latinx/a/o student enrollment in institutions of higher education accounted for only 3% of enrollment in 1976 (Hurtado et. al, 2008; National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Despite the growth in the Latinx/a/o population, now the largest racial minority group in the United States consisting of 55.3 million individuals representing 17.3% of the U.S. population, the educational attainment rate of Latinx/a/o individuals lags far behind both the general population and other historically under-represented populations of color (Arias, 1986, Pew Research Center, 2016). Latinx/a/o students graduate from four-year institutions at much lower rates for various reasons, including lack of financial resources, lack of familial support, hostile environments and lack of sense of place (Astin & Oseguera, 2003, Fry, 2002; Hurtado, et. al, 2008). Given such obstacles, many Latinx/a/o students are entering and graduating from higher education institutions through sheer determination, resiliency and self-determination (Hurtado, et. al, 2008).

The Civil Rights movement of the 1960's propelled Latinx/a/os, specifically Mexican-Americans/Chicanx/a/os, to fight and demand political, economic, and educational equality (MacDonald, Botti & Clark, 2007). *El movimiento,* the Chicano civil rights movement, shepherded in collective efforts with the goal of increasing representation of Latinx/a/o students in higher education (Hurtado, et. al, 2008). *El movimiento* advocated for increasing Latinx/a/o student representation, development of Chicanx/o and Puerto Rican/Latinx/o studies programs, hiring Latinx/a/o faculty and staff and the formation of campus support services or Latinx/a/o student community centers (Griswold del Castillo & De Leon, 1996; Hurtado, et. al, 2008; MacDonald, 2004).

The Latinx/a/o community, influenced by the African American Civil Rights movement, utilized self-agency to help advance access to colleges and universities while bringing awareness

to the educational access issues plaguing the Latinx/a/o community (MacDonald, Botti & Clark, 2007). This Latinx/a/o centric movement, centralized in the West and Southwest regions of the United States, was the precursor to the formation of the Chicano Council on Higher Education (CCHE) and provided the foundation for activism based on a loose, yet common, ideological mission for social change (Muñoz, Jr., 1989; Urrieta, 2004).

Despite groundwork laid by activists of the past, hostile campus climates that did not facilitate sense of belonging and stifled educational outcomes such as retention and matriculation continued to pose challenges to Latinx/a/o students (Astin & Oseguera, 2003; Fry, 2002; Hurtado et. al, 2008; National Center for Education Statistics, 2016).

Latinx/a/o Students Navigating Campus Environments

Long standing institutional structures such as race neutral policies, color blind programs and priority utilization of space continued to cater to predominantly White norms (Gonzalez, 2000; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Young, 1991). In 2005, Hurtado and Ponjuan examined perceptions of Latinx/a/o students on sense of belonging through a longitudinal study of 370 first and second year Latinx/a/o students from nine public universities varied in geographic location, size and enrollment demographics. The nine institutions were selected based on their demonstrative commitments to diversity initiatives, both curricular and co-curricular, success in diversifying student enrollment and commitment to public service through relationship building with the surrounding community.

Survey questions focused on four main areas: sense of belonging, hostile climate for diversity, self-reported analytical skills and pluralistic orientation. Sense of belonging measured students' affinity with their institution, including the extent to which students felt they were part of the campus life community and felt a sense of community (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005).

Students were also asked to reflect on their perceptions of institutional climate for diversity, especially in relation to group identity, and perceived racial tensions and stereotypes expressed by faculty in the classroom (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005).

Survey results found sense of belonging for Latinx/a/o students was strongly associated with the student's living situation; students who lived on campus indicated a higher sense of belonging compared to those who lived off campus (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005). Latinx/a/o students who participated in co-curricular events focused on diversity were more likely to perceive the campus as a hostile environment (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005). This could be associated with student resistance to systemic oppression experienced on campus and the need to find a safe-haven in an unwelcoming college environment (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005). Additionally, survey results found that native Spanish speaking students were more likely than native English speakers to perceive a hostile climate for diversity on campus. This suggests that students with strong linguistic cultural ties viewed the institution as less welcoming and affirming (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005).

Similar findings by Nunez (2009) indicated that academically and communally engaged Latinx/a/o students reported a greater sense of belonging, but also experienced a higher level of hostility on campus. Even highly connected and engaged Latinx students were not immune to campus hostility, suggesting Latinx/a/o students are required to navigate hostile campus environments, despite active engagement with their institution (Nunez, 2009). This relationship between the individual and campus environment creates an undeniable pressure.

This pressure intensifies with increased media promotion of anti-brown and xenophobic political agendas, policies and rhetoric. In 2016, the Southern Poverty Law center coined the term "Trump Effect" to reflect the negative impact the election of Donald Trump had on campus

climates. Muñoz, Vigil, Jach and Rodriguez-Gutierrez (2018) found that the Trump Effect greatly impacted campus climates and experiences for Latinx/a/o students, specifically DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) and undocumented students. The 16 participants in the study conducted by Muñoz, et.al. reported an increase in racist nativism on campus, exploitation of undocumented student labor, citizen fragility and peer solidarity as a mechanism for student resilience.

The Muñoz, et.al. (2018) study is an important study that nuances campus climate to include political influence and its impacts on Latinx/a/o students, specifically in regard to their mental, emotional and physical safety. The navigation of hostile campus climates for Latinx/a/o students, including undocumented and DACA students, requires resilience to succeed in an environment that is the result of white supremacy and normativity (Muñoz, et.al, 2018). The Trump Effect exacerbates this common experience for Latinx/a/o students. In an effort to combat growing campus hostility, Muñoz, et. al. (2018) called for institutions not only to self-identify as DACA-friendly institutions, but to also address the actions, policies and practices of White supremacy. Such recommended actions would address both the historical implications of systemic racism and the impact of the Trump Effect.

Latinx/o Men in Higher Education

While the number of Latinx/a/o students attending colleges and universities has increased in recent decades, the representation of undergraduate Latinx/o men continues to decline in comparison to their female counterparts (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). Although there has been extensive research on the challenges and successes of Latinx/a/o students in higher education, there is little research specifically related to Latinx/o men in college; the data that does exist

shows educational attainment gaps, differences in enrollment, and persistence rates between male and female Latinx/a/o students (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009).

Saenz and Ponjuan's (2009) review of 2010 U.S. census data found among Latinx/o men 18-24 years of age, 34.2% had an educational attainment level of less than a high school degree. Additionally, the researchers found Latinx/o men cohorts, with exception to those 60 years or older, earned fewer bachelor's degrees compared to corresponding Latinx/a female cohorts, indicating a growing gap in educational attainment. In 2015, Latinx/o men accounted for 11.2% of bachelor's degrees conferred to U.S. citizens (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2016). The most current data of students entering in 2011 shows that Latinx/o men have a 50% chance of degree attainment of a bachelor's degree with a reported rate of 50.7% graduation rate (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2017). The gender gap in degree attainment is an important marker, as Latinx/a females comprise 58.2% bachelor graduation rate (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2017). Access, retention, and graduation statistics are just one part of the puzzle for Latinx/o men, as the campus environment continues to dictate much of the Latinx/o experience at predominantly White institutions.

The campus environment of predominantly White institutions serves as an impediment to Latinx/o men and those who succeed tend to do so through determination, exceptional academic skill and other strong personal characteristics (Hall & Rowan, 2000). Gonzalez's (2000) case study of two first-generation undergraduate Latinx/o/Chicanx/o men at a predominantly White institution found that Latinx/o students were marginalized and experienced alienation due to the lack of Latinx/a/o culture within the social context of the campus environment. This sense of alienation was heightened by the small number of Latinx/a/o students, faculty, and staff at the institution, the minimal political sway the group had on institutional policy, and the limited

Spanish spoken on campus (Gonzalez, 2000). A critical finding of the study was the marginalization experienced as a result of the physical campus environment as little representation of Latinx culture was present in campus architecture, art, or other symbolism (Gonzalez, 2000). The lack of Latinx culture represented in physical form manifested as an internalized message that Chicanx/o and Latinx culture were less important than the expansive White cultural messages present across campus (Gonzalez, 2000).

Gonzalez (2000) noted that the "epistemological world" (p. 77) was crucial to the Latinx/a/o students, as it was the way in which knowledge and experiences were shared within social environments across campus. The students did not find such refuge in the classroom and were actively creating cultural spaces within organizations that focused on Latinx culture. The intent of the students was not to teach non-Chicanx/os about Chicanx/o culture, but instead to create a space for self-identified Latinx/a/o students to dialogue with one another, share ideas, and actively engage in action specific to the Latinx/a/o community, while challenging the White-centric paradigm of campus (Gonzalez, 2000). Consistent with Pérez and Saenz's more recent study (2017), these findings supported that Latinx/o men rely on both family and Latinx/a/o peers to increase sense of belonging at predominantly White institutions. Given the hostile climate at many predominantly White institutions, Latinx/o men students require a greater level of peer support, self-awareness and introspection to be successful (Pérez & Saenz, 2017)

Research on Latinx/o men experiences (Gloria et al., 2009; Gonzalez, 2000; Pérez & Saenz, 2017; Pérez & Taylor, 2015) indicates these students have a need and want for social and physical spaces to engage with peers to both foster a sense of belonging and grown in their Latinx/o identity while at predominantly White institutions. Providing a space for students to

explore their identity while receiving a level of cultural nourishment is one of the foundational priorities of multicultural student services and cultural centers.

Psychosocial Factors of Identity and Culture

The presence of cultural specific spaces, peers and community assist Latinx/a/o students in navigating predominantly White institutions. A study of the university environment and persistence attitudes of Latinx/a/o students conducted by Castillo, Conoley, Choi-Pearson, Archuleta, Phoummarath and Van Landingham (2006) found direct correlations between ethnic identity, university environment and persistence attitudes. Castillo et.al (2006) found that participants with salient ethnic identity perceived the university environment negatively and as more hostile; however, findings showed no significant relationship between ethnic identity and persistence attitudes when the university environment was removed from the equation. Simply put, the researchers found ethnic identity had no impact on Latinx/a/o students' drive to succeed at institutions of higher education. Yet, the chilly and hostile campus environments similar to those experienced by Latinx/a/o students in the 1960s and 1970s, continued to hinder educational attainment for Latinx/a/o students (Castillo et. al, 2006).

To better understand the impact of institutional perception, Hernandez (2013) studied undergraduate Latinx/o men's perceptions through an environmental and attachment theoretical framework. The strongest indicated perception was that of psychosocial tension. This psychosocial tension consisted of a "sense of cultural awareness, attitude toward university, and sense of self" (Hernandez, 2013, p. 169). Participants' continuous efforts to negotiate commonly held Latinx/o stereotypes, the financial sacrifices taken to attend college, and to navigate the racial tension to hold on to culture and identity had lasting impacts (Hernandez, 2013). Participants acknowledged that "the influence of race, privilege, cost of education, balancing

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one's life, negotiating campus space and identity, the dominant presence of Euro-American culture of the campus and the lack of inclusion" (p. 5) greatly contributed to their experience and general sense of belonging on campus, which increased the importance of staying connected to their communities (Hernandez, 2013, p. 5). Cultural congruity contributes to the psychosocial-cultural well-being of collegiate Latinx/o men, despite the consistent hurdles that call into question the need to stay at the institution (Gloria, Castellanos, Scull & Villegas, 2009).

Despite decades of activism, progress and determination, campus environments continue to stifle a true sense of belonging for Latinx/a/o students on college campuses across the country. Campus environment and ethnic identity for Latinx/o men have a relationship that is unwavering; this intersection of ethnicity and gender produces unique educational experiences and challenges for men of color.

Collegiate Men of Color & Gender

Studies of men and the social construction of masculinity are diverse in terms of the identities and locations on which they focus (Connell, 2005). Men on college campuses experience a unique intersection of identity and environment, as gendered socialization and the evolution of masculinity is informed, negotiated and validated by peers throughout a man's life and carried with them onto college campuses across the country (Connell, 1993; Harper, 2004). Collegiate men, having been influenced, molded and socialized by their families, peers and environment as young boys bring unique attitudinal and behavioral characteristics with them (Harris & Harper, 2008).

Pre-collegiate socialization takes place in four social settings: family, peer-groups, media, and school (MacNaughton, 2006). Within these settings both explicit and implicit messages of masculinity, manhood and gendered norms are shared with young boys (MacNaughton, 2006;

Harris & Harper, 2008). These messages, paired with observation and imitation, dictate much of

a young boy's understanding of gender roles and masculinity (MacNaughton, 2006).

Societal expectations of masculinity are further instigated by the environments that many

men experience on college campuses. College men are expected to be competitive, unemotional,

aggressive, responsible, authoritative, successful, rule breakers and tough (Edwards & Jones,

2009). Not only do these expectations explicitly indicate who college men should be, they also

implicitly indicate who college men should not be feminine, gay or emotional (Edwards & Jones,

2009). Understanding the gender socialization process that occurs in young boys allows us to

acknowledge the gender role conflict that exists for collegiate men of color at predominantly

White institutions.

Gender Role Conflict

Influences on the development of male gender roles and socialization include, but are not

limited to, family, media, academic environments (Connell, 2004). Due to gender socialization

and the pressure to conform to male gender norms, internal gender role conflict is unavoidable.

Gender role conflict is defined as a "psychological state in which gender roles have negative

consequences or impact on the person or others" (O'Neil, 1981, p. 203). Male gender role

conflict is the result of deviation from the socially constructed male role expectations of being

successful, powerful, competitive, emotionless, and restrictive in affectionate behavior between

men, coupled with conflict between work and family relations (Pleck, 1981; O'Niel, 1981;

O'Neil, Helms, Gable, David & Wrightsman, 1986; Good & Wood, 1995; O'Neil & Nadeau,

2004; Harper, Harris & Mmeje, 2005; Davis & Liang, 2014).

Gender role conflict and the intersection of masculine identity creates a fear of femininity

(O'Neil, Helms, Gable & Wrightsman, 1986). This fear manifest as a psychological, and even

physical, resistance to stereotypical feminine values, attitudes and behaviors (O'Neil, Helms, Gable & Wrightsman, 1986). Explicit rejection of stereotypical feminine values and norms reinforces gender expectations that promote homophobia and hyper-masculinity, which in turn prompts destructive behavior such as restricted emotional vulnerability, aggressiveness and isolation (Harris & Harper, 2008; O'Neil, 1981). These expectations, attitudes and behaviors, often enforced from boyhood, dictate and inform the attitudes and behaviors of men as they enter colleges and universities, creating gender conflict (Harris & Harper, 2008). Specifically, hyper-masculinity and machismo impact the way men of color interact with one another and the environment in which they exist.

Men of Color and Masculinity

The intersection of gender and ethnic identity has been given little empirical attention (Harper, 2004). While broad research on gender role conflict shows college men are often pushed into living gendered stereotypes, which can result in substance abuse, sexual and physical violence, often the inquiry is free from a racial and ethnic integration of gendered stereotypes (Harper, 2004; Pérez, 2012). Added to the pressure to conform to gendered stereotypes is the need for peer approval in which masculinity is negotiated, affirmed or questioned (Connell, 1993, Harper, 2004). The application of White European masculinity norms to Black men was examined by Harris (1995), who noted the intersection of race and male gender, coupled with limited access to education and other resources, created a shift amongst masculinity norms for Black men. The inability for Black men to uphold some of the White European masculine norms resulted in a forging of new masculine norms that included "sexual promiscuity, toughness, thrill seeking and the use of violence in interpersonal interactions" (Harris, 1995, p. 280).

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Little empirical research exists on masculinity of Latinx/o men, yet it dictates perceptions of this population due to the stereotypical assumption that all Latinx/o men adhere to behaviors and attitudes known as machismo. Machismo is often described as a hyper-masculine gender role related to aggression, anti-social behavior, and patriarchal and sexist attitudes and behaviors (Arciniega, Anderson, Tovar-Blank, Tracey, 2008; Campos, 1998). The concept of machismo is often connected with Mexican or Mexican-American culture, but is often associated with Latinx/o men, regardless of cultural ethnicity. Machismo is not only seen as a negative construct amongst many non-Latinx/a/o individuals, but is also perceived as negative amongst Latinx/o men. Mirandé (1988) found that 52% of Latinx/o men surveyed viewed machismo as a negative connotation, 12% viewed it as a neutral connotation and 35% considered it as a point of cultural pride.

Men of color engage with masculinity, both internally and externally, and navigate this engagement with great attention. There are expectations for men of color, specifically Black and Latinx/o men, to exhibit dominant masculine traits while also meeting the cultural expectations of masculinity, which are nothing more than an adaptation, amendment or rejection of the dominant masculine social norms (Edwards & Jones, 2009). These gendered norms, while challenged in some ways, are also adhered to and expected of collegiate men of color.

Collegiate Men of Color and Masculinity

The college campus provides a unique environment for men of color to navigate gender identity and role. This is especially true within groups of other male peers, as Connell (1993) found that collegiate men of color seek peer approval and negotiate behavior within peer groups. This is an example of a socio-environmental pressure experienced by collegiate men of color and yet another way in which Lewin's (2013) theory of B=f(P, E) is at play. The intersection of race

and ethnicity, along with gender, creates a unique lived experience for college men of color at predominantly White campuses.

Harper (2004) studied the conceptualization of masculinity among 32 high-achieving Black men at six predominantly White research universities. These students had a mean grade point average of 3.32, were involved in multiple organizations and leadership positions, had peer respect, developed relationships with faculty and administrators and earned collegiate awards. The findings of the study painted a vastly different picture from traditional gendered stereotypes, as participants' defined masculinity in non-typical and unconventional ways (Harper, 2004). Behaviors of participants were not only unconventional, but they were accepted and validated by other non-high-achieving Black collegiate men (Harper, 2004). Other men saw the participants' involvement in student organizations, campus leadership and pursuit to improve the Black college community as positive traits and which validated their behaviors. These findings differ from other studies, which indicated a need to adhere to traditional masculine norms (Campos, 1998; Saenz, Bukoski, Lu, Rodriguez, 2013). Due to the variance in these findings, one might question the impact of the intersection of ethnicity and cultural norms play in gender roles and adherence to masculine social norms.

Campos (1998) studied ethnicity, cultural pride, acculturation and age as predictors of gender role identity. A total of 392 male participants (299 Latinx/o, 56 Black and 37 White) were studied utilizing the four scaled male role norm scale (MRNS) developed by Fisher, Tokar, Good and Snell (1998). The four scales are status and respect, anti-femininity, tough image and violent toughness. Black men scored higher than both Latinx/o and White men in both status and tough image. There was a significant difference between the more and less acculturated Latinx/o participants and their responses to violent toughness and anti-femininity, which could

be due to the role machismo plays in the lives of young Latinx/o men and the environmental pressure of acculturation (Campos, 1998). Latinx/o men, in some comparisons, were less likely to endorse machismo than were Black or White men (Campos, 1998). These survey findings support Mirandé's (1998) suggestion that masculinity is defined and grounded based on cultural context, which is driven by socio-ecological experiences on college campuses.

Machismo and the social pressures to behave within a rigid gender framework have negative impacts on Latinx/o men. Saenz, Bukoski, Lu and Rodriguez (2013) found that pride and machismo served as a significant barrier to academic success for Latinx/o men. Pride and fear prevented Latinx/o college men from seeking academic support as familial expectations to earn money and support the family pulled these students away from their educational pursuits (Saenz & Bukoski, 2013). It is apparent that machismo influences behaviors, specifically help-seeking behaviors (Saenz & Bukoski, 2013), making academic and social expectations of institutions of higher education difficult for some Latinx/o men to navigate.

Students of Color and Environmental Space

The Principles of Topological Psychology, developed by Kurt Lewin (2013), identified that behavior is the result of person and environment, often represented as B=f(P, E) (Banning & Bryner, 2001). With this equation, Lewin provided the foundation for what would become the study of campus ecology. Lewin believed that behavior was not determined by the physical environment, but rather by the psychological environment of people (Walsh, 1973). It is through this methodology that the psychological environment determines behavior and the physical environment affects the individual through perception of self and experience (Walsh, 1973).

The theory of person and environment fit attempts to explain success and performance as the result of the transactional interaction between people and their environment (Gilbreath, Kim

& Nichols, 2011). It is the transactional interaction in a good person-environment fit that promotes feelings of satisfaction, self-confidence, and expertise (Gilbreath, Kim & Nichols, 2011). Environments have specific characteristics that make them unique and result in varying behavior (Banning, 1978). From the ecological psychology and person environment theory emerged the idea of campus ecology (Banning, 1978).

Campus Ecology

Similar to person-environment theory that attempts to understand the process of adjustment between individuals and their environments (Caplan, 1987), the impact of the environment on behavior can be applied to the relationship between a campus environment and students (Banning, 1978; Banning & Bryner, 2001). Both early and current environment psychology and campus ecology studies relied on early person environment theories to explain the impact of person and environment on behavior. Such theories include Baker's theory of behavior settings, Holland's typology of personalities and environment characteristics, Stern's need x press=culture theory, Moo's social ecological approach and Pervin's transactional approach (Banning, 1978; Walsh, 1973).

Campus Ecology and Community

The ecology and culture of a university is composed of many elements ranging from cultural properties, formal policies, and procedures to the daily routines of the institution (Kuh, 2001). Strange and Banning's (2001) hierarchy of environmental design included three environmental conditions; safety and inclusion, involvement and community. According to the hierarchy, the conditions of safety and inclusion and involvement must be met if the community condition is ever to be accomplished.

The last environmental condition of community is the one of the foci of this research, as it offers a sense of belonging, a commitment to a larger purpose, and encourages engagement (Strange & Banning, 2001). According to Strange and Banning (2001), "communities establish a status of full membership for participants in an environment, offering them opportunities to engage over time in distinct history, tradition and culture" (p. 161). Students of color spend a great amount of time making sense of the multiple layers of race, culture, gender, citizenship status, and language, all of which inform their experiences on campus (Yosso & Lopez, 2010). Cultural centers, to be successful in creating a place of community and facilitating sense of belonging must have a consistency with the physical environment that defines common purpose, characteristics and unique qualities (Strange & Banning, 2001).

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Figure 2.1 Hierarchy of Learning Environment Purposes

Barrett's (2014) study of the "relationship between the students' sense of community on the college campus and the physical space of the college union" (p. 24) utilized three constructs to measure sense of community: sense of belonging, social activities, and social support network.

The physical construct aspect of the study examined eleven campus spaces, encompassing campus areas from classrooms to parking facilities. The results from over 15,000 students showed there were strong relationships between the three community constructs and the eleven physical environment constructs (Barrett, 2014).

Research by Reif (2014) utilized Strange and Banning's (2001) campus ecological framework and Olednburg's (1989) third place theory as a theoretical framework. Third place is an environment outside of home or work that serves as a gathering spot for a specific group that promotes engagement with other individuals, a relaxing area and experiences that are limited in other areas (Oldenburg, 1989; Reif, 2014). Eleven transfer students participated in the study which utilized photographs to capture the instances and spaces where participants experienced community. From subsequent interviews with the participants, Reif (2014) found that physical space impacted student involvement and sense of community. Students utilized the college student union to build community with peers and it was found that criteria set by Oldenburg's third place theory were met by the college student union, despite concerns regarding lighting, seating, and general aesthetics (Reif, 2014). It was also found that while the college union was not an ideal place to build community, a sense of ownership was held by study participants because of their utilization of the space and participation in programs in the college union (Reif, 2014).

Emergence of Cultural Centers

Due to unrest on college campuses across the country in the 1960's and 1970's, especially at predominantly White institutions, cultural centers were established (Jones, Castellanos & Cole, 2002). Despite limited institutional support, financial resources, and changing political climates, cultural centers serve as social, political, and academic vehicles for

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students of color at predominantly White institutions (Jones, Castellanos & Cole, 2002). Research specific to Asian-American and Pacific Islander, Native American and Latinx cultural centers is growing, but is extremely limited (Liu et. al, 2011; Lozano, 2011; Shotton et. al, 2011). As Black cultural centers were the first to be established, they have a more extensive body of research and that literature serves as a foundation for empirical research on these environments. Cultural centers and multicultural student services, while often similar in mission and purpose, differ from one another in how they serve as a means for community amongst students of color.

Multicultural Student Services

It is important to discuss multicultural student services and the differences between these offices and cultural centers. The increasing enrollment of Latinx/a/o students and their need for physical space and specific services prompted universities to reassess the support offered for this population (Shuford, 2011). The 1960's Civil Rights Movement, along with many educational legal battles, not only brought policy change, but physical change to college campuses across the country (Shuford, 2011). During this time when political activism was high, minority student service offices, which would evolve into multicultural student services, began to form (Shuford, 2011). These service offices, established to provide support for students of color, often focused on recruitment, socialization, financial aid assistance, and retention (Young, 1991; Shuford, 2011). While multicultural student services offices and cultural centers emerged at similar times due to the political environment on college campuses, they differ in some important ways, despite being more similar than different (Shuford, 2011). Multicultural student services offices tend to focus on services provided, whereas cultural centers focus on targeted services and programmatic initiatives (Young, 1991; Shuford, 2011). Cultural centers are guided by an overarching mission to promote and preserve cultural identity for students of color (Young,

1991), whereas multicultural student services seek to provide broader functional student assistance. Despite their different objectives, multicultural student services and cultural centers were both established to transform campus environments; however, that shared mission cannot be achieved if these services and centers are as "marginalized on campus as the students it exists to serve" (Stewart, 2011, p. 7).

Black Cultural Centers

Black cultural centers have existed on college campuses for more than 30 years, first emerging during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's (Patton, 2006). As the Black population grew at predominantly White institutions in the 1960's, the institutions were unwilling to create an environment conducive to the academic success of Black students (Patton, 2006). As a result, Black students sought to organize themselves and identify resources to assist them in combating the discrimination, isolation, and racism experienced at predominantly White institutions (Patton, 2006). These students pressured institutions to increase resources and implement changes to create equitable academic environments (Patton, 2004). Desired changes included, but were not limited to, hiring more Black faculty members, recruiting more Black students, establishing minority affairs offices, and building Black cultural centers (Patton, 2006). While Black cultural centers have evolved, they uphold their historic purpose to help retain students of color, reinforce cultural identity, and provide solace from the hostile campus environment (Committee on Policy and Racial Justice, 1993; Hefner, 2002; Patton, 2004).

Patton (2004) conducted one of the first empirical research studies on cultural centers, specifically Black cultural centers. Their research sought to examine the role of Black cultural centers on the Black student experience at three predominantly White institutions (Patton, 2004). Specifically, the study examined the Black student experience and perception of the centers'

programs, services and presence (Patton, 2004). Three varied institutions were selected,; the

University of Florida (Gainesville, Florida) a large, comprehensive, research, public institution;

Northern Illinois University (DeKalb, Illinois) a medium, regional public institution; and,

Wabash College (Crawfordsville, Indiana) a small, private all male institution.

Patton (2004) found seven emergent themes regarding Black student experiences with

Black cultural centers. First, Black cultural centers were a "home away from home" (p. 216), as

the centers provided space, support services and a familiar environment where students could

socialize. The second theme was that Black cultural centers greatly influenced first-year

students' acclimation and adjustment to the campus. Whether it was Black student orientation,

social events or involvement opportunities, the cultural center was critical to the adjustment of

Black students (Patton, 2004). Third, student involvement in the Black cultural center correlated

with additional participation in other activities focused around the Black community. The

cultural center served as an umbrella resource for many Black student organizations, which

propelled student involvement in additional organizations and initiatives. Fourth, staff and

administrators within the Black cultural center contributed to how students perceived the cultural

center. Positive interactions with the cultural center staff greatly impacted the amount of time

students spent in the center and provided students with a sense of consistency and familiarity.

Fifth, the Black cultural center helped foster a sense of Black identity for the students. Black

students saw the center as a beacon of Black culture at the university and as a place to learn

about themselves and others in a safe environment (Patton, 2004).

The sixth emergent theme greatly aligned with Lewin's (2013) ecological equation in that

the human aggregate and the physical space of the BCC impacted both the Black student

behavior and perception of the BCC (Patton, 2004). This refers to the idea that students'

experiences are positively impacted when they feel welcome and have a space that is educational, social, and culturally relevant (Patton, 2004). Lastly, the study revealed that a vast majority of Black students at the institutions failed to utilize the cultural center. Reasons for this varied; some students perceived the centers as too "radical", some found social support networks elsewhere on campus, some indicated the physical location of the center was undesirable or lacked centrality, and some students were unaware the cultural center existed as a resource (Patton, 2004).

Patton's (2004, 2006) research on Black cultural centers and physical locations that serve the needs and wants of Black students is critically important to the existence and progress of cultural centers at predominantly White campuses, especially during a time when multicultural centers are favored (Hefner, 2002, Richmond, 2012). Richmond (2012) expanded upon Patton's (2004, 2006) research by studying how Black cultural centers have advanced to serve as examples of best practices for cultural centers (2012).

Richmond (2012) utilized a multi-site case study to understand factors that contribute to the success of Black cultural centers at predominantly White institutions. Successful centers were those that withstood changing political climates and institutional goals, while preserving their historical purpose and mission (Richmond, 2012). Richmond (2012) found six central themes common amongst successful Black cultural centers: leadership and legacy, building campus connections, remaining relevant and advancing the institution, community engagement and collaboration, student ownership and call to action, and alumni engagement and involvement (Richmond, 2012).

Leadership and legacy proved to be critical in the advancement of the Black cultural centers studied. The legacy of leadership was woven into the fabric of the centers and

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empowered the students to advocate on behalf of the cultural centers, and provided a basis for cultural center administrators and staff to advance targeted agendas to campus leadership (Richmond, 2012). Building campus connections was also foundational to success. Administrators and staff of Black cultural centers understood that actively engaging with various departments and institutional leaders while maintaining a high level of visibility was crucial to maintaining a seat at the table (Richmond, 2012). As with any academic entity, relevancy to institutional goals and mission are necessary for survival. Successful Black cultural centers assisted the institution in meeting goals, aligned cultural center initiatives with institutional-wide objectives, and continuously worked to provide innovative programming and services (Richmond, 2012).

Not only were Black cultural centers successful at building on-campus relationships, their reach extended into the greater community, which allowed them to leverage support from multiple areas (Richmond, 2012). Student ownership and engagement was at the forefront of these centers and was often cited as a key reason for their success. Student initiatives, collective action and determination pushed these cultural centers to continue the pursuit of progress (Richmond, 2012). Alumni engagement was the last overarching theme shared by successful Black cultural centers, representing a source of ongoing financial and social capital apart from the institution. This alumni engagement allowed the centers to maintain and leverage multiple constituency groups for both fiscal and programmatic resources (Richmond, 2012).

Latinx Cultural Centers

Although far less research has been conducted on the impact of Latinx cultural centers, there are several key studies. Lozano's (2014) study of a Latino cultural center at a Midwestern predominantly White institution examined the sense of belonging, thriving and validation of

eleven undergraduate Latinx/a/o students. Lozano's empirical study is the only study of its kind, in that it specifically studies Latinx/a/o students' experiences within the cultural center. Five major findings emerged from the study.

Firstly, students were connected with the Latinx cultural center through relationships with alumni, campus mentors, active upperclassmen/women or through targeted programs and student organization resource fairs. The connection to the cultural center was strengthened because "they were actively seeking something – connection, involvement, cultural familiarity or perhaps cultural validation" (Lozano, 2014, p. 91).

Secondly, the Latinx cultural center environment provided students with a space that was familiar, comfortable, welcoming, and embraced Latinx cultural expression through language, music, food, dance, community and even created a sense of empowerment through art. Thirdly, building on the prior finding, the Latinx cultural center served as a hub for involvement for many of the participants in the study. Engagement within the center was found to be highest during a student's first and second year at the institution and to decrease once engagement in other involvement opportunities increased. Participants saw the Latinx cultural center as foundational to establishing connections with other involvement opportunities and community building across the institution (Lozano, 2014).

Fourthly, the lack of a substantial Latinx/a/o presence on campus was identified as a concern amongst participants. The location of the Latinx cultural center on the outskirts of campus made it difficult for some students to find and utilize the center, while others perceived the removed location as a sanctuary from the larger campus. Although the Latinx cultural center sought to mitigate the marginalization and racial tension Latinx/a/o students experienced on campus by providing a welcoming space for students, it lacked resources to address the issue of

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representation of Latinx/a/o students on campus. An insufficient budget and lack of faculty and administrative support further exacerbated the issue (Lozano, 2014).

Lastly, participants ascribed meaning and purpose to the physical space within the cultural center. The main floor was identified as a communal neutral space open to all and was used for general community building. The second floor was dedicated to four specific Latinx/a/o and Native student organizations. This dedicated space created a perception of ownership that suggested the rooms were not to be utilized by non-members and served as a symbolic representation of those organizations' historical connection with the cultural center (Lozano, 2014).

Lozano's (2014) study also found that sense of belonging was critical to student success and experience at predominantly White institutions. In this respect, the Latinx cultural center served as a connection to campus and fostered a sense of belonging for the students (Lozano, 2014). The environment of the cultural center, both in physical and social forms, promoted a sense of belonging and influenced behavior of these Latinx/a/o students. As Bronfenbrenner (1989) noted, "there is always interplay between the psychological characteristics of the person and the specific environment; the one cannot be defined without reference to the other" (p. 225). Person-environment congruence indicates that a person is likely to be more compatible with their environment if they are similar to the dominant type within the setting. This person-environment congruence could be applicable to cultural centers and the behaviors, values, attitudes and expectations within the environment that resonate with students of color and their respective cultural center. In college students, greater person-environment congruence has been found to result in a higher level of satisfaction and a desire to persist and increase retention (Smart, Feldman & Ethington, 2000; Strange & Banning, 2015). Given the impact of person-

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environment congruence, this study seeks to understand the relationship between undergraduate Latinx/o men, the Latinx cultural center and sense of belonging.

Community & Sense of Belonging

Community and sense of belonging offer similar experiences but differ in definition (Furman, 1998; Strayhorn, 2012). Community offers a sense of belonging, security and engagement of participants and a sense of purpose (Strange & Banning, 2015). Strayhorn (2012) proposed that sense of belonging is a precursor to community and not the same, despite being similarly defined. This is an interesting proposal, as one might assume college students perceive the two terms interchangeably without regard for the relationship between the terms. In relation to college students, sense of belonging is defined is as "students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, represented, valued by and important to the group (e.g., campus community or others on campus" (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 3). This definition becomes even more important when considering the experiences of men of color, specifically Latinx/o men. Sense of belonging for Latinx/o men is crucial as it is likely they "perceive themselves as marginal to the mainstream of life [of college]" on predominantly White campuses (Hurtado and Carter, 1997, p. 324; Strayhorn, 2012).

Community

Bickford and Wright (2006) indicated that a community paradigm emphasizes both the physical and social environments and their role in individual and group learning and growth. It is important to acknowledge that community, a result of sense of belonging, is fluid and has a natural ebb and flow that mirrors one's environment. Achieving community requires development, personal effort and the commitment of a group; community is achieved when one

feels cared for, valued as an individual, accepted, and able to contribute towards a common goal and purpose (Cheng, 2005; Strange & Banning, 2015). Boyer (1990) indicated an ideal college community was purposeful, open, just, disciplined, caring and celebrative. These idealistic characteristics create a unique and holistic campus environment that seem to be far from reach for many campuses.

Reif (2014) studied how college unions facilitated community for transfer students. Utilizing a participatory action research method, participants identified physical and social aspects of the college union that were relevant to community and sense of belonging. Participants confirmed that physical spaces within the college union were critical to the establishment of community. Reif's (2014) findings indicated the physical environment and human aggregates are important in the formation of community and dictated much of their behavior in the space. Participants utilized the space to meet both individual and group needs through manipulation of the physical space. Reif (2014) found "this manipulation was an indication that campus culture might be more valuable than or as valuable as the collective design, and that if both these concepts were in harmony, an ideal space could be created" (Reif, 2014, p. 262). Through this behavior, community was sought and established through a physical space.

For Latinx/o men, establishing community on a college campus is the result of the navigation of many different experiences. Huerta and Fishman (2014) utilized Schlossberg's (1989) theory of mattering and marginality to explore how undergraduate Latinx/o men navigated college environments and built relationships. Key findings indicated the importance of the college environment, importance of peer and faculty mentorship and feelings of mattering and marginality for Latinx/o men. Latinx/o men indicated peer validation provided them with

the drive to be academically successful and increased their self-esteem. When the participants were able to engage in an environment that was safe, academically encouraging and positively influencing, it provided these young Latinx/o men the opportunity to explore their ethnic identity, engage with other Latinx/a/o peers and professionals and transition into a place of support and progress (Huerta & Fishman, 2014).

It is important to consider that the idealistic characteristics identified by Boyer (1990) are entrenched in centuries of systemic of racism, sexism and classism. It was these very practices for which cultural centers on predominantly White campuses were founded. It was within these small, yet important, spaces of identity and culture where these ideal characteristics of community actually could exist for students of color.

Sense of Belonging

Little is known about how social identities and campus environments create or facilitate a sense of belonging for college students (Strayhorn, 2012). The basic desire to establish relationships with others to feel a sense of belonging is a human need and motivation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Maslow, 1962; Strayhorn, 2012). Sense of belonging is the "degree to which an individual feels respected, valued, accepted, and needed by a defined group (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 87).

Baumeister and Leary (1995) found that sense of belonging had impacts on emotional and cognitive processes; those that experienced a sense of belonging had more positive emotional responses and patterns. Baumeister and Leary (1995) proposed two central aspects to sense of belonging. Findings indicated people needed frequent positive interaction with the same individuals and for those interactions to take place regularly, for an extended amount of time (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Creating intentional environments and programs that promote a sense of belonging has never been more difficult given institutions' growing racially diverse populations (Museus, Yi, Saelua, 2017). Hausmann, Schofield and Woods (2007) found that sense of belonging was an important variable in predicting student persistence and matriculation. Utilizing an intervention research design, the researchers found that individuals who participated in the intervention were more likely to persist and maintain a sense of belonging. The intervention in the study were letters from upper-administrators and small institutional gifts such as decals and ID holder. Given this impact on student success, developing models to understand how to create environments that promote a sense of belonging is a critical next step for institutions of higher education (Hausmann, Schofield & Woods, 2007)

The Engaging Campus (CECE) Model of College Success (Museus, 2014) was utilized in a study of 499 students conducted by Museus, Yi and Saelua (2017). This study found several relationships between environment and sense of belonging, suggesting the CECE model could be utilized to better understand sense of belonging amongst college students. The CECE model consists of nine environmental elements which include cultural relevance, cultural familiarity, culturally relevant knowledge, cultural community service, meaningful cross-cultural engagement and culturally validating environments (Museus, Yi, Saelua, 2017). The element of culturally validating environments is critically important to consider when studying campus sense of belonging, given that it refers to the extent to which students feel like their ethnic and cultural identities are valued by the institution and community (Museus, Yi, Saelua, 2017).

As the literature and research of sense of belonging continues to grow, it is important to consider the definition of sense of belonging and the applicability of such a construct to different populations. Vaccaro and Newman (2016) conducted a grounded constructivist theory study of

51 first-year college students that explored the definitions and development of a sense of belonging. Emergent themes of the study indicated that environmental perceptions, involvement and relationships with others determined the interpretation of the definition and experience of the sense of belonging (Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). The study, which examined "minoritized" and "privileged" students, showed that sense of belonging was experienced and defined differently between the groups. Minoritized students, defined as members of historically oppressed and under-represented social identities (e.g., students of color, LGBTQ people, low socioeconomic individuals and non-Christian individuals) saw safety and respect as crucial components of belonging. Privileged students, those who had access to power, resources and opportunities, did not (Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). Vaccaro and Newman's study filled a gap in the literature as it illustrated that individuals with oppressed identities and privileged identities defined and experienced sense of belonging differently.

Strayhorn (2008) studied Black collegiate men and the relationship between diverse interactions with peers and the effect on sense of belonging at predominantly White institutions. Findings indicated that students who had interactions with peers of racial difference were more likely to report higher levels of sense of belonging. This finding was also true for White men who interacted with peers of a different race. Such findings show the importance of intercultural and cross-racial interactions on the influence of sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2008). Similar results were found in Maramba and Museus (2013), where sense of belonging for Filipino American students was positively influenced by cross-racial interactions and in-group Filipino relationships.

Although the growing literature regarding students of color and sense of belonging (Hausmann, Shofield & Woods, 2007; Maramba & Museus, 2013; Museus, Yi, Saelua, 2017;

Strayhorn, 2008; Vaccaro & Newman, 2016) indicates that this is an area of growing interest, one limited area of research is sense of belonging specific to the Latinx/o men.

Latinx/a/o Student Sense of Belonging

Hurtado and Carter (1997) conducted one of the first studies to examine sense of belonging amongst Latinx/a/o students. The researchers found that Latinx/a/o students who made sense of their environment through peer interaction and group membership were more apt to develop necessary skills to be successful at the institution (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). These memberships and peer group interactions with other Latinx/a/o individuals, both inside and outside the institution, were critical to fostering the feeling of being at "home" and increasing Latinx/a/o students' sense of belonging. These memberships and interactions are important to consider when discussing the mission and objectives of cultural centers at predominantly White institutions. The role of student participation in activities such as religion, activism, dance, art and other culturally significant activities have often been excluded in studies that examine sense of belonging for Latinx/a/o students (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Hurtado and Carter (1997) suggested additional research be conducted to "determine sub-environments that contribute to a high sense of belonging among members (in the aggregate), allowing researchers to understand how such communities can foster educational outcomes" (p. 341).

Building on the work of Hurtado and Carter (1997), Hernandez (2013) sought to understand Latinx/a/o students' perception of campus climate while negotiating the psychosocial, cultural and environmental perspectives of the college experience. Sense of belonging emerged as a theme in Hernandez's (2013) research which found that participants defined sense of belonging in varying ways. Participants indicated sense of belonging, or lack thereof, was influenced by mentorship, representation of Latinx/a/o students and faculty and

inclusivity in the curriculum. A key finding was the resonance of the absence of a culturally inclusive physical space which spoke to the perception of the campus environment, values and sense of belonging (Hernandez, 2013).

This research study looks to expand upon the work of Hurtado and Carter (1997) in understanding how the Latinx cultural center, as a sub environment, facilitates a sense of belonging and community amongst Latinx/o men, as there is a lack of research showing how dominant and cultural environment experiences contribute to Latinx/a/o student sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

Summary

The characteristics and dynamics of human aggregates are particularly relevant to understanding the challenges of creating inclusive campus environments that promote sense of belonging. Typically, students of color and other historically under-represented groups experience a more hostile campus environment compared to their White peers (Strange & Banning, 2001). These hostile campus climates, partnered with cultural centers, create an interesting interaction at predominantly White institutions.

Strange and Banning's (2015) hierarchy of environmental design takes into consideration students of color and recognizes that the majority creates both a cultural and physical environment that can dictate experience. Despite this consideration, it is limited in understanding how such environments play a role in the sense of belonging and community formation of students of color, specifically Latinx/o men. Many leading theories and practices center on White students and the White experience and marginalize students of color, both in academic research and on college campuses (Yosso & Benavides Lopez, 2010). The application of critical race theory to highlight the limitations of the hierarchy of learning environmental

design seeks to acknowledge that cultural centers provide a counter space which enable Latinx/o

men to establish a sense of belonging, learn, and resist White-centric theories and institutional

practices (Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998, Yosso & Benavides Lopez, 2010).

Cultural centers, especially Latinx cultural centers, offer a space where students can

"process and respond to the rejection they experience attending a historically white college"

(Yosso & Lopez, 2010, p. 94). These centers are counter spaces that allow students of color to

build the community that they need, which are often similar to their home communities (Yosso,

2005; Yosso & Lopez, 2010). Although some research exists on current campus ecological

research, there is limited research on the physical environment in higher education and the role

that it plays within learning, support and sense of belonging (Harrington, 2013; Temple, 2007).

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine the experience and ecological factors associated with Latinx/o men's sense of belonging in the Latinx cultural center at a predominantly White institution. Two main research questions guide the study:

1. How do Latinx/o men experience sense of belonging in a Latinx cultural center at predominantly White institution?

   a. What role does race play in sense of belonging in the Latinx cultural center?

2. What ecological factors are associated with sense of belonging for Latinx/o men at the Latinx cultural center?

This chapter presents the methodological approach, theoretical framework, research approach and rationale for the study. Additionally, research participants, the research site, data collection and analysis procedures, trustworthiness, delimitations and limitations are discussed. Research protocol was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the researcher's home institution and the participant site institution. Approval for the study was received in March 2018, from Colorado State University; approval for research collection was also approved by Rocky Mountain University (RMU) in March 2018.

Methodological Approach

This study utilized a qualitative research methodology. Through qualitative research, a greater depth of understanding of people and environments is explored (Berg, 2004). As a qualitative researcher, the goal is to understand how humans arrange themselves in their settings and make sense of their environments through symbols, rituals, social structures and social roles (Berg, 2004). Through a qualitative methodological approach, this study explored the experience of Latinx/o men within a Latinx cultural center at a predominantly White institution.

Creswell (2013) defined qualitative research as "the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 44). Qualitative research as an interpretive framework is guided by a set of four assumptions of ontology, epistemology, axiology and methodology (Creswell, 2013). Ontology questions the nature of reality and acknowledges that there are multiple realities (Creswell, 2013). Epistemology refers to the relationship between the researcher and that being researched, recognizing closeness to the research and subject(s) is crucial (Creswell, 2013). Axiology questions the role of values and the impact of both the researcher and participant's narratives (Creswell, 2013). Methodology describes the process of the research and design (Creswell, 2013).

For this qualitative study, these research assumptions are viewed through a critical paradigm. A critical paradigm and perspective provides the research a foundation for consciousness and transformational liberation and emancipation action (Guba, 1990; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011). Specifically, this study uses a theoretical framework of critical race theory (CRT) and Latinx critical theory (LatCrit).

Theoretical Framework

The neo-liberal doctrine that promotes colorblindness and self-interest continues to permeate institutions of higher education and positions the White middle-class student experience as the standard (Gillborn, 2014; Yosso & Lopez, 2010). This historical marginalization and uncritical perspective negatively impacts students of color, specifically Latinx/a/o students who are entering institutions of higher education at rising rates. There are many factors that contribute to the inability for Latinx/a/o students to access institutions of higher education but there are also critical factors that impact their persistence, learning and

development once they arrive. One of those critical factors is the campus environment,

experienced both physically and culturally when attending a predominantly White institution.

When examining sense of belonging of Latinx/o men at a predominantly White institution, it is

imperative to understand how race continues to inform student experiences.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory and LatCrit serve as the foundational theoretical constructs for this

study to understand Latinx cultural centers' facilitation of sense of belonging for Latinx/o

collegiate men at predominantly White institutions. Critical race theory (CRT) is a body of

research and theoretical framework that calls into question and challenges the racial injustice and

oppression that exists (Delgado, 2012, Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1997; Patton, 2006).

The challenge of racial injustice is captured by the five main tenets of CRT: 1) racism

permeates all and is an ordinary component of society, 2) experiential knowledge in the form of

storytelling, 3) interest convergence, 4) critique of liberalism, and 5) commitment to social

justice (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, Ladson-Billings, 2010, Yosso & Lopez, 2010). The tenet of

racism as an ordinary and engrained component of American society looks at both the systematic

oppressive structures that perpetuate White supremacy as well as failure for the majority to

recognize that such racism exists (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). The second tenet of CRT is that

of experiential knowledge through storytelling. This powerful tool provides voice to those that

are often silenced. Through storytelling, people of color can provide essential context to the

experience of oppression and systematic racism (Ladson-Billings, 2010). Storytelling is an

important tool as critical race theorists and social justice change agents work to dismantle

oppressive systems, as people of color can bring a "presumed competence" (p.10) to speak about

race and oppression (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). It is these counter-narratives that provide the

basis for critical race theory. The third tenet of CRT is interest convergence. This tenet argues that real change is only achievable when it is in the interest of the White people (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). The current political, economic and social structure is created in a way that perpetuates and maintains White supremacy and there is little interest in dismantling such a structure, as it serves White people materially, physically and financially (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). The fourth tenet is a critique of neo-liberalism policies and attitudes (Ladson-Billings, 2010). This critique is tied to interest convergence in that it argues that a color-blind liberal agenda continues to perpetuate racism and benefits White people (Ladson-Billings, 2010). The final tenet of CRT is a commitment to social justice. The general foundation of CRT is that of law, policy and progress. The tenet of social justice focuses on utilizing research and practice to create both political and social change for communities of color (Bernal, 2002).

Latinx Critical Theory (LatCrit)

One of the critiques of CRT is that it focuses solely on the binary Black and White racial experience and does not consider intersecting identities of people of color (Bernal, 2002). Latinx critical theory (LatCrit) extends beyond the White and Black racial binary to acknowledge the experiences of Latinx/a/o citizens, and addresses the intersections of sex, class, legal status and gender (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001). Whereas CRT focuses on the Black and White binary, LatCrit is focused on building coalitions and progress for Latinx/a/o pan-ethnicity (Bernal, 2002, Hernandez-Truyol, Harris & Valdes, 1996). According to Iglesias (1997) and Davila and Bradley (2010)

> "LatCrit as an exploration of how CRT could be expanded beyond the Black/White
> paradigm, incorporating a fuller, more contextualized analysis of cultural, political and

economic dimensions of white supremacy, particularly its impact on Latina/os in their individual and collective struggles for social justice and self-understanding" (p. 42).

LatCrit provides a Latinx-centric theoretical foundation, allowing exploration of how environments perpetuate racial subordination and empowerment (Delgado Bernal, 2002). Further, LatCrit is grounded in counter narrative storytelling to disrupt the marginalization of Latinx/a/o individuals in aspects of race, ethnicity, language and immigration status and phenotypes (Hernandez-Truyol, Harris & Valdes, 2006; Oliva, Pérez & Parker, 2013). Specifically, a LatCrit grounded analysis of education, according to Olivia, Pérez and Parker (2013), "examines ways in which race and racism explicitly and implicitly impact educational structures, processes and policy discourse that affect Latinos" (p. 142).

Applying a LatCrit framework allows for the understanding of Latinx/a/o students as both the creators and holders of valuable knowledge that can inform policies and practices, create the necessary paradigm shifts on college campuses and even within Latinx cultural centers. Through a LatCrit perspective, this study seeks to better understand the impact of Latinx/a/o pan-ethnicity in making sense of an environment as one of empowerment, action and belonging (Valdes, 1996).

Research Approach

Ethnography looks to understand patterns of values, behaviors and beliefs of a culture-sharing group (Creswell, 2013; Harris, 1968). It is through ethnography that researchers can develop a complex understanding of a culture and the shared experiences of groups (Creswell, 2013). Utilizing ethnography as a method allows for the study of the physical environment, as well as of individuals who interact with that space, to understand the conditions that exist (Gildersleeve & Sifuentez, 2017). It is through ethnography that research can assist in

understanding how culture is produced by institutions of higher education, and, more importantly, how such culture can be critically addressed and transformed for the betterment of minoritized populations (Gildersleeve & Sifuentez, 2017).

Through CRT and LatCrit theoretical perspectives, this study focuses on the behaviors of a culture-sharing group to create positive change for participants and Latinx cultural centers (Berg, 2004; Creswell, 2013). Critical ethnographic research looks to interrogate and question social theory (Carspecken, 1996). Specifically, Kinchloe and McLaren (1994) identified values and characteristics of critical research, noting that research calls into question social and cultural norms, acknowledges privilege and oppression, that oppression takes on many forms and that academic research often perpetuates racial, class and gender oppression.

Data Collection

This ecological study of sense of belonging for undergraduate Latinx/o men acknowledges the transactional relationship between the individual and the environment. Lewin's (2013) equation of B=f(P, E) saw behavior as a function of the person and environment. This study focused on undergraduate Latinx/o men (the person) and the Latinx cultural center (the environment) to understand the experience of sense of belonging (the behavior). Data was collected through 18 semi-structured photo elicitation interviews of six Latinx/o men and two researcher observations of the Latinx cultural center.

Site

This study took place at a midsize, four-year, public institution in the Rocky mountain region of the United States. The institution will be identified as Rocky Mountain University (RMU) in this study for anonymity. Located in a city of roughly 100,000 residents, RMU was founded in 1890 as a teaching/normal school. The institution evolved to become an active

research university granting bachelors, masters and doctoral degrees. The university now enrolls over 13,000 students, with an undergraduate population of over 10,000, which accounts for 76% of the total student population.

RMU was selected for this study based on two primary institutional characteristics: student demographics and presence of a Latinx cultural center. RMU is a predominantly White institution and the Latinx/a/o population is the largest minoritized population. The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) data indicate RMU's Fall 2017 undergraduate race and ethnicity demographics consists of 56% White, 19% Latinx/a/o, 13% race/ethnicity unknown, 4% Black or African-American, 4% Multiracial/Two or more races, and 2% Asian. According to most recent NCES six-year graduation data for RMU, the 2009 first-time, and full-time student cohort consisted of 126 Latinx/o men. Of that cohort, 51 graduated within 5 years, resulting in a 40.5% graduation rate. RMU's Latinx cultural center, founded in the fall of 1985, has a long standing history, making it an ideal research site.

Participants

The study utilized a purposeful sampling of six self-identified Latinx/o undergraduate men. This method of sampling was selected because the purpose of this study was to understand the sense of belonging for Latinx/o men within the Latinx cultural center (LCC), which creates a need for specific demographic criteria. Through a purposeful sample, participants were contacted because they met one of the following three criteria: 1) currently participated in a LCC event or program, 2) employed at the cultural center or 3) visit the cultural center a minimum of twice per week. In addition, the participant must self-identify as a Latinx/o man and be an undergraduate student. Due to my interest in the experience and the physical environment within the Latinx cultural center amongst Latinx/o men, it was determined that purposeful sampling

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would be most effective (Creswell, 2015; Patton, 2002). The decision to focus on undergraduate Latinx/o men acknowledges that Latinx/o men experience hostile campus climates and lower persistence rates, but also recognizes that through critical navigation skills and determination, Latinx/o men can be and are successful at institutions of higher education when the environment and culture are supportive (Huerta and Fishman, 2014; Perez & Taylor, 2015; Saenz and Ponjuan, 2009; Yosso, 2005).

During the spring 2018 semester, I solicited participation from 10 Latinx/o undergraduate men who were attending RMU and met the participant criteria outlined above. A cultural center administrator assisted in identifying a list of potential participants and an email containing an introduction, IRB information, a description of the research, and an invitation to participate was sent to potential participants. A copy of the email is provided in Appendix A.

Six of the individuals contacted responded and agreed to participate in the study. When potential participants responded, individual meetings were scheduled to discuss the research topic, criteria and expectations of the participant and researcher. Consent forms and copies of IRB approval were disbursed and collected once the participant agreed to participate in the study.

Data Collection Procedures

Ethnography allows for the exploration of an experience of a group in detail and gives meaning to human action (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994). Through an ethnographic method utilizing photo-elicitation interviews, I explored the experience of sense of belonging for Latinx/o men within the Latinx cultural center at RMU. The photo elicitation method provided a visual context for sense of belonging and the ecological attributes of the Latinx cultural center. Data collection procedures for this study utilized participant-driven photo elicitation, semi-structured interviews and researcher observations within the Latinx cultural center.

Photo Elicitation Interviewing

Utilizing a photo elicitation ethnographic design, one can understand the lived experience of participants and encourage discussion, reflection, and transfer of knowledge through interaction with the photographs (Berg, 2004). Photo elicitation allows participants to guide the research process to ensure that their voices are expressed in a consistent manner and provides a critical emancipatory opportunity (Berg, 2004; Wang & Burris, 1997). In general interviewing, dialogue is initiated by the researcher; in photo elicitation interviewing, dialogue is initiated by visual images (Lapenta, 2011). The photo elicitation data collection process of this study included 18 interviews, 9 photos, and two researcher observations.

Photo elicitation interviewing (PEI) is a methodology that utilizes photographs in conjunction with interviews (Harper, 2002). Through PEI, participants take photos and choose the images that are examined during the interviews (Creswell, 2015; Van Auken, Frisvoll & Stewart, 2010). This research approach gives voice and power to participants and provides an opportunity for them to explicitly share their realities, while also engaging in the data generation process (Creswell, 2015; Van Auken, Frisvoll & Stewart, 2010).

Photo elicitation, first identified as a method in 1957 by John Collier, consists of three elements that inform use of the methodology (Clark-Ibáñez 2004; Harper, 2002):

- photographs are visual inventories of objects, people and artifacts,
- photographs depict events that are a part of a collective or institutional path, and
- photographs are intimate dimensions of the social (Clark-Ibáñez, 2004, p.1511)

Photo elicitation diminishes inadequacies of traditional interview methods by building rapport between the participants and researcher through a semi-structured interview process (Clark-Ibáñez, 2004). Photo elicitation as a research method continues to evolve to empower

participants (Van Auken, Frisvoll & Stewart, 2010). It is through photo elicitation that

participant knowledge and experience is utilized as an epistemological creation of knowledge for

sense of belonging for Latinx/o men. It is through PEI that participants provide counter-

narratives and become generators of knowledge (Harper, 2002; Van Auken, Fisvoll & Stewart,

2010).

The specific PEI method utilized for this study was reflexive photography, which calls

upon the participant to be the photographer (Lapenta, 2012). This differs from traditional photo

elicitation where photographs are provided by the researcher. Utilizing reflexive photography

decreases researcher bias in the selection of specific images and ensures the voices and

experiences of participants are the focus (Lapenta, 2012).

Photos

Appropriate training and a hardcopy text-based summary of photo guidelines were

provided to participants. A copy of these guidelines is provided in Appendix B. Additionally,

participants were trained on the process of digital photo uploads, anonymity protocol (Appendix

C), and the foundational constructs of campus ecology and sense of belonging. Each participant

was directed to take photographs of any social or physical setting that represented sense of

belonging within the LCC. All participants chose to utilize their cellular phones to take

photographs; no participant requested a digital camera from the researcher. Participants were

asked to take pictures within the Latinx cultural center of settings, situations or representations

where sense of belonging was either experienced or challenged. The number of photographs

taken was determined by participants, as no minimums or limitations were set. Each participant

was provided access to an electronic private folder, visible only to the participant and researcher,

where they could upload their images. Participants were given two weeks to collect and submit

photographs, after which time interviews were scheduled with each participant.

Interviews

Each participant was interviewed three times during the study, including a first general

rapport interview, following closely the three-interview series described by Seidman (2006).

The first interview focused on learning about the participant, specifically life experiences related

to the research topic (Seidman, 2006). Understanding the context of how participants arrived at

RMU was important to understanding their experiences at RMU (Seidman, 2006).

The second interview focused on the details of the experience, in this case, sense of

belonging (Seidman, 2006). Utilizing participant submitted photos, I sought to understand the

experience of the participants and the relation that physical space, interpersonal relationships and

race played in those experiences (Seidman, 2006). The third and final interview focused on

ascribing meaning and making connections of the understanding of sense of belonging and the

transactional relationship between themselves and their physical environment. I utilized

participant submitted photos to further explore the early emerging themes of sense of belonging

and the role of the LCC. A full list of preliminary interview questions is provided in Appendix

D.

Photo elicitation interviews occurred at the end of the two-week photography session.

Each interview lasted approximately one hour and was digitally audio-recorded. During the

interview, each photograph submitted by the participant was displayed and the participant was

asked to reflect on the photograph and their experience of sense of belonging within the cultural

center. This reflection and interview process allowed participants to give context to their

perceptions (Wang & Burris, 1997).

A semi-standardized interview process was used to allow a natural flow for the interview process. Each participant was asked specific questions regarding sense of belonging, with the opportunity to probe further for clarification and context (Berg, 2004). This semi-standardized structure gave me the ability to understand sense of belonging through the lens of the participant (Berg, 2004). Interview questions utilized an adapted version of the photo voice SHOWeD mnemonic (Appendix D) developed by Wang and Pies (2004) and specific questions. The SHOWeD mnemonic, originally developed for participatory action research gives a foundation for photo elicitation interviews.

Observations

In accordance with classic qualitative research, observation serves as a critical technique of data collection for this study (Berg, 2004). Observation provides context for the understanding and interpretation of cultural behavior within the Latinx cultural center (Mulhall, 2003). During the course of the study, I visited the Latinx cultural center at varying times and days to personally examine the physical attributes of the space including the physical location, physical condition, design, layout, furnishings, and artwork, along with the human aggregates in the form of common characteristics of those in the space (Banning, 2015). Researcher observation, in addition to photo elicitation interviews, is important because observation "provides insight into interactions between dyads and groups; illustrates the whole picture; captures context/process; informs about the influence of the physical environment (Mulhall, 2003, pp. 307).

Observation was conducted as a complete observer and nonparticipant, which allowed me to study and observe the environment from a distance without direct involvement with activities or individuals in the cultural center (Creswell, 2013). Creswell's (2013) observational protocol

was utilized to record information; each observation session focused on recording descriptive notes which summarized, in chronological order, the events and behaviors occurring in the cultural center. The protocol also included reflective notes on my reflections, observation summaries and general summary conclusions, for potential theme development. Table 3.1 shows the schedule of the data collection process.

Table 3.1

Data Collection Process

Data Method	Constructs	Means	Completion
Study Introduction	Sense of Belonging	Audio Taped	April 2018
1st Round of individual interviews	Sense of Belonging	Audio Taped	April 2018
Researcher Observations	Physical attributes	Note taking	April 2018
2nd round of individual interviews	Sense of belonging & Race	Audio Taped	May 2018
Observations	Physical attributes	Note taking	May 2018

Data Analysis

Data collected from photo elicitation interviews and observations was transcribed and coded to create a heuristic, a method of discovery (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). Data was sorted into patterns and coded utilizing both a first cycle and second cycle (Saldaña, 2016). First cycle coding was conducted to assign codes to chunks of data utilizing an elemental method (Saldaña, 2016). In Vivo coding "uses words or short phrases from participant's own language in the data record as codes" (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014, pp. 74). In Vivo coding process was utilized for first cycle coding was determined to be the best coding method for this study

because of the power it gives to participants and because it provides an opportunity to find themes specific to Latinx/o collegiate men. In Vivo data software was not used for coding. The In Vivo coding process was followed utilizing a Dedoose data management software.

Second cycle coding was used to group first cycle summaries into a more defined list of themes. These themes and identified patterns have four important functions: condensing information into a smaller number of analytic units; allowing analysis of data during collection so future fieldwork can be more focused; assisting in creating a schema of understanding regarding the interactions and laying the ground work for a cross-case analysis by identifying common themes (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014)

Comprehensive field notes were taken during observations of the Latinx cultural center. This process allowed me to systematically and comprehensively describe in detail the social settings of the Latinx cultural center (Wolfinger, 2002). Through comprehensive field notes, I recorded events in the Latinx cultural center in detail that might otherwise have been forgotten (Wolfinger, 2002). The field notes were used to understand the utilization patterns of the physical space, behavior in the physical space and the role of the physical space.

Trustworthiness

To ensure the findings and interpretations of this study are accurate, I utilized two strategies of validation (Creswell, 2015). Trustworthiness was met through the utilization of triangulation and member checks. Triangulation is accomplished through the employment of various sources and methods of data collection to provide perspective on a specific phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). In this study, it was through individual interviews, photographs and observations that triangulation was achieved and employed to assist in validity.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) found member checks are "the most crucial technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314). Member checks are a credibility factor in which the collected data are shared with the participants to ensure accuracy. Member checks ensures I was appropriate, honest and accurate in my research. Through member checks, I took "data, analysis, interpretations and conclusions back to participants so they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account" (Creswell, 2013). The findings chapter was provided to all study participants with a window for feedback. No participants provided feedback on the data, analysis, interpretations or conclusions.

Study Limitations and Delimitations

The limitations of this study are based on study design and researcher bias. The study design, utilizing ethnographic photo elicitation methodology, is qualitative and does not utilize any quantitative methods. A mixed method study design could potentially increase applicability and provide a holistic understanding of the use and ecological status of the Latinx cultural center. Another limitation is research bias due to personal identity and professional experience. The researcher identifies as a Latino man and has previously directed a cultural center and multicultural student services office, which could potentially influence bias.

The delimitations of this study are due to its population focus and one research site. The study is focused on undergraduate Latinx/o men. Graduate students were not included in this study due to the researcher's interest in understanding the Latinx/o undergraduate experience within the specific cultural center. Additionally, the research only included one site - the LCC at RMU. Since only one Latinx cultural center was studied, the results of this study may not be generalized to other cultural centers.

CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

This chapter presents the research findings which are the result of the transcribed and analyzed interviews of six Latino undergraduate men and two researcher observations. The research questions guiding the study were: (1) How do Latinx/o men experience sense of belonging in a Latinx cultural center at a predominantly White institution; (1a) What role does race play in sense of belonging in the Latinx cultural center; and (2) what ecological factors are associated with sense of belonging for Latinx/o men at a Latinx cultural center?

This chapter is organized by the emergent themes of the political safety, masculine vulnerability, person-environment congruence through cultural validation and, lastly, physical space as a counter-narrative. Prior to the introduction of the themes, a profile for each participant is presented to provide context for the emergent themes. Table 4.1 provides a summary of participant characteristics, by study pseudonym.

Table 4.1

Participant Profiles

Pseudonym	Class Year	Major	Legal Status	State of Origin	Cis-Gender	First-Generation	Ethnicity
Carlos	First-Year	Undeclared	U.S. Citizen	U.S. Born – Dual Citizen Mexico	Yes	Yes	Mexican
Felix	Senior	Accounting & Finance	Resident	Mexico	Yes	Yes	Mexican
Hugo	Soph.	Marketing	Un-documented	Mexico	Yes	Yes	Mexican
Lucas	Soph.	Mexican American Studies	Resident	Mexico	Yes	Yes	Mexican
Maximo	Soph.	Criminal Justice	U.S. Citizen	U.S. Born	Yes	Yes	Mexican
Raul	Soph.	Criminal Justice & Criminology	Un-documented	Mexico	Yes	Yes	Mexican

Participant Profiles

Six self-identified Latino men were interviewed in spring 2018 to investigate how the Latinx cultural center (LCC) facilitated sense of belonging for undergraduate Latinx/o men at a predominantly White institution. A brief profile of each participant follows.

Carlos is a first-year student who has not yet declared a major, but is leaning towards an architecture major. Carlos indicated that he "is interested in everything…so it's kind of hard to decide." He was born in the United States and holds dual citizenship in the United States and Mexico. Originally, Carlos wanted to enlist in the United States Marine Corps., but he took a chance and applied to a handful of colleges. He decided which to attend based on the level of institutional financial support offered. Carlos identifies as Mexican and is from a single parent household, due to his father being deported when he was eight years old. He describes his family as the "hardest working people" he has ever known. Carlos has been a student employee of the LCC since his first semester.

Felix is a graduating senior who would receive his degree in accounting and finance in spring 2018. Originally from Mexico, he came to the United States undocumented. Seeking United States citizenship, Felix left the United States his senior year of high school to migrate back to Mexico in order to petition, with hopes of being back in time for graduation in May. He spent the next two years in Mexico as a result of long legal proceedings. Due to the delay caused by the legal proceedings, Felix considers himself a non-traditional student. Felix returned to the town in the United States that he called home and started attending a local community college so that he could be close to family. Once he transferred to the local university, he chose to major in accounting because he describes himself as an "ambitious guy" and has "that immigrant

mentality. I'm just going to work to be successful." Felix is a cultural center student employee and has been working at the LCC for two years.

Hugo is a sophomore who recently declared a major in marketing. Originally from Juarez, Mexico, he migrated to the United States in middle school. Hugo decided to attend Rocky Mountain University because of a persistent and personable Latinx staff admissions recruiter. Additionally, the university is a reasonable distance from his parents, as he knows they will need him on occasion. Hugo decided to go to instead of working in the family auto business because "I've been doing that for such a long time and I hate it." Hugo identifies as Mexican and when presented with the term Latinx, he responded, "What's Latinx? It sounds like a super Latino." Hugo has a great sense of humor and uses humor to lighten the mood, facilitate establishing relationships, and at times, as a coping mechanism.

Lucas is a sophomore majoring in Mexican-American Studies who intends to go to law school and become an immigration lawyer. Lucas is from Guanajuato, Mexico and immigrated to the United States at the age of three. He is now a resident of the United States but has been traveling back to Mexico for 17 years. He does not consider the United States home because "it doesn't feel right for me" and is not seeking citizenship because it is a "pride thing" to him. Lucas identifies as a Mexican and is proud of his ethnicity and culture. Lucas lives at home with his parents and his three brothers. Lucas is an easy person to converse with and provides a great deal of context which he indicated is typical of his family. Throughout the interviews, Lucas came across as activist-minded and most critical of Rocky Mountain University. Lucas is a student employee of the LCC and started working at the center as a first-year student.

Maximo is a sophomore majoring in criminal justice with a minor in sociology. He cited his witnessed bias towards people of color as the reason for wanting to pursue a career in law

enforcement. He also indicated that several family members in Mexico are transit police, which influenced his desire to become a U.S. Marshal. He lives off-campus and is the legal guardian of a 16-year-old brother who lives with him. Maximo was born in the United States but spent a great deal of his upbringing in Mexico until he moved back to the United States four years ago. Maximo is a student employee of the LCC and started working there at a first-year student.

Raul is a sophomore majoring in criminal justice and criminology with a minor in sociology. He indicated his motivation to go into law enforcement stemmed from the experience of not seeing "Brown cops on the street." He is originally from Michoacán, Mexico and migrated to the United States. Raul chose Rocky Mountain University because it was convenient from a transportation standpoint, he could continue to live with his parents, and the university offered the most scholarships. In addition to the convenience of attending Rocky Mountain University, it was the same persistent admissions counselor who recruited Hugo that convinced Raul to attend.

Theme 1. Political Safety During the Bade Hombre Era

This central theme of political safety often showed up during interviews through expressions of fear, anger, worry and anxiety, accompanied with a significant change in demeanor and exuberance. Despite the multi-faceted concern for safety, participants acknowledged the cultural center as a place of refuge. The theme of safety is examined through the political climate created on campus at RMU by a visit and the subsequent election of Donald Trump. The experience of safety is explored through the role of the cultural center in facilitating a sense of belonging.

Hugo reflects on a memory of the 2016 presidential election that he shared with his peers in the cultural center:

There was a bunch of people that I could tell were feeling the same thing as me because

we were sitting at the conference table and we were looking at the computer and how the

state thing [elections] was going…and we all had the same face. We were worried like

what's going to happen. Yeah, like it's a mutual feeling that everybody here was having.

Figure 4.1. Che is the light

This photo (Figure 4.1), taken by Hugo, is of the conference room which shows the table

where he and his peers watched election results with a sense of worry and fear. One large wall

of the conference room exhibits a painting of Che Guevara, arguably one of the most prominent

Latinx political figures, who sought to liberate Latinx individuals from the unjust and oppressive

systems of western politics. This serves as an interesting juxtaposition between Hugo's physical

setting and experiencing the 2016 elections in that room. It is important to note that the men in

this study noted the conference room typically served as a space that facilitated positive

experiences rather than just political worry. This flexibility is discussed below in regard to the

cultural center's ability to be a safe haven.

Lucas was the first one to bring up the visit of now President Donald Trump and the climate that it created for him at RMU as a first-year student. Here he reflects on attending the Trump rally held on campus.

I felt that my first semester when they let Donald Trump come on to campus, and everybody knew he was going to be the republican candidate. We actually went into the rally. So, we were inside, um, and it was surprising to see professors, classmates, like people I saw in my class every single day there cheering him on. That's when I realized that...that's when it really hit me. That's when I was like, they don't want us here. Really not even here at Rocky Mountain University not even here in [TOWN], they don't want us here. Um, so that part was hard.

A change in vocal affect was noticeable as Lucas reflected on this experience; his speech slowed and became more subdued. I found this to be a genuine result of raw emotion from a man who generally was smiling, talkative and full of energy. It appeared that Lucas was both saddened and angered that his peers and professors were cheering on a man that was actively calling for the marginalization of non-white individuals and prompting him to internalize these witnessed actions. It was at this moment that Lucas questioned his safety in the classroom, amongst campus peers, faculty and staff and even within the greater community. Lucas continued to reflect on his experience as result of the Trump rally and focused on the concern of safety of others in his community:

The only thing that got my attention from all of that is safety, not just for myself. Not even for myself because I'm so used to being concerned about my safety. Not just necessarily on this campus but in this entire country. I've grown used to it. I've just accepted the fact that me being Mexican, just because of my skin color, I'm not safe here

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regardless of where I'm at. Regardless if I'm at my house, regardless if I'm on campus, even here at the center, we're not really entirely safe because there are people out there who don't want us here. Really what concerned me was the safety of the others that look like me. Mainly people that have never been in those positions. Where there's a person telling them to go back to a country or there is a person telling them all these different racial slurs. That was my main concern.

Lucas, after sharing his experience with the Trump rally, acknowledged that safety is rarely afforded for Latinx/a/o individuals, especially on predominantly White campuses. Lucas seeing his classmates and professors at the Trump rally solidified his concern for safety on campus and beyond. This concern ultimately influenced his limited engagement with departments and offices outside of the Mexican-American studies program, the Spanish department and the LCC. Reflecting on safety, he saw the LCC as a safe haven from what he experienced and saw that evening of the Trump rally. He shared:

Like the fact that on the entire campus, we've got to be on our toes just in case anything was to happen. Coming here, we don't have to do that. Granted, yes it's not completely a safe place, but we're safer than we would be just out there.

This sentiment is not unfamiliar for many students of color on college campuses, specifically predominantly White institutions. What is important to note is that this sentiment is similar to those students of color who attended college during the Civil Rights era (Jones, Castellanos & Cole, 2002) during which aggressive politics also looked to marginalize and intimidated non-White students, prompting the creation of racially-based cultural centers. These participant experiences, reminiscent of the Civil Rights era on college campuses some 60 years ago, served as a stark reminder that racism is alive and well on predominantly White campuses.

The national political climate exacerbates those sentiments by empowering dominant identities to consciously and sub-consciously perpetuate the cycle of oppression. As evidenced by the quotes from participants above, safety on campus is an ongoing concern for these Latinx/o men in the current climate. Cultural centers continue to serve the same role they did during their founding in the 1960's and 1970's; providing safe havens for non-white students during politically turbulent times. While the existence of these cultural centers addresses a need for many students of color, it in no way absolves the institutions of systemic racist actions, policies and climates that many predominantly White institutions perpetuate. Cultural centers, at their core, were founded as result of the fact that institutions of higher education were unsafe for students of color and it appears that they continue to serve this purpose.

For all of the participants, the political climate impacted how they saw themselves on campus and how they saw the physical space within the cultural center during politically charged times. All of the participants shared personal stories and feelings of how the LCC's physical space played a critical role as a result of the political climate nationally and at RMU. Many saw the physical space as one that took on the role of providing both emotional and mental safety. It is important to acknowledge that the cultural center provided a physical safe space that allowed participants to experience a sense of emotional and mental safety which is an important precursor to sense of belonging. The center's flexibility to meet programmatic and cultural needs was important. Felix reflects on when Donald Trump came to RMU prior to being elected president and the explicit role that the cultural center took on to aid undocumented students as result of the political fear:

> When Trump came to Rocky Mountain University like two years ago when he was
>
> running for president, the center was a haven for a lot of Latino students here. So, a lot of

students felt like they were safe here and um, and we had DACA students that were

worried about their immigration status. Whatever Trump was saying we just tried to,

like, you know just tried to support as many Latino students as we can.

This support was needed and wanted by many that visited the center on a regular basis or who

now perceived it as one of the only places of refuge on a predominantly White campus. During

his interview, Hugo shared his concerns and the worries of his family and peers, but came to the

realization of the role of the center during this politically turbulent time. During this important

realization, I saw a significant change in Hugo and how he spoke of the center. It appeared as if

Hugo was never afforded the opportunity to reflect on the human and physical role the cultural

center played for him during this time. After this realization, the way in which Hugo spoke of

the center seemed to change and he became much more intentional about how he spoke of the

center's role in his experience at Rocky Mountain University.

I also talked to other students and they were just as worried as me. And then I remember

after the elections that I would talk to my parents and I could hear it through the phone. I

could hear the fear in their voice as well, like we don't know what's going to happen. The

same one that I heard at the center, like my family in the center, like people from the

center, they all sounded the same. I knew they were all worried for me and also for

themselves. I was even more like, wow, this really is my home.

The physical aggregate of the cultural center is important at this time due to the political climate

and the men's desire to belong on their respective campus. At a predominantly White campus,

the dominant characteristics are shared and reinforced throughout the campus and those who

share those characteristics are likely to feel safe while those who differ are at risk (Strange &

Banning, 2001). As evidenced by the experiences of these men, the political climate challenged

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the sense of safety on campus. The harsh and targeted rhetoric spewed by Donald Trump that Mexican men in the United States are "bringing, drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists." seemed to be internalized, prompting a need for a space of refuge and reassurance. The cultural center, a space designated for programmatic initiatives, community building and typically light-hearted activities, was now being utilized for intentional and passive initiatives to support Latinx/a/o students in a time of political strife and communal concern that weighed heavily on them.

As result of the election of Donald Trump, the human and physical aggregates of the LCC came together to address and acknowledge the attack on Latinx/a/o individuals. The physical space provided an outlet for LCC staff to provide resources that both calmed and informed Latinx/a/o students at RMU. Hugo saw the cultural center spring into action.

> I believe the center the next day was like holding like a, like a feel better type of thing. I don't know what we're doing to get through the time. And then immediately I already started seeing people like the announcements, stuff like what to do. If you get stopped, they're like, yeah, you know, you could tell that people were worried and they cared about what's going to happen. That's the feeling that I got here, like people are worried, like they're trying to see what they can do to help us.

Raul reflected on the center providing reassurance and tangible resources during a time of hostility and uncertainty. This was especially pertinent to Raul as an undocumented student at Rocky Mountain University.

> For example, when the whole DACA thing was going on with Donald Trump and he said he was going to remove DACA, the center really stepped in and brought lawyers. They brought free DACA renewal clinics. They brought in things like that. So it's just kind of

like you feel reassured and, you know these people are here to provide you resources and

to address the community. Especially like at those times…. It like restores a sense, uh,

you know, it is a safe haven for you.

Lucas reflected on the center and how the interconnectedness of the human and physical

aggregates of the center interacted. In addition to the physical space, the professional staff

provided a sense of safety for students. This support was critical to many students as the

hostility was being experienced on campus and within the city where the university is located.

Lucas shared:

There was a lot of rumors around (CITY NAME) that ICE was in town. The former

assistant director said I'll drive around and see if I see anybody. It gave us more

reassurance that we were safe here because the people here would and are still willing to

go the extra mile to ensure student safety. That's one of the main things I really love

about the center is that they will go the extra mile just to ensure that our people are safe.

It was evident through the shared experiences of Hugo, Felix, Raul and Lucas that relational

transactions between the physical and human aggregates of the cultural center resulted in a safe

haven that facilitated a sense of belonging as result of the feeling like they mattered, were cared

for and supported by peers and professional staff of the LCC. The transactions between these

aggregates informed the common sense of purpose amongst those that utilized the cultural

center. One could argue these experiences also further solidified the values and purpose of the

cultural center.

Maximo seemed to be well aware and extremely empathetic when questioned about the

center's role during politically charged times. While Maximo would relate his answers to his

personal experience, he acknowledged his personal experience mirrored that of many other men

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in this study and those Latinx/a/o students who regularly visit the LCC. Maximo's calm and intentional reflection proved to originate from a place of care and concern. When Maximo was asked what role the cultural center plays during heated political times, he responded:

> Definitely the center plays a big part when events happen for the fact that me personally seeing what Latinx people are going through, um, that affects me in a way because that's my people you know, that's people that come from the same roots as I do. Those times I feel in a way defeated because we're being attacked and sometimes can't do anything about it because if we do something about it's more likely the attack will get bigger and violent. But being able to come into the center, you know you're safe. Um, you know there are other individuals going through the same thing. They're going to relate and they're going to support you. Despite the fact that you know them or that you might not, like those individuals are there.

Here Maximo acknowledged the solace that is provided by both the human and physical aggregates of the cultural center. The common experience of his peers and having a physical space in which to create such community seemed to be important to Maximo. His short, but evident, indication of fear of retaliation is worth noting. One could assume that his fear of provocation would come at the expense of his community but also the physical space of the cultural center. This defensibility and territoriality are central components of creating safety within the hierarchy of learning environment purposes (Strange & Banning, 2001).

Hugo, a rather funny and joking person, became serious for the first time in the series of interviews when asked about the cultural center's role after his ongoing experience with political hostility. Hugo said:

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I mean, obviously, during that time I was just worried about what's going to happen and I felt like there was not really many people I could talk to. Like yeah, I could talk to my girlfriend. Like I don't know what to do now and she was just like, I'm pretty sure it'll be okay and stuff. I could tell she did not understand the stress I was going through, but here at the cultural center they did.

When asked how Hugo's girlfriend racially identified, he shared she was White and her race likely influenced her response. This acknowledgement and experience again showed that the human and physical aggregates aligned at Rocky Mountain University for the dominant population as to not question their mental, emotional and physical safety.

As the conversations around political, emotional and physical safety increased, I could sense that the participants were weighed down with fear and concern. The amount of physical and emotional energy put into navigating a hostile campus and national climate seemed almost too much to endure. This weight thrust upon these men seemed to influence their feelings and appreciation for the human and physical aggregates of the cultural center. Maximo, when looking at all of his submitted photos for the project shared:

I feel like I always have to be mentally prepared, physically prepared, emotionally prepared because you never know who you might encounter, but when you come into this space you know you're safe. This space makes me feel safe and the campus makes me feel like I have to be guarding myself at all times from other individuals. I'm just going to that part of feeling like I can relax here, like I belong here; being able to be myself and show off my true roots, which is a Mexican male. I don't know...it's just an amazing place you know. It's being able to be proud of myself and my culture without being afraid of what can happen to me or what people can say about me or say to me.

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The men in this study showed a great deal of vulnerability when reflecting upon the political hostility that existed on campus and across the country. While no photos were submitted with a focus on political safety, many of the photos of physical space were secondarily associated with emotional and physical safety. It was determined that the men identified sense of belonging solely from a positive lens did not relate spaces to negative experiences. It was not until prompted to expand on how the space in the submitted photos represented sense of belonging for him as a Latinx/o man that the overarching theme of political safety became a constant reflection.

The second theme of safety was that of vulnerability and appeared as a direct challenge to the stereotypical machismo behavior that many of the men felt pressure to subscribe to but openly challenged.

Theme 2: Shedding Machismo: Emotional Vulnerability

As these men opened up, shared their valid fears, concerns, anger, and needs for emotional safety, they were intentionally and actively allowing themselves to be vulnerable and talking from a place that challenged the machismo Latinx/o stereotype. This emergent theme was unexpected but gratefully appreciated. I, maybe unjustly and informed by my own attitude and position during my undergraduate years, expected the men to internalize and outwardly exhibit stereotypical notions of masculinity and machismo. Instead, I witnessed these men express their need for space for emotional safety to cry, seek advice, serve as a role model and challenge both their own and society's notions of Latinx/o masculinity.

Maximo, unprompted, was the first one to bring up masculinity and Latinx/o culture and the dissonance that he feels between his true emotions and the pressure to subscribe to what he has been taught. He shared this through a photo that he took of a couch in the office of an LCC staff

member.   Prior to reflecting on the photo, he shared his experience with the room which is represented in the photo:

> In the Mexican culture, men are supposed to be machos and not supposed to express their feelings, but going into this room you feel it kind of breaks down a little bit of a stereotype, but to me that brings out more culture in a way. So yeah.

Figure 4.2. That Safe Feeling

When prompted why he took this picture, Maximo shared:

> This couch just represents that safe feeling. I'm able to go in here and sleep. I would sleep like a baby because I know that no one's going to bother me. My director would just be doing her work and she would let me sleep there if I want, if I have problems going on and

I can't really talk to people, she just lets me go in there and sit there or lay there and just

calm down and then go back to my business. Yeah. That's most what the couch represents.

It's just like me being able to bring myself back to reality without causing any

problems...definitely once I walk into this room, I feel like I let all my guards down,

physical, emotional, mental. I'm not going to get hurt and they're not going to judge me

and I am going to be able to be myself. It's just warm and loving. It's the room itself and

most of it is the person that's in the room, I think it all ties together.

As I watched Maximo stare at the picture and reflect on the meaning this physical space had for

him in creating an emotionally safe space, I saw a small smile come over his face. He seemed to

connect with this space in a way that was different and grounded in an emotional attachment for

both the physical and human elements within that environment.

Maximo went on to reflect on another photo of the same physical space, but of a different

area within the room. This photo seemed to elicit a response that was more focused on a

personal relationship grounded in a vulnerability and the desire for personal growth as a Latino

man, which based on previous conversations, seems to be connected with his relationship with

his mother.
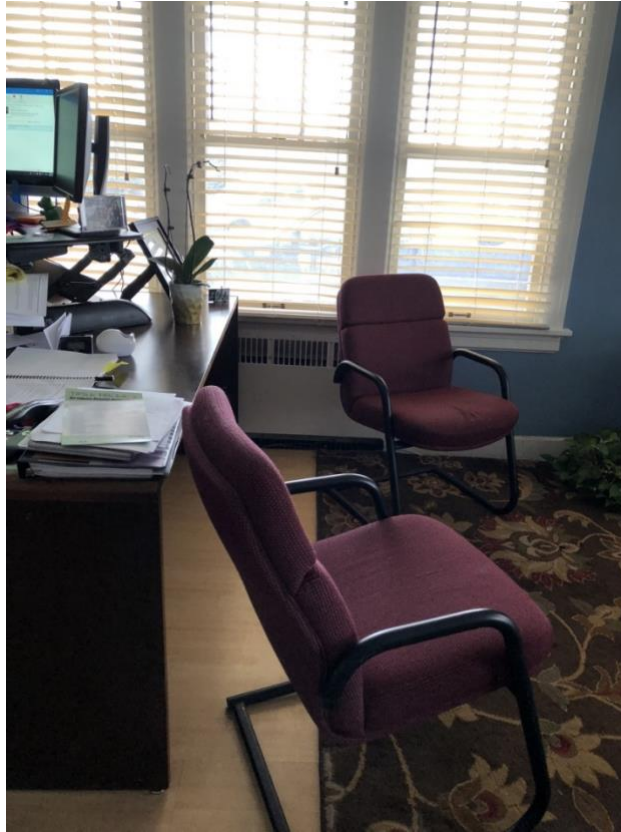
Figure 4.3. Motherly Figure

Hermen: Photo number three, you submitted. What is it that you see here and what does it represents for you?

Maximo: I just see in my perspective home. There is no person in this picture but it, represents a mother figure to me. It's warm for sure. Somewhere where I can go and talk about how I feel, whether I'm upset, I'm joyful or any other emotions I can go into this space and freely open onto how I feel without judged or without receiving advice if I don't want to. Just let things out. Definitely. I believe this is the most important space for me at the center.

Maximo: The chairs really represent that motherly figure. I am able to open up myself and that's not something that is seen in the Latino male, but being able to do that makes me feel like I belong more because there's not someone telling me like, hey, this is not

part of your culture. To me, the director letting me open up is like me embracing my culture and who I am.

When Maximo shared that it was the most important space for him at the center, I instantly wanted to know more on how this space facilitated sense of belonging for him. More specifically, I wanted to understand how his identity as a Latino man interacted with the identified space to create a strong sense of belonging. Maximo elaborated:

Definitely. Well, my perspective for a Latino male, we're always close to family, like especially our mother figure. So, in this space I'm able to go in and talk to our director and have the bond, the family bond. Like I mentioned before, my family is from Mexico. So, this space just coming into this space with the intention makes me feel like I'm embracing who I am because of this space. I feel free, you know.

The physical distance between Maximo and his family, specifically his mother, seemed to heighten the intensity and importance of the relationship and utilization of this space. Maximo shared that while his relationship with his mother was strong and she was the one who fueled his motivation to graduate from RMU, the physical separation from his mother, who resided in Mexico, left him yearning for a maternal connection. A connection that he felt was critical to his development, not only as a man, but as a Latino man.

 This utilization of space as a place of vulnerability and support continues with a photo submission from Lucas.

Figure 4.4. Vulnerability

When Lucas was asked what this space represented to him and how it facilitated a sense of belonging, he responded:

It's really just, it's basically an office. Um, there's a couch in there next to the desk, but the reason why that's the one of the most important places. But um, that's kind of my go to place where I'm like, well, I'm actually needing help. Um...the doors that can be shut and then like just like a little private space to just like talk. I know a lot of my coworkers do that as well. That's the place where you go and you talk about like your personal stuff. That was the place where I've done it like I have so many times. I was like, just sat there and talked and I cried my eyes out just because of that stuff that's going on. Um, so yeah, that's the only, that's why it's one of the most important spots.

Lucas identified this place as one of comfort and that allows him to emotionally express himself. It was a space he identified that has been occupied by multiple professional staff members, but one that consistently served this purpose, regardless of who was serving in that

professional capacity. When asked why that space was important to him as a Latino man, he shared:

> Really just to have a space like that, because that's really what's important to me is the fact is to have a space where I can go and just be vulnerable. Oftentimes more often than not Latino males are being portrayed like that. Being portrayed as being strong, they're portrayed as being like the top one in the family that they can't be vulnerable, they can't do anything, and they can't show emotions about anything. So, it's just a space where I can go there and be vulnerable and everything.

This vulnerability allowed Lucas a place where he could work to overcome the stereotypical machismo practices. When reflecting on what it was like to be a Latino man at the cultural center, he was honest and reflective of how his upbringing had been challenged regarding what it meant to be a Latino man in public spaces.

> It definitely has been interesting. I wouldn't call it tough, but it hasn't been easy either. In my family, the one thing that from my dad's side of the family is that they've taught us is to not show sadness. I am pretty sure that's similar to every Latinx or Latino male. So coming here to a place where a lot of people showed emotions, a lot of people were vulnerable around other folks. It was kind of a culture shock because I was like...whoa, okay, all I have ever been told was don't cry, don't show sadness, and be strong.

This socialized behavior that is perpetuated by societal norms, has resulted in these men finding few environmental outlets to show their emotions. The societal and familial definition of what it is to be a man, specifically a Latinx/o man, has created an interesting role for the cultural center. In the physical space that is culturally congruent with these men, this space is also actively challenging the masculine societal norms and behaviors entrenched in the Latinx/o culture. Felix

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acknowledged that Latinx/o men feel pain, but often times lack spaces and environmental opportunities to express such pain.

> And so right now I feel like being Latino male, it was very um, what's the word? It's like there's a lot of negativity to it, but like I feel like we don't get our pain voiced.

It is important to acknowledge the relationships between the men's willingness to challenge the machismo norms and race. Specifically, the physical environments and the racial makeup of those in those spaces. Maximo reflects on the role race plays in creating spaces for vulnerability.

> The relationships and culture in my personal option has created a big impact for me and if it was someone that's not Hispanic, I feel like those spaces would lose the safe part of it. Losing the safe part of it and not being able to relate to the individuals sitting behind that desk which is a loss of culture, respect and just values. Even if they [non-Latinx person] were familiar with the Hispanic culture, I feel like they have not been through the struggles and they don't know what it is to be part of the Hispanic life. So, even if you get educated about it, you still don't know personally what it feels like, how your parents or someone that has been through, like the struggles.

> The acknowledgement of the importance of the human aggregate, in addition to

utilization of the space, is noted as the person-environment congruence facilitates Latinx/o engagement with the cultural center. The Latinx/a/o human aggregate in relation to the physical space within the cultural center met the first foundation of safety within the hierarchy of learning environment purposes (Strange & Banning, 2001). This would prove to serve as a catalyst for Latinx/o engagement with the cultural center.

Theme 3: Person-Environment Congruence

Environments either promote or deter engagement. The LCC's familiarity, human aggregates and physical artifacts created a unique environment at RMU. It was the person-environment congruence that resonated with the men and that promoted engagement within the LCC. This familiar, safe and engaging environment promoted the transactional relationship between the men and the LCC. The person-environment congruence that was expressed was one of cultural validation. This cultural validation resulted in the engagement of a space to build cultural capital amongst peers and strive personally and academically.

Through a series of photographs produced by the men in this study, the cultural center's ability to express a set of values, beliefs, behaviors and expectations through cultural messages is undeniable. One of the most frequently described spaces that the men felt validation was the kitchen. While not all participants took a photo of the kitchen, all participants reflected on the role of the kitchen within the cultural center and their experience. While Mexican food was a component of the discussion of the photo submissions, the participants seemed to always relate it back to the relationship with peers and the validation created as result.

Carlos submitted the photo below. When he was asked why he submitted the photo and how it represented sense of belonging for him, he shared the following.

Figure 4.5. The Three Icons

I love the kitchen because I like food and I love how like we would always cook. Last semester we cooked there a lot and we would have movie nights. I like the kitchen for the fact, we cook Mexican food, like real stuff you know. The stuff that they give you at the dining places…horrible…the Mexican grill and what not, horrible. None of it tastes good at all. It's a Spanish rice tastes horrible.

Carlos gave the above statement with an intense fervor. His disgust at the inauthenticity found outside the center seemed to be a point of contention for him. Carlos would go on to relate the kitchen and artwork in the space to his desire for famlilisimo and ethnic congruency. Carlos stated:

I like that for that reason, you know, it gives you that taste of, you know, of your family. And then I'm like, I really, the first day I came here I loved how this painting was the eagle and the snake, I was like, it's is different, like it's portrayed differently and I like it. And I was like, that's just, that's literally the three icons of Mexico right there. The gold eagle, nopal and the snake. So, I thought that was good and I was like, it's just cool because it's just a nice wall painting that moves into the kitchen.

Lucas also submitted a photograph of the kitchen. As he reflected on how the kitchen facilitated sense of belonging to him, a large smile came to his face as he reminisced on the communal events that the kitchen initiated. Lucas shared:

Whenever I like just stand there and look at the kitchen, I just remember all the events we had, all the times we've cooked, all the times we've just been like, and it's just like a group of people. We're just using the kitchen, like either cooking, eating, like laughing, all of that. Whenever I just like stare at that space, I like in my mind, I remember all of those different times. We've had good times in there.

Figure 4.6. Only Missing the Comal

I asked Lucas to expand upon his statement and be specific on how the kitchen related to his sense of belonging as a Latino man and he responded with the following statement.

Our culture is, I mean, I may be a little biased here, but our culture is one of the richest cultures when it comes to food. And so, I think that's a really huge part of it and since I can't, like I can't just drive to Mexico to just get some like tacos or some enchiladas from Mexico or from the actual place. I've been able to have a place to make them or eat them while in the US, it really takes me back, and it makes me feel like I'm actually over there. If we had a comal an actual big round comal with the little fire here. That would make it feel exactly like home.

As Lucas continued to look at the photo, something else caught his eye and concentration from the comal that he was envisioning in the space. Luis made the correlation between race/ethnicity and the physical space:

Even the, like the painting in the background, like you always have something in the kitchen, like the Mexican or Latinx kitchen. There's always some kind of decorations, whether that'd be a drawing, a family picture, a little, um, the center pieces you took from a Quinceanera.

During my time at the cultural center, the kitchen was always busy with activity. There constantly seemed to be food available to students. One specific day, there was left over food from a cultural center event that consisted of rice, beans and enchiladas. The director of the cultural center was walking around asking "mijo, have you eaten?" and urging students in the cultural center to eat some more or to take some home. Carlos reflected on how this behavior and invitation reminded him of home:

Like, see, like I walked in and already they were already talking about food and all these things and beans. I just ate some stale pizza that in my room. I don't know how old it was, but I was hungry and I was just thinking I need some food, but I don't want to like you know go to that horrible dining hall. Like you know, there's that food and literally she like, you saw, she was like, she acted like a mom you know, did you guys eat alright? You know, that's sort of like our culture.

This cultural validation permeates this space as result of the transactional relationship between the human and physical aggregates. The human aggregate of the LCC director using familial language such as "mijo" likely facilitates a level of engagement from these men that is not experienced anywhere else at RMU. Pairing the familial language as a variable of the human aggregate with the physical space, in this case the kitchen, and one gets a familial person-environment transaction that encourages promotions of engagement within the space. It is this transaction that promotes engagement leading to sense of belonging.

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Luis and Carlos specifically spoke about the kitchen as a place that felt personal and offered security in identity on a predominantly White campus. I believe it to be important to acknowledge the role of cultural validation in engagement on a predominantly White campus. The kitchen, while small in square footage, seemed to be one of the places that both validated and engaged.

The conference room was another popular areas for participants. Many of the men shared the numerous roles this room played in facilitating a sense of belonging. This multi-faceted space served as a hub of activity for the men in the study. The conference room is a great example of flexibility within the space while maintaining its purpose.
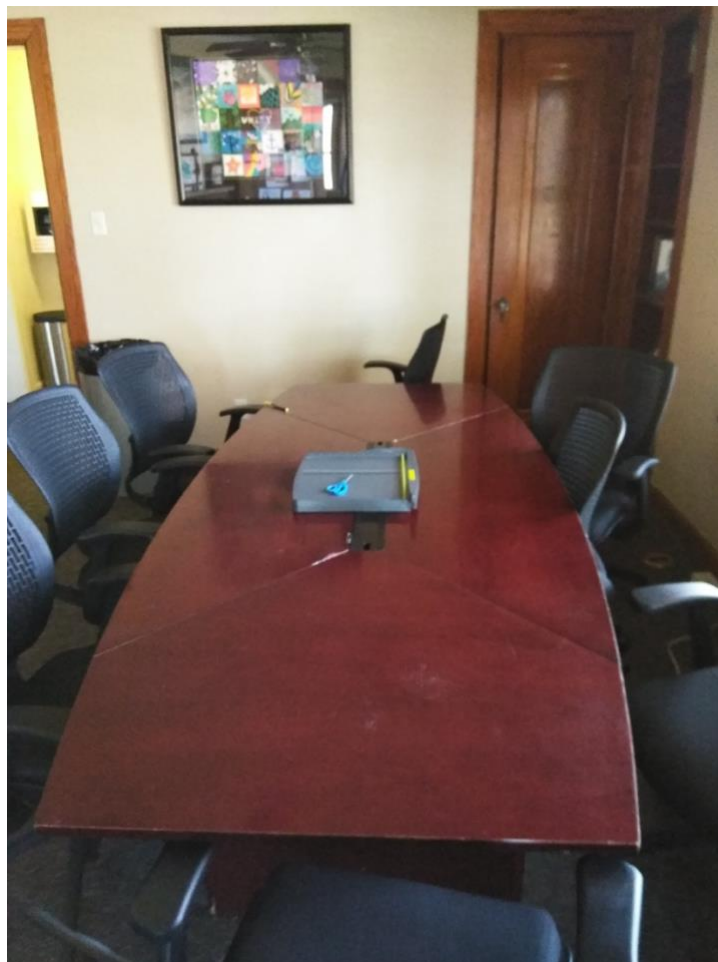

Figure 4.7. My Place

Raul submitted the photo above and was excited to talk about the conference room. When prompted to share why he submitted this photo he shared:

I picked this space because, mostly because I'm always there. That's the place where I'm usually at most of the time. Honestly because like when I come in, and that's usually when I'm doing homework, I'm working on assignments and things of that nature. So, for me, I'm really connected with that space. It's like that's where, that's not my place, but people know that's my place.

Raul went on to joke about having a specific seat and started laughing when he shared:

Usually they know where I sit. So don't sit there. Unless they don't know, then I give them a pass, but they will learn real quick.

Raul, Felix, Hugo and Maximo indicated that the conference room was a place for them to get work done, but was also a social hub where they could go to build relationships that were crucial to them feeling a sense of belonging. In this space, they would build a level of social, academic, and cultural capital while creating a sense of belonging through validation. Raul shared:

We would be at the conference table doing homework and ask the other person, how'd you get this? How'd you get that? But in terms of the social interaction, it was more of like, hey, how was your day? You know, how do you feel about the test? How are you feeling in general? And I feel like that interaction, it definitely is another social place to interact as well.

Raul saw the conference room as a critical place that facilitated a sense of belonging. He reflected on this space and was reminiscent of how when his statistics class proved to be difficult, with help from a peer received in this space he was able to get through the semester. It was the conference room where he found the academic support he was seeking. Felix also found

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the conference room academically validating, although he initially remembered the conference room to be a place of stress, mostly due to his finance classes. Here Felix reflects on the stress he experienced, as well as the validation and investment he received from his peers in this space.

> I remember, uh, coming from like a stressful day in class, and freaking out about homework and figuring out how to solve these problems. But I remember, Miguel [a friend of Felix], was a gentleman that would try to relax everybody. He would be like, hey man, like what's going on, you know, this and that. But he would, but he would tell me about classes like to take and which ones with good professors. He would tell me accounting students are pretty stressed all the time, he would be like, I understand, but don't freak out. I had some of my most stressful times here but also some of the most tranquil times as a student.

As Felix reflected on the conference room, he leaned back in his chair and I could sense that the photo created a small level of anxiety for him but also an appreciation for the relationships that came from that space. Maximo shared similar experiences with the conference room. For Maximo, it was a place that had two major functions which were to focus on academic tasks while allowing for a level of socialization that he felt was necessary to be successful. Maximo shared:

> From my perspective, I like sitting specifically in this chair. If there's new people I introduce myself. So aside from doing my homework, this space gives me the chance to socialize and I actually get to meet new people. My purpose there is to be doing homework, but at the same time being able to socialize with other individuals so I won't be stressing myself out as much just doing homework.

Hugo had similar sentiments regarding the conference room. Here, Hugo reflected on the conference room as a place to work with the flexibility of the space being positioned to establish relationships.

> [The conference room] is where I am more prone to work with people. During my first year, not as much this year, but in my first year, this is where I would work. I guess when I had more questions and I wanted to meet people. Last year I had a lot more questions so I would sit here and usually other people that came in, they would also sit in that table and that's how I was able to interact with new people. I don't know what the intention of that room was, but it's definitely a place where I met a lot of people. That's pretty much how I know everybody in the center, honestly, because we were either doing homework at that table or we sat there and made fun of something.

After these reflections of the conference room, I began to see the conference room as a place where capital was being built amongst these men. While the men in this study first saw the conference room as a place to accomplish academic tasks and goals, they typically never did so alone in this space. The conference room started to take on a different meaning and one that provided validation, respect and community through a mutual understanding of their shared purpose to graduate from Rocky Mountain University. These men were attracted to this environment because those within this space had common interests and reinforced these interests. This is a classic example of human aggregate theory. Given this emergent theme, the physical and human aggregates of the space greatly influenced engagement with the center and one could argue that this particular space helps the LCC achieve their objective to retain and matriculate Latinx/a/o students.

One observation that I made during my time at the cultural center was the artwork and visual messaging that existed in the conference room. It is easy to say that this room was rich in visual representations of prominent Latinx/a/o pioneers and trailblazers for the progression of Latinx people. The room consisted of a large mural of Che Guevara, Cesar Chavez, and small framed images of Frida Kahlo. In a corner of the room there were some historical photos of the cultural center, its founders, along with some prayer candles of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Scattered throughout the room were Central and South American ancestral artwork in various forms. For Raul, Felix and Maximo it fostered a sense of pride and motivation to succeed. Raul shared:

> I feel like it's a crazy sense of our identity. People who look like you, who come from you, who are Latinx people in our culture that paved the way or made accomplishments and surrounding yourself with that identity. Like, this is part of you, you were part of it as well. It creates a sense of belonging for me because this is where we've been at and look where we're at now. From Cesar Chavez, Che Guevara, and Frida Kahlo. It's like look what they'd done. It's crazy because, I feel like that plays a part subliminally because you're like, okay, they did it and they look like me. I could do something as well.

Raul saw the visual representation of the Latinx culture, specifically the historical figures, as motivation and a reminder of what it means to work hard to achieve something and ultimately engage in the required capacity of his ultimate goal, to graduate from RMU. Raul went on to say:

> Attaching those achievements that they did to a part of our identity and if we integrate those achievements and those people into our identity, then it feels like you want to be

here to succeed. So, I feel that with the conference room you have Cesar Chavez above the fireplace. You have Che Guevara right there. You got pictures of Frida Kahlo. So it's like, you're doing homework and like, oh look, I'm doing homework for a better future. They did something else that wasn't like me but they still paved the way for a better future.

Figure 4.8. Paved the way

The visual representation was important for these men as it promoted engagement and facilitated a sense of belonging as result of engagement. Felix indicated that he would not find anything like the conference room elsewhere on campus, specifically noting that he could not visit the dean's office and expect to see a representation of Latinx people. He further indicated that the conference room was motivating specifically from a gender standpoint as "it reassures us that there's confidence as well as support for us. We're [Latinx/o men] seen as a few but this is how they try to support us the best way they can. That's how I see this."

Maximo shared that the paintings really resonated with him and motivated him to keep pushing to succeed:

> [The artwork] resonates with me because I am able to see throughout the center things that represent us. This creates a sense of belonging because those are individuals that fought so we can have a place here and being able to see that in the center facilitates everything to me. That artwork represents me.

Strange and Banning (2001) identified cultural artifacts as important indicators of institutional values, culture and historical roots. The understanding of values and culture provide a sense of direction for how one might engage with the environment. This visual messaging and cultural artifacts within the cultural center are important because these men cannot expect to see such artifacts on campus that relay the values of Latinx people. Additionally, the human aggregates were important in creating the culture of engagement and progress within the LCC. These artifacts in the cultural center look to fulfill the lack of representation at Rocky Mountain University and instead relay the Latinx centric representation of what engagement looks like.

It seemed apparent from the men in this study that the relationship between the human and physical aggregates that promoted cultural validation increased the level of engagement within the space. The physical markers, whether it was the oval conference room table that allowed for them to make eye contact with one another, the kitchen that provided the much necessary familiarity through food or the art work throughout these spaces, provided clear indications of the cultural center's values, purpose and attitudes. It is this clear physical message that allowed the human aggregate to thrive in promoting cultural capital, relationship building and academic pursuits. These aggregates associated with the Latinx culture facilitated

engagement for the Latino men in this study in a way that the general campus of Rocky Mountain University could not.

Theme 4: Latinx Cultural Center as a Counter Narrative

Physical space tells a story. From the artifacts that hang on the wall to the furniture choices, the physical space informs the users of the values, purpose and objectives of the space. For the LCC, this tells the story of centralizing the Latinx cultural and ethnic identity. The LCC as a physical space is a counter narrative to the predominantly White environment that exists outside its walls. It is the counter narrative, facilitated through both the physical attributes and human aggregates, which offer the sense of belonging for the men. The final theme in this research is that a home away from home serves as a counter narrative. All of the men in this study identified that the culturally relevant spaces within the LCC promoted a sense of belonging for them at a predominantly White institution. For example, Maximo found the LCC served as a place of common understanding and peer validation:

> Even if I wasn't an employee, I would come here because there's actually this space here that has other individuals like me. It's motivating to see others and to come here and get more involved. We are able to come together and fight through the injustices here on campus. Because it is a predominantly White campus, together we are stronger. In this space we respect each other and value each other because of our stories and similar backgrounds. We know the struggles we and our families have been through.

These experiences of common understanding and validation are centralized from a Latinx racial perspective. Hugo, when asked how the LCC was a validating and welcoming space for him noted:

Here at the center, people are going to know what you're going through, what you might

experience. They are going to understand more than any other building here. It creates

that sense of home and understanding. The people here understand you more than

anyone else could.

Almost as if there was corroboration of stories between participants, Lucas also saw the physical

space as one of validation, familiarity and mattering:

You feel accepted in the ways that when you utilize the space you are not going to be

looked at differently, because here at the center the people in this space grew up around

this stuff too.

This common experience of participants viewing the LCC as a physical space of

validation, familiarity and as a home away from home produced a heightened level of sense of

belonging. This physical space serves as a counter narrative to the general, and sometimes

hostile, RMU environment. It is the counter narrative that creates the home away from home.

A stand-alone structure, the LCC is an older house on campus. This small but mighty

brick house stands on top of a hill at the northwest corner of campus. Somewhat removed from

the center of campus where other the other racially centric cultural centers are located, arriving at

the LCC produces a physiological experience unlike any other building on campus. Upon

approaching the LCC, one immediately gets the sense that one has left the general RMU campus

and what lies behind the door will be a unique environment. Lucas reflected on this experience:

Every time I'm walking to the center, I'm going up the little hill, I just stare at the center.

I imagine my home back in Mexico because it is similar to the way my home is set up.

The little roads outside and you walk up to it. I picture my home just walking up to the

house and opening the door. It feels like opening the door in my house in Mexico.

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Figure 4.9. Bienvenidos

This familiar setting promotes the behaviors that are understood by the men in this study. The living room is a popular space within the LCC and one that is cited by many as a gathering place that facilitates community in a setting that is familiar. Lucas shared:

I remember the first time I walked in [the LCC]. I opened the door and walked in and the [living] room was set up the same way it is right now. There were people sitting on the couches, there was one person standing up leaning on the couch. He was the first one to introduce himself and everybody else jumps off the couches and starts introducing themselves. People were saying hi to me, greeting me. They were asking me about me and showing genuine interest in getting to know me… It's like when you go into a family reunion.

Figure 5.1. Family Reunion

This photo submitted by Maximo is of the LCC living room, a central gathering place for many who entered the LCC. During my time at the LCC, it was not uncommon to see many people spread out on the couches watching soccer or what seemed to be a popular choice, Jersey Shore. When Maximo was asked to describe the photo and identify how this space facilitated sense of belonging, he responded:

In this space, usually students come in and that's the place I go. Most sit down on the couches, watch TV. Sometimes the individuals don't know each other and they sit next to each other and then conversations start and they get to know each other. Definitely this is one of the places where people are able to relax, come into this space and hang out, watch TV or just interact with each other.

Maximo went on to describe how the space represented a sense of belonging and familiarity as a result of the high work ethic instilled in him as a Latino man. Consistent with the experiences of seeing the LCC as a safe haven, one that promoted engagement, he associated the LCC as a space that aligned with a cultural component of hard work.

> From my perspective, it's just like in the Latino culture first comes hard work. You're always doing your thing and then you get home and you just throw yourself in the couch and relax. This space provides the like having a stressful day at work I can just come into this space and just throw myself in the couch. This is more public like being able to hang out with los amigos. Just being able to come from a hard working day, stressful day, sitting in this couch and just feeling like I accomplished something today and just sitting down and taking all that in.

This counter narrative of space at RMU produced a real sense of home away from home for Raul. When he reflected on the role of the living room and how it represented him as a Latino man, he talked about the familiarity of the setting and how it centered on family. It was the centering of family and the LCC, in this case, specifically the living room, which caused a visceral response from Raul in reflecting on the living room picture submission.

> Well because like when you go home that's basically where that's like the center for your family. That's where your dad's watching TV, your mom's going to be there watching telenovelas or whatever. So that's why I like feel really connected with that area because usually when I go home that's where my, I could find that parents. It goes back to that family aspect because like when I'd be sitting in the living room at home you feel like this is your place. You know, I feel comfortable in a sense because it's something that's so relatable to like your own house and your home. It's really like it creates a sense of

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belonging for me for me. You sit down and you feel like you belong, that you feel

comfortable, you feel open, you feel like you could express yourself because it's like, like

a family setting, you know.

This common expression of the role of the living room of offering something that no other place

on campus could provide was important. For Raul, it was the reason that he kept coming back.

Raul told his family about this space, which provided them with some relief as they were worried

about him when not at home.

My mom knows about this place and she doesn't worry. There's so much support here.

It's like you never left home. It's just you went to an extension of home and that's why I

keep coming back because it's like an extension of my home. I'm here every day because

it's like why would I not want to come home, you know, it's the values and those

experiences.

Lucas had similar reactions to the LCC serving as a home away from home. He too indicated the

familial connection, not experienced anywhere else on campus, as what attracted him to the

space. During the last interview, he expressed an apparent emotional attachment to the LCC,

directed both at the physical aspects of the LCC, but also the sense of belonging experienced in

the space. For him, it was familiar, it was comfortable, and it was home.

It sounds cliché but it really is a home away from home. That's the perfect way to

describe it. We have a kitchen, we have a living room, we have a TV, we come here and

we sleep, we hang out. We've had game nights, we eat, we'll bring on consoles and we'll

just be playing there. I remember once there was a movie playing, the movie mean girls,

and then a couple of women wanted to watch it. Me and my friend, we were watching

soccer and so they wanted to change the channel, we were arguing, running around the

house. It was literally like if it was our own home we were running around fighting over

the remote. Yeah, that's literally how I would describe it…its home.

The men in this study felt that the place represented a Mexican house in multiple ways. So much

so that little physical aspects of the LCC stood out to them as representing an environment that

was familiar and racially consistent. For instance, multiple participants indicated that the coffee

table in the middle of the LCC living room stood out to them. Many indicated that while their

family did not drink coffee, the coffee table was a staple in the Mexican household and told a

different story than other spaces on campus. Raul shared that he was not sure what the coffee

table was for, but it was something that pulled the room together.

From the small Latino centric toys to the LCC award proudly displayed on the coffee

table, it was an interesting focal point for the men in this study. Hugo reflected on the

observation that the coffee table was something he has rarely saw in White households, which he

quickly qualified as not a fact due to him not having visited many White households.

I mean the living room, it has these toys like yoyos and things. I hadn't been to a lot of

white households, but it's a typical look of a Latino household. I've been to a lot of like

Latino houses, that's what I imagined one to look like. So I'm guessing it's something

that a lot of people, a lot of Hispanics going to relate to it. Like for example, my

girlfriend, she's not Hispanic and they don't have a table in the middle, so that might be

connected.

Both Hugo and I laughed at his observation and environmental scan of Latinx and White

households. While one might think an observation of the coffee table may seem trivial, it is this

familiarity in the physical artifacts of the LCC that assists in facilitating not only safety and

engagement, but a sense of belonging for the men in this study. These physical artifacts, in

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conjunction with the human aggregates in the environment, facilitate a sense of belonging that is not experienced anywhere else at RMU. This helps understand the transactional relationship between humans and the environments and the role of race in facilitating a sense of belonging in a Latinx cultural center.

Combating White Supremacy in Passive Manners

While there were some intentional and responsive efforts put forward by those within the LCC who rallied against political agendas that target the Latinx population such as the reversal of DACA to the visits of political figures that spewed xenophobic and anti-Latinx rhetoric, many of the men in this study felt that the LCC passively combated White supremacy by creating a space for them, as Latinx/a/o students, on a predominantly White campus. Lucas noted:

> This being a place where I can get help to succeed, where I can come and get resources, get help. That in itself I see as disrupting because, we don't disrupt white supremacy in the sense that we go out and we protest every single day. We disrupt it disrupt it in a more passive way.

When Lucas was asked to reflect on such passive actions and how they impact usage of the LCC, he quickly responded with information that the LCC Director provided him. This acknowledgement and buy-in of the passive actions as disruptions to White supremacy were echoed by many of the men in this study. Lucas elaborated:

> If you talk to our director, she'll tell you the best way to go against white supremacy is by getting our education by being somebody in life and showing White people what we can actually be. This is plenty for us, its plenty for us to be able to go and get help and succeed, but it's one of the few spaces that we have and if somebody tries to take it away? It's as if they were trying to take away opportunities to succeed.

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This reflection by Lucas was interesting, as many of the men felt that they were navigating a delicate situation that could result in unquestionable challenge by the dominant White culture at RMU. Maximo shared similar sentiment with this concern of not pushing too hard on the cultural and racial norms in fear that it would create increasingly hostile or even potentially violent environments. One of the most blatant comments regarding the LCC's passive tactics for challenging White supremacy came from Carlos who adamantly believed it was not in the best interest of the LCC to challenge such systemic issues and norms. Carlos believed that the LCC at times was counterproductive in preparing his peers for navigating difficult situations. While he internalized this view point in some capacity, he also projected his opinion onto those who utilized the center. Carlos shared the following when asked if the LCC actively or passively confronted White supremacy at RMU:

> I feel like it has backlashed for the fact that it babies us. For me it backlashes, because like I don't like being babied, but for others it might help them, you know, feel safe and everything for sure. Like definitely a lot of people feel way safer here but also sometimes I just feel it babies. You know and we don't have to complain about everything. If we keep complaining, they're just going to keep pushing us away. I talked to people a lot here and they're always talking about social injustice and what not. And that's cool but when you're in Mexico and everything, do you ever like talk about anything like social injustice or anything? No, Mexicans never talked about that.

It was interesting to hear such an unexpected and strong dissenting opinion of the role of the LCC. This acknowledgement of the safe haven, paired with the calling out of overly sensitive Mexicans who Carlos deemed to be "white washed", was one that made me question if

community, as a unified group working towards common purpose, had been achieved for Carlos. As Carlos explained his somewhat contradictory view of the center:

> The center is needed but it's because we're small. If we were big, everybody would be here and it'd be nothing special. Since we're small and you know, we still help but we're not the face, you know, and that's where I feel like it should stay. The centers are needed for the people who actually need it. Not for that people who want it. If you want a cultural center that's because you don't need it. People fought for this, you know, they did it because they needed it. But if you want, it's like a different thing, you know? That's not the same thing. That's why I feel like this place it was needed and people made it themselves.

This drastically different explanation of the LCC and its role was one that made me question if there was some cognitive dissonance occurring for Carlos. On one hand he mentioned that the space is needed by a group of Latinx/a/o students at RMU as a predominantly White institution, but also believed that the LCC's role was not to question the cultural norms that created such a need. This cognitive dissonance made Carlos' next photo submission even more interesting.

Figure 5.2. More than a workplace

Carlos submitted a photo of the courtyard right outside the LCC where he had experienced an event that solidified a sense of belonging for him. It was a place where the center held a surprise birthday party for him. For Carlos, all he ever wanted was a surprise birthday party with a piñata. Carlos' mother worked with the director of the LCC to host the party at the LCC because of the importance of this space to Carlos. He shared:

> I would always tell my mom, I don't want no kids, I just want a piñata. So like she came
>
> up and uh, this is where we did the piñata, right here. Everybody in the center went
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> outside and we all had cake, we played, we hit the piñata and it was all right here. It was
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> fun. Everybody was just having fun, listening to music, eating food, and hitting the

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piñata. It made me feel more at home, you know. How do I say it, you know, everybody

was there like a real family. It was like more than the workspace.

When Carlos was reflecting on this picture, he shared that it was the only place on campus you

would see students having a party, playing Spanish music and hitting a piñata. Given that RMU

was a predominantly White campus, it appeared that participants utilized and engaged with the

space because of vastly different experience it provided for them at Latinx/o men. Carlos noted:

I always tell my friends, I was like, I'll be back. I'm going to the center, I need to refill

my Mexicaness. We'll bump Mexican music. We will watch telenovelas which I hate

because there's only a few that I like. We have similar experiences, some stuff that we

talk about, the artwork, you know, this house feels more Mexican than any other place.

While a majority of the men in this study would agree that the LCC disrupted White

supremacy in a more passive way, the LCC still told a counter narrative on the predominantly

White campus of RMU. The counter narrative, while passive, still is an active action towards

combating oppression targeting a marginalized population. In the case of this study, it was

evident that the physical space and human aggregate of the LCC produced a counter narrative

that facilitated a sense of belonging.

Summary

In this chapter, the findings gave voice to a population that is thinning at institutions of

higher education and the role of the Latinx cultural center in facilitating a critical experience, a

sense of belonging. The four major themes were (1) political safety; (2) masculine vulnerability;

(3) person-environment congruence through cultural validation and (4) Latinx cultural center as a

counter-narrative. These emergent themes provided context and an understanding of how the

Latinx cultural center facilitates a sense of belonging for Latinx/o men at a predominantly White institution.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter presents a discussion of the findings of the study in response to the research questions of 1) How do Latinx/o men experience sense of belonging in a Latinx cultural center at a predominantly White institution? 1a) What role does race play in sense of belonging in the Latinx cultural center? and 2) What ecological factors are associated with sense of belonging for Latinx/o men in the Latinx cultural center?

Discussion focuses on the four themes of the ecological contexts that facilitate sense of belonging: political safety, masculine vulnerability, person-environment congruence through cultural validation and physical space as a counter-narrative that facilitates community. Building on Strange and Banning's (2001) hierarchy of environmental learning purposes, a Latinx/o centric model of environmental learning purposes is presented. Based on the culmination of the findings, implications and recommendations for Latinx cultural centers interested in examining the ecological factors associated with sense of belonging for Latinx/o men are identified. Finally, a discussion of the limitations, strengths, and recommendations for future study is included.

Latinx/o Men at a Predominantly White Institutions

The navigation of marginalization to find a sense of belonging at the LCC at RMU was an easy acknowledgement for the men in this study. Rocky Mountain University's physical environment, cultural values and norms, played a role in the marginalization of the study participants while the physical environment, values and norms within the LCC facilitated a sense of belonging for the men. The transactional relationship between the physical and human aggregates was found to be evolving yet consistent.

The fluid nature of the transactional relationship of the men in this study and the LCC

facilitated a multi-faceted space which allowed them to utilize and transform the space to fit their

needs and wants not only as Latino students, but as Latino men. The men's ability to utilize the

space in a holistic, authentic and validating way is similar to the findings of Lozano (2014),

Patton (2004, 2006), Jones, Castellanos and Cole (2002), and Richmond (2012).

Overview of the Findings in Relation to the Existing Literature

Political Safety

Sense of belonging is defined as "students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling

or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted,

represented, valued by and important to the group (e.g., campus community or others on campus

(e.g., faculty, peers)" (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 3). In this definition, sense of belonging may only be

achievable if a student also experiences a level of safety and inclusion by said group. Safety and

inclusion is achieved when there is no threat to one's physical or psychological safety, but also

when one experiences a sense of mattering and validation (Rendon, 1994; Schlossberg, 1989;

Strange & Banning, 2001). This meaningful and validating sense of safety is required to create

an environment of learning and belonging (Strange & Banning, 2001).

Human aggregates are environments translated through people (Strange & Banning,

2001). These human aggregates determine the features of a particular environment, partially as a

function of the characteristics of the individuals who inhabit the space (Holland, 1973). Strange

and Banning (2001) identified safety and inclusion as the foundation for personal engagement

and community. For many, safety is categorized as physical in nature, but for Latino participants

in this study, safety concerns included being threatened physically, mentally and emotionally as

a result of the current political hatred expressed on the RMU campus. The hostile political

climate during the bad hombre era exacerbated an existing tension experienced by the Latino participants of this study. This constant political tension, in conjunction with the hateful rhetoric of Donald Trump labeling Brown men as drug dealers, criminals and rapists, only intensified the men's feelings of being un-safe, unwelcome and disrespected.

Political safety, encompassing physical, mental and emotional well-being, is a critical component of safety that is often ignored or dismissed. Political safety is an important consideration of ecological settings when developing intentional spaces, specifically settings for student learning. While the hierarchy of learning environment purposes acknowledges safety for minoritized populations can be challenged by dominant campus cultural values, it has not accounted for how xenophobic political rhetoric and actions of the dominant population specifically challenges the safety of Latinx/a/o students. The men in this study continuously indicated the political climate, both nationally and on the RMU campus, created an environment that felt unsafe and generated concern. The LCC provided the human aggregates and an ecological physical setting that fostered a sense of safety through support for physical, mental and emotional well-being.

Tinto's (1975) theory of student departure would call for students of color to assimilate to the White normative to be successful. The Latinx cultural center and its physical space, human aggregates and values are a direct response to this absurd and racist notion. The Latino men in this study are successful because of their unwillingness to assimilate to the White normative of RMU. The LCC is both a physical and cultural space that provides political safety, opportunities for involvement and a sense of belonging based on the men's desire to exhibit pride in their shared racial and ethnic identity.

The findings of this study align with those of Nunez (2009) who found that academically and communally engaged Latinx/a/o students reported a greater sense of belonging, but also experienced a higher level of hostility on campus. All the men in this study, despite their varied involvement on-campus, found RMU to be politically hostile and situated in the White narrative. The RMU White narrative was focused on assimilation, political status-quo and invalidation of non-White cultural wealth. From Lucas' experience of seeing this first hand at the Trump rally held on campus to Raul's concern for his future as a DACA student, political implications related to safety were exacerbated by the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States.

Additionally, the men in this study seemed to experience similar findings to those noted by Harper (2009), who found at predominantly White institutions the White narrative views men of color as underachievers, unmotivated and as a product of affirmative action (Harper, 2009). The political rhetoric and beliefs of white supremacy heightened this narrative at RMU. The men in this study were impacted by such rhetoric, but showed resiliency in their experiences. While Reid and Radharkishnan, (2003), Rankin and Reason (2005), and Nelson Laird and Niskode-Dossett (2010) found gender and race effects on perception of campus environment and climate had inconsistent results, the men in this study indicated that gender and race have had an effect on campus climate at RMU since the election of Donald Trump. The experiences of the men as result of the political hostility supported sentiments by Hernandez (2013), who found that the influence of race, privilege and White dominance intensified the desire and need to utilize the LCC as a space of mental, emotional and physical safety.

The findings of this study reflect the historical founding of race-centric cultural centers at predominantly White institutions. In the 1960's and 1970's, students of color, specifically Black and Latinx/a/o students, stewarded in physical spaces on campus that were seen as safe havens to

escape racist, discriminatory and marginalizing campus environments (Patton, 2004; Patton, 2006; Committee on Policy and Racial Justice, 1993; Hefner, 2002). Based on the findings of this study, the reasons for use of the LCC is similar to that of Black cultural centers forty to fifty years ago. This could be related to the findings of Muñoz, Vigil, Jach and Rodriguez-Gutierrez (2018) which showed that the election of Donald Trump exacerbated already violent and hostile campus climates. College campuses, specifically predominantly White campuses, suffered from the "Trump Effect." Hostile political environments, specifically xenophobic White hegemony focused political agendas, policies and rhetoric, reinforced the need and want for the LCC for the men in this study. The findings of this study show that presence of Brown bodies, regardless of citizenship, on campus is not enough to end the racist and white supremacy foundations of higher education which continues to validate White supremacy norms, values and bodies.

When viewing safety through a LatCrit lens and the ecological framework of the hierarchy of learning environment purposes (Strange & Banning, 2001), the transactional relationship between a physical space such as the LCC, ethnicity, legal status and gender of the men in this study is evident. The intersection of Latino identity and ecological space of safety are important for the men in this study. The conference room, surrounded by prominent Latinx/a/o role models, with its oval table to promote equal voices, peer recognition and community building is one example where multiple identities have intersected and the physical environment not only meets the wants, but also the needs, of the men in this study. Maximo discussed a perfect example of how this plays out within the LCC, noting that because of the cultural support, validating of one another's stories and acknowledgement of similar struggles due to race/ethnicity, there is a great deal of respect and value for one another.

Within the LCC, the living room served as a refuge for some of the men who were concerned for both their and their family's safety as a result of the racist political motives to remove them from the country. Flexibility for the environment to adapt to the needs of the population is an important aspect of any environment hoping to promote safety. In this case, the living room was the central space where immigration lawyers would assist the men under DACA, and where the men could find those who shared similar concerns, all while alleviating a degree of emotional and mental stress.

Shedding Machismo

Masculinity, socialized expectations, and evolving behaviors and attitudes were examined and negotiated by the men in this study. The combination of the physical space and the human aggregates of the LCC provided an active space for mental, emotional and behavioral change to happen. All the men in this study actively challenged the societal socialization of masculinity, and specifically, what it meant to be a Latino man. As illustrated by Lucas' acknowledgment of his previously sexist attitudes and behaviors being challenged in the LCC, Maximo's vulnerability and emotional freedom within specific spaces of the LCC or Felix's desire to voice his pain and hurt, the LCC was home to an active dismissal of the societal masculine expectations of Latinx/o men.

The men in this study came to RMU and the LCC with a well-informed and culturally validated idea of masculinity and gendered socialization. This aligns with the findings of Connell (1993) and Harper (2004), who found men bring learned and enforced socializations to college campuses. The pressure to subscribe to the masculine attributes of being competitive, unemotional, aggressive, authoritative, rule breakers and tough (Edward & Jones, 2009), was acknowledged by the men in this study, as were the problematic outcomes of internalizing such

attitudes and behaviors. The ongoing questioning of hyper-masculine and machismo thoughts and behaviors of the men in this study showed that Latinx/o undergraduate men are not only capable, but interested in, actively rejecting such notions.

This gender role conflict was a daily experience for the men in this study. One of the most interesting aspects of this gender role conflict was not only the men's acknowledgement of this tension, but the questioning, affirmation and negotiation that was a common experience for the men which aligned with previous research (Connell, 1993; Davis & Liang, 2014; Good & Wood, 1995; Harper, et. al, 2005; O'Niel, 1981; O'Neil, et.al., 1986; O'Neil & Nadeau, 2004; Pleck, 1981).

It is important to acknowledge that masculinity within the Latinx culture, especially for Mexican and Mexican-American men, looks different and is often identified and internalized as machismo. This socialized and affirmed hyper-masculine gender role perpetuates patriarchy, aggression and sexism (Arciniega, Anderson, Tovar-Blank, Tracey, 2008; Campos, 1998). The men in this study identified machismo and its negative implications of attitudes and behaviors as counter-productive to their mental and emotional well-being. The men were deliberately un-learning societal expectations and norms, as they saw machismo as a negative set of values, attitudes and behaviors, which aligns with the findings of Mirandé (1988) study. Additionally, the men in this study defined masculinity in a much more holistic way and saw seeking help, engaging with administrators and accepting feedback as critical aspects to masculinity. This finding is consistent with that of Harper (2004) in that the effort and support of challenging the social norms and expectations of traditional masculinity was ongoing for the men. While the men were constantly navigating the machismo gender role conflict, the influence of Latinx/o machismo was still strong enough to create mental and emotional barriers in determining

academic and social expectations, but not so much that machismo created a barrier to seeking

academic and social support. This finding differs from that of Saenz and Bukoski (2013) which

found that machismo, fear and pride prevented Latinx/o college men from seeking academic and

social support. This suggests that the physical and human aggregates of a space influence the

support seeking behaviors of Latinx/o men.

The environments of the LCC that allowed the men to experience and express masculine

vulnerability served as critical vehicles for facilitating such opportunities. This specific

transactional environment is an example of physical space interacting with the human aggregate.

When Maximo was reflecting on his photo submissions Motherly Figure (Figure 4.3) and That

Safe Feeling (Figure 4.2), he acknowledged that the combination of the physical space, partnered

with the human aggregate, was the reason for his feeling of safety and sense of belonging in that

environment. Additionally, Lucas' submission of Vulnerability (Figure 4.4) as a physical space

where he seeks help, shares personal stories and shows emotions is an indication that these

environmental spaces and relationships facilitate men in shedding the societal norms that can

plague Latinx/o men. This supports Strange and Banning's (2001) finding that productive

ecology occurs when the physical artifacts and human aggregate are aligned and congruent. In

this case, these environments within the LCC acknowledged and promoted the needs of Latinx/o

men to be emotionally and mentally vulnerable in an effort to shed machismo norms.

Person-Environment Congruence through cultural Validation

The element of culturally validating environments is critically important to consider

when studying campus sense of belonging, given that it refers to the extent to which students

perceive their ethnic and cultural identity to be valued by the institution and community

(Museus, Yi, & Saelua, 2017). The men in this study strongly identified the LCC as a culturally

validating environment of great importance, as they acknowledged there was no other space on the RMU campus that captured their Latinx/o identity. Felix was the first participant to mention that it was extremely unlikely to visit a department chair's or a dean's office and see anything that represented him as a Latino man. Carlos shared that the LCC is the place where he goes to refill his "Mexicaness", a direct indication that the general RMU campus lacks appropriate outlets beyond the LCC. For these men, their ethnic identity provided a motivating drive to succeed at RMU. One example of this sentiment is Felix's sharing his "immigrant mentality" which he defined as an acknowledgement that as a Brown man he will have to work harder than White people to be successful, but his willingness to do so was unwavering. Artwork in the LCC was also perceived to be ethnically/racially centering and motivating, as Raul, Carlos and Maximo all reflected on the artwork in the LCC. This cultural validation resulted in the engagement of a space that encouraged them to strive personally and academically.

These Latinx-centric messages in transaction with the human aggregate of the LCC seemed to contradict the findings of Castillo, Conoley, Choi-Pearson, Archuleta, Phoummarath and Van Landingham (2006), who found that there was no significant relationship between Latinx student ethnic identity and the drive to succeed at institutions of higher education. The men in this study identified the cultural center's ability to express a set of values, beliefs, behaviors and expectations through cultural messages as critical to their engagement. These values, beliefs and expectations that motivated engagement were focused on the success, persistence and matriculation of Latinx/a/o individuals.

The LCC, as the environment, and the human aggregates of the men created a transactional relationship that strongly informed engagement within the space. Hernandez (2013) and Gloria, Castellanos, Scull and Villegas (2009) found that for Latinx/o men the

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navigation of race on college campuses, specifically hostile environments, only increased the need and want for to stay connected to Latinx cultural and ethnic communities. Whether through the informal and relaxed interactions within the living room, the academic pursuits being made amongst peers in the conference room or the Mexican meals being prepared in the kitchen, this connection was not only wanted, but needed by the men in this study.

Lozano's (2004) findings also aligned with those of this study. Lozano found that the Latinx cultural center provided a space familiar in language, music, food and community and empowerment through art. The Latinx cultural center served as a hub for involvement, both within the cultural center and across the institution; participants gave meaning and purpose to the physical space. The LCC provided this connection in both physical and human means, as evidenced by Raul's leadership position in a Latinx youth mentoring organization that provided scholarships to first-year students, Maximo's involvement in the same organization because of his desire to make impacts within his community and Lucas' presence on the front lines of student activism specific to Latinx issues at RMU.

Gonzalez (2000) found that Latinx students' internalized feelings of being less important based on the lack of Chicano/x and Latinx representation through architecture, art and other symbolism across campus. These feelings were exacerbated by the White normative cultural messages that were well represented across campus. The men in this study acknowledged that there was little Latinx representation across the university, which made the LCC even more important to them. Carlos, Luis, Maximo and Raul all indicated that the familiarity of images, physical artifacts and the representation within the LCC were important to facilitating a high level of engagement with the LCC. The high level of representation in the LCC directly

impacted engagement by the men in this study. This transactional relationship that promoted engagement is a pre-cursor to a sense of belonging.

Physical Space as Counter-Narrative for Sense of Belonging

The development of collective resistance, which includes identifying affirming counter-space, building community that affirms cultural knowledge and challenges the dominant narrative, is a product of the environment and experiences (Yosso, et. al, 2009; Ballon, 2015). Despite engaging in collective resistance, many Latinx/a/o students continue to find institutions of higher education unsafe and hostile (Rankin & Reason, 2005; Yosso & Lopez, 2010). While this was found to be true for the men in this study, they found the LCC at RMU to be a place of safety, engagement and a counter-narrative to the White normative sense of belonging at the institution. Collective resistance developed from the transactional relationship between the physical space of the LCC and the human aggregate of the cultural center that ultimately created a counter-narrative. The resulting counter-narrative was the Latinx sense of belonging on a hostile predominantly White campus.

The creation of this counter-narrative was the result of both explicit and inexplicit messages that the men in this study were not welcome or wanted at RMU. The LCC, as a physical space, served as a direct contradiction to those persistent messages. The human aggregate of the LCC, specifically the community and sense of belonging experienced in the space, served as a reinforcement that the men were welcome and validated. For the men in this study, the physical and human aggregates of the LCC promoted a level of sense of belonging not found anywhere else on campus. This experience made me think of a statement Lucas made regarding the LCC's ability to validate Latinx/a/o students; he acknowledged that White supremacy facilitates the real message that they are unwanted and unwelcomed, but that the LCC

validates them as individuals and students and gives them the mental and emotional strength to say "I'm not going anywhere."

Lucas knew that he could arrive at the LCC and not have racial insults hurled at him. Raul and Hugo could come to the LCC and be assured their physical and mental safety, given their statuses in the United States. Maximo knew he could come to the LCC and be vulnerable and emotional, which actively opposed the machismo expectations he grew up believing. Felix and Carlos could come to the LCC and focus on their academic success, with appropriate resources and support in a way similar to the majority of RMU students. For the men in this study, sense of belonging at the LCC was the counter narrative.

The men in this study felt validated and respected in this space. This sense of belonging was not only promoted by the physical space, but by their peers and the fellow men in this study. The empowerment experienced within the group of these men was a major component of their sense of belonging within the LCC and proved to be a central focus in the creation of the narrative of Latino men at RMU. The men in this study felt that they mattered and were validated within the LCC space.

Similar to the findings of Huerta and Fishman (2014), when participants were able to engage in an environment that was safe, academically encouraging and positively influencing, it provided Latinx/o men an opportunity to explore their ethnic identity, engage with other Latinx/o peers and professionals and see the place as one of support and progress. The findings of this study identified a specific environment that facilitated such essential components of the Latinx/o experience. Maximo noted that the men he saw actively engaging with the LCC went on to graduate from RMU, whereas those who did not left the institution. He went on to describe how

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watching the upper-class Latinx/o men graduate gave him a sense of hope and energy for helping other Latinx/a/o students.

The men in this study needed and wanted a space to experience safety, engage in, and build community with other Latinx/a/o students and professional staff. While this study was not one that sought to understand the implications of cross-racial or intercultural interactions on sense of belonging such as studies by Strayhorn (2008) or Maramba and Museus (2013), it was apparent that in-group Latinx interactions and the Latinx-centric LCC was just as, if not more, important in facilitating sense of belonging for the men in this study.

This could be because the men's experiences seemed to be comparable to the findings of Hernandez (2013). Hernandez (2013) found that Latinx students' lack of a sense of belonging was exacerbated by the lack of mentorship, representation of Latinx students and faculty and inclusivity in curriculum. Additionally, participants in the Hernandez study perceived the absence of a culturally inclusive physical space as having an impact on their sense of belonging. The study by Hernandez (2013) provided an additional data point to the findings of this research to show that Latinx/a/o students, specifically Latinx/o men, need a safe, engaging and communal Latinx-centric space. This physical space and human aggregate facilitate a sense of belonging that is needed to create the counter-narrative.

The purpose of this study was to understand the ecological factors associated with how Latinx/o men experience a sense of belonging in a Latinx cultural center at a predominantly White institution. This transactional relationship between the physical environment and the human aggregates within the LCC resulted in not only behavior, but an emotional and mental state. To better understand this transaction, the research questions that guided this study will be addressed.

How do Latinx/o men experience sense of belonging in a Latinx cultural center at a

predominantly White institution?

The participants in this study indicated that they experienced a sense of belonging in the

Latinx cultural center (LCC) due to the political safety, emotional support, cultural validation

and opportunity to create/share their own narrative. The men in the study strongly

acknowledged that the LCC served as a safe haven from the hostile and racist environment of the

general RMU campus. The physical and human aggregates of the LCC served as a place of

physical, mental and emotional refuge, which was a critical aspect to the experience of sense of

belonging for the men. The participants also saw the LCC as a place in which they could

challenge the machismo stereotypes of Latinx/o men by being emotionally and mentally

vulnerable. This vulnerability was a direct result of the physical and human aggregates of the

private offices of LCC administrators and the trusting relationships with LCC administrators.

The men in this study cited the cultural validation of the space was crucial in their experiences.

Whether it was the Latinx centric artwork, the familiarity of the furniture style and arrangement

or the culturally understood and consistent behaviors that took place in these familiar

environments, these culturally validating physical and human aggregates kept the men coming

back. For the men, the LCC provided a physical space where a counter-narrative of the college

experience could be developed. The LCC was a space that validated the cultural wealth that the

men came to RMU with and celebrated the rich culture that was salient to them as individuals

and students.

What role does race play in sense of belonging in the Latinx cultural center?

Race played a key role in the sense of belonging for the men in this study. Race was at

the center of many of the experiences the men had in the LCC; the men identified the LCC was

one of the very few racially validating spaces on campus. Due to race being central to the experience of the men in this study, it was evident that race and sense of belonging were interconnected. Whether it was Carlos coming to the LCC to refill his Mexicaness, Raul hanging out in the living room that reminded him of his Mexican household, or Lucas knowing he could visit the LCC and find safety amongst other Latinx/a/o peers and administrators, race was the primary role for the sense of belonging the men experienced in the LCC.

What ecological factors are associated with sense of belonging for Latinx/o men in a Latinx cultural center?

The men in this study resonated greatly with the ecological factors in the LCC and their impacts on their internalized sense of belonging. For many of the men, it started with the living room, where they acknowledged that the furniture, while outdated, was culturally familiar and relevant. From the specific observations of the imitation rivets on the arms of the couch and loveseat to the coffee table in the living room, the ecological artifacts within the LCC facilitated not only familiarity, but a sense of belonging. The men also acknowledged that the Latinx centric artwork throughout the LCC was motivating and encouraging to their psyche. These messages established a direct relationship between their academic pursuits and the betterment of the Latinx/a/o population at RMU and beyond. Whether it was relaxing on the couch watching *Blood In, Blood out*, building academic and navigational capital at the communal conference table or the culturally relevant artwork that surrounded the men, the culturally relevant ecological factors both affirmed and facilitated belonging.

Theoretical Discussion

The theoretical framework for this study is situated in a way to understand racial implications on the environment for Latino men. As such, the theoretical frameworks utilized

were critical race theory (CRT) (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) and Latinx critical theory (LatCrit) (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001). Critical race theory calls into question and challenges the racial injustice and oppression that exists (Delgado, 2012; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1997; Patton, 2006). Latinx critical theory extends beyond the White and Black racial binary to acknowledge the experiences of Latinx/a/o citizens, and addresses the intersections of sex, class, legal status and gender (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001). While not a theoretical framework, the Hierarchy of Environmental Learning Purposes (Strange & Banning, 2001), a conceptual framework of campus ecology, is discussed and utilized to better understand the racial implications of the environment for Latino men within the LCC.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory is comprised of five main tenets: 1) racism permeates all and is an ordinary component of society, 2) experiential knowledge in the form of storytelling, 3) interest convergence, 4) critique of liberalism, and 5) commitment to social justice (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2010; Yosso & Lopez, 2010). For the men in this study, CRT not only was applicable but was real in how they navigated the world and specifically, RMU. Delgado and Stefancic (2012, p. 7) stated the "system of white-over-color ascendancy serves important purposes, both psychic and material, for the dominant group". It was this system, higher education in the United States, that these men negotiated on a daily basis.

Latinx Critical Theory

The nuanced experiences of Latinx individuals, specifically those of the Latino men in this study, are influenced by the intersection of sex, class, legal status and gender, all of which are components of LatCrit (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001). LatCrit seeks to understand and provide context for the racial experience of the Latinx/a/o population by acknowledging the pan-ethnic

composition of its people and other intersecting identities (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001). The men in this study consistently referred to the intersections of sex and gender identity, legal status and race/ethnicity as strongly informing not only how they perceived and utilized their environment, but also how those human aggregates influenced behavior. These intersecting identities are crucial to acknowledge when contextualizing the environmental and human transaction for Latinx/a/o students.

The findings of this study show that the intersection of sex, gender, class, and legal status with environment, in this case a predominantly White institution, can produce unique experiences and needs for undergraduate Latinx/o men. LatCrit acknowledges the multiple identities influencing the experiences of Latinx/o men attending a predominantly White institution of higher education. This study found that while all of the tenets of CRT were evident within the space in some capacity, three specific CRT tenets were critical to the study.

Racism Permeates All

Key to the study was the CRT tenet that identifies racism as an ordinary and underlining component of society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). The men in this study reported and acknowledged that racism permeates all aspects and is an ordinary component of society, with the campus of RMU being no different. The experiences of the men in this study showed that the college campus is still a place that is unwelcoming and hostile towards non-White students. This hostility can be traced back to the founding of many institutions of higher education that were built on the backs of indigenous communities and African slaves (Wilder, 2013). Just as in the 16th and 17th centuries, race and ethnicity continues to be a powerful aspect leveraged by White dominant identities. It can be argued that racism is an ordinary component of any predominantly White institution that has a Latinx cultural center. It is the White-centric,

normative and supremacy values that create the need for these centers on campuses in the first place. Although cultural centers serve as a beacon of hope, support and community for many Latinx/a/o students, they are also a symbol of racism, hostility and a reminder that these institutions were built for White students. As Delgado and Stefancic (2012, pg. 7) stated "our system of white-over-color ascendancy serves important purposes, both psychic and material, for the dominant group."

Undoubtedly, the way institutions of higher education, specifically predominantly White institutions, see and discuss race has changed over time, from the 16th century, the civil rights era of the 1960's and 1970's and now; yet political hostility continues to violently marginalize Latinx/a/o students. The color-blind equality attitudes of leadership at predominantly White institutions, paired with racist and anti-brown rhetoric and political actions, allow institutions of higher education to act in ways that appear as progress but are nothing more than veiled normalized racism and interest convergence. The creation of a Latinx/a/o cultural center does not absolve institutions of prior victimization and ongoing racist practices, policies, funding and decisions.

Interest Convergence

One of the facets of the findings was the way in which the participants perceived how they were actively disrupting White supremacy. The men in this study saw their academic and social success at RMU as a passive disruption of racism and White supremacy. This passive disruption benefits both the men in this study and the RMU but in different ways. The academic and social success of these men assist in their academic, professional and upward mobility. The subdued and passive disruption benefits RMU as it allows the institution to maintain the status quo and racialized social norms and values. It is important to note that this passive disruption

seemed to be rooted in fear of retaliation directed towards the students and the cultural center.

Fear is often used as a tool by an oppressing body, in this case, the institution. It is this

internalized fear that potentially limits the Latinx cultural center's ability to enact true

institutional cultural change that benefits Latinx/a/o students. To apply Lewin's (2013)

ecological equation, the environment, a racialized hostile campus climate, in transaction with the

human aggregate, a racially and politically targeted Latinx/a/o population, has resulted in the

behavior, which is to passively co-exist without actively disrupting the status quo of RMU.

These often under-staffed and under-funded centers, while important and critical to the success

of many Latinx/a/o students, can also be a vehicle for interest convergence in today's hostile and

racialized political climate.

Counter Storytelling

There was a strong reliance on counter-storytelling and counter-narrative creation. The

tenant of experiential knowledge in the form of storytelling was an interesting aspect for the men

in this study. Acknowledging that the men came to RMU with experiential knowledge that

racism has informed much of their lives and is an ordinary factor of society, the counter-narrative

that the men created was a direct response to the hostile environment of RMU. One may

question if Latinx cultural centers are nothing more than a vehicle of interest convergence and a

way to placate Latinx/a/o students, but it is hard to ignore the counter-narratives that are being

validated and developed within these spaces. It is critical that these spaces actively disrupt

institutional and cultural validations of White supremacy to avoid becoming nothing more than a

whitewashed entity whose sole existence is implementing heritage month programming. A

major aspect of this counter-narrative creation existed largely outside of the Black and White

racial binary grounded in CRT and distinct in the overlap of ethnicity, legal status, sex and gender.

Conceptual Model Discussion

The critical integration of the Latinx/a/o identity in relation to the environmental components, in this case, the LCC and predominantly White campus of RMU, magnifies Lewin's (2013) ecological equation of B=f(P,E). This ecological equation describes the transactional relationship as a function of the person (P) and the environment (E), resulting in behavior (B). The results of this study show how the environment strongly influences and serves as a central indicator for Latino men in the production of behavior. The environments these undergraduate Latino men navigated, the RMU general campus and the Latinx cultural center, in partnership with their identities, influenced their behavior. The men in this study showed that the general RMU environment produced anxiety, mental and emotional tension and concern for physical safety as result of their human aggregates in non-LCC spaces. The racial implications on the ecological equation is an important finding of this study.

The results of this study reinforce Lewin's ecological equation, while nuancing the experience of the undergraduate Latino man. Strange and Banning's (2001) hierarchy of environmental learning purposes acknowledges Lewin's ecological equation in the creation of a learning environment. Strange and Banning's (2001) hierarchy included three environmental conditions; safety and inclusion, involvement and community; the conditions of safety and inclusion and involvement must be met if the community condition is to be attained.

The environmental condition of community is the one of focus in this research, as it offers a sense of belonging, a commitment to a larger purpose, and encourages engagement (Strange & Banning, 2001). According to Strange and Banning (2001), "communities establish a

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status of full membership for participants in an environment, offering them opportunities to engage over time in distinct history, tradition and culture" (p. 161). The men in this study spent a great deal of time navigating the multiple layers of race, culture, gender, legal status, and language, which inform their experiences on campus, and ultimately their sense of belonging within the LCC (Yosso & Lopez, 2010).

Latinx/o Ecology

When utilizing Strange and Banning's (2001) hierarchy of environmental learning purposes, it is important to acknowledge the implications of Latinx centric identities such as race, ethnicity, legal status, class, language sex and gender in the creation of an environment of learning. The intersectionality of these Latinx centric identities and their impact on the establishment of the conditions noted by Strange and Banning (2001), specifically safety, involvement and community, provides much-needed context in the creation of not only these conditions, but also intentional environments that are Latinx/a/o-centric. Acknowledging the implications of Latinx centric identities, provides a more comprehensive understanding of campus ecological impacts for Latinx/o men.

The Latinx Purposeful Ecology illustrates the findings and stories of the men in this study and provides a different structuring of environmental purposes. For these men, sense of belonging started with their full membership in the Latinx racial/ethnic community through living a distinct history, upholding traditions and culture. The Latinx Purposeful Ecology nuances the human aggregates that Latinx/o men bring into the environment and informed how they interacted and made sense of the space. The element of community and sense of belonging was informed by the intersection of race, gender, legal status, sex, class and language and served as the foundational element for men. Sense of belonging was accomplished through the

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transactional relationship of the LCC and the men creating cultural capital and producing a counter narrative. The men formed environments and relationships conducive to challenging hyper masculinity norms and Latinx/o machismo which brought about personal and communal growth. The environment of the LCC validated their existence as Latino men and their role in creating the space was critical. This is seen through the student produced art, furniture set up and even the food created in the newly remodeled kitchen. Finally, political safety gave the men mental, emotional and physical refuge from a hostile campus environment.

The Latinx Purposeful Ecology model identifies different environmental purposes, one that is purposeful for Latinx/o men. These environmental purposes are not hierarchical or defined through a racially White lens. Instead these environmental purposes are fluid in nature, defined through the intersectional Latinx-centric identities and are result of a transactional relationship that centers the Latinx/a/o experience on a predominantly White campus. Given this finding, racial and ethnic centric spaces might provide a different progression of environmental determinism and learning purposes. Additional ecological studies are needed to further explore this possibility and to determine if the extended framework assists in the creation of environments that foster the conditions of counter narrative creation, emotional vulnerability, person-environment congruence and political safety for Latinx/a/o students.
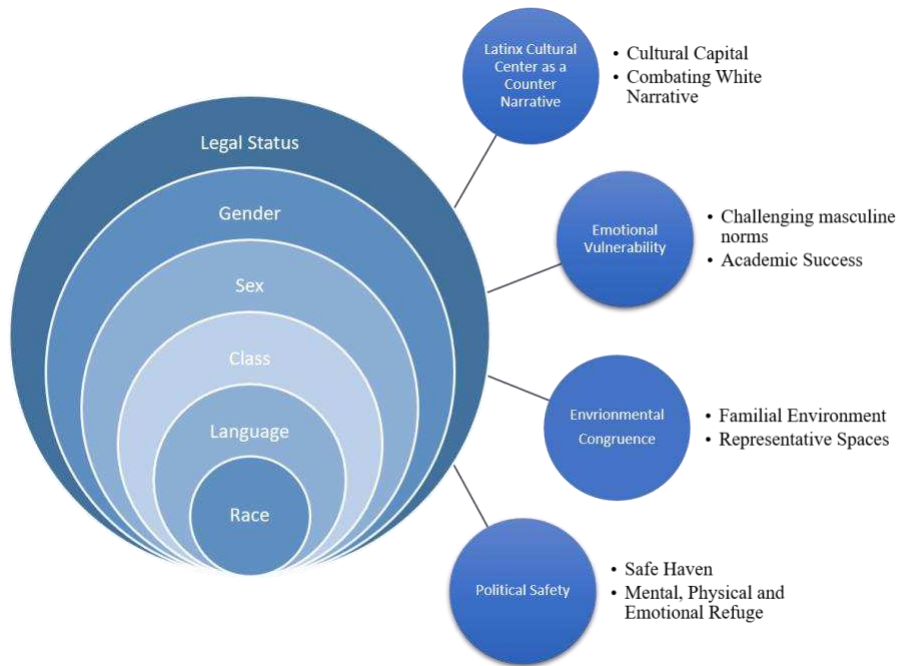
Figure 5.3 Latinx Purposeful Ecology

Implications for Practice

This study seeks to inform Latinx cultural centers and institutions of higher education on how to facilitate sense of belonging for Latino men at predominantly White institutions. This environment, which continues to mirror White centric experiences, continues to marginalize non-white students. For this reason, Latinx cultural centers serve a specific and important purpose to Latinx/a/o students, and, in this case, Latino men at RMU.

The experiences of the Latino men in this study are both unique and telling of the state of not only the United States, but of predominantly White college campuses. Specifically, the reasons for needing and engaging with the Latinx cultural center is no different than the historical reasons for the creation of such cultural centers. Institutions must make it a priority to not only continue to resource, support and fund Latinx cultural centers, but also to create safer and more inclusive college campuses. The implications for practice based on these findings

support the need for Latinx cultural centers for Latinx/a/o, students but call into question the supposed progress being made on predominantly White college campuses.

Implications for Latinx Cultural Centers

Implications for Latinx cultural centers became apparent after much analysis of the needs and wants of the Latino men in this study. Intentional support and resources for Latinx/o men is a specific area that is important for Latinx cultural centers to address. During much of my observation in the LCC, the space was heavily utilized by what I perceived to be Latinx/a students. Participants of this study confirmed that Latinx/a women comprised the majority of visitors/participants and student employees. Given the difference in enrollment and persistence rates between men and women Latinx/a/o students (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009), it is imperative that environments, programs and relationships are sensitive to the unique needs of Latinx/o undergraduate men at predominantly White institutions. It also must be stated that many of these environments, programs and relationships do not need to exist within the gender binary, but careful attention given to multiple gender identities, including gender fluid and non-conforming Latinx/o students.

The Latino men in this study want to see more Latinx/o men utilizing the space provided in the Latinx cultural center. By being intentional about the programmatic initiatives that acknowledge and validate the unique experiences of Latinx/o men at a predominantly White institution, Latinx cultural centers can continue to be seen as safe havens and places of confirmation for a population that typically is invisible on, and disappearing from, college campuses. Latinx cultural centers might consider the formal and informal ways it invites Latinx/o men to be emotionally vulnerable, seek help and support through the machismo gender conflict. Providing specific programs for Latinx/o men to explore gender, hyper-masculinity and

toxic machismo attitudes and behaviors is one suggestion. Additionally, ensuring that Latinx cultural center administrators are both prepared and knowledgeable on assisting Latinx/o men to navigate such unique cultural conversations is imperative.

Latinx cultural centers have the opportunity to explore the function of their environment, the E in Lewin's (2013) ecological equation of $B=f(P,E)$, through the lens of the unique human aggregates of the Latinx/o man. The physical environment, physical artifacts and messaging should be conducive to building engagement, validation and sense of belonging for this population. Whether it is the artwork on the walls, furniture that facilitates informal interaction or familial artifacts, the aggregates of these Latinx/o men are unique and should be addressed as a function of behavior in the Latinx cultural center. Through involving Latinx/o men in the creation of the physical space within the LCC will help ensure the environment resonates and validates their identities as Latinx/o men.

Direct action towards social justice and equity should be a priority for the Latinx cultural center. The men in this study identified that the work towards disrupting White supremacy was "more passive". I believe it to be critical for the LCC to engage in political action through mobilization of both students and administrators. Through intentional actions in confronting equity both on campus and within the greater community, the LCC could position itself as an entity that calls into question the very issues the LCC was established to address such as campus climate, retention/matriculation and blatant racism. The LCC at RMU was result of student activism and calling attention to the demands of Latinx/a/o, specifically Chicanx/a/o, students. There is an opportunity to return to this critically consciousness action and empower Latinx/a/o students to engage in creating change.

The last implication came from a short but direct comment from one of the men in the study regarding the university budget. It was indicated that RMU was experiencing budget cuts and the LCC was being asked to trim their programmatic budget. The LCC, already consisting of an extremely small number professional staff and boasting a healthy number of new and historic programs, was having to make some difficult decisions. The implications of budget cuts is an opportunity re-think the financial structure of the LCC. Instead of depending on solely institutional funding, the LCC might explore sources of revenue by leveraging relationships with general community members and alumni. Such action could help address the impact of institutional budgetary constraints on a population that has been historically marginalized by institutions of higher education and ensure that Latinx/a/o students are not collateral damage as result of budget cuts.

Implications for Institutions of Higher Education

For the participants in this study, there exists a notable tension between gratefulness and frustration regarding the existence of the LCC at RMU. The men in this study were grateful for what the LCC provided and acknowledged that without the LCC many of them would likely have left RMU. This acknowledgement centered on the perpetuation of systemic racism at institutions of higher education that marginalizes a number of Latinx/a/o students on campus. There is a high level of frustration at the fact that institutions of higher education, specifically predominantly White institutions, continue to placate the Latinx/a/o population rather than addressing the systemic issues, specifically environments and practices that promote white supremacy and prompt the need for the LCC.

Given the political climate within the United States and prevailing acknowledgement of racism's inherent place within the world, institutions of higher education have the opportunity to

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respond in a manner that validates all students' existences and creates an environment that is conducive to learning and success for all students. To facilitate this, institutions should explicitly denounce harmful political rhetoric that takes place within its buildings that other and marginalize Latinx/a/o students. Failure to take an active stance against hateful, racist and xenophobic rhetoric, policies and behavior is a direct embracement of oppression. Institutions of higher education, specifically predominantly White institutions, can no longer remain neutral under the facade of promoting diverse thought.

While the men in the study likely suspected a challenging environment at RMU, the first interaction with the institution seemed to represent one of genuine care, support and confidence. The men in this study acknowledged the persistent recruitment and ongoing support of a specific admissions officer as critical to their decision to attend RMU. They indicated this admissions officer communicated directly with them in whatever means necessary (i.e. Facebook, email, phone, etc.), spoke to their parents in Spanish to alleviate the concerns and fears they had about their sons attending RMU and connected them with cultural, academic and financial resources. It is recommended that RMU solidify and extend these practices through Latinx centric retention programs for sophomores, juniors and seniors as a way to ensure continuous support outside of just recruitment. Additionally, it is recommended that these solidified and extended practices are carried out by a team of full-time staff members instead of one person. This team should consist of professionals who are focused on both recruitment and ongoing support through graduation.

One specific area that RMU seemed to excel at was the support of DREAMer/DACA students. The men in this study who identified as DREAMers indicated strong support and advocacy on their behalf, both by the LCC and the Office of Equity and Inclusion at RMU. Conversely, there seemed to be little support for those not under the DACA or the DREAMer

umbrella. Given the current political assault on undocumented individuals and migration from central and south America, RMU should take the initiative to clearly list and publicize the support and services afforded to both students who are 'protected' under DACA and also for those who are not.

The lack in adequate funding and staff members for the LCC should be addressed. Given the Latinx/a/o student population is RMU's largest minoritized racial group, there must be an institutional commitment to support Latinx/a/o students through a highly funded programmatic and initiative budget with an appropriate number of full-time LCC staff to support a growing demographic. The LCC being asked to do more with less is a direct indication of institutional priority and could be considered violence against the Latinx/a/o student population.

Limitations and Strengths

The experiences of the six men in this study provide great insight on the role of the physical and human environment in facilitating sense of belonging within the Latinx cultural center. While the findings acknowledge the unique experiences of these Latino men, these findings cannot be generalized to all Latinx/o men at RMU or other institutions of higher education. Another limitation in generalization is that the men in this study identified as Mexican. Due to all the participants identifying as Mexican, these findings are limited to giving voice to one group within the pan-ethnic Latinx/a/o population.

One of the strengths of this study is that it allows for the creation of the epistemological foundation for the transactional relationship between the physical environment of a Latinx cultural center and the human aggregate of Mexican men. It is my assumption that my identity as a multi-racial Latino man allowed for there to be a stronger rapport and understanding between the men in this study and myself.

Recommendations for Future Study

This study examined the ecological factors of a Latinx cultural center in the facilitation of undergraduate Latinx men in an effort to address the gap in campus ecology. Further research is needed to address the experiences of non-Mexican men and the role of the Latinx cultural center, as well as the experiences of Latinx/a women and the role of the Latinx cultural center. As an increasing number of Latinx/a/o women enter institutions of higher education, understanding the environmental context that facilitates belonging for this population could be of great interest. Continuation and expansion on the study of campus ecology and Latinx/a/o undergraduate students is recommended. While campus climate impact on Latinx/a/o students is well documented, there exists a gap in the literature of understanding the role of environmental messages and physical artifacts in promoting Latinx/a/o student success at predominantly White institutions.

Personal Reflection

Through this process, I learned just as much about myself as a person, scholar, practitioner and as a multi-racial Latino man. There was so much that the men shared in this study that resonated my core. Often times when I met with the men in this study, it was as if I was meeting myself 15 years ago. While there were many similarities, there were also vast differences, and those differences were privileges that I held. As a fair skinned multi-racial Latino man with U.S. citizenship privilege, these men were navigating issues, systems and environments vastly different than I ever encountered.

While there was a great deal of similar understanding, with an acknowledgement of the differences of experience, the men in this study gave me hope for what is to come. It is without a doubt that these men will go on to be social change agents, supporters who give voice to not only

the Latinx/a/o community, but specifically other Latinx/o men. Their willingness to explore

their ethnic, racial and gender identity and the role it plays in a space was nothing short of

amazing. The men in this study gave their time, their stories and their expertise in their lived

experience, both within the LCC and at RMU. This epistemological foundation of knowledge is

a gift and one that I am extremely grateful for.

Through this research, I became more convinced that institutions and environments must

provide a space for Latinx/o men to not only experience a sense of belonging, but to give voice

to the unique experiences of Latinx/o men. The intersection of gender, sex, legal status and

masculinity is lived out in a variety of ways for Latinx/o men. Due to this variance, Latinx/o

men need space to explore both assets and problematic notions in order to not only be better

students, scholars, practitioners and professionals, but also better people and community

members.

Environment matters. The physical and human aggregates of an environment matter in

facilitating a sense of belonging. Through this research process, I have come to understand the

role of the environment on a person's mental, emotional and physical well-being. Due to gaining

a better understanding of environmental factors, potential purpose and impact, I have determined

that campus ecology, specific to minoritized populations, is of great importance. Institutions of

higher education must and can do better at supporting these cultural spaces. Through adequate

funding, staffing and student ownership, institutions can truly create a space of empowerment.

This empowerment is crucial to combating the increasingly hostile political and racialized

environments that Latinx/a/o students, faculty and staff are required to navigate on a

predominantly White campus. Additionally, institutions of higher education not only have the

ability, but the responsibility to ensure that Latinx cultural centers are not utilized as a means of

White supremacy through interest convergence and neo-liberalist practices, policies and actions. Environments matter, as do the students that utilize them.

Summary

The results from this research provide additional racial/ethnic and gender context to the transaction between Latino men and the environment of a Latinx/a/o cultural center. Additionally, the results of this study better inform the racial and gender impacts on the Hierarchy of Environmental Learning Purposes (Strange & Banning, 2001) and provides a revised environmental model centering Latinx/a/o students. This ethnographic qualitative research brings into perspective the physical and human aggregates of sense of belonging. Given the popular research focus on campus climate in relation to student experience, this study centralizes campus ecology to acknowledge that environments and culture inform one another.

It is with great hope that this study informs both Latinx cultural centers and institutions of higher education on the importance of physical and human aggregates within an environment as crucial to the facilitation of sense of belonging for Latinx/o men. The LCC addresses the need for physical safety, given anti-brown and Latinx political agendas, provides space for emotional vulnerability, provides an engaging and culturally validating space and utilizes an empowering environment to produce a counter-narrative to the experience at a predominantly White institution. By understanding the ecological impact and its role in facilitating sense of belonging for Latinx/o men, we can work towards equity and justice through the creation of a sense of place.

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APPENDIX A

E-MAIL TO PARTICIPANTS

From: Hermen Diaz
Sent: XXXX
To: XXXX
Subject: Latinx Male Study

I hope this email finds you well. My name is Hermen Diaz and I am a doctoral student in Higher Education Leadership at Colorado State University. For my dissertation study, I am interested in understanding the experiences (sense of belonging) of undergraduate Latinx male students that utilize the Cesar Chavez Cultural Center.

I myself identify as a Latinx male and so my passion and interest in this topic stems from my personal undergraduate experience. My study will take place during the spring 2018 semester. I am interested in interviewing 6-10 undergraduate Latinx males who are classified as a either a sophomore, junior or senior and have participated in a [LCC name redacted] event or program, work at the cultural center and visit the cultural center a minimum of 2 times per week. The study will utilize photo-elicitation to understand your experience in the cultural center. During the initial meeting, you will be briefed on the photograph process, guidelines and study concepts. After the submission of your photos, you will meet with me for two interviews roughly 60 minutes in duration each. During these interviews, we will discuss and explain their photographs within the cultural center and how it relates to sense of belonging.

Privacy and confidentiality is of the utmost importance. The information you provide will be stored in a secure online data system. The audio recordings of interviews will be stored on a secure online system that only the researcher and principal investigator has access too. We hope to gain more knowledge on the sense of belonging within the Latinx cultural center, specifically for Latinx males. Each participant will receive a $25 Amazon.com gift certificate for their participation. I would like to meet with you in person to discuss in detail what my research would entail.

 If you are interested, please respond to this email with some available times to meet. I look forward to hearing from you.

Hermen Diaz

APPENDIX B

PHOTOGRAPHY GUIDELINES

Photographs capture a specific moment or environment that provides a visual understanding how you experience sense of belonging within the Latinx cultural center. Sense of belonging is defined by you and the moment or environment that facilitates such an experience. Sense of belonging is the focus of the photography.

The photographs should focus on the physical environment or moment that captures sense of belonging for you. The photographs depicting physical space should not contain people who are identifiable. If you choose to photograph an environment or moment where individuals are identifiable, please obtain a written consent form from the individual. The Photograph Release Form is included and copies provided.

Below are some prompts that may help you when taking photographs of sense of belonging:

1. What is your favorite space of the Latinx cultural center?
2. What are some of the unique characteristics of the Latinx cultural center?
3. Where do you see a sense of belonging for others?
4. Where do you not see a sense of belonging for yourself or others?
5. Where do you experience sense of belonging in the Latinx cultural center?
6. How does the Latinx cultural center best showcase Latinx culture and pride?
7. What do you see as a crucial aspect, space or part of the Latinx cultural center?
8. What is an event, program or general moment that you appreciate at the Latinx cultural center?

APPENDIX C
Digital Photo Uploads & Anonymity Protocol

Digital Photo Uploads

This study utilizes photography to elicit reflection and discussion during interview sessions. The overall goal regarding this study is for the researcher to gain theoretical and practical knowledge in understanding the experiences (sense of belonging) of undergraduate Latinx male students that utilize the [LCC name redacted].

Your part in this study includes using your smartphone or your own digital camera to take photographs that depict physical and cultural environments within the [LCC name redacted] that promote sense of belonging. You will submit your photos utilizing a shared google drive folder that is only accessible to both you and the researcher. You will have two weeks to submit photos.

After the submission of your photos, you will meet with me for two audiotaped interviews roughly 60 minutes in duration each. During these interviews, we will discuss and explain their photographs within the cultural center and how it relates to sense of belonging.

Anonymity Protocol

The photographs should focus on the physical environment or moment that captures sense of belonging for you. The photographs depicting physical space should not contain people who are identifiable. If you choose to photograph an environment or moment where individuals are identifiable, please obtain a written consent form from the individual. The Photograph Release Form is included and copies provided.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview 1: Focused on Life History
1. Tell me a little about yourself.
2. What is your major and minor?
3. Do you live on or off campus?
4. Where are you originally from?
5. How do you identify yourself? (Hispanic, Latino/x, etc.).
6. How would you describe your family?
7. What was your high school like?
8. Why did you select RMU?
9. Do you plan to graduate from RMU?
10. How would you describe your time at RMU?
11. What is it like being a Latinx male at RM?
12. How did you find the LCC?
13. How would you describe the LCC?
14. What is it like being a Latinx male in the LCC?

Interview 2: The Details of Experience
Utilizing 6-10 participant photos, how do these represent sense of belonging within the Latinx Cultural Center?

The SHOWeD prompts were implemented utilizing the SHOWeD mnemonic.
Wang, C. C., & Pies, C.A. (2004). Family, maternal, and child health through photovoice. *Maternal and Child Health Journal, 8*(2), 95-102.

SHOWeD Mnemonic

1. What do you See here? Describe what you see in this photograph of the Latinx cultural center.
2. What's really Happening here? Describe what is going on in the Latinx cultural center in this photograph?
3. How does this relate to Our lives? Describe how sense of belonging is taking place here?
4. Why does this problem, concern, or strength exist? Describe why you took this photo and what it represents for you.
5. What can we Do about it? Describe what could make this activity, situation or space in the photograph better in creating/facilitating a sense of belonging.
6. How would you describe your interaction with the LCC?
7. How would you describe your experience being a Latinx male at RMU?
8. How would you describe your experience being a Latinx male utilizing the LCC?
9. How does culture and race play a role in your college experiences?
10. How does culture and race play a role in the LCC?
11. What does sense of belonging mean to you? How would you define sense of belonging?
12. How did the LCC make you feel a sense of belonging?

13. How did the LCC not make you feel a sense of belonging?
14. What about the LCC made it conducive to creating a sense of belonging?
15. When you enter the LCC, how does it make you feel?
16. How would you describe the LCC to someone who hasn't ever visited the space?
17. Describe how the LCC provides a place of safety and inclusion.
18. Describe how the LCC provides a place of involvement.
19. Describe how the LCC provides a place for community.
20. Describe what it is like being Latinx male in the LCC.
21. What are some of the greatest strengths of the LCC?
22. What are some areas of improvement for the LCC?
23. How would you describe the physical space of the LCC?
24. How does the physical space of the LCC promote a sense of belonging?
25. How does the physical space of the LCC not promote a sense of belonging?
26. How does the physical space of the LCC affect your behavior?

Interview 3: Reflection on the Meaning
Questions for this interview were not pre-determined. Questions for the third and final interview were formulated based on early emergent themes found during interview number two.

APPENDIX E

GATEKEEPER RECRUITMENT MATERIALS

From: Hermen Diaz
Sent: XXXX
To: XXXX
Subject: Latinx Male Study

Hello XXXX (GATEKEEPER),

My name is Hermen Diaz and I am a doctoral student in Higher Education Leadership at Colorado State University. For my dissertation study, I am interested in understanding the experiences (sense of belonging) of undergraduate Latinx male students that utilize the [LCC name redacted]. I myself identify as a Latinx male and so my passion and interest in this topic stems from my personal undergraduate experience. My study will take place during the spring 2018 semester.

I am interested in interviewing 6-10 undergraduate Latinx males who are classified as a either a sophomore, junior or senior and have participated in a [LCC name redacted] event or program, work at the cultural center and visit the cultural center a minimum of 2 times per week. The study will utilize photo-elicitation to understand their experience in the cultural center. During the initial meeting with each participant, they will be briefed on the photograph process, guidelines and study concepts. After the submission of their photos, they will meet with me for two interviews roughly 60 minutes in duration each. During these interviews, they will discuss and explain their photographs within the cultural center and how it relates to sense of belonging.

Additionally, observations of the physical space of the cultural center is desired. As a researcher and non-participant, this would consist of 2 observation sessions. Field notes of these observations would be gathers to better understand the physical and human attributes of the cultural center.

I was hoping you could provide me a list of Latinx males that meet the above criteria. Attached is the message I will be sending potential participants.

If you have any questions about my research, please contact me at hermen.diaz@colostate.edu or the study advisor, Dr. Susana Muñoz at Susana.munoz@colostate.edu.

Regards,

Hermen Diaz
Doctoral Candidate
Colorado State University

APPENDIX F

PHOTO RELEASE FORM

I, _____, give
_____ (photographer) permission to
photograph me. I understand the pictures may be used by the researcher (Hermen Diaz) and/or
the research committee Dr. Susana Susana Muñoz, Dr. Albert Bimper, Dr. David Mckelfresh and
Dr. Kathy Sisneros. These uses may be, but are not limited to: published research or academic
presentations.

_____   _____   _____
Name   Signature   Date