EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF FIRST GENERATION LATINO COLLEGE GRADUATES

by

REBECCA IRENE GARCIA

(Under the Direction of Paul Schutz)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine factors first generation Latino college graduates identified as the most influential in their pursuit of a college degree, what needs and resources they had in college, and what approaches and strategies they used to succeed. In-depth interviews were used with 7 Latino college graduates to develop an understanding of what promotes educational success for this group. The participants in the study suggested 4 sources of influence for their college experiences: (1) influence of mentors and educational advocates, (2) family influences, and (3) influence pertaining to knowledge of one's heritage. Two subcategories emerged from (3) influence pertaining to knowledge of one's heritage, which were (3a) the effects of one's minority status and (3b) embracement of diversity on the college campus. This study concluded by offering (4) recommendations and suggestions to the educational community for increasing Latino college attendance and graduation.

INDEX WORDS: Latino, Hispanic, First Generation, College Graduate, Successful, Educational Experiences

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Being attentive to who is attending college, graduating from college, and, equally important, who is not attending or graduating from college is vital to the economic and social well-being of the United States. As a country, the U.S. continues to become increasingly diverse. It is important that we follow the progress of the Latino population given that the number of Latinos living in the United States skyrocketed by about 57.9% over the last decade, from 22.3 million in 1990 to 35.3 million in 2000, making Latinos the nation's largest minority group. In the U.S., Mexicans (58.5%) comprise the largest portion of the Latino population followed by Puerto Ricans (9.6%), Cubans (3.5%), Central (4.8%) and South Americans (3.8%), and Spaniards (0.3%). Reports from the U.S. Census Bureau reveal a disturbing discrepancy in the educational attainment of Latinos compared to other ethnic groups, including Whites, African Americans, and Asians (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). For the purposes of this study, the terms Hispanic[1] and Latino[2] will be used interchangeably to refer to the same group of people.

Latinos have the highest high school drop out rate of any ethnic group in the United States at 28.6% and the lowest college attendance rate with only 35% of recent Latino high school graduates (ages 16 to 24) going on to college. Mexican Americans face even graver numbers with only 51% of those older than 18 years receiving a high school diploma, compared with 84.9% of non-Hispanic Whites and 78.5% of non-Hispanic Blacks (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

Because of the dependence of the U.S. labor force on higher education, this pattern will greatly affect the future economy of the United States. The incredibly low proportion of Latinos in higher education compared to the dramatic percentage increase in the population, indicates a serious and disturbing imbalance. Education has historically been the path for upward occupational, economic, and social mobility in the U.S.A.; hence, as the Latino population continues to increase, education remains the key issue. As a nation, the U.S. must invest energy in ensuring college attendance and graduation among the growing number of Latino students to secure its prosperity. The fact that the largest minority group in this country remains undereducated is unacceptable.

The low representation of Latinos in higher education can be attributed to various circumstances, including but not limited to, high drop-out rates before high school graduation, inadequate preparation for college courses, and overrepresentation in both lower tracking classes and lower socioeconomic status groups. In addition, Latino students tend to enroll in two-year community colleges as opposed to four-year institutions (Gandara, 1993). Hispanic students who do not acquire a college degree have an increased risk of not having the proper skills for many positions that require a college degree in the current job market, resulting in a "growing unskilled, undereducated population that cannot meet the demands of a technology based workplace" (Salinas & Llanes, 2003). An increased number of individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds competing for low skilled jobs will inevitably funnel a decline in the economic output of a country (Pelavin & Kane, 1990); thus, it is in the best interest of the U.S. to increase the educational attainment of Latinos. A report by the PEW Hispanic Center states that, according to the U.S. Census Bureau data (2000), over the next 25 years the baby boomer generation will be retiring, meaning that the White working age population is expected

to decrease by 5 million. At the same time, the number of working age Hispanics is expected to rise by 18 million, a considerable portion of the labor force. As a society, the United States must not ignore or downplay the important economic and social contributions Latinos, the fastest growing and youngest segment of the U.S. population, can make.

The main goal of this research was to develop an understanding of what promotes educational success, defined as earning a college degree, among the Latino population. In this study, the educational experiences of first generation Latino college graduates were examined to identify what needs and resources they had in college and what approaches and strategies they used to succeed. Although it is important to understand what hinders educational success, it is equally as important to understand what promotes educational success among this small group of college graduates.

The research questions that guided this investigation follow:

(1) What factors did Latino college graduates perceive as being influential to their educational success?

(2) What factors did Latino college graduates perceive as hindering their educational success?

(3) What advice or recommendations do they have for the educational community?

The primary purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of what led to the educational success of these Latino college graduates, in hopes of helping future and current college students successfully navigate their way through the educational system.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The majority of research studies on differential ethnic achievement in education completed thus far have focused on the experiences of minorities who do not succeed at obtaining a college education, whereas only a few studies have attempted to capture the experiences of the successful individuals (Gandara, 1995; Harrington and Boardman, 2000; Hernandez, 2000).

Although the absence of Latino students from higher education institutions is said to be a result of lower high school graduation rates, part of the problem lies in the retention and graduation of students who do enter college (Salinas & Llanes, 2003). Retention, sometimes referred to as academic persistence, is the ability to matriculate toward degree completion (Castellanos & Lee Jones, 2003). This issue of retention is a serious matter that deserves attention, considering that the Latino student drop-out rate at U.S. institutions and universities has exceeded 50% over the past few years (NCES, 2002). Although the enrollment rates have improved, the matriculation rates have remained very low for numerous reasons, including, but not limited to, cultural and background variables, socioeconomic status, previous education, academic and acculturative stress, family influences, individual attributions, campus climate, and mentorship.

Although some universities have attempted to increase campus diversity, this goal has remained largely unattainable. An analysis of diversity admissions program policies in California, Florida, and Texas found diversity programs to be more successful when supported

by aggressive university outreach to public schools and substantial funding put into financial aid programs. Unfortunately, because of budget cuts, nationally these efforts are being significantly reduced. Institutions face additional challenges in increasing diversity, including legal disputes about diversity and affirmative action policies. Some institutions that have experienced these legal issues include the University of Georgia, the University of Michigan, and the University of California at Berkley (Hebel, 2003).

Within the Latino culture, the family institution tends to be given top priority, a sense of obligation to the family cohort is said to have an impact on the academic retention of Latino students. This notion of "familism" is a core feature embedded in Latino culture where the focus is on one's relationship to members of the immediate and extended family (Valdes, 1996). A unique emphasis and sentiment is placed on the value of family compared to the general U.S. population (Alvarez, 1994).

Studies of the Latino family cohort, suggest one must recognize the complexity of such a valued institution when examining educational implications. Although there are reports that Latino parents provide limited financial support, emotional support from the family has been known to facilitate and encourage the student to work toward his or her academic potential (Gloria, 1999). Studies show that Latino parents are one of the most important influential factors in the persistence of and academic achievement in their children's education (Arellano & Padilla, 1996; Flores, 1992; Nora & Cabrera, 1996). In many cases, the mother serves an additional role where her support significantly contributes to the Latino child's educational success (Gandara, 1995).

Family background, including socioeconomic status and parental education level, are influential in the attainment of a college degree for Latino students. Gallagher, Alvarez-Salvat,

Silsby and Kenny (2002) followed a multiethnic sample, including Blacks, Whites, Asians, and Latinos, of academically successful inner-city high school students. These students were selected based on their enrollment in a high-school university collaborative program that sought to prepare them for college admissions by providing academic enrichment classes on a college campus two Saturday mornings a month. In examining the relationship among parental attachment, academic achievement, and psychological distress, Gallagher et al. (2002) found that strong maternal and paternal attachment yielded higher academic achievement while strong paternal attachment yielded lower feelings of depression and anxiety. Although this sample not only consists of Latino students, they share commonalities with this sample. Seventy percent of the students who participated in this program reported they would be the first in their families to attend college, a common feature of a Latino student's educational experience. Assuming their parents were over the age of 25, it is likely that they will be the first in their families to attend college, given that the educational attainment for the Hispanic population ages 25 and older has been considerably less than the White non-Hispanic population, according to the March 2000 U.S. Census current population report. Only 57% of Hispanics ages 25 and older completed high school compared to 88.4% of White non-Hispanics. More than a quarter (27.3%) of the Hispanic population had less than a ninth-grade education as compared to 4.2% of the White non-Hispanic population (Therrien & Ramirez, 2000). Parental education level has been found to correlate with college attendance (Horn & Nunez, 2000). The level of attainment in education among Latino parents is a serious factor to consider when looking at Latino educational success, given that many of the parents are unfamiliar with the necessary preparation, requirements, and challenges of the U.S. education system (Reyes & Valencia, 1993).

Patricia Gandara was one of the few researchers who focused on Latino college student success by investigating the experiences of Latino college graduates in California. Gandara (1995) examined the factors that influenced low-income Mexican Americans who came from disadvantaged backgrounds and achieved high academic status in the form of a M.D., Ph.D., or J.D. Participants consisted of 50 men and women born in the 1940s and early 1950s from the baby boom era. A majority of these participants were either first in their families to be born in the United States or came to the U.S. at a very early age with neither of their parents having graduated from high school. A semi structured interview format was used to inquire about family background, siblings, childrearing practices, religious experiences, peer relationships, experiences in schools, mentoring, personal characteristics, and achievement attributions. Gandara concluded that parents of these Latino college graduates were generally supportive of their children's educational aspirations through modeling hard work ethics, setting high performance standards, and expressing hope for a better future by earning a college degree.

Relevant theories

Understanding the value and utility Latino students place on achieving a goal, such as earning a college degree, and completing a task, such as taking the SAT, is critical to understanding their academic achievement. The student's own realistic expectation for being able to successfully reach a goal or complete a task is also a factor when looking at Latino college student success. The expectancy value theory by Wigfield and Eccles (1992) has generated an abundance of research on academic achievement in educational contexts. This theory suggests that the two most important predictors of motivation and educational achievement are expectancy and task value. The student will most likely ask him, or herself questions such as, why am I doing this task; what is the value of doing this task; how well do I

expect to do the task and what is the likelihood that I will be able to complete the task? Research indicates that higher expectations for success are positively related to achievement behavior and an individual's choice and persistence (Wigfield & Eccles, 1992). This motivational construct reflects the individual student's belief and judgment about his or her capabilities to successfully complete the task at hand or reach a goal. Given the uniqueness of family relations among the Latino culture, not only is it critical to understand the students' expectations and values, but also the parents' expectations and values. This theory is consistent with the results reported by Gandara (1995) whose parents of the academically successful Latinos clearly expressed hope for a better future by means of educational status to their children, consequently projecting the value, importance, and utility of receiving a higher education.

One of the many constructive findings of Gandara's study were the participants' cognitive explanations for their success. The majority of the subjects reported that individual persistence and effort was a more important predictor of academic success than their innate ability. Ability ranked third behind persistence (first) and hard work (second) as contributors to academic achievement (Gandara, 1995).

The work of Bernard Weiner (1986), a motivational theorist, speaks to the value that these participants placed on effort and persistence. Weiner's (1986) attribution theory is a motivational construct that explores an individual's personal explanation for succeeding or failing at a task. An attribution is a cognitive explanation that we make to explain, understand, and justify our successes and failures. For example, does a student attribute his or her success or failure to luck, effort, mood, knowledge, an unfair test, or individual interest in the task? Weiner's attribution theory has significant implications for understanding and sometimes retraining students' perceptions and attributions.

The causal explanations students make can influence their emotional experiences, which can either work to their advantage by encouraging them to persist and work harder or to work to their disadvantage by discouraging them from future task engagement. There are three consistent dimensions in an attribution: (1) locus, (2) stability, and (3) responsibility. Locus refers to the location of the cause, meaning whether it is internal or external to the individual (Weiner, 1986). The second dimension is stability, whether the cause is viewed as something that is permanent or changeable. An example of this is how much time a student chooses to spend studying for an exam. This dimension appears to be closely related to a student's expectation for the future. The third dimension is responsibility, whether or not the cause is perceived as something that can be controlled by the individual.

These three dimensions have important implications for student motivation. Specifically, the notion of this concept breaks down a student's attribution and looks at whether the attribution being made is useful or maladaptive to the student's persistence. When a student attributes his or her success to hard work, effort, and persistence, this is seen as being an attribution internal to the individual. This attribution is also unstable, because the student can alter how much effort he or she puts into something. The attribution is controllable because the student believes they have power over the outcome. The bottom line is when a student believes he or she has control over his or her educational outcome, this student will be much more likely to have a successful educational career. Therefore, understanding individual minority students' attributions can serve as a useful tool in facilitating their academic achievement.

Going away to college can pose a challenge for all students; however, this experience can be particularly difficult for young Latinos who have been raised from a communal perspective in which the entire family is depended on and seen as a major source of both emotional and

financial support. When Latino students move away from home for the first time and away from their ethnic community, they may experience additional challenges in adjusting to college life. Ethnic identity development can be affected when they leave their source of support, community, parents, and family. The development of university and college programs that provide social support and ethnic group affiliation has been recommended to aid the successful completion of college for Latino students (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Orozco, 2003).

As a response to the excessive dropout rate among Mexican American high school students in the United States, the following researchers conducted a study to determine which variables affect academic success for this particular population. Lopez, Ehly, and Garcia-Vasquez (2002) investigated two factors that were associated with academic achievement: acculturation and social support. They used a rating scale instrument on acculturation, the Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican American-II (ARSMA-II), to assess 60 ninth-grade students' of Mexican-descent cultural orientation toward the Mexican culture and Anglo culture (Cuellar et al., 1995). The second component measured was the students' perceived social support using the Social Support Scale for Children (Harter, 1985). The participants in this study consisted of 60 ninth-grade students of Mexican descent from a U.S. Southwest school district with approximately 50,000 students: 16.2% were Latino. The results suggested that, when these students adopted values and practices associated with the dominant culture, yet maintained characteristics and features of their native culture, they tended to have higher academic achievement. These researchers suggest that schools need to be aware that acculturation and social support for their Latino students may lead to higher retention. They proposed an increase in student social support by providing multicultural support groups, programs for parents that

assist them in becoming knowledgeable advocates in their child's education, and cultural awareness training to faculty (Lopez, Ehly, & Garcia-Vasquez, 2002).

The rapid change in the demographics of the United States demonstrates that the U.S. is becoming increasingly diverse; however, college academic programs are generally not as culturally diverse and don't serve the needs of students from underrepresented groups. Research suggests that minority students' perceptions of the environmental context or climate are important when studying persistence in education (Gloria, Robinson Kurpius, Hamilton, & Wilson, 1999). A students perceptions of a college environment as unwelcoming and negative can contribute to their decision not to persist in this college and consequently graduate. A collegial educational community must recognize the possible effects of campus culture and climate to increase academic achievement among minority students. Failure to acknowledge their needs can result in social isolation, loneliness, and alienation for these students and consequently adversely affect their academic success (Wright, 1987).

The Influence of Mentors

One of the most critical factors in educational success for Latinos is mentors and role models. Their contribution to college matriculation and persistence of Latino students cannot be underestimated. Frequent contact with faculty is also an important element in student persistence (Tinto, 1993). With the use of a national cross-sectional sample of students who had taken the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ), Anaya and Cole (2001) evaluated responses for 836 undergraduate Latino students in 1997. The survey evaluated student-faculty interactions, participation in co-curricular activities, and interpersonal experiences. Latino college students overall had favorable perceptions of interactions with their faculty members; however, the frequency of interaction was low. The student's academic performance was

enhanced with educationally related and distinctly academic interactions. The following three variables were statistically significant for Latinos: 1) quality of relationships with faculty; 2) talking with faculty; and 3) visiting informally after class. Saenz (2000) stresses the importance of increased mentoring and effort by faculty members in the retention of minority students.

Rendon (1994) assessed students out-of- class experiences on learning and retention in a project titled the "Transition to College Project". The out-of-class experiences included participation in extra curricular activities and informal interactions with peers and faculty members. One hundred and thirty two first-year students with diverse backgrounds were interviewed. The students who became socially and academically involved appeared more excited about learning. They met regularly with their instructors and were members of clubs and organizations. In-class academic validation was especially important in regards to faculty involvement. Rendon (1994) noted the following descriptions of faculty who fostered students in academic class validation: 1) faculty who demonstrated a genuine concern for teaching students; 2) faculty who were personable and approachable for students; 3) faculty who structured learning experiences that allowed students to experience themselves as capable of learning; 4) faculty who worked individually with those students who needed extra help 5) faculty who provided meaningful feedback to students.

In addition to experiencing normal academic stress, Latino students are affected by their minority status, intimidation by the campus climate, and limited positive academic role models (Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996). According to Quintana, et al. (1991) the students' concerns for academic success include students' perceptions of stress that resulted from approaching teachers, producing the quality of academic scholarship required, and failing to meet academic expectations. Similarly, Smedley, et al. (1993) found that "minority status" was another major

source of stress for ethnic minorities, which was elevated by their perceptions of the negative expectations of White peers and faculty. Minority status in the academic arena can undermine students' academic confidence and result in attrition as they are often viewed as receiving "special status" and benefits because of affirmative action rather than merit based individual accomplishments. A social-psychological process can also occur in which the negative stereotype about a group is internalized by the student; thus, the students conformed to the stereotype threat. Stereotype threat can significantly affect the performance and achievement of minority students and other underrepresented groups (Steele, 1997).

Considering the Latino population is the largest minority group in the United States, institutions of higher education must be accountable for understanding, recruiting, retaining and graduating Latino students. The full picture is definitely complicated, and as existing research suggests, there are many issues requiring further clarification.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Participants

Participants included seven Latino, first generation college graduates (1 Cuban, 2 Puerto Ricans, 1 Venezuelan, and 3 Mexicans; 4 women and 3 men). Generational status referred to the number of generations the participant's family has been in the United States. They were classified as first generation because they were born outside the United States and were the first generation of their families to attend school in the United States. I interviewed all of these individuals, and the targeted age group was 18-60. Participants had to hold a bachelors degree from an accredited four-year college in the United States.

Theoretical Perspective and Framework for Inquiry

This study was approached from a phenomenological perspective in that the research sought to investigate the experience of Latino college graduates from their perspectives and their lived experiences. With its long-standing history in sociology and philosophy, phenomenology maintains a commitment to understanding social phenomena from the actor's own perception; thus, this theory holds that the significant reality is what people perceive it to be (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). Rooted in the philosophical perspective of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), phenomenological studies investigate the meaning of the lived experience of a small group of people (Schram, 2003). The focus for this study was on what the individuals' experiences meant to them, with the goal of providing a comprehensive description of the essence of the Latino

college experience. The underlying assumption is that discourse and reflection can reveal the essence or "central underlying meaning of some aspect of the shared experience" (Schram, 2003, p. 71). This study was conducted with the following assumptions: 1) human behavior is understandable in the context of relationships to people, events, and situations; 2) to understand the life of a group of people, one must understand how people perceive and act on objects of experience; 3) reality is tied to one's consciousness; and 4) the meaning of a particular phenomenon can be revealed through dialogue and reflection (Schram, 2003). From this theoretical perspective, the researcher can see how participants experience, live, and describe the phenomenon under investigation and can look for the meaning of the participants' experience (Creswell, 1998).

Procedures

Emails were initially sent to the educational community at a large southeastern university, including listserves of individuals who belong to Latino Student Associations and other Latin American groups to solicit participants. Individuals who had previously expressed interest in the study were also contacted through email. Flyers were posted throughout the educational community and at community organizations in the Southeast. Participants were selected based on how they met the criteria for this study. Participants had to be Latino, first generation, and a U.S. college graduate. The interview was scheduled in a mutually convenient location where privacy was respected. Interviews took place in participants' homes (per their requests), parks, libraries, and coffee shops. All interviews were audiotaped with permission of the participant via a signed consent form (see Appendix A). Once the first interview was completed, individuals were asked to fill out a 22-item demographic questionnaire, which took

about 15 minutes. This demographic questionnaire asked about nationality, socio-economic status, family background, and college information (see Appendix B).

Design

The open-ended interviews were conducted using a semistructured interview guide to gather an in-depth, detailed account of educational experiences of these Latino college graduates. Given the exploratory nature of this research, in-depth interviews were used to seek detailed information and knowledge about personal matters such as "individual's self, lived experiences, values and decisions, occupational ideology, cultural knowledge or perspective" in relation to participants college experiences (Johnson, 2001, p.104). In-depth interviewing seeks "deep information and understanding," the same deep knowledge and understanding experienced by the participants of the phenomena under investigation (Johnson, 2001, p.106). "The informant would be kind of a teacher and the interviewer a student, one interested in learning the ropes or gaining member knowledge" (Johnson, 2001, p.106).

The interview guide was developed from a phenomenological perspective. Leading questions were avoided, and carefully chosen open-ended questions were used to allow the participants to reflect on their own personal experience. The interview guide consisted of a set of questions using the same wording and order with each participant (see Appendix C). Follow-up questions were used to clarify, ask for examples, and to request participants to reflect on or further explain a statement. Considering the length of the interview, each participant was given the choice to conduct both interviews the same day or to schedule the interviews on two separate days. The choice was left up to each participant, and the decision primarily depended on personal schedules. Two separate interviews were conducted for three of the participants, and

the remaining four participants preferred to conduct both interviews on the same day. Each interview was tape recorded and ranged from an hour and a half to two hours long.

Data Analysis

The primary method of analysis used was the constant comparative method, rooted in grounded theory. The constant comparative method is a form of inductive analysis, in which researchers "study [the] data" and "study [the] interview questions" in hopes of generating patterns and themes that were truly derived from the actual raw data (Charmaz, 2002, p. 682). Inductive analysis aspires to produce "grounded theory," created from sound research, "the discovery of theory from data" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 1). Glaser and Strauss, the original researchers who proposed grounded theory, emphasized the importance of avoiding "preconceived" ideas, while stressing the point that when grounded theory is used, "initial decisions are not [to] be based on a preconceived theoretical framework" (1967, p.45). Because I am Mexican American woman from the same ethnic group as the individuals studied, avoiding a preconceived theoretical framework was very important to the validity of the interviews and the data (see Appendix D).

The analysis process began by returning attention to the original research questions (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 8). Coding is the first critical analytic step that moves the researcher from a descriptive frame of mind toward the next step, which is conceptualizing the coding and making connections (Charmaz, 2002).

I approached the data by working from the bottom up while thoroughly and systematically investigating the data with objectivity as a constant focus. The "constant comparative" method of analysis includes four stages, all of which were followed in a sequential

order: (1) the generation of codes, (2) integration of categories and their properties, (3) delimitation of categories, and finally, (4) writing the emerging theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Once the interviews were complete, the audiotapes were transcribed, and then coding the data began by reading through interview transcripts and writing key words down on the side of the margins that described the participants' perspectives, beliefs, thoughts, experiences, suggestions or recommendations. Each segment was read line by line, key phrases were underlined, texts that stood out were circled, and notes were taken throughout this process. Evidence in the form of quotes that seemed to be truly reflective of themes possibly emerging from the data were noted via side notes aimed at reminding me of something that came up that was especially descriptive and appeared meaningful to the participant. I noted any quotes in the data that appeared to be representative of what the participant was trying to express. This was sometimes a difficult decision as I wanted to stay close to the data and give a true and reflective representation of the participants' thoughts, beliefs, and experiences. This issue was settled by making a note each time a participant referred to a certain comment or talked about something related to it. The frequency of certain thoughts, ideas and beliefs that occurred in the data, as well as the emotions expressed by participants, allowed me to comfortably select excerpts from the text to use as supporting evidence. Colleagues analyzed the transcriptions and gave feedback about the patterns and themes that were apparent to them. The combination of frequency of occurrence, member checks with colleagues, and emotional expressions of participants in this study were very beneficial in extracting findings grounded in the data.

The data were studied, line-by-line a number of times so that existing patterns and themes began to emerge from the data. Comparing and contrasting concepts, events, or incidents that evolve out of the data are key components in this technique. During the second reading of the

transcripts, categories were defined with properties listed that fell under these categories. A code was attributed to each sentence or paragraph, sometimes both. At the beginning of this process, a codebook was developed where all of the codes that emerged and their definitions were recorded. This was very helpful in ensuring that each code remained consistent. Coding continued as the transcriptions were read, and reread adding and changing things as necessary. More established coded sections were compared with other similarly coded sections to ensure consistency, as well as adherence to the definition of the code. Once coding was completed, the codes that had common elements became categories (Strauss & Corbin 1990).

My own thoughts and interpretations of the data were recorded using a process referred to as memo writing throughout the research process (Charmaz, 2000) (see Appendix: E). After coding, I would pause and jot down thoughts and any lingering questions. This process was very helpful when it came time to returning to the data the following day, because I could then come back to the data and examine it with a fresher outlook. These notes allowed for me to collect my thoughts and sometimes answer the questions that remained from the previous day.

During the next phase of the analysis, the codes developed with the use of the codebook (see Appendix F), memos, and transcription notes were used to create narratives (see Appendix G). Narrative analysis was used as a means of making sense of the data from the participants' view and attempting to capture the participants' story in a true and reflective manner. Cortazzi (2001) refers to the term narrative, in the broad sense, as "structures of knowledge and storied ways of knowing" (Cortazzi, 2001, p.384). Narrative inquiry is a form of discourse where events are constructed into a unit, which is based on temporal agreement by means of a plot (Polkinghorne, 1995). On revisiting the original research questions, I further examined one of patterns that emerged from the data. Respondents reported on influential individuals whom they

believed significantly affected their educational experiences. Next, I organized the tables according to Labov's "evaluation model" with each of the following components of the narrative structure: abstract (what was this about?), orientation (who, what, when, where?), complication (then what happened?), evaluation (so what?), result (what finally happenes?), and coda (end of narrative) (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). Most of the narratives were organized by the participant with a beginning, an end, and a moral of the story, but there were also many instances when the participants bounced around from one thought to the next. For the narrative to become clearer to the reader, I moved a few sentences around from the original transcript to enhance the flow of the narrative. After the tables were constructed, I read through the original interview data to make sure that the constructed narratives were congruent with what the participant was trying to express. This type of analysis allowed for a close examination of the data and consideration of who, what, where, when, and why themes occurred (Glazer & Strauss, 1967, p. 101-116).

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Each individual's story of his or her educational journey was unique, yet the factors the participants believed influenced their educational success were parallel across stories. Before interpreting the themes that were generated by their stories, an in-depth look at Patricia's story is presented to exemplify the richness of the research participants' accounts found in each story. A discussion and interpretation of the main themes that came out of this research then follows.

Patricia's Story

Patricia, a native of Puerto Rico, came to the United States as a young woman to attend college in the southeastern part of the U.S. As she recounted what affected her decision to attend college in the U.S., she talked about her "wonderful middle school English teacher, Rosa, the one who inspired [her] to have [the] dream to come to the Unites States."

> I literally fell in love with the woman. She was Puerto Rican. I wanted to be like her, talk like her and walk like her. She had us read poems, lyrics of songs like Mahogany, Diana Ross, and [then] interpret them in English. Everything we did made me think about myself as a woman... She was my teacher, became [my] friend and [eventually my] surrogate mother [in the U.S.]. She had grown up in the states, spoke English beautifully, and I wanted to speak English just like her. She became my mentor.

Initially Patricia saw Rosa as a role model, someone she viewed as an end goal for herself; however, this teacher not only served as a role model, but she befriended Patricia and encouraged her to go to college.

> In high school during my junior year, I was invited to go to Tallahassee for two weeks to visit one of my teachers, Rosa. I ended up staying for a month and I loved it! So, for the next few years Rosa kept telling me "you know if you apply to one of the nearby colleges at least you'll have me. We can help you. We can be your surrogate family while you're here.

Patricia' story stresses that she perceived this teacher to have had a significant impact on her educational journey and the decisions and commitments she made during this time.

> What inspired me was this Latina woman who knew English and she was a professional and that's what calls me to where I am today. I mean if I was the only student she impacted, it is to her credit…

In Patricia's case, the importance and value of mentoring was passed down to her by Rosa, her mentor, and eventually she "felt that as a bilingual Latina, [she] needed to be active in the community and more involved in an area where professionals are geared towards helping [Latino] students." Patricia's testimony demonstrates that her mentor passed this value down to her because she was such a significant part of her life. After acknowledging the importance of having a supportive role model, she sought out the opportunity to be involved in a local high school mentoring program.

> I know the impact I had last year when I was involved in a mentoring group at the high school. As soon as the girls heard my accent, they warmed up to me. I think it just gives you an edge with them. I know what inspired me, a Hispanic woman who spoke English and was a professional. That's what calls me to be where I am today.

When her fifth grade "son asked [her] why [she] went back to school for [her] masters [in social work], [she] told him several reasons, financially it would be good for the family but [she] also

felt that as a Latina [she] could give back to a group of people that right now are not getting as much help as they need. We need professionals that can cater to this group."

An emphasis on the value of education in Patricia's family also contributed to Patricia's success. Patricia's background was unique in that, while neither of her parents received a college education, her mother was a teacher's aide in her elementary school; hence, "she knew what was going on in [her] school system and was very involved in [her] studies."

> She was very good at studying with me. If I had a difficult test, she would make a test for me so that I could practice, so she was very involved and very concerned about my grades.

In addition, both parents had high expectations and set clear ground rules.

> I mean, they wanted A's. Expectations were very high. "I know you can do it." I was disciplined, and there was no television till I finished my homework. Her rule was if you keep bringing A's you're fine, but if they drop, church will go out the window, boys will go, no work, no nothing!

In Patricia's immediate family "going to college was expected in [her] house. It was [seen] as the next step with no gaps in between college and high school. You graduate from high school [then] you go to college." Patricia commented that her parent's high expectations of her were unique in her community, "That's not the overall expectation put on everyone from my small town in Puerto Rico [but that was the expectation put on me.]

After Patricia first arrived in the southeastern part of the U.S., one of the first events she recalled was directly connected to her identity as a minority; thus, began her conceptualization of what it meant to be a minority on a college campus.

> [It] didn't hit me till I stepped foot on the University of Florida. I remember very clearly on my first day of class, I was waiting in the hall, and I remember the look of an American girl, and making a comment. I overheard her; she spoke too loud, "oh there's that Puerto Rican." I don't know why she said Puerto Rican. Clearly, she was able to distinguish that I was different. So, that's when I first felt [different]. It was because of the language, a lot of it. I didn't perceive it as a skin color or an ethnicity thing until later.

This conceptualization of her identity was related to a strategy that she adopted where she embraced the existing diversity of her college campus as a means of facilitating her own acculturation and comfort level in the U.S. college atmosphere. Even though clinging to her ethnic group may have initially been the most comfortable approach, Patricia made a conscious decision to submerge herself in an environment that allowed her to flourish socially and academically in the college community and improve her English.

> I realized my weakness in English. One of my rules was that I was not going to veer towards Spanish [speaking] friends only. I wanted to make American friends too, and, in my dorm, I was submerged. I was already half way into the semester and I understood speaking English, and I overcame a lot during those first three months. In fact, my first roommate was Korean, very proper in her English. I learned so much English because of her. I think the dorm helped me a lot to have such a mix [of people]. I had all kinds of friends, American, Hispanic, Black, and African American… It was very diverse in that sense. I did not have any qualms about friendships. I thought it was so neat meeting different people.

Patricia intentionally surrounded herself with a positive environment by attending church, which provided her with the opportunity to socialize and quickly make friends in her new environment.

Not only did Patricia seek out positive friendships, but it also seems as though she sought out a similar family network.

> I joined a church, which I think helped to acculturate me, to make immediate friends, and to be taken care of. Families in church would invite me to have dinner with them. [For example,] somebody would invite me to go have Thanksgiving with their family. My friends from church were definitely rooting for me the whole time [I was in school]. I think that being in a college group where everybody would get together and study [helped.] I had resources, they would tutor me or [give me] whatever help I needed.

Patricia also had negative experiences during her time in college that proved to be challenges she overcame. One of the challenges was being separated from her family for the first time. As research suggests, family is a central component within the Latino culture that can directly influence the Latino college student's experience. Patricia described her family as "very unified and close, as close as you can get." This closeness often considered when referring to Latino cultures can serve as a positive support as well as a negative distraction. As Patricia recalled her college years, she portrayed herself as an emotional student distracted by her longing for her family and the comfort that entailed.

> Every three or four months it would hit me, and I would go through a period of missing family, it's what most interfered… when I first [started], my grades dropped, the first year I came. If you don't have your family around…I think there is an emotional part that, you can say like a… protection or something. It wasn't there. I would tell my mom, I wish I could see you guys through a peep hole and make sure everything's ok. Then I would be fine. So going through those times were very hard. It was emotionally difficult because my parents were not around. I just left everything and came to the South. I

would cry myself to sleep at night, but I kept saying [to myself] many people have done it before me and that's what kept me going.

Patricia's story demonstrates that while her close bond with her family was distracting at times it was manageable because of her use of certain tactics, such as positive self-talk. The support of Patricia's family helped her persevere and eventually matriculate toward graduation.

> They thought that what I was doing was important. I remember them saying, 'You are very brave, you are very courageous in doing this.' It gave me pride and strength to keep on going when I was down.

Patricia's parents expressed the importance of a higher education by maintaining high expectations for her and sacrificing so she would receive a better education to prepare for college, an opportunity that clearly was not available to them. Patricia is now a mother of three children. In the following story, she talked about her own expectations as a parent of three children and how she balances her acculturation to the U.S with her native roots as a Puerto Rican Latina.

> At first I was appalled when some of my [U.S.] friends shared with me how their parents kicked them out of the house right after high school. They just said, 'Hey, you're18, you can earn money now, you can go to college, we support you, but you're out.' I was like why would your parents do that to you? I would never do that! And now I understand that philosophy. I've told my son you can choose not to go to college, but you'll have to go to work and move out. You're legally [an adult] at that time and you can produce but if you go to school, we'll support you and help you financially. We've talked about working at [fast food restaurants] and he says, "That's all they pay!" He's young, entering fifth grade, but the expectation is for him to go to college.

Knowing and understanding the utility and value of a college education was something that continuously came out of this research as a contributing factor to this group of participants' success.

Interpreting the Influences

Despite the negative statistics about the Latino students being far behind academically, there are individuals who have defied the odds and continued to move forward in their educational career. The following four categories emerged from the interviews as influential factors in the lives of this group of Latino college graduates: 1) The *influence of mentors and educational advocates*-someone who made a significant impact on the student's educational journey by advising them academically or serving as an educational advocate by making some type of decision that benefited their education; 2) *Family influence*-expectations, involvement, beliefs, values, support, and the expressed utility and value of a college education; 3) *Knowledge and influence of one's heritage* - individuals' perception of who they are, where they are from, their culture, belief system, and something that connects them with a larger group of people from the same ethnic background or shared language. Two subcategories emerged from 3) *Knowledge and influence of one's heritage*, which are: *a) minority status and b) embracement of diversity. Minority status* refers to when the participants acknowledged their identity as a minority as a part of who they were on the college campus. This identity informed a strategy they used where they consciously made the decision to *embrace diversity* on their campus as a means of facilitating their acculturation in their new environment. The final category was *recommendations for the educational community* where these participants discussed knowledge they believed they needed to share with the community about the culture and actions they thought needed to take place to increase the amount of Latino college attendance and graduation.

The influence of mentors and educational advocates

One of the contributing factors of Latino college student success was a mentor, an influential supportive person in the Latino college graduate's life. This mentor served as an advocate for the students' educational well being while providing encouragement and support. Who the mentor was varied across the sample – sometimes the mentor was a parent, in other cases this person was an extended family member, a friend, or a teacher. Having someone who served as an educational guide in the lives of these participants demonstrates the role a mentor can have in the life of a student. Mentors helped these students in a variety of ways, from maintaining high expectations to providing them with knowledge on how to get to college and what avenues to follow to ensure their success. The following example of Rosa, a young woman from Mexico, exemplifies the importance of a mentor. In this excerpt from her interview, Rosa is reflecting on her high school years in California and how her brother in-law served as an advocate for her by being actively involved in deciding which high school track in which she was placed.

> I thought everybody in the 11th grade took those [lower level] classes but my brother-in-law said, "You could test her on what she knows instead of just automatically putting her in addition and subtraction math, just because she is Mexican and fresh from Tijuana. She plays tennis and wants to go to college." So I got a total change of classes.

Neither of Rosa's parents had received much education. Thus, having at least one person who watched out for her educational well being made a difference in which academic track she was placed. Her brother-in-law played a critical role in her educational career. If he had not stepped in, Rosa would have most likely accepted the classes that she was assigned because she was not aware she had other options.

Having someone expose the students to something new and of interest to them also served as a tool in building a foundation that would eventually serve as a lasting inspiration to the student's educational career. Martha, a Puerto Rican woman, remembers her teacher Señora Lopez:

> Señora Lopez was amazing, that's where I learned my first English words. She gave me this big book about New York- it was easy reading in English. There were tall buildings, and I don't know what happened to the book, but that's the book that took me eighteen years later to New York [where I graduated from college].

The role of a mentor or educational advocate is critical in the development of any student's educational career. This may be particularly essential for the success of a Latino student, because many of these students are likely to be the first in their families to have graduated from high school and attend college. While family support may be available, specific advice about the student's educational well being may not be accessible from parents themselves if they have not experienced a successful educational career in the U.S.

Family Influence

None of the parents of these participants had a higher education; nevertheless, family influence in the form of support, constant encouragement, and high expectations served a purpose in facilitating the students' educational aspirations. Family support came in several forms, including encouraging words, emotional support, financial support, high expectations, and monitoring the student's studies on some level. Monitoring their child's studies varied, ranging from the parents asking them if their homework was complete and making sure the work was done to a higher level of involvement more task specific with the parent(s) drilling the students on math problems, checking their homework, or studying for a test together. Lydia's mother was

not able to help her with her academics; however, she maintained high expectations for her daughter while placing an emphasis on the importance and utility of an education.

> They did push school. My mom encouraged college; she did want me to [go]… I mean, they didn't even know how to help me, but they did say "do your homework, do your homework". They didn't know what else to do, you know? They knew the importance of an education, but they didn't know what to explain because they didn't finish school. My mom only went to second grade.

Fernando's situation was similar in that his mother was a critical figure in encouraging his studies even though she did not have the academic skills to help him.

> My mother always pushed school, first things first. In other words, "go home from school and do your homework before anything else". As far as her [involvement in our education] it was pretty much [limited], just checking up on you, but it wasn't because she wanted it that way. My mother didn't go to school past the second grade. She knows how to read and write but she couldn't help us with academics.

A lack of communication and rapport between the school and the parents is often found in the experiences of the first generation of Latino students in the U.S. The idea of what an appropriate level of involvement is may be different depending on one's experience and background. In U.S. schools, parental involvement is viewed as necessary for a student's academic success; however, this is not a universal concept. Martha speaks of the high academic expectations her mother had for her while exhibiting very little involvement.

> My mother wanted a straight-A child. Homework was on my own. They provided the space, the tools, and everything. But the PTA stuff that goes on over here, it didn't happen. My mother would put me on the bus to go to school and things happened. Then, I would come home and do my homework… There was very little parental involvement.

One of the factors contributing to the educational success of this group of participants was their understanding of why they should go to college and what it meant for their future. The value of a college education was passed on to them by their parents in some instances.

> [A college education] meant a better future. My mom would always say: "I don't want you to work as hard as I am and do the same thing over and over. The pay rate is not as good" [when you don't have a college education.]

Martha discovered the value of a college education through one of her own personal job experiences.

> Working at that daycare center during college [helped me complete my college degree]. I worked so hard for so little money and the ones making the big money were the ones that had the degrees. I knew that the only way to make it in this country was to get an education.

The families of the participants also influenced their values and beliefs by demonstrating their courage to endure difficult situations by working hard for their future and the future of their children. By modeling their consistent work ethic day in and day out, the parents of these Latino college graduates instilled a work ethic in their children that they would later use

during their college years. Maria talks about the initial situation her family was in when they first arrived to the United States

> We came from Cuba in 1961, I was six. It was hard at first. They worked long hours. My mom came here with an education, but no English skills. She had to work in factories. In Miami, she peeled shrimp and did a lot of sewing. They struggled, because they were both in their forties and they had to leave everything behind and literally start from scratch. They had to work very hard to start their lives over.

As reported in the literature, the participants described their relationships with their families as being "very important," "family first," "very close," "as one," "powerful," and "family oriented." The close knit family ties and obligation that generally exist within the Latino community can have both a positive and negative influence and can serve as both a resource and a diversion. The first year of college away from home can be a stressful and challenging experience for all students. When students are required to physically separate from their families for an extended period of time to attend college, their longing for their family and familiar community can serve as a distraction. This presents a unique, emotionally difficult challenge for the Latino student, because a fundamental element of the Latino culture is raising their children from a communal perspective with the entire extended family.

Martha faced a different issue in regards to her close family ties and obligations. She left Puerto Rico at the age of 18 to attend college in New York with the approval of her parents. After "falling deeply in love with an American, [she] married [him]. [Her] parents realized [she] wasn't going back home so they stopped tuition. They were very upset [she] wasn't coming home after school, because that's the rule. Just as you take it for granted that you graduate from

high school, and go to college, you also take it for granted that [once] you finish college you come home."

The deep connection to family felt within the Latino community can both promote the development of educational growth as well as hold it back. Several of the participants believed that their families' support was essential to their educational success. The following participants talked about how family was a key factor in choosing a college.

> Fernando: "We are very close. We are all here in the [South] except for one sister. That's one of the reasons I went to college here because we support each other economically, emotionally, or whatever way you need to be supported." Hugo also discussed how his family influenced his decision to attend a college in the United States. "They came to this college, my sister and my brother-in-law that is why I came here. I had the guidance from them and it was very helpful."

Knowledge and influence of one's heritage: minority status

I asked all participants, when they first began to conceptualize their identity as a minority. Several of them spoke about their first impressions when they came to the Unites States and the culture shock they experienced that led them to begin thinking about their identity as a minority.

Lydia: "In California [where I lived before] I was, you could say the majority. When I came here, I was like…Oh my gosh! The thing is that I don't think many Hispanics want to stand out. They just want to fit in. Before I didn't even notice, or think about me being Latino. When I got here I was thinking about it a lot more…"

Experiencing culture shock was a common occurrence among this group of participants. While the identity as a minority may appear obvious to the outsider, the minority members may

not have given too much thought to the idea until a specific experience enlightens them. This can present a challenging and awkward experience in which the Latino students may initially feel isolated in their new surroundings. Martha talks about how she was not accustomed to seeing race differences when she first arrived to the U.S.

> Martha: "[When I was in school] they were all Puerto Rican kids, all different colors and sizes. I never saw race differences untill I got to New York. I was very naïve because I thought the whole world was like Puerto Rico where you look at character, and not their skin color. It was worse when I got here [to the South]."

Although certain areas of the Unites States are densely populated with Latinos, other areas, such as the South, are only in the beginning stages of a massive influx of the Latinos. This situation presents a unique and challenging experience for the Latino student who is making headway in his or her college. For example, Hugo, a native of Venezuela, had an unexpected and difficult time relating to the U.S. culture when he first arrived.

> It was a culture shock for me at the very beginning. I thought, as we say in Spanish "*Que es mas una rilla para un tigre.*" One more stripe for a tiger. I had been in New York and Texas, but I didn't realize that those were cities with a lot of international exposure so I said, "wow this is going to be easy," but it was hard when I came to the [South]! People are very nice, polite [and] cordial but they [are also] very distant, like you stay here and I stay here, arms width, and you don't go to my place, you know.

In Martha's situation she decided to take action and express her concern for the lack of diversity on her college campus.

> When I got there in the1980s, I was the second Latina to be accepted to this college. I was one of two Latinas and I expressed the fact that… you know, why

> am I the only one here? What's wrong with you people? I was upset. The counselors went to Puerto Rico and started to recruit because the next year we got 10 and the next year 6. Now they have a whole exchange college.

One of the concerns expressed was receiving different treatment from teachers based on assumptions about their status as a Latino. Lydia talked about her disappointment when she was unable to enroll in high school honors classes because her teacher assumed she did not speak English well enough.

> I was in honors back in California. When I moved here [to the South], they lowered me because they thought I didn't speak English well enough. It was a big deal to me. They just put me down to a lower level, and I was very upset. I kind of made history, when I graduated from high school [here in the South]. I was one of the first of seven Hispanics to graduate from that high school.

Martha shared a similar experience in which her status as a minority almost caused her to be misplaced into ESOL classes. Her minority status also affected her performance because she "always felt she had to be better than the rest."

> My name was Maria Ramirez when I got to college. They see my last name and they said, "You cannot take Literature 1, you have to take ESOL." So I said, "I don't think I need ESOL." She said, "why"? I said, "Because I can have a conversation with you. I can read books that you can read. I can handle English very well". I had to fight my way out of ESOL. I took Lit, and I aced that class. I never heard about ESOL again. [I always felt] I had to be better than the rest. I couldn't just be doing it. It had to be done better than anybody else because I have a handicap (English as a second language).

Knowledge and influence of one's heritage: embracing diversity

One thing that became increasingly clear in the interviews was that, after acknowledging their status as a minority on campus, these students adopted a strategy in which they embraced the diversity on their campus as a way to incorporate themselves into the college community. Lydia talked about her initial attempts at making friends: "When I first got here, I had a friend, and she was Latina. She was someone that made me feel comfortable." However, she also talked about "having had a lot of foreign friends, like Japanese friends, [different] ethnicity friends because [she] also felt like [they] had something in common because" [they] were minorities."

Martha remembered being "very determined to fit in when [she] got to college. Being one of two [Latinas], I had two options: to stick with her and become the two against the world or just figure it out. I figured it out. I never had a problem especially when the school started getting a little more diverse."

The connection between acknowledging one's self as a minority and using specific strategies- such as embracing diversity- to be successful in college was made clear through this research. Hugo describes "the ideal [college] experience as the cultural experience, where you open your mind to a new language, a new culture, new food, new behavior, new interaction and learn about others in the world [which allows you] to get the most out of the cultural experience. [Hugo suggests] seeing diversity not as an obstacle but [as an] enriching opportunity."

Recommendations and Shared Knowledge

All participants were asked what actions they thought the educational community needed to take and what they believed they wanted to share about the Latino community to facilitate and encourage college attendance and completion. These participants felt that implementing some

type of support group that would serve as a foundation for this particular student body was a critical determinant in having Latino students persist and remain in college. One participant described the "importance" of and "mandatory" aggressive effort that needs to take place.

> A core group of Latinos or somebody needs to be in charge of the newcomers. They need to grab them by the hand and say "come join us" just to let them know that they are ok. We're in this [together] and if you need anything we're here.

They also talked about changing the "learning disability view" that they believed many teachers had of their Latino students and changing it to a "language deficiency view."

> All too often they move them out of ESOL unprepared, and then they get placed in special education. It's not a learning disability these children have, it's a language deficiency.

They advise monitoring the students early on in their educational careers to prevent them from not academically achieving.

> It would be helpful if we had some type of team to monitor [the students], beginning in middle school through high school, [because] an ESOL child goes into the mainstream and they are forgotten, and thrown out there with no help.

In regards to understanding Latino families, participants recommended some general guidelines to bridge the existing gap between the Latino community and the educational community. Latino parents tend to have a limited education so they suggested it is not wise to assume they know what you're expecting from them. At the same time, it is important to find out what their background is. This can vary greatly within Latino populations. For example, according to the U.S. Census current population report (2003), 18.6% of the Cuban population earned a Bachelors degree while 7.6% of the Mexican population earned a bachelors degree. In

addition, 70.8% of the Cuban population had a high school education while only 50.6% of the Mexican population had attained a high school education. Latinos could have been educated in their native country and be familiar with the educational system there, but they tend to not be familiar with the U.S. educational system or how to prepare their children for college in the U.S.

"Many times they haven't graduated high school, sometimes they've only gone up to the fourth grade. Parents don't [always] know. We need to prepare our students early on and prepare their study habits."

Some spoke of the importance of having practical expectations of Latino parents considering "generally both parents have to work, sometimes two jobs, so coming to class and participating during working hours is not realistic."

> Latino moms [generally] don't get to stay home and have Oreos and milk when the kids get home. We need two full time jobs and [sometimes] part time jobs on the side. It's the American mentality that the parent needs to be involved in the classroom. Let's be real. Our families need to work.

To develop a facilitative relationship between the parents and teachers increased effort in communicating with the parents need to occur in U.S. schools. The parents must be informed of what is going on and what is expected of them and their children. Martha, who is a middle school educator, talks about her involvement with her Latino students' parents.

> I'll call the parents, they'll call me. I'll call them for both good and bad, to have a conversation and get to know them... I also make home visits. It's important to know where they came from, about the culture, and to know how important the family is, the whole family.

Financial concerns are rarely far from the minds of Latino families and students. These participants made use of part time jobs, loans, financial aid, and scholarships.

> I had no money for tuition so I went to the bank and got a student loan and I got a job at a daycare center, so I was able to pay. It was sink or swim. A lot of people sink. It was hard.
>
> Parents are learning more about the value of an education, but they are still busy working, and a lot of kids drop out. Some don't fit in with peers, some work to help their parents, and others just don't see the value in getting a college education.
>
> My family had economical problems, and they focused too much on money. I learned through college that the first generation [tends to] think about the basic needs of the family.
>
> They worried so much about our economical situation that I thought I needed to help. I'm the oldest so I took the responsibility without them asking me for anything. The first thing that came to mind was to start working. I didn't want to leave high school… A friend from church said, "The best way to help your parents is to help yourself first. Finish school and you can help them later." [That's] what I did.

When asked what the ideal educational experience is for a Latino student, participants frequently talked about the importance of a mentor and thought that it was essential to a Latino student's academic success.

> It's very important to have a mentor. There are a lot of different avenues and opportunities but when you're that young, unless you have somebody directing, pushing, and encouraging you, you can easily get lost. This is particularly true for a Latino student,

> because maybe the parents don't have the educational background to be good [academic] mentors for their kids.

Some spoke of the differences that often exist among generations.

> I realize we have a lot of differences. An example can be the way we communicate with others. Sometimes first generations are shyer and [less likely] to be outspoken.

One participant talks about the emphasis on getting married and staring a family at a young age.

> Getting married young is common among Latinos, sometimes expected. That's the way it's always been. I think that's why there are a lot of drop outs among the Latinas. Instead of doing their own thing, they want to have a family. That's the only way they know about becoming someone. Having a family is like having a career, a way to fulfill yourself. I've wanted to get married since I was 18, but now I know that I need to invest in myself first to offer something better. That's helped me wait.

One participant made the point that:

> As a society we want to prosper and the best way to better our self economically is for all of us to come to the same understanding. While we are different in ethnicity, we all want to better ourselves and our situation. They need to begin [by] reaching some level of acceptance [of the Latino community] and then to understand the little differences. For example, the value of family and how we [tend to] approach our goals which is with "us" [in mind] instead of "I" in mind, [considering] the cohesion of the family. For us as a smaller ethnic group, it is our responsibility to share with them. It has to begin in school, with education, early on.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this project was to investigate the educational experiences of Latino college graduates and the factors they believed contributed to their successful attainment of a college degree. This research has provided a looking glass into the lived experiences of these college graduates by allowing them to reflect on their educational journey and what they thought influenced their experiences.

Participants in this study tended to have similar influences and contributing factors across their stories. Mentors and educational advocates contributed various sources of influences; those influences took the form of encouragement, support, academic guidance, and friendship. In some situations, an advocate stepped forward and made critical educational decisions with the student's best interest in mind. As reported in the literature, participants talked about this person as a key player in their success (Castellanos & Jones 2003; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Padilla, Trevino, Gonzalez, & Trevino, 1997; Pascarella, 1985; Iverson, Pascarella & Terenzini, 1984; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Rendon, 1994; Saenz, 2000, Smart & Pascarella, 1986; Tinto, 1993). Advocates provided specific knowledge to guide the participants on exactly how to get to the college degree. Similarly, in an exploratory study of "possible selves and future orientation" of Latino adolescents, results indicated limited declarative and procedural knowledge for both their educational and occupational hoped-for selves (Yowell, 2000). Bratlinger (1993) also found the plans and strategies of low-income adolescents indicated a vague understanding of the necessary steps to achieve academically, whereas high-income youth tend to have a more

concrete, detailed plan to attain their educational goals. The limited declarative and procedural knowledge about their educational goals may indicate that educational institutions for Latino students need to provide them with appropriate experiences that can lead to a successful educational outcome (Yowell, 2000). An important function of educational institutions serving Latino students is to introduce students to a variety of career and educational options, because Latino parents have little educational experience (Romo & Falbo, 1996), especially in college. A critical component of this introduction of career and educational options includes strategies and specific plans (i.e., procedural knowledge) aimed at attaining educational goals. Nevertheless, while parental education and knowledge of the U.S. education system was limited, parents' influence was still very prominent throughout the stories of these participants.

The family, a central regarded component of Latino culture, can have a great deal of influence on a Latino student's educational decisions, commitments, and priorities. As seen through this research and the research of others, the family provided various sources of influences in the form of high expectations, support, beliefs, values, and the way in which they expressed the utility and value of a college education to their children (Arellano & Padilla, 1996; Flores, 1992; Cabrera, Nora, & Casteneda, 1993; Gandara, 1995; Gloria, 1999, Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Nora & Rendon, 1990).

Regardless of the level of parental education and socioeconomic status, parents maintained high expectations for their children's academic achievement. Those expectations were often rooted in the parents' belief and hope for a better future for their children by means of educational achievement. When authority figures maintain high expectations, as most of the parents of these participants did, it is likely those expectations will be assumed by the child. This can in turn affect students beliefs and judgments about their own capabilities to successfully

complete a task or reach a goal. Concurrent with Wigfield and Eccles' (1992) expectancy value theory, these Latino college graduates held high expectations for themselves and understood the value and usefulness of a college education in the United States. Although high expectations from parents are useful, high expectations from mentors, educational advocates, and teachers can be equally effective in promoting motivation and educational achievement.

In reflecting on their previous educational experiences, participants described the type of involvement their parents had in their education. They talked about either a lower level of involvement in the form of simply inquiring about their school day and homework on a daily basis or a higher level of involvement consisting of the parent sitting down with them and working on homework together or preparing for tests. While the higher level of involvement seemed to be most useful but required a certain level of education, both types of involvement seemed to be effective in instilling a respect and value for academia in the child.

Concurrent with the literature on academically successful Latinos in explaining the reasoning behind their educational success, participants typically described their parents as hard workers who clearly expressed to them not only the utility and value of a higher education as a means for upward occupational success (Gandara, 1995 & Hernandez, 2000), but also the value of hard work. One of the ways in which the families influenced these students was by modeling constructive attributions that were adopted by these college graduates. Consistent with Weiner's (1986) attribution theory, these college graduates tended to attribute their success to their hard work, persistence, and effort; hence, they had control over their educational outcome. These beliefs seem to have transcended these individuals as they not only took the college route themselves, but also have the same high expectations and belief for their own children.

These participants attended a four-year college away from home, and, for most, it was their first experience away from their family. This experience posed a new and difficult challenge. As they talked about separating from their family to pursue their education, they discussed the emotional difficulties and challenges they faced once they left their comfort zone of family and their familiar community. This emotional component expressed by the participants is something that I have not seen in the literature. The separation from family brought on a range of emotions, such as guilt from not being able to tend to the families' needs, whether psychological, emotional, or financial. In addition to guilt, they often grieved and longed for the unique closeness with their familiar network of family (i.e., *familsmo*). These emotions served as distractions from their academic achievement. This emotional phenomenon tended to be more prominent during their first few years away from home. While these students talked about the separation from their family as a challenge, they also talked about how their families' constant encouragement, faith, admiration, and respect for what they were doing gave them a sense of pride, dignity, and strength to persist. The lifeline connection to their family and loved ones clearly made a difference in their success and degree attainment.

The third theme brought out by this research is *knowledge and influence of one's heritage.* Prior to attending predominantly White institutions, these individuals did not spend much time thinking about their identity as a minority as evident in their stories. In many cases, they did not feel the extent of being a "minority" until a specific experience shed light on this. In describing their first encounter with that reality, they talked about initially feeling awkward. After beginning to attend a primarily White institution, they began to conceptualize what it meant to be a minority within the college community. This notion then fostered their adoption of a strategy they used to facilitate their acculturation and comfort level in the college environment

while maintaining their identity as a Latino student – something considered to be very important when examining academic success (Lopez, Ehly, & Garcia-Vasquez, 2002). These individuals made a conscious decision to embrace whatever diversity already existed on their college campus by seeking out relationships with students from various backgrounds. This strategy seemed to be a very useful one that eased their transition and nurtured their comfort level and acculturation on the college campus.

On being given the opportunity to share cultural knowledge and insight, the following recommendations were proposed by participants to increase the educational success of Latino students. Schools, universities, and other educational institutions should aggressively encourage and sponsor support groups that are specifically tailored for Latino college students to effectively deal with the challenges they face. Incorporating mentors, who can act as educational advocates for these students' early on in their educational career, would also be a wise investment especially because the students may be the first in their families to navigate their ways through the U.S. education system. Any type of communication or informational experience where the parents can be informed of the U.S. education system and process should be encouraged and supported.

The educational community needs to also be made aware of the possible generational differences and similarities among their Latino students. For example, succeeding generations of Latino students tend to have lower educational aspirations and achieve lower academic outcomes than first-generation Latinos (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995). More research is needed in this area to distinguish exactly what those generational differences are.

Early intervention programs in elementary, middle, and high school should be used to increase student and parent knowledge on the requirements for college admission, which will in

turn influence goals and objectives of the students for a higher education. These early intervention programs need to include the entire college preparation phase including curriculum, financial costs and options, and the use of admission tests.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Given the lack of knowledge about the education system in the United States that generally exists among Latino students and parents, they must be provided additional resources, mentors and educational advocates, and support groups within the college community that are designed to meet their needs. These efforts will facilitate their progress toward degree completion. The mentor or educational advocate does not necessarily have to be someone of the same ethnicity. In this study, respondents talked about both types being critical in their success. This person must be a caring individual who not only genuinely takes interest in the student, but also has the knowledge to guide, direct, and nurture the academic development of the student.

Understanding and accepting the underlying notion that family is the most salient component of Latino culture will allow the educational community to begin to understand the unique challenges Latino students often face. It is no secret that Latino families are accustomed to working hard. In many cases economic reasons are why they came to the United States in the first place, to work hard to provide a better life for their family and a better future for their children. Conveying this sacrifice often made by parents to the students can be used as a strategy to encourage Latino students to persist. There is an established work ethic embedded in the Latino culture that, when transferred to the academic arena, can work to the students' advantage by providing them with the endurance and effort needed to persist and graduate. Attributing one's success to hard work, effort, and persistence can also be a very useful strategy for a student. If students' do not possess useful attributions, it is possible to retrain them by modeling

constructive attributions. Going to college during one's youth essentially means that the ability to contribute to the family's immediate needs is limited. This can cause conflicting emotional experiences for Latino students as they may believe they are being selfish by advancing themselves while the family continues to struggle, thus, causing a mismatch between their deeply rooted beliefs and values and their actions, resulting in feeling disloyal. One of the key factors in increasing the educational attainment of Latinos is including the parents in the educational journey. Having the support of the parents can serve as one of the most motivating and powerful tools in encouraging Latino students to persist and eventually graduate; hence, communicating the importance and value of a college education in the United States, not only economically but also socially and politically, to the parents and students is essential. In addition, it is imperative that we have high expectations for our Latino students. High school should be seen as a great accomplishment but not the end of their educational journey.

Attending a primarily White institution and being away from one's familiar community for the first time, as in the case of these participants, can pose a difficult experience for students' as they attempt to adjust to college life. In addition to the stressors of being away from home, they are also faced with dealing with the existing "minority status." In many cases, Latino students are unable to identify with faculty on campus because of the lack of Latino faculty. Once Latino students are in college, they need to be encouraged to continue networking with others who are driven to attain their college degrees and are experiencing similar struggles for the first time.

The combination of that initial conflicting emotional experience and dealing with the fact that there are often few individuals on campus like them can be overwhelming.

Although educators need to provide opportunities for Latino students to network with students of similar and diverse backgrounds as well as develop relationships with faculty, it is also in part the students' responsibility to assimilate themselves into the college community. Concurrent with the existing literature respondents reported making a conscious effort to do so, all the while maintaining their ethnic identity.

Ensuring the educational attainment of Latino students must be a nationwide effort among the educational community. While this research has highlighted some significant findings with implications, further research is needed. When examining the retention of Latino students in postsecondary settings, an investigation of the generational differences and similarities that exist among Latino students would be very useful in providing educators with knowledge that would allow them to be better equipped to work with the Latino student population. It is particularly important to focus on students who have succeeded at overcoming obstacles and barriers rather than solely focusing on those who do not manage to matriculate toward degree completion. Last, in reaching our goal to prosper as a society, we need to come to the understanding that this issue of increasing academic achievement among our rapidly growing Latino population is in the best interest of everyone.

NOTES

[1]Hispanic:

> "This term was introduced into the official government lexicon by the Office of Budget and Management in 1978, creating an ethnic category that included persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central American, South American, or some other Spanish origin (Trevino, 1987). This label refers to various populations bound by a common ancestral language and cultural characteristics, but that vastly differ in immigrant history and settlement in the United States (Castellanos & Lee Jones, 2003)."

[2]Latino:

> "Hayes-Bautista and Chapa (1987) introduced the term Latinos, restricting the name to person residing in the United States whose ancestors are from Latin American countries in the Western Hemisphere. This term is more inclusive than Hispanic. It includes people from Latin America (e.g., Peru, Argentina, Nicaragua, and Guatemala) who do not necessarily Speak Spanish (e.g., Brazilian) (Castellanos & Lee Jones, 2003)."

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APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM

I_____agree to participate in a study entitled, **"Latino/ Hispanic College Graduates and their Intergenerational Perspectives on their Educational Experiences,"** conducted by Rebecca I. Garcia, 349 Aderhold Hall, Department of Educational Psychology, University of Georgia, Athens GA. 30602, Phone (706) 255-8561 under direction of Dr. Paul Schutz, Department of Educational Psychology, phone number (706) 542-4247. I understand that I am participating voluntarily and that I can withdraw my consent at any time without giving any reason and without penalty. I can have my responses returned to me if I decide I don't want them to be included in the study.

1.) I have been told about the following items:

- The reason for the research is to develop an understanding of what helps and hinders the college graduation of Latinos and document a collection of college graduate Latino experiences. The benefits that I may expect from it are the chance to share my own experiences and the opportunity to review the finding from the study.

- The procedures are as follows: Prior to the beginning of the interview I will receive a consent form, one for my records and one for the researcher's records. It will take approximately 15 to 20 minutes to complete the consent form. Once the interview is complete I will receive a questionnaire requesting demographic information that will be collected once I have completed it. This questionnaire will take approximately 20 minutes to fill out.

- After volunteering to participate, I will be first interviewed in a mutually convenient location where privacy will be respected. This will range from one to four hours long. This interview will be tape recorded.

- I will receive a copy of the transcript from the first and second interview in which I will be given the opportunity to further clarify or elaborate my responses.

- At the end of the first interview I will be given the option to continue on with the second interview or to schedule another day and time to conduct the second interview. This option is entirely up to me and the intent of this option is to make this process as convenient as possible for me.

2.) This study should not make me uncomfortable or anxious and should not put me in any danger. I may decline to answer any questions at any time and no explanation is needed.

3.) My participation in this study will not prejudice my future relations with The University of Georgia.

4.) The researcher will use a pseudonym for me when she writes down my responses to protect my identity at all times, including in published research. The researcher will keep my identity confidential unless required by law.

5.) The researcher will keep the tapes indefinitely for research purposes If I wish to have the tapes destroyed once transcriptions are complete I will let the researcher know and they will be destroyed upon my request.

Please sign your name if you agree to allow the researcher to keep the tapes indefinitely for research purposes _____.

OR

Please state if you wish to have the tapes destroyed once transcription is complete_____.

6.) If I have any questions now or while she is working with me, the researcher will answer them for me. She can be reached at (706) 255-8561 or rebeccaig1979@hotmail.com.

I understand that I am agreeing by my signature on this form to take part in the research project and understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form for my records. In addition I give my permission to the researcher to use audiotapes and transcriptions.

Signature of Investigator_____Date_____
Signature of Participant_____Date_____

Please sign both copies of this form. Keep one and return the other to the investigator. The researcher Rebecca Garcia will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone at (706) 255-8561 or by email at rebeccaig1979@hotmail.com.

The Institutional Review Board oversees research at the University of Georgia that involves human participants. Questions or problems regarding your rights as a participant should be addressed to Chris A. Joseph, Ph.D. Human Subjects Office; Institutional Review Board; University of Georgia, 606A Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542- 3199, E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu

APPENDIX B

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

You are not obligated to fill out this demographic questionnaire. If you don't know the answer please leave it blank and if at any time you don't feel comfortable answering the question you may also leave it blank. Thank You.

1.) Your age:

2.) Your sex: Male Female

3.) Were you born in the US? Please circle YES NO

4.) If you were not born in the US, what country where you born in?

5.) How many years have you lived in the US?

6.) Were your parents born in the US? Please circle
Mother YES NO
Father YES NO

7.) What is the highest level of education you have completed?

8.) What is the name of the institution from which you received your highest degree?

Degree program began what year?
Degree program completed what year?

9.) What field did you obtain your degree in?

10.) Other degrees completed?

11.) Are you currently employed?

12.) What is your career or current employment status?

13.) How would you characterize the socioeconomic status of your family of origin? Please circle

Lower Class
Working Class

Middle Class
Upper Class

14.) How would you characterize your current your current socio economic status? Please Circle

Lower Class
Working Class
Middle Class
Upper Class

15.) What is the primary language spoken in your home?

16.) Do you have children?

17.) If you have children, How many? What are their ages?

Do you have any siblings?
If yes, How many brothers? How many sisters?

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Guide 1

1) Tell me about your family

2) Describe your role in your family

3) What was elementary school like for you?

4) What do you remember from elementary school?

5) How would you describe yourself as a student in elementary school?

6) Tell me about middle school and high school. What was it like for you? What do you remember?

7) Describe yourself as a student during these years.

8) Tell me about your parents. What was their involvement in your education like?

9) Tell me about your academic preparation for college.

10) Tell me about your decision to go to college. What did that mean to you?

11) What were your parents thoughts and beliefs about college?

12) How would you describe your college experience? What events do you remember from your college years?

13) What types of relationships did you have with peers on campus?

14) Who most influenced you during your high school years? As a student. Who most influenced you during your college years? As a student.

15) What needs did you have in college?

16) When you experienced one of those times, when you had that need, how did you go about dealing with it?

17) What resources were available to you in college?

18) What do you think helped you complete your college?

19) What most interfered with your college completion? Can you think of something that you feel most hindered your college completion?

Interview Guide 2

1) Since the first time we talked, what thought have you had about our discussion?

2) Tell me about a class that you enjoyed.

3) Tell me about a class you didn't like.

4) What was it like for you to earn a college degree?

5) Tell me about your own expectations as a parent for your child's educational goals.

6) What would you describe as the ideal educational experience for a Latino college student?

7) Respond to this statement: As you may know recent statistics show that Latinos are the nations largest minority group. Latinos also have the highest high school drop out rate of any other ethnic group, 28.6%/ They also have the lowest college attendance, only 35% of recent Latino high school graduates choose to go on to college.

8) What do you think needs to be done to encourage Latino college attendance and degree completion?

9) When I say the word "Latino" what does that mean to you?

10) When I say the words family "la familia" what does that mean to you?"

11) What do you think the educational community needs to know about the Latino culture or what do you think would be helpful for them to know so they can obtain a better understanding of the culture?

12) Is there anything else you would like to talk about that I haven't mentioned?

APPENDIX D

SUBJECTIVITY STATEMENT

My personal educational journey and life experiences led me to develop this program of research. This research I have conducted is very much a part of who I am and what I care about. I take this opportunity to reflect and share with you my background and personal journey that has framed my epistemological beliefs. My subjectivity, my perception of reality, and my belief in how knowledge is acquired have influenced my research from day one.

My identity as a Mexican American woman, and first generation college graduate, has also informed my research questions from the beginning. I was born and raised in the small town of Gilroy, California, where I lived with my parents, my older brother, and my nanny from Mexico. My parents, both originally from Fresno, California, grew up in a situation much different than my own. My own childhood consisted of a typical, middle class lifestyle, while theirs consisted of enduring the hot sun of the valley, working in the fields alongside the rest of their family. Needless to say, they became accustomed to hard work at a young age and developed an incredible work ethic that allowed them to advance their economic situation. While both of my parents graduated from high school, neither of them attended college; however, the expectation for me to attend college was always present. It was never a question of "if" I would attend college, but rather it was seen as the natural next step after high school. I am still not quite sure how this high expectation was created, but it was something that was understood.

There was also no question of "where" I would attend college. Gavilan Community College was just 10 miles away from my home, and my parents saw this as the perfect and

"only" place I would start my college career. At the time I momentarily thought about attending a four-year university away from home, but my parents made it clear that not only was I too young to leave on my own, but that it would also be unnecessarily expensive. This was a reasonable claim because I was in a situation that allowed me to continue to live at home rent-free and my tuition would be significantly less at the community college level. I accepted this and I knew there was not going to be any negotiating on whether I would leave home or not. I understood the financial aspect but I also knew there was more to it. There was absolutely no way I was going to get the ok to move out at the age of 17. To my parents, that was just inconceivable at the time.

After spending my first three years of college at Gavilan, I decided to major in psychology and transfer to San Francisco State University. I had always known that I wanted to be in a helping profession and psychology seemed to suit my personality and interest in studying others and myself. At this point, I began to notice how few people around me were actually making that jump from the community college level to the university level.

Eventually, after arriving at San Francisco State, I applied for a scholarship, Career Opportunities in Research, which was geared toward increasing minorities in the mental health field. As a result of receiving this scholarship, I was one of four girls who received additional guidance and mentorship during my junior and senior year. This experience made all the difference in the world for me. Even though I knew what I wanted to do in my career, study psychology and conduct therapy, I had absolutely no idea of how to get there. I did not realize how clueless I was about graduate school and my chosen career until my mentor enlightened me. My parents have always been supportive; however, they had no background knowledge in higher education and how to get into graduate school. Fortunately, I had a mentor who provided me

with the knowledge I needed to do so. From that point on, I was on a mission to get into graduate school, and fortunately for me I was wisely advised by my mentor that I needed to get involved in research and keep up my grades. In addition to the advising I received, I was also encouraged to conduct my own research study, present, network, and travel to professional conferences. Graduating from San Francisco State was a great accomplishment, but again, it was just another stepping stone for me. At this point, my family was thrilled I had graduated from college and even more pleased that I wanted to attend graduate school.

Once I was accepted to the educational psychology program at the University of Georgia, I was both thrilled and scared at the same time. After the excitement wore off from being accepted into the program, I began to get nervous. I had never been that far away from my family and friends before, and I was unsure of what the South would bring. My family was very proud and encouraged me to do whatever I wanted to do. When I made the decision to move, they were happy, but shocked that I was willing to move so far to further my education. Regardless of their shock, they have always been my biggest supporters. Before I left, they assured me they would help me in anyway they could. This is a promise they have kept.

I must admit my first days of graduate school I was dumbfounded by the lack of Latinos that I encountered. I remember the first day I got on the university bus. I just sat there in disbelief that all I could see was a see of White faces and blond hair. I knew there would be fewer minorities attending graduate school in the South, but being in the environment daily reiterated the fact that minorities in general are overwhelmingly underrepresented in graduate school. This is true for the entire United States, not just the South. As I sat in every class my first semester, I could not get over the difference in the environment I was now in and I realized my being a Mexican American graduate student was a very rare thing and I was definitely different. I was

shocked and uncomfortable with seeing Latinos all over town but very rarely in any of my classes. This is still something I continue to deal with, and the best way to deal with it is to make change and take action. One way I deal with this is by studying and researching issues that are very dear to me.

Having been raised in northern California I was very accustomed to being in a community that had a high percentage of Latinos. To be even more specific, Gilroy is about 50% White and 50% Mexican with very little of any other ethnicity. This is changing now, but while I was growing up, I had no idea that I was different, frankly because I was not. There were plenty of people just like me. I can't help but laugh at myself when I think about the radical change I made in my living environment; I was very naive. I went from living in one of the most liberal, diverse (San Francisco), and highly populated Latino areas in the country to one of the most conservative and predominantly African American and White areas. From this point on, I began to question why there were so few Latinos graduating from college and what was going on in the lives of those who were graduating?

I am very grateful for the educational opportunities, mentors, and family support that we instilled in me the value of education and facilitated my academic career. My eyes have been opened and my exposure here at the University of Georgia will affect my career decisions for the rest of my life. My ethnic identity as a third generation Latina will forever be much more salient to me than it was when I was in my comfort zone of Northern California.

As a member of the group of individuals I studied, I believe it is important to state my own position within this research. My epistemological beliefs about knowledge and truth are derived from a constructionist viewpoint. Crotty (1998) characterizes epistemology as "the theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective and thereby in the methodology,"

how we know what we know (p.3). I believe that we construct our own meaning as we begin to interact with the world the day we are born. I also believe that different people can and will construct their own knowledge in different ways. Crotty (1998) describes constructionist as

> The view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context (p. 42).

I also acknowledge that, while we as individuals engage with the world and construct our own meaning, we do so with cultural lenses. Our culture shapes how we view the world and what we see and do not see. The best way to describe this is from a social constructionist perspective, which emphasizes the grip our culture has on us because "we inherit a 'system of significant symbols.' For each of us when we first see the world in meaningful fashion, we are inevitably viewing it through lenses bestowed upon us by our culture. Our culture brings things into view for us and endows them with meaning and, by the same token, leads us to ignore other things" (Crotty, p. 54).

I approached this study from a phenomenological perspective, which is developed in the philosophical perspective of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). Although I shared similar characteristics with my participants in my educational journey, such as being Latina and the first in my family to graduate from college, my third generation status in Northern California as well as other experiences may have created a different educational experience than those I choose to interview.

Given that these participants are among the first generation in the United States, it was essential that I honor their experiences, knowing that they could have had differences and similarities in their experiences; thus, prior to developing this study, I made a commitment to set aside, or bracket, preconceptions about the nature of the Latino college experience.

APPENDIX E

MEMO WRITING

Patricia (An influential person)

Patricia began her narrative with background information such as where she was born and the name of the small town she lived in, “Baladonia, Puerto Rico.” She provided the audience with a descriptive portrayal of her early educational years, indicating that she was from a close-knit community with a family-oriented neighborhood. Early on in the narrative she begins to talk about her mother’s involvement in her education, “Since my mom was a teacher she was always, you know, she knew what was going on in the school system. My mom as a teacher was very involved in my studies.” She reiterates her mother’s involvement throughout the narrative by providing the audience with examples of her mother’s continuous engagement and interest in her schooling. Her parents expectations were high, and they expected nothing less than A’s from her. Patricia’s evaluation of her experiences with her mother was very interesting in that she appeared to have a clear understanding of what was expected, why, and the consequences she would encounter if she didn’t meet their expectations. At one point in the narrative I felt as though I may have been hearing her mother’s voice come through, “No television till I finished my homework. Go take a shower and then she’d let me have dinner and then… her rule was if you keep bringing A’s you’re fine but if you drop it church will go out the window, boys will go out…no church, no nothing!” The long term result of her mothers invested interest in her daughter’s education came through rather clearly in the narrative, “going to

college was expected in my house. It was definitely the next step, no gaps in between. You graduate from high school, you go to college." The main characters in Patricia's narrative are her mother and herself. Patricia takes on the role of a good student, active in her schoolwork, yet also obedient to her mother's expectations and rules. Her mother occupies the role of an active heroine who plays a major part in meeting her daughter's educational needs and actively participates in the facilitation of her education, "She would make a test for me so that I could practice so she was very involved and very concerned about my grades. I remember if I had a spelling test or something she would dictate [to] me or if I had math [test] she would make up problems for me, always asking me, "so what did you get in that project, what did the teacher say?" Other characters in the narrative include other community members such as teachers, and extended family. Their role seems to be both passive and active. They are passive in the sense that they are not very active in the story; however, their mere presence is contributing to the close knit community in which she lived. Patricia's father is passively mentioned when she refers to "they," "I mean they wanted A's, expectations were very high" but she referred to her mother as the actively engaged person who participated in her studies.

Memo Writing: Reina (An influential person)

Reina's narrative includes several main characters, her father, her brother n law and her self. She begins the narrative by providing background information about her father, his unfulfilled dreams of playing volleyball and his obsessions with athleticism that he tried to pass on to his daughters. During the opening of the narrative her father plays the role of a powerful man who is blinded by his personal goals and dreams and oblivious to his daughter's lack of interest in tennis. According to Reina her early educational years suffered due to her fathers

actions of enrolling her in a tennis academy where her primary focus was on tennis and not on her education. Throughout the narrative she positions herself in a passive role in which she doesn't have much power or choice in her life. She plays the part of a submissive obedient daughter who is victimized by her father's personal dreams. Neither her father nor her mother had any interest in education for her. His primary focus was on her tennis career. Throughout the narrative there are numerous examples of situations where her tennis career is put in front of her educational well being. Her mother plays the role of a submissive wife who is not concerned about her daughter's education, "My mom was very religious and very much into accepting the macho role [of] a man, and so she was very submissive." A significant event takes place during the structural component referred to as the complication; however, it's more of a turning point in Reina's educational career than a complication. Her sister marries a man who takes an interest in Reina's education. She refers to him as knowing, "stuff about education." He didn't agree with her fathers obsession with tennis and lack of interest in her education so he and her sister strategically convinced her father to let her live with them during the school week so she could attend high school in San Diego, California. They included her tennis career as a factor in this decision when they pitched the idea to her father knowing that her father would not agree otherwise. Her brother n law plays the role of an active hero who rescues her from her father's fanatical tennis dreams. As a result she becomes more involved in education and begins to take on a more active role in her education, "going to school it was different having to read the textbooks [in] English that people didn't speak, I mean the different English spoken and written and stuff like that. I used the dictionary a lot; I asked a lot of questions." Her brother n law continues to be an advocate for her education as he takes on an active role as her guardian while she attends high school and becomes even more involved by demanding she received college

prep classes rather than the easy classes she was assigned, “cooking, PE, and consumer math, just very easy classes.” As a result of her brother n laws intervening in Reina’s education she received the courses she needed in order to be prepared for college. She had to repeat her senior year of high school because she wasn’t prepared to move on and her brother n law agreed with the counselors recommendations. She portrays him as an individual who seemed to have her best interest at heart. Throughout the narrative it’s interesting to see how Reina’s positions her self as someone who is always listening to others or taking the advice of the older man in her life, whether it be her father or her brother n law.

Memo Writing: Hugo (An influential person)

Hugo describes his role as the eldest son who has the responsibility put on him by his parents to set a good example for his younger brothers and sister. It is his job to focus on his education and his parents emphasize the importance and value of his education. The main characters in this narrative are Hugo and his mother. He positions his mother in the role as a person who is actively involved in his education and someone who maintains high expectations. As the heroin she was someone who was concerned and expressed interest in his studies, “Mostly my mother [was involved in my education] and because my mother spoke French because also she went to a French school, so, um she was the one that [went] to those school meetings.”

APPENIDIX F

CODE BOOK

- **Family Dynamics**- any description of the family such as demographic information, number of brothers and sisters, big family, small family, and socioeconomic status.
- **Family Relationship**-description of their family's relationship, close, distant, cold, loving, supportive.
- **Role in family**- participants' role in the family, oldest, youngest, responsible, care taker, baby of the family.
- **Parents Role**- parents role in their educational experiences, expectations
- **Parents level of education**- elementary, middle school, high school, college
- **Native Language**- primary language spoken in the home, Spanish, English.
- **Response to Family question**-there response to the question "what does the word family, or la familia mean to you?"
- **Schools attended**- prior to college (private, public, home schooling.)
- **Academic Standing**- elementary, high school grades, perceived themselves as a good student or not so good student before college.
- **Extracurricular activities**- activities they participated in outside academia, sports, and hobbies.
- **Support system**- refers to any source of support they had during their educational experiences, specifically college.
- **Personal expectations**- personal educational expectations for themselves.

- **Expectations for their children**- their expectations regarding college for their own children.
- **Community needs to know**- refers to what the educational community and Latino community needs to know about the Latino culture.
- **Strategies-** strategies they used during college, such as self talk, embracing diversity or other things they did that they felt helped them.
- **Self talk**- the way they talk to themselves.
- **Mentor**- someone who they feel impacted their educational choices, experiences, inspiration, influence, mentor, role model.
- **Opportunities-** special experiences that they encountered, such as a scholarship, visit to a university campus, invitation.
- **Available resources**- resources that were available and perceived as useful to them in college, such as financial resources (loans, scholarships), housing, friends, church.
- **Financial situation**- their financial situation in college.
- **Identity-** how they identify themselves, labels or descriptors they use to identify themselves, woman, Latina, Puerta Rican, Cuban, Mexican, Mexican American.
- **Self Perceptions**- what they think of themselves, descriptors used to describe their character.
- **Conceptualization of being a minority**- this refers to their response to the question "when did you first perceive yourself as being a minority?"
- **Beliefs-** any beliefs they express, such as religion or any other relation to part of their belief systems
- **Work ethic**- hard working

- **What helped them complete their college degree**- their response to a question, anything they feel was useful or contributed to their degree completion in anyway.
- **Interference with degree completion**- anything that they perceived as interference or a road block to their degree completion.
- **Suggestions or Recommendations**- to the educational community to encourage college attendance and completion
- **Acculturation**- any changes they mention about themselves that are related to their stay in the United States
- **Response to Latino Statistics**- their thoughts, ideas and beliefs regarding the statistic I ask them to respond to.
- **Preparation for College**- academic preparation for college, experience with standardized test
- **Mentors/ Advocates**: someone who made a significant impact on the students educational career from the participants perceptions. Someone who acted in the best interest of the student by advising them academically or making some type of decision for them that benefited their education. This could be a number of people, teacher, parent, brother, friend etc…
- **Knowledge of Heritage**: a statement from the participants that talks about their perception of who they are, where they came from, their culture, belief system, something that connects them with a larger group of people from the same ethnic background or shared language (Hispanic).
- **Minority Status**: this is when the participants acknowledge their minority status as a part of who they are, for example talking about themselves as being a smaller part of the

general population or college population, receiving privileges or not receiving privileges and being identified as a certain segment of the population.

- **Needs**: this simply refers to needs that the participants say they had in college or needs they think students now have.
- **Embracing Diversity**: embracing diversity is the idea that these participants went into their college experience with the idea/ strategy that they wanted to maintain an open mind and learn about other cultures while not only actively getting involved with other ethnicities on campus but also making sure they do not only stick to their own as a means of maintaining comfort.
- **Utility/Value of a college education**: participants expressed understanding the value of a college education or usefulness of a college education, economically, socially etc… Some times this was learned through their own personal low paying job, their parent's low paying job, or by having someone explain to them why they need to go to college.

- **What the educational community needs to do to encourage Latino college attendance:** each participant talked about knowledge they felt they needed to share with the educational community and actions they think the community needs to take in order to increase college attendance and graduation.
- **Campus Climate:** environment on campus, the feeling they got from the campus, people etc… when they talk about themselves as part of the campus community. Somewhat related to minority status.

- **Family involvement, expectations**: Family support came in several forms, including encouraging words, emotional support, financial support, high expectations and monitoring their studies.

APPENDIX G

NARRATIVES

Narrative 1

An Influential Person in My Life

Narrative of Patricia

Abstract: what was this about?
They wanted A's, Expectations were very high.

Orientation: who, what when, where?
(Who) I was born in a (**Where)** small town in Puerto Rico, Baladonia. I grew up in that small town, um most of my life and I went to public school locally most of my life there. In Puerto Rico elementary school goes from Kindergarten to sixth grade instead of fifth like here. (**When)** When I was about to enter sixth grade I was a very good student. One of my teachers suggested to change me to a private school where I could be a little bit more challenged. My dad used to commute to the next town and he found a private school to send me and you know the school had a bus to come in and you know my parents sacrificed to send me there because it was… In our terms and in our time it was very expensive to send me. [When I was in elementary, before I attended private school] my mom was a teacher so she was always around um so what I always remember was that I couldn't get in trouble because she would hear about it very quickly. [She was at] the same school [as me]. So I was very… My teachers were my neighbors, neighbors of my family so I knew everything that was going on in the **(Where)** schools. My first grade teacher was one of my aunts. My mother purposely did not put me in her first grade class she wanted for me to go with somebody else. My second grade teacher was my next door neighbor and the school system was pretty small so you pretty much stay with your group and I would walk to school with my mom and my [younger] sister. You know, it was just very…
What: Well, since my mom was a teacher she was always uh, you know she knew what was going on in the school system. My mom as a teacher was very involved in my studies. I mean they wanted A's, Expectations were very high. [She would say] "I know you can

do it." She was very good at studying with me.
Complication: Then what happened?
If I had a difficult test she would make a test for me so that I could practice so she was very involved and very concerned about my grades. I remember her if I had a spelling test or something she would dictate me or if I had math she would make up problems for me, always asking me, "so what did you get in that project, what did the teacher say?

Evaluation: So what?
And I was much disciplined and there was no television till I finished my homework. Go take a shower and then she'd let me have dinner and then… her rule was if you keep bringing A's your fine but if you drop it church will go out the window, boys will go out…no church, no nothing! No work. I mean that was her thing but I never got to that point where she would have to take something away. I knew my limits.

Result: What finally happened?
Going to college was expected in my house. It was definitely the next step, no gaps in between. You graduate from high school you go to college. That's no the overall [expectation] from my small town, that's not the expectation put on everyone.

Narrative 2

An Influential Person in My Life

Narrative of Hugo

Abstract: What was this about?
Always we [received] the best education.

Orientation: Who, What, When, Where?
(Who) I am the oldest. I was told to be **(When)** always the example for my brothers…my brothers and my sister. So, I have this motherly responsibility um, that's one of my roles. Um, to give the example that, just to study, the studies…education. **(What)** Even if my family [is] middle class, we are middle class, but always education was the best. I mean, we didn't have the best clothes, we didn't have the best house but we always had the best education. I mean I am an example because like I am the one that's gotten more degrees, uh, maybe not the happiest one (laughter) but, uh, what my parents want me to be for them always, you know, I got my degrees.

Complication: Then what happened?
Mostly my mother [was involved in my education] and because my mother spoke French because also she went to a French school, so, um she was the one that [went] to those school meetings. And I remember once we had a problem at home and my math score, uh, went down a semester

Evaluation: So what?
and so I remember that my mother was really worried and the teacher was worried and so they realized that something [was wrong]

Result: What happened?
the teacher asked her, "you know what is there something wrong [with Hugo], [is he] happy at home?" blah, blah, blah. But um, yes my mother was [involved] uh, they were uh, you know?

Coda: finish narrative
Always very high expectations…Good schools, high expectations

Narrative 3

An Influential Person in My Life

Narrative Analysis of Reina

Abstract: What was this about?
Neither of my parents went beyond six grade in school, and um my dad was playing volleyball which he was sponsored by the army. But everybody that played was college students. So, he never left Mexico playing volleyball and he always regretted that, that there were politics involved or there was this or there was that and stuff like that. So, um he did hang around with those people. He's very smart, he read a lot just to try to keep conversations with the guys and everything like that, but he did not go beyond sixth grade. My mom was very religious and very much into accepting the macho role as a man, so she was very submissive and stuff and my sister wasn't like that and I am not like that. But my sister did rebel against it with my dad and I kind of, because I saw how they didn't get along, they didn't talk to each other in the same house, [a] small house like for five years…nothing. I mean, my dad wouldn't say a word to her, or if he looked at her, he just looked at her to criticize her you know "look." But she said "good morning" and "good night" but that was it. And I thought wow… I don't want that, so I guess I…whatever my dad wanted me to do I did, just to …to have him happy and [to have] my mom not worry because my mom worried a lot. With my dad's trauma of not being able to go beyond what he did with [his] volleyball [career], he wanted to have a son. Of course he had my sister and then he had me. And, um, he wanted that person to be what he wasn't, so he would force sports on [us]. He tried it with my sister but it didn't work with her, and then [he tried it] with me. I gave in to whatever he said, but I was too little to start with volleyball so we tried swimming, gymnastics, and then tennis. That's where we stayed, with tennis.

Orientation: Who, what, when, where?
During **(When)** elementary I went to public school in [Tijuana, Mexico], If you had some money you send your kids to one of the Catholic schools, private schools. But, my **(Who)** dad wasn't thinking like that because he was thinking of saving everything possible so that I would play tennis, so I went to public school. And the public school where I went to [there] were two shifts; the morning shift and then the afternoon shift. And so I went to the afternoon shift so that I could practice [tennis] in the morning. My dad had a muffler shop, that's what his job was. He worked by himself and so he could close or open whenever and stuff like that. And so, he wanted [me] to practice in the morning. There was never, I mean **(What)** I would just have to take my report card to my parents and my dad would sign it without looking at it like school was not important to my dad at all,

especially because we were both girls and we were going to grow up to be like my mom. Or in my case uh if I, it was two ways; if you don't play sports you are going to be, you know, just a housewife like my mom. But, if you play sports then you get to travel and then you marry another athlete and then the same thing happens, you will get married, stay home, and have kids so why do you need school? I didn't go to school for the seventh grade. The whole year I played in the morning, and then something else happened also, by that time I was already playing the sectionals and the nationals and uh…I knew…I started at public, course in Tijuana and they built a new raquet club a uh like a membership only type of club with sixteen courts and they hired an American guy to teach tennis, but he was mostly involved with the ladies. So they wanted someone with the kids and they thought my dad, since he taught me and he was good and all that stuff, they asked him if he wanted to be a part time teacher. So part-time became full-time, he just uh sold his [muffler] shop…no uh he had it but someone else worked there. And he was at the club so, I wasn't in school I was at the [tennis] club from like seven o'clock in the morning till uh 6 or something and we would eat there, you know, that whole year. Then after that um I was offered a scholarship at a tennis academy in Mexico [that] they were starting up . There was a craze for tennis academies in the US, there still is, but in Mexico they thought they could do the same thing. So there were two Italians that opened up uh an academy in Mexico and so uh the top ranked players would be living there and going to a private school, parents would pay for everything, private school and then practice afterwards, but they offered me a scholarship and my parents said, "Well that's great". And if I wanted to do it my dad had you know his visions of [a] professional tennis player so, yeah, [he] didn't consider what my mom thought or anything. I mean my mom was crying because I was fourteen and I was already going to be living with all these 16 [and]18 [year olds]. Because they were older they were able to, instead of going to the private school, it happened somehow in the academy that they said, "well we could focus in the morning on physical conditioning and then at night and in afternoon um the drills, the lessons, and practice matches and we would have these awesome players. So, we would only have tutors tutoring the kids here and [they would] take the tests for adult education like the GED type of thing. Take a test for the subject and whatever. So, they could do that but I couldn't because I was fourteen and the minimum age was fifteen or sixteen. So they were ok with [me] just not doing anything. And my parents didn't mind and the coaches didn't think much of it because they were saving on paying me, the only under fifteen years old, they would have to be paying me private school, and so they saved that money so I didn't go to school. **(When)** For five consecutive years in my age division, **(Who)** [I was] number one in **(Where)** Mexico. My **(Who)** dad was of course in heaven. I enjoyed the friendships better than the actual playing and competing. My dad didn't know that, [he] thought I was into [it] like he was. **(What)**When I went back to school I was sixteen, I got out of the [tennis] academy and I was sick of tennis, it was too much.

My sister married and American from San Diego and he thought that it wasn't right that I wasn't in school and that my dad was so fanatical [about] tennis and so he said when they got married and she was pregnant "It would be nice if my sister, has company and help with the baby and Reina could be learning English because realistically speaking maybe she won't make it in the pros and then she would have the opportunity to play college tennis." So, my dad was thinking of college tennis maybe as a stepping stone to go again to try to be pro, not about the education. Otherwise my father never would have [agreed]. My brother knows stuff about education. And so [my brother in law and sister] wrote papers, they were my legal guardians over the week and then I would go home [to Tijuana] on the weekends or play tournaments on the weekends. I went to high school without being in school since the sixth grade (laughter) and they just tested me with English to find out if I had some English. And they just put me as a junior first because of my age and I was so scared because I hadn't…I mean I had been reading the books for adult education so that one day I could take all the test and pass them and stuff, but I never got the chance to, and even if I did probably I wouldn't have passed them because how can you remember all that stuff in one day just to take a test…

Evaluation: So what?

My English [got] better [and] better. I mean it was easy through the television, and then there was tennis you know…just being around kids with tennis uh they couldn't speak Spanish so everybody…it was a big deal for them to you know, "do you know how to say this…oh…you don't know what that is?" They were always explaining things to me. So, I was never embarrassed of not knowing that much, I mean, I felt proud of what I was learning. But um, going to school it was different having to read the textbooks [in] English that people didn't speak, I mean the different English spoken and written and stuff like that. I used the dictionary a lot, I asked a lot of questions um but from the first day in high school the counselors, uh alphabetically I got a counselor, and said "ok you are going to go to miss [Jones] the ESL instructor and she is going to test you on how much English [you know]," They weren't talking to me they were talking to my brother-in-law because he went with me. So he left me there and then he picked me up. So the lady was saying, "ok can you say, 'refrigerator'?" And, I think that was a word that was…"oh she can say refrigerator you know her conversation's good and stuff and whatever."

Result: What finally happened?

So they put me in junior year and I got my class schedule and my brother-in-law came and picked me up, he was so mad; my schedule was cooking, PE, not ESL but reading, and um consumer math or something; it was just very easy classes. And I didn't know anything about how schools went in [San Diego], I thought everybody in the 11 grade took those classes, but my brother-in-law was so mad and he went in again, all the doors were closed because there was only a line of parents and students going in, and uh I remember he was knocking and everything and we went in. He

was very wired so his face was red and he was literally yelling at the counselor, saying that, you know, just because she is Mexican, she's fresh from Tijuana, and ok she hasn't had school these years but, you know, you could test her on what she knows because I did tell him I've been reading these books I know something about some algebra and stuff like that, instead of just automatically putting her in addition-subtraction math because you know she plays tennis and she wants to go to college. And they said "oh, she plays tennis, she is going to be on the tennis team," so total change of classes and I got classes that looked good with my brother-in-law. I had algebra and I had history and um English-American literature and stuff like that, you know, according to my age. But the classes were with all the athletes and they weren't the same as the other classes but I had fun in them.

Coda: finish narrative

By the time I was a senior another counselor looked at my paperwork because, even though he wasn't my counselor, and he said "you're not ready for college, you have to stay another year, you know we have to change you from being a senior to being a junior so that you repeat," I had two English classes, I had American Literature and English Literature and different levels of something with a different group in Geometry and so I had to stay an extra year and my brother-in-law said "ok well, that's good."