SUCCESS STARTS HERE--HOW WE GOT TO COLLEGE AND WHAT MADE US STAY: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINO MALES' PERSISTENCE IN OBTAINING THEIR BACHELOR'S DEGREE

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By

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AUTHORIZATION TO SUBMIT

DISSERTATION

This dissertation of Raeshelle Meyer, submitted for the degree of Doctor of Education with a major in Educational Leadership and titled "Success Starts Here--How We Got To College And What Made Us Stay: A Phenomenological Study on the Lived Experiences of Latino Males' Persistence in Obtaining their Bachelor's Degree," has been reviewed in final form. Permission, as indicated by the signatures and dates given below, is now granted to submit final copies.

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ABSTRACT

This transcendental phenomenological study examined the factors that led to the successes of Latino males' persistence in obtaining their bachelor's degree. Through the lens of participants' lived experiences, first-generation Latino males unpack their experiences and describe how those experiences impacted their academic achievement to graduate with their bachelor's degree. Participants' stories illuminated Latino males' resiliency to persist without dropping out when facing adversity in both their academic and home environments. The results of this study indicated the necessity for both K-12 and four-year institutions to examine Latino males' educational experiences and how family, sense of purpose, school environments, and academic and social supports are integral to their success in obtaining a bachelor's degree. Moreover, this study strongly suggests that four-year institutions need to fully recognize and evaluate the programs and practices that may be causing Latino males to drop out without obtaining a bachelor's degree and, in turn, increase Latino male postsecondary bachelor's degree attainment and close the equity achievement gap. The future of the nation's Latino male students depends on it!

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Chapter I: Introduction

"The question I like to ask every child I visit in the classroom is, 'Are you going to college?' In this great country, we expect every child, regardless of how he or she is raised, to go to college." President George W. Bush, remarks at the Griegos Elementary School, Albuquerque, New Mexico, August 15, 2001 (Fry, 2002). The overall academic achievement among American youth showcases a striking disparity, with the Latinx population being one of the most vulnerable (Mollet et al., 2020; NCES, 2023c; Ponjuán et al., 2015; Salinas et al., 2019; Turcios-Cotto & Milan, 2013). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2024a), the percent of high school drop out for individuals 16-24 years old was the second highest for Hispanic students. In contrast to their White counterparts who had a dropout rate of about half at 4.3%. Hispanic students represented the second highest dropout rate among all race/ethnic groups. While there has been a dramatic improvement in high school graduation rates for Latinx students, the disproportionality and gap continues to be ever present and impacts enrollment and persistence to postsecondary education.

In 2020, Latinos represented 21.8% of undergraduate college students in the United States (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2022). While there has been an uptick of Latinos enrolled in college, the students are overrepresented in community colleges and continue to be underrepresented in four-year institutions (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2022). In 2019, the percentage of Latinos with an Associate's degree was 31%; increasing from 15% in 2000 (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2022). In addition, transfer to four-year universities, degree or certificate attainment is low for Latino students (Allen, 2016; Fry, 2002; García & Garza, 2016; Ponjuán & Hernández, 2016). Of interest, are Latino males as they are the

fastest growing and youngest population; research has demonstrated that little is known about the educational experiences of Latino males' and the obstacles and successes they encounter (Allen, 2016; Carey, 2016; G.A. García et al., 2017; Hines et al., 2019). From an equity lens, there is a sense that Latino males are in fact, vanishing traditional K-12 settings along with higher education institutions; specifically four-year institutions (G.A. García et al., 2017; Huerta & Hernández, 2021; Noguera, 2012; Pérez & Sáenz, 2017; Sáenz & Ponjuán, 2009; Sáenz et al., 2016). Moreover, many higher education institutions reflect virtually no Latino males with respect to overall population (Aud et al., 2010; G.A. García et al., 2017; Luis et al., 2023). The phenomenon of the vanishing Latino is reflective of Latino male students disappearing from the educational pipeline; both in the K-12 traditional setting and in higher education (Huerta & Hernández, 2021; Luis et al., 2023; Sáenz & Ponjuán, 2009; Sáenz et al., 2016). In 2014, understanding the critical issue of the lack of bachelor's degree attainment among minority men, Former President Barrack Obama instituted the My Brother's Keeper initiative (Luis et al., 2023). This federal program expands the educational and career opportunities specifically for young men of color (Luis et al., 2023).

The Latinx population represents about 18% of all undergraduates and falls in congruence with the U.S. Latinx population accounting for about 19% in 2020 (Mora, 2022). The college enrollment rate in 2018 were highest for Asian students ages 18 to 24 year old at 59%, followed by White students (42%), Black students (37 %) and Latinx students (36%). Despite continued enrollment increases for Latino students in higher education and increased completion rates, graduation rate gaps remain (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2022; Swail et al., 2004). According to the *Education Pays 2023 report,* between 1981 and 2021, the bachelor's degree attainment has widened for adults 25-29 by increasing from 17% to 22%

between White and Hispanic adults (Ma & Pender, 2023).

Some research has demonstrated that contributing financially to the family is one obstacle that inhibits Latino males from pursuing higher education; although Latino families want their sons to go to college, the expectations to help the family can become the priority (Clark et al., 2013; Covarrubias et al., 2021; Ponjuán & Hernández, 2016). Salinas et al., (2019) reports the structural inequities in higher education systems is one barrier Latinx students face. Accessing financial aid processes, admissions and applications are obstacles that become barriers for Latino males (Jobs for The Future, n.d.; Ponjuán et al., 2015; Sáenz et al., 2016).

Research suggest that Latino males are more likely to enroll in two-year programs as opposed to four-year universities (Ponjuán et al., 2015; Salinas et al., 2019). In 2022, Latinx students represented 37% of total enrollment in two-year institutions making them the most popular institution type (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2023a). Lack of knowledge of financial aid, enrollment, and actual cost of attending are among reason why Latino males choose two-year institutions over four-year (Ponjuán et al., 2015; Salinas et al., 2019). Research suggest that Latino males rely heavily on financial aid in order to participate in postsecondary education (Ponjuán et al., 2015; Turcios-Cotto & Milan, 2013). There is a significant number of Latino students that enter postsecondary education as low-income students; 32 % of independent Latino students earn less than $30,000 annually, while 33% of dependent Latino students earn less than $50,000 annually (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2022). Table 1 outlines the number of Associate's degrees awarded to Latinx and White students by gender in years 2010-11 and 2020-21.

Table 1

Associate's Degree Completion of Hispanic and White students

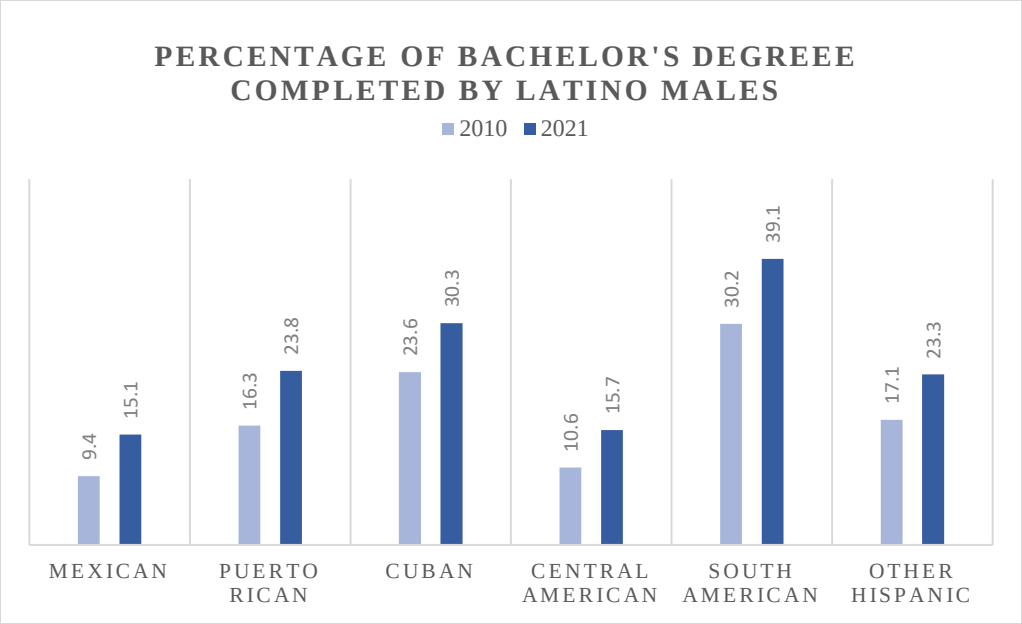
Ethnicity	2010-11 Male Female	2020-21 Male Female
Hispanic	47,911 78,386	92,004 174,113
White	238,012 366,733	197,603 311,112

Note: Comparison data on associate's degrees earned by White and Hispanic males and females for years 2010-11 and 2020-21 from NCES (2022) nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d21/tables/dt21_321.20.asp?current=yes. Public domain.

In contrast, when looking at four-year degree completion rates among Latino males, startling data in Figure 1 below reveals that just two Latino male subgroup had a bachelor's completion rate above 20% in 2010 (NCES, 2023a). Fast-forward, in 2021, data demonstrates a positive trend for bachelor's degree attainment; four out of the six Latino male subgroups completion rates were above 20%. While data in Figure 1 demonstrates a positive growth in the percentage of adults age 25 or older with a bachelor's degree for Hispanic male subgroups, the data remain clear that the disparity continues to be perpetuated as Hispanic males bachelor's degree attainment rates are far below their White male peers (NCES, 2022).

Figure 1

Percentage of Bachelor's Degree Completion by Latino Males 25 Years and Over



Note: Comparison data on the percentage of bachelor's degree attainment for Latino male subgroups 25 years and over for years 2010-11 and 2020-21 are from the NCES (2023a) https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d22/tables/dt22_104.40.asp. Public domain.

Furthermore, when looking at bachelor's degree completion rates by Latino subgroups in 2010 and 2021 in Figure 1 above, there is a glaring disparity between Mexican male students and other Latino populations with the exception of Central American males. The Mexican subgroup is one of the lowest percentage of bachelor's degree attainment of all Hispanic adult males 25 and over (NCES, 2023a).

There is a deficit of Latino males who enroll and complete college when compared to White males (Fry, 2002; Pérez & Sáenz, 2017; Ramirez et al., 2020; Yosso & Solórzano, 2006). While Latino males are persisting in their postsecondary education, it is imperative to know and understand what makes those Latino males go on to higher education and why their completion

rates continue to be far below both their Latina female and White male peers (Kilgore & Wagner, 2017; Pérez & Sáenz, 2017).

Historically, Latino males have competed their bachelor's degrees at a far lower rate than their While male counterparts (Contreras & Contreras, 2015; NCES, 2023b; Ramirez et al., 2020). This data suggest that Latino males are falling short of completion with the White male population (Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Ramirez et al., 2020**)**. While there has been growth in college enrollment by Latino students, they continue to experience subpar college degree attainment rates- emphasizing that bachelor's degree attainment has remained flat over the last 25 years (Contreras & Contreras, 2015). This issue is not one of access as there are many institutions for these students to access in the nation (Contreras & Contreras, 2015). Low attainment rates of this population calls for a major shift in inequitable structural practices in higher education to better support all students (Sáenz et al., 2016). Table 2 outlines bachelor's degrees earned by Hispanic and White males in academic years, 2006-07, 2015-16, and 2020-21.

Table 2

Bachelor's Degrees Earned by Males Comparison 2006-07, 2016-17 and 2020-21

Ethnicity	2006-07	2015-16	2020-21
White	480,747	522,834	499,092
Hispanic	44,750	92,946	123, 256

Note: Comparison data on bachelor's degrees earned by White and Hispanic males for years 2006-07, 2015-16, and 2020-21 are from the NCES (2023b) https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d18/tables/dt18_322.40.asp. Public Domain.

Closing the higher education enrollment gap for Latino students has begun to happen; however, graduation rates continue to be far below their White peers (G.A. García et al., 2017; Pérez & Sáenz, 2017; Ponjuán & Hernández, 2016; Ramirez et al., 2020; Sáenz et al., 2016; Turcios-Cotto & Milan, 2013; Yosso & Solórzano, 2006). Glaring gaps in bachelor's degree attainment are further illuminated as only 16% of all bachelor's degree conferred in 2019-20 were Latino students, compared to White students at 61% (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2022). There is a need to make a pivot in postsecondary institutions away from the predominantly oppressive norms that have been practiced (Yosso & Solórzano, 2006). Underscoring oppressive norms in higher education, Taylor et al., 2023 states "Higher education in the United States is founded on a Eurocentric epistemological perspective based on white privilege and "American democratic" ideals of meritocracy, objectivity, and individuality" (Taylor et al., 2023).

High school preparation is also a contributing factor in the success or lack thereof for Latino male students (Murphy & Murphy, 2017). Many Latinx students attend high schools that are low performing and thus are "underperforming" when they enter college (Murphy & Murphy, 2017; Rodriguez & Oseguera, 2015). According to Rodriguez & Oseguera (2015) low expectations for performance, deficit culture bias, and the lack of mentoring programs can account for why Latinx students are not college- ready. Moreover, educational institutions often lack transfer and transition information to both Black and Latino males (Jackson & Knight-Manuel, 2019).

Providing opportunities for students to earn college credit while in high school has been an educational priority for several decades (Adams et al., 2020; Bragg et al., 2006; Walk, 2020). While schools play a pivotal role to inspire and encourage learning, they also serve to support

students who are from low-income families in college access (Carey, 2016). These programs have one common philosophy; that is, to provide access and opportunity to postsecondary education (Barnett et al., 2015; Hoffman et al., 2009; Kilgore & Wagner, 2017; Somers et al., 2002). Dual enrollment, one of the pathways high school students can access college credits, means that students are dually enrolled in both high school and college, but students may not necessarily receive high school credit (Bragg et al., 2006). Participation in dual enrollment for high school students has increased substantially 75% from 2002 to 2011 (Kilgore & Wagner, 2017). Such increase can be pointed to an expansion of access to a wider range of students from what historically was offered and intended for advanced and gifted students (Kilgore & Wagner, 2017).

Data on earning college credits in school has revealed that the number of college credits earned in high school directly correlates to student's persistence and attainment of a postsecondary degree (N. García et al., 2018; Song & Zeiser, 2019) In examining how persistent students were in obtaining a bachelor's degree in conjunction with credits earned while in high school, data revealed that there was a significant association between how many credits earned while in high school in relationship to obtaining a bachelor's degree (N. García et al., 2018; Song & Zeiser, 2019). To illustrate this point, a research study by N. García et al. (2018), showed that high school students who completed less than 19 college credits in high school were less likely to complete a college degree. However, those students completing more than 19 credits during their high school experience, were more likely to be college completers. A 2009 study found that on average, early college high school students earned 23 college credits when they graduated high school (American Institutes for Research, 2009). Conversely, studies also suggest that earning

college credits, no matter how many, is significant in obtaining a postsecondary degree (N. García et al., 2018; Kuhlmann, 2017; Muñoz et al., 2014).

Closing the achievement gap has been a persistent and elusive goal for education reform (Muñoz et al., 2014; Turcios-Cotto & Milan, 2013; Woodcock & Olson Beal, 2013). The reality that minorities are less likely to enroll in college than other students has put high school accelerated programs in the forefront as they are designed to ensure that traditionally underrepresented students including: low-income, minority students, English Language Learners, and those who are the first graduate in their families have access to postsecondary experiences (Barnett et al., 2015; Gilson & Matthews, 2019; Kaniuka & Vickers, 2010; Muñoz et al., 2014; Walk, 2020; Woodcock & Olson Beal, 2013). While dual enrollment programs in community colleges have existed for decades, the purpose and mission behind dual enrollment has shifted from an escape of sorts for academically advanced students, toward a philosophy of creating a college-going culture primarily to target underrepresented students (Hoffman et al., 2009; Kaniuka & Vickers, 2010; Kilgore & Wagner, 2017). Creating access to college, especially for rural and low-income students who may not have opportunities for advanced coursework, aligns with the goal to narrow the achievement gap while creating pathways for students to earn college credits in concert with high school academics (Adams et al., 2020; Hoffman et al., 2009; Song & Zeiser, 2019).

This is further challenging for first-time college goers and low-income students who typically do not have that kind of cultural capital, thereby illustrating that college campuses have processes where cultural assumptions are made; this is just one inequity and barrier that exists for traditionally underserved students (Mollet et al., 2020; Ponjuán et al., 2015). First-generation college students are much more likely to be of Latino descent than any other racial group. In

2015-16, 44% of Latino students were the first in their family to go to college, compared to 22% of White students (Excelencia in Education, 2019; Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2022). Moreover, community colleges excel at forming partnerships and collaborations to provide a variety of coursework to meet the needs of both traditional and nontraditional aged students (Kilgore & Wagner, 2017; Williams & Southers, 2010). To this end, it is these partnerships that allow community colleges to serve a diverse student population and, in turn, have become an access point to higher education (Song & Zeiser, 2019; Williams & Southers, 2010).

Research indicates completing a postsecondary degree affords higher income, job security, and economic stability (Cerezo et al., 2013; Fernandez, 2018). Earning a postsecondary degree in the United States is correlated to increased income, a stable job, and health benefits (Ma & Pender, 2023). When there is a productive economy, it generates a higher living standard (Ma & Pender, 2023). Thus, a college education is an integral piece to a promising, successful future if a person is willing to pursue and complete a postsecondary education (Carey, 2019; Pike et al., 2015). Earning college credit before college can impact enrollment and degree attainment for many students (N. García et al., 2018; Kuhlmann, 2017; Muñoz et al., 2014). Table 3 illustrates the education attainment along with the weekly earnings and unemployment percentage associated for 2022.

Table 3

Educational Level Earnings and Unemployment Rates of 2022

Educational Attainment	Unemployment rate %	Median weekly earnings
Professional Degree	1.4%	$2,080
Master’s degree	1.9%	$1,661

Bachelor's degree	2.2%	$1,432
Associate's degree	2.7%	$1,005
Some college, no degree	3.5%	$935
High school diploma	4.0%	$853
Less than a high school diploma	5.5%	$682

Note: The data above is for persons who are 25 years and older. U.S. Department of Labor Statistics (https://www.bls.gov/emp/tables/unemployment-earnings-education.htm). Copyright 2023 by U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2023), those that hold a high school diploma have median weekly earnings of $853.00, while those that hold a bachelor's degree have a median weekly earnings of $1,432.00 per week. This represents an increase in weekly earnings of almost 68% (U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2023). Furthermore, the table illustrates that unemployment rates were 4.0% for those that hold a high school diploma, as opposed to just 2.2% for those that hold a bachelor's degree (BLS, 2023). According to the NCES (2024b), in general, individuals who had a higher level of education earned more in 2022. The median annual earning for full-time workers ages 25-34 were $41,800 for high school graduates as opposed to $66,600 for those who earned a bachelor's degree. As such, among workers who had completed a bachelor's degree the median annual earnings for Asian groups were the highest followed by those who were White (NCES, 2024a). There is a strong economic benefit of having a postsecondary education; however, the matriculation rates, while increasing, still falls short for students of color in particular (Carey, 2019; Mansell & Justice, 2014). Despite the economic advantages of having a postsecondary degree, student's aspiration to go-on and complete their

postsecondary education remains far less for underserved populations than their White counterparts (Carey, 2019; Somers et al., 2002; Turcios-Cotto & Milan, 2013).

Statement of the Problem

While there has been progress in diversifying the demographics and providing access to students enrolling in college, inequities in both college persistence and completion of degrees remain (American Council on Education, 2018). Disrupting the systemic injustices with the intention to support efforts to close the enrollment and achievement gaps for underserved students; specifically Latino males underscores the importance of this study. The Latinx population is the fastest growing population in the United States and while the enrollment of Latinx students has steadily increased, completion of bachelor's degree's rates have not (Anthony et al., 2021; Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2022). There is a notion that Latino males are vanishing from four-year institutions given the lack of degree completion along with their female counterparts both completing and enrolling at far higher rates (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2022; Sáenz & Ponjuán, 2009). While this may be true, research is needed to lift up the voices and successes of Latino males who have persisted and completed their bachelor's degree.

Fewer studies have focused on the go-on rate of Latinx students specifically, males to four-year institutions (Mollet et al., 2020; Salinas et al., 2019; Turcios-Cotto & Milan, 2013). Even fewer studies have examined the successes and barriers of Latino males in bachelor's degree completion in postsecondary education. Finally, there is a breadth of research on Latino males going on to community college; however, current research is limited on Latino males who go on to four-year institutions and successfully complete their bachelor's degree and graduate in Oregon (Crisp et al., 2015; Evans, 2009; Lee et al., 2017; Saunders & Serna, 2004).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the lived experiences of Latino male students regarding the barriers that are linked to their academic success in their postsecondary education. This research study focused on investigating the lived experiences of six Latino male students who were successful in completing their bachelor's degree and attended a four-year institutions in Oregon. The overall intent of this study is capture the true essence of Latino males' in-depth perspective on barriers and successes they encountered in their persistence in attaining their bachelor's degree.

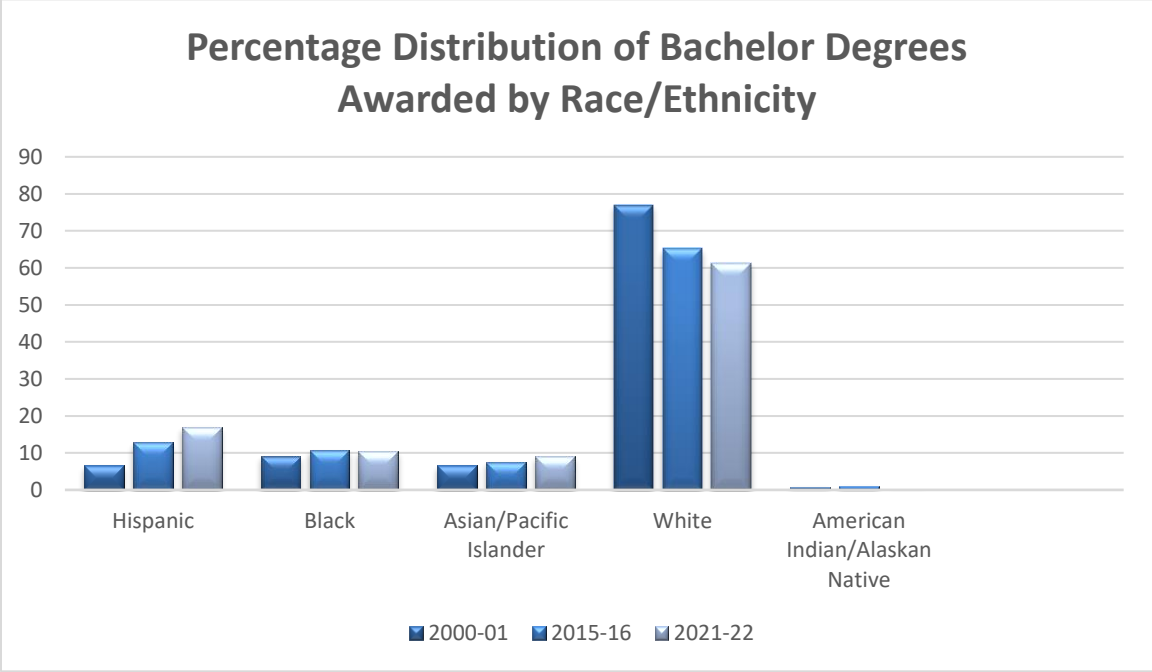
Background

Martin Castro, Chair of the Civil Rights Commission, elevated the importance and impact of education for Latinos by so eloquently stating that "Education is one of the most important civil rights issues... Once you have an education you can't be oppressed, you can't be led astray" (Vasquez, 2013). Mr. Castro continued and summarized that once an individual obtains an education, this becomes the foundation through which a transformation unfolds and has irreversible and has lasting effects on their communities. Echoing Martin Castro, education benefits individuals, families, and communities alike. Latino communities understand the value of education and encourage their youth to pursue higher education (Agger et al., 2018; Clark et al., 2013). This is evidenced by data from NCES (2023b) and is demonstrated in Figure 2 below. Data in Figure 2 demonstrates the percentage of distribution of students awarded bachelor's degrees between the years 2000-01 and 2021-22 more than doubled for Hispanic students and represents a 319% overall increase in the number of bachelor's degrees conferred from 77,745 in 2000-01 to 325,929 in 2021-22. In addition, a nearly 80% increase in bachelor's degree attainment was held Black students between the years of 2000-01 and 2021-22 while

Asian/Pacific Islander saw an increase of over 121% in those same comparison years. White students' degree attainment decreased from 77% in 2000-01 to 58.8% in 2021-22. As opposed to Hispanic student degree attainment increased by more than doubling between 2000-01 and 2021-22. Overall, this data suggests that parents of Latinx students are supportive of their children to go to four-year institutions and that those students are enrolling at an increasing rate (Capers, 2019; Carey, 2022).

Figure 2

Percentage Distribution of Bachelor's Degrees Awarded by Race/ethnicity: Academic Years 2000-01, 2015-16, and 2021-22



Note: The data above represents bachelor's degree that were conferred by race and ethnicity in years 2000-01, 2015-16, and 2021-22 by the NCES (2023b) https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d23/tables/dt23_322.20.asp. Public domain.

While this data does demonstrate a significant increase in Latinx students pursuing their bachelor's degrees, there are large gaps in the overall distribution of

bachelor's degrees awarded between White students and their peers from other races. While White students' degree attainment dropped about 18 percentage points between the years 2000-01 and 2021-22, they continue to hold the largest share of bachelor's degrees during the period between 2000-01 and 2021-22 (NCES, 2023b).

Although there is a push for Latinx youth to enroll in postsecondary education, statistics demonstrate that with the exception of Native American and Alaska Natives, Latinx students are less likely to persist to college (Ramirez et al., 2020). Additional data suggest that while a larger proportion of Latinx students enroll in higher education, less than one-quarter of all Latino males enrolled in postsecondary education graduate with a four-year degree (Mollet et al., 2020; Saunders & Serna, 2004; Somers et al., 2002; Strayhorn, 2010). Latino males are represented disproportionately in two-year colleges as well (G.A. García et al., 2017; Strayhorn, 2010). In the workplace, data reveals that Latino males are underrepresented in managerial professional positions compared to their While male counterparts; one reason for this discrepancy is that many Latinx males struggle to overcome the language barriers in schools (Strayhorn, 2010). Latinx parents value higher education for their boys and in fact, research supports that Latinx males will say that their families support them in pursuing postsecondary education (Agger et al., 2018; Clark et al., 2013; Sahay et al., 2016). However, data suggest a distinct disconnect between persistence and completion of degrees in higher education among Latino males in particular (Agger et al., 2018; Clark et al., 2013).

Table 4 below demonstrates a visual of degree attainment in four, five and six years of both White and Hispanic males at four-year higher education institutions for the 2016 entry cohort. The data from the table compares percentages of White and Latino

males and the number of years it took to complete their postsecondary degree at four-year postsecondary institutions. Data from Table 4 reveals that the percentage of Latino males graduating with in four, five, or six years is far less that their White Male counterparts. To illustrate, about 34% of Latino males graduated with their degree within four years as opposed to White males at nearly 48%; representing a disparity of 14%. For males who graduated within five years White males completed at just above 61%, while the percentage of Latino males completed represented about 55% of bachelor's degrees. Finally, approximately 55% of Latino males completed their degrees within six years compared to nearly 65% for their White male counterparts. There is also a larger discrepancy in the number of bachelor's degrees conferred for Latino and White males in term of time of completion within four years as opposed to six years.

Table 4

Gender and Race Degree Attainment in Four, Five or Six Years for Entry Cohort 2016

Race/Ethnicity	Four Year	Five Year	Six Year
White Males	47.7	61.8	64.7
Hispanic Males	34.5	55.4	54.6

Note: The data above represents graduation rates for students obtaining bachelor's degrees from four-year institutions by race/ethnicity, gender, and time to completion for entry cohort 2016 by the NCES, (2024) https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d23/tables/dt23_326.10.asp. Public domain.

In order to understand the lived experiences of Latino males who graduated with their bachelor's degree from a four- year institution, a transcendental phenomenological framework was adopted (Moustakas, 1994). The framework's intention is to immerse oneself fully so that

the pure essence of the experience can be understood (Moustakas, 1994). Created by the father of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), "transcendental phenomenology is a scientific study of the appearance of things, of phenomena just as we see them and as they appear to us in consciousness" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 49). Requiring the researcher to attempt to get to the essence of phenomena as experience is the pinnacle of the theory of transcendental phenomenology.

Research Question

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the lived experiences of Latino male students regarding the barriers that are linked to their academic success in their postsecondary education. This research study focused on investigating the lived experiences of six Latino male students who were successful in completing their bachelor's degree and attended four-year institutions in Oregon. The intent of this study was to explore research questions that would provide an inclusive view (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The research question guiding this study included:

1. What experiences influenced Latino males to persistently enroll without dropping out in completing their bachelor's degree?

Description of Terms

The following provides a list of key vocabulary and terms that were used throughout the study. Researchers state that providing a definition and meaning to terms adds both clarity to the research and creates a clear path of communication (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). For the purpose of this investigation, terms that were used in this study and require clarification and explanation are provided below.

Accelerated learning programs. A high school initiative intended to provide exposure and opportunities to high school students to earn college credits concurrently while in high school. Examples of such programs include: Advanced Placement, CLEP, Dual Credit, Early College, International Baccalaureate (Jagesic et al., 2022).

College-going rate. This reflects the percentage of all high schools students who graduate high school and go on to any postsecondary education. This includes any two or four-year programs and programs that are less than two years (Idaho Ed Trends, n.d.).

Dual credit. Refers to students enrolled in high school courses where they have the potential to earn both high school and college credit. An example of this could be students who are enrolled in Advanced Placement coursework. These students will receive high school credit, but may or may not receive college credit based on criteria of the test and college (Jagesic et al., 2022).

Dual enrollment. A dual enrolled student is one who is taking courses from two differing institutions concurrently; specifically dual enrollment courses are typically offered through a high school and a postsecondary institution (Ison, 2022).

English language learners. Refers to a diverse group of students whose native language is not English (U.S. Department of Education).

First-generation students. A first-generation student is defined as students whose parents did not graduate from college and may or may not have graduated from high school (Ishitani, 2003).

Graduation rate. The number of an institutions first time, first year undergraduate students who complete a degree within six years **(**Federal Student Aid, n.d.).

Go on rate. Also termed as immediate college enrollment, this measures the number of high school students who matriculate to college following high school graduation within a specified time frame (NCES, 2022).

Higher education. Types of education provided at any postsecondary institution that ends with the completion of a degree or certificate (Britannica, n.d.).

Hispanic. Referring to individuals who are of Latin American descent and who are Spanish speaking (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).[1]

Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs). Defined by the Higher Education Act, these are higher education institutions that enroll at least 25% undergraduate full-time Hispanic students (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Latinx. A gender inclusive term used to describe people of Latin American origin who do not subscribe to a gender specific structure of Spanish grammar (del Río-Gonzalez, A.M., 2021).[1]

Low income. Low-income is defined as a family of four's income in 2021 falling at or below 26,500. If the family is larger add $4,500 for each family member and if the family is smaller, subtract $4,500 (Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, n.d.).

Persistence. A student's ability to continuously enroll in college without interruption and is in pursuit of a degree and attends full time (Hably et al., 2012; Lenning, 1978).

Postsecondary. For this study, postsecondary refers to any level of education after high school including: college, university, or trade school (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

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[1] The terms "Hispanic" and "Latinx" are used interchangeably throughout this paper and are terms meant to both describe and summarize the population of people living in the United States and are of that ethnic background.

Racially minoritized populations. Include student populations such as African Americans, Latinx, Native Americans, Alaskans, women, people who experience disabilities, and first-generation college students (Roughton, 2016; Snodgrass Rangel et al., 2020).

Scaffolding. Supports that are put in place that help students reach their full potential. Instructional supports can include peers, mentors, parents, teachers, computer or paper-based tools that, without, students may not be able to fully access or gain the skill being taught (Belland, 2014).

Success. For the purposes of this study, success encompasses six important components in postsecondary education including: academic achievement, satisfaction, career success, acquisition of skills and competencies, persistence, and attainment of learning objectives (York et al., 2015).

Traditional-age student. Students between the ages of 18-23 years (Justice & Dornan, 2001).

Underrepresented. For the purposes of this study, underrepresented refers to marginalized groups including: Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, and two-spirit (LGBTQ2+), people who have disabilities, women, people who come from low-income backgrounds (Arif et al., 2021).

Significance of the Study

Nationally, data is demonstrating that Latino men are persisting to higher education; however, their completion and graduation rates rank among the lowest of all underserved students in postsecondary education; including their female counterparts (Clark et al., 2013; N. García et al., 2018; Ramirez et al., 2020). Research has demonstrated that there is a distinct correlation between one's educational level and their earnings over time (Mansell & Justice,

2014; Turcios-Cotto & Milan, 2013). The vanishing Latino in completion of their bachelor's degree in four-year higher education institutions underscores the significance of this study (Evans, 2009; G.A. García et al., 2017; Pérez & Sáenz, 2017). To address this problem, a need to examine the determination of Latino males to persist and complete their bachelor's degree is needed (Clark et al., 2013; Evans, 2009; Pérez, 2017). Understanding the trials and tribulations of Latino males in their journey to degree completion can provide a much needed lens on supports needed to ensure their successes (Kundu, 2019; Moní et al., 2018; Ponjuán & Hernández, 2016). Through Latino males' voices, their stories of triumph, hardship, barriers, and victories can be heard. Much of the literature discusses the lack of success Latino males have in degree completion in their postsecondary education; therefore, it is critical that the stories of success are uncovered and told by this population (Clark et al., 2013; Evans, 2009; Kundu, 2019; N. García et al., 2018; Moní et al., 2018; Pérez, 2017).

The goal of this qualitative, phenomenological research study was to examine the lived experiences of six Latino males and their success in postsecondary education in obtaining their bachelor's degree. In the voices of Latino males, there can be a better understanding of what future Latino males may face in their higher education experiences. Furthermore, this study will enhance understanding of the phenomenon while also adding depth and value to the limited research on Latino male students; specifically, those who are attending four-year institutions in Oregon. This investigation can provide a map for both K-12 and higher education institutions to learn and understand factors that enable Latino male students to experience success. These successes can then inform higher education institutions on retaining and graduating Latino males.

Overview of Research Methods

A narrative approach using a phenomenological, qualitative research design is the foundation of this study and was utilized to examine the lived experiences of Latino male students regarding their persistence and tenacity in their postsecondary education (Husserl, 2017; Moustakas, 1994). This research study focused primarily on Latino male students who attended four-year institutions in their postsecondary education. In addition, participants were all within three semesters of completing their bachelor's degree or had completed their bachelor's within the past five years. The intention of this study was to understand what factors played a role in each student's success. Qualitative research, according to Creswell and Guetterman (2019), is preferred when the variables in the research problem are not known. Furthermore, a qualitative approach is best suited when the literature yields little regarding the phenomenon being explored; therefore, the researcher must go to the participants in the study in order explore the research problem (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Moreover, an interpretive model was a foundational component to this study. Interpretation in qualitative research calls for the researcher to focus on how human beings understand their experiences (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Since this study relies on a deep understanding of Latino males' experiences, perspectives, and knowledge, a phenomenological research design was the most appropriate (Moustakas, 1994; Peoples, 2021). This study emphasizes the lived experiences and the importance of those experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

A pilot interview was conducted using the interview protocol with two Latino males who were within three semesters of graduating with their bachelor's degree at a university in the Pacific Northwest. Participants who participated in the pilot interviews were not included in the participant sample. The primary purpose of conducting a pilot interview was to allow the

researcher to assess the questions being asked during the interview to ensure all questions were worded correctly and made sense to participants. The pilot study also assists the researcher in ensuring the study has a sound study design (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The purpose of conducting a pilot study is three-fold: refine research questions, critique the research instrument and methods, and estimate what resources and how much time will be needed prior to the full-scale study (Ismail et al., 2018).

Research methods used in this study follow phenomenological research methods that involve preparing the data for analysis, phenomenologically reducing the data, immersing in imaginative variation, and illuminating the essence of the lived experience (Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015). Six Latino males were recruited through purposeful and snowball sampling to participate in one to one interviews. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Following the transcription of interviews, data analysis followed Moustakas' Modification of the Van Kaam method of analysis of phenomenological data (Moustakas, 1994). The eight-step model creates a pathway to ensure that there is a specific process to analyze and interpret the data collected. Steps in this model include: Horizonalization, Reduction and Elimination, Clustering and Thematizing the Invariant Constituents, Final Identification of the Invariant Constituents and Themes by application, Individual Textural Descriptions, Individual Structural Descriptions, Textural-Structural Descriptions, Synthesis-Composite Descriptions (Moustakas, 1994).

Conclusion

The primary purpose Chapter I was to familiarize the reader with the context of the study. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to capture the essence of the lived experiences of Latino males who will graduate and who have graduated with their bachelor's degree from four-year institutions in Oregon. In addition, this chapter offered an overview an

overview of the research and also described the rationale in conducting the study. Four- year institution enrollment and cohort data bachelor's degree graduation data for Latino males was presented to build a solid foundation for the study. Data to demonstrate Latino males who enrolled at four-year institutions and continued on through graduation of a bachelor's degree by cohort was not available, thus the researcher discussed persistence through the lens of enrollment data and bachelor's degree attainment to draw out the significance of the study. Key terms were also highlighted in this chapter to help orient the reader and ended with an overview of the research methods. Chapter II will present a review of current research on the centrality of the dissertation literature review in research preparation. Chapter III will describe the methodology, research design, and procedures for this investigation. Chapter IV details how the data was analyzed and provides both a written and graphic summary of the results. Chapter V is an interpretation and discussion of the results as they relate to the existing body of research relevant to the dissertation topic.

Chapter II: Review of Literature

The overall academic achievement among American youth showcases a striking disparity, with the Latinx population being one of the most vulnerable (Mollet et al., 2020; Ponjuán et al., 2015; Salinas et al., 2019; Turcios-Cotto & Milan, 2013). According to the NCES (2023c), from 2010-2021, overall high school dropout rates decreased from 8.3% to 5.2%. Dropout rates for Black students declined from 10.3 to 5.9 percent and the decline for Hispanic students went from 16.7 percent to 7.8 percent. In contrast to their White counterparts, the dropout rates were not distinctly different than Black students at 4.1%; however significantly higher than Hispanic students (NCES, 2023c).

While the Latinx population has increased, it makes sense that the postsecondary go-on rate among underserved populations has steadily increased (Clark et al., 2013; Mora, 2022; N. García et al., 2018; Pérez & Sáenz, 2017; Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2022). It is estimated that in the year 2030, Hispanics will account for 24% of the work force in the United States (Murphy & Murphy, 2017). Between 2020 and 2030, Hispanic share of the labor force will account for 78% on the new workers (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, 2024). In addition, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, by 2030, Hispanics will represent 1 out of 5 workers in the workforce (Dubina, 2021). Although this data is trending in a positive direction, the completion rates for these populations have not increased (Clark et al., 2013; Excelencia in Education, 2019; N. García et al., 2018; Murphy & Murphy, 2017; Pérez & Sáenz, 2017; Saunders & Serna, 2004). In fact, Latinx students are far more likely to enroll in two-year institutions rather four-year colleges or universities (Evans, 2009; García & Garza, 2016).

Community college are appealing because they provide an access point to higher education for minoritized students (Nora, 1987). Moreover, Latinx students tend to matriculate to

community colleges along with other students who are low-income, underrepresented, or first-generation because these institutions have created partnerships and built bridges with their local high schools (Bragg et al., 2006). Mendez-Newman (2007) and Baca (2007) report that approximately 60% of Latino community college students are enrolled in developmental or remedial courses in mathematics and reading before moving on to general curriculum coursework. According to Hood (2010) many Latino student arrive at community colleges ill-prepared in both math and writing. Rodriguez & Oseguera (2015) point to low performing schools where many Latino students attend as a major contributor why these students don't excel in college.

In the fall of 2022, approximately 34% of Latinx students are enrolled in four-year institution after graduating high school (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2023a). In 2012, Hispanics ages 18-24 years of age represent 19% of all students in this group with only 8% holding bachelor's degrees (Murphy & Murphy, 2017). This is lower than other underrepresented populations including Blacks who represented 14%, with 9% holding bachelor's degrees (Murphy & Murphy, 2017). Hispanic students in 2021 earned 15.9% of bachelor's degrees showcasing a dramatic increase from 2012 (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, 2024). Although there are increases in the number of Latinos earning bachelor's degrees, across higher education institutions, there continues to be stark gaps in the number of Latino males graduating with degrees (Clark et al., 2013; N. García et al., 2018; Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2022). In an attempt to help aid in solving this issue, there has been a significant increase in prioritizing supports and access to college coursework in high school for this population (Allen & Roberts, 2019; Mansell & Justice, 2014; Saunders & Serna, 2004; Walk, 2020).

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of Latino male students who were either within three semesters of competing their bachelor's degree and attended a four-year institution in Oregon or have completed their bachelor's degree within the last five years at a four-year institution in Oregon. The following review of literature explores multitude of educational disparities facing Latinx students, specifically focusing on Latino male students in order to better understand the realities of this group of students. This review of the literature will cover the five main bodies of literature that is pertinent to this study: (1) Accelerated learning and preparation, (2) Hispanic-Serving Institutions, (3) Types of supports, (4) Latino males in higher education, and (5) Persistence.

Accelerated Learning

The term "college readiness" has become a buzzword in recent education reform and focusses on student's academic readiness and preparation to attend postsecondary institutions following high school graduation (Lee et al., 2017). Accelerated Learning options first began as enrichment opportunities for the most gifted students (American Institutes for Research, 2013). More recently, accelerated learning is used to entice and engage middle and low achieving student with the intention to increase their learning and academic momentum especially for underserved students (American Institutes for Research, 2013). The idea of integrating high school with higher education dates back to 1930s and 1940s with Leonardo Koo's 6-4-4 plan (Kaniuka & Vickers, 2010; Kisker, 2006; Walk, 2020). Koo's 6-4-4 plan placed grades 7-10 in a junior high school and grades 11-14 in junior college (Kisker, 2006). Throughout the past century, educators have advocated for access and opportunities for high school students to pursue postsecondary coursework while in high school (Kisker, 2006; Mansell & Justice, 2014; Walk, 2020). Scholars, among others, cited cost savings for students, flexible schedules, allows for

accelerated learning, provides opportunities to higher education coursework, reduces drop outs, contributes to a college-going culture, improve students' motivation, prepares students for the rigor of college, and enhances curricular unity as benefits of combining high school with college (Hoffman et al., 2009; Kilgore & Wagner, 2017; Kisker, 2006; Zinth, 2016).

An astonishing 47 states in addition to the District of Columbia have dual credit policies in place (Kilgore & Wagner, 2017). Of the 47 states, 10 of those states require public high schools and public postsecondary institutions to provide dual credit (Kilgore & Wagner, 2017). While dual enrollment programs in community colleges have existed for decades, the purpose and mission behind dual enrollment has shifted from its initial philosophy from an escape of sorts for academically advanced students toward a philosophy of creating a college-going culture primarily to target underrepresented students (Adams et al., 2020; Allen & Roberts, 2019; Hoffman et al., 2009). Although many students take advantage of dual credit opportunities, many students do not (Mansell & Justice, 2014). Students report that financial reasons and not knowing about college credit options as to why they choose not to enroll (Mansell & Justice, 2014). Although dual credit gives access to high school students to postsecondary education, many underserved populations are not enrolling (Kilgore & Wagner, 2017). The research does suggest that accelerated programs have given opportunities to underrepresented students and that those programs do prepare students for college (Hoffman et al., 2009; Kuhlmann, 2017; N. García et al., 2018). High schools have assumed the prioritization to support students in being college-ready by offering different pathways for students to access college credit (American Institutes for Research, 2016). These pathways have a goal that is two-fold: prepare students academically for the rigor of college and develop students socially to be able to negotiate the expectations of college (Duncheon, 2020; Woodcock & Olson Beal, 2013). Currently, there are no data that

demonstrate enrollment, by ethnicity and sex or describes how students are doing in different types of accelerated coursework (Chatterji et al., 2021). Data from the Civil Right Data collection does showcase student participation in dual enrollment by student group. In the 2017-2018 school year, female students represented 9.0% of all students enrolled in dual enrollment coursework as opposed 7.2% of males (Fink, 2018). Further data reveals that Hispanic students accounted for 5.7% while White students held 10.3% in dual enrollment programs (Fink, 2018).

Following is a list of some accelerated programs that students in secondary school have access to. Although not a comprehensive list some accelerated program include the following: International Baccalaureate Program, Advanced Placement program, Credit by Exam, and Early College Design.

International Baccalaureate Program

As a global leader in international education, the International Baccalaureate is a non-profit organization known internationally for providing programs to education for fifty years (Dickson et al., 2018). There are four International Baccalaureate programs for students aged 3 to 19. In order for students to access the International Baccalaureate (IB) program, the school must be an authorized IB school (International Baccalaureate, n.d.). The IB program has grown in popularity over the last few decades, so much so, that it is offered worldwide in nearly 5,800 schools across more than 160 countries (International Baccalaureate, 2024). Together with Canada, the United States hosts 45% of all IB schools worldwide (Dickson et al., 2018). The mission of IB is to create a better, more peaceful world through challenging and rigorous programs (International Baccalaureate, 2012). The quality of the IB program include: a positive reputation for its concept driven, inquiry-based pedagogical framework, students are academically prepared for postsecondary education when they participate in IB programs,

parents believe that students' cultural fluency is developed, IB programs are heavily regarded as prestigious by universities, and finally, IB programs are viewed at a "platinum" education (Dickson et al., 2018).

Advanced Placement Courses

Initially designed for the most superior students, Advanced Placement (AP) program offers students an opportunity to earn college credit while also develop college-readiness (Kolluri, 2018; Trigatti, 2018). More recently, AP coursework has been extended and offered to serve students from marginalized backgrounds; therefore, equitable access has become a main tenant of AP (Kolluri, 2018). As with many accelerated programs, high schools offering at least one AP class has doubled since 1990, moving to 18,920 in the 2012-13 school year (Trigatti, 2018). In 2021, nearly 23,000 high schools offered at least one AP course with an average of 9.48 AP subjects per school (Kolluri et al., 2023). AP has a proven track record to help students prepare for college, gain admission, and experience success once on campus; however, leveling the achievement gaps among students of color, students from rural areas, and students from low-income families do not perform as well as their peers who are White, middle-class (Finn & Scanlon, 2020).

Credit by Exam

Credit by Examination (CBE) is an accelerated program in high school whereby students receive college credit for prior learning by demonstrating mastery of course content through a course examination (Kreplin, 1971). One such examination is called the College Level Examination Program (CLEP). The CLEP test is specifically designed to test students that overs introductory level college material (College Board, 2020). Students taking the CLEP may earn three or more college credits that can be used at over 2,900 postsecondary institutions (College

Board, 2020). In addition, CLEP offers 34 exams in history and social sciences; composition and literature; science and math; business, and world languages (College Board, 2020).

Early college designs

Early college high schools, a relatively new dual credit pathway that ensures all students have access to college credits, came to the educational forefront in 2001 (Adams et al., 2020; Allen, 2016; Allen & Roberts, 2019; Barnett et al., 2015; Bragg et al., 2006; Kaniuka & Vickers, 2010; Mansell & Justice, 2014; Muñoz et al., 2014; N. García et al., 2018). Early college high schools by definition are high schools located on or near a college campus and provide students with opportunities to simultaneously earn their Associate's degree and high school diploma (Adams et al., 2020; Allen, 2016; Allen & Roberts, 2019; Barnett et al., 2015; Bragg et al., 2006; Kaniuka & Vickers, 2010; Mansell & Justice, 2014; Muñoz et al., 2014; N. García et al., 2018). The impetus for the early college high school was not only to provide access and opportunity along with a rigorous curriculum, but was targeted to underserved populations (Adams et al., 2020; Kaniuka & Vickers, 2010; Mansell & Justice, 2014; Muñoz et al., 2014; N. García et al., 2018; Thompson & Ongaga, 2011). In addition, this model is unique from other dual credit models in that high school students attend their college classes inside the college classroom setting with other adult college learners (Adams et al., 2020; Allen, 2016; Allen & Roberts, 2019; Barnett et al., 2015; Berger et al., 2010; Bragg et al., 2006; Kaniuka & Vickers, 2010; Mansell & Justice, 2014; Muñoz et al., 2014; N. García et al., 2018). This reimagining of breaking the lockstep of graduating high school and then moving on to college provided students who may had never had opportunity to earn college credits, to not only, earn college credit in high school, but also graduate high school and their associate's in concert with one another (Kisker, 2006; Muñoz et al., 2014; Walk, 2020).

According to the Gates Foundation, the early college model was a way to invest in education and fight the inequalities that exist in traditional high schools (Allen & Roberts, 2019; Kaniuka & Vickers, 2010; Muñoz et al., 2014; Song & Zeiser, 2019; Walk, 2020). Foundations, philanthropic organizations, and the federal government have all put huge amounts of dollars toward "College and Career Readiness"; the early college high schools exemplify this mission (Allen & Roberts, 2019; Berger et al., 2010; N. García et al., 2018; Walk, 2020). Completion of postsecondary coursework is critical for the future success of underrepresented students; specifically Latino males (American Institutes for Research, 2009; Clark et al., 2013; Ponjuán et al., 2017; Rodriguez et al., 2016).

Hispanic-Serving Institutions

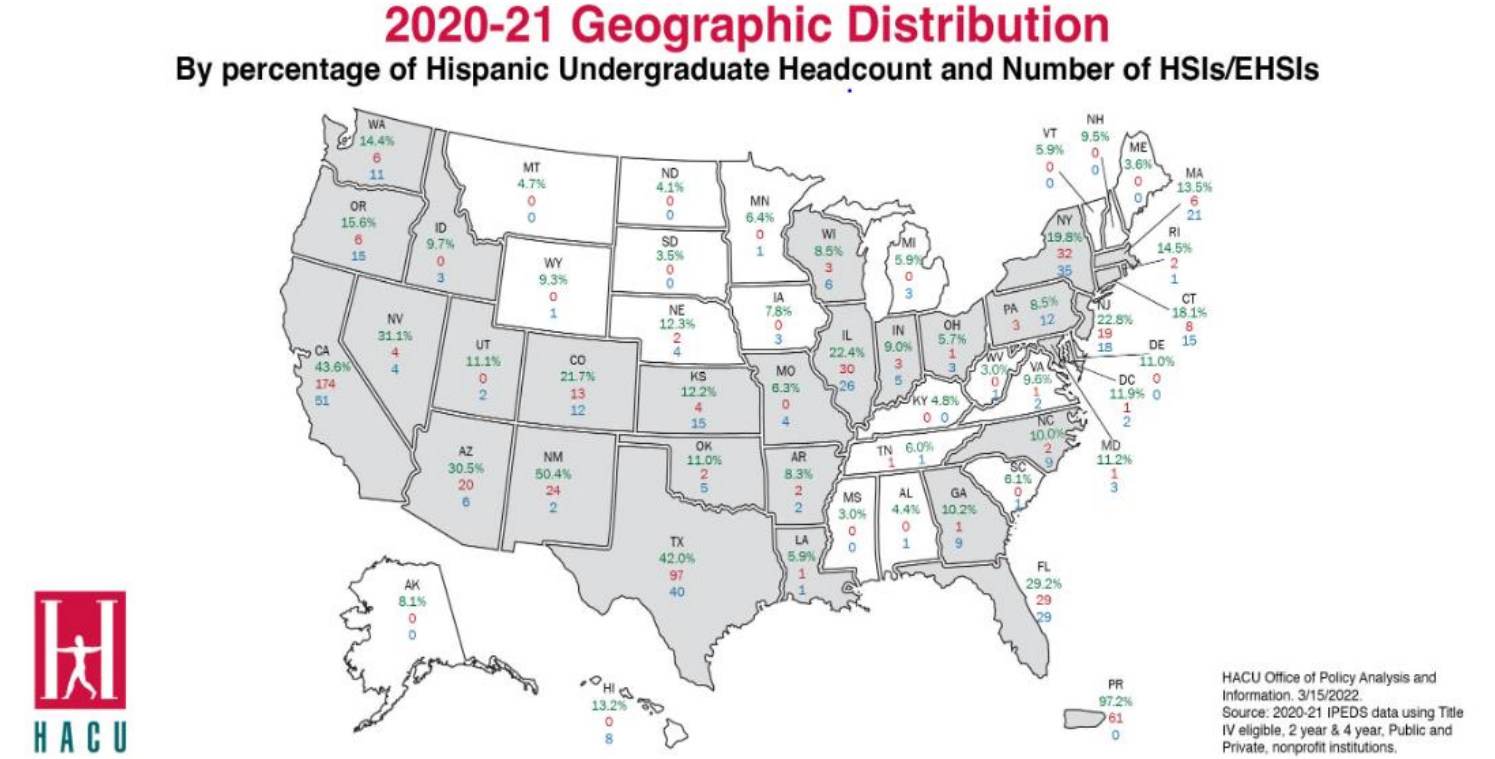
The Latinx student population across the United States has seen an exponential increase over the last several decades climbing from 1.5 million in 2000 to a high of 3.8 million in 2019 (Mora, 2022). Many barriers and challenges that Latinx students face in their K-12 education carry over into their postsecondary experience (Contreras & Contreras, 2015). Dropout rates and under preparedness can impact their postsecondary experience and thus, success (Contreras & Contreras, 2015). In the United States, the Latinx population is the most segregated ("The Role of Hispanic-Serving Institutions", 2013). Concentrated largely in the west, nearly half of all Latinx population resides in California and Texas ("The Role of Hispanic-Serving Institutions", 2013). Among Latinx subgroups, Mexican are concentrated largely in West and South regions, Cubans largely in the South, and Puerto Ricans in the Northeast (Contreras & Contreras; 2015; "The Role of Hispanic-Serving Institutions", 2013). Latinx college students are also concentrated at institutions in these same regions (Contreras & Contreras, 2015; "The Role of Hispanic-Serving Institutions", 2013).

Institutions that are concentrated because of their proximity to Latino populations are referred to as Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) (Duncheon, 2020). HSIs are defined as two- or four-year institutions with a 25% or greater Hispanic student enrollment among all full-time students (G.A. García et al., 2017; García & Ramirez, 2018; Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, 2024; U.S. Department of Education, n.d.; Venegas, 2021). In addition, HSIs must also maintain at least 25% Pell Grant eligibility in order to be considered an HIS (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, 2024; Venegas, 2021). Continuing to grow at a rapid rate, HSIs have gone from 137 institutions in 1990, to 229 in 2000, to 311 in 2010, and 572 in 2022, and 600 in 2022-23 (Excelencia in Education, 2024; Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, 2024). While HSIs are both two and four-year institutions, two-thirds of all HSIs are public and the majority are four-year institutions (Excelencia in Education, 2024). In 2020-21, there were a total of 559 HSIs housed in 29 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. In 2022-23, the number of HSIs increased to 600 and are located in 28 state, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia. (Excelencia in Education, 2024). HSIs in the academic year 2020-21 enrolled 2.2 million Hispanic undergraduate students (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, 2024). In 2022-23, HSIs enrolled 63% of all Latino undergraduates and only represent 20% of all higher education institutions (Excelencia in Education, 2024). Geographically, HSIs are diverse as about 53% are located in cities, 30% in suburbs, 10% in towns, and 7% in rural locations (Excelencia in Education, 2024). Figure 3 below outlines the geographic distribution of HSIs across the United States. Data in the figure also displays the percentage of undergraduate Hispanic students by state along with the total number of HSIs and EHSIs (Emerging Hispanic-Serving Institutions).

Figure 3

Number of Hispanic-Serving Institutions and Emerging Hispanic-Serving Institutions by State

Note: From HACU



http://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.hacu.net/images/hacu/conf/2022CapForum/ResourcesMenu/2022_HSI_FactSheet.pdf

HSIs originated in an effort to provide access to higher education focused on the Hispanic population (Contreras & Contreras, 2015; García & Ramirez, 2018; "The Role of Hispanic-Serving Institutions", 2013). Congressional hearings were held in 1983 to discuss access to higher education and two themes emerged: (a) Hispanics had limited access to higher education and (b) this population were concentrated in institutions that had limited funding to support Hispanic students' needs ("The Role of Hispanic-Serving Institutions", 2013).

While HSIs represent only 18% of all higher education institutions, they enroll 66% of all Hispanic undergraduate students in both Puerto Rico and the United States (Hispanic Association

of Colleges and Universities, 2024). HSIs routinely graduate 40% of Hispanic baccalaureate degree holders along with graduates in the technology, science, engineering and math fields ("The Role of Hispanic-Serving Institutions", 2013). In 2019, institutions that are identified as Hispanic-Serving Institutions had a 3.5% increase in Latinx graduation rates than non-HSIs (Capers, 2019; Venegas, 2021). Capers (2019) suggest that there is a correlation between the increase in graduation rates of White students and the graduation rates of Latinx students. To illustrate, a one percent increase in White students' graduation rates is directly related to a 59 percent increase in the Latinx graduation rate (Capers, 2019). In addition, there lies an association between retention and grit of students who attend HSIs (López & Horn, 2020). Students who attended HSIs and who have an aptitude to persevere with passion for their goals (grit) were found to exhibit a higher level of success and were able to overcome adversities they faced, managing stressors, and increased motivation (López & Horn, 2020). Research has demonstrated that Latino males who attend HSIs tend to develop their ethnic identity through leadership opportunities offered, that in turn, increases their feelings of belonging and increases their eagerness to persist (G.A. García et al., 2017).

HSIs on average, despite state federal funding, are less funded than other institutions, therefore being somewhat vulnerable (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, 2024). In the fiscal year 1995, Hispanic-Serving Institutions were first funded by a federal grant program. In the years that have followed, Congress has not been able to keep up with exponential growth of HSIs (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, 2024). HSIs are funded through various funding sources and have received over 3.1 billion dollars in dedicated funding; however, this is still not proportional to what other intuitions receive (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, 2024). For example, in 2010, HSIs were funded at $3,446 per student,

while other degree granting institutions received $5,242 (“The Role of Hispanic-Serving Institutions”, 2013). Moreover, this funding trend has yet to get better; the 2016-17 data on funding for HSIs showcases that they are funded at a startling two-thirds of the funding to educate a disproportionately low-income, historically marginalized students (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, 2024). Additional shocking data reveals that HSIs receive only 68 cents of every federal dollar compared to all other higher education institutions (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, 2024). This disparity calls for all stakeholders to join hands in supporting the growing number of HSIs. It is imperative to address the funding dilemma in order to support Hispanic students’ needs and provide supports to ensure they graduate, if the nation is going to meet its workforce needs (Excelencia in Education, n.d.).

Types of Support

Student success in college is defined in postsecondary education as persistence and an achieved a degree (“Major Theoretical Perspectives”, 2007). There is also emphasis on the importance of the quality of the student experiences as a factor in student’s success (G.A. García et al., 2017; “Major Theoretical Perspectives”, 2007). Studies focusing on successful Latino men have outlined the barriers they overcame, high school experiences, family supports, caring teachers, early college exposure, and innovative interventions by educational providers as indicators of their success (Carey, 2019). Moreover, research revolving around the degree attainment gap among Hispanic students point largely to the success of those students relies heavily on the quality of their college experiences and supports (Arbona & Nora, 2007; G.A. García et al., 2017; “Major Theoretical Perspectives”, 2007; Moní et al., 2018). Moreover, historically underrepresented students face challenges taking advantage of their school’s resources that make their experience difficult (Capers, 2019; “Major Theoretical Perspectives”,

2007). Latino males who have high academic goals have emphasized the importance of support networks as an essential component to their academic success (G.A. García et al., 2017; Pérez & Sáenz, 2017). Different types of support can influence the academic outcomes and performance of Latinx students (Baker, 2013).

Family Support of Latino Males

Almost all youth first hear of about college from family within the home (Covarrubias et al., 2021). For Latino males in particular, some research suggests that female family members have been identified as being a primary advocate and supporter of their educational pursuits (Sáenz et al., 2016). The role of family influence on Latino male success and educational aspirations is at the pinnacle of understanding achievement and postsecondary persistence and retention (Clark et al., 2013). Understanding the achievement of Latino males, is to understand a concept referred to as *familismo*-this is the cultural norms which involves a strong familial attachment (Clark et al., 2013; Covarrubias et al., 2021; López et al., 2019; Sáenz et al., 2016). As a cultural construct, *familism*o is a foundational and critical value held by the Latinx population. *Familismo* involves the loyalty, dedication, and commitment of all family members in decisions (Clark et al., 2013; López et al., 2019; Sáenz et al., 2016).

Culturally, Latino males are expected to provide for their family which is one reason why Latino males' educational aspirations do not often include postsecondary enrollment (Clark et al., 2013; Covarrubias et al., 2021). Contributing financially to the family is one obstacle that inhibits Latino males from pursuing higher education; although Latino families want their sons to go to college, the expectations to help the family can become the priority (Clark et al., 2013; Covarrubias et al., 2021). Moreover, data also suggest that Latino males are more likely to drop out of high school and withdraw from postsecondary education prior to graduating (Clark et al.,

2013). For males, educational aspirations were positively correlated with parent respect and parent expectations, but negatively correlated with positive perceptions of jobs in the local community (Agger et al., 2018). Noteworthy, is that parents' expectations are directly and indirectly linked to increases in postsecondary enrollment among adolescents (Agger et al., 2018; Sáenz et al., 2016). Furthermore, scholars continue to stress the critical discourse regarding aspirations to go to college by parents and family to their children (Carey, 2016; Sáenz et al., 2016).

Faculty Support

Higher education institutions often provide supports such as tutoring, faculty and student mentoring programs to promote academic success and continued perseverance among their students (Brooks & Allen, 2016). Research demonstrates that faculty and student involvement are positively correlated with differing academic outcomes as well as increasing student engagement and involvement in their higher education journey (Parra & Collins, 2018). Higher education faculty are essential in promoting success and achievement among Latino males (Pérez & Sáenz, 2017; Rodriguez et al., 2016). The review of the literature revealed that there is gap in what professors know about the issues Latino males face (Pérez & Sáenz, 2017). This is echoed by college and university students that demonstrated college professors need a greater amount of awareness of challenges Latino males face (Clark et al., 2013; Mollet et al., 2020; Pérez & Sáenz, 2017; Salinas et al., 2019). Further research indicates that professors may consider the value in what type of prior knowledge students bring that can be relevant to the subject matter being taught (Castillo-Montoya, 2017). To that end, through an increase in awareness, professors would find solutions on how to support Latino males and their success in degree attainment (Clark et al., 2013; Pérez & Sáenz, 2017; Rodriguez et al., 2016; Salinas et al., 2019).

Allen (2016) noted students benefit from one-to-one teacher help, strong relationships with faculty where trust was developed, and support and mentorship were fostered with college faculty; thereby providing opportunities for support to students. Students also described situations where they needed to gain confidence to interact with professors as well as other college students in class (Duncheon, 2020; Rodriguez et al., 2016). Rodriguez et al. (2016) noted that faculty engagement or lack thereof can have long term negative effects on Latino males. Data from that study revealed that Latino males made meaning out of their experiences with faculty (Rodriguez et al., 2016). Additional findings reveal that when Latino males feel faculty are not invested in them or do not portray an authentic care, that influenced their engagement in coursework (Pérez & Sáenz, 2017; Rodriguez et al., 2016). The degree that Latino males feel that their professors engage with them in their learning is low (Pérez & Sáenz, 2017). In fact, Latino males often feel disengaged in learning and do not receive positive academic appraisal (Pérez & Sáenz, 2017). Understanding the challenges Latino males face, may better help them succeed in postsecondary education and provide the scaffolding needed to complete their degree (Mollet et al., 2020; Salinas et al., 2019).

In addition, Capers (2019) suggests that faculty representation is positively correlated to Latinx graduation rates. In fact, faculty of color are more likely to support diverse undergraduate and graduate students through mentorship and research projects (Contreras & Contreras, 2015). Much of a higher education climate is reflected in how diverse the faculty is (Contreras & Contreras, 2015; “The Role of Hispanic-Serving Institutions”, 2013). For example, a less diverse faculty could suggest that cultural competence, being open to multiple viewpoints, and commitment to serving a diverse student population is not a priority for the college (Contreras & Contreras, 2015; The Role of Hispanic-Serving Institutions”, 2013). Finally, research has

demonstrated that faculty of color are more likely to engage with students of color through mentorship, research projects, and provide opportunities of equitable access in college classrooms (Contreras & Contreras, 2015).

Peer/Mentor Support

Creating a college-going culture means that communities support and encourage students to go to college (Allen & Roberts, 2019; Song & Zeiser, 2019). One of those supports is for institutions to have strong mentoring programs that could have a positive impact of Latino males pursuing higher education opportunities (Clark et al., 2013; Venegas, 2021). In addition, implementing a strong outreach program tailored for Latino males creates a welcoming environment and therefore, promote students' educational success (Clark et al., 2013).

Predicting graduation rates for Latinx students includes peer representation as an equally important indicator (Capers, 2019). Research demonstrates that campus environments that host a diverse students population improves students' sense of belonging, their level of comfort with the college environment, enhances institutional climate, and reduces marginalization of underserved students (Capers, 2019; Moní et al., 2018; Strayhorn, 2008). When college campus environments host a diverse student population, it encourages retention and persistence in degree attainment (Capers, 2019). Latino males rely heavily on peer support and networks to be engaged learners that lead to academic success (Capers, 2019; Pérez & Sáenz, 2017). Moreover, Latino male achievers have sustained academic determination through their peer networks (Pérez & Sáenz, 2017). Latino males emphasized that their successes lie within their peer groups who have the same high academic expectations as they do and rely on their peers for encouragement for their success (Pérez & Sáenz, 2017). These peer groups participate in activities that promote

success and leadership such as: weekend study groups, participating in undergraduate research, and attending graduate school (Pérez & Sáenz, 2017; Venegas, 2021).

Latino Males in Higher Education

As one of the fastest growing populations in the United States, Latinx students demonstrate not only a lower matriculation rate to postsecondary education, but lower degree completion rate than their White and African American counterparts (Allen, 2016; Carey, 2019; Clark et al., 2013; Moní et al., 2018; Ponjuán et al., 2015). Data for undergraduate enrollment in postsecondary institutions by ethnicity and race in years 2000, 2010, and 2018 demonstrate this problem in Table 5 as follows:

Table 5

Undergraduate Enrollment in Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions

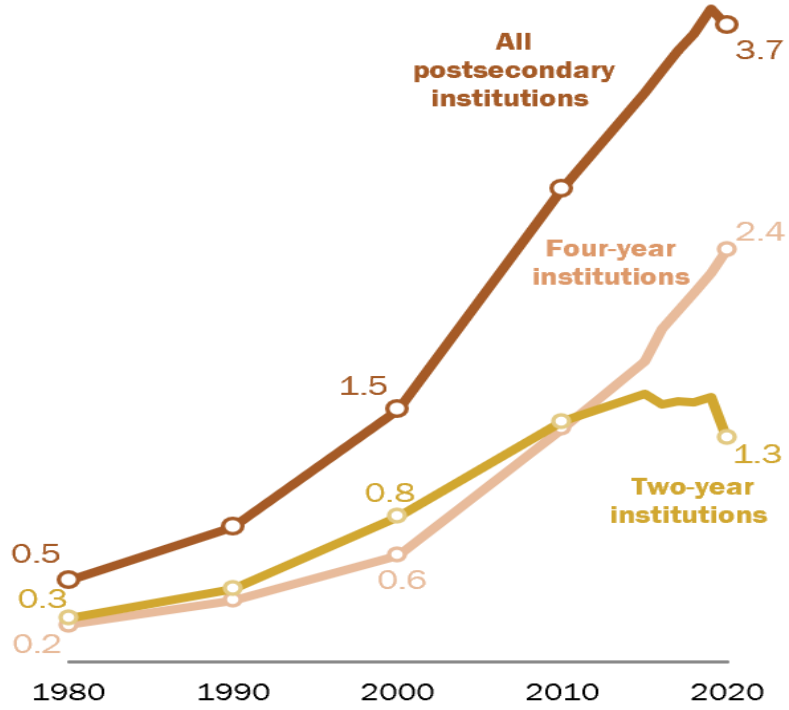
Ethnicity	2010	2019	2021
Hispanic	2.6	3.5	3.3
Black	2.7	2.1	1.9
White	10.9	8.5	7.8

Note. Enrollment in millions by the NCES, (2022) https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d22/tables/dt22_306.10.asp. Public domain.

According to the Mora (2022), enrollment of Hispanic students in four-year institutions has reached an all-time high. In fact, Figure 4 below showcases that over the last two decades, Hispanic enrollment in college and universities has more than doubled. This suggests that while degree enrollment for the Hispanic population has increased steadily over the last decade, there continues to be an increasing educational achievement gap between college enrollment and retention (Clark et al., 2013; Moní et al., 2018; Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2022).

Figure 4

Fall Enrollment of Hispanic Students at U.S. Postsecondary Institutions



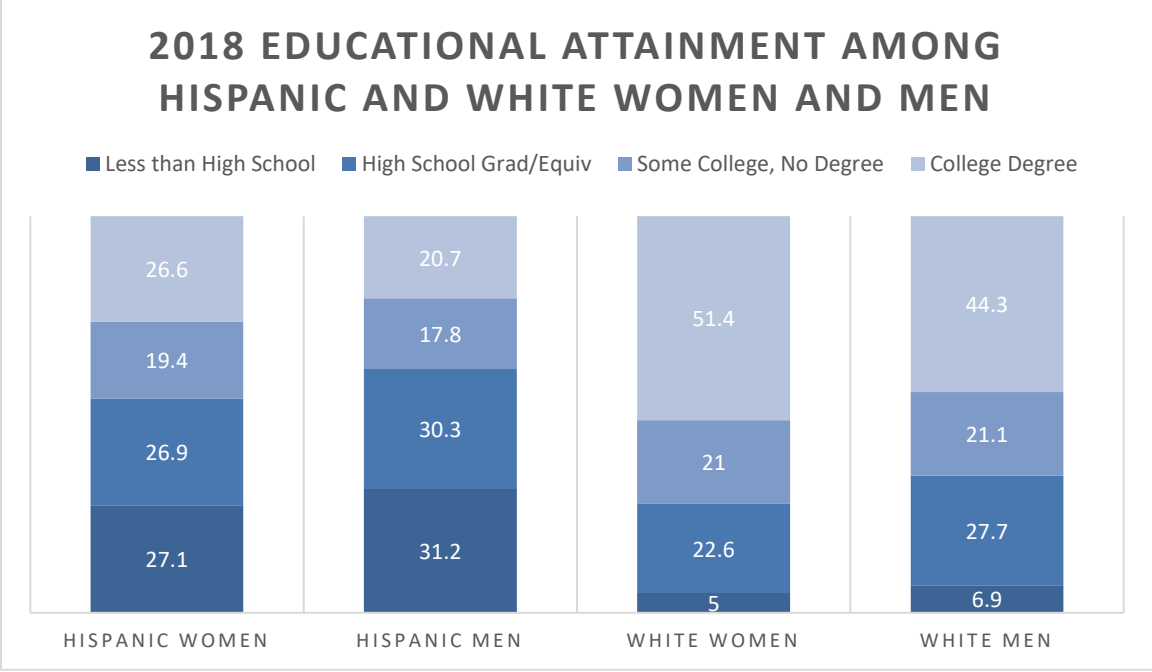
Note: Numbers are represented in millions from Mora (2022) https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/10/07/hispanic-enrollment-reaches-new-high-at-four-year-colleges-in-the-u-s-but-affordability-remains-an-obstacle/ft_2022-10-07_hispaniceducation_01a/. Public domain.

The Hispanic population accounts for 3.4 million students enrolled in postsecondary education in 2018 as compared to 8.7 million White students. To further complicate this educational issue, there is also a wide gap in gender matriculation and completion of postsecondary education (Clark et al., 2013; Excelencia in Education, 2019; Turcios-Cotto & Milan, 2013). The majority of ethnic groups enrolled in postsecondary education identify

themselves as female (Excelencia in Education, 2019). Research has clearly demonstrated that women have far surpassed men in both high school graduation rates and in postsecondary enrollment and completion (Clark et al., 2013; Excelencia in Education, 2019). In 2020, women held 58% of all conferred bachelor's degrees and have accounted for more than 50% of degree holders for over 30 years (Bryant, 2022). The enrollment of women in many universities is upwards of 60%, thus demonstrating women are aspiring to higher education (Bryant, 2022; Clark et al., 2013). Not only are women aspiring to postsecondary education, but they also have surpassed men in both bachelor's and advanced degree completion for the first time according to the NCES (Anthony et al., 2021; Clark et al., 2013). Figure 5 below demonstrates the data in percentages from 2018 supporting the gender educational achievement gap among Hispanic and White women and men.

Figure 5

2018 Educational Attainment among Hispanic and White Women and Men



Note: The numbers outlined above are represented in percentages and describe the educational attainment in 2018 for Hispanic and White women and men. Data from Anthony et al., (2021).

To emphasize this gender achievement disparity, since 2000, the overall college enrollment rate for females has surpassed males; 2000-2018, college enrollment for females increased from 38% to 44% as compared to males, 33% to 38% (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2020). Overall women have made great gains in their access and completion of postsecondary education (Anthony et al., 2021; Clark et al., 2013).

Research had demonstrated that females have surpassed males in both enrollment and postsecondary completion; however, there is a glaring achievement gap within the Latinx student population (Clark et al., 2013; NCES, 2024b). Several research studies suggest that there exists a gender differentiated trend among achievement and completion of postsecondary degrees among Latino females and males (NCES, 2024b; Clark et al., 2013). Ponjuán et al., (2015) reported that over the last decade there has been a decline in in postsecondary enrollment among all male ethnic and racial groups. According to Fry & Lopez (2012), 16.5% of Hispanic students were enrolled in postsecondary institutions as compared to 36.2 % of White students and 25.1% of Black students. Although there was an increase in enrollment between 2010-2011, (15% among Hispanic students), this was still much lower than their White counterparts.

Data from Table 6 below not only suggest that Latino males have lower completion rates than their Latina female counterparts, but males in general have overall lower completion rates of postsecondary education than their female counterparts.

Table 6

Percentage of Persons 25-29 years with Varying Levels of Educational Attainment in 2021

Educational Attainment	Female	Male

High school completion and higher	Hispanic 90.5 Black 93.6	Hispanic 86.6 Black 94.6
Associate's completion and higher	Hispanic 38.8 Black 41.0	Hispanic 29.4 Black 26.3
Bachelor's completion and higher	Hispanic 27.1 Black 32.1	Hispanic 19.6 Black 19.7

Note: Data from the NCES, (2019) https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2020/2020009.pdf. Public domain.

The distinct achievement gap among Latino males when compared to other ethnic male subgroups regarding postsecondary enrollment and retention suggest a need to better understand this education problem (Clark et al., 2013; Moní et al., 2018; Ponjuán et al., 2015). There is not yet a full understanding among researchers as to why Latino males fall short in postsecondary enrollment and degree completion (Mollet et al., 2020; Somers et al., 2002). To understand this prolific educational problem, educational reform efforts aimed toward marginalized populations has become critical in supporting a college-going culture and degree completion (Mollet et al., 2020; Somers et al., 2002). In addition, the need to identify the barriers that exist for Latino males in pursuing and completing postsecondary degree programs is compelling (Moní et al., 2018; Ponjuán et al., 2015).

Persistence

Persistence and equity in higher education have been, and continue to plaque outcomes for underserved populations in the United States. Despite research, theories, and data, the fact that underserved populations, while growing numbers, are not leaving four- year institutions with bachelor's degrees at the same rate as their White counterparts. Martin Luther King in 1963 addressed the equity gap at Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C, during his iconic and celebrated address to the American people:

> In a sense we've come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our 54 republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the "unalienable Rights" of "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note, insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked "insufficient funds. (para. 4).

Dr. King provided a map for equity among underserved populations. That map underscores the importance of how equity intersects with persistence and demonstrates that his words were relevant in 1963 and are just as relevant today.

The phenomenon of student persistence is complex and therefore, several models have been developed to support understanding it (Astin, 1984; Bean, 1985; Tinto, 1975;). The theoretical models (Bean and Eaton's Psychological Model of College Student Retention, Tinto's Model for Student Retention, and Weidman's Model of undergraduate socialization) aim to understand persistence and are primarily focused on traditional-age students at four-year institutions, making them integral to this study in understanding the factors that shaped traditional-age Latino males to persist through their higher educational experience without dropping out (Astin, 1984; Bean, 1985; Tinto, 1993). Enrollment and retention of students is a top priority of higher education intuitions (Bean, 1985). Although access to higher education is available to most students, the reality is that many students who begin college at four-year institutions, drop out prior to completing a degree (Bean, 1985; Ishitani, 2008).

Persistence is an educational construct that defines success of students in their educational journey. According to Lenning (1978) a student who persist is one that continuously enrolls without interruption. The complexity of this definition is further defined by Astin (1984) adding that a student who is persistent is both in pursuit of a degree and attends full time (Habley et al., 2012).

Early studies on student retention theorized that students themselves failed, not the institutions to which they attended. Tinto responded to this notion by stating "This is what we now refer to as blaming the victim" (Tinto, 2007, p.2). To understand and improve student retention and achievement, it is imperative to zoom out and look past the blame and instead, focus of the areas of research that can promote higher levels of completion and retention rates. Tinto's (1975) early studies on student retention suggested that efforts to retain students were connected to an institution's commitment to keep students along with student goals. Initially, Tinto thought that a student's course grades were the primary measure of academic integration; however, he also considered how students advanced intellectually along with the degree to which they acclimated to the community on campus. Tinto defined social integration as connections with peers, engaging with staff and faculty, and a student's willingness to participate in extracurricular activities. Tinto (1975) provided a final analysis and suggested "It is the interplay between the individual's commitment to the goal of college completion and his commitment to the institution that determines whether or not decides to drop out from college" (p. 96).

Concerning theories of attrition, Tinto (1975) provided an analysis and suggested:

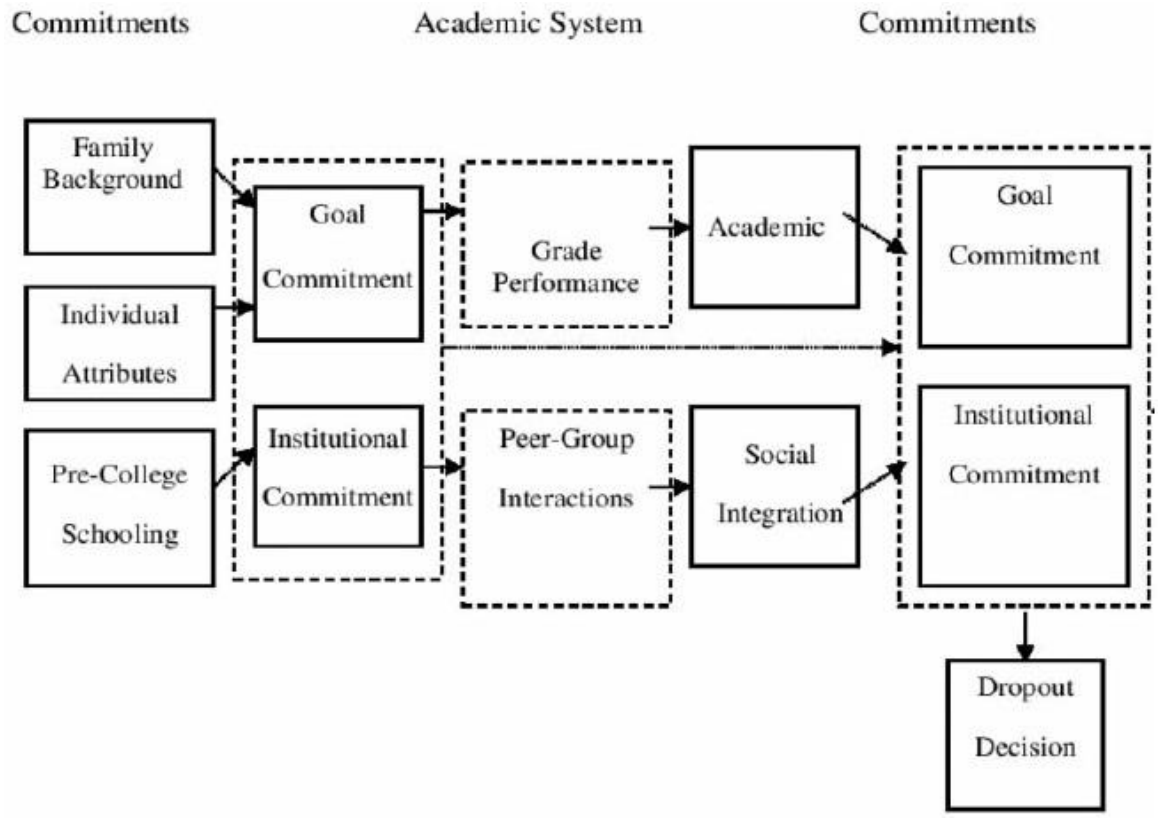
> Distinguishing between the academic and social domains of the college further suggests that a person may be able to achieve integration in one area without doing so in the other. Thus, a person can conceivably be integrated into the social sphere of the college and still

> drop out because of insufficient integration into the academic domain of the college (e.g., through poor grade performance). Conversely, a person may perform adequately in the academic domain and still drop out because of insufficient integration into the social life of the institution (e.g., through voluntary withdrawal). (p. 92)

Figure 6 below illustrates the depth of how social and academic integration are interwoven in institutional systems. While this illustration may seem simple enough, the complexity is unfolded as institutional environments evolve and all variables are in play; this alters student's perceptions on the ultimate decisions to persist or drop out. While internal factors provide rich descriptions on student retention, external factors must also be considered as they can have big impact and students don't always have a voice thus, can sway students in their decisions making. For example, state, federal, and institutional levels of satisfactory academic progress (SAP) is a potential limiting factor on the future endeavors of students. It is important to note that student retention and persistence don't necessarily equal student success as those factors are mostly measured in graduation rates for higher education systems. According to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2023b), the persistence rate was up .9% or 75.7% for students who started college in the fall of 2021, while disparities still exist among race and ethnicity, the Latinx retention and persistence rates have continued to climb. These indicators demonstrate early success patterns for students in postsecondary institutions (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2023b).

Figure 6

Tinto's Institutional Departure Model



Note: From Tinto (1993). Copyright 1993 by the University of Chicago Press

The most critical year in terms of institutional intervention, is a student's first year of college (Tinto, 2012). The first year is key in institutions providing academic support as that is a key factor in student retention (Tinto, 2012). Academic support is the theory that seeks to explain voluntary student departure prior to degree completion coupled with the longitudinal and interactive forces (Tinto, 1988). Tinto's theory suggests that student's backgrounds, along with precollege academic achievement are direct lines to influence their commitment to the institutions and to graduate (Tinto, 1988). When students enter college, they interact with and participate in the diverse academic and social communities at varying degrees (Tinto, 1988).

Tinto (1993) identified three pivotal reasons for student departure that included: academic difficulties, individuals'' inability to resolve their occupational and educational goals, and their lack of ability to remain integrated in both the social and intellectual life of the institution. According to Tinto's (1993) Model of Institutional Departure, in order for students to persist, student must be integrated into both formal and informal institutional systems. Formal systems such as academic performance and extracurricular activities are noted, while informal systems such as faculty and staff interactions and peer-group interactions are illuminated as primarily is students' persistence.

Vincent Tinto (1993) developed three principles of an effective retention program. First is that any program must be committed to the students it serves. A program should be focused on the targeted population and not to other factors that may cause the direction of the program to go out of focus. Tinto notes, "It is a commitment that springs from the very character of an institution's educational mission" (p. 146). Second, an effective retention program must be committed to the education of all students, not just to some. Thus, although it may incorporate special interventions for special populations, a retention program must address the needs of all students for the institution to meet its mission of providing quality education to all. Third, an effective retention program must be committed to the development of social and educational network communities for students. All students are integrated in these communities and are valued as competent members.

Conclusion

Past research has demonstrated that high school context plays a pivotal role in how students access college (Engberg & Wolniak, 2010). How students access postsecondary education relies heavily on high school characteristics (Engberg & Wolniak, 2010). In addition,

research has demonstrated that high schools play a pivotal role in shaping students' college choice decisions (Engberg & Wolniak, 2010).

Dual credit options in high school have afforded opportunities to access college in order for students to get a running start on their postsecondary education (Mansell & Justice, 2014). Underserved populations continue to fall short in both postsecondary matriculation and degree completion as compared to other ethnic groups (Capers, 2019; G.A. García et al., 2017; Kundu, 2019; Somers et al., 2002). Although the Latinx population is the fastest growing, those numbers do not coincide with postsecondary enrollment or degree completion (Ayala, 2020; Clark et al., 2013). Moreover, data suggest that Latino males in particular are vanishing from higher education. There is a stark disparity in enrollment and completion between Latino males and females in postsecondary education (Ayala, 2020; Clark et al., 2013; Pérez, 2017). The need to understand this phenomenon is critical in ensuring policies and practices are changed in order to ensure their future success.

Despite Latino males falling short among other males in their higher education degree completion, there are Latino males who are graduating from higher education with their bachelor's degree from four-year institutions and changing the landscape for future Latino males. Most literature is focused on matriculation of Latinx students to higher education institutions such as community colleges and barriers associated with Latinx student's success. However, little to no literature focuses on degree completion among Latino males in four-year institutions; specifically in Oregon or trying to solve the educational issues and successes they encounter. The purpose of this literature review was to demonstrate some of the common challenges and successes Latino males face in their educational journey. The literature does suggest that the

persistence of Latino males and the likelihood they will successfully complete their degree is highly dependent on both external support systems along with the collegiate environment.

Chapter III: Design and Methodology

While the number of underserved students enrolling in colleges and universities are growing nationwide, there continues to be significant achievement gaps in both persistence and completion of postsecondary degrees. Latino males in particular, while one of the fastest growing populations in the United States, are underrepresented in four-year institutions and are far less likely to complete their bachelor's degrees compared to their Latina female or While male peers (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2022). In addition, Latino males overall have lower degree attainment rates than other males (Excelencia in Education, 2019). To illustrate, in 2018, the percentage of Latino males who had earned an associate degree or higher was 21%, compared to Asian males (60%), White males (46%), and African American males (29%) (Excelencia in Education, 2019). This phenomenon of Latino males completing their bachelor's degree in four-year institutions at lower rates demonstrates that Latino males are struggling (Capers, 2019; Excelencia in Education, 2020; Mora, 2022; Rodriguez et al., 2016).

According to Moustakas (1994) literature in the phenomenology study is used to ground the research problem along with setting the stage for the inquiry. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the lived experiences of Latino male students and their persistence to overcome educational barriers in obtaining their bachelor's degree at a four-year institution in Oregon. This research study focused on traditional age Latino male students who enrolled in a four-year institutions in Oregon after graduating high school. The study utilized semi-structured one-to-one interviews with Latino males throughout Oregon who were either within three semesters of graduating with their bachelor's degree or had graduated within the last five years.

Research Question:

As an emerging design, the central phenomenon being studied was to focus on understanding what motivated Latino males to persist to complete their bachelor's degree. These lived experiences set the stage for this qualitative, phenomenological research design. Within qualitative research, research questions evolve and change as the researcher explores the central phenomenon (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Research questions are designed as the building block and provide the scaffolding to guide the central phenomenon being studied (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The central research question guiding this study is as follows:

1. What experiences influenced Latino males to persistently enroll without dropping out in completing their bachelor's degree?

The intention of this study was to understand what factors played a role in each student's success and unpack specific factors that lead to participants' completing their bachelor's degree. Recognizing and sharing the perspectives of the participants in this study can potentially change the landscape of how higher education institutions support Latino males in their pursuit of a bachelor's degree and close the achievement gap in the percentage of Latino males who become degree completers with their White male peers (Capers, 2019; Rodriguez et al., 2016).

This chapter delineates the research design and questions that was the foundation of this study. In addition, chapter three captures the specific details of the participants in the study along methods that were used to both collect and analyze data related to the lived experiences of Latino males who completed their bachelor's degree at four-year institutions. Finally, this chapter discusses the role of the researcher as well as the limitations.

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative approach to examine the lived experiences of Latino

male's persistence to obtain their bachelor's degree at a four-year institution in Oregon. A qualitative approach was the most appropriate research track as this type of research is best suited to look at a research problem where the researcher cannot easily identify the variables (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Maxwell, 2013). Individual semi-structured interviews were the core data collection method and provided an opportunity for participants to answer questions using an interview protocol with additional opportunities to elaborate or clarify responses through probing questions. A member checking process was enacted by the research to provide participants an opportunity to reach the summary of their responses and check for accuracy, thus improving the validity of the data (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

Qualitative research is derived primarily from a process and inductive approach to the world that emphasizes descriptions of specific people or situations (Maxwell, 2013). This idea is corroborated as Creswell and Guetterman (2019) states that in qualitative research, the researcher needs to learn more from the participants through exploration. Qualitative research is most concerned with the process rather than the outcomes (Maxwell, 2013). Lichtman (2006) emphasizes that "The main purpose of qualitative research- whatever kind- is to provide an in-depth description and understanding of the human experience (p. 8). One of the greatest strengths of qualitative research is its process orientation, inductive approach, and is flexible (Maxwell, 2013). There is an emphasis on people and situations that provide thick-rich descriptions and gives voice to the participants and that, in turn, provides an opportunity to find solutions to the problem being studied (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

This study was grounded in a qualitative approach wherein which a phenomenological method of research was utilized (Chan et al., 2013; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Maxwell, 2013). Phenomenology was originated by German philosopher Edmund Husserl (Moustakas,

1994; Peoples, 2021; Van Manen, 2016) “Phenomenology aims to grasp the exclusively singular aspects (identity/essence/otherness) of a phenomenon or event” (Van Manen, 2016, p.27). While phenomenology was first utilized solely in the philosophical discipline, several disciplines such as education, psychology, and nursing are now using phenomenological research. Capturing the lifeworld experiences of a specific population is at the heart and purpose of phenomenological research (Husserl, 2017; Peoples, 2021). A phenomenological approach is one that explores, describes, and analyzes the meaning of lived experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Phenomenology originated from the Greek word phenomenon which means “something that shows itself, and manifests that it can become visible by itself” (Barbera & Inciarte, 2012, p.201). Husserl believed that what appears in consciousness is the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Using a phenomenological methodology allowed the researcher to illuminate personal meanings and rich descriptions of the lived experiences of each of the participants (Peoples, 2021). This approach lends itself to understanding a central phenomenon within a small group to gain insight on the lived experiences (Chan et al., 2013; Guillen, 2019; Moustakas, 1994; Peoples, 2021).

The phenomenological approach to research as an avenue to obtain a comprehensive lens into events and portrays experiences by the participants (Husserl, 2017; Moustakas, 1994). These lived experiences are what capture the individuality and intimate details of each participant thereby providing the story to help understand the phenomenon being studied (Chan et al., 2013; Moustakas, 1994). The literature in a qualitative study may not yield much information about the phenomenon being studied, so the researcher must evoke information from the participants in an exploratory manner (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). In addition, data

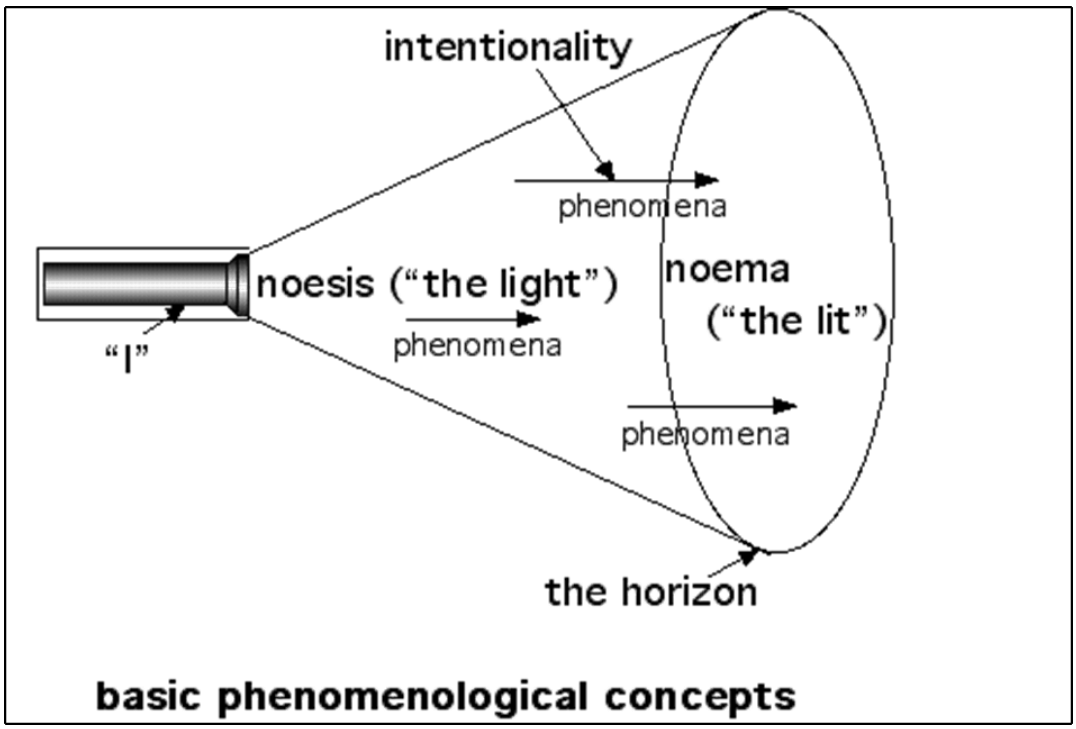
collected using this design lends itself to gather data in a natural setting and promotes participants to share their stores in a comfortable environment (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019)

Within phenomenology there are two main types of approaches: transcendental descriptive phenomenology and hermeneutic interpretive phenomenology. Known as the father of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl believed that it is critical to set aside judgements and biases about experiences in order to grasp a full understanding of the phenomenon from participants (Moustakas, 1994). In this sense transcendental phenomenology focused on the description of experiences by participants and places less reliance on the interpretation of the researcher (Moustakas, 1994). Researchers utilizing a transcendental approach, bracket their own assumptions, judgements, beliefs and ideas related to the phenomenon being studied (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Moustakas, 1994; Peoples, 2021) This process of reduction and setting aside prejudgments is referred to a 'epoché' and is "a Greek word meaning to refrain from judgment" (Simon & Goes, 2011).

The research design to best capture this study was through the application of a transcendental phenomenological approach (Husserl, 2017; Moustakas, 1994; Peoples, 2021; Van Manen, 2016). According to Moustakas (1994) "Transcendental phenomenology is a scientific study of the appearance of things, of phenomena just as we see them as they appear to us in consciousness" (p.49). Phenomenology is described as a model that aims to explain the nature of things; it is the very essence and veracity of the phenomenon being studied (Husserl, 2017). Figure 7 below illustrates the basic concepts of transcendental phenomenology.

Figure 7

Phenomenological Model



Source: https://webspace.ship.edu/cgboer/qualmethone.html

Note: Copyright 1998 by C. George Boeree

While the terminology in transcendental phenomenology is complex (i.e. intentionality, noesis, noema, and epoché), when applying those terms to the human experience, they become valuable in sense making of the phenomena (Moustakas, 1994).

Intentionality is foundational mechanism of consciousness; it is "our own awareness of something" (Moustakas, 1994; Peoples, 2021). The idea of intentionality is a primary theme within Husserl's philosophy (Peoples, 2021). Noema is the thing that is thought about and is defined as "not the real object but the phenomenon, not the tree but the appearance of the trees" (Moustakas, 1994, p.29). The term noesis refers to "the act of perceiving, feeling, thinking, remembering, or judging" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 69). Epoché, also referred to as bracketing, is

part of the formal process called phenomenological reduction where intentional consciousness using a process of suspending judgments and assumptions in order to focus on the analysis of the experience (Peoples, 2021). In essence, the researcher positions themselves as a stranger in a strange land when they practice epoché and suspend all preunderstanding (Peoples, 2021). Husserl believed that when understanding a phenomenon nothing can be taken for granted or assumed (Moustakas, 1994; Peoples, 2021. When conducting transcendental phenomenological research, the researcher is trying to get to the very essence of a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; Peoples, 2021).

In phenomenological research there is not a fixed set of methods; however there are methodical guidelines (Peoples, 2021). Methodical guidelines provide the foundation to ensure the research meets the objective and intent of the study (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Specific, systematic steps included are: design and develop a methodology for the research, develop a research question(s), identify participants for the study, create a data collection system, discuss analytic methods that were utilized in the study, and acknowledge limitations (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

Participants and Setting

The setting for the study included participants who resided in Oregon who either graduated from a four-year institution in Oregon or are enrolled in a university in Oregon. This particular region ws selected as there is a gap in the literature that focuses on this specific region in the United States regarding traditional-age Latino males' persistence in obtaining a bachelor's degree.

Following certification of the ethics training (Appendix A) along with approval from the Northwest Nazarene University Institutional Review Board (Appendix B), the researcher

initiated communication to potential participants through purposeful and snowball sampling. Snowball sampling was utilized as a recruitment strategy where participants were asked to assist the researcher in identifying other candidates for the research study (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Once potential participants were identified and they met the participant criteria, invitation letters (Appendix D) were sent asking for participation in the research study. Following an acknowledgement of participation by potential participants, an Informed Consent Form (Appendix C) was sent via Qualtrics to minimize any barriers for participation. Participants gave consent by checking a box on the Informed Consent; the checking of the box acted as the signature of each participant. Once the researcher received signed informed consent forms, contact with participants was initiated via phone or email. Following the analysis of data, the researcher developed a list of common themes that emerged from the horizonalizing procedures and sent those via email to all participants to serve as member checking (Appendix I). In addition, each participant was provided renumeration for their participation in the study. The amount of renumeration was a $25 gift card; the gift card was sent electronically to all participants who participated fully.

In a phenomenological research study, the participants often are selected using the following criteria: their lived experiences of the central phenomenon, they are willing to share their experiences, and they often can add value and enhance the experience of the phenomenon (Laverty, 2003). The inquiry asks the question “What is this experience like for you?” and therefore, the sharing of information by participants and can be captured through (a) researcher’s own interpretations of the phenomenon; (b) the participants experiences and information, and (c) can also include experience that participants bring forward that can be

outside of the context of the research study (Laverty, 2003). Six Latino male students who participated in the study were selected and met the following criteria:

1. A traditional age Latino male undergraduate student who is enrolled at a four-year institution in Oregon, is within three semesters of graduation, and has been continuously enrolled since their freshman year.
2. A Latino male graduate who obtained their bachelor's degree within the last five years from a four-year institution in Oregon.
3. Identified themselves as a Latino male (could be from any Latin decent: Mexican, Puerto Rican, etc).

Finding participants that are information rich, according to Patton (2002), is the cornerstone for qualitative sampling. In qualitative research, naturally, the number of participants is fewer as the researcher is seeking an in-depth information about the individual (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Phenomenological research includes a small number of participants (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). There is a high level of intentionality in phenomenological research when selecting participants as each participant must have experienced the phenomena of the research questions (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The recommended number of participants for a phenomenological study is 3 to10 (Dukes, 1984). The selection process of all Latino male participants followed a homogenous sampling strategy (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Homogenous sampling allows the researcher to select participants based on a common characteristic (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The predetermined criteria, previously stated, was established for each of the six participants. Prior to the semi-structured interview, participants were asked basic demographic questions. Table 7 below outlines each participants' profile including, age, first-generation college goer status,

parents' educational level, college credits earned while in high school, college major, remedial classes taken in college, expected graduation date or the date in which each participant graduated, and the number of years it took each participant to graduate.

Table 7

Participant Profile

Pseudonym	Age	First-generation college	Parents' postsecondary education level	Academic discipline	Expected graduation date/date graduated	Years enrolled to graduate
Joel	23	Yes	No College	Political Science	Exp. 2024	6
Pedro	25	Yes	No College	Cinema & Media Communications	Grad. 2020	4
José	26	Yes	No College	Public Health	Grad. 2019	4
Gabriel	22	Yes	No College	Secondary Education-Spanish	Exp. 2024	4
Javier	22	Yes	No College	Marketing	Exp. 2024	4
Alberto	22	Yes	No College	Law, Rights, Justice	Exp. 2024	4

The researcher sent recruitment emails to potential participants asking to participate in the study. All participants were assigned pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality and anonymity. The age range of participants ranged from 22-26 years old and lived both on and off campus while attending college.

Data Collection

Typically in phenomenological research, data collection occurs through long interviews that address the research questions (Moustakas, 1994). Interviews occur in an informal setting in

an interactive process that utilizes open-ended questions and comments (Moustakas, 1994). While the researcher may develop questions in advance that are aimed at evoking a comprehensive view of the experience of the phenomenon, often times the questions are altered or not used at all when the participants shares his or her experiences (Moustakas, 1994). For this study, the researcher decided to conduct one-on-one semi-structured interviews in a virtual setting (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Interviews provide the avenue to understand the lived experiences of a human being (Monday, 2020). To that point, the researcher was seeking to understand the phenomenon at a deep level; using interviews to hear participants' stories creates space for the researcher to gain a richer understanding (Van Manen, 2016).

Semi-structured interviews were selected as they provide opportunities for the researcher to change phrasing of the questions and add additional questions based on the responses from participants (Moustakas, 1994). Prior to the interview, the researcher provided verbatim instructions to each of the six research participants (Appendix E). Demographic data questions were collected at the beginning of the interview. During the interview, four questions focused on family and culture; three questions focused on school experiences prior to college; postsecondary experience were captured in the next four questions; institution environments were the focus on the next five questions; and one question concluded the interview. The researcher recorded all interviews and took field notes during the interviews. All interviews were transcribed by a transcriptionist (see Appendix H). Interview lengths varied based on the stories of each participant; the average length of each interview was approximately 70 minutes.

Sources of Data

In total, six Latino male students participated in individual semi-structured interviews. All interviews were conducted virtually and lasted approximately 70 minutes; interviews were

recorded with permission and the researcher took field notes. The interviews took place over a four week period during the fall of 2023. All interviews followed identical protocols and the researcher used the same interview questions (Appendix G) in all interviews. Finally, all responses from the interviews provided essential and critical data that yielded answers to the research questions.

Prior to the pilot study, the researcher sent the interview protocol to an expert panel for review and feedback. The expert panel was comprised of four experts in the field of the research study and included three females and one male; all who have had experience in postsecondary with Latino males. The researcher used the feedback from the expert panel to align and modify the interview protocol prior to the pilot study. One of the primary roles the expert panel service is to ensure that all questions were aligned to the central research question in the study.

Conducting a pilot study is highly recommended before using any modified or new instrument (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Pilot tests are performed generally to a small group by administering the instrument and adjusting the instrument based on interactions prior to the study participants. A pilot interview was conducted using the interview protocol (See Appendix F) with two Latino males who will graduate with a bachelor's degree and were not included in the participant sample. Table 8 below outlines the demographics for the pilot interviewees.

Table 8

Demographics for Pilot Interviews

	Setting	Gender	Ethnicity	Age	Education Degree
Edgar	Virtual	Male	Identified as Latino	22	Bachelor of Science in Marketing expected June 2024
Miguel	Virtual	Male	Identified as Hispanic	22	Bachelor of Science in Fire Management expected June 2024

Following the pilot interviews and based on critiques from the pilot interviews, the researcher noticed patterns in the transcripts and field notes. The interview protocol was amended prior to use with study participants (see Appendix G). The pilot test served as a mechanism to identify confusing questions, test probing questions, clarify questions that were confusing to the participants, and gauge length of each interview.

In phenomenological research, validity is viewed as plausibility (Hancock, 2002). Moreover, the idea of validity is encompassed in the plausibility of concepts and data relationships (Hancock, 2002). In phenomenological research, audiences must be convinced the interpretation of the data are both compelling and convincing. Validity in phenomenological research focuses on plausibility along with evidence that is both accumulative and interconnected (Neuman, 2006) “Plausible means that the data and statements about it are not exclusive; they are not the only possible claims nor are they exact accounts of the one truth in the world. This does not make them inventions or arbitrary. Instead, they are powerful, persuasive descriptions that reveal a researcher's genuine experience with the empirical data” (Neuman, 2006, p. 197).

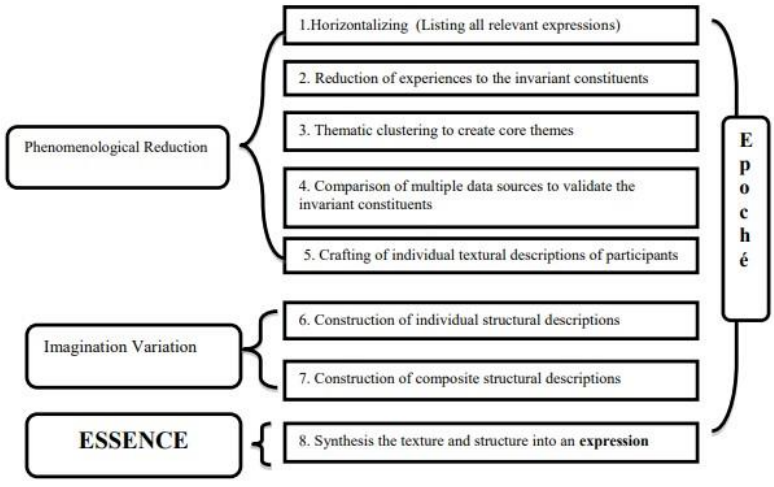
Analytical Methods

Qualitative research is a process approach that evolves and is flexible as data is scrutinized (Maxwell, 2013). Creswell and Guetterman (2019) describes the qualitative process as more of a spiral and less linear. There are three phases to which qualitative data is expresses, (1) organizing data, (2) coding the data to uncover themes, and (3) discussing and describing data (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Qualitative research analysis is part of the design; therefore, requiring decisions about how the analysis will be completed which, in turn, plays a role in the rest of the research design (Maxwell, 2013).

In phenomenological research, the goal is to understand the phenomenon in its wholeness (Peoples, 2021). The foundational tenant in transcendental phenomenology is to illuminate the total essence of the phenomenon without judgment and bias (Moustakas, 1994; Peoples, 2021). Moreover, researchers conducting phenomenological research need to "live through their participants' descriptions as if they were their own" (Peoples, 2021). The procedures for both preparing and analyzing the data to give light to the essence of the lived experience include: preparing the data for analysis, phenomenologically reducing the data, immersing in imaginative variation, and illuminating the essence of the lived experience (Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015). The recorded interviews were first transcribed using a transcriptionist. Following the transcription of all interviews, the researcher followed Moustakas Modification of Van Kaam's method of phenomenological data analysis (Moustakas, 1994). Figure 8 outlines the steps in a visual format and illuminates the grand themes of data analysis in transcendental phenomenology (Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015).

Figure 8

Steps of Data Analysis



Note: Copyright Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015

Step 1: Horizonalization: After all interviews were transcribed and organized, the researcher began data analysis with horizonalization. Horizonalization is a process where every statement relevant to the research question is regarded as having equal value (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher read all transcripts with the intention to fully understand the stories of each participant (Peoples, 2021). Following reading, the researcher highlighted and listed statements that were meaningful and related to the research questions.

Step 2: Reduction and Elimination: In this second step of data analysis, the researcher clustered all statements and quotes selected during horizonalization into themes (Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015). It is through this step that the researcher brought light from all statements and quotes that were relevant to the phenomena (Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015). The researcher used the following test to determine relevance for each statement or quote: "(a) Does it contain a moment of the experience that is a necessary and sufficient constituent for understanding of it? (b) Is it possible to abstract and label it?" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). In using these questions as guide, if the researcher answered no, the expression was eliminated. This was also true for any statements that were vague, repetitive, or that overlapped (Moustakas, 1994). In contrast, if the researcher answered yes, then the statement or expression was a horizon of the experience. All of the horizons that passed the test of relevancy remained and are referred to as the invariant constituents of the experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Step 3: Clustering and Thematizing the Invariant Constituents: The purpose of this step was for the researcher to thematize all invariant constituents; these are the horizons defined as the "Core of themes of the experience" of the phenomena being researched (Moustakas, 1994).

Step 4: Final Identification of the Invariant Constituents and Themes by application: This step focuses on the researcher taking the themes that were derived from interviews or other data

collection methods and comparing them to other methods with the intent to verify accuracy and transparency across data sources (Moustakas, 1994). For this study, the data collection method utilized was semi-structured one-to-one interviews. The researcher compared the identified themes across interview data and field notes, along with the literature to ensure accuracy and that there was a clear representation across the data sources.

Step 5: Individual Textural Descriptions: The narrative that explains participants' perceptions of the phenomena is referred to as the textural description (Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015). This step involves the researcher providing specific experiences of the co-researchers using the verbatim excerpts from the transcribed interview (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher in this study read and re-read the transcript for each participant and highlighted verbatim statements that were relevant to the phenomenon being studied. Using these highlighted statements, the researcher then writes textural descriptions of participants' experiences as it related to the phenomenon.

Step 6: Individual Structural Descriptions: This step asks the researcher to use imaginative variation in seeking clarity on the textural descriptions of the participants. Imaginative variation asks the researcher to imagine and immerse themselves how the experience occurred and through that, the researcher creates structures (Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015). For this study, the researcher used textural descriptions that described how the participants experienced the phenomenon and in turn, applied those to write descriptions of the lived experiences of Latino males who graduated with their bachelor's degree from a four-year institution in Oregon.

Step 7: Textural-Structural Descriptions: This step involves the researcher combing both the textural and structural descriptions to uncover the true essence of the phenomenon by merging the themes from the participants' interview transcript (Moustakas, 1994). The

researcher captured the essence of the phenomenon being investigated through combining the textural and structural descriptions to make meaning of the experiences and integrating those with the themes from the interview transcript.

Step 8: Synthesis-Composite Descriptions: In this final step of data analysis, the researcher creates a synthesis of the textural and structural description for each of the co-researchers; term coined by Clark Moustakas used to describe the participants in transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994; Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015). The composite descriptions illuminate the "what" and "how" of the experiences being investigated (Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015). The purpose of this step is for the researcher to reach the essence of experiences of the phenomenon (Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015). The researcher synthesized the structural and textural descriptions to "develop a composite description of the meanings and essences of the experience, representing the group as a whole" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 122). The researcher wrote the composite narratives in third person where a universal description that in turn, represented the findings from the study as it relates to Latino males who graduated or will graduate with their bachelor's degree from a four-year institution.

Limitations

As with all research studies, there will be limitations that need to be addressed and acknowledged (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Limitations create boundaries in research that are highly influenced by factors that are out of the control of the researcher (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Specifically, in qualitative studies there tend to be less participants, which could mean that the experiences the six Latino males who participated in this study doesn't necessarily reflect the beliefs, experiences or opinions of all Latino males (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). In addition, a limitation could be that because participants vary

in socioeconomic status, life experiences, parental educational background and other environmental factors, participants' perceptions and lived experiences could vary.

A significant limitation in qualitative research is the large amount of data required (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). With the large amount of data required, also comes a subsequent limitation in that there is a challenge with the amount of time needed to conduct interviews and focus groups, code all of the data so that analysis and sense making can happen. Creswell and Guetterman (2019) suggests that qualitative studies can demonstrate a limitation that includes the subjective analysis of the researcher. Finally, another limitation is the results of this study may not generalize to a larger population.

Role of the Researcher

An important component in designing a qualitative study is the role of the researcher is deciding between structured and unstructured methods (Maxwell, 2013). Qualitative studies rely on inductive processes and flexibility to "respond to emergent insights" as a way to sense of the data that emerges (Maxwell, 2013). Unstructured methods allow the researcher to focus on a particular phenomenon; this is the case with a phenomenological study (Maxwell, 2013). Phenomenological studies are grounded in analytical and descriptive experiences by individuals in their everyday life (Chan et al., 2013; Eddles-Hirsch, 2015; Stolz, 2020). The role of the researcher in a phenomenological study is, in fact, to uncover or demystify the phenomenon they are attempting to study (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015). In a phenomenological study, the researcher is the data collection instrument and works to uncover meaning from participants' lived experiences (Peoples, 2021).

The researcher conducting a phenomenological study embraces the human experience and seeks to capture that through the lens of the participants' everyday experiences (Chan et al.,

2013; Eddles-Hirsch, 2015; Stolz, 2020). One key characteristic in a phenomenological study is thick, rich descriptions of the phenomenon being studied (Moustakas, 1994; Peoples, 2021). As the research instrument in qualitative studies, it is not possible for the researcher to be completely objective (Stolz, 2020). However, when the researcher is able to acknowledge potential preconceived ideas this aids in addressing potential bias and provides opportunities to decrease the influence of the researcher (Chan et al., 2013).

It is critical that the researcher presents how the participants' experienced the phenomenon rather than the researcher's perception or assumptions about the phenomenon (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015; Stolz, 2020).). In order to overcome such issues, a process referred to as "reduction" aids the researcher in keeping an open mind and to listen in an objective way in order to reveal what Husserl refers to as the "essences of internal consciousness" (Moustakas, 1994; Stolz, 2020). Phenomenological reduction in transcendental research is the foundational procedure whereby the researcher liberates themselves and strips away all presuppositions; thereby seeing the true essence of the world. (Husserl, 2017)

The practice of epoché, also referred to as bracketing or suspending is a process in phenomenological research whereby the researcher intentionally puts aside preconceived notions, assumptions, beliefs, attitudes, and opinions regarding the phenomenon being studied (Chan et al., 2013; Eddles-Hirsch, 2015; Guillen, 2019; Moustakas, 1994; Stolz, 2020). This process allows the researcher to not distort an experience into another type of experience and allows the researcher to be an active listener and record the experiences of participants in an "open and naïve manner" (Chan et al., 2013; Eddles-Hirsch, 2015; Guillen, 2019; Stolz, 2020). According to Guillen (2019), this principle "does not imply questioning the world as if it existed…the objective of being able to observe life of the consciousness that is behind the

objects understood as given things" (p. 218). Epoché in short, provides a map for the researcher to determine the original sense objects possess or "how they become objects of consciousness" (p. 219). Finally, during the data collection and analysis research process, bracketing minimizes the influence of the researcher (Chan et al., 2013; Eddles-Hirsch, 2015; Stolz, 2020). Following epoché, the phenomenological reduction technique moves to an inquiring back into the consciousness (Husserl, 2017).

The researcher's identity as a White woman educational leader, who has worked closely with Latino males, families, and communities throughout her career was an important point of reflection throughout the research process. The researcher utilized both epoché and a critical friends approach to strengthen and address bias throughout the research process. Critical friends are colleagues who support the researcher's learning through asking critical questions and listen and clarifying the researcher's ideas; their role is to provide honest and impartial feedback.

Chapter IV: Results

Postsecondary enrollment and attainment goals are at the heart of several initiatives, policies, and programs in the United States (Excelencia in Education, n.d.; Lumina Foundation, 2024). Specifically, there has been an intentionality to zoom in and focus on the enrollment and persistence of Latinx postsecondary degree attainment rates (Anthony et al., 2021; Excelencia in Education, 2019; Hanson, 2024; Lumina Foundation, 2024; NCES, 2023b). Nationally, while the Latinx population is the fastest growing in the United States, the achievement gap in completion and attainment between the Latinx population and their White peers has continued increase. (Anthony et al., 2021; Excelencia in Education, n.d.; Luis et al., 2023; Lumina Foundation, 2024; Montelongo, 2018; NCES, 2023a; Schak & Nichols, 2017). Within that context, there has been a recognition and awareness that Latino males, in particular, are attaining bachelor's degree at a far lower rate than their female Latina peers and White peers (Excelencia in Education, 2019; Luis et al., 2023; Lumina Foundation, 2024; Montelongo, 2018; NCES, 2023b; Schak & Nichols, 2017). There has been minimal research about the successes of Latino males in their persistence in obtaining their bachelor's degree nationwide, but more specifically in Oregon. Oregon is the 19th state with a Latinx population of 13.6% (Data USA, 2021). Moreover, there is a 24.9 percentage gap in Latinx and White Degree attainment and falls below average nationally for Latinx degree attainment and degree attainment gap (Schak & Nichols, 2017). In 2021, White students were the most common race/ethnicity group that were awarded degrees at 33,924. This represents 4.77 times the number of degrees awarded to Latinx students with 7,119 degrees awarded (Data USA, 2021).

This transcendental phenomenological research study aimed to zoom in on the lived experiences and success of Latino males who were:

1. Within three semesters of graduating with their bachelor's degree from a four-year institution in the Oregon or;
2. They had graduated with the bachelor's degree within the last five years from a four-year institution in Oregon.

Understanding Latino males lived experiences and their successes in persisting to complete their bachelor's degree can contribute to general understanding of persistence and retention of Latino males and can inform institutional changes to support this group students. This research was guided by a qualitative phenomenological approach. Through one-on-one semi-structured interviews, participants were asked to share their experiences on persisting to complete their bachelor's degree. Each of the six participants attended or is attending a four-year institution in Oregon.

The central research question guiding this study is as follows:

1. What experiences influenced Latino males to persistently enroll without dropping out in completing their bachelor's degree?

This chapter begins with an overall description of the participant group and individual participant vignettes. The remainder of this chapter outlines the analysis of the data and significant findings that includes the true essence of the phenomenon being studied.

Data Collection Instrument

The interview protocol was created by the researcher and utilized to conduct on-on-one semi-structured interviews with the selected participants. The interview protocol ensured alignment to the research question and was scrutinized by experts in the field to examine for validity. There were a total on 30 items that made up the interview protocol. All interviews were conducted in a virtual setting and lasted approximately 70 minutes. Prior to each interview, the

researcher used the interview protocol to describe the research to each participant (Appendix G). Following the interviews and data analysis, the researcher utilized member checking as an avenue to ensure participant voice was accurately reflected in the analysis of interviews (Appendix I). Table 9 below outlines the demographics of the expert panel who reviewed the interview protocol. Each of the expert panelists had first-hand knowledge and experiences with Latino males in their persistence in postsecondary education. After reviewing the interview protocol, the expert panelists made recommendations to further align questions that would elicit the desired data from participants in answering the research question.

Table 9

Demographics of Expert Panel

	Gender	Ethnicity	Position	Type of institution	Years in Practice
Expert 1	Male	Hispanic	Adjunct Professor	Private four-year University	11
Expert 2	Female	Latino	Senior Director of Learning, Equity and Communications	Non-profit organization supporting Oregon's School Administrators	26
Expert 3	Female	White	President	Community College	32
Expert 4	Female	White	Assistant Professor of Education	Private four-Year University	12

Participants

All six participants in this study were first-generation college goer males who identified as Latino or Chicano. Of the six, five would be or are the first to graduate with a bachelor's degree in their family. The ages of participants ranged from 21-26 with two of the six

participants having graduated within the last five years with their bachelor's degree. The two participants that graduated, did so within four years. The remaining four participants are currently in college and will complete their bachelor's degree in the spring 2024. All six participants relied heavily on scholarships to attend college and none of the participants have taken or took student loans during the course of their bachelor's degree journey. All six participants relied heavily on scholarships to attend college and none of the participants have taken or took students loans during the course of their bachelor's degree journey. One of the participants went to a community college first, then transferred to a public four-year institution in Oregon. All participants graduated from an Oregon high school and attended a four-year institution in Oregon; two participants attended private four -year institutions. Three of the six participants attended an Emerging Hispanic-Serving Institution (EHSI). Emerging Hispanic Institutions are higher education institutions that comprise an undergraduate Hispanic enrollment between 15-24% (Excelencia in Education, n.d.). Five of six participants completed or will complete their bachelor's degree in four years. Two of six participants lived at home while attending college, while the remaining four lived on campus during their college journey. In addition, all six participants worked either a part-time or full-time job while attending college. All participants were exposed to college during high school and all took advantage of accelerated learning opportunities (AP or college coursework) while in high school. All six participants were identified as English Language Learners at some point in their elementary-high school education. Finally, all six participants shared their parents had not been to college and Spanish was their first language. Table 10 below provides a sketch of participants including institution type and graduation date.

Table 10

Participant Profile

Pseudonym	Age	Year in School/Graduation date	Institution Type
Joel	23	On track to graduate spring 2024	Public-EHSI
Pedro	25	Graduated 2020	Public
José	26	Graduated 2019	Public
Gabriel	22	On track to graduate spring 2024	Private-EHSI
Javier	22	On track to graduate spring 2024	Public
Alberto	22	On track to graduate spring 2024	Private-EHSI

Joel

Joel, 23, is in his sixth year at a public Emerging Hispanic-Serving Institution in Oregon and will graduate with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science in May 2024. Joel receives financial aid through grants and scholarships to pay for his education. Joel identifies as Latino, but indicated he feels more connected to Chicano; he is a first-generation college goer and has an older brother who graduated from college with a degree in biology and a younger brother who started college this year. Joel named that one motivation for him to study Political Science had to do with his parents' undocumented status stating "undocumented folks are often very politicized within politics, we're used as, you know, somewhat pawns here and there, that motivated the entirety of my maior." Joel also stated that his identity as a Chicano has inspired him to pursue his minor in Chicano/Latino studies and has influenced who he chooses to associate with.

Joel grew up in an urban area in Northwest Oregon with both of his parents and two brothers. Early on in his elementary schooling, Joel was fortunate enough to attend a school where was placed in a Spanish immersion program. Joel noted that his schooling experiences

involved a diverse group of students. When Joel moved on to high school, he continued to be part of the Spanish immersion program. Joel stated that he felt fortunate to be part of the Spanish immersion program as that allowed him to connect with people from a similar background as his. Growing up, Joel's first language was Spanish; he indicated that he learned English by watching cartoons like Japanese Anime was placed in an English as a Second Language (ESL) program up until sixth grade. At home, Joel speaks Spanish especially to his parents, and noted that he primarily speaks English with his siblings.

During Joel's elementary, middle and high school schooling, Joel describes his experiences as mostly positive as there were a diverse group of students who he could connect to. Joel discussed that some of the barriers in his experiences involved the lack of diversity in the educators who taught at the schools he attended and stated, "The issue with that, however, was finding educators who actually look like me and who actually could relate to me." Joel noted that his educators who taught Spanish and other culturally specific courses were of Spanish decent; those from Spain. Joel noticed that many of the educators who were Spanish speaking "were not necessarily people who could relate to a bunch of brown kids who come from low-income communities and instead, you know, they had their own implicit biases."

In Joel's interview, he spoke specifically about how participating in programs like TRIO and Mente during high school, along with being exposed to college, shaped his commitment to go on to college. It is through Joel's lived experiences in his own education, his parents' experiences, along with his brother encouraging him, set the stage for his success in continuing on to college and to persist to complete his bachelor's degree.

José

José is a 26 year old first-generation college graduate. As a child immigrant from

Mexico, José came to the United States at the age of 10 with his mom and younger brother to live their father who worked in Oregon. José has two younger brothers and resides with his family in Northwest Oregon. José stated that Spanish is spoken at home with his parents. José feels pride in where he came from in Mexico and noted in his interview that it was difficult leaving his home country and coming to the United States stating,

> I want to say did feel sad and kind of more like, depressed that I was no longer seeing the people that I used to see, my friends from elementary school back in Mexico. I still remember their faces in my head.

As part of José's identity, he stated he feels more connected to the term Latino as it represents all of Latin America, including Mexico. José described two of the biggest barriers for him in school was not being able to speak the English language along with him being the only Latino male in fifth grade. During José's fifth grade year, he was identified as an ELL learner and also qualified for the Migrant program. He describes this first year coming to the United States as challenging, but that he received so much support from his teacher. He described her as, "the most compassionate person." During José's 8th grade year, one of his teachers gifted him a computer, that gift, he said, was the first role model who showed him what college was and that was a possibility for him.

José describes his schooling as mostly positive. As a predominantly white school district, José stated there were not many Latino male role models nor were there many Latino male students who wanted to pursue a college education. In this sense, that caused what José described as "a very distancing thing. I did not meet another peer that was just like me at all in high school." José goes on to say

> I was seen as the intelligent Mexican, I guess, and my Latino peers did see me as the

> most intelligent person, but that also created a, sort of like a dynamic of like, oh, you're the smart one, I'm not, and I already know I'm not going to go to college.

In high school tokenized as being one of only a few Latinos in the school, José stated that it was because of two teachers; one in middle school and one in high school that he pursued college. While in high school, a teacher signed José up to participate in the TRIO Upward Bound program. José stated that this program changed his trajectory, opened up opportunities for him to connect with other Latino males like him and provided the structure he needed to get to college. Through the TRIO program, José was exposed to Latino male role models and mentors, introduced to college visits, provided homework supports, and encouraged to take college coursework. During the summers, José would participate in a six week program where he would live on a college campus in a dorm and take classes. José stated that this exposure to college was a driver for him to pursue his bachelor's degree and attributed the Migrant and TRIO programs to his successes in high school.

From high school, José attended a smaller private university. After the first year, he transferred to a larger public institution in Western Oregon and graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Public Health in 2019. José was the recipient of the Ford Family Scholarship and it was because of this scholarship, he was able to compete his college education. José describes his motivation to pursue a college education and to complete revolved around the work he had done with his dad and wanting something different. José stated,

> I wanted to say that what really influenced me to go into higher education was working with my dad out there in the, you know, under really, I guess, under some circumstance, weather circumstances that were not, I don't know, the greatest… I don't see myself doing this for the rest of my life.

Javier

Javier is a senior at a public university in Oregon majoring in marketing and will be a first-generation college graduate. Following high school, Javier attended a community college where he earned his Associate's degree before transferring to a four-year university. Javier is the second youngest of five children and grew up in a rural area in Eastern Oregon with his parents. Born to parents from El Salvador and Mexico, Javier proudly identifies as Latino. Growing up, Javier noted that his neighborhood was low-income and his environment was rife with shootings and drug dealings. Despite those dangers, Javier credits his parents and older siblings for steering him toward a path of a bachelor's degree. Javier noted that because neither of his parents had a college experience, they were not able to support him in navigating financial aid, scholarship, or college applications. Javier expressed gratitude to his older sister who had been to college for helping to support him through those challenges.

During his high school experience, Javier notes that his high school was committed to providing opportunities for all students to take college classes. Javier also emphasized that his schooling experiences consisted of college visits and a close connection to the local community college. Javier graduated high school with about 38 college credits which propelled him forward to be successful in earning his bachelor's degree. Javier discussed extensively about the power of role models in his life both in high school and college. Javier was grateful and appreciative of those role models for encouraging him to take college classes and provide the needed supports for him to be successful. Following high school, Javier attended a local community college and took part in the CAMP (College Assistance Migrant Program) program. As a CAMP participant, Javier stated he was connected to students with similar backgrounds and this was a driver for his success. He was provided a mentor during his time as the community college through the CAMP

program and Javier continues to keep in touch with that individual as he transferred to a public university. Javier noted that when he transferred to the university, he was really scared to leave his family. He stated that he had never been away from his family and he was worried he would not finish his degree. Javier acknowledged that the first semester at the university was challenging not only because he was far away from home, but that there weren't a lot of students that looked like him in his classes. Javier noted that he was afraid to talk about his culture or identity in this setting as most of his classmates and professors were White. He also noted that many of clubs on campus and activities are mostly White folks and it initially made him not want to show up. He stated his feeling in this sentiment,

> I may feel intimidated and I might be nervous about being the only Latino, the only Latino male, I still persist. And I still go through and it really, it's kind of a bittersweet emotion because I know I shouldn't be afraid, but I am.

Javier's connection to his culture comes through his participation in the CAMP program and he is connected to the Cultural Resource Center on campus as well.

Javier stated that although being in this setting feels intimidating, it is also one of the very reasons he continues to persist to obtain his bachelor's degree. "I feel like it makes me want to break that barrier, break that statistic, and encourage others to do the same thing." Javier is speaking to his own knowledge around Latino males being the least likely to graduate and to drop out. The driving force behind Javier's persistence in obtaining a bachelor's degree despite obstacles is deeply personal having witnessed his mother battle cancer and learned that his father was incarcerated when Javier was a child. Javier is committed to breaking the cycle, growing himself as a Latino male, and being a role model for other Latino males who come from hardships and challenges in their upbringing.

Alberto

Originally born in Mexico, Alberto's strong sense of culturally identity carries with him in all that he does. He describes that he feels connected to the Latino identity and always lives his life as a Latino. Alberto is youngest of five siblings and speaks Spanish at home with his parents. Alberto stated that all of his siblings that been to college at some point, but that only two have degrees. Alberto, a first-generation college goer, will be the third sibling to obtain his bachelor's degree in the family. Growing up, Alberto described that his siblings and parents lived in a very small apartment in a city in Northwestern Oregon. He said he grew up very poor and did not have a lot; noting that his dad was the primary source of income. Alberto had a smile when he talked about when they got to move from the apartment and were able to move into a house given to the family by Habitat for Humanity. With joy Alberto stated "we were all Habitat kids, which I love still."

In 2024, Alberto will graduate with his Bachelor of Arts degree in Law, Rights and Justice and Latin American studies from a private university in Oregon. Alberto plans to go to law school to become an immigration attorney. Alberto has supported the cost of his college education through grants and scholarships. Alberto has also worked part-time both on campus and off campus throughout college to support himself. Alberto acknowledges that one of the barriers for him during college is that he has worked sometimes four jobs at a time to pay for his living expenses. He stated that his parents expected him and his siblings to work as soon as they were able and since that time, Alberto has always had at least two jobs while going to college. Alberto credits his parents and his older siblings as being key role models that have been an encouragement in his educational journey. He understands and points out how fortunate he feels that he had the wisdom of his older siblings to support him through high school and navigating

college.

During high school, Alberto participated in the AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) program along with AP courses. Alberto was focused on being successful in high school and noted "ever since I went into freshman year, I was on the AP, like, trajectory because I wanted to, like, my end goal was always, you know, get into a good school, get good grades." He also stated that during his junior and senior years, he started become more involved and participating in a lot of events within his community and attended Mente, where he connected with students and adults that looked like him. During his senior year, he became Student Body President. While in high school, Alberto worked a lot and noted that when he received his DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) approval at fifteen, he went to work. While in high school, Alberto started a mural project to help bring life to the school walls. During his senior year, he had begun to do start mural about Latino identity and history, but was not able to finish it due to COVID (Alberto graduated high school in 2020).

Alberto's choice for college was a private university in Oregon. He started college in the fall of 2020 and said it was a challenge all classes were on zoom and it was difficult to establish connections with other students. Initially, Alberto lived at home while going to college and worked in the financial aid office. Alberto says he met a lot of people working there and he made sure to get involved in the Latino clubs on campus. Alberto says that he has strong connections with his professors at college and that is a primary driver for him to continue to work toward his degree. He says that his professors encourage him and lift him up. Alberto speaks specifically about the influence his Spanish professor had on him in terms of persisting toward his degree. He said that the three Hispanic women are mentors; he sees a lot of his mom, aunts, and grandma in their accomplishments. He went on to say that, "…my Spanish professors, they're three Hispanic

women who have also been mentors to me…they're very motherly figures, always taking care of us and always, like, inspiring us."

Pedro

Pedro, age 25, graduated in 2020 from a private university in Oregon with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Cinema and Media communications. As an awardee of the Oregon Opportunity Grant among other scholarships; this afforded Pedro the opportunity to obtain his degree without taking loans. In addition, Pedro worked part-time during college and was paid a stipend for being a peer mentor. Pedro noted in his interview that because he grew up in a single family household, he was concerned about not being able to pay for college. He also noted that he worked tirelessly growing up to support his mom with finances so she would be financially stable; this was a motivating factor for Pedro to, "work so hard, especially in high school, to get scholarships, volunteer, be active, and yeah, it was just me putting in more and more work to get to where I was or to where I'm at right now."

During his interview, Pedro consistently brought up that his mom was the primary advocate for him to pursue his college education. Pedro noted, "My mom was my support to be able to kind of help me…even though she didn't have a formal education." Pedro also noted that one of his biggest motivators to pursue a college degree was "exiting or leaving poverty." Pedro really sees his mom as a role model for changing conditions in order to better oneself. He noted that his mom was the first in his family to leave Guatemala to come to the United States. Pedro says that he too, is leaving a legacy much like his mom, when he graduated with his bachelor's degree. Pedro stated that he did not ever consider his mom not having a formal education as a disadvantage or holding him back from pursing a college education. In fact, Pedro says it's the opposite. He was very clear that it was because his mom did not have a formal education that

pushed him to excel and motivated him to persist to complete his bachelor's degree.

Pedro grew up in an urban area in Oregon and attended a technical high school. Pedro noted that although the high school was predominately White and he did not see a lot of students that looked like him, there was a lot of diversity in student's backgrounds as they came from different middle schools across the region to attend this high school. Pedro discussed that his high school offered hands-on career and technical education programs. He noted that he was able to explore his interests and where he developed his passion for digital media. Pedro was involved in the Digital Media Production Program during high school and this supported his goal to pursue this as a career field in college. Pedro noted that the support systems in place during his high school experiences definitely played a key role in his wanting to go on to college.

Pedro's story of being an overcomer becomes more interesting as he noted that he was not a good reader, writer, and struggled in math. Because of this, Pedro was identified as a special education student during his 9th grade year. In addition, Pedro was also identified as an English Language Learner. Pedro noted that in his elementary years, he knew he struggled academically and that he needed more support. He went on to describe that he received free tutoring from one of his neighbors during third or fourth grade. Pedro said he really struggled through school until his 9th grade year when he was given some supports through special education. He also noted that after his junior year, there was a meeting where there was a decision that he did not need special education. The following year, Pedro was enrolled in AP courses including: AP English and AP photography. Pedro noted that his teachers of those two AP courses were responsible for encouraging Pedro to go to college and helping him realize that he was capable of going to college. Pedro reflected, "Just because I'm in particular special programs or programs that a majority of my peers aren't in, doesn't mean I'm, like, steps behind

them or anything of that sort."

During his college experience, Pedro notes that his success as a first-generation Latino male college goer has a lot to do with belonging and feeling connected to other ethnic minority males on campus. He pointed out that his identity as a Latino male in a largely White institution and being away from home for the first time, motivated him to seek out students with similar cultural backgrounds and to integrate with other males from minority groups. Pedro noted that together, they were all supporting each other as minority males to persist and compete their bachelor's degree. Pedro also stated that he was very active on campus and participated in peer mentorship programs and culturally specific clubs.

Gabriel

At 22 years old, Gabriel is a senior at a private university in Oregon and will graduate with his Bachelor of Arts in Secondary Education and Spanish in the spring of 2024. Gabriel will be the first in his family to graduate with a college education. Gabriel's mom and step-dad reside in Mexico and his only brother, whom is two years younger, resides in California. When talking about his family, Gabriel disclosed that he did not have a relationship with his biological dad. Gabriel's journey to nearly completing his bachelor's degree is, what he describes as "a very, very different story than most of my peers or friends."

At the age of 7, Gabriel, his brother, and his mom moved to Mexico; Gabriel describes this as "a new beginning." Gabriel attended elementary and middle school in Mexico, and because he did not have dual citizenship, at the age of 15, he had to leave his family in Mexico and return to Oregon to attend high school. Gabriel lived with his uncle and wife and attended a predominately Hispanic-Serving high school in an urban area in Northwestern Oregon. Upon returning from Mexico, Gabriel recalls that he wasn't able to communicate in English. One

motivation for Gabriel pursuing an education degree he says, “Part of the reason I’m majoring in education is because of my own experience in high school. And I had a lot of amazing teachers who really believed in me and they just pushed me to do better.” Gabriel participated in a program specifically for English language learners. Students who came from another country would automatically be placed in this program. Gabriel describes the impact of this program stating, “My school had a great reputation when it came to producing, like, you know, high-achieving students and students who came here to learn English and then they became proficient, biliterate in both languages.” Gabriel began high school in a level 1 English Language Development course and moved to level three during his sophomore year. During his junior year, he exited the program and continued on to take International Baccalaureate advanced courses such as: history, math and Spanish.

He attributes much of his success to the fact that his high school reflected about 80% or more Latino students along with that, the staff were diverse as well. Gabriel noted,

> I literally had my science teacher, she was Mexicana and she taught the entire science class in Spanish. My math teacher was also, he was from the Dominican Republic, so he would teach the class in both English and Spanish at the same time.”

During high school, Gabriel participated in the AVID program; this provided opportunities for him to explore the potential of going to college. Gabriel stated,

> It was through AVID, that’s when we started to look at different colleges, different programs, scholarships. And then I started to attend tours to colleges through that, through AVID, of course. And then I started to look into, like, different programs and what I wanted to do. So that’s basically when I became inspired to go to college and the very first scholarship that I got was the Beat the Odds Scholarship.

When talking about his experiences in high school and college, Gabriel notes that his support system (including friends, role models who had similar backgrounds) encouraged him to be successful in high school and to then pursue a college education. Gabriel notes one individual that has had the biggest impact on him both as a Latino male and as a college student. Gabriel summarizes the impact of this role model for him stating, "He makes me realize that I'm also able to do, one day maybe, do the work that he's doing for others." As a first-generation Latino male, Gabriel notes that he became involved in culturally specific programs both in high school and college and it is through those programs that Gabriel describes "being part of a support system that really encourages me and motivates me to be in college, to know that I'm not alone and that I have a system that also supports me and cares about me."

Throughout his tenure at college, Gabriel has worked on campus. In addition, he is a coordinator for one of the Latinx clubs on campus which is also a paid position. Gabriel relied heavily on scholarships to attend college and lived on campus. Gabriel discussed a lot about loving school and wanting to continue on to college, and also worrying about how to pay for college. Gabriel has taken advantage of opportunities while in college as he has studied abroad three times, has become a student ambassador, and was accepted to attend the United States Hispanic Leadership Institute in Chicago.

Results

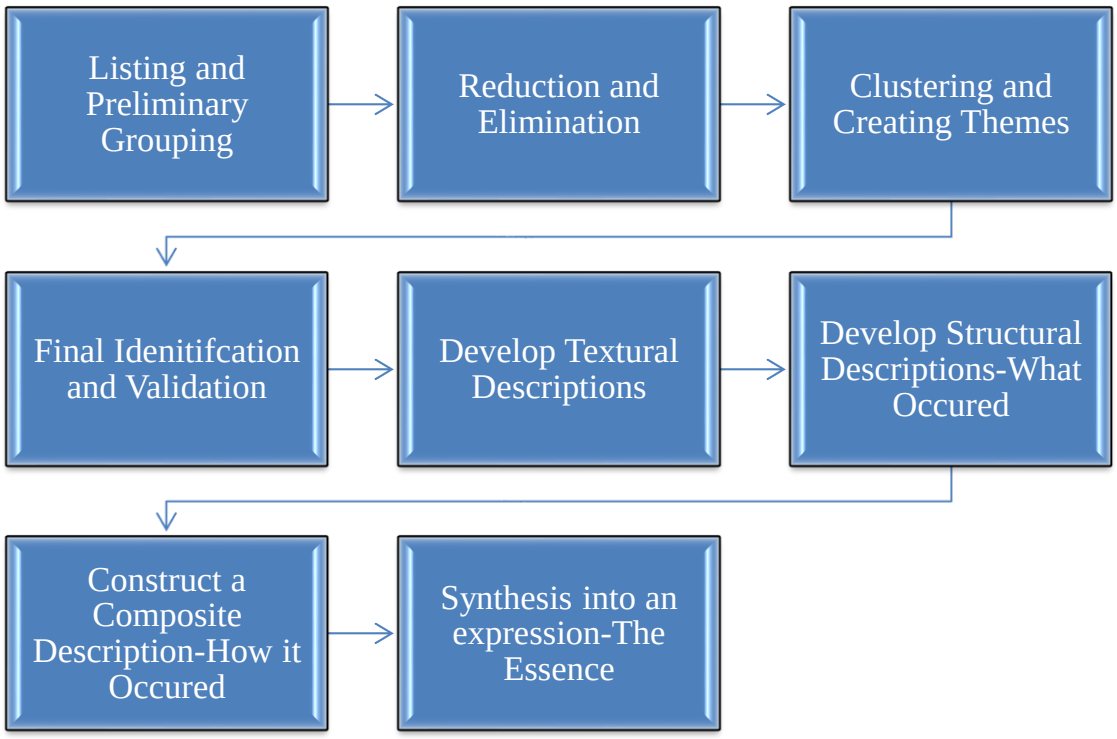
All six participants were asked to participate in a 30 question individual semi-structured interview (see Appendix G). Within those interview questions, the first 13 were demographic in nature, with the remaining 18 focused on answering the central research question.

Moustakas' Modified Van Kaam method (1994) of analysis provided the framework to analyze the data from the individual interviews from the six participants. The steps of

Moustakas' Modified Van Kaam method include: (1) listing and grouping, (2) reduction and elimination, (3) clustering and creation of themes, (4) final identification and validation, (5) develop textural descriptions, (6) develop structural descriptions for all six participants, (7) construct a composite description, and (8) synthesis of the total essence of the experience for all participants. Throughout the data analysis process, the researcher enacted bracketing, also referred to as epoché, as a process to set aside experiences or beliefs the researcher may have related to the phenomenon. Following the steps shown in Figure 9, core themes emerged that both answered the central research question and captured the essence of the experiences of the participants.

Figure 9

Data Analysis Steps



Note: From Moustakas (1994)

Steps 1 and 2

Horizontalization, the first step in Moustakas' Modified Van Kaam method (1994) of phenomenological data analysis asks the researcher to consider each statement from participants as having equal value. The researcher read and reread transcripts from the interviews several times to become familiar with the tone and feelings of the participants. Coding was conducted by participants first and then by interview question second. A total of 396 excerpts were identified as being relevant in answering the central research question. From the excerpts, 60 codes were identified with 670 code applications (excerpts where several codes were identified). The coded excerpts, also referred to invariant constituents, were reviewed by the researcher using the horizontalization process whereby the researcher treated each statement with equal value and any overlapping or repeated statements were removed. Table 11 below outlines the initial codes along with the resulting codes that were identified following the horizontalization process. This reduction process (step 2) resulted in a total of 385 significant statements that were organized into 44 codes and were used in steps three and four.

Table 11

Horizontalization Process

	Step One: Initial Coding Process	Frequency	Step Two: Reduction Following Horizontalization	Frequency
1	Academics	4	Academics	4
2	Access to college coursework in HS	8	Access to College Coursework in HS	8
3	Being a Latino male	19	Challenges and experiences of being a Latino male	22
4	Being a minority	24	Being a minority	24
5	Being away from family	9	Being away from family	9
6	Belonging	20	Belonging	20
7	Better life	7	Better Life	8
8	Campus involvement	25	Campus Involvement	25
9	Challenges in college	26	Challenges in college	22
10	Citizenship status	3		

	Step One: Initial Coding Process	Frequency	Step Two: Reduction Following Horizontalization	Frequency
11	College going culture in HS	13	College going culture in HS	17
12	College institutional barriers	19	College institutional barriers	19
13	College mentors	11	College mentors	11
14	College supports	23	College supports	24
15	Community college	2		
16	Community network in college	11		
17	Connecting to people of similar background	32	Connecting to people of similar background	32
18	Culturally responsive	8	Culturally responsive	8
19	Cultural expectations	13	Experiences with marginalization	7
20	Educators and staff of color	11	Educators and staff of color	19
21	Faculty influence	16	Faculty Influence	16
22	Family and culture	24	Family and Culture	31
23	Family support	18		
24	Fears	3		
25	Financial support to go to college	8	Financial struggles and socio economic challenges	14
26	First-generation	19	First-generation	19
27	Friend support	6		
28	Giving back	4	Giving back	7
29	Guilt	3	Guilt	8
30	Hands on	2	Hands on	2
31	High school barriers	3		
32	High school-college connection	3	High school-college connection	3
33	High school college visits	8	High school college visits	8
34	High School teacher and staff influence	8		
35	High School Role models	3		
36	High school supports	14	High school supports	14
37	Identity	14	Identity	14
38	Immigration to America	5	Issues relating to immigration, documentation, and assimilation	5
39	Language Learning	2		
40	Mentors	12	Mentors	12
41	Micro-aggressions	3		
42	Mom support and influence	8	Mom support and influence	8
43	Motivation to persist	41	Motivation and personal growth in college	54
44	Parent support	5	Parent and family support	23

	Step One: Initial Coding Process	Frequency	Step Two: Reduction Following Horizontalization	Frequency
45	Peer mentor	9	Peer support and mentorship	12
46	People of color as influence	10	People of color as influence	10
47	Perceptions of others about Latino males	13	Perceptions of others about Latino males	13
48	Persistence	7	Perseverance and overcoming challenges	7
49	Pride	7	Personal pride and accomplishment	7
50	Racism/Bias	18	Racism/Bias	19
51	Role models	21	Role models	21
52	Self-advocacy	4		
53	Self-doubt	4		
54	Self-fulfillment	7		
55	Socio economic status	6		
56	Stereotypes of Latino males	19	Stereotypes of Latino males	19
57	Why higher education	10	Why higher education	10
58	Working while in college	9	Working while in college	13
59	Working while in college-impacts	4		
60	Worries about going to college	15	Worries about going to college	17
Total	Code Applications	670		665

Steps 3 and 4

Codes from the previous steps were grouped by common expressions that created clusters that were listed together. The researcher again reviewed each expression and statement and if those statements did not represent the group as a whole, they were eliminated. The remaining codes were validated through data points that included transcripts from the interviews and field notes from the researcher. Through this process an additional six codes were eliminated, leaving a total of 38 codes. Table 12 below outlines the final codes along with the frequency of each code for all six participants.

Table 12

Participant Code Frequency

Code	Gabriel	Joel	Pedro	Alberto	José	Javier
Access to college coursework	1	1	1	1	2	2
Being a minority	4	4	6	1	1	9
Being away from family	3	1	3	0	0	3
Belonging	3	5	9	1	1	2
Better life	1	1	2	1	1	2
Building a system of support	3	6	0	1	1	0
Campus involvement	2	7	6	4	3	3
Challenges/experience of a Latino male	8	2	2	3	6	1
Challenges in college	7	8	9	2	2	4
College going culture in HS	2	2	3	1	5	4
College institutional barriers	1	10	4	2	1	2
College supports	3	4	6	1	3	7
Connecting to people of similar background	4	9	8	3	7	1
Culturally responsive	0	5	0	2	0	1
Educators and staffed color	3	6	4	1	1	5
Experiences with marginalization	1	1	1	1	1	1
Faculty influence	3	3	2	3	1	5
Family and culture	7	8	3	4	3	6
First-generation	7	3	4	1	3	1
Giving back	1	1	1	2	1	1
Guilt	2	1	1	1	1	2
High school supports	3	2	2	2	5	1
Identity	2	3	6	3	1	1
Issues related to immigration, documentation, and assimilation	1	1	1	2	2	1
Mentors	3	6	7	3	2	4
Mom support and influence	2	0	2	1	3	0
Motivation and personal growth in college	14	13	11	6	2	8
Parent and family support	2	7	2	5	1	6
Peer support and mentorship	2	3	5	1	1	2
Perceptions of other about Latino males	1	3	3	1	1	4
Perseverance in overcoming challenges	1	2	1	1	1	2
Personal pride and accomplishment	2	1	1	1	3	1
Racism/bias	5	7	1	3	3	1
Role models	4	2	2	2	7	4
Stereotypes of Latino males	4	4	3	3	3	2
Why higher education	3	1	1	2	4	1
Working while in college	1	1	1	5	1	5
Worries about going to college	6	1	4	1	2	3

Using the remaining 38 codes and 379 participant excerpts, thematic clusters were created from the participants' experiences related to the phenomenon. Following, the core themes emerged and represented the experiences of all six participants experiencing the phenomenon. Table 13 below showcases the initial codes, frequency, thematic clusters, and core themes.

Table 13

Clustering and Thematizing Invariant Constitutes

Final Codes	**Frequency**	**Thematic Clusters**	**Core Themes**
Access to College Coursework in HS	8	Advocacy for inclusivity Diverse perspective	Family
Being a minority	25	Challenges as minority male	Sense of Purpose
Being away from family	10	Culturally responsive	Welcoming and Culturally Diverse School Environments
Belonging	20	Diverse perspectives among educators and education institutions	Academic Supports for Latino Males
Better Life	8	Empowerment in identity	
Building a system of support	11	Family encouragement in pursuing a bachelor's degree	
Campus Involvement	25	First-generation and motivation	
Challenges and experiences of being a Latino male	22	Mentorship and support systems	
Challenges in college	32	Navigating financial challenges and support	
College going culture in HS	17	Overcoming stereotypes and misperceptions of Latino males	
College institutional barriers	20	Peers	
College supports	24	Program involvement	
Connecting to people of similar background	32	Representation in education systems	
Culturally responsive	8	Resiliency	

Educators and staff of color	20	Respect for cultural backgrounds	
Experiences with marginalization	7	Role models	
Faculty Influence	17	The role of teachers and professors	
Family and culture	31		
First-generation	19		
Final Codes	**Frequency**	**Thematic Clusters**	**Core Themes**
Giving back	7		
Guilt	8		
High school supports	15		
Identity	16		
Issues relating to immigration, documentation, and assimilation	8		
Mentors	25		
Mom support and influence	8		
Motivation and personal growth in college	54		
Parent and family support	23		
Peer support and mentorship	14		
Perceptions of others about Latino males	13		
Perseverance in overcoming challenges	8		
Personal pride and accomplishment	9		
Racism/Bias	20		
Role Models	21		
Stereotypes of Latino males	19		
Why higher education	12		
Working while in college	14		
Worries about going to college	17		

Step 5 and 6

The core themes that resulted from steps one through four were used to create individual textural and structural descriptions for each of the six participants (found later in chapter four). Textural descriptions are descriptions of what happened according to participants who experiences the phenomenon. In contrast, structural descriptions describe how the phenomenon occurred along with the setting. Both the individual textural and structural descriptions were

grounded in participants' quotes along with their perceptions and feelings from their own experiences.

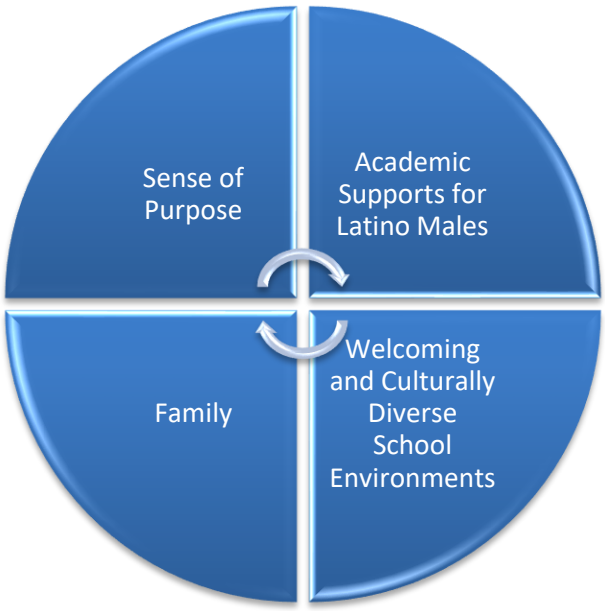
Step 7

In this final step of Moustakas' Modified Van Kaam method (1994), the researcher used the individual textural and structural descriptions to generate a composite description that was representative of the participant group as a whole. The core themes and codes were reviewed; the researcher then grouped and reduced them in order to formulate the composite descriptions and final principle themes. It is through this process that the essence of the phenomenon is uncovered.

One central research question guided the data collection and data analysis section of this study. The research question asked Latino males to describe their experiences in persisting to complete their bachelor's degree. The principle themes that follow demonstrate the results of the data analysis to describe the shared experiences of Latino males who persistently enrolled in four-year institutions in Oregon to complete their bachelor's degree. Four core themes emerged in identifying participants' overall experiences and rationale for persisting and completing a bachelor's degree. The four themes displayed in Figure 10 include: Family, Sense of Purpose, Welcoming and Culturally Diverse School Environments, and Academic Support for Latino Males. The four core themes are the foundation in answering the guiding research question: What experiences influenced Latino males to persistently enroll without dropping out in completing their bachelor's degree?

Figure 10

Essence of the Phenomenon Represented in Four Core Themes



Discussion of Essence through Core Themes and Findings

Core Theme One: Family.

When interviewing the six Latino male participants for this study, it was clear that one motivation to persist to complete a bachelor's degree was a deep sense of commitment to family and cultural value referred to as *familismo*. There were 66 occurrences in participant quotes where this theme presented itself. Within the core theme of family, participants expressed ideas related to the education of their parents, socio-economic upbringing, how their moms and other women in their family had impact on their success, the support of their parents, challenges of being away from family, and the financial stress and worry in attending college. All participants acknowledged that the lack of education of their parents did not have a negative impact of their persistence to complete a bachelor's degree. In fact, all participants viewed their parents' lack of college education as an advantage and motivation to complete their bachelor's degree. This was

evidenced by Alberto when he stated, "…it as an advantage because they always saw it as a priority, you know, to give us education." This feeling was echoed by Joel, "…still provides a good amount of motivation that I have to take advantage of this opportunity that they weren't necessarily afforded." Pedro stated, "Just because my mom doesn't have an education background, like, doesn't mean that it presents as a disadvantage for me."

Not only did participants understand their parents' lack of access to formal college education as an asset, they all spoke clearly about how their low-income upbringing was a primary pillar that motivated them to succeed in college. Javier stated, "…coming from a lower income neighborhood it was, it was pretty dangerous. My dad had dreams of going to higher education, going into college, but unfortunately, he had to work in agriculture to provide for his mother." Alberto noted, "We were very poor; it was only my dad working." Pedro noted, "…leaving poverty was probably my reason to get my bachelor's degree." Gabriel echoed, "I reflect back on my experience back in Mexico, and then I see my parents still living in Mexico under poor conditions." Joel expressed both his fear and motivation when he stated, "we're low income and undocumented. So I face this pressure of like, I'm going to have to retire my parents because we don't have a plan for retirement." José noted with gratitude,

> What really influenced me to go into higher education was working with my dad out there in the, you know, under really, I guess, under some circumstances…that were not, I don't know, the greatest…was part of my story that pushed me to get into college and appreciate the education and also knowing that both parents had that disadvantage of not going to school really helped shape my story for the future.

The influence of mothers and female family members also became a common thread in participant interviews. Joel stated,

> …I think about my mother and when she first came to this country and how difficult it was for her. And so I feel as if I owe it to her and to, you know, mitigate a lot of the harshness that she had to go through.

José shared, "I grew up with, you know, Mom…my mom was more supportive of me going into college and doing what I wanted to do." Alberto echoed the importance of both his mom and women in family when he stated, "I come from a very long line of strong women who are big feminists…" Joel echoed, "…mom was more of like a conversation, more like a moral support about why pursuing higher education or why, you know, pursuing a college degree was such important for us." Gabriel stated it this way,

> …my mom has told me this. She's like, there's a lot of problems going on here with me, but I don't want to tell you because I don't want to interrupt your studies. Mom is always like oh, that's fine, está bien, you know?

Interview participants expressed the value of parental support in their persistence and success in completing bachelor's degree. Alberto shared, "…because my parents have always instilled in my siblings and I this, the importance of education and the importance of, like, a career and a college education because they themselves never had it." Alberto went on to say,

> They're the ones who have always pushed me and my siblings to get a college degree, to continue education and to get as many as degrees as we want or can get. So they've always wanted us to be educated and to have knowledge and to kind of pursue more things and anything that their parents were able to give them or not give them.

Javier stated it this way, "My parents always encouraged me to go to school…support from my parents to make me pursue a higher education, it's just so great. I don't know how to explain it. Joel explains,

> …they can't help me with the writing, they can't really help me with the math or anything like that, but they could still support. I was fortunate that my older brother was going to college because that kind of set the path towards me. It allowed me to see myself within that space as well, and so I kind of assumed I was going to go to college.

Pedro echoed these sentiments, "I was the first to go to college and my family was really supportive of me going to college." All participants spoke to how their parents had direct discourse around going to college and the importance of pursuing a college education. Alberto described it this way, "it's a very common thing among a lot of us who were brought here as kids, is that our parents brought us here for a better life and for better education, better opportunities." In a few instances, participants spoke on how their fathers and other family members were not encouraging in their pursuit of a bachelor's degree and the cultural expectations of males. José stated, "…he knew I was heading into that path and he was not supportive about it. He was like, no, you're going to stay with me and you are going to continue the work." Gabriel shared,

> …some of my extended family members. They always question my degree. So it's like, what are you studying? And I'm like, oh, education. They're like, why? Oh, I want to be a teacher. And they're like, they just started questioning my degree. They start questioning my abilities, or they think that I should, that I could do something else.

Pedro noted that, "Latino community a lot of it is because, you know, I guess even fathers and male figures, adult male figures have occupations that you are expected to fulfill or learn."

During the interviews, participants discussed their feelings on being away from family in order to pursue their bachelor's degree. Two of the participants lived at home while attending college, while four lived on campus. Pedro stated, "…being away from my family was a

challenge…and the mental health issues that arose." Javier described it this way,

> …primary barrier was moving out on my own…it's pretty difficult being seven hours away from home at some place I've never really been at before. After graduation from my community college, I was ultimately contemplating not going to university because I didn't want to move out. I didn't want to live seven hours away from my family and friends and be separate from all of them.

Gabriel echoed those statements, "…feeling of homesickness and feeling alone is never going to go away."

Interview participants all described navigating financial hardships and their worries and concerns about supporting their families and paying for college. This was illuminated when Pedro stated, "…financially, when I thought about college, I was kind of concerned about, you know, not being able to pay for college. Being able, trying to support my mom with finances, being able to help her be financially stable." This was echoed by José, "If I hadn't gotten the Ford scholarship, I don't think I would have gone to college." This was further reiterated by Gabriel when he stated,

> I knew that I wasn't going to be able to pay for my own education. I have no idea how I'm going to pay for it. My initial plan was to attend the community college because, of course, it was going to be a cheaper. I became inspired to go to college and the very first scholarship that I got was the Beat the Odds Scholarship…I won't have to worry about paying for college. So yeah, I ended up receiving many scholarships.

Javier concluded with, "…a lot of financial aid, a lot of grants and scholarships…I haven't taken out any loans." All participants expressed that without the scholarships, they would have not pursued their bachelor's degree. Most participants received merit –based scholarships or private

scholarships due to their documentation status.

Core Theme Two: Sense of Purpose

For all participants in this study, finding a sense of purpose in pursuing their bachelor's degree was illuminated as they told their stories. Participants' awareness of their "why" for aspiring despite challenges and obstacles revealed an array of descriptions including: cultural expectations of being a Latino male, the stress and fear of documentation and citizenship, living into their identity as a first-generation Latino male college goer and graduate,

For all of the participants, giving back and changing the trajectory for other Latino males and family was a primary reason for their purpose in pursuing and completing a bachelor's degree. Pedro stated, "I can say that my why was wanting to contribute to my community, finding a way how I can use my higher education to do that." He goes on to say,

> …building my future, being able to, you know, not fulfill the status quo that was set upon me, but rather to change it and to impact others. I'm just doing this to, one for my family, one for myself, the other is to give back and to do something, make a contribution to my community.

José also stated, "I was shaping for the kiddos in the back. My cousins, my, because I have a few cousins here, but I was the oldest one and the one that was going to college and I wanted to set a great example." Javier describes it this way, "I feel like it makes me want to break that barrier, break that statistic, and encourage others to do the same thing." Alberto stated, "it's obviously my biggest motivation because I want to succeed and be, you know, like, just a good Mexican Latino person successful in the world." Finally, Gabriel commented, "I want to keep doing this for other students who came here like me… through my own experiences, I'm also able to encourage other younger classmen to take all of these opportunities." Gabriel also

emphasized, "…and it's also our own life purpose that we're pursuing and it is our own, and it's our own work, it's our own struggle, our own, the skills, the work that we're putting into pursue this degree." All participants had smiles as they talked about their success, perseverance, and resilience in completing their bachelor's degree. Joel captured his feelings by saying, "I felt excitement. I was like, I couldn't imagine and believe myself actually finishing my bachelor's." This sentiment was echoed by José when he said, "I would just remember walking on campus and just realizing, whoa, I can't believe I made it to here." Gabriel emphasized his pride by stating, "I'm also just grateful for my own self-reliance, my own hard work, and my own independence to pursuing my own educational, my degree."

Identifying cultural norms and expectations that Latino males face and learn to navigate in pursuing their bachelor's degree rose to the top in the interviews by all six participants. Asking for help was a common theme from all participants as a something that was not promoted culturally among Latino males, but was something that made a difference in their success as a student. Joel described it this way, "lacking in asking for help, that's something as a Latino male, you don't, you know, you got the whole stereotype, but we don't ask for help." Javier noted, "Seek help. Don't drown without asking for help." Joel also noted, "…reach out to support networks…reaching out to friends, family, and everything I could." Gabriel noted in his first year of college, "I don't know where to ask for help. I don't know how to organize my time. I don't know what's going on with me, so, and I was actually so close to fail a class." Gabriel echoed this stating, "…during that first year, my first year, I was really struggling with a class. I learned that if I don't advocate for myself, no one is going to do it for me." Mental health was also addressed by participants as something that is not talked about or supported within the Latino culture; especially for Latino males. Gabriel described it this way,

> I grew up within a Mexican household and I always thought that therapy was for the weak, for example. I always thought that therapy was not a thing because, like, we should be strong and I'm a Latino male, I should be strong. I really get an opportunity to express my feelings and my emotions. Something that, of course, within our culture is not often seen.

Pedro noted, "…challenges where I was, like, emotionally unstable and they needed like to make sure that I took care of myself." Joel echoed by stating, "…because of my counselor I have been able to finish my degree." For many of the participants a cultural norm as a Latino male means working. While all participants stated that their parents were supportive of their pursuit of a bachelor's degree, each of the six participants discussed working as a means to provide for themselves while going to college. Alberto describes it this way,

> So my parents always provided, have always provided us with the essentials...money to pay for my own things because my parents have never, they did give us money when we were little, but as soon as we were able to work, they wanted us to work. I think, though, that has always been my biggest obstacle, because I've always had at least two jobs while I was in college.

This is echoed in Javier's statements,

> …main barriers would be in my personal life, it would be the amount of hours I'm working. It impacts me academically because then I don't have much time, or much time to do a lot of school work and it gets kind of rushed…I don't have much time to go to tutors.

Gabriel noted, "Since my freshman year, I have been able to work." José discussed that he tried to work two jobs while in college because that's what he thought he should do. He later noted, "I

later realized I couldn't do it."

Identity was discussed frequently by all participants in the interviews as part of their purpose in persisting in completing their bachelor's degree. All participants demonstrated pride in their heritage as they discussed their culture. Alberto stated, "I love being Mexican. I wear my Mexican citizenship with a badge of honor." Pedro noted, "…connect more of my male identity with other student males…helped me to develop my identity as a Latino male, but also part, being part of a bigger, like, racial, like a multi-ethnic group." Pedro goes to say, "Latino males are stuck at where they feel like they're not good enough, they don't have enough, but they want to contribute." Gabriel echoed with,

> I do believe that society's opinions do impact our journeys and because a lot of the messages that we often get is that we college, Latino college males should be working already after high school. That we should be getting a job working in construction and why are we going to college when that's like, that's not our place?

Joel stated,

> I don't want to assimilate in certain ways. And I don't seek to, how would I say, let go of parts of me. So in essence, it makes me more proud and it makes me more want to place more effort in learning my own history and being Chicano and in serving my community simply because of these societal opinions.

Joel continues his point by stating, "I find a lot of strength in in my identity. I find a lot of strength in being Mexicano. I find a lot of strength in being Chicano." Gabriel noted, "…identity as a Latino is very much like focused on and politicized, I emphasize it and I hold on to it and I'm proud of it."

Being a first-generation student was named by participants as a pivotal foundation of

their identity. Gabriel stated,

> I see, I look at the first-generation experience as a strength, as an identity that comes with so many strengths and skills rather than seeing it as a deficit. First-generation identity has really been also a motivation for me because I'm like, I will be the first one in my family to graduate from college, the first professional within my family. I am a brown person, a Latino male in college who, you know, it's kind of like breaking boundaries, breaking cycles of generations of people not attending higher education.

Pedro stated, "I'm reminded about being the first…think that being the first to get a bachelor's was something that, you know, is like a legacy." Joel emphasized, "So I would just think encourage them (referring to other first-generation Latino males) to, you know, start pushing in these spaces where they weren't, how do I say, really welcomed early on." In the discussions around being a first-generation student, participants disclosed sense of guilt and added stress to achieve associated with being a first-generation student. Gabriel captured his feelings of guilt in this way, "obstacle or challenge, would be feeling guilty all the time…not being able to help them or support them either way, emotionally or economically, really affects me." When talking about being at college and having fun experiences, Javier reflected this, "I should be possibly working in the field with my dad right now." Joel emphasized the role that guilt played in his success by stating,

> When I was doing bad in school, that feeling came with a lot of guilt because I was thinking to myself, who am I to struggle with this role as a student when my parents didn't even have the opportunity to become a student to begin with. Guilt is pretty prominent for us (referring to Latino males) and so I felt a huge part of guilt for not doing well and then it just, it was just like a cycle and I kept doing worse and then like that, it

> just kept rolling down.

This was echoed by Gabriel,

> This sounds kind of selfish, but lately I have been focusing more on myself because, of course, being able to prepare myself first. …it's the biggest obstacle for me because I often reflect on whether I should probably, like, stop taking advantage of these opportunities and using my money from working, and helping my parents financially instead of me traveling and having all of these great experiences.

Concerns, fears, and worries came to the forefront as some participants described what it means for themselves or their parents to be undocumented and navigating that as part of their identity. Joel describes his feelings about his parents' citizenship status this way,

> …it's them being undocumented has presented other things where it's like, oh, I can't do that. Oh, I can't speak on this or I can't do this because I guess there's this constant fear of bringing attention to ourselves in fear that, you know, but not also just that it's the, and I hate to say this, but I do have that issue of anxiousness, of anxiety that at any moment, like, my life can change if they're plucked out of this country.

Joel continues on and states,

> Ever since elementary school, I understood that my parents aren't documented. And I understood that we are Mexican and that comes with certain conditions that have been placed on us. And because undocumented folks are often very politicized within politics, we're used as, you know, somewhat pawns here and there, that motivated the entirety of my major.

Alberto stated,

> I was always angry about my documentation and the fact that, you know, we were really,

> we were brought here as kids, it's not really our fault that we're here. But I've kind of made my peace with it, I guess. I've kind of come to a point in my life where I've kind of accepted the fact that I will probably never become a U.S. Citizen or resident because it's really not in the cards for me.

Pedro captured purpose as a pillar to persist to obtain his bachelor's degree by stating,

> I knew kind of my purpose and my mission and vision for myself and my community. It's like your core anchor, I guess, basically your core reason and then also your anchor to making sure that you're, when in time that you're pushed back or feel like the waves are pushing your boat, you at least are anchored in the same position and aren't having to drift away or get lost anywhere. I can say that my why was wanting to contribute to my community, finding a way how I can use my higher education to do that.

Core Theme Three: Welcoming and Culturally Diverse Inclusive School Environments

A large and very emotionally charged core theme that surfaced from participants' lived experiences was around school environments; including both high school and college. Participants' experiences with school environments prompted a zooming in to discover how it is tied to Latino males' persistence in obtaining a bachelor's degree. Faculty and staff influence, representation on campus, breaking barriers and overcoming stereotypes and racism of Latino males, and the importance of belonging were central ideas related to school environments. Albert reaffirms this when he stated, "we need help sometimes, especially in a place like academia, where there's not really much, like, clear pathways for us, you know, we have to make that ourselves." Pedro reiterates the significance of this core theme when he stated, "we all know that higher education, the system of higher education wasn't built for minority groups, multi-ethnic groups." This ideas is echoed in Joel's comments, "…build foundations to support students who

aren't typical to these spaces because, you know, they weren't created for us to begin with."

All six participants discussed the influence staff and faculty had in their persistence to obtain a bachelor's degree. This also included staff and faculty influence in their high school education. Joel stated, "…biggest supports, yeah, so it was the staff or faculty supporting us, supporting me that encouraged me to stay." Alberto also stated,

> My professors have been one of the, like, yeah, big role models, but also big, like, mentors for me. My Spanish professors, they're three Hispanic women who have also been mentors to me…they're very motherly figures, always taking care of us and always, like, inspiring us.

Alberto continued to say, "…very, like, accomplished people. So I see a lot of, like, my mom and, like, my aunts and my grandmas in them. I think I've had a pretty good connection with my professors, my peers, that I've always had a really good experience." This is echoed in Gabriel's comment, "This teacher believes in me. Like, that means that I can do it, you know." José also summed up his experience by stating, "My counselor, she's another person that shaped my education probably the most that helped me throughout everything." While all of the participants had positive experiences with staff and faculty during their high school and college journeys, all participants explicitly revealed any negative experiences they had were with staff or faculty who were White. Javier shared a negative experience he had in this way, "…I had was when a professor at the community college encouraged me to drop out. It really messed with my head because I kind of got impostor syndrome from that. Like I'm not good enough." Gabriel also explained a negative experience like this,

> A White staff member told me that I needed to challenge myself. I honestly felt embarrassed. That comment really hurts because I'm already, being in college is already,

> like, challenging enough…I also started to realize was a first-generation student not challenging enough?

Following that experience, Gabriel says, “I often think that, oh, they're probably right. I should probably pursue something else, something more challenging, or actually I should challenge myself, as this person told me to.” Throughout high school and college, all participants described the lack of representation they noticed in their professors and staff. Joel stated, “…educators who actually look like me and who actually could relate to me.” José tells of an experience stating, “Teachers approached me because we were the only Latinos in class and they asked, do you know where David is?” José discussed how this teacher assumed because José was Latino that he must automatically know this other Latino male student. Joel described this experience when he said,

> There was another situation where one of the educators in the second grade thought that I had stolen a toy from a kid and she dumped me and my cousin's backpacks onto the floors of the front of the elementary school building…and we were accused simply because we were the only Latino kids just out there.

Javier sums it up when he stated, “I had that negative experience, that positive experience ultimately I powered over that negative experience.”

As participants were talking about their experiences with staff and faculty, ideas around racism, bias, and stereo types of Latino males emerged. Joel made a connection in stating,

> My high school peers who didn't graduate simply because teachers had implicit biases. Like, if you see a student in the back of the classroom with his head down, they instantly assume he's an anomaly and they stop working with that student or attempting to motivate them. My high school peers, some of them didn't graduate because, essentially,

> they were pushed out."

José also stated,

> …not getting along with my AP chemistry teacher either. So I was like, I don't know, I was just, and I think it might have been some racism involved on there too. Because I was probably, yeah, the only one Latino taking the class. And I felt like she'd make things harder for me.

This was echoed in Pedro's comments stating, "…not necessarily people who could relate to a bunch of brown kids who come from low-income communities and instead, you know, they had their own implicit biases already placed on there."

Alberto noted, "There's so much stereotypes and bad connotations, like, associated with being Latino." Pedro weighed in when we stated,

> I guess, like, you know the devaluing of Latino males based on, like, you know, I guess media meeting portraying us as criminals or trying to see like, just more of like lower class workers for labor. Stereotypes and misperceptions of Latino males. If I think it's true, then you know, what can I do to make a change or if I'm just going to fall into the perceptions and stereotypes, or fulfill the status quo that was already established."

Gabriel noted, "…Latinos being lazy, being too *machistas*, not doing well in college, dropping out or super easy, dropping our first year… instead of, like, lifting us up, they, of course, have a negative impact on us." As Gabriel was talking, he was referring to the opinions and views of society regarding Latino males. Javier also noted,

> As a minority and a first-generation student, I feel like a lot of people around me think that I have everything handed to me. I'm a Latino, I'm a minority in college, that I get what I want and that I'm here based just because of that. And that's something that's really

> upset me, and that's something that has been kind of, I don't, kind of not directly said to me, but kind of hinted that way in some instances.

Along this same vein, participants brought to light the cultural racism that also plaques Latino males. Alberto described his experiences as a Latino male in this way,

> There's a lot of racism even within our own culture against, you know, Latinos who are dark skinned or brown or come from different areas in Mexico. I'll be honest and real about the fact that I am very much White presenting as well. I'm a little taller than most. I have fair skin, light brown hair.

Alberto describes that he has not been faced with cultural racism as he doesn't look like what folks would consider a typical Latino male. Joel also acknowledges that in this way, "I was preferred over my peers because I was lighter skinned and that also coincided with even Latina educators as well."

During the interviews, participants spent quite a bit of time talking about diverse perspectives in school environments; particularly around curriculum. Joel noted that "Schools need to understand that, yeah, you could have diversity and say you're diverse, but you need to support it." Alberto drives the point by stating,

> I've brought this up a lot with my professors, you know, kind of had a lot of debates with them about we've primarily focused a lot on the Western or European white, like, way of thinking when it comes to philosophy, politics, religion, anything like that. I always, I need to make it a focus, to focus on Latin America because it's so ignored in an academic setting.

Joel supported that idea when we stated, "Political science is very much a white person's course. I hate that the entirety of the study of political science is based on American hegemony, but it's

also based on the American perspective." Joel goes on to say, "But I think about how I always attempt to add my own cultural background into my writing." Pedro points out, "Because the teacher can't see past, you know, that perspective, it forced me to write another thing. And so, you know, educators just in general need to be, how do I say this, more open to different views?" Gabriel adds on by saying, "I'm reading an article and it's another, I'm sorry to say, it's another white person, you know, writing about something."

Role models were mentioned by all participants as a key factor in school environments being welcoming spaces for Latino males. All six participants mentioned role models at some point in their interview. For participants, role models ranged from teachers in high school, to school counselors, principals, to college professors and college staff. The one thing all role models had in common was that they were all from a minority background. Participants discussed in great detail the power of connecting with folks from similar backgrounds. José recounted,

> …times that really transformed me where, I think it was like starting at the middle school age when my last year, eighth grade, where I had a teacher and he gifted me a monitor and computer box and he said, 'I think you would be great for college'. And so I was like, you know, really excited to get, it was going to be our first computer in the U.S. He would tell my parents, 'I think José should consider going to college'.

Gabriel noted, "I had a lot of amazing teachers who were role models and really believed in me and they just pushed me to do better." Pedro also stated,

> I had teachers from those two programs who were role models, help me realize that it is possible to go to college. When challenges do arise, like for example, racism, difficulty with classes or resources, they're there to, you know, help us, talk us through it, or to

provide us with knowledge of certain things.

Alberto described his role models in this way, “my older siblings are my role models because they went to college and it way harder than me.” Javier also described role models in his life when he stated, “key role models that might come off as a surprise is my high school principal. I still stay in contact with some of my advisors and role models I have.”

Mentioned 43 times in interviews, all six participants disclosed a sense of belonging was a primary feeling they had when discussing school environments. The feeling of belonging was key for participants in their school environment and was an essential component of their persistence and completion of their bachelor’s degree. Pedro shared, “We all long for a place to belong and when we don't feel belong in the particular community, maybe we’re not motivated to pursue our dreams and passions.” Joel captured that thought in this way, “we're all looking for belonging and those spaces, you know, ensured my place of belonging there.” Gabriel echoed the power of belonging in this way, “So just being part of a support system that really encourages me and motivates me to be in college, to know that I'm not alone and that I have a system that also supports me and cares about me.” Within belonging, participants discussed their experiences and fears of being a Latino male in school environments where they feel isolated and alone. Javier described it this way,

> Walking into a classroom and seeing that I am one of the only Latino people in that entire room, especially here at such a large university. It definitely intimidated me at some scale. It's made me want to not show up to club meetings, to events, to certain experiences that I ultimately would have needed…it's kind of a bittersweet emotion because I know I shouldn't be afraid, but I am.

This idea is echoed in Joel’s comments when he shared,

> I had to act like the perfect minority because I was just afraid of that and I was, it's a real fear, yeah. And it did place certain barriers where I was, like, too afraid of doing something because I wanted to stay home or I didn't want to bring attention to myself.

José noted, "It was hard, but most of my classmates were White… I became known for the language and being Latino." Gabriel described it in this way,

> …first of all I wanted to lose the accent just because I was afraid that people would make fun of me because of my accent. It felt like you always wanting to justify yourself, like trying to justify why you're there, justify, you know, your own values and beliefs.

All six participants described scenarios that were challenging for them while in college and each one talked about how belonging helped them overcome any challenge they faced. Joel talks about it in this way,

> I essentially failed three terms straight, back-to-back with no, how do I say it, no light of success at all. But despite that I still never felt like dropping out, that wasn't part of the equation at all. I had to essentially, like, to overcome these challenges, I had to pull from my networks.

Part of the network of belonging for participants was their peer groups. Participants were clear about the importance their peer groups had on their success in college. Pedro stated this way,

> …especially if you're a Latino in a predominantly White institution, it has helped me connect with other groups, with Asian American groups, with Black American groups, with Pacific Islander groups, and just kind of like getting to be, I guess what we would say, like a minority group at a predominantly White institution.

Pedro continued on to say, "peer support was part of it that helped me kind of, like, navigate it was kind of a little bit of a challenge to continue to pursue." Joel noted,

> Peers, people who are within the same school grade as me, kind of seeing them persist and push forward in higher education motivates me. Start building a body of students so that you start creating, you know, power and generate a community for yourself.

Gabriel described it in this way, "My friends, for example, they have been here to support me whenever I need anything. I do encourage my friends a lot as well." José shared, "… meeting other peers and listening to their stories. Pedro also stated,

> …be part of something on campus, not bigger part of, like, the bigger part of campus, but actually be part of campus and you know, be part of a community...being able to connect with others, being able to find those opportunities and establishing those relationships just so that you survive college.

José also discussed the importance of school environments being welcoming to families as he describes it in this way,

> One of the, another moment that really impacted me was the events that some of these student groups would put together. And they would be, it's called, where they would invite folks to the college campus, like Hispanic families. And it was, it was kind of like a retreat on campus for families. I think it's Mi Familia…and they also had workshops for the parents to learn about our life, student life in college and how we go about things and how they can best support us.

Core Theme Four: Academic Supports for Latino Males

Another prominent theme from participant's lived experiences was the core theme of academic supports. Mentioned 66 times in the verbatim transcripts, all six Latino males in the study talked extensively in their interviews about the value of connections, relationships, and networks were key in their persistence to obtain a bachelor's degree. In addition, all six

participants highlighted academic supports in their first year of college was a primary force in their success to persist without dropping out. Academic supports named included: mentoring, programs in high school that promote college-going; including, access to college coursework, and Latino specific programs or clubs or clubs and programs for ethnic diverse groups.

One of the primary academic supports mentioned by all participants that fostered a sense of community in their journey was mentoring. The term mentor/mentoring was mentioned 59 times within the invariant constituents. Participants referred to mentoring as a pivotal component for both their high school and college journeys. Participants describe how their participation in mentoring programs and, in turn, how they themselves became mentors was a key factor in their persistence. Joel describes his experience by stating,

> When I first started college, I got into the GANAS (Gaining Access & Navigating for Academic Success) program and I think with that, it guaranteed me success. I got a mentor. I think mentorship is really important for a lot of students who are first-generation especially because no one from our background has ever completed this alone.

Joel goes on to explain, "I find myself again in like a mentoring type of role, mentoring high schoolers." As a migrant student, José received mentoring in the CAMP program and stated mentoring was beneficial, "… learning how to study, become involved, meet people, you know, attend, like, outside events also, like conferences." José noted that he became a mentor through the Oregon Migrant Leadership Institute and stated, "I was also helping shape the future of kids in high school." Pedro discussed his experiences with mentoring in this way, "In high school, it was mentors or adults who I, you know, established good relationships with, like student/teacher and mentor to mentee." Pedro goes on to talk about mentoring in college and stated, "I got involved in clubs and mentoring…couple of mentors were professors and then others were just,

like, they, you know, were part of an office." Following, Pedro became a peer mentor was paid a monthly stipend. Javier, also a migrant student discussed how his participation in the CAMP program provided mentoring opportunities "My mentor was a Latino male and he was someone who gave me a safe space to do my homework and stay there and get academic support from and whatever, in whatever subjects I needed."

Through interviews and reviewing transcripts, all six participants attended high schools that both hosted programs that promoted a college-going culture for Latino males and offered opportunities for college coursework. All six participants participated in programs in high school where they had introductions to college and all participants participated in some kind of dual-credit college coursework. Gabriel stated,

> My school, I believe, does a great job in providing those resources, the information we need to apply for these scholarships. I was part of AVID, it's, of course, a college readiness program...students who came here to learn English and then they became proficient, biliterate in both languages.

José describes his experience by stating, "…program called TRIO Upward Bound…one hundred of us and then we would occupy a whole building at the college and they would help us with our homework. Like all the college kids would help us with our homework." Javier also stated the importance of programs that introduce college to students in this way,

> So in high school, we took a lot of trips to universities and colleges and seeing the environment and the opportunities presented at those colleges just seemed really intriguing to me. My high school they kind of drilled in your head higher education is great, higher education is great, pursue higher education.

Alberto also highlighted his experiences in high school that had impact on his decision to attend

college, “I was always working, but I was always also still involved with school, at least, like, junior year, my AVID class and we visited colleges and began applying for scholarships.” Both Joel and Gabriel talked about the impact of a programs geared toward Latino male high school students called Mente. Joel describes Mente by saying, “Mente was a good opportunity and, you know, kind of going within a campus space.” Gabriel remembers meeting an accomplished Latino male role model at Mente and describes the impact in this way, “I met Saul and I'm like, oh, he went to Harvard. He's a person I look up to, like a lot, and he works here. I want to be like him and come to college here.” Participants stated that participating in those programs was the necessary tool to launch them into college, and as Pedro stated, “find and look for those opportunities.”

In terms of college coursework in high school, Alberto, Pedro, and Joel all took AP courses while in high school and all three earned college credits. Javier noted, “I had access to dual credit courses with my local community college, which has helped me come to where I am today and graduating early for my bachelor’s degree.” Gabriel shared, “my school had International Baccalaureate courses, the program. So I took a couple IB courses, like history, math, Spanish.” José describes his experiences with earning college credit like this,

> …program together for six weeks on campus and you would live on campus, you would actually live on the campus. You'd stay in dorms and then you would take, like, classes and they’d give you a credit for graduating at the high school and college too.

Latino-specific programs or programs for ethnic diverse groups emerged as common thread from participants interviews. All participants were involved in a club, fraternity, study abroad, or diversity center during their tenure as college students. One of the benefits of being involved on campus, Pedro stated, “it builds your network.” Joel describes his experiences by saying,

> …it's also influenced, you know, my circles, like the people in which I'm around and I guess the level of empathy I have towards other people and other struggles as well…that connection is very crucial to succeed within college, because then the next day we're all, you know, studying together.

This was also echoed in Alberto's comments, "…allowed me to be a part of a group, a cohort, of people from my similar background." Gabriel stated, "I studied abroad for the first semester and did again two more times." Javier notes, "I utilize the Cultural Resource Center so that I could feel more at home with my, with other Latinos and Latinas that are in similar situations as me." The power of these programs to connect and empower Latino males can best be described by Joel, "I got two homes. I got one, you know, at home. And then I got the campus, which makes me feel comfortable and I guess that's, that comfort-ness is invaluable." Pedro summarizes the importance of academic supports in this way, "retention programs that they have established to help students stay in school, like multi-ethnic and diverse students; like us." Javier went on to emphasize the power of programs that support Latino males when he said, "once you find your environment, your community, then you can thrive at your best and graduate with your bachelor's degree."

Conclusion

Chapter four provided a data analysis that included: an overall description of the participant group, individual participant vignettes, analysis of the data by steps, and significant findings that includes the true essence of the phenomenon being studied. This was a transcendental phenomenological study that allowed the researcher to capture the essence of the phenomenon being researched.

These themes collectively portray a narrative of resilience, cultural pride, challenges

faced, the importance of mentorship, and empowerment of Latino males in persisting to obtain their bachelor's degree. The narratives also highlight and emphasize the need for representation, leveraging support systems for academic success, navigating identity challenges, and advocating for inclusivity. In addition, the lived experiences of the participants illuminate the need for institutions to be responsive to the diverse needs of their student populations. Evidence of the impacts of participants successes in obtaining their bachelor's degree are further discussed in Chapter V

Chapter V: Discussion

The Latinx population continues to be the fastest growing in the United States (Allen, 2016; Carey, 2016; G.A. García et al., 2017; Hines et al., 2019; NCES, 2019). There has also been an increase in the number of Latinx students going on to higher education (Excelencia in Education, 2019; Hernandez & McElrath, 2023; NCES, 2023a). However, while there are increases in both Latino male and female students matriculating to higher education institutions, the bachelor's degree attainment rates are disturbingly low (Anthony et al., 2021; Excelencia in Education, n.d.). Further alarming is that Latino males continue to be consistently achieving degree completion at lower rates than their peers (Excelencia in Education, 2019; Luis et al., 2023; Lumina Foundation, 2024; Montelongo, 2018; Schak & Nichols, 2017). National degree attainment in 2022, inclusive of associate's degree for Latino adults, is slightly more than 29 percent, compared to about 52 percent for White adults (Lumina Foundation, 2024). For context, in 2017, overall degree attainment for Latino adults is about 10 percentage points lower than that of White adults in 1990 (Schak & Nichols, 2017). From 1990 to present, there has not been a closure of the achievement gap for Latino adults in attaining their bachelor's degree. Furthermore, this continued gap in degree attainment among Latino males signals education entities to act with haste to close these pervasive equity gaps in order to provide Latino males the opportunity to earn a high-quality college education while also increasing bachelor's degree attainment.

While much of the existing research regarding this topic magnifies the lack of success of Latino males in higher education, this research study intentionally approached the research using an anti-deficit approach; revealing counter narratives along with the assets that enable the successes of Latino males as they have navigated their college education journey. To that end,

the research for this study aimed to understand experiences and identify factors that influenced the persistence of Latino males in attaining their bachelor's degree. Amplifying the voices of the Latino males through their own testimonies of how they overcame obstacles to reach academic success was at the heart of this study and was addressed through the following research question:

> What experiences influenced Latino males to persistently enroll without dropping out in completing their bachelor's degree?

The remaining sections of this chapter focus on the researcher's discussion regarding the results of the study that were presented in Chapter IV. In addition, recommendations for future research and implications for professional practice tie up the remaining part of Chapter V.

Summary of the Results

The purpose of this research study was to contribute to the inadequate amount of research on the lived experiences of Latino males in their persistence to obtain a bachelor's degree at four-year institutions in Oregon. This was a qualitative phenomenological study that utilized a transcendental approach. Transcendental phenomenology was best suited for this study as the researcher aimed to not impose any interpretations or preconceived ideas and allow the true essence and meaning of the phenomenon to be uncovered (Moustakas, 1994). Each experience is unique to the individual, the researcher believed it was criterial to capture the voices of the participants to illuminate the essence of the phenomenon (Laverty, 2003; Moustakas, 1994; Peoples, 2021). Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with each of the six participants. Each interview lasted approximately 70 minutes and was conducted in a virtual setting. All interviews were recorded, transcribed and then analyzed by the researcher. Throughout the research process, the researcher routinely engaged in bracketing or epoché in order to put aside any preconceived ideas and acknowledge any potential bias. Through

Moustakas' Modified Van Kaam data analysis method (1994), the researcher was able to immerse herself in the verbatim transcripts to uncover the essence of the phenomenon.

Ensuring validity in this qualitative study occurred when an expert panel of four reviewed and gave feedback on the interview protocol. In order to ensure trustworthiness in the study, the researcher conducted two pilot interviews, had ongoing discussions with critical friends, kept a journal, and conducted member checking to ensure the participants' voices were accurately reflected in the writing (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Maxwell, 2013; Saldaña, 2015).

Through participants' verbatim expressions and stories, an overall understanding of the phenomenon of the persistence of Latino males in obtaining their bachelor's degree was uncovered. Participants in this study demonstrated grit through their persistence. Chapter IV provided an analysis of participant stories that revealed several themes providing rich insights into how they overcame barriers along with asset-based implications that aided in Latino males' educational attainment. Figure 11 below captures the four core themes that emerged as the essence of the phenomenon in this study that was centered on persistence:

- Family
- Sense of Purpose
- Welcoming and Culturally Diverse School environments
- Academic Support for Latino Males

Figure 11

Core Themes Foundational to This Study

Family

The participants in this study unanimously stated that family played a critical role in their persistence to obtain a bachelor's degree. Culturally, the traditional core value of *familismo* was elevated as participants described the attachment and emotional support their families provided and how that contributed to positive outcomes in their quest for a bachelor's degree.

Additionally, family was heavily discussed as a primary mechanism of support, determination, and aspiration. Pedro stated, “I was the first to go to college, and my family was really supportive of me going to college.” Research supports that for males, educational aspirations were positively correlated with parent respect and parent expectations (Agger et al., 2018).

Within the theme of family, all participants acknowledged that in their view, their parents’ lack of a formal education was not only an asset, but also was a driving force for their persistence to degree completion. Moreover, all participants had a low socioeconomic upbringing. To this end, participants again, passionately shared their stories of growing up poor and indicated how that was a significant component in their decision to go to college and earn a bachelor’s degree. Javier stated, “…coming from a lower income neighborhood it was, it was pretty dangerous. My dad had dreams of going to higher education, going into college, but unfortunately, he had to work in agriculture to provide for his mother.” Alberto noted, “We were very poor; it was only my dad working.” Pedro noted, “…leaving poverty was probably my reason to get my bachelor degree.” Gabriel echoed, “I reflect back on my experience back in Mexico, and then I see my parents still living in Mexico under poor conditions.”

Holistically, all participants expressed the value of parental support played in their persistence to a degree. All participants noted that their parents routinely discussed the advantages of having a formal education and encouraged their children to pursue a college education. One of the participants, Alberto shared, “…because my parents have always instilled in my siblings and I this, the importance of education and the importance of, like, a career and a college education because they themselves never had it.” Alberto went on to say,

> They're the ones who have always pushed me and my siblings to get a college degree, to continue education and to get as many as degrees as we want or can get. So they've

> always wanted us to be educated and to have knowledge and to kind of pursue more things and anything that their parents were able to give them or not give them.

Within parental support, the influence of mothers and other influential female family members was illuminated in participants' stories of success. It was evident from participants the value they placed on their mom's encouragement and support. Joel stated,

> …I think about my mother and when she first came to this country and how difficult it was for her. And so I feel as if I owe it to her and to, you know, mitigate a lot of the harshness that she had to go through.

José shared, "I grew up with, you know, Mom…my mom was more supportive of me going into college and doing what I wanted to do." Alberto echoed the importance of both his mom and women in family when he stated, "I come from a very long line of strong women who are big feminists…" Gabriel stated it this way,

> …my mom has told me this. She's like, there's a lot of problems going on here with me, but I don't want to tell you because I don't want to interrupt your studies. Mom is always like oh, that's fine, está bien.

Research supports the role female family members have on Latino males and suggests that they have been identified as a primary advocate and supporter in their pursuit of a college education (Sáenz et al., 2016).

As participants were discussing the value of their family in their pursuit of a bachelor's degree, a common theme arose around being away from family while they attended college. For some participants, this was almost a deciding factor for them not to attend college. For most participants, there was a strong feeling of loneliness and disconnectedness from family as they entered their first year of college. Pedro stated, "…being away from my family was a

challenge…and the mental health issues that arose." Javier described it this way,

> …primary barrier was moving out on my own…it's pretty difficult being seven hours away from home at some place I've never really been at before. After graduation from my community college, I was ultimately contemplating not going to university because I didn't want to move out. I didn't want to live seven hours away from my family and friends and be separate from all of them."

Gabriel echoed those statements, "…feeling of homesickness and feeling alone is never going to go away."

Navigating financial worries also came to the forefront as participants explained how they got to college. All participants received scholarships and grants to support them in paying for college. Interestingly, not one participant took out student loans in their higher education journey. All participants disclosed that if it were not for scholarships and grants, they would not have pursued their college education. This was illuminated when Pedro stated, "…financially, when I thought about college, I was kind of concerned about, you know, not being able to pay for college. Being able, trying to support my mom with finances, being able to help her be financially stable." This was echoed by José, "If I hadn't gotten the Ford scholarship, I don't think I would have gone to college." This was further reiterated by Gabriel when he stated,

> I knew that I wasn't going to be able to pay for my own education. I have no idea how I'm going to pay for it. My initial plan was to attend the community college because, of course, it was going to be a cheaper. I became inspired to go to college and the very first scholarship that I got was the Beat the Odds Scholarship…I won't have to worry about paying for college. So yeah, I ended up receiving many scholarships.

Javier concluded with, "…a lot of financial aid, a lot of grants and scholarships…I haven't taken

out any loans." Some of the literature suggests that because Latino males are expected to provide for their families, their lack of education aspirations to attend postsecondary education is impacted in a negative way (Clark et al., 2013; Covarrubias et al., 2021). According to participants in this study, providing for the family was a worry, but that did not influence their educational aspirations.

Through all of the conversations, it was clear that family was a significant factor in Latino males' both pursuit and persisting in obtaining their bachelor's degree. The strong sense of *familismo,* the foundational cultural construct involving a strong familial attachment, was both a motivator to persist and led to feelings of worry, loneliness, and in some cases, depression (Clark et al., 2013; López et al., 2019; Sáenz et al., 2016). This dichotomy of feelings was a barrier to overcome, and in the end, was the very thing that launched participants to success. The literature corroborates the notion of family as a primary pillar for Latino males' educational aspirations and successes in postsecondary education (Clark et al., 2013; Covarrubias et al., 2021; López et al., 2019; Sáenz et al., 2016).

Sense of Purpose

For participants in this study, it was evident that identifying and finding purpose was a pillar to their success in obtaining their bachelor's degree. Giving back, starting a legacy, the expectations of being a Latino male, identity, and first-generation all became significant parts in participants' purpose for pursuing and persisting in their postsecondary education.

The term "giving back" was spotlighted by all six participants as they described part of their "why" for both perusing and persisting in their postsecondary education. Pedro stated, "I can say that my why was wanting to contribute to my community, finding a way how I can use my higher education to do that." He goes on to say,

> …building my future, being able to, you know, not fulfill the status quo that was set upon me, but rather to change it and to impact others. I'm just doing this to, one for my family, one for myself, the other is to give back and to do something, make a contribution to my community.

Despite challenges and barriers, participants were clear that their own internal motivation to be a successful college graduate lay in the goal to give back to their family, their community, their peers, and themselves. Breaking down barriers and setting an example that is counterintuitive for the status quo for Latino males was where participants found strength to persevere. Javier describes it this way, "I feel like it makes me want to break that barrier, break that statistic, and encourage others to do the same thing." Alberto stated, "it's obviously my biggest motivation because I want to succeed and be, you know, like, just a good Mexican Latino person successful in the world." Finally, Gabriel commented, "I want to keep doing this for other students who came here like me… through my own experiences, I'm also able to encourage other younger classmen to take all of these opportunities." Gabriel also emphasized, "…and it's also our own life purpose that we're pursuing and it is our own, and it's our own work, it's our own struggle, the skills, the work that we're putting into pursue this degree." Changing the current landscape and setting a new trajectory for other Latino males was primary in participants' purpose to persist. Gabriel emphasized his pride by stating, "I'm also just grateful for my own self-reliance, my own hard work, and my own independence to pursuing my own educational, my degree."

Learning to navigate shifts in what participants knew as cultural expectations of being a Latino male along with the intersection with persisting in their college education was at the forefront in supporting their purpose. Through their stories, participants identified asking for help as a norm for Latino males that was not encouraged. Joel described it this way, "lacking in

asking for help, that's something as a Latino male, you don't, you know, you got the whole stereotype, but we don't ask for help." According to participants, asking for help is not only not promoted culturally for Latino males, but it also a sign of weakness. These sentiments from participants surrounding asking for help were in alignment with the literature as Latino males often do not have the confidence to interact with their teachers/staff/faculty for help (Duncheon, 2020; Rodriguez et al., 2016). Similarly, the topic of mental health was also addressed by several of the participants. Again, participants describe mental health as a topic that is not only discouraged culturally, but that therapy is "for the weak". Gabriel described it this way,

> I grew up within a Mexican household, and I always thought that therapy was for the weak, for example. I always thought that therapy was not a thing because, like, we should be strong and I'm a Latino male, I should be strong. I really get an opportunity to express my feelings and my emotions. Something that, of course, within our culture is not often seen.

Culturally, there is a belief that being a Latino male signals strength; therefore, showing emotion and seeking support through mental health services went against the cultural norm. The words from participants around mental health did not come out in the literature and suggests a need to be researched in relationship to persistence for Latino males in obtaining their bachelor's degree. A final component of a cultural norm for Latino males in this study was centered on working. All six participants discussed an internal feeling that they needed to work while pursuing their bachelor's degree. For most participants, working while going to college was the only means to provide for themselves. Alberto describes it this way,

> So my parents always provided, have always provided us with the essentials...money to pay for my own things because my parents have never, they did give us money when we

> were little, but as soon as we were able to work, they wanted us to work. I think, though, that has always been my biggest obstacle, because I've always had at least two jobs while I was in college.

This is echoed in Javier's statements,

> …main barriers would be in my personal life, it would be the amount of hours I'm working. It impacts me academically because then I don't have much time, or much time to do a lot of school work and it gets kind of rushed…I don't have much time to go to tutors.

Working while going to college became an obstacle for participants as they described the academic impacts of trying to work, sometimes two and three jobs while attending college. This somewhat aligns with the literature that there is a cultural norm for Latino males, in particular, to provide for their families (Clark et al., 2013; Covarrubias et al., 2021). There was dissonance with the participants' stories and the literature related to Latino families expectations for their Latino sons to provide financial support as a contributing factor why Latino males do not go-on or attain a postsecondary education (Clark et al., 2013; Covarrubias et al., 2021).

Participants' identity and pride became another foundational piece in their purpose to persist in their postsecondary education. All participants were proud of their culture and have vowed to stay true to their identity; even in the midst of being a minority in predominately White institutions. Alberto stated, "I love being Mexican. I wear my Mexican citizenship with a badge of honor." Pedro noted, "…connect more of my male identity with other student males…helped me to develop my identity as a Latino male, but also part, being part of a bigger, like, racial, like a multi-ethnic group." As part of their identity, all participants shared being a first-generation college students and graduates. While participants found much strength in their identity as a first-

generation college graduate, that also came with a sense of guilt and stress to achieve. Gabriel stated,

> I see, I look at the first-generation experience as a strength, as an identity that comes with so many strengths and skills rather than seeing it as a deficit. First-generation identity has really been also a motivation for me because I'm like, I will be the first one in my family to graduate from college, the first professional within my family. I am a brown person, a Latino male in college who, you know, it's kind of like breaking boundaries, breaking cycles of generations of people not attending higher education.

Joel emphasized, “So I would just think encourage them (referring to other first-generation Latino males) to, you know, start pushing in these spaces where they weren't, how do I say, really welcomed early on.” Participants often reflected on feeling guilty for participating in college activities such as study abroad programs rather than contributing to the family. That same sense of guilt came as participants discussed their academic struggles in college coursework. When participants struggled in academics, they described a strong sense of guilt that they should be doing better as their parents did not have the opportunity to go to college. Javier reflected this, “I should be possibly working in the field with my dad right now.” Joel emphasized the role that guilt played in his success by stating,

> When I was doing bad in school, that feeling came with a lot of guilt because I was thinking to myself, who am I to struggle with this role as a student when my parents didn't even have the opportunity to become a student to begin with. Guilt is pretty prominent for us (referring to Latino males) and so I felt a huge part of guilt for not doing well and then it just, it was just like a cycle and I kept doing worse and then like that, it just kept rolling down.

Part of some of the participants' identity was their citizenship status or the citizenship status of family members; primarily their parents. Fear, anxiousness and worry plagued participants as they described several instances throughout their educational journey when they felt they could not speak to a particular topic in school for fear of being looked down upon. The literature around the persistence of Latino males in obtaining their bachelor's degree did not address Latino males or their families who were undocumented along with their worries, fears, and anxiousness surrounding their documentation status while attending school. Joel describes his feelings about his parents' citizenship status this way,

> …it's them being undocumented has presented other things where it's like, oh, I can't do that. Oh, I can't speak on this or I can't do this because I guess there's this constant fear of bringing attention to ourselves in fear that, you know, but not also just that it's the, and I hate to say this, but I do have that issue of anxiousness, of anxiety that at any moment, like, my life can change if they're plucked out of this country.

Joel continues on and states,

> Ever since elementary school, I understood that my parents aren't documented. And I understood that we are Mexican and that comes with certain conditions that have been placed on us. And because undocumented folks are often very politicized within politics, we're used as, you know, somewhat pawns here and there, that motivated the entirety of my major.

Participants described a constant state of fear that their parents could be sent away at a moment's notice. Other participants have come to accept their documentation status and that they will never become a United States citizen. Alberto stated,

> I was always angry about my documentation and the fact that, you know, we were really,

> we were brought here as kids, it's not really our fault that we're here. But I've kind of made my peace with it, I guess. I've kind of come to a point in my life where I've kind of accepted the fact that I will probably never become a U.S. Citizen or resident because it's really not in the cards for me.

There was a strong sense of both anger and resentment that participants were brought to the United States as children and questioned why they would not ever have the opportunity to become a citizen with the same rights and opportunities. Opportunities to research and gain insights on Latino males who are undocumented or who have family that are undocumented along with the impact on their persistence in bachelor's degree achievement needs further study.

Welcoming and Culturally Diverse School Environments

School environments that were both culturally diverse and welcoming were a core theme throughout participants' stories. Within this theme, central ideas around staff and faculty influence, representation on campus, racism and bias, culture of diversity in school, role models, and belonging emerged as being key components in participants' overall persistence to bachelor's degree attainment and are echoed in their stories. Albert stated, "we need help sometimes, especially in a place like academia, where there's not really much, like, clear pathways for us, you know, we have to make that ourselves." Pedro reiterates the significance of this core theme when he stated, "we all know that higher education, the system of higher education wasn't built for minority groups, multi-ethnic groups." This idea is echoed in Joel's comments, "…build foundations to support students who aren't typical to these spaces because, you know, they weren't created for us to begin with."

While all participants had mostly positive experiences with staff and faculty in both high school and college, all participants noted that the influence of their teachers and staff had an

impact on their successes as a student. Joel stated, "…biggest supports, yeah, so it was the staff or faculty supporting us, supporting me that encouraged me to stay." Alberto also stated, "My professors have been one of the, like, yeah, big role models, but also big, like, mentors for me. Participants notably mentioned that faculty and staff who looked like them was a big factor in how they viewed themselves as student and how those connections supported their dreams and aspirations to succeed. Joel stated, "…educators who actually look like me and who actually could relate to me." Representation of faculty and staff resulted in participants being able to see themselves in academia which supported their goals to catapult them to bachelor's degree achievement. "My Spanish professors, they're three Hispanic women who have also been mentors to me…they're very motherly figures, always taking care of us and always, like, inspiring us." Alberto continued to say, "…very, like, accomplished people. So I see a lot of, like, my mom and, like, my aunts and my grandmas in them." The need for faculty representation is supported in the literature and is positively correlated to Latinx graduation rates. In fact, faculty of color are more likely to support diverse undergraduate and graduate students through mentorship and research projects (Contreras & Contreras, 2015). In addition, participants spoke highly of their teachers and staff and described them as "inspiring and accomplished". This is echoed in Gabriel's comment, "This teacher believes in me. Like, that means that I can do it, you know." José also summed up his experience by stating, "My counselor, she's another person that shaped my education probably the most that helped me throughout everything." It was important for all participants to feel valued, cared for, and understood by their teachers and staff in both high school and college. While positive experiences with faculty and staff were prevalent, each of the participants disclosed instances in their educational journey where negative interactions and relationships with faculty and staff had

damaging impacts. Research reveals that when Latino males feel faculty are not invested in them or do not portray an authentic care, that influenced their engagement in coursework (Pérez & Sáenz, 2017; Rodriguez et al., 2016). Each of the harmful experiences participants discussed, revealed a common denominator; all experiences where there was a negative interaction were with White faculty or staff. Participants noted that they had many teachers and staff throughout their educational careers who were White that played a key role in their successes; however, any damaging experiences were also all encounters with White staff. Javier shared a negative experience he had in this way, "…I had was when a professor at the community college encouraged me to drop out. It really messed with my head because I kind of got impostor syndrome from that. Like I'm not good enough." Gabriel also explained a negative experience like this,

> A White staff member told me that I needed to challenge myself. I honestly felt embarrassed. That comment really hurts because I'm already, being in college is already, like, challenging enough…I also started to realize was a first-generation student not challenging enough?

Participants described feeling ashamed, unworthy, and second-guessing their choice to continue in their educational careers. In addition, participants told stories of being tokenized in educational settings as most participants attended predominantly White institutions. José tells of an experience stating, "Teachers approached me because we were the only Latinos in class and they asked, do you know where David is?" José discussed how this teacher assumed because José was Latino that he must automatically know this other Latino male student.

Overcoming stereotypes, systemic racism, and biases during their educational journey rose to the top as a common idea for all participants. Microaggressions and implicit bias were

central to participants' experiences during their educational journey. This was echoed in Pedro's comments stating, "…not necessarily people who could relate to a bunch of brown kids who come from low-income communities and instead, you know, they had their own implicit biases already placed on there." Participants discussed in detail about overcoming and navigating the perception of Latino males as being criminals, lazy, and lower class workers. Joel made a connection in stating,

> My high school peers who didn't graduate simply because teachers had implicit biases. Like, if you see a student in the back of the classroom with his head down, they instantly assume he's an anomaly and they stop working with that student or attempting to motivate them. My high school peers, some of them didn't graduate because, essentially, they were pushed out.

Working to create a new status quo and change the negative narrative for future Latino males was a rationale for participants to persist in their bachelor's degree attainment. Alberto noted, "There's so much stereotypes and bad connotations, like, associated with being Latino." Pedro weighed in when we stated,

> I guess, like, you know the devaluing of Latino males based on, like, you know, I guess media meeting portraying us as criminals or trying to see like, just more of like lower class workers for labor. Stereotypes and misperceptions of Latino males. If I think it's true, then you know, what can I do to make a change or if I'm just going to fall into the perceptions and stereotypes, or fulfill the status quo that was already established.

Gabriel noted, "…Latinos being lazy, being too *machistas*, not doing well in college, dropping out or super easy, dropping our first year… instead of, like, lifting us up, they, of course, have a negative impact on us." While the literature did not specifically discuss educator racism and

implicit bias, the literature did discuss how a less diverse faculty could suggest that cultural competence, being open to multiple viewpoints, and commitment to serving a diverse student population is not a priority for the college (Contreras & Contreras, 2015; “The Role of Hispanic Serving Institutions”, 2013). Cultural racism also emerged during participant interviews as being a barrier for Latino males. Participants disclosed that their height, skin tone, and accent often played a role in how they were preferred or treated by both their peers and teachers. Alberto described his experiences as a Latino male in this way,

> There's a lot of racism even within our own culture against, you know, Latinos who are dark skinned or brown or come from different areas in Mexico. I’ll be honest and real about the fact that I am very much White presenting as well. I'm a little taller than most. I have fair skin, light brown hair.

Alberto describes that he has not been faced with cultural racism as he does not look like what folks would consider a typical Latino male. Joel also acknowledges that in this way, “I was preferred over my peers because I was lighter skinned and that also coincided with even Latina educators as well.”

Being able to access culturally diverse pedagogy was important to all participants. In fact, participants discussed at length that in their educational careers, there was a lack of cultural responsiveness and awareness. Participants noticed that the education setting what based on predominately white –euro centric views. This included: instruction, curriculum, books, class activities, and school events. Joel noted that “Schools need to understand that, yeah, you could have diversity and say you’re diverse, but you need to support it.” Alberto drives the point by stating,

> I've brought this up a lot with my professors, you know, kind of had a lot of debates with

> them about we've primarily focused a lot on the Western or European white, like, way of thinking when it comes to philosophy, politics, religion, anything like that. I always, I need to make it a focus, to focus on Latin America because it's so ignored in an academic setting.

Joel supported that idea when we stated, “Political science is very much a white person's course. I hate that the entirety of the study of political science is based on American hegemony, but it's also based on the American perspective.” All participants noted that they worked to weave in their cultural heritage as they could through discussions and their written assignments. Joel stated, “I think about how I always attempt to add my own cultural background into my writing.” Participants were very clear that educators holding diverse perspectives and being open to other views was critical in the success of future Latino males. Gabriel adds on by saying, “I'm reading an article and it's another, I’m sorry to say, it's another white person, you know, writing about something.”

All participants discussed in depth the importance and impact of role models in their successes as first –generation college graduate. According to all participants, role models were the key in their overall motivation to persist in their bachelor’s degree journey. For participants, role models were pivotal in both their K-12 education experiences along with their college journey and were inclusive of: school counselors, K-12 teachers, staff, college professors, and academic advisors to name a few. Gabriel noted, “I had a lot of amazing teachers who were role models and really believed in me and they just pushed me to do better.” Pedro also stated,

> I had teachers from those two programs who were role models, help me realize that it is possible to go to college. When challenges do arise, like for example, racism, difficulty with classes or resources, they’re there to, you know, help us, talk us through it, or to

provide us with knowledge of certain things.

For participants, many of their role models were adults who shared similar backgrounds; the power the role models had on participants' successes were stated by all participants in the study. Connection and support were two words participants used to describe role models in their lives.

Within the educational setting and thinking about their persistence to obtain a bachelor's degree, participants overwhelmingly mentioned the word "belonging" throughout the interviews. Participants described school environments that felt like they belonged along with settings where they did not feel they belonged. Pedro shared, "We all long for a place to belong and when we don't feel belong in the particular community, maybe we're not motivated to pursue our dreams and passions." Joel captured that thought in this way, "we're all looking for belonging and those spaces, you know, ensured my place of belonging there." Gabriel echoed the power of belonging in this way, "So just being part of a support system that really encourages me and motivates me to be in college, to know that I'm not alone and that I have a system that also supports me and cares about me." A sense of isolation and loneliness was felt by participants as they described educational settings where they did not feel they belonged. These environments were described as intimidating and unwelcoming; words like "fearful" and "afraid" were also mentioned as participants described educational environments where they felt a lack of belonging. This idea is echoed in Joel's comments when he shared,

> I had to act like the perfect minority because I was just afraid of that and I was, it's a real fear, yeah. And it did place certain barriers where I was, like, too afraid of doing something because I wanted to stay home or I didn't want to bring attention to myself.

Javier described it this way,

> Walking into a classroom and seeing that I am one of the only Latino people in that entire

> room, especially here at such a large university. It definitely intimidated me at some scale. It's made me want to not show up to club meetings, to events, to certain experiences that I ultimately would have needed…it's kind of a bittersweet emotion because I know I shouldn't be afraid, but I am.

As participants discussed belonging, peers came to the forefront as essential in feeling a sense of belonging. This is further supported by the literature as Latino males rely heavily on peer support (peer support from participants in this study were those that were from diverse populations and had similar experiences) and relationships in order to be engaged learners and in, turn, achieve academic success (Capers, 2019; Pérez & Sáenz, 2017). Participants discussed the power of creating a peer network as an avenue for belonging. This was especially true as Latino males described attending predominantly White institutions; it was critical to create a community with peers from ethnically diverse groups. Pedro stated this way,

> …especially if you're a Latino in a predominantly White institution, it has helped me connect with other groups, with Asian American groups, with Black American groups, with Pacific Islander groups, and just kind of like getting to be, I guess what we would say, like a minority group at a predominantly White institution.

Pedro continued on to say, "peer support was part of it that helped me kind of, like, navigate it was kind of a little bit of a challenge to continue to pursue." Joel noted,

> Peers, people who are within the same school grade as me, kind of seeing them persist and push forward in higher education motivates me. Start building a body of students so that you start creating, you know, power and generate a community for yourself.

Support, encouragement, motivation, and challenge me, were all words used to describe the impact peers had on participants' sense of belonging. The sense of belonging aligns with the

literature when discussing school environments that host a diverse student population (Capers, 2019; Moní et al., 2018). Pedro also stated,

> …be part of something on campus, not bigger part of, like, the bigger part of campus, but actually be part of campus and you know, be part of a community...being able to connect with others, being able to find those opportunities and establishing those relationships just so that you survive college.

Understanding the challenges Latino males face, may better help them succeed in postsecondary education and provide the scaffolding needed to complete their degree (Mollet et al., 2020; Salinas et al., 2019).

Academic Supports for Latino Males

For Latino males in this study, a core theme of academic supports was central to their persistence in obtaining a bachelor's degree. In particular, participants discussed the importance of these supports in their first year of college. Academic supports participants named included: mentoring, high school college-going culture that included college coursework, and Latino specific programs, clubs, or clubs and programs for ethnic diverse groups.

Of all academic supports participants in this study discussed, none were as prevalent as mentoring. Mentoring, for all participants in this study, was, by far, one of the most critical factors in their success to persist without dropping out to obtain their bachelor's degree. This was also cited and supported in the literature that institutions with strong mentoring programs has a positive impact on Latino males' persistence (Clark et al., 2013; Venegas, 2021). In addition, all participants mentioned the pivotal role mentors and/or mentoring played in their K-12 experience. Interestingly enough, participants who participated in mentor programs in college, also became mentors themselves during their college careers. Giving back and encouraging other

Latino males was a common thread as participants spoke about the value of being a mentor. Joel describes his experience by stating,

> When I first started college, I got into the GANAS program and I think with that, it guaranteed me success. I got a mentor. I think mentorship is really important for a lot of students who are first-generation especially because no one from our background has ever completed this alone.

Joel goes on to explain, "I find myself again in like a mentoring type of role, mentoring high schoolers." Becoming involved, meeting new people, receiving academic support, and having someone to help problem solve were some of the benefits of participating in a mentoring program, according to the views of participants. José noted that he became a mentor through the Oregon Migrant Leadership Institute and stated, "I was also helping shape the future of kids in high school." Pedro discussed his experiences with mentoring in this way, "In high school, it was mentors or adults who I, you know, established good relationships with, like student/teacher and mentor to mentee." Pedro goes on to talk about mentoring in college and stated, "I got involved in clubs and mentoring…couple of mentors were professors and then others were just, like, they, you know, were part of an office." It was evident in the transcripts from participant interviews, that a common value of mentoring was that participants were connected with another minority male leader who had similar background. This connection point served as a motivator for participants to persist and graduate with their bachelor's degree. Javier, a migrant student, discussed how his participation in the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) provided mentoring opportunities "My mentor was a Latino male and he was someone who gave me a safe space to do my homework and stay there and get academic support from and whatever, in whatever subjects I needed." Participants' stories contribute to the literature that institutions who

have strong outreach programs tailors for Latino males creates a welcoming environment, and therefore, promote their educational success (Clark et al., 2013).

Earning college credit while in high schools along with being exposed to college during high school was a frequent common thread shared by all participants and is supported by the literature as an avenue for postsecondary success for minority populations. Research suggests that accelerated programs provide opportunities to underrepresented students and those programs do, in fact, prepare students for college (Hoffman et al., 2009; Kuhlmann, 2017; N. García et al., 2018). All participants in this study acknowledged exposure to college in high school through college coursework, was a primary factor in their ability to see themselves in college. Each of the six participants graduated high school with some college credit. Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and Early College were all programs participants joined in while in high school. Javier stated the importance of programs that introduce college to students in this way,

> So in high school, we took a lot of trips to universities and colleges and seeing the environment and the opportunities presented at those colleges just seemed really intriguing to me. My high school they kind of drilled in your head higher education is great, higher education is great, pursue higher education.

Alberto also highlighted his experiences in high school that had impact on his decision to attend college, “I was always working, but I was always also still involved with school, at least, like, junior year, my AVID class and we visited colleges and began applying for scholarships.” Along with college coursework in high school, all participants participated in a high school programs specifically designed to promote a college-going culture. College visits, support in applying for scholarships, navigating college entry, and being surrounded with other Latino males who were

aspiring to college were some of the primary reasons these programs were so essential in participants' success in going on to college. Javier noted, "I had access to dual credit courses with my local community college, which has helped me come to where I am today and graduating early for my bachelor's degree." Gabriel shared, "my school had International Baccalaureate courses, the program. So I took a couple IB courses, like history, math, Spanish." José describes his experiences with earning college credit like this,

> …program together for six weeks on campus and you would live on campus, you would actually live on the campus. You'd stay in dorms and then you would take, like, classes and they'd give you a credit for graduating at the high school and college too.

Participants also noted that their Latino male peers who were not exposed to those environments most often did not go on to pursue their bachelor's degree. While, the literature in this study did not specifically mention the power and impact of high school programs that promoted a college-going culture and elevated Latino males' access to college, there is a copious amount of literature suggesting that accelerated learning opportunities and advanced coursework contributes to a college-going culture, improves motivation, reduces drop outs and prepares students for college; specifically underserved student populations (Hoffman et al., 2009; Kilgore & Wagner, 2017; Kisker, 2006; Zinth, 2016).

Involvement through Latino specific programs or programs for ethnically diverse groups was also a key component of academic support according to participants in the study. Participants pointed to involvement on campus in clubs or organizations was a critical element in their persistence of obtaining a bachelor's degree. Participants noted that their involvement in culturally specific organizations or groups on campus reinforced their ability to "build a network" of support. One of the benefits of being involved on campus, Pedro stated, "it builds

your network." Joel describes his experiences by saying,

> …it's also influenced, you know, my circles, like the people in which I'm around and I guess the level of empathy I have towards other people and other struggles as well…that connection is very crucial to succeed within college, because then the next day we're all, you know, studying together.

This was also echoed in Alberto's comments, "…allowed me to be a part of a group, a cohort, of people from my similar background." The connections that were built through involvement in Latino specific or ethnically diverse programs was described by participants as a "crucial" factor for success in college. These programs provided participants with opportunities to connect and empower Latino males that inevitably launched them to be a first-generation college graduate The power of these programs to connect and empower Latino males can best be described by Joel, "I got two homes. I got one, you know, at home. And then I got the campus, which makes me feel comfortable and I guess that's, that comfort-ness is invaluable." Pedro summarizes the importance of academic supports in this way, "retention programs that they have established to help students stay in school, like multi-ethnic and diverse students; like us." Latino males who have high academic goals have emphasized the importance of support networks as an essential component to their academic success (G.A. García et al., 2017; Pérez & Sáenz, 2017).

Conclusions

Acknowledging and understanding Latino males' persistence in obtaining a bachelor's degree is a critical factor in closing the ever-expanding equity gap in postsecondary bachelor's degree attainment (Mollet et al., 2020; Salinas et al., 2019). Significant disparities for Latino male attainment rates for postsecondary bachelor's degrees demonstrates the current higher education landscape. These disparities have created an equity gap in education that continues to

perpetuate the equity gap in the nation's economy (Lumina Foundation, 2024; Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2022). There has been some research conducted on closing the equity gap for the Latino males with a focus on community colleges. However, there is limited research that focuses on the assets and successes on Latino males who have persisted in obtaining their bachelor's degree; with an intentional focus in Oregon. Findings from this study strongly support the idea that family, sense of purpose, school environments that are welcoming and culturally diverse, and academic supports are pivotal drivers in Latino males persisting without dropping out to obtain their bachelor's degree; this is supported by the following conclusion from this study.

First, to understand how best to engage and educate Latino males is to understand *familismo*. This core family value embodies closeness, provides a source of emotional support and contributes to the positive self-esteem of Latino males. Latino males' commitment to family supports, inspires, and motivates them to not only go to college, but to persist without dropping out to obtain their bachelor's degree. Making their families proud and changing the economic trajectory for the family is among the top reasons Latino male participants in this study completed college. Moms and other women family members play a key role for Latino males in supporting their persistence (Sáenz et al., 2016). Latino parents overall, are very supportive of their sons both graduating from high school and college. In fact, Latino males feel a sense of empowerment from their parents to go on to college and persist as an act of gratitude to parents for providing opportunities they themselves did not have. Both K-12 and higher education institutions can support Latino males' success by understanding and engaging families (Agger et al., 2018; Clark et al., 2013; López et al., 2019; Sáenz et al., 2016).

Second, sense of purpose. Latino males who persisted to obtain their bachelor's degree

understood their “why”. They have a sense of pride as first-generation college goer and graduate while also having a great amount of guilt surrounding being away from the family. This clash in feelings can result in Latino males to lack confidence in their decision to go to college and persist. In addition, Latino males’ commitment to higher education while simultaneously navigating their identity as a Latino male can create some disequilibrium. An example of this is that Latino males stated they “don’t ask to help” or seek out support in the way of counseling (Duncheon, 2020; Rodriguez et al., 2016). They also stated that there was a cultural ideal that therapy was “for the weak”. Overcoming these cultural norms for Latino males in order to succeed and navigate educational systems can be a barrier in their success as a student. As a whole, Latino males are very proud of their heritage and it is part of their purpose in pursuing a bachelor’s degree. Latino males find strength in their identities and as such, do not want to let go of who they are when they enter education institutions. In essence, Latino males thrive in giving back to their families and communities and is a large part of their purpose; they understand that having a bachelor’s degree is the way to make that happen.

The third conclusion is that a welcoming and culturally diverse school environment played a pivotal role in Latino males’ persistence in obtaining their bachelor’s degree. To support Latino males’ success, recruitment and hiring process reforms can increase culturally diverse faculty and staff representation. Faculty and staff play a key role in promoting the successes of Latino males. When faculty come from the same cultural background as the students, students are more comfortable asking for help. For Latino males, role models play a large factor in their success. Role models can be teachers, staff, friends, and family members. Latino males rely heavily on personal connections with their teachers and staff; when teachers and staff believe in and show support for Latino males, they are encouraged and empowered to

succeed in both K-12 and higher education settings. Latino males are constantly noticing and experiencing bias and racism in their educational experiences. According to Latino male participants, they are viewed and treated as criminals or gangsters and are only worthy of lower-class jobs (Rodriguez & Oseguera, 2015; Strayhorn, 2010). This is one motivating factor for Latino males in their persistence to graduate with a bachelor's degree. Changing the status quo and creating a new story of success for future Latino males motivates Latino males to succeed. Lack of diversity in staff, curriculum, clubs, and events perpetuate a feeling of isolation and unwelcoming school environment. A sense of belonging is something that Latino males yearn for in their education environment. Teachers and professors that adopt a culturally responsive practice and are open to views and opinions outside of the traditional euro-centric views in education allow Latino males to feel welcomed and encourage their participation in class discussions. This is especially true when there is a lack of diversity in the student population. Furthermore, all educators in all levels of education should examine their own bias and in turn, implement culturally responsive practices along with understanding the challenges Latino males face. Enhancing educators' cultural competence would support a deep understanding of Latino males' educational experiences and cultural values. Culturally responsive curriculum and teaching practices not only can make the school environment a welcoming space for Latino males students, but also reflects cultural backgrounds that, inevitably, provide greater opportunities for relationship building and connections between educators and Latino male students. Finally, as faculty and staff engage in examining their own implicit bias through culturally responsive practices at all education levels provides Latino males the needed scaffolding for academic success and thus, close the achievement and bachelor's degree attainment gap.

The final conclusion is that intentional and structured academic support for Latino males is crucial in ensuring bachelor's degree attainment rates increase thus closing the achievement gap. Implementing and sustaining effective mentoring programs in both K-12 and higher education settings creates avenues for Latino males to not feel isolated and gives them confidence to persist to graduation. Mentoring programs also provide a pathway for empowerment for Latino males; especially first-generation males as they learn to navigate systemic barriers and allows for participation in campus clubs and organizations. In addition, when Latino males are mentored, they often become mentors therefore supporting future Latino males in their persistence to obtain a bachelor's degree. Another significant support for Latino males is access to advanced coursework in high school; when Latino males are engaged in college coursework or dual-credit courses and have exposure to college through campus visits, they begin to see themselves in spaces they may not have thought they could get to. College readiness programs such as AVID or TRIO are a bridge for Latino males to have the needed structure and support to be successful in their advanced coursework. For Latino males, being connected with other individuals with a similar background provides a network of safety. Culturally specific and ethnic diverse programs create an environment and community for Latino males that allows them to thrive. The power of academic and social supports for Latino males cannot be understated and is supported by the literature. These are necessary supports that will both launch them into college equipped to succeed and provide the needed scaffolding in college to support their persistence to successfully attain their bachelor's degree.

Recommendations for Further Research

The findings from this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study not only contribute to existing literature, but also lays a foundation for the understanding on Latino males'

persistence in bachelor's degree attainment at four- year institutions both in Oregon and on a national scale. The researcher's intent was to lift up the voices of Latino males and unpack the factors that contributed to Latino males' success to persistently enroll without dropping out to obtain a bachelor's degree. It is clear that both K-12 and four-year institutions must use an intentional equity lens to prioritize Latinx students; specifically, Latino males in order to address and increase these students' postsecondary bachelor's degree attainment rates (Huerta & Hernández, 2021; Lumina Foundation, 2024). The following outlines specific recommendations that would significantly impact future research to address this topic.

The first recommendation is to increase the sample size of Latino males. For this study, there were a total of six participants. While the recommended number of participants for a phenomenological study is between three and ten participants, adding an additional four participants would provide greater support for the study's findings (Dukes, 1984). In addition, by increasing the number of participants, there could be an intentionality to seek Latino male participants who come from geographical diverse regions (such as rural) in Oregon. By expanding the number of participants to include a more diverse geographical representation of Latino males who persisted to attain their bachelor's degree, could serve as a foundation for greater understanding how different regions and size have influence on Latino males access and opportunity in degree completion.

The second recommendation is to conduct research studies on the successes of Latino males in four-year institutions; specifically, four-year Hispanic-Serving Institutions. While most of the research regarding Latino males' persistence revolves around community colleges, a narrowed focus on institutions whose values and priorities are centered on their minoritized students, such as four-year Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), hold opportunities to create and

implement culturally responsive programs that would greatly benefit Latinx students.

A plethora of the research focuses on the deficits and lack of success of Latino males in higher education (Harris & Wood, 2016; Howard et al., 2019; Sáenz & Ponjuán, 2009). Participants in this study noted over and over that the negative connotation surrounding Latino males is a prolific issue that is exacerbated by media and thus, influences how they are treated in educational settings. It is with that context, that the third recommendation is to conduct research to reflect a positive portrayal and assets of Latino males attending four-year institutions. By utilizing an anti-deficit research approach, centering Latino male voices who have defied the odds can greatly shape the future of Latino males and other minority men of color. Moreover, an increase in confidence and motivation would result in positive representations of Latino males in educational materials, and classroom discussions. Finally, positive portrays of Latino males persistence in attaining their bachelor's degree can be a scaffold to counteract the stereotypes and bias Latino males may face both in educational settings and society. Research that tells the story Latino males' strengths and success promote a more inclusive and equitable school environment.

The fourth recommendation is to focus on individual and minoritized categorical groups of students to enhance understanding of outcomes for these individual communities in the following ways: (1) the impact on socioeconomics with regard to education, (2) policy implications, (3) barriers in high school for Latino males who chose not to go on to postsecondary institutions, and (4) Latino males who were successful in their persistence compared to those that were not. For example, research to compare the rationale for Latino males who chose postsecondary education and bachelor's degree attainment in comparison to Latino males who chose not to matriculate to postsecondary education could provide the scaffolding K-12 educational systems need in order to strengthen positive educational experiences for Latino

males. In addition, research that compares Latino males that dropped out of a four-year institution during their bachelor's degree coursework with those Latino males who persisted could be instrumental in providing a map for four-year institutions, educators, and policy makers to take dramatic action to improve access to supports for this group of students and the economy as a whole.

The fifth recommendation for future research revolves around participants' stories on documentation. Through their lived experiences, participants revealed how their documentation status both launched them to earn their degree and also was a barrier to overcome in their educational journey. Participants also discussed in detail about their parents documentation status and how that weighs in on their persistence to a bachelor's degree. A positive portrayal of undocumented Latino males and their persistence to face the challenges of being undocumented and how that plays a role in their educational journey is needed for future research to support policy and advocacy for Latino males in their pursuit of a bachelor's degree.

The sixth and final recommendation again came from participant voices in this study and was not reflected in the literature was around mental health. Participants in this study spoke extensively on the expectation of Latino males is to be strong; showing emotion or seeking counseling comes in conflict as a cultural norm for Latino males. Further research to study how Latino males pursue mental health supports and how that plays a role in their persistence to attain a bachelor's degree would provide the educational field with an understanding of nonacademic supports that Latino males are needing.

Implications for Professional Practice

Results of this study have implications for professional practice that span early childhood through college regarding the future success of Latino males in obtaining their bachelor's

degrees; addressing the widening equity gap in postsecondary degree attainment. Overall, this study revealed that Latino male participants despite barriers, were keenly aware of the value in obtaining a bachelor's degree and thus demonstrates how education is a form of liberation.

The first implication for professional practice is centered on efforts to reverse the educational trends in bachelor's degree attainment for Latino males by initiating family and community engagement. Understanding the achievement of Latino males, is to understand a concept referred to as *familismo*-this is the cultural value that centers a strong familial attachment (Clark et al., 2013; Covarrubias et al., 2021; López et al., 2019; Sáenz et al., 2016). Given that family is at the center for Latino males, cultivating relationships with Latino families is a core function both of K-12 and higher education institutions. Educational institutions need to develop practices to that encourage Latino families and communities to become active participants in the educational experiences of Latino males. The intentional outreach to Latino families and offering services of support should be thought of as one of the most critical components to support the success of Latino males.

Furthermore, educators need to engage in trainings to be culturally responsive and address the biases and negative stereotypes of Latino males so that they, too, can engage Latino male students, families, and communities. Research suggest that when Latino males feel faculty are not invested in them or do not portray an authentic care, that influenced their engagement in coursework (Pérez & Sáenz, 2017; Rodriguez et al., 2016). Furthermore, the degree that Latino males feel that their professors engage with them in their learning is low (Pérez & Sáenz, 2017). Finally, with an increase in awareness, professors would find solutions on how to support Latino males and their success in degree attainment (Clark et al., 2013; Pérez & Sáenz, 2017; Rodriguez et al., 2016; Salinas et al., 2019).

The second implication revolves around prioritizing the needs of Latino males by implementing education programs and initiatives in K-12 settings such as AP, early college, dual credit options, and minority focused honors classes to increase the successes of this community of students. The alignment of K-12 systems and higher education has never been more critical than it is today. The research does suggest that accelerated programs have given opportunities to underrepresented students and that those programs do prepare students for college (Hoffman et al., 2009; Kuhlmann, 2017; N. García et al., 2018). Creating a college-going culture within K-12 systems with an intentionality to provide equitable access and opportunities for Latino males is imperative in ensuring that the current landscape for Latino males shifts. Leaders must be cognizant of who is enrolling in these accelerated learning opportunities as there is often a disproportionality in the distribution of students who participate in these programs. Ethnicity, race, gender and income are often linked with students who participate in advanced coursework in high school. School leaders along with school boards must enact polices to ensure that low-income Latino males are able to be provided ample resources to be able to participate in advanced coursework. Students report financial reasons and not knowing about college credit options as to why they choose not to enroll (Mansell & Justice, 2014). Although dual credit gives access to high school students to postsecondary education, many underserved populations are not enrolling (Kilgore & Wagner, 2017). Within that, it is critical that K-12 educators and leaders pay close attention to the gender gap that exists in the participation of advanced coursework; the current backdrop points to largely female representation in advanced coursework, while Latino males lag behind (Fink, 2018). In 2022, a larger percentage of female high school graduates immediately enrolled in college as opposed to 57 percent of males (NCES, 2022). Further alarming is that just 38% of males immediately enrolled in 4-year institutions compared to 51%

of females (NCES, 2022). Implementing programs that provide these opportunities such as AVID and TRIO can launch Latino males into advanced coursework, while also providing the necessary supports (including scholarship writing, college entrance support, and college visits) and pathway for postsecondary success.

The third and final implication is centered on specific academic and social supports in both the K-12 and higher education settings. Access to advising, counseling, mentoring, tutoring, financial literacy, and college and career planning all play a pivotal role is ensuring the success of Latino males in obtaining their bachelor's degree. Studies focusing on successful Latino men have outlined the barriers they overcame, high school experiences, family supports, caring teachers, early college exposure, and innovative interventions by educational providers as indicators of their success (Carey, 2019). It is not enough to offer these opportunities, both K-12 and higher education institutions must be intentional to engage Latino males in ensuring that they are receiving the academic and social supports to providing the necessary skills and knowledge to be success in taking college credit coursework. For higher education institutions, nonacademic supports are just as critical as academic supports in ensuring the success of Latino males. First-year support programs, faculty and peer mentoring, advising and counseling will support Latino males, who are generally first-generation students, in reaching their goals to graduate with their bachelor's degree. Ensuring Latino males have consistent role models and mentors at every turn in their college journey will change the trajectory of degree attainment. Serious efforts must be taken to promote faculty and staff diversity in high education institutions along with enacting practices to recruit, hire and retain faculty who are Latino and other men of color. Finally, higher education institutions can look to Hispanic-Serving Institutions to understand, replicate practices, and implement programs that support Latino males. Research has demonstrated that Latino

males who attend HSIs tend to develop their ethnic identity through leadership opportunities offered, that in turn, increases their feelings of belonging and increases their eagerness to persist (G.A. García et al., 2017).

Data from this research can support and inform both state and national policy interventions that are aimed at systemic and individual levels of change. Not in any particular order, key actionable steps recommended and hold large positive implications for practice include:

1. Add equal investment and resources in schools where Latinx students attend; increase in high qualified teachers, access to advanced coursework, and academic supports
2. Implement early intervention programs that target Latino male students and their families from pre-kindergarten through high school.
3. Expand access to college intentionally for Latino males by increasing funding for financial aid, scholarships, deliberate guidance on the college application process, financial aid options, and priority in college acceptance processes.
4. Increase funding to provide targeted support service for Latino males in in four-year universities such as: mentoring, tutoring, counseling, and leadership development opportunities.

If we are to make greater progress toward equity and acknowledge the strength multiculturalism and multilingualism presents, a central role of educational policies must center the advancement of Latinos in the United States (Contreras, 2011). The contradictions of the American educational system touting equity and diversity, the rapid growth of the Latinx population, the underfunding of schools where Latinx students attend is “the savage inequalities” in schools where Latinx students attend (Kozol, 1992), demands immediate and responsive action to

provide the respect, recognition, and right to educational opportunities they deserve (Contreras, 2011).

This study aimed to elevate the voices of Latino males in understanding their persistence in obtaining a bachelor's degree. Through qualitative data collection and analysis, it was evidenced that that persistence for Latino males who earned their bachelor's degree was attributed to four essential areas: family, sense of purpose, welcoming and culturally diverse school environments, and academic supports for Latino males. This study addressed a critical gap in the literature as researchers, educators, policy makers, and employers across Oregon and the nation continue to examine the postsecondary go-on rates alongside of postsecondary bachelor's degree attainment rates. Research is clear that there must be a conscientious and expedient approach to address the glaring gap in bachelor's degree attainment for Latino males. Listening to Latino males who have persisted in obtaining a bachelor's degree is an avenue to address the postsecondary bachelor's degree attainment gaps. Through the lived experiences of Latino males, educators and policy makers can put practices into place immediately to begin to change the trajectory for Latino males in obtaining their bachelor's degree. Missing this opportunity to elevate Latino males' voices and provide educational advancement will continue to have a profound impact on the future of not only Oregon, but the nation as a whole and future of the economy. "To reach the Latino degree attainment goal by 2030, states can close the degree completion gap by accelerating Latino completion while increasing for all students and scale up programs and initiatives that work for Latino, and all, students" (Excelencia in Education, n.d.).

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Appendix A: ACRP Research Certificate

ACRP

FOR LEARNING FOR LISTENING FOR LIFE

Certificate of Completion

Association of Clinical Research Professionals certifies that

Raeshelle Meyer

has successfully completed

Ethics and Human Subject Protection: A Comprehensive Introduction

Version: Jan 2020

Date of completion: Jan 18, 2021

Bridget Gonzales —Director, Training and Professional Development

ACRP

Appendix B: Institutional Review Board Approval

9/12/23

Dear Raeshelle,

The IRB has reviewed your protocol: 0345. You received "Full Approval". Congratulations, you may begin your research. If you have any questions, let me know.

Northwest Nazarene University

Rick Boyes

IRB Member

623 S University Blvd

Nampa, ID 83686

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

A. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

Raeshelle Meyer, Ed.S., a doctoral student in the Department of Graduate Education at Northwest Nazarene University is conducting a research study related to the challenges and successes encountered by Latino males focusing on their persistence and resilience through attaining a bachelor's degree. I hope to uncover "common" elements that supports Latino males' success in college despite facing difficult circumstances during their educational journey.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a healthy volunteer, over the age of 18.

B. PROCEDURES

If you agree to be in the study, the following will occur:

1. You will be asked to sign an Informed Consent Form, volunteering to participate in the study.

2. You will answer a set of interview questions individually and/or in a focus group setting. The discussion will be audio recorded for accuracy and is expected to last approximately 70 minutes. Your response(s) will help to provide and give encouragement to other Latino males who might be facing the same challenges you went through.

3. There are several questions prepared for the study. In the interviews/focus groups I may also ask follow up questions to help clarify such as "Can you expand on that issue?" or "How did it make you feel?" If you are uncomfortable with any question I may ask, please let me know immediately, and I am happy to move to the next questions. You may also choose to end the interview at any time.

4. You will answer a set of demographic questions at the beginning of the interview.

5. You will be asked to read a debriefing statement at the conclusion of the interview.

6. You will be asked to reply to an email at the conclusion of the study asking you to confirm the data that was gathered during the research process.

These procedures will be competed virtually and will take a total time of about 70 minutes.

C. RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

1. Some of the discussion questions may make you uncomfortable or upset, but you are free to decline to answer any questions you do not wish to answer or to stop participation at any time.

2. For this research project, the researchers are requesting demographic information. The researchers will make every effort to protect your confidentiality. However, if you are uncomfortable answering any of these questions, you may leave them blank.

3. Confidentiality: Participation in research may involve a loss of privacy; however, your records will be handled as confidentially as possible. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications that may result from this study. All data from notes and digital recordings will be kept in a secure, password-protected folder on the principal investigator's school computer. In compliance with the Federalwide Assurance Code, data from this study will be kept for three years, after which all data from the study will be destroyed (45 CFR 46.117).

4. Only the primary researcher and the research supervisor will be privy to data from this study. As researchers, both parties are bound to keep data as secure and confidential as possible.

D. BENEFITS
There will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. However, the information you provide may help educators and other historically marginalized better understand what it takes to complete a bachelor's degree.

E. PAYMENTS
There are no payments for participating in this study.

F. QUESTIONS
If you have questions or concerns about participation in this study, you should first talk with the researcher, Raeshelle Meyer. She can be contacted via email at rmeyer@my.nnu.edu or via cell phone at [redacted]. If for any reason you do not wish to do this, you may contact Dr. Michelle Van Beek via email at mvanbeek@nnu.edu, via telephone at 208-467-8802, or by writing 623 University Drive, Nampa, Idaho 83686.

Should you feel distressed due to participation in this, you should contact your own health care provider.

G. CONSENT
You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point. Your decision as to whether or not to participate in this study will have no influence on your present or future status as a professional.

I give my consent to participate in this study:

Signature of Study Participant	**Date**

I give my consent for the interview and discussion to be audio recorded in this study:

Signature of Study Participant	**Date**

I give my consent for direct quotes to be used in this study:

Signature of Study Participant	**Date**

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent	**Date**

THE NORTHWEST NAZARENE UNIVERSITY INSTITUTION REVIEW BOARD HAS REVIEWED THIS PROJECT FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH.

Appendix D: Electronic Student Recruiting Email

Email/Text/Phone

Hello!

My name is Raeshelle Meyer and I am a Doctoral Student at Northwest Nazarene University studying the lived experiences of Latino male students who are within three semesters of competing their bachelor's degree and who is attending a four-year institution in Oregon or who have completed their bachelor's degree within the last five years at a four-year institution in Oregon.

You are receiving this email because you have been identified as a student who has attended a four-year institution and is within three semesters of gradating with your bachelor's degree. The study will capture the voices of six Latino male students who aspired through college toward graduation. I would like to conduct an individual interview about your experiences and perspective of your aspirations to go on to college, what motivates you to complete your degree, the challenges you have faced, and what you attribute to your success. The questions will focus on your experiences and your beliefs about your challenges and success in aspiring to go to college through completion of your degree. Participation in the interviews will take approximately 70 minutes and findings from the study will shared with you upon completion of the study.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please reply to this email confirming your interest to participate along with the best number to reach you. Thank you for considering participation in this study. If you have any questions, please email me at Rmeyer@my.nnu.edu or via phone @ [redacted]

I look forward to hearing from you!

Raeshelle

Appendix E: Verbatim Instructions

Hello [NAME]!
Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this research study. Your input is appreciated as is your time.

Semi-structured, Audio-Recorded Interviews

A semi-structured, audio-recorded interview will be conducted with each participant. These procedures will be completed at a public location mutually decided upon by the participant and the researcher and will take approximately 70 minutes.

I would like to conduct the interviews within the next month. This process is completely voluntary and you can select to suspend your involvement at any time. You can select to answer questions that are of comfort to you and are not obliged to answer all of the questions. Please, see the attached interview questions.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to call, text or email me. I am grateful to you and look forward to our interview and learning about your college experiences. Thank you again for your participation

Raeshelle Meyer
Doctoral Student
Northwest Nazarene University
rmeyer@my.nnu.edu
[redacted]

Appendix F: Interview Protocol-Initial for Pilot Study

The purpose of this study is to examine how Latino male students or graduates describe their lived experiences related to their academic success in attaining a bachelor's degree from four-year institutions. With your permission, I will record and transcribe verbatim this interview for only for the purposes of data analysis procedures. For confidentiality purposes, a pseudonym will be assigned and used throughout the study. As a volunteer to participate in this study, you may abstain from answering any question. In addition, if, at any time, you are uncomfortable, you may stop or leave the interview.

General Background

1. Tell me a little about yourself
2. Can you briefly discuss your upbringing?

Family and Culture

3. What is the language spoken in your home?
4. What was your first language?
5. Who in your family has had the influence on you pursuing your bachelor's degree?
6. What is the highest level of education anyone in your family has completed?
7. How does your culture affect you as a student?
8. How would you describe your family values about education?
9. When at family gatherings, what stories come to mind in regard to education?

School Experience Prior to College

10. Can you tell me about your schooling experiences prior to college?
11. Did you acquire any college credits while in high school?
12. What was your high school GPA when you graduated?

13. Can you describe your high school experience? How did that experience play a role in aspiring to go to college?
14. How did you decide to attend this four-year institution?

Postsecondary Experiences

15. What are your schooling experiences now (if the participant has graduated reframe the question)?
16. What helped shaped your commitment to stay in college?
17. Who has been your biggest supporter?
18. Can you identify any role models or someone who has encouraged you throughout your educational journey?
19. What barriers or challenges did you encounter in college?
    a. Were you able to overcome these barriers? If yes, how so? If not, what did you do to move forward in your journey?

Institutional Environment

20. What barriers or challenges did you encounter concerning your academic, social, and personal environments regarding your aspirations to graduate?
21. Were there any barriers or challenges you faced that did not facilitate a true learning environment at this institution?
22. What experience contributed to persistence as a successful Latino male in this college environment?
23. Have you been involved in any type of activities in college?
24. Did you have any positive/negative experiences that you faced while pursuing your degree?

25. How did you overcome barriers in obtaining your degree (from family, friends, and college)?
26. Do you believe the opinions of society have affected how Latino males are viewed?
27. What type of advice can you give to Latino males of your age? And of Latino males in high school?

Concluding Question

28. Are there any comments or observations about your academic success that you would like to share?

Appendix G: Interview Protocol-Modified

The purpose of this study is to examine how Latino male students or graduates describe their lived experiences related to their academic success in attaining a bachelor's degree from a four-year institution in Oregon. With your permission, I will record and transcribe verbatim this interview for only for the purposes of data analysis procedures. For confidentiality purposes, a pseudonym will be assigned and used throughout the study. As a volunteer to participate in this study, you may abstain from answering any question. In addition, if, at any time, you are uncomfortable, you may stop or leave the interview.

General Background and demographic information

1. Full name:
2. Which term do you prefer? (Hispanic, Latino, Latinx)
3. How connected do you feel to your chosen identity term (Hispanic, Latino, Latinx)?
4. Number of siblings:
5. What language(s) do you primarily speak at home?
6. Did your parents/guardians attend college?
7. Can you briefly discuss your upbringing?
8. Were you enrolled in a predominantly Hispanic-serving high school?
9. Did you have access to advanced opportunity classes (e.g., honors, gifted and talented, college-level) in high school? If yes, please describe what courses.
10. College Major:
11. Degree earned or sought:
12. Are you receiving any financial aid (scholarships, grants, loans) to support your college education?

13. Are you working part-time or full-time while attending college?

Family and Culture

1. How has the support or lack of support from your parents/guardians influenced your decision to persist in your bachelor's degree program?
2. Who has had the most influence in your decision to pursue and persist in your bachelor's degree?
3. How has your family's educational background presented challenges or advantages in your journey towards completing your bachelor's degree?

School Experience Prior to College

4. How did your high school experiences shape your decision to attend college, and in what ways did those experiences influence your persistence in pursuing a bachelor's degree?

5. How did the factors that influenced your choice of a four-year institution play a role in your determination to persist and complete your bachelor's degree?

Postsecondary Experiences

7. Can you describe your recent schooling experiences? If you have graduated, can you reflect on your experiences in the final semesters leading up to graduation?

8. Which experiences, supports, or challenges have played the most significant role in shaping your commitment to persist in college?

9. Who have been the key role models or individuals that have encouraged you in your educational journey, and in what ways have they influenced your decision to persist in completing your bachelor's degree?

10. Can you describe the primary barriers or challenges you faced during college? How did you navigate these challenges, and what strategies or support did you utilize to continue your educational journey?

11. Can you describe key experiences or moments that have been instrumental in your persistence and success as a Latino male in college? How did these experiences shape your journey toward graduation?

12. In what ways have your culture and identity influenced your experiences, challenges, and motivations as a college student?

Institutional Environment

13. In terms of your academic, social, and personal life, what were the main barriers or challenges you faced related to your goal of graduating? How did these challenges influence your journey toward completing your degree?

14. Have you been involved in any college activities or organizations? If so, how have these experiences influenced your decision to persist and complete your bachelor's degree?

15. Can you share specific positive and negative experiences you encountered while pursuing your degree? How did these moments influence your commitment to continuing your education?

16. Can you describe the primary barriers you faced from family, friends, and the college environment while pursuing your degree? What strategies or support systems did you utilize to overcome these challenges?

17. Do you believe societal opinions have influenced your experience or perceptions as a Latino male in college? If so, in what ways?

18. Based on your experiences, what advice would you offer to other Latino males in college, and to those in high school, to encourage them to persist and complete their bachelor's degree?

Concluding Question

Is there anything else you'd like to share about your journey, challenges, aspirations, and successes in attaining a bachelor's degree as a Latino male?

Appendix H: Confidentiality Agreement

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

SUCCESS STARTS HERE--HOW WE GOT TO COLLEGE AND WHAT MADE US STAY: A PORTRAIT OF LATINO MALES

I, Stephanie Thomas [name of research assistant], agree to assist the primary investigator with this study by transcribing interviews [list research tasks]. I agree to maintain full confidentiality when performing these tasks.

Specifically, I agree to:

1. keep all research information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing the information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) with anyone other than the primary investigator;

2. hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be revealed during the course of performing the research tasks;

3. not make copies of any raw data in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts), unless specifically requested to do so by the primary investigator;

4. keep all raw data that contains identifying information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) secure while it is in my possession. This includes:
   - keeping all digitized raw data in computer password-protected files and other raw data in a locked file;
   - closing any computer programs and documents of the raw data when temporarily away from the computer;
   - permanently deleting any e-mail communication containing the data; and
   - using closed headphones if transcribing recordings;

5. give, all raw data in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) to the primary investigator when I have completed the research tasks;

6. destroy all research information in any form or format that is not returnable to the primary investigator (e.g., information stored on my computer hard drive) upon completion of the research tasks.

Provide the following contact information for research assistant:

Printed name of research assistant Stephanie Thomas

Address: [redacted]

Telephone number: [redacted]

Signature of research assistant Stephanie Thomas Date 4/13/23

Printed name of primary investigator Raeshelle Meyer

Signature of primary investigator Raeshelle Meyer Date 04/15/23

Appendix I: Member Checking Email

Date:

Dear [Participant Name]

This is a follow-up to the interview you participated in on [DATE]. Thank you for your participation in my study entitled *Success starts here-How we got to college and what made us stay: A phenomenological study on the lived experiences of Latino males' persistence in obtaining their bachelor's degree.* The purpose of this email is to share some of the themes that emerged as a result of all interviews (see below). Please review these statements and let me know if they accurately reflect the conversation. If you have any suggestions for modifications, or any questions, please let me know by [DATE].

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of Latino male students who are within three semesters of competing their bachelor's degree who matriculated to a four-year institution in Oregon or who had graduated with their bachelor's degree within the last five years from a four-year institution in Oregon.
The research question guiding this study was:

1. What experiences influenced Latino males to persistently enroll without dropping out in completing their bachelor's degree?

Many themes were evident from the individual interviews. After reading and coding transcripts, results demonstrate….. [will complete after results]

[THEMES SHARED HERE WITH VISUAL DEPICTION}

If these ideas do not reflect your memory of the discussions, or your experiences, please reply to this email, or contact me at rmeyer@my.nnu.edu or via phone [redacted]. Thank you again for your support with this dissertation study.

I, again, am grateful to you for participating in this research study.

Sincerely,

Raeshelle Meyer
Doctoral Student
Northwest Nazarene University
IRB Application# 0345