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Concordia University–Portland
College of Education
Doctorate of Education Program

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How Latino Male Students Perceive the Effects of Social Engagement on Degree Completion

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Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in

Higher Education

Christopher Maddox, Ph.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee

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Abstract

Latino males are entering higher education at increasing rates, yet they are not graduating at the same rate as their peers. Latino males remain the smallest group to have a college degree, limiting opportunities for continuing education and obtaining gainful employment. The purpose of this study was to explore how Latino male university students perceive the effects of social engagement on degree completion. A hermeneutic, phenomenological approach was utilized enabling the study participants the opportunity to describe their experiences of the explored phenomenon and increase comprehension as to why they interpret their experiences in the manner that they do. Questionnaire and interview responses from 10 Latino male university students who have earned a university degree were reviewed and analyzed for qualitative data that indicated the motivational factors that led to degree completion among this group. Study results indicate that social engagement was vital in the development of a sense of belonging and for decisions of persistence to degree completion. All study participants noted the positive impact of involvement in student organizations, in particular, membership in a Latino-based fraternity, as fundamental to their academic success. The study findings may contribute to the existing body of literature, providing insight into potential policy changes and the development of strategies and programming that aid Latino male university students integrate into the campus community, improve retention, and ensure degree completion.

Keywords: Latino male students, sense of belonging, retention, persistence, engagement, involvement, perception, degree completion

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to all Latinx students. May you continue to rise and achieve your dreams. And to my husband. Your love and support have been a source of strength throughout this journey to achieve my own dreams.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank and acknowledge my family and friends for their support throughout my doctoral journey. In particular, I would like to acknowledge my husband, whose unwavering encouragement and constant reminders always kept me focused and on track, even when I would lose confidence in myself and was not sure I could keep going. I would also like to acknowledge my dissertation committee for their support and feedback during the dissertation process. I especially would like to acknowledge my dissertation chair, Dr. Christopher Maddox, whose continuous help and guidance were instrumental to the improvement of this body of work, as well as my own growth as a researcher.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge and thank the participants of the study, who so willingly and openly shared their life and experiences with me. This work could not have been accomplished without you. Your perspectives will be of tremendous help to future generations of Latino students.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The number of Latino male students enrolling in higher education across the United States continues to grow steadily (Arbelo-Marrero & Milacci, 2016; Kim, Rennick, & Franco, 2014). Despite this growth, Latino males are not graduating from universities and are trailing behind their White student counterparts, as well as students of other racial and ethnic backgrounds, in earning a bachelor's degree (Aguinaga & Gloria, 2015; Clayton, Medina, & Wiseman, 2017; Holloway-Friesen, 2018; Sanchez, Usinger, & Thornton, 2015). The purpose of this hermeneutic, phenomenological study is to explore how Latino male university students perceive the effects of social engagement on degree completion. Further study on success factors that lead to the academic success of Latino male students is needed to contribute to the available information and guide support efforts for this student population to increase their degree completion rates (Escamilla and Trevino, 2014; Kim et al., 2014; Kouyoumdjian, Guzman, Garcia, & Talavera-Bustillos, 2017).

Within Chapter 1, I will introduce the background of Latino male students in higher education in the U.S. The conceptual framework, where I discuss the theorists that served as guides toward understanding the factors that impact students while at university, as well as the problem statement and the purpose of the study, will also be presented in this chapter. I will offer the research question, in addition to the rationale for the study, its relevance, and the significance of the study. Additionally, I include key definitions for this study, together with assumptions. A summary concludes this chapter.

Background and Conceptual Framework

Since 1976, the growth of the Latinx population in the U.S. has resulted in an 11% increase in overall Latinx student enrollment at universities (Clayton et al., 2017; Trevino &

DeFreitas, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2017a). There was a 15% growth in Latino male students entering the higher education system over the same 40-year period (U.S. Department of Education, 2017a). Despite this boost in matriculation numbers, Latino males continue to lag other ethnic groups in academic degree attainment, with college graduation rates remaining low (Holloway-Friesen, 2018; Michel & Durdella, 2018). According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018), approximately 23% of all Latinx households had a member who attained a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 70% Asians, 30% Blacks, and 44% Whites. The failure to graduate may impede Latino male students from enjoying the social and economic benefits that come with earning a university degree, including a significantly increased lifetime earning potential and an improved overall quality of life (Murphy & Murphy, 2018; Sanchez et al., 2015).

Latino males remain one of the smallest groups to obtain a college degree, despite an increase in their enrollment numbers, with nearly 12% of all bachelor's degrees conferred to males in 2016 being awarded to Latino males (Arbelo-Marrero & Milacci, 2016; Clayton et al., 2017; Estrada & Jimenez, 2017; Kim et al., 2014; Kouyoumdjian et al., 2017; Ponjuan, Palomin, & Calise, 2015; Spruill, Hirt, & Mo, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2017b). These statistics are true with a gap in degree completion rates clearly present when compared to their White male student counterparts, who were awarded approximately 67% of degrees in 2016 (Sanchez et al., 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2017b). Due to cultural perspectives, Latinx students are often branded as incapable of coping with the transition from high school to university, are unable to adapt to the university campus culture and environment, possess deficient preparation for collegiate studies, and are incapable of coping during their transition into the higher education setting, all in an effort to explain the discrepancy between enrollment

numbers and graduation rates (Gummadam, Pittman, & Ioffe, 2016; Matos, 2015; Perez & Sáenz, 2017).

Upon entering higher education, students encounter unique circumstances and situations within the university environment that play a role in both degree completion and departure (Zerquera & Gross, 2017). Further understanding on how these contexts impact students' persistence decisions and academic success is required. In addition, identifying the factors that aid retention require further examination, in order to counteract the low graduation rates among Latino male students (Salas, Aragon, Alandejani, & Timpson, 2014). This hermeneutic, phenomenological study exploring how Latino male university students perceive the effects of social engagement on degree completion may provide insight into the lived experiences of this student group and how these involvements contribute to their ability to graduate from a university.

Astin (1993), Dweck (2016), and Tinto (1993) provide the conceptual framework for the study. Astin's (1993) student involvement theory addresses how environmental factors affect a student's level of academic and social involvement. Dweck's (2016) theory of motivation provides perspective on how the perception of ability, intelligence, and the surrounding environment can either enhance or hinder motivation and therefore aid or diminish persistence and resilience. Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure focuses on student retention, persistence, and the factors that drive a student to leave higher education. Ravitch and Riggan (2017) noted that the conceptual framework serves as a guide that offers direction, as well as balance when conducting new empirical research. For the conceptual framework, I draw from each theorist's work and perspective on higher education, providing a viewpoint from which to analyze how Latino male students persist in higher education.

Tinto's analyses on persistence and the factors that could lead to departure, together with Astin's concept of student involvement, aid in examining what impact the perception Latino male university students have on the effects of social engagement on their persistence and degree attainment. Utilizing Dweck's theory of motivation allows me to recognize how students' perspectives or beliefs on skill and the world around them can serve as motivation to either persist or withdraw in the face of a challenge. By acknowledging these mindsets, I can understand how Latino males view the university environment and how a particular mindset contributes to their resilience and motivation to persist through to graduation. By using these theories as a conceptual framework, I will be able to determine what factors within the university environment positively support Latino male academic outcomes.

Statement of the Problem

Latino male student enrollment in post-secondary programs at colleges and universities in the United States has risen by 15% since 1976 (U.S. Department of Education, 2017a). Despite this growth in enrollment, matriculation numbers for Latino males have continued to trail behind the total enrollment numbers for White male students, with 30% less Latino males enrolling in higher education in 2016 (U.S. Department of Education, 2017a). Besides, undergraduate completion rates for first-time, Latino male students at 4-year postsecondary institutions have become stagnant. Latino males continue to be among the smallest groups to have a college degree, despite their increased enrollment numbers. Social engagement continues to be an integral element to the collegiate experience. Increased on-campus involvement through social engagement may be a factor preventing the further decline of degree completion rates among Latino male students. The problem is Latino male students are not graduating from university at

the same rate as their peers, resulting in a reduced number of Latino male students not continuing in higher education or obtaining gainful employment.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this hermeneutic, phenomenological study is to explore how Latino male university students perceive the effects of social engagement on degree completion. Campus climates and environments can contribute to the creation of barriers that reduce Latino male students' integration into the institution. Latino males may display increased feelings of isolation or of *not fitting in* due to the unwelcoming environment. Participation in student-led organizations, such as fraternities and culture-oriented organizations, may help Latino male students become connected to the university and develop a sense of belonging within the campus community. This connection and sense of belonging may function as factors that motivate male, Latino students to persist in higher education.

Research Question

The research question for this study is:

1. How do Latino male university students perceive the effects of social engagement on degree completion?

Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study

Qualitative research explores the meaning individuals or groups assign to a problem or situation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). By using a phenomenological research design, study participants can describe their experiences of the explored phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). For this qualitative research study, a hermeneutic, phenomenological approach is utilized. The rationale for this study is a phenomenological research design is the most appropriate approach to explore how Latino male students perceive their experiences on university campuses. This

research design may aid in identifying the motivational factors Latino males credit for their decision to stay in higher education and earn a bachelor's degree. Integrating hermeneutics as a part of the design provides insight into why participant interpretation occurs the way it does and the processes that influence the making of meaning (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). For this study, incorporating this approach can increase comprehension of why Latino male students interpret their experiences of the phenomenon in the manner that they do. Other research designs were considered, including grounded theory and ethnography; however, I determined a hermeneutic, phenomenological research design was best in enabling the study participants the opportunity to share the unique perspective of their experiences, capturing the essence of this experience, and providing insight into the impact of the phenomenon.

This study is relevant to the Latinx community in general and Latino male university students specifically. This study is also relevant to Latino males in fraternities, as well as to those who choose to engage in social activities and with social organizations on campus. The low degree completion rates of Latino male students belies the increase in university enrollments among this student group (Arbelo-Marrero & Milacci, 2016; Estrada & Jimenez, 2017; Ponjuan, Palomin, & Calise, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Therefore, identifying the challenges Latino male university students experience while enrolled in a university is necessary for determining what circumstances may lead this population to earn university degrees at lower rates than their peers. Likewise, identifying which factors lead to their academic successes can aid in understanding what influences persistence, leading to degree attainment. Therefore, garnering this information is also relevant and crucial to university personnel, future Latino male university students, and their parents, due to having potential implications on future enrollments and degree completion rates.

This study is significant to Latino male university students, as well as the university personnel they encounter and work with, including teaching faculty and advising staff. The findings of this study can fill a gap in the literature on success factors among Latino male students, through highlighting information that focuses on the dynamics within social engagement that motivates Latino male students' decisions to persist to degree attainment. Furthermore, the lack of studies that focus specifically on Latino male students' social engagement through participation in culture-specific groups limits the available information on how membership affects their decisions to persist to degree completion. The findings of this study may aid efforts for transformational change, leading to improved practices in supporting Latino males in earning a bachelor's degree. The data gathered in this study can assist university enrollment and academic advising teams in developing strategies for increasing retention and improving graduation rates.

Definitions

The following is a list of terms and definitions provided to aid the reader in understanding essential concepts of this study:

Academic engagement: Interactions and relationships with peers and faculty members at the institution of education (Rodrigues, Massey, & Sáenz, 2016).

Academic persistence decisions: The actions, processes, and decisions students take or make to stay in school (Aguinaga & Gloria, 2015).

Academic success: Accomplishments met within an academic setting, typically measured or defined through grade point average (GPA), graduation rate, enrollment in graduate studies, and degree attainment (Murphy & Murphy, 2018).

Caballerismo: A positive image of Latino male identity stemming from a softer, prosocial form of masculinity (Estrada & Arciniega, 2015; Sáenz, Mayo, Miller, & Rodriguez, 2015).

Campus environment: The *campus environment* will be conceptualized using Samura's (2016) concept of *campus space*; the physical environment, such as buildings and classrooms, the different types of academic relationships, such as faculty-student interactions, and the various social relationships, such as student organizations, found on a university campus (Samura, 2016).

Counterspaces: Safe spaces or areas, including student centers and relationships with faculty and student organizations, where individuals can maintain or preserve elements of their identity, develop a sense of belonging, and navigate the campus climate (Palmer & Maramba, 2015; Von Robertson, Bravo, & Chaney, 2016).

Engagement: Time and energy spent or invested on purposeful activities, having an association with positive changes in both skill and ability, as well as psychological adjustment (Wilson et al., 2015; Zumbrunn, McKim, Buhs, & Hawley, 2014).

Ethnic identity: The cultural orientation or identification of an individual concerning a specific ethnic group (Aguinaga & Gloria, 2015).

Fit in or fitting in: Emotions and feelings that simulate a person is a part of or integral to a group or community (Vaccaro & Newman, 2016).

Fixed mindset: The perception that intelligence is static where mistakes are a lack of ability, leading to a lack of effort and withdrawal or avoidance of challenges (Dweck, 2016).

Growth mindset: The perception that ability is something that can be developed through effort, hard work, seeking input, and attempting new strategies (Dweck, 2016).

Integration: The level of shared attitudes and beliefs students have with their peers and faculty, and the ability to adapt to their university (Wilson et al., 2015).

Involvement: Participation in activities for enjoyment or enrichment, including faculty-student interaction, mentorship, and participation in student organizations (Vaccaro & Newman, 2016; Von Robertson et al., 2016).

Latino: Cultural identity utilized by males associated with origins in or with parents who come from a Spanish speaking country, and includes additional factors such as generation, immigration status, country of origin, Spanish speaking skills, and socioeconomic status (Gonzalez & Morrison, 2016).

Latinx: Inclusive, nongender ethnic identity term used to describe individuals who are associated with racial-ethnic groups and countries of origins in Latin America, including Mexico, Puerto Rico, Venezuela, Dominican Republic, Cuba, El Salvador, and Ecuador. This term is used in lieu of pan-ethnic terms, such as Latino, Latina, or Hispanic. (Capers, 2019; Corona et al., 2017; Keels, Durkee, & Hope, 2017).

Machismo: Traditional construct of Latino male identity associated with masculinity, typically linked to negative characteristics such as power, control, assertiveness, and aggression (Rodriguez, Massey, & Sáenz, 2016; Sáenz et al., 2015).

Persistence: Concept associated with staying or remaining in school and the intent of getting through (Murphy & Murphy, 2018).

Racial microaggressions: subtle forms of racism, intentional or unintentional, usually conveyed through racial insults or slurs, racially assaultive remarks, negative gestures, or confrontations, leading to possible mental, emotional, and physical problems (Palmer & Maramba, 2015; Von Robertson et al., 2016).

Sense of belonging: A psychological process related to adjustment and transition, where feelings of attachment and connection are developed through subjective feelings of fitting in, comfort with others and surroundings, support from a group or the community, social connectedness, supportive relationships, and acceptance. The term *community* sometimes replaces in place of *belonging* (Palmer & Maramba, 2015; Turner & Thompson, 2014; Vaccaro, Daly-Cano, & Newman, 2015; Vaccaro & Newman, 2016; Zumbrunn, et al., 2014).

Social engagement: involvement in on-campus groups either formally organized, such as clubs and fraternities, or informal groups, such as study groups, that fall within the social system of the university (Tinto, 1993).

Social system: structures within the university which center around the daily life and needs of students, where the interactions between students, faculty, and staff primarily occur outside the academic domain of the institution (Tinto, 1993).

Assumptions

Creswell (2014) highlighted the necessity of identifying personal assumptions at the onset of a research study. I make the following assumptions while conducting this research study: (a) study participants provide open and honest answers to interview questions, (b) social engagements and experiences will continue to be essential and vital to students as they navigate through university campuses, and (c) the chosen sample for this study is representative of the student population I make inferences to. Confidentiality will be maintained to ensure that participants are responding honestly to all interview questions. Additionally, participants will be informed of the voluntary nature of the study, allowing them the opportunity to opt-out at any point they no longer wish to participate. Social engagement with on-campus organizations and activities is an accepted element to university life. Students will continue to partake in these

social experiences, as they have become customary to the higher education experience. For this study, all the data was collected directly and solely from the participants' own thoughts, opinions, and perceptions, to ensure that the sample is indeed representative of the student population. Furthermore, personal biases and attitudes were withheld and not shared, to prevent any potential influence on participant responses.

Summary

In Chapter 1, I present the background on the status of Latino male students in higher education in the United States. This student population remains one of the lowest groups, when compared to their White counterparts and other ethnic groups, in relation to graduation rates and degree completion (Allen & Stone, 2016; Auinaga & Gloria, 2015; Clayton et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2014). Within this chapter, I explain the problem as Latino male students not graduating from university at the same rate as their peers. The purpose of this hermeneutic, phenomenological study is to explore how Latino male university students perceive the effects of social engagement on degree completion. In the conceptual framework, I outlined the theories on involvement, departure, and motivation that guide my study and research design. Key terms were highlighted and defined, to aid in understanding the essential concepts in this study. In this chapter, I also included my research assumptions, in addition to discussing the significance of the research and how it may contribute to the literature on Latino male student motivation, persistence, and academic success. In Chapter 2, I discuss the conceptual framework further and in-depth, noting the interconnectedness of the theories of involvement, motivation, and departure and how they are useful in understanding student drive and determination. Also, I review studies on student experience, retention, and achievement in higher education, identifying and highlighting emergent themes within the literature.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Enrollment of Latino male students in colleges and universities across the United States has steadily increased over the last 40 years (U.S. Department of Education, 2017a). Although the growth of the Latinx population in the U.S. has contributed to a growing number of Latinx students entering the higher education system, Latino males continue to obtain a college degree at lower rates when compared to their peers (Allen & Stone, 2016; Arbelo-Marrero & Milacci, 2016; Holloway-Friesen, 2018; Michel & Durdella, 2018; Ponjuan, Palomin, & Calise, 2015; Trevino & DeFreitas, 2014; Wagner, 2015). Due to the lower graduation rates among Latino male students, approaches to retention require further examination (Salas, Aragon, Alandejani, & Timpson, 2014). Furthermore, institutional contexts do play a role in degree completion and departure, pressing the need to further understand how these contexts impact persistence decisions and academic success (Zerquera & Gross, 2017). The purpose of this hermeneutic, phenomenological study was to explore how Latino male university students perceive the effects of social engagement on degree completion.

I explored authors who researched student success, specifically looking at participation in student organizations on university campuses, within Chapter 2. These authors focused on common themes regarding the persistence and resilience of students of color, including Latinos and Latinas, as well as how their participation in on-campus student organizations affect their academic outcomes (Gloria, Castellanos, & Herrera, 2015; Gummadam, Pittman, & Ioffe, 2016; Irlbeck, Adams, Akers, Burris, & Jones, 2014; Johnson, Wasserman, Yildirim, & Yonai, 2014; Lundberg, 2014; Murphy & Zirkel, 2015; Pichon, 2016; Patterson, Perkins, Butler-Barnes, & Walker, 2017; Thomas, Wolters, Horn, & Kennedy, 2014; Von Robertson, Bravo, & Chaney, 2016). First, I describe the utilized literature search strategies; this description is followed by a

conceptual framework that describes the theories that have been used by researchers to help understand the factors and motivators leading to student retention in college and academic persistence to degree. In the conceptual framework, I included Astin's (1993, 1999) and Tinto's (1988, 1993) theories on the importance of student involvement and engagement on college campuses. Dweck's (1986, 2016) theory on motivation and the factors that affect the motivational process, as well as how personal views on ability impact personal resilience, is also included within the conceptual framework.

I also provide a review of the literature in Chapter 2. I organized this section using the following common themes found in the literature: (a) building a sense of belonging and community helps students to develop a connection with the university and with each other, (b) increasing student involvement, engagement, and integration with the campus community through student-led organizations and co-curricular activities improves the level of satisfaction students have with college life, (c) student development and psychological adjustment is improved through better connections with the higher education institution and peers, (d) the impact of ethnic identity and racial microaggressions on the perception students have of the campus culture and environment, and (e) the importance of understanding the impact student perceptions have on engagement and interactions with peers, university personnel, and the institution as a whole. In addition, I explored studies regarding how a sense of belonging is pivotal for student success in higher education and are presented within this chapter. Additionally, studies on how student involvement, development, and adjustment, as well as how racial and ethnic identity influences a student's sense of belonging, were also be explored.

Literature Search Strategy

Machi and McEvoy (2016) maintained that a quality search of the literature requires a deliberate strategy to identify and collect relevant literature. For this literature review, I focused the search on primary, peer-reviewed studies published between 2014 and 2019. I conducted the literature search using the Concordia University library and Google Scholar. Throughout the literature search, the following databases were utilized: ERIC, Taylor and Francis Online, ProQuest, Springer Link, and EBSCO. To locate relevant research that would yield results within acceptable parameters, I used several search filters, including: 2014 to 2018, since 2014, peer-reviewed articles, available online, scholarly peer-reviewed journals, and full text. I conducted an initial keyword search using the terms *fraternity and retention*, utilizing the Concordia University library. This initial search yielded two results, necessitating a broadening of search parameters and keyword use.

Additional searches were conducted, both on Google Scholar and the Concordia University library. Subsequent searches were expanded to include *Greek-life, Greek organization, Greek membership, fraternities, and fraternity membership* as key terms. Additional keywords utilized in these searches included: *success, academic persistence, academic resilience, college experience, degree completion, impact, co-curricular activities, academic success, student activities, achievement, participation, Latino academic persistence, Latino fraternity, college outcome, brotherhood, student organizations, academic success, college success, Latino fraternity membership, Greek affiliation, fraternity affiliation, sense of belonging, high-achieving Latino male college students, bonding, community, and retention*. The Boolean search method was also incorporated during the search for literature, using multiple keyword combinations. Using this method yielded an increased number of results, ranging from

61 to 27,548. In addition, I scanned through the references of various studies and identified sources on related topics cited by other researchers, to expand the search.

Conceptual Framework

Creswell and Creswell (2018) noted that the use of theory provides a lens or perspective that aids in shaping what is looked at and the questions that will be asked. The theories developed by Astin (1993), Dweck (2016), and Tinto (1993) assisted with the direction of the conceptual framework of this study, aiding in the understanding of the challenges and successes Latino male university students have on university campuses and how this impacts their perception of the effects of social engagement on degree completion. Through the student involvement theory, Astin (1993) emphasized the role of environmental factors and the effect they can have on a student's level of academic and social involvement. Dweck (2016) highlighted in the theory of motivation the role individual mindsets, whether fixed or growth-oriented, have on influencing the life a person leads. In the theory of student departure, Tinto (1993) stressed the issues of student retention and persistence, focusing on the factors that can drive a student to leave or depart from higher education. I drew from each of these theorists' work to analyze how the perception Latino male university students have of the effects of social engagement while enrolled in a university impacts their ability to persist in higher education and earn a degree.

Astin's Student Involvement Theory

Student characteristics, input, and involvement with university environments are central to Astin's (1993) student involvement theory. Astin (1991) noted that traditional notions of excellence are limited. In analyzing the quality of higher education institutions and their educational programs, Astin (1997) stressed that traditional measurements to assess institutional

performance are flawed, failing to account for student inputs. Student characteristics as input are important indicators that allude to potential performance or achievement in college (Astin, 1968). Traditional factors, such as academic ability while in high school, are seen to have a connection to student academic outcomes. Additionally, the connection between student traits upon entering university, environmental characteristics, and on-campus experiences can serve as a measurement for student involvement (Astin, 1993). This type of involvement is typically seen during a student's initial entrance into high education. Although his study focused on analyzing the effects of traditional measurements of institutional performance on student intellectual achievement, Astin (1968) could not deny the need to examine other environmental factors to determine their potential impact on student achievement.

Retention rates are influenced and enhanced by environmental variables at higher education institutions (Astin, 1993). Recognizing how collegiate environments impact student development and are reinforced by the level of involvement a student has with the campus culture is central to Astin's (1993) student involvement theory. Environmental variables within the university setting have the potential to affect student involvement, thus impacting their achievement (Astin, 1968). Environmental factors within the institution also influence actual student retention rates, which often differ from the expected rates university administrators anticipate before student matriculation (Astin, 1997). Expending more energy and time on the educational experience enhances learning and development, with the peer group serving as the most influential source of student involvement (Astin, 1993).

The absence of a student community can have adverse effects on the satisfaction with the overall collegiate experience (Astin, 1993). In addition, the characteristics of the peer group have a significant impact on every aspect of a student's development; he highlighted that the

values, attitudes, and self-concepts, as well as the socioeconomic status of the peer group, are critical determinants that indicate how an individual student will develop. Astin (1999) also alluded to the correlation between spending more time on campus and the increased likelihood of student persistence and retention. Universities with a more significant percentage of students living on campus have higher-than-expected retention rates, indicating that proximity to campus is an essential determinant of student retention, which can increase the connection with the campus community and enhance the college experience (Astin, 1997). The peer group is an important environmental factor, indicating that this element has a profound effect on student development (Astin, 1993).

Contrasting the reputational and resource approach with what he identified as the talent development approach, Astin (1999) argued that an institution will be deemed as excellent when it aids in developing students' abilities and talents; he further emphasized how a student's academic progress is marked by their development while in college or university. This development is influenced by the level of involvement a student has on campus, where a student's learning and personal development increases as the student becomes more involved in college (Astin, 1999). During this developmental process, students may experience negative outcomes that result from being isolated from peers or being physically removed from the campus (Astin, 1993). Students' learning and personal development are increased the more they are involved in college and the college experiences (Astin, 1999). A more extensive measurement of involvement looks at a student's experience and level of involvement after being in college for some time.

According to Astin (1993), student learning, academic performance, and retention have a positive association when students are academically involved, are involved with faculty, and are

involved with peer groups. The greater the energy placed on getting involved, the greater the outcome a student can expect with respect to their achievement and success. Traditional pedagogical techniques, however, place students in a passive role within the learning process, which leads to a lack of involvement and resulting in learning being diminished (Astin, 1991). The theorist emphasized how this reduced involvement in the learning process causes students to view learning as an independent or solitary endeavor, rather than a cooperative and social effort, where interpersonal skills are developed (Astin, 1991). By contrast, students who become more involved on campuses contribute to their own development; investing in the college experience, whether through academic work, interactions with faculty members, or involvement in extracurricular activities can cause a student to develop an attachment to the higher education institution (Astin, 1999). As students navigate through the university environment, becoming involved in both social and academic activities can improve their commitment to persist to degree completion. Utilizing Astin's theory of student involvement assisted in understanding how the challenges and successes encountered throughout university matriculation impacts students' perception of the effects of social engagement and influences their persistence, by examining if personal development and an attachment to the university through on-campus involvement led to positive persistence decisions.

Dweck's Theory of Motivation

Emerging from the field of psychology, Dweck's (2016) theory of motivation outlines the beliefs individuals hold about themselves, their abilities, and how they cope with failure. The perception people hold of their abilities can have a profound effect on the way they lead their life (Dweck, 2016). Additionally, these personal beliefs, or self-theories, allow or give meaning to lived experiences (Dweck, 2000). Personal views of ability, intelligence, and the role of failure,

can be either static or malleable. For individuals who possess the perception that ability and intelligence are unchanging, where these traits are set from birth, that is innate or inborn, they are said to have a fixed mindset; whereas individuals who see these qualities as ones that can be developed over time through effort and help from others, they possess a growth mindset (Dweck, 2007b; 2010; 2016). These mindsets impact motivation and achievement, as well as academic success (Dweck, 2012). Students' personal beliefs or self-theories held about their intelligence or abilities, that is their mindset, can have a strong influence on goal setting, the level of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation possessed, and the level of interest in an activity maintained over time (Dweck, 2000).

Dweck (1986) stressed that there are factors outside ability that influence whether a person will withdraw or persist when faced with challenge or difficulty. Dweck (2007a) noted that what students believe about their intelligence matters greatly. For individuals with fixed mindsets, making mistakes means they are not capable of achieving or succeeding (Dweck, 2007a). When perusing tasks or setting goals, people with a fixed mindset will often demonstrate a lack of effort or even withdrawal when faced with an obstacle or challenge, due to the desire to avoid being perceived as lacking ability (Dweck, 1986). This aversion to failure can be attributed to the belief that everyone has a set amount of intelligence from birth. Dweck (2010) noted that individuals with a fixed mindset often become discouraged or defensive when unable to immediately demonstrate success. Setbacks are seen as an implication for lacking ability, resulting in the avoidance of challenges, and ultimately leading to demonstrating less resilience; when failure is attributed to a lack of ability, or rather lack thereof, performance is impaired (Dweck, 2012, 2017). Yet, the capacity for adapting, changing, and growing is characteristic of human nature; motivation seems to be diminished in individuals with a fixed

mindset, seeing ability and intelligence as a fixed trait that cannot be altered, potentially leading to lower persistence levels (Dweck, 2012).

According to Dweck (2007b), individuals who possess a growth mindset seek new strategies to counteract failure, which in turn leads to an increase in their efforts to achieve success. Students who possess a growth mindset will respond to obstacles with continued involvement and utilizing all available resources (Dweck, 2010). With regards to accomplishment, Dweck (2007b) noted the connection or relationship between dedication and persistence, stressing how these two factors are key to achievement. Individuals with a growth mindset see hard work and effort as a means for enhancing ability (Dweck, 2007a). Furthermore, individuals with growth mindsets believe success can be achieved through learning, where initial aptitudes or talents can grow through application and experience (Dweck, 2016). When failure is attributed to effort, a quality an individual can control, performance was sustained or improved (Dweck, 2017). Putting in the effort, facing challenges with an open mind, and viewing obstacles as a means for growth can result in the further development of ability over time. Dweck (2007a) acknowledged that students who develop a growth mindset would have increased motivation, better grades, and see high achievement on assessment. By contrast, having a growth mindset could lead to a greater motivation to persist, given the desire for growth and improvement since intelligence and ability are not seen as static. Dweck (2012) did note the association between growth mindset and resilience.

Dweck's (2016) theory of motivation highlighted how motivation is affected by the personal belief individuals have about their ability and intelligence; this perception can fall under a fixed mindset, where these traits are innate and cannot be changed, or a growth mindset, where ability and intelligence can be further developed from an initial state. For students, the

perception they have of their abilities and intelligence can impact their mindset and influence their motivation and determination to reach degree completion. Additionally, mindset is also swayed by the perception individuals have of the world around them. For university students, the view they have of the campus community and their place in it could affect their motivation or desire to remain connected to the institution. Through the use of Dweck's theory, exploring Latino male students' challenges and successes on university campuses aided in understanding how their engagement on campus contributed to their sense of belonging on campus, and what impact this had on their mindset. Additionally, Dweck (2000) stressed that mindset could greatly influence the levels of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation a person possesses, in addition to impacting a students' self-esteem levels while at college. Coupled with Astin's (1999) theory of student involvement, which focuses on the personal development that occurs during involvement in campus academic and social activities, looking closely at the challenges and successes Latino males experience on campus informed how this group uses social engagement to change their mindset, motivating their persistence to degree. Utilizing the theory of motivation together with the Theory of Student Involvement as a framework to view the lived experiences of Latino male students while enrolled in a university assisted in understanding the factors that motivate persistence decisions and increase resilience among this student group.

Tinto's Theory of Student Departure

Within Tinto's (1988) theory of student departure social and academic forces shape a student's voluntary integration into the college community. Making a connection to Emile Durkheim's theory on suicide, Tinto (1988, 1993) emphasized how a student's departure from college is not dissimilar to departure from society through suicide, noting that a student's decision to leave the university is similar to a person's decision to commit suicide. Both

behaviors can be understood as a representation of voluntary departure or withdrawal from a community, where the individual appears to be rejecting the conventional attitudes concerning the value of remaining in the community (Tinto, 1993). Van Gennepe's study of the rites of membership in tribal societies was also utilized by Tinto (1988) as a backdrop for understanding the process of student persistence as time-dependent. Van Gennepe's model for community membership illustrated how a person undergoes a process, or a rite of passage, to become a member of a community while transitioning away from another.

Tinto (1993) suggested caution in wholly ascribing to the notions of integration and community membership outlined by Durkheim and Van Gennepe. College communities are not as permanent or extensive as other communities students may belong to. Students do undergo a similar rite of passage from their pre-collegiate community, with all its norms and expectations, into a new college community (Tinto, 1988). Upon entering university, students must separate themselves, to some degree, from membership in their previous community. Students then undergo a period of transition, where they exist between old associations and new associations.

Transitioning into higher education is a difficult time for students and is characterized as a period of coping with adjustment to college life (Tinto, 1988). The intensity of the transition phase will depend on how different the norms and behavior patterns necessary for incorporation into college life are from those experienced in the past. Moving into the incorporation phase, students must utilize the norms that are appropriate for life in the college setting, in order to establish membership within the college community (Tinto, 1988). Tinto warned that social interactions and contacts are not always ensured, limiting students from access to an essential factor that assists in integration with the campus community. In addition, Tinto stressed that students experience these phases very differently from each other, indicating that the process is

not the same for every student. In order to assist during the transition into collegiate life, an institution must commit to the education of its students, nurturing their social and intellectual growth (Tinto, 1993). Institutional action is necessary to help promote student motivation, by providing much needed academic and social support (Tinto, 2017).

Students, however, must be involved in their own learning as well; Tinto (1993) highlighted the benefits of involvement by noting how increased engagement can strengthen the commitment students make to the goals of education. While emphasizing that increased student involvement or integration into college life leads to an increased likelihood of persistence, Tinto (1997) noted the passive roles students take in the classroom. Colleges and universities can involve students and make them active participants in the learning process, by engaging them in the classroom, which in turn can lead to engagement outside the classroom (Tinto, 1993). Rather than taking a back seat to their education, Tinto argued for a more active and engaged approach on the part of students. The classroom is important to student persistence in higher education, and the development of a collaborative learning community can aid students in connecting academic and social networks (Tinto, 1997). These collaborative learning communities allow for students to view each other as peer learners, further strengthening the academic and social connection.

The decision to leave an institution of higher education is often a result of factors that occur after a student enters the community (Tinto, 1993). A student's departure from college is a reflection not only of the individual but of the community as well when effective means for individuals to integrate into both the social and intellectual aspects of the university community are not adequately provided (Tinto, 1993). Daily formal and informal interactions in academic and social domains, in addition to the perception of those interactions, are strong determinants

that influence decisions of departure (Tinto, 1993). Students are presented with many barriers that threaten their attempts at persisting in college, including a sense of loss, confusion, and isolation (Tinto, 1988). Students who desire to persist in college, however, will expend the effort to do so despite the barriers or challenges that arise (Tinto, 2017). This desire is strengthened when students have made a strong academic and social connection with the campus community.

Tinto (1988) stressed the need to acknowledge that factors that lead to departure from college are not constant and they change over time. Persistence predictors, Tinto (1997) noted, change throughout a student's college career, necessitating consideration of persistence as a longitudinal process and the parallels it has with moral and intellectual development. This view adds a new dimension to understanding decision to persist. Moreover, consideration of student perspectives as a way to understand their interests and how this leads to persistence is needed (Tinto, 2017). According to Tinto, these interests are tied to a student's motivation to persist. Tinto also noted the importance of self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and perceptions of the curriculum when analyzing students' perspectives and how these factors influence a student's motivation to persist. Tinto (1988) discussed how students stay and persist in college because of either an academic or social integration with the college community. Persistence is heightened when students can bridge the academic-social divide, which is achieved through increased academic and social involvement (Tinto, 1997). Although Tinto noted why students may depart from higher education in his theory of student departure, he also emphasized how integration into the college community through academic and social engagement can lead to an increase in sense of belonging, influencing persistence. Applying this theory in exploring how Latino male university students perceive the effects of social engagement will aid in comprehending the motivations these students tap into to navigate the campus environment and persist to graduation.

Tinto (1997) believed that students should be more proactive with their education, taking an active role in becoming more involved. This point is related to Astin's (1999) position, which emphasized greater student involvement in college, leading to an increase in both student learning and personal development. Astin's (1999) suggestion to the correlation between student persistence and time on campus is analogous to Tinto's (1993) argument on the strong influence interactions between academic and social domains have on determining decisions regarding departure from higher education. Dweck (2000) pressed that the perspectives or mindsets individuals have provide meaning to lived experiences, a point that is akin to Tinto's (2017) position on the inclusion of student perspectives to understand the factors that act as persistence motivators. Utilizing elements of the theory of motivation, the theory of student involvement, and the theory of student departure aided in examining how Latino male university students perceive the effects of social engagement while matriculated in a university on degree completion, shedding insight into how their perspectives on achievements and coping with difficulty affects their mindset and ultimately their ability to attain a bachelor's degree.

Conceptual Framework Summary

The theories developed by Astin (1993), Dweck (2016), and Tinto (1993) serve as a foundation for the conceptual framework of this study by providing insight on how educators should view Latino male students' persistence in higher education. Astin's theory and Tinto's theory complement each other, stressing the importance of students becoming more involved, both academically and socially, to integrate themselves with the university environment. Tinto's (1997) belief that students should take a more active role in their education, that is, become more involved, is related to Astin's (1999) position that greater student involvement in college will lead to an increase in student learning and personal development. Astin's (1999) allusion to the

correlation between time on campus and student persistence and retention is similar to Tinto's (1993) argument on interactions in academic and social domains as strong influential determinants for decisions regarding departure. Both theorists see these as critical motivational factors that increase the likelihood of persistence and retention.

Dweck (2016) stressed that the view a person assumes for him or herself would affect the manner in which they lead their life. Additionally, Dweck (2000) noted that these personal beliefs aid in giving meaning to lived experiences. This concept is similar to Tinto's (2017) position on utilizing student perspectives as a means to explore and understand what motivates them to persist. In addition, both Dweck (1986) and Tinto (1988) discussed the presence of barriers or factors that can limit an individual's progress, influencing whether they persist or withdraw in the face of challenge. Dweck noted that a person's mindset, how they view their ability and intelligence, can impact how he or she will deal with difficult situations, and ultimately cope with failure. According to Tinto, barriers that limit individual progress can threaten student persistence. Both theorists note how individual perspectives are necessary to understand the impact specific barriers have on motivation and feelings of persistence. Whereas Dweck (2016) utilized psychology in the adoption of individual mindset for her theory of motivation, Tinto (1993) drew upon sociology sources in the development of his theory of student departure.

Considering Dweck's theory of motivation permitted me to recognize how student perspectives of their ability could factor into their motivation to persist in higher education. Recognizing the impact of individual mindset assisted me in understanding what contributes to a student's desire to engage in social experiences on university campuses and how this involvement serves as a motivational system for persistence and resilience. Understanding

Tinto's views on what causes students to depart higher education, coupled with Astin's notion on what helps students become more connected with an institution, allowed me to examine elements within the university campus climate that serve as factors to keep Latino male students persisting in higher education. Using these theories as a conceptual framework also assisted me in determining what elements within the environments at universities, in particular social experiences through involvement with student organizations, support Latino male academic outcomes.

Review of Research Literature and Methodological Issues

I reviewed the current literature regarding university environments and on-campus involvement, and the influence they have on the collegiate experiences of students and their motivation to persist to degree completion (Machi & McEvoy, 2016). In the review of research literature section of Chapter 2, I provide refereed perspectives on the factors that contribute to student persistence and retention in college, as well as how race and gender play a role in feelings students develop to persist to graduation. Within the reviewed literature, certain authors employed a deficit model or a deficit-based perspective to explain why Latinx students are academically unsuccessful, by focusing on factors that lead to failure, which for Latinxs leads to their underrepresentation in higher education (Aguinaga & Gloria, 2014; Arbelo-Marrero & Milacci, 2016; Kim, Rennick, & Franco, 2014; Matos, 2015; Perez & Taylor, 2016; Salas et al., 2014). With regard to Latino male students, emphasis was placed primarily on why they do not succeed, rather than looking at the factors that contribute to Latino males navigating successfully through higher education (Sáenz, Garcia-Louis, Peterson Drake, & Guida, 2018). In the literature, employing a deficit model draws attention away from growth and development, maintaining ignorance and misunderstandings regarding communities of color (Kim et al., 2014;

Matos, 2015). In addition, assumptions grounded in deficit-based perceptions can shape the educational aspirations of Latino males (Perez, 2017). By contrast, the use of an asset-based perspective places the focus less on limitations to access and success, and more on what contributes to academic achievement (Perez & Taylor, 2016).

Considering the factors that support student success is necessary in order to avoid the continuance of students departing higher education before earning a degree (Robinson, Scott, & Gottfried, 2019). Escamilla and Trevino (2014) noted that factors that are typically seen as deficits could be converted into assets. For an asset-based model, the concentration is on strengths that provide insight into the factors that lead to student success for Latinos in higher education (Kouyoumdjian, Guzman, Garcia, & Talavera-Bustillos, 2017). Without ignoring factors that limit the academic progress of Latino male students, the reviewed literature primarily focused on elements that contribute to academic success, highlighting literature that follow an asset-based model.

A Sense of Belonging and Community

The common theme of *a sense of belonging* was detected from various authors throughout the review of the literature; according to Kim, Rennick, and Franco (2014), establishing a sense of belonging was seen as necessary to positive student outcomes. Other authors noted the importance of a sense of belonging from these perspectives: academic performance (Murphy & Zirkel, 2015; Patterson et al., 2017), persistence (Pichon, 2016; Thomas et al., 2014), and psychological adjustment and well-being (Gummadam et al., 2016). Belonging is viewed and experienced differently between privileged and minoritized students (Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). Although belonging was defined similarly by both sets of students, where a sense of belonging was built by feelings of comfort and fitting in, privileged students tied

belonging to activities where they experienced friendliness and fun, whereas minoritized students attributed safety, respect, and authenticity to building a sense of belonging (Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). A sense of belonging is an important factor that benefits college students, including Latino male students (Gonzales, Brammer, & Sawilowsky, 2015). Latinx students are more likely to adjust to collegiate life, and ultimately graduate, if they encounter a college environment that is racially comfortable and welcoming (Von Robertson et al., 2016).

A sense of belonging is not a static variable, but rather it is an ongoing process where students must remake or reposition themselves or the campus space, in order to increase belonging (Samura, 2016), and self-advocate for the support and resources they need to develop or enhance their belonging (Vaccaro, Daly-Cano, & Newman, 2015). The development of a sense of belonging was dependent on students' perception of the college environment (Murphy & Zirkel, 2015). Students are less likely to integrate into the college environment and life when their personal values and beliefs are incompatible with those of the institution (Allen & Stone, 2016). However, along with satisfaction with both educational and social experiences, the sense of belonging has a positive effect on student outcomes, especially among Latinx students (Kim et al., 2014). Although the effect is not immediate, sense of belonging can have long term implications for students of color, where developing an early connection can lead to improved academic performance (Murphy & Zirkel, 2015). Additionally, sense of belonging was seen to have both direct links to student retention in college (Cerezo, Lyda, Enriquez, Beristianos, & Connor, 2015), as well as indirect associations with retention (Patterson et al., 2017).

Tinto (1997) noted the importance of a sense of belonging as an influential factor that can affect a student's motivation to persist. Interpersonal relationships or interactions with peers can cause either positive or negative perceptions of belonging, which are linked to a student's level

of motivation in class (Zumbrunn, McKim, Buhs, & Hawley, 2014). For students, seeing themselves as fitting in can play an important role in college success (Gonzales et al., 2015). Finding a sense of community can have beneficial effects on a student's sense of belonging, affecting both resilience and persistence (Clayton, Medina, & Wiseman, 2017). The feeling or sense of belonging was also crucial for making a connection with the university, which increases the likelihood that a student will persist in college (Gonzales et al., 2015). Belongingness amplifies student motivation to persist since he feels both welcomed and valued, as well as respected as a member of the campus community (Thomas et al., 2014). Pichon (2016) also noted a relationship between a sense of belonging and persistence.

A sense of belonging can be fostered through activities and events that create social connectedness, assisting students in integrating and adapting to the campus environment, increasing the chances of persistence. (Turner & Thompson, 2014). Student experience and sense of belonging are also influenced by the level of involvement and integration with the college environment, in addition to how this environment is perceived. As both Astin (1993) and Tinto (1993) stressed, increased involvement will strengthen student motivation and commitment to the goals of education and assist their integration into the university community, key elements necessary for academic persistence. Being part of a small community on campus aids students in becoming more connected with the university, resulting in positive collegiate outcomes (Demetriou, Meece, Eaker-Rich, & Powell, 2017). The experiences students have within the university community can shape the manner in which they develop feelings of belonging with the institution, helping to not only to persist, but also thrive (Estrada, Mejia, & Hufana, 2017). Student-faculty interaction, as well as peer connectedness, are essential factors for the development of a sense of belonging and a connection with the institution, which leads to higher

degree aspirations and willingness to persist (Pichon, 2016). Developing positive instructor-student relationships can lead to desired academic outcomes for students (Robinson et al., 2019). Furthermore, establishing relationships with peers helps in the building of cultural connections and in student development, which is essential for retention at the university (Kiyama & Luca, 2014).

Belonging is important to everyone; however, students from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups experience belonging differently (Murphy & Zirkel, 2015). Additionally, a sense of school belonging not only impacts academic outcomes or persistence, but also effects student psychological adjustment and well-being (Gummadam et al., 2016). In their study on the relationship between participation in high-impact practices and feelings of belongingness on college campuses, Ribera, Miller, and Dumford (2017) found that sense of belonging is context-dependent, whether this perspective was based on race, gender, or generational status. This context can be influenced by either institution or student-related characteristics. The development of a connection and a sense of belonging with the university was affected by how students integrate into the campus community, their development and psychological adjustment to the collegiate environment, and how they perceive and experience the campus environment. This perception of the campus environment is vital to the mindset students will adopt when facing the challenges encountered at university. Dweck (2000) stressed the influence mindset has on motivation and the impact this has on student self-esteem while in college, therefore impacting how students confront the process of integration, adjustment, and overall experience with the campus community. What a student does and how he encounters these factors will ultimately determine the resulting outcomes, in particular, retention, persistence, and other

academic outcomes (Acevedo & Stodolska, 2017; Patrón & Garcia, 2016; Zacherman & Foubert, 2014)

Student Involvement, Engagement, and Integration

A strong sense of belonging is developed when students become involved, engaged, or integrated into the campus culture and environment. Collegiate success was greatly influenced by involvement factors, such as faculty-student interaction and participation in student organizations (Irlbeck et al., 2014; Von Robertson et al., 2016). Involvement with student organizations afforded college students an opportunity to grow and develop through access to a peer support network, which allowed members to serve as models or mentors for participants through a student perspective (Turner & Thompson, 2014). Through building these connections, participants of student organizations experienced personal benefits with their increased involvement (Demetriou et al., 2017). Students who maintain membership in social organizations, like fraternities, were more likely to be involved on campus and display a higher level of satisfaction with the campus' social life (Walker, Martin, & Hussey, 2015). Additionally, membership in a Greek organization increased the likelihood that a student will maintain full-time status while in college and complete a degree program (Walker et al., 2015). Students in their first year of university who were involved with Greek life had a higher sense of belonging when compared to their peers who did not join a fraternity or sorority (Ribera, Miller, & Dumford, 2017). Student members can expect a higher probability of graduating on time (Routon & Walker, 2014). Wagner (2015) stressed the development and utilization of on-campus learning communities that act as surrogate families, in order to help improve the peer climate through student involvement; this can also aid in increasing persistence past the first year.

Perez and Sáenz (2017) acknowledged that peer interactions can enhance social connectedness and diverse citizenship, but also warned that over-involvement could compromise academic success. Peer networks can provide vital support, however overreliance on these networks could lead to unintended detrimental consequences to academic outcomes (Perez, 2017). A lower undergraduate grade point average can result from over-involvement, especially when involved in groups like fraternities (Perez, 2017; Routon & Walker, 2014). Additionally, despite numerous studies indicating a connection between involvement and persistence, Thomas, Wolters, Horn, and Kennedy (2014) found no significant relationship between campus involvement and persistence, yet this could be attributed to the type of institution where their study was conducted.

Astin (1993) stressed the importance of a student community, noting that the absence of one can negatively impact the satisfaction students have with the overall college experience. Engagement in co-curricular activities on campus can be beneficial to academic performance (Zacherman & Foubert, 2014). Not only is engagement in student organizations impactful while in college, especially racially or ethnically oriented organizations, but the impact will extend well beyond the college years (Bowman, Park, & Denson, 2015). When opportunities to engage in co-curricular activities are not readily available, the enhancement of the learning experience is diminished (Lundberg, 2014). Bowman (2014) noted that when students are open to experience, that is, an openness to diversity and challenge, they are more motivated to become engaged. However, minimal interaction with peers both in and out of academic and social contexts is not enough to build connections or a sense of belonging. In a study on Native American college students and the influence interactions with diverse populations has on a sense of belonging, Strayhorn, Bie, Dorime-Williams, and Williams (2016) discovered that frequent or continuous

engagement with diverse peers is necessary for developing belonging, given the time needed to establish connections and build trust. Still, minimal interaction and engagement in social activities and organizations can be of benefit to students. In their study of student service members and veterans, Southwell, Whiteman, MacDermid Wadsworth, and Barry (2018) found that despite their nontraditional student status and diminished engagement with social interactions on campus, student service members and veteran students still benefitted positively from these interactions when they did engage. This benefit also helped to improve the likelihood of their persistence in higher education.

Academic engagement is also pivotal in ensuring a student becomes more connected with the university. Tinto (1997) noted the importance of student engagement in the classroom, where collaborative learning communities can assist students in bridging their academic and social networks, influencing their persistence in higher education. Clayton, Medina, and Wiseman (2017) noted that membership in both academic and social communities could diminish the risk of dropping out. Demetriou et al., (2017) studied first-generation college students and reported that investing additional time on coursework and other academic endeavors open additional opportunities for students, leading to increased success. In a study on the interactions and experiences of students within the classroom, Pichon (2016) indicated that when students engaged and developed relationships with other students who possessed high levels of confidence and degree aspirations, they were likely to demonstrate similar traits. Student engagement in education is beneficial, leading to improved performance (Kim et al., 2014; Salas et al., 2014). Musoba and Krichevskiy (2014) found that student performance in early English and math courses can be a predictor of persistence to graduation, especially for Latino and Black

students. Engagement with support programs that provide both emotional and academic support can aid students in completing a baccalaureate degree (Escamilla & Trevino, 2014).

Factors that contribute to integration with the campus community and retention behaviors are not the same for students across different collegiate years. In a study on support for first-year male students, Turner (2016) identified social engagement as an essential component in integrating students into the college community. On-campus activities that help connect students with each other and the campus community include sports, learning communities, professional organizations, and Greek-letter organizations, such as fraternities (Turner, 2016). Latino male students also benefit from participation in Latino fraternities, which offer positive structural and academic campus integration (Von Robertson et al., 2016). Greater integration with the campus community was linked to a decrease in the likelihood of departure (Clayton et al., 2017). Students who partook in co-curricular activities, as well as embraced leadership roles during their first year of college, felt more connected to the campus environment and developed critical campus relationships (Ribera, Miller, & Dumford, 2017).

Additionally, academic integration had a positive impact on first-year persistence, yet the same could not be said for second-year retention (Ishitani, 2016). When considering the generational level of students, that is whether the students are the first-generation in their families to pursue higher education, differences were also evident. In their study on Latinx undergraduates and the importance of identity and cultural fit within the university on academic persistence decisions, Aguinaga and Gloria (2015) discovered that there were differences in what influenced these decisions, which were dependent on the generational level of the student. First-generation students placed more weight on meaning and adherence to values, whereas university fit was more important to second and subsequent generation students (Aguinaga & Gloria, 2015).

Therefore, these generational differences can influence when and how students become integrated with the university and the campus community.

Student Development and Psychological Adjustment

During the transition into collegiate life, Latinx students will experience challenges, such as feeling overwhelmed or disconnected (Clayton, Medina, & Wiseman, 2016; Salas et al., 2014). Tinto (1988) identified the transition to higher education as a difficult time where students attempt to adjust and cope with college life. Despite demonstrating resilience and enrolling in university, Latinx students may begin to question if they belong in higher education, especially if they received nonuniversity messages in high school (Martinez & Deil-Amen, 2015). The lack of a connection or an inability to connect can lead students to view challenges as personal limitations (Perez & Taylor, 2016). Storlie, Moreno, and Portman (2014) indicated Latinx college students also face barriers during their matriculation that lead to feelings of frustration, marginalization, and alienation, as well as fear of failure. Wilson et al., (2015) also noted that perceptions of lower self-efficacy in class could lead to negative emotions in that class. When students of color experienced stress related to the academic environment, there was a negative influence on persistence (Johnson et al., 2014). Active and direct interventions are needed to counteract previously received negative messages about ability (Martinez & Deil-Amen, 2015).

Astin (1993) stressed peer groups are an environmental factor on college campuses that can have a profound impact on a student's personal development. Jagešić (2015) noted an association between students' academic aspirations and the academic abilities of their peers, where students who have a lower academic ability than their peers are more likely to have diminished academic aspirations. For Latino males, the fear of peer rejection interferes with

their seeking help or support on campus (Sáenz et al., 2018). The social and emotional support from college peers can aid students in their transition into college life (Allen & Stone, 2016; Vaccaro et al., 2015). Additionally, participation and involvement in out-of-class organizations and extracurricular activities can positively impact student development and wellbeing (Billingsley & Hurd, 2019; Thomas et al., 2014). Student development occurs when students are active agents within their environment and do so in a progressively complex manner (Demetriou et al., 2017). Latinx students benefit from their college experiences, which are essential and relevant to their development and achievement (Kim et al., 2014). Student organizations, such as ethnic-specific student organizations or Hispanic student organizations, allow for student members to experience a non-threatening environment, where they are free to express themselves and develop (Castellanos, 2016). Involvement within a culturally oriented organization, such as a Latino-based fraternity, can help members feel welcomed and part of a community (Estrada et al., 2017). Moreover, fraternity membership can help minimize feelings of loneliness and isolation through the creation of a community of support (Turner, 2016).

Hevel, Martin, Weeden, and Pascarella (2015) found that fraternity and sorority membership does not have a direct effect on students' critical thinking skills, psychological well-being, moral reasoning, and inclination for inquiry and life-long learning, especially in the fourth year of college. Conditional effects were discovered in the study, based on students' racial and ethnic identities, and entering academic abilities (Hevel et al., 2015). Membership in a fraternity can have an amplifying effect on the educational outcomes of students, as reflected by their entering academic ability (Hevel et al., 2015). The authors did note, however, that fraternal membership does not influence everyone in the same way.

Latino males often hesitate seeking assistance, especially from faculty members whom they perceive are inaccessible or unapproachable, which can hinder their adjustment into the classroom (Rodriguez, Massey, & Sáenz, 2016). Cultivating a sense of belonging in class will improve how students feel and increase their effort and willingness to participate in class, due to the relationship between belonging and academic engagement (Wilson et al., 2015). Arbelo-Marrero and Milacci (2016) stressed a similar point, indicating that student fears and anxieties can be overcome by building a strong sense of belonging and acceptance. Additionally, psychological adjustment and well-being are improved when a sense of school belonging is established, impacting academic outcomes and persistence as well (Gummadam et al., 2016). Reassuring students in the face of difficulty can also be impactful. Strayhorn (2014) indicated, in his study on the role of grit in the academic success of Black male students, how encouraging male students to keep trying or push through challenges despite any potential setbacks, can be as important as focusing on the effects previous grades and test scores have on academic success.

Student identity may influence psychological adjustment and well-being, as well as how a student relates to others and builds connections. Well-being can be damaged over time due to the stress that can be produced by attempts at maintaining or expressing a hyper-masculine persona or attitude (Estrada & Arciniega, 2015). Latino males will often experience pressure from peers to conform to the socially accepted concept of what it means to be a man (*machismo*), in particular from peers who did not choose to pursue higher education, therefore forgoing anything that is perceived as feminine (Sáenz, Mayo, Miller, & Rodriguez, 2015). Estrada and Jimenez (2017) determined, in a study on Latino male identity, that engendering positive masculinity, or *caballerismo*, amplifies social connectedness and belonging, which is important for the success of college Latinos. Attention should be placed on the social environment, which

is important in forming or encouraging a different form of masculinity (Estrada & Arciniega, 2015). Failing to create a space where positive masculinity is or can be engendered will only widen the lack of support Latino males need to overcome any obstacles to persistence they may encounter (Sáenz et al., 2015). Regarding ethnic identity, Gummadam, Pittman, and Ioffe (2016) noticed a strong association with psychological adjustment might not be present. The authors indicated a link between ethnic identity and self-worth, which ethnically underrepresented students can tap into in order to protect themselves when feeling disconnected from the university.

Impact of Ethnic Identity and Racial Microaggressions

Dweck (2000) noted that stereotypes about certain groups, whether good or bad, can manifest through possessing a fixed mindset, where the belief is that certain traits or characteristics are fixed and inherent within particular groups. This mindset or perspective can be changed. Additionally, the campus environment must be included as a factor in understanding the conditions that can support student persistence (Johnson et al., 2014). Although the institutional climate has an immense effect on all students, it has a particular effect on racial and ethnic minority students, where the racial climate experienced can moderate the educational experiences, retention, and degree completion of these students (Castellanos, Gloria, Besson, & Clark Harvey, 2016). In exploring the underlying racial conceptions of college students, Johnston (2014) found that several college contexts, such as classes or student organizations, influence students' understandings of race. In addition, there was a disparity in how race relations are both perceived and experienced by majority and minority students (Lo, McCallum, & Hughes, 2017). The perception students have of the campus environment and

experiences they encounter can significantly affect their sense of belonging, which could have detrimental effects on academic outcomes.

The perception students have of the campus climate and attachment to the university changes when they feel ignored or invisible on campus (Palmer & Maramba, 2015). Issues and difficulties arise when students perceive that they are not welcomed or supported because of their racial or ethnic identity (Spruill, Hirt, & Mo, 2014). These perceptions are often the result of racial microaggressions experienced by students of color, which emerge from negative interactions with faculty, staff, or peers based on stereotypical views or opinions (Cerezo et al., 2015). Stereotypes often hinder the sense of belonging that would benefit Latinx students (Gonzales et al., 2015). Additionally, racial microaggressions have a negative impact on the social, cultural, and psychological adjustment of students (Von Robertson et al., 2016). Students of color, however, will experience reduced observations of racism on campus when they perceive they are prepared for the campus social environment (Johnson et al., 2014).

Students may possess a fluid view or conception of race (Johnston, 2014). Race and the perceptions of the campus racial climate can have a negative influence on male undergraduate persistence (Johnson et al., 2014; Spruill et al., 2014). Black and Latino men experience more hostility and unfriendliness in university campus environments (Cerezo et al., 2015). Student racial and gendered identities can lead to experiences of alienation and racial hostility (Brooms & Davis, 2017). Additionally, students who experience racial microaggressions tend to feel increasingly more detached from the higher education institution (Palmer & Maramba, 2015). In a study on Black male student persistence, Brooms and Davis (2017) discussed how barriers arise during students' transition into and navigation through college when they experience gendered and institutional racism on campus. Latino male students are also the victims of

misconceived opinions regarding their skills and knowledge (Perez & Taylor, 2016). Patrón and Garcia (2016) suggested that the academic progression of Latino male students is hindered due to being members of an oppressed social identity group. When students of color, including Latino males, are concerned with being stereotyped or not fitting into the educational environment, the concerns interfere with their academic performance (Murphy & Zirkel, 2015).

Historically, racially marginalized people were deficient or lacking in academic preparedness and familial support or involvement, placing the cause of these perceived flaws on genetics or culture (Matos, 2015). Stereotypes and racial misconceptions can contribute to the unfavorable treatment of students of color, including racial profiling, physical avoidance, and broken communication with White students and faculty (Brooms & Davis, 2017). Students may not be able to recognize that they are experiencing a racial microaggression due to social indoctrination perpetrated by and through the media, music, and even peers (Palmer & Maramba, 2015). Racial and ethnic disparities in academic performance, however, can be explained through understanding the perceptions students of color have of both the classroom and residential environments (Martin, Spenner, & Mustillo, 2017). Students who encountered faculty genuinely dedicated to and cared about their educational experience identified these individuals as a source of support toward college completion (Kouyoumdjian et al., 2017). Additionally, faculty-student interactions can help mitigate the effects of the campus climate on a student's engagement (Wood & Ireland, 2014). Furthermore, interpersonal interactions with other students were also seen by students as a means of support (Kouyoumdjian et al., 2017).

During the transition into campus life, students are more inclined to seek out peers who share common or like identities (Michel & Durdella, 2018). Support networks that consist of individuals with similar identities are often sought out or created, in order to establish a safe

space where a sense of belonging and connection is fostered and allows students to cope with an unwelcoming campus environment, as well as structure their time (Billingsley & Hurd, 2019; Museus, Sariñana, & Ryan, 2015). Students are likely to form or integrate into micro-communities within the college to cope with feelings of alienation or denigration (Brooms & Davis, 2017). Developing both academic and social counterspaces allow students to have a safe place where they can receive the help and support needed to navigate through a negative campus climate (Palmer & Maramba, 2015). Von Robertson, Bravo, and Chaney (2016) highlighted the importance of counterspaces on campus for Latinx students, noting how they can instill belonging and create a sense of home and family. Latinx students will seek to replicate the familial structures they are accustomed to, creating support structures within a new surrogate family (Matos, 2015). Students who partake in cultural-specific organizations develop a sense of comfort and belonging when surrounded by members of similar racial backgrounds (Delgado-Guerrero, Cherniack, & Gloria, 2014). Acevedo and Stodolska (2017) found that while participation in ethnic-centered organizations can strengthen ethnic identity, students who have a higher ethnic identity will perceive the university climate as more negative, leading to lower college adjustment. Cultural empowerment, however, was essential for the retention and success of young Latinxs (Acevedo & Stodolska, 2017). Additionally, culture-specific spaces are used to hold higher education institutions accountable in providing students of color the means to feel represented and supported (Delgado-Guerrero et al., 2014).

Dweck (2000) argued that groups are made up of individuals that differ from one another and the dangers that can arise when strong beliefs are held about the supposed superiority or inferiority of a particular group, or that most members within a given group share the same traits or qualities. Higher education institutions can harbor a campus culture that oppresses racially

underrepresented student groups, due to long-standing histories and traditions that uphold values, beliefs, and norms of a dominant racial group (Kiyama, Museus, & Vega, 2015). Colleges and universities, as educational settings, can be perceived as raced in ways that appear to favor White students (Murphy & Zirkel, 2015). Most programming, activities, and organizations, particularly in elite universities, reflect a traditional White, upper-class style and interest (Martin et al., 2017). Moreover, students, especially those matriculated at highly selective universities, may perceive the institution as operating in a manner that favors the servicing of socioeconomically advantaged White students (Matos, 2015). Students who experience an environment that is culturally homogenous, such as in predominantly White institutions, may perceive the campus climate as hostile (Delgado-Guerrero et al., 2014). Students who adhered to an Anglo orientation, by adopting White American values, would view the university climate more positively, resulting in increased academic persistence decisions (Aguinaga & Gloria, 2015). This notion is similar to the study findings by Ojeda, Castillo, Rosales Meza, and Piña-Watson (2014), noting that being acculturated to White American culture had a positive impact on college persistence.

A sense of culture shock is experienced when students enroll and attend an institution that is predominantly represented by a differing culture or race (Allen & Stone, 2016). This feeling makes establishing a sense of belonging all the more critical; according to Murphy and Zirkel (2015), there was a correlation between the social representation of race and academic choices, in addition to being a predictor of student belonging. The nature, as well as the meaning of belonging, will be different when students experience negative racial stereotypes, yet the development of a strong sense of belonging should help mitigate the effects of negative stereotype threat (Murphy & Zirkel, 2015). While Capers (2019) noted that university campuses

should focus beyond simply extending racial and ethnic diversity numbers to improve graduation rates among minority students, Von Robertson, Bravo, and Chaney (2016) stressed the need for higher learning institutions to provide both institutional support and develop a campus environment that is more inclusive.

The Importance of Student Perception

Perceptions of the campus environment impact how students relate to and engage with their fellow students, staff and faculty, and the higher education institution overall (Southwell et al., 2018; Tovar, 2015). Additionally, student perception of the college or university can also affect their sense of belonging, and in turn their academic outcomes (Castellanos et al., 2016; Holloway-Friesen, 2018). Furthermore, for Latinx students, their wellbeing derives from their perceived feelings of welcome and comfort on campus (Gloria et al., 2015). The factors that affect a sense of belonging, that is ethnic identity and racial microaggressions, psychological adjustment and well-being, and student involvement, integration, and engagement are influenced by the perception a student has of the campus environment and the higher education institution as a whole.

Negative perceptions of higher education can begin even before students enroll at a higher education institution. According to Sanchez, Usinger, and Thornton (2015), Latinx students have a negative perception of college affordability. Wood and Harris (2015) noted that financial matters impact the college students will select to attend. Therefore, having negative perceptions of college affordability may hinder the enrollment aspirations of these students due to the belief that they cannot afford a college education. In addition, if students also perceive themselves to be less capable in their performance in class, they may begin to experience negative feelings about being in the classroom (Wilson et al., 2015). Lin, Her, and Gloria (2015)

found, in their study of the educational experiences of Hmong American students, that lower or decreased perceptions of peer support correlated with lower confidence in ability, as well as lower self-esteem. Furthermore, when students perceive that they are less competent than others in the student population, they experience psychological stress or feel like their culture is devalued (Von Robertson, Bravo, & Chaney, 2016). These perceptions can affect how comfortable a student will feel in the campus environment and if they truly belong in higher education.

Meeting students' psychosocial needs, along with their academic needs, can ease not only the college transition experience but also improves the perception of being valued at the institution (Tovar, 2015). This improved perception in turn boosts the sense of belonging, as well as helps facilitate interactions and relationships with other members of the campus community. According to Tovar (2015), when students perceive that they matter, they are more likely to believe that they are valued as members of the university community, influencing the success they will experience. However, when students struggle with the university culture, including facing a conflict between their own ethnic identity and the prevailing university culture, they will perceive the campus environment negatively (Clayton et al., 2017). Taking steps to improve the overall perception students have of the campus environment should be of utmost importance for higher education institutions.

In exploring cultural fit and overall college and life satisfaction, Castellanos, Gloria, Besson, and Clark Harvey (2016) found that students who have a positive perception of the university environment are more likely to express satisfaction with college life, feel a greater sense of overall fit, and possess attitudes that positively affect academic persistence. Holloway-Friesen (2018) noted similar findings, indicating that the perception students have of the college

or university environment will determine how welcome and comfortable they feel at the institution. When students perceive their environment to be welcoming, they are more likely to feel like they fit in or that they belong. Vaccaro and Newman (2016) indicated that the perceptions students have of the campus environment shape their sense of belonging. Universities can do much to help students improve their perception of the campus environment and their sense of belonging as well.

Southwell et al. (2018) noted that involvement with student organizations and clubs had a positive association with students' perceptions of the campus environment. Zumbrunn, McKim, Buhs, and Hawley (2014) cautioned that interpersonal relationships or interactions students have with their peers could cause both positive and negative perceptions of belonging. Still, students' perception of belonging links to their academic motivation (Zumbrunn et al., 2014). Faculty-student relationships also impact student perception of the higher education institution.

Southwell et al. (2018) found that for student service members or veterans, the perception of how supportive the university environment was to their degree completion goals was enhanced by the number of frequent visits to academic advisors and other faculty members. Developing faculty-student interactions into mentoring relationships can have a meaningful and positive impact on student development. Beyond fit and belonging, perception is also vital for Latino males university students, when looking at their place within education.

Understanding the perception Latino male students have of education and the institution overall is vital to providing practical support for these students. Urias and Wood (2015) noted that peer and cultural expectations of Latino men contribute mixed messages regarding identity and gender roles. Pressure to conform to a culturally accepted concept of masculinity often presses Latino males to avert undertaking any endeavor perceived as feminine (Sáenz et al.,

2015). While education may be seen more like a female activity, Urias and Wood (2015) found that the more educational pursuits are valued, the higher the perception that school is a domain that is well suited to support both women and men. Harris, Wood, and Newman (2015) noted similar findings in their study on the effects of racial and masculine identities on action control or focus, indicating that when men perceive school as a domain for both men and women, their focus on collegiate studies was greater.

Additionally, men that were able to separate the act of seeking help from the perception of it as a sign of weakness or a display of femininity were more likely to remain focused in college (Harris, Wood, & Newman, 2015). Furthermore, when Latino men perceive themselves to be focused and driven, they likely feel more comfortable with their masculinity as well as with their pursuits of education, despite the perception that school is a space reserved only for women (Urias & Wood, 2015). The educational institution, however, can also have an impact on Latino students' perceptions beyond education. Holloway-Friesen (2018) noted that the college environment could also have implications for the perception Latino males will have of potential careers and the barriers they may encounter.

Synthesis of Research Findings

I reviewed literature that focused on factors affecting student resilience, retention, and persistence to graduation; I also reviewed other studies that centered on student development, psychological adjustment, and mental well-being. Authors who focused on how these elements affect or impact Latino male students are also included. I identified research that highlighted the experiences of students in higher education and how they cope with different campus environments and cultures. Additionally, I reviewed several primary studies that examined how student perceptions of their higher education institution are linked to their experience, which was

correlated with their feelings to persist and can result in a positive academic outcome. In the literature, the authors used a variety of research methods, including quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods.

Dweck (2000, 2016) and Tinto (2017) stressed the importance of student perspectives, and the meaning behind these perspectives, in order to help understand what contributes to students' motivation to persist in higher education. When students have the opportunity to express their views, they obtain the means to express their concerns, as well as provide recommendations on what contributes to their success (Cerezo et al., 2015). Many studies reviewed in this chapter utilized student perspectives and experiences to demonstrate how involvement in student organizations influenced their sentiments toward the university environment and a sense of belonging with the campus community. These perspectives were gathered using different methods, including interviews, surveys, study and focus groups, journals, and observations. Researchers used these data sources to demonstrate how student experiences can shape a sense of belonging (Brooms & Davis, 2017; Estrada et al., 2017; Murphy & Zirkel, 2015; Pichon, 2016).

Student experiences are influenced by participation in student organizations and other cocurricular activities. Astin (1999) maintained that increased student involvement in college could increase student learning and personal development. Students, in particular Latinx students, seek participation in student organizations in order to create a sense of community that develops into a home away from home for participants (Salas et al., 2014), create familial structures that mimic family support (Matos, 2015), find supportive environments (Patrón & Garcia, 2016), lessen the impact of the transition into college life (Irlbeck et al., 2014), and access resources and support (Castellanos, 2016). For Latinx students, college experiences seem

relevant or essential to both their development and achievement, lending a positive effect on selected outcomes among these students.

Researchers have focused on the effect membership in Greek-letter organizations has had on students' collegiate outcomes. Routon and Walker (2014) ascertained that membership in a Greek-letter organization does affect collegiate outcomes, noticing an increase in the likelihood of graduating on time. Estrada, Mejia, and Hufana (2016) indicated how the experiences of brotherhood could generate feelings of connectedness between fraternity members, as well as increase their sense of belonging with the institution. Delgado-Guerrero, Cherniack, and Gloria (2014) stressed how cultural-specific sororities provide its members a much-needed counterspace, which offers a safe refuge from a hostile campus climate. Although the study conducted by Delgado-Guerrero et al. focused on Latina women membership in sororities, Castellanos (2016) indicated that Latina student organizations are similar to organizations that cater to males. Both types of organizations face similar challenges, in addition to providing a sense of community and support (Castellanos, 2016).

Adverse effects concerning membership in Greek organizations are noted. De Donato and Thomas (2017) noticed the unfavorable effects some periods of membership have on academic performance. The authors found that participation in Greek organizations can cause significant distractions from coursework. Hevel, Martin, Weeden, and Pascarella (2015) provided a different perspective on the effects of Greek organization membership, noting that fraternal membership neither influences students' educational outcomes negatively nor does it enhance members' education. Despite research on the effects of Greek organization membership on students' college experience and persistence decisions were identified in the literature, few authors focused on Latino male college student participation or membership in cultural-specific

student organizations, like Latino-based fraternities, and the effects it has on their decisions to persist in higher education.

Critique of Previous Research

The authors' findings on the effects of participation in student organizations on college campuses clarified the connection between student engagement with their environment and their personal development. Data and information found within the literature were also helpful in understanding the factors that impact student retention and feelings of persistence, as well as resilience, development, adjustment, and mental well-being (Allen & Stone, 2016; Gummadam et al., 2016; Martinez & Deil-Amen, 2015; Vaccaro et al., 2015). Researchers also provided valuable evidence on the importance of participation in student organizations for students of color, showing how this helps build a sense of belonging and connection with the institution, affecting their feelings of persistence. Although the data found within previous research on engagement with student organizations were helpful, the findings in the research on Greek organization membership was mixed (Hevel et al., 2015; Ribera et al., 2017; Routon & Walker, 2014; Perez, 2017; Walker et al., 2015).

Furthermore, the lack of studies that specifically focus on the perception Latino male university students have of the effects of social engagement on degree completion while enrolled in a university limits the available information on how these obstacles and triumphs affect their decisions to persist to degree completion. In addition, the sole use of a deficit-based model to determine the factors that impact the academic success of Latinx students negates the aspects of the collegiate experience that support achievement (Aguinaga & Gloria, 2014; Kim et al., 2014; Matos, 2015; Perez & Taylor, 2016). Including an asset-based model, which centers on the circumstances that lead to student success, ensures that a wider perspective of all the factors that

affect degree completion is considered (Kouyoumdjian et al., 2017; Robinson et al., 2019). A research study assessing how Latino male university students perceive the effects of social engagement on degree completion and the impact this has on their persistence to degree completion is needed.

Summary

In this chapter, I utilized the theories of Astin (1993), Dweck (2016), and Tinto (1993) as the basis of my conceptual framework, which aided me in discovering emerging themes within the literature. Authors discussed the importance of participation in student organizations on college campuses and the effect this has on student retention, persistence, and academic outcomes (Acevedo & Stodolska, 2017; Patrón & Garcia, 2016; Zacherman & Foubert, 2014). The authors also concentrated on how student academic and social involvement can enhance the collegiate experience, as well as lead to positive development and psychological adjustment. Authors also supported the correlation between student college experience and sense of belonging within the literature. Furthermore, the authors noted how positive and negative experiences can impact the connection students make with the campus community.

In the literature, authors focused on the impact students' academic and social experiences with the university campus culture and environment can factor into their motivation and persistence decisions. Participation in student-led organizations was highlighted as having a generally positive impact on student persistence decisions. The authors did not, however, examine which elements of participation led to factors that contributed to academic success. Furthermore, membership in Greek-lettered organizations, such as fraternities, was recognized as having an influence on collegiate outcomes, yet there was a lack of consensus among researchers on whether Greek organization membership had a positive or negative effect on students'

academic outcomes (De Denato & Thomas, 2017; Routon & Walker, 2014; Walker et al., 2015). Despite researchers providing support for the importance of participation in student organizations for students of color, findings in the literature on the factors that led to Latino male motivation and determination to remain in higher education and earn a degree, as well as the impact of culturally-specific student organization membership, were narrow.

Different approaches or perspectives were utilized by the authors to describe contributing factors that led to student academic success. When utilizing a cultural deficit model, Latinx students were viewed as being less prepared for collegiate studies, unable to adapt to the campus culture, or incapable of coping with the transition into higher education (Gummadam et al., 2016; Matos, 2015; Perez & Sáenz, 2017). Precollege academic indicators, such as grade point average (GPA) and standardized test scores, were noted as not being strong predictors for Latinx student academic performance and persistence to graduate (Musoba & Krichevskiy, 2014). Authors saw these preconceived perspectives of Latinx students as contributing to racial microaggressions which made for an unwelcoming campus environment.

In the literature review, I outlined how student integration and engagement with the college environment through participation in student organizations and co-curricular activities can improve a student's sense of belonging on campus and their motivation to persist. Including a qualitative study that focuses on how Latino male university students perceive the effects of social engagement on degree completion can expand the literature. Understanding what elements found within the experience of collegiate life, including participation in culture or ethnic-specific student-led organizations, and lead to greater feelings of persistence to degree completion for Latino men, will be valuable in supporting the retention of this particular student group. The research methodology for determining how Latino male university students perceive

the effects of social engagement on degree completion, how they navigated and managed the university climate and culture, the challenges they faced, and what factors led to their academic success, is described in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The enrollment of Latino males in higher education has increased in the last four decades, yet college completion rates among this student population group has remained low (Arbelo-Marrero, & Milacci, 2016; Estrada & Jimenez, 2017; Kouyoumdijian, Guzman, Garcia, & Talavera-Bustillos, 2017; Ponjuan, Palomin, & Calise, 2015; Spruill, Hirt, & Mo, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2018). For first-time Latino male students, undergraduate completion rates are stagnant, leading this student population to remain among the smallest groups to have a college degree despite their increased enrollment numbers (Clayton, Medina, & Wiseman, 2017; Kim, Rennick, & Franco, 2014). In the literature, some authors focused on how participation in student organizations clarified the connection between engagement with the campus environment, student development, and decisions to persist through to graduation (Bowman, Park, & Denson, 2015; Turner & Thompson, 2014; Walker, Martin, & Hussey, 2015). Social engagement through participation in on-campus student organizations may be a factor in preventing a further decrease of Latino male students graduation rates. The problem remains Latino male students are not graduating from university at the same rate as their peers resulting in a reduced number of Latino male students not continuing in higher education or obtaining gainful employment. The purpose of this hermeneutic, phenomenological study was to explore how Latino male university students perceive the effects of social engagement on degree completion. Findings of this study may aid university officials in developing measures for supporting Latino male students to persist and earn a bachelor's degree.

In Chapter 3, I present the research methodology for this study. The research methodology outlines the structure the study will have, highlighting what and how particular elements in the research will be examined (Krathwohl & Smith, 2005). In this chapter, I discuss

the rationale for that design and study, my role as the researcher, as well as the methods used to gather and analyze the data. I review the research population and method for sampling, in addition to instrumentation, in this chapter. Lastly, I discuss the trustworthiness and ethical issues as they pertain to this study.

Research Question

The research question for this study was:

1. How do Latino male university students perceive the effects of social engagement on degree completion?

Role of the Researcher

Creswell and Creswell (2018) identified the role of the researcher as that of an inquirer, who is involved in both a sustained and intensive experience with research participants. My role as the researcher consisted of being an interviewer, data collector, and data evaluator.

Additionally, the role required that I be an active listener to the participants, as they share their lived experiences on the phenomenon being explored. The role of the researcher also called for me to identify possible participants and determine which individuals to include in the study based on criteria that center on the demographics being studied in the research.

Personal background, biases, and values can shape the researcher's interpretations produced during the study when considering the strategic, ethical, and personal facets of the qualitative research process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Using reflexivity is necessary, in order to identify personal feelings and reactions, and the potential influence they may have on the direction the study may take. Creswell and Creswell (2018) noted two key points when utilizing reflexivity during a research study: past experiences and how past experiences shape interpretations. As a Latino male, I had experiences navigating through higher education,

including participation in a student-led, culture-oriented organization at a university in the Western United States. My experiences have led me to have conclusions regarding higher education and the role involvement in student organizations had on my own motivation and decisions to persist to degree completion. By incorporating journaling, reflexivity, where I identify any personal feelings and reactions on past experiences and how they may influence my interpretations, as well as a variety of other validity strategies throughout the research process, such as triangulation and participant feedback, I ensured that the data was not compromised. These steps assisted in demonstrating the accuracy of the information collected. Furthermore, the use of a phenomenological approach to this study was purposely selected, to focus solely on the lived experiences of the individual participants and not those of my own.

Purpose and Design of the Study

The purpose of this hermeneutic, phenomenological study was to explore how Latino male university students perceive the effects of social engagement on degree completion. Within this study, I chose a phenomenological research design because individual participants are granted the opportunity to share their unique perspective on an experience. Through this process, the essence of the experience for the selected individuals was captured, providing insight into the impact of a shared phenomenon. Phenomenology was the appropriate research method to answer my research question, aiding in identifying and understanding the factors this student group ascribes to motivating their decision to stay in higher education and earn a bachelor's degree. The integration of hermeneutics allowed for the exploration of why the study participants interpret their experiences the way that they do, in addition to the factors that influence the making of meaning. Using a phenomenological design and a hermeneutic approach not only allowed the participants to describe their experiences of the phenomenon

being explored, but also aided in helping to identify the processes that influence the making of meaning regarding the manner in which they interpret their experiences (Creswell, 2014; Ravitch & Riggan, 2017).

I did consider other research designs for this study. Grounded theory design attempts to generate a theory that will explain an action or interaction on a topic, highlighting the process of events, actions, and interactions that have occurred over time (Creswell, 2012). Within grounded theory, the data is the basis for the theory that is generated to provide answers to a process as it pertains to a particular topic. This design approach, however, is best used when other theories do not fit the available data. Ethnographic research design examines and interprets the shared patterns of behavior, beliefs, language, as well as the actions over some time, of a group that shares common cultural traits (Creswell, 2012; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Ethnography was considered as a possible research design, yet this approach would require continued, long-term access to a culture-sharing group that can be observed in a natural setting (Creswell, 2012; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In considering ethnography and grounded theory design, phenomenology was considered the best approach for this study, because it allowed the participants to describe their experiences about a particular phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Research Population and Sampling Method

According to Creswell (2012), the selection of participants must be made with purpose and intent, to best explore and understand the phenomenon being studied, while avoiding generalizing to a population. Krathwohl and Smith (2005) noted the importance of the sample being representative of the key variables and characteristics that are crucial to the study. For this

study, I selected individuals that aided my exploration and understanding of the factors Latino male university students attributed to their successful completion of a university degree program.

Participant Selection Logic

I purposefully recruited college graduates who were involved in or engaged with student-led organizations while enrolled at university. These students were identified through common association with a fraternal organization at a university in the Western United States.

Participants were selected based on their membership with this fraternity, an indication that they were involved with a student organization while at university. For the study, the participants also had to be within certain key demographic criteria: (a) particular age, (b) race and ethnicity, and (c) degree completion status. Recruiting a total of 15 participants was deemed ideal, in order to reach data saturation.

With regards to age and degree completion status, participants needed to be at minimum age 22 and have earned their bachelor's degree from a 4-year university in the Western United States. This age and status were selected to best align with the purpose of this study, which is to explore the perception of the effects of social engagement on the ability to graduate from a university. In addition, all participants were recruited from a Latino-based fraternity located at the study site. Since I sought to explore the elements within social engagement that influences student resilience and stimulates decisions to persist, recruiting students that have completed their baccalaureate studies and can reflect on their time and experiences while at university seemed like a logical starting point. Furthermore, recruiting participants from a Latino-based fraternity aided in garnering insight into student on-campus involvement, as well as how engagement impacted their ability to graduate with a bachelor's degree. No upper age limit was

considered, given that in this dissertation I sought to explore the factors that have led to academic success among Latino male students.

Creswell (2014) advanced a rough estimate on the number of participants to include within a phenomenological study, noting a range of three to 10 individuals or until data saturation occurs. While the specific amount to the number of participants needed or how many should be included in a study is not set, an adequate sample is reached when newly gathered data no longer reveals new insights or properties, and saturation of the themes is achieved (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For this study, I pursued a participant sample of 15 individuals seeking data saturation in order to capture the essence of the lived experiences regarding the shared phenomena. This number of participants is appropriate, since a larger number of participants may lead to repetitive or redundant data, and no new insights or properties are revealed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Procedures for Recruitment

Recruitment approaches to gather a purposeful sample can be wide-ranging (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Upon receiving signed consent to recruit from the membership, an initial recruitment post outlining the purpose of the study was placed on the Facebook social media forum of one of the chapters of the Latino-based fraternities. In addition, a variety of procedures or methods were also utilized to recruit potential participants for this study, including making phone calls, sending text messages, emails, and instant messaging on social media. With my access to the listserv of this Greek-lettered organization, recruitment communications regarding the study were sent via email directly to the membership. Personal and direct communication with potential participants was also achieved through telephone and instant messaging, providing additional information on the parameters of the study. This communication outlined the study,

its purpose, as well as explain any implications for involvement in this research. Interested individuals were asked to contact me directly for further evaluation and screening, to determine feasibility and meeting of research criteria. Only individuals who met the prescribed criteria for the research study were chosen to participate.

Once the participants were identified, additional direct communication through email and telephone was conducted, where further details were shared about the study and answers to any questions the participants may have had regarding their involvement and the study as a whole were given. Selected participants were provided with a consent form, prior to any study material being disseminated. Once consent forms were signed, returned, and received, one on one appointments were set up with each participant to outline subsequent steps in the study process, including the interview process and how the collected data will be analyzed and used.

Instrumentation

Data for this study was collected using two tools. Initial data was collected using a self-designed Qualtrics questionnaire (see Appendix A) outlined in the research studies of Clayton, Medina, and Wiseman (2017) and Palmer and Maramba (2015). This questionnaire was used to gather important participant information, including the following: university major, degree earned, grades and grade point average (GPA), which organizations the participants were involved with, and their level of participation. The second instrument to collect data was semistructured interview questions; these were used to elicit participant views and opinions on the campus environment, their participation in a cultural-specific student organization, and the impact these elements played on their desire to continue to degree completion (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). These interviews questions (see Appendix B) were partially structured, to allow for question modification and freedom of order (Krathwohl & Smith, 2005). Specific

questions were open-ended to allow for full and rich descriptions of lived experiences. The interview questions followed a protocol, to provide structure and flow to the conversation, and ease the gathering of data (Creswell, 2012). Interviews were conducted via telephone and online teleconferencing software.

Although Booth, Colomb, Williams, Bizup, and Fitzgerald (2016) cautioned over the use of scripting in an interview, the development and use of specific questions helped in guiding the discussion and gather pertinent data that reflected the purpose of the study. I designed the interview questions to allow for a narrative and qualitative approach to participant response. This approach was achieved through the use of open-ended questions. Additionally, I limited the interview to five to 10 questions that directly relate to my research topic as recommended by Creswell and Creswell (2018), guided by the study's research question, and worded in a manner that allowed for a broader perspective of the central phenomenon. In total, the interview consisted of eight questions. I also used probes, clarifying questions, and asked for examples, in order to gather a rich description of the participants' thoughts and views. Additional follow-up questions were utilized as needed, in order to gather additional data or clarification on provided responses.

Data Collection

The collection of data is critical for the building of evidence to support a claim (Machi & McEvoy, 2016). The self-designed, preliminary questionnaire provided useful introductory data on the study participants. The questionnaire contained 10 questions, focusing primarily on the organizations the study participants were involved with during their time at university, as well as their level of involvement with these organizations. This questionnaire was shared with participants via the online service Qualtrics, for ease of access and return. Upon receiving the

completed questionnaires, I used the data to prepare for the interview processes of the 10 participants of this study.

For this phenomenological study, I utilized semistructured interviews as the primary tool for collecting data. I contacted the selected participants via email, text message, and telephone, to schedule an appropriate and mutually convenient time to conduct the individual interviews. I used each interview to gather information on the impact social experiences through membership in an on-campus, student-led organization had on the ability to graduate from a university among Latino male students. I recorded these interviews using the record feature on Zoom, which allowed me to repeatedly review the responses to the questions. I then transcribed the data using word processing software and used the information for analysis (Creswell, 2014). To ensure confidentiality, I assigned a pseudonym to each participant after conducting the individual interviews. All recordings and transcripts were destroyed after I completed the data analysis process within Chapter 4.

Throughout each individual interview, I took handwritten memos to aid in reflexivity. The use of these reflective notes during the research process ensured that I continuously kept in mind my personal experiences and how they may potentially influence my interpretation of the results (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). While reviewing the interview transcripts, I referred to my memos and compared the transcribed responses to my notes, to ensure that all pertinent data was collected and documented. To ensure the validity of the data collected, I used a variety of validity strategies, including triangulation of the data.

Identification of Attributes

The main attributes for the study stem from the conceptual framework based on Astin's (1993) theory of student involvement, Dweck's (2016) theory of motivation, and Tinto's (1993)

theory of student departure. The identified attributes for this study are involvement and engagement, belonging, persistence, and perception. This study explored the perceptions of Latino male students and the impact social engagement has on belonging and persistence. The perceptions and experiences shared by the Latino male students provided rich data.

The focus on involvement and engagement was used in this study to support the exploration of how social interaction between students influenced their experience on campus and how this contributed to their feelings of belonging. The emphasis on these attributes aligned with the theories of Astin (1999), who maintained that increased time spent on campus and greater student involvement resulted in personal development, and persistence, and Tinto (1993;1997), who believed students should have a greater role in their education and be involved, through increasing their interactions between academic and social domains on campus. The focus on the attributes of persistence and perspective related to the theories of Dweck and Tinto. Dweck (2000, 2016) stressed how personal views can affect how people lead their lives and how personal beliefs assist in providing meaning to lived experiences. Likewise, Tinto (2017) held that the utilization of student perspectives can assist in exploring and understanding motivations for persistence. Based on these theories, the use of these attributes in this study informed the exploration of student perspective on social interaction and academic achievement, and the impact experience has on success.

Data Analysis Procedures

An understanding of how to make sense of text and image data to develop answers to research questions is required when analyzing qualitative data (Creswell, 2012). Krathwohl and Smith (2005) noted that data analysis would vary, depending on both the kind of data collected and the methods used in gathering it. Since individual interviews were used as the primary

source of data, my data analysis plan concentrated on this method. Using five sequential steps Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggested for the data analysis process, I:

1. Consolidated the data and prepared it for analysis by scanning the material, organizing the raw data, arranging it by type, transcribing all interviews onto electronic media using word processing software, and typing up handwritten memos. The interviews were recorded using the record feature on the online video conferencing software Zoom.
2. Reviewed all of the data to garner a general overview and get a sense of the information collected and reflecting on its overall meaning. I pinpointed any general ideas the participants identified in their responses and wrote memos on any general thoughts I had on the data. Through this process of open coding, the information was broken down, or disassembled, by generating categories and grouping it together (Yin, 2011). Categories are constructed when codes are assigned to pieces of data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).
3. Followed a coding process that consisted of reviewing the interview transcripts and locating the instances where the participants noted elements or factors that contributed to decisions to persist in higher education. Memos were written down when the underlying meaning of these occurrences appeared. I reviewed these memos on the interview transcripts and group together any comments that appeared to go together, clustering similar topics. Through the process of axial coding, where developed categories are linked with subcategories, these open codes were organized into bracketed chunks (Yin, 2011). I then sorted them using keywords or phrases that represented each category. These keywords and phrases included belonging, growth,

- connection, brotherhood, family away from home. Grouping open codes into categories is done through the process of *analytical coding*, which results from interpretation and reflecting on meaning (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).
4. Used the coding process to generate a description and themes, as well as identify possible theme connections. The description included detailed information of the participants, the settings where they experienced the shared phenomenon, and the events surrounding their social experiences. Through the coding process, the codes were grouped as they related to or revealed some link to the categories or themes being explored in this study. The themes included the following: a sense of belonging, personal development, racial/ethnic microaggression, student perception, engagement, and involvement. I then assembled the data based on the theme or category and performed a preliminary analysis of the findings. The data was recoded and reanalyzed as necessary.
 5. Conveyed the findings identified in this study through the analysis of the data and through discussion that represented the description and the themes. The discussion contained a detailed review of the identified themes and any connections between these themes.

Validation of the Research Design

Assumptions

The following assumptions were held while conducting this research study: (a) the study participants provided honest answers to interview questions, (b) social engagements and experiences continue to be vital to students as they navigate through higher education, and (c) the sample for this study was representative of the student population I made inferences to.

Confidentiality was maintained to ensure responses to the interview questions were provided genuinely and to protect the identity of all study participants. The voluntary nature of the study was conveyed to the participants, allowing them the option to opt-out at any point during the study if they no longer wished to participate. Engagement in social activities and involvement with on-campus student organizations is an accepted component of university life, and students continue to participate in social experiences as customary to the higher education experience. Data was collected directly from the participants' own thoughts and perceptions, ensuring that the sample was representative of the student population. Lastly, personal biases and attitudes, as well as personal experiences, were withheld to prevent any influence on participant responses.

Delimitations

The delimitations of this research study are restricted to Latino male students who attended a university in the Western United States, earned a bachelor's degree, and were engaged in social activities through student-led organizations. Through this study, I explored how Latino male university students perceived the effects of social engagement on degree attainment. Therefore, this study did not include students who were younger than 22 years of age and have not earned a university degree. Participants included students who departed from the university and returned at a later date and have since completed a degree program. Inclusion of this subgroup provided valuable insight on the challenges Latino male students face in trying to obtain a university degree.

Limitations

There were limitations in conducting this study on Latino male students' experiences while enrolled in a university and the impact these have on their academic success. Some of the participants may have had difficulty remembering specific experiences or occurrences while at

the university. This issue is especially real for participants who graduated more than 10 years ago. This study pulled from the experiences of Latino male students who are members of a specific Latino-based, Greek-lettered organization, limiting the depth of the research since it only examines the perspectives of individuals who engaged with this fraternal organization. Additionally, this limitation also fails to include the viewpoints of students outside of this fraternity. Furthermore, drawing from the experiences of students who already graduated further limited this study, as the experiences of current undergraduates and their perceptions of the impact of social engagement on degree completion was excluded. Lastly, the use of one study site also presented a limitation to this study.

Dependability

Checking for accuracy and credibility of research findings, by determining that the findings are indeed accurate, and the approaches used to discover them are stable and consistent, lends to the strength of qualitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For this study, I utilized different strategies that aid in determining the accuracy consistency of the findings to ensure dependability. These tactics included triangulation, to support and provide justification of the emergent themes present in the data, rich and thick description, to communicate the study findings through detailed descriptions and multiple perspectives, member checking and rechecking of transcripts, to ensure the absence of errors or mistakes, and continuous comparison of data with codes, to avoid a shift of the definition of codes. Objectivity was maintained throughout the research process, by using validity strategies that ensured steps were taken to present the findings as derived exclusively from the views and experiences of the participants. These strategies and practices were used to obtain the data and ensure dependability of the study.

Ethical Issues

Booth et al. (2016) noted that reporting research ethically contributes to the search for some common good. As such, within the role of the researcher, I anticipated any ethical issues that may have arisen during the study (Creswell, 2014). There are various types of ethical issues that a researcher must anticipate before conducting a study, at the beginning of the study, as well as when collecting, analyzing, reporting, sharing, and storing data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In anticipation of potential ethical issues, and since my study relied on the utilization of human subjects, I submitted my research plans to the Concordia University–Portland Institutional Review Board (IRB) committee for review and assessment of potential risk. Additional methods to address potential ethical issues were utilized throughout the research process. I provided detailed disclosure of the purpose of the study to all potential participants, to avoid any misinformation or deception. Informed consent forms were utilized to gather permission from individuals who wished to proceed with participating in the study. Creswell and Creswell (2018) stressed the need to not pressure any participants in signing a consent form, noting that involvement should be entirely voluntary.

In the collection of data, I endeavored to avoid exploitation of the participants, as well as avoid the collecting of harmful or potentially harmful information (Creswell, 2014). Since participation in this study was entirely voluntary, participants were informed that they may withdraw from continuing in the study at any time. Ensuring participant wellbeing also included refraining from disclosing any information that could be deemed harmful to any of the participants. Concerning analyzing, reporting, sharing, and storing data, I respected the privacy of all the study participants by keeping all information and documentation in a secure lockbox

inside a home office with restricted access, and reported all findings precisely as derived from the data.

Conflict of Interest Assessment

The relationship I share with the potential participants of this research study is that of being a fellow member of the same fraternal organization which the recruited individuals hold membership. Despite this common association, for the purpose of this study, there was no anticipated conflict of interest. Furthermore, my role as the researcher required that I serve as an active listener to the participants, solely focusing on their lived experiences and not my own. Lastly, no potential financial or professional benefits are anticipated as a result of this study.

Researcher's Position

There were common characteristics that I shared with the participants of this research study. As a Latino male, I experienced navigating the higher education process as well. In addition, I have had experience participating in a student-led, culture-oriented organization at a university in the Western United States. As such, my experiences have led me to have certain conclusions regarding higher education and the role involvement in student organizations has on motivation and decisions to persist to degree completion.

Summary

In Chapter 3, I explained the methodology for this phenomenological study, including the research design and rationale for selecting this qualitative research approach. I also discussed my role as the researcher and the instrumentation I used to conduct my study. Methods for sampling and research population, including the logic used to select participants and the procedures that were used to recruit potential participants, were also discussed in this chapter.

Utilizing interviews, I collected data on the motivational factors that led to the persistence decisions among former Latino male university students in their pursuit of a bachelor's degree.

In order to maintain the validity and reliability of the research findings, I identified various strategies that ensured dependability, including triangulation, rich and thick descriptions, and comparing the data with utilized codes. Ethical issues were also discussed in this chapter, where I explained the methods I used to ensure participant privacy, confidentiality, and wellbeing. I also conducted a conflict of interest assessment, as well as reviewed my position as the researcher.

Recognizing the low college completion rates among Latino male students (Arbelo-Marrero & Milacci, 2016; Estrada & Jimenez, 2017; Ponjuan et al., 2015), and despite the increase of Latino male enrollment in higher education (U.S. Department of Education, 2016), this study aimed to fill the gap in the literature by focusing on the successful factors that led to decisions to persist to degree completion among Latino male students in higher education. Through this study, I pursued an understanding of the lived experiences of these students with regards to a shared phenomenon. In this chapter, I outlined the methods I utilized to assess the effects social engagement and membership in on-campus, student-led organizations, such as a Latino-based fraternity, had on Latino male students' resilience and the impact this had on their decisions to persist to degree completion. In Chapter 4, I provide an overview of this study and describe the study sample used in the data collection. In addition, an overview of the methodology utilized for this study is provided, along with a discussion of the tools utilized in collecting the data, as well as a description of the data analysis process. A summary of the findings is also provided, in addition to a review of the questionnaire responses and an evaluation of the interviews conducted.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

Through this hermeneutic, phenomenological study, I explored how Latino male students perceived the effects of social engagement while enrolled at a 4-year university on degree completion. The exploration of these perceptions was conducted through review of questionnaire responses provided by study participants, as well as through the analysis of interviews conducted with these individuals. Given that the college completion rates for Latino males remains low despite the enrollment increase in higher education among this student population, the findings of this research study provided insight into factors and elements that served as motivators for Latino males to persist to degree completion (Arbelo-Marrero, & Milacci, 2016; Estrada & Jimenez, 2017; Spruill, Hirt, & Mo, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

Within Chapter 4, I provide a description of the sample used in data collection, which includes the target population and the participants included for the study, as well as the study site. An overview of the methodology utilized for this research study is also provided, where I discuss the tools utilized in collecting the data, followed by a description of the data analysis process. Next, a summary of the findings is provided, based on the research question: How do Latino male university students perceive the effects of social engagement on degree completion? A presentation of the data and results will follow, with an overall summary concluding this chapter.

Description of the Sample

Participants were selected based on meeting the necessary demographic criteria explored in this research study. These key criteria included being: (a) Latino male, (b) at least 22 years of age, (c) earned a degree from a 4-year university, (d) attended a university in the Western United

States, and (e) engaged in on-campus student organizations. During the recruitment process, a total of 13 individuals agreed to participate, however, only 10 completed the entire research study process. Of the three participants who did not complete the study process, one decided to opt-out and no longer participate, one did not respond to continued communication efforts, and the final dropped-out participant only responded to participation reminders after I concluded the data collection process. This sample size falls within the participant range suggested by Creswell (2014) for a phenomenological study in order to reach data saturation.

All the participants recruited for this study were Latino males. The participants were former students who had earned a bachelor's degree from a 4-year university in the Western United States and were all a minimum 22 years of age. The participants for this study were recruited from individuals who hold membership within a fraternal organization at the university selected for the study site. This fraternal organization is located at various universities across three states, where each university location is identified as a local chapter. Out of the 26 chapters that make up this fraternity, one local chapter was selected for recruitment purposes. This chapter was selected due to ease of contact and being acquainted with the individuals at this site. While this local chapter has current undergraduate members, who have yet to graduate and earn a bachelor's degree, these particular members were excluded from participating. Given that the purpose of the study was to explore how Latino male university students perceive the effect of social engagement on their ability to persist to graduation and earn a bachelor's degree, the individuals selected had to meet the demographic criteria for this study.

Methodology and Analysis

I utilized two sources of data for collection and analysis for this hermeneutic, phenomenological study. First, the responses to the 10-question questionnaire, consisting of

scaling questions and open response questions, were reviewed. The Qualtrics questionnaire was developed utilizing the data collection strategies outlined in the studies of Clayton, Medina, and Wiseman (2017) and Palmer and Maramba (2015). In addition, semistructured interviews were conducted to better understand the perceptions participants have of their social engagement while at university and the meaning they ascribe to the effects this involvement had on their persistence to degree. The questions for the interview were semistructured to permit question modification and freedom in order, and followed a protocol that provided structure, ease the gathering of data, and flow to the conversation (Creswell, 2012; Krathwohl & Smith, 2015).

The questionnaire, which provided introductory data on the study participants, was provided upon receiving the signed consent form. The online survey service Qualtrics was utilized for the administration of the questionnaire. Participants were emailed an access link and were given as much time as needed to complete the questionnaire. Most participants completed it within a week of receiving the access link. Upon receiving the completed questionnaire, an interview was scheduled. All 10 interviews were held within a 2-month time period as the participants' schedules allowed, and each lasted on average 17 minutes in length. The interviews were all held remotely using the online teleconferencing service and were recorded, both audio and video, to allow for repeated review and transcription. I manually transcribed all the interviews verbatim from the recordings using word-processing software and prepared them for analysis.

I utilized Creswell and Creswell's (2018) suggested 5-step process for data analysis, including prepare and transcribe the data for analysis, review the data, begin coding the data, develop descriptions and themes based on the codes, and prepare the representation and discussion of the findings. Using this recommendation, I began the analysis of the data by

consolidating and organizing the information, scanning the material, and arranging it by type. An initial review of that data was conducted, in order to garner a general overview and make sense of the information collected. I conducted a second review where key points were highlighted and concepts were identified for coding. These codes were then categorized into common themes and assigned a keyword or phrase that best identified the grouping, including: (a) belonging, (b) growth, (c) connection, (d) brotherhood, (e) challenge, (f) success, (g) family away from home, and (h) participation or engagement. This analytical coding was utilized to interpret and reflect on the meaning of the themes, and identify connections (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The themes explored in this study included:

- sense of belonging
- personal development
- racial or ethnic microaggressions
- student perception
- engagement and involvement

I reanalyzed the data until saturation was reached and no new common themes were identified.

I organized the different codes into the keywords and phrases that best described them utilizing spreadsheet software. This process allowed for a visual format for analysis, permitting an ease of interpreting and reflecting on the meaning of these codes. Using the spreadsheet, I identified connections between the codes and assigned them to the themes they most pertained to. Reviewing the data objectively, I compared the information on the spreadsheet to the interview transcripts, searching for additional details on the experiences shared by the participants and how they interpreted them, noting any connection with the themes explored in the study. Through these techniques, the data was reviewed and analyzed to assess the

perception Latino male students have on social engagement and the impact it has on their ability to earn a 4-year degree.

Summary of the Findings

The findings of this study were revealed based on the experiences as described by the participants and their understanding of the explored phenomenon. The participants noted their perception of the effects of social engagement during their enrollment at a 4-year university. Results from the questionnaires and interviews highlighted the motivational factors these Latino males credit for their decision to persist in higher education and achieve the goal of earning a bachelor's degree. Across all the interviews, there was a consistency in the findings indicating that social engagements had a definite impact on the overall experience at the university among all participants.

Through their responses, the participants provided details of their experience that helped answer the research question of how Latino male university students perceive the effects of social engagement on degree completion. The perception of the effects social engagement had on their degree completion was consistent among all study participants, where most of them noted the influence social engagement had on their ability to earn a degree. Responses provided by the study participants reflected a desire to remain in higher education, due to the influence of members within the social groups on campus, indicating a connection between involvement in student organizations and persistence. The motivation the participants experienced while witnessing the academic success of their peers in on-campus student organizations swayed their mindset toward continuing their education through to graduation.

Membership in the fraternity was seen by study participants as a key factor in decisions to persist and graduate. Out of the 10 participants, eight Latino males indicated that their social

engagement while enrolled at university directly impacted their ability to earn a degree; furthermore, these experiences improved their overall university experience allowing them to feel more connected to the institution itself, as well as develop a sense of belonging. The establishment of a sense of belonging was facilitated through membership with on-campus, student-led organizations. While some participants were involved in multiple student organizations, all Latino males attribute their membership in their fraternity as the primary factor that had the most impact on their collegiate experience. Whether through direct academic support, mentoring relationships, or the development of pseudo-familial bonds, all participants noted their involvement with their fraternity having a positive impact during their time at university. The findings clearly indicate that Latino male university students perceive their on-campus social engagement having a positive effect on their overall university experience and on degree completion.

Presentation of the Data and Results

By organizing, reviewing, and analyzing the data collected, I was able to gather the information necessary to answer the research question, in addition to understanding how Latino male university students perceive the effects of social engagement on their ability to complete a program of study and earn a degree. In this section, I present the questions found on the questionnaire and the responses that were provided by the study participants. The interview questions and their corresponding responses are also presented in this section.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire the study participants were asked to complete consisted of a total of 10 questions. Of the 10 questions, three were scaling questions and seven were open response questions. The questionnaire was utilized to gather basic background information about each

participant, such as college major, degree earned, and grades, in addition to information about on-campus engagement with social organizations, in preparation for the interview portion of the study. The questionnaire, administered via Qualtrics, consisted of the following questions (see Appendix A):

Question #1: What was your major at university? Responses provided by the participants were varied. As shown in Table 1, a wide range of majors were represented among the study participants, falling within a variety of academic fields. Three participants reported a major within the field of behavior and health sciences, while two reported selecting a major within the field of business. Two of the participants opted for a major in a science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, or STEM, field. The remaining three participants reported a major that could not be grouped into a common field, representing three separate academic disciplines. These majors were within the academic fields of health and human services, criminal justice, and communications.

Question #2: What degree did you earn? The study participants indicated receiving one of two main undergraduate degrees, as shown in Table 1. The participants received either a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) degree or a Bachelor of Science (B.S.) degree as undergraduates. Seven of the participants indicated they had earned a B.S. degree. One participant did note that he had already received a Master of Arts degree. No other participants indicated that they had earned any additional degrees beyond an undergraduate degree.

Question #3: What grades did you earn while at university? Identify undergraduate Grade Point Average (GPA), if possible. The range of grades among the study participants was not very wide, as shown in Table 1. Most of the grades point averages (GPA) were similar, with the majority of participants indicating that their GPAs fell within the 3.0 to 3.9 range. The

majority of the reported grades point averages, seven in total, were in the lower end of that range. Only one participant indicated a lower GPA, noting an average that was within the 2.0 to 2.9 range. Another participant could not recall his specific GPA, instead noting that he earned mostly B and C grades as an undergraduate student.

Question #4: Are you currently enrolled in graduate studies? If so, what degree are you pursuing? As shown in Table 1, most of the study participants indicated they were not pursuing graduate students at the time they completed the questionnaire. Of the remaining four participants, three noted that they were presently pursuing a graduate degree. Two of these participants indicated they were pursuing a Master's degree, while the other participant acknowledged he was pursuing his teaching credential. The final participant specified that he had already completed his graduate studies and earned a graduate degree. Of those that indicated they were currently enrolled in a graduate degree program or had completed their graduate studies, the responses they provided indicated that their studies were in the field of education.

Table 1

Participant Self-Reported Academic Information

Participant*	Major	Degree	Grades/GPA	Graduate Studies
Isaac	Kinesiology	B.S.	3.2	Master's in Academic Counseling
Roberto	Mathematics	B.S.	B average (3.0)	Teaching Credential
Joaquin	Criminal Justice	B.S.	Mostly B & C. Cannot recall GPA	No
Javier	Social Behavior	B.A.	3.12	Master's in Education
Jesus	Psychology	B.A.	2.7 – C average	No
Ramon	Business Management	B.S.	3.0	No
Arturo	Communications Design	B.S.	3.0	N/A
Leonardo	Business Administration	B.S.	3.2	No
Lorenzo	Mathematics	B.S.	3.0	Completed M.A. in Education
Daniel	Collaborative Health and Human Services	B.A.	3.7	No

* All names utilized in this table are pseudonyms.

Question #5: What was your level of involvement with extracurricular organizations at university? Every participant of this study indicated having some level of participation with extracurricular organizations. In response to this question, most participants indicated a significant level of involvement with extracurricular organizations while at university, as shown

in Table 2. Out of the 10 participants, four individuals noted a moderate level of involvement, while four other participants noted a high level of involvement. Of all the participants, only two responded that they had a lower level of involvement while at university. One participant indicated that he was slightly involved, while the other indicated that he was minimally involved.

Table 2

Level of Involvement with Extracurricular Organizations at University

Level of Involvement	Number of Participants	Percentage of Total
Not Involved	0	0%
Minimally Involved	1	10%
Slightly Involved	1	10%
Moderately Involved	4	40%
Highly Involved	4	40%

Question #6: Which organizations were you involved in? How many years? As shown in Table 3, all participants responded that they were involved in a Greek-lettered, fraternal organization for three or more years. Half of the participants indicated that this was the only student organization they were involved in while enrolled at university. Two participants noted their years of involvement with this organization continued beyond five years, with one participant suggesting continued involvement well beyond degree completion, spanning 14 years. The other participants indicated being involved in additional organizations on campus, including another group related to Greek life on campus. Only one participant indicated involvement in collegiate sports. Additionally, two participants did not specify the number of years they were involved with the on-campus organizations they held membership in while at university.

Table 3

Organization Membership and Number of Years of Involvement

Participant*	Organizations	Number of Years Involved
Isaac	Nu Alpha Kappa Fraternity	5
Roberto	Nu Alpha Kappa Fraternity	4
Joaquin	Nu Alpha Kappa Fraternity	6
Javier	Nu Alpha Kappa Fraternity	14
	AVID	7
	WEB	5
	CADA Student Leadership	
Jesus	Nu Alpha Kappa Fraternity	3.5
	University Soccer Team	2
Ramon	Nu Alpha Kappa Fraternity	4
Arturo	Nu Alpha Kappa Fraternity Multicultural Greek Council	
Leonardo	Greek Organization	3
Lorenzo	Nu Alpha Kappa Fraternity	5
	Multicultural Greek Council	3
	CAMP Club	2
Daniel	Nu Alpha Kappa Fraternity	
	M.E.Ch.A.	
	Inter Club Council	

* All names utilized in this table are pseudonyms.

Question #7: How would you rate your overall experience with the organizations you identified being involved with? All the participants indicated an overall positive degree of satisfaction with the organizations they were involved with at university, as shown in Table 4. Out of the 10 participants, six rated their experience as excellent, while the remaining 4 participants indicated their experience with the organizations they were involved with was good. None of the participants indicated an average or negative experience with their organizational involvement.

Table 4

Degree of Satisfaction with Organizational Involvement

Degree of Satisfaction	Number of Participants	Percentage of Total
Terrible	0	0%
Poor	0	0%
Average	0	0%
Good	4	40%
Excellent	6	60%

Question #8: Of the organizations you identified being involved in while at university, which one were you most involved in? The majority of the study participants indicated that they were most involved with a fraternal organization while enrolled at university. Out of 10 participants, eight identified their fraternity was the organization they were most involved with. One participant noted different organizations, while another participant provided the response of “Same,” which could indicate that he was most involved with his fraternity as well, based on responses to previous questions.

Question #9: What was your level of overall involvement in Latino or ethnically oriented organizations? Please describe. The study participants all indicated at minimum, a moderate level of involvement with Latino or ethnically oriented organizations. Most of the responses provided indicated involvement with the fraternity as the main organization of engagement. Additionally, the participants noted in their responses that their involvement consisted primarily with Latino-oriented organizations. This is to be expected, since most responses reveal that their fraternity is a Latino-based organization. Comments provided by the participants included:

- “I was a member of one of the University’s Latino Fraternity.”
- “We are a Latino base fraternity and my involvement was very high and at all times.”
- “Participated in founding Latino-based club and fraternity on campus.”
- “Being part of Latino fraternity provide me to be involved with community and student center at university.”
- “All organizations are Latino oriented.”
- “High, 2 of the organizations/clubs I was involved in were composed predominately of Latinos.”
- “My level of overall involvement was medium because I only took part in one organization.”

Question #10: Did your social engagement have a positive or negative effect on your experience while at university? The participants indicated in their responses that their social engagement had an overwhelmingly positive effect on their overall experience while at university, as shown in Table 5. Six of the participants expressed that their social engagement had an extremely positive effect on their experience at university. Meanwhile, four participants

noted that their social engagement had a moderately positive effect on their collegiate experience. None of the study participants selected any of the other rating options.

Table 5

Rating of the Effect of Social Engagement

Rate of Effect	Number of Participants	Percentage of Total
Extremely Negative	0	0%
Moderately Negative	0	0%
Slightly Negative	0	0%
Neither Positive or Negative	0	0%
Slightly Positive	0	0%
Moderately Positive	4	40%
Extremely Positive	6	60%

Interviews

Semistructured interviews were conducted to identify the perceptions participants have on the effect social engagement has on degree completion. Additionally, through the interviews, I sought the meaning they ascribe to the effects this involvement had on their persistence to degree. 10 interviews, consisting of eight questions, were conducted during a 2-month period, each lasting on average 17 minutes in length. The interviews were all held remotely using an online teleconferencing platform and were recorded, using the platform’s record feature, for review and transcription. The participants were asked the following questions (see Appendix B).

Question #1: Do you believe your on-campus involvement impacted your experiences at your university? If so, how? The participants of this study noted a wide range of impact to their university experience. Overall, the sentiments shared were generally positive regarding the experiences at the university and whether on-campus involvement had impacted these experiences. While some participants indicated the impact improved their connection to the university, others highlighted a feeling of belonging as they interacted with others on campus. Two participants noted a sense of growth through their on-campus involvement. Another participant stressed that his involvement aided his focus on academics. Comments provided by the participants included:

- Lorenzo: “I think that because I got involved early on, that I decided to stay longer.”
- Jesus: “It kind of showed me . . . showed me around . . . what was around campus . . . the different . . . clubs and . . . and activities that were offered for the campus. It’s . . . actually being involved gets you more . . . a more . . . out there and see the options that you have.”
- Leonardo: “being able to be involved and come into that social gathering definitely helped better my university experience, since I was living at home.”
- Joaquin: “I think overall, being part of an organization is something that impacted me . . . my involvement in being part of my comm . . . well, university.”
- Roberto: “I was able to get to know the people, get to see the uh . . . other majors, and um . . . just be able to interact with them.”

Question #2: What was the racial/ethnic make-up of the student organizations you participated in? How do you think this shaped your experience within these groups? All participants noted that the groups they associated with while enrolled at university were

predominantly Latino in membership. A few participants pointed out that there was some diversity in the groups they were involved with, yet they mostly gravitated towards groups that consisted of individuals that had similar racial and ethnic backgrounds. When diversity was encountered, however, participants noted that it allowed them to see things differently and step out of their own comfort zones. Two participants expressed being involved in two different groups, one that had a primarily large Latino membership and the other consisting mostly of White students.

In responding to how the makeup of these groups shaped their experience, one participant suggested that being in a mostly White group was not a complete surprise, noting preconceived impressions of diversity on college campuses. One participant stressed that there were benefits to engaging with groups that were made up of members that had similar cultural traits and faced similar issues on campus. Still, another participant alluded to the limitedness of being part of groups that predominantly reflected their own culture. Participant responses included:

- Joaquin: “Well, part of the fraternity was, like I said, more Mexican. Um . . . where the groups I attended uh . . . for . . . part of my major were more Caucasian people.”
- Lorenzo: “It was basically different groups and I liked to being (*sic*) in my comfort zone with Latino people. So, that definitely pushed me to explore other cultures and just um . . . Yeah, just to understand people better.”
- Jesus: “you already foresee that you’re gonna . . . you’re gonna see a minority, that you’re gonna be a minority in college . . . beforehand. It kind of prepares you for it, cause it’s something that you already expected, as you are already going into college.”

- Javier: “I think a lot of . . . a lot of positivity comes out from organizations from our same backgrounds, because they . . . you have gone through some of it and then you see whether or not the way they deal with the issue was the best way.”
- Roberto: “most of the people that would hang out were mostly Latino, so compared to other cultures, I was mostly exposed to my own culture . . . I wasn’t exposed to much . . . well, I was exposed, but I decided to, you know, to join a Latino organization. And I was able to . . . to spend more time with them, rather than other cultures.”

Question #3: What was your initial impression of the university you attended? Did this impression change over time? How so? Study participants were fairly consistent in their sentiments, when responding to this question, noting a sense of challenge or obstacles to overcome. Some participants expressed feelings of fear or apprehension when arriving at the university for the first time, due to perceiving themselves as unprepared for higher education, discomfort due to culture shock, or the uncertainty of their new environment. One participant even expressed self-doubt, when reflecting on his first impression of his arrival at university. Two participants, however, did express positive impressions of the university when they attended. Those participants who expressed an initial negative impression of the university, did indicate that these thoughts did change over time. Comments participants made included:

- Joaquin: “For me, it was more of a culture shock. Like I said, I came more from a majority, you know, ethnicity, coming to a minority ethnicity – me attending their . . . college.”

- Lorenzo: “There were different times, you know, definitely in the classes where I didn’t feel like . . . where I felt I didn’t really belong . . . definitely there were people that were a little bit more prepared in . . . to be in the university.”
- Daniel: “I was frightened. I was just questioning my decision. Like, why did I decided to do this? Why didn’t I just stay home?”
- Javier: “ I didn’t belong . . . When I think about this university, I mean, I would say that I didn’t . . . I didn’t . . . I didn’t fit in.”
- Arturo: “The crowds were a lot more diverse in [redacted] than other universities, which I feel like that’s what made me feel at home, in a sense. It wasn’t too different than where I grew up.”
- Roberto: “It was really good . . . it was in the open . . . I met a lot of people, so I was able to create a good network.”

Question #4: How would you describe your overall experience at this university?

Why do you describe it as such? Overall, the study participants indicated an overall positive experience at the university. However, the elements or factors that contributed to those sentiments were varied. Most participants felt the overall experience was improved by a sense of connection with the groups they were involved in, with three participants alluding to a sense of brotherhood that they had with other members contributing to these positive outcomes. One participant expressed his experience was improved due to his involvement allowing for a quick adjustment. Two participants conveyed feelings of regret, reflecting on missed opportunities to be more involved with other groups on campus and participating more in the classroom. Two participants did indicate a challenge to their experience, yet still felt the overall experience was rewarding and satisfying. Participant comments included:

- Joaquin: “I think it was a great experience . . . mmm . . . in being involved and then meeting people there.”
- Daniel: “I look back at my undergrad and I’m really grateful for all the experience that um . . . that I encountered and everybody that I met. I think that they really shaped me.”
- Javier: “It was a time of growth . . . It was comforting because I was not by myself. I was fortunate to have peers . . . that were dealing with the same issues . . . So, I would say that at the end, my experience at college was rewarding and comforting because I had that group. I was able to . . . I know that when things got tough, I had a member of the group, or members of the group, willing to help . . . and in the big picture, we would always be there for each other, regardless of the issues.”
- Arturo: “the university as a whole, thanks to the group I was with, I think I was able to gel (*sic*) pretty quickly.”
- Roberto: “I wish I could have done more. Get more involved . . . get more involved with other organizations, not just one.”
- Leonardo: “I would say it was, for me, it was satisfying being able to attend a university given that uh you know, Latinos don’t always have that opportunity, but at the same time it was a bit, like I felt something was lacking just because I didn’t have that on-campus interaction.”

Question #5: Did you experience any difficulty in adjusting to university life? How?

Most of the study participants expressed having experienced difficulty in adjusting to university life, with 9 out of the 10 participants indicating having to overcome some sort of struggle or challenge. While some noted the transition from high school to university was particularly

difficult, others indicated that the lack of familial support contributed to the challenge of adjusting to university life. One participant expressed feeling homesick and unsure of his newfound independence, in addition to possessing a fear of failure. A number of participants discussed feeling unprepared or lacking in skills necessary to be academically successful. Two participants highlighted the language barriers they encountered, due to being English language learners.

Other challenges expressed by the participants in their responses included struggling with an increased sense of responsibility, understanding time management, and not having anyone to turn to at first. The participants indicated that the most difficult time of the adjustment period was during the onset of their collegiate experience, typically within the first 2 years, with one participant noting that starting university was more challenging than finishing. Comments provided by the participants included:

- Leonardo: “I think my first year and a half was the hardest for me just uh . . . I guess the transition from high school to university within the first few years for me were hard because in its . . . I don’t know if it’s the high school that I attended or what it is. I don’t think that it did a great job preparing you for university
- Lorenzo: “At the time, I was . . . I was living uh . . . living at home. I was basically commuting. Uh . . . so I . . . I didn’t necessarily have trouble with that . . . in terms of living there, but, I mean, you could definitely feel a different um . . . like a different . . . I guess, yeah, culture . . . way of life. It was very different, I mean, my parents didn’t go to university so it wasn’t like they could tell me the ins and outs.”

- Arturo: “I feel like the most challenging task of going to college was just separating from my family . . . But I feel like that just the start was the most challenging than finishing the university.”
- Joaquin: “Just me being homesick . . . being on my own, you know? Not . . . just . . . pretty much being independent. I mean, I didn’t know if I was gonna fail.”
- Ramon: “Challenges, absolutely . . . Obviously, one of them I already mentioned to you was my language barriers.”
- Roberto: “Just time management, overall. Um . . . just . . . the pace, um . . . academically, um . . . as a first-generation student, English learner . . . it was a little . . . it was difficult. Um . . . you know . . . to get uh . . . to adapt to the academic part and be able to . . . just succeed in each and every class. Um . . . of being able to do the expectations.”

Question #6: What was your level of involvement with your fraternity? All

participants indicated being involved with their fraternity to some degree. While a few participants stated they were involved for a few years, others indicated being involved during their entire time at university. Some participants even indicated a continued involvement that spanned beyond their time as an undergraduate, noting that they are still engaged with their fraternity at some level. For some participants, involvement was gradual, growing over time. For others, they were extremely involved, holding various positions and roles within the organization. Of the 10 participants, two highlighted a growth in skills and a development of leadership qualities, while one participant expressed seeing the benefits of being involved, leading to increased engagement with the fraternal organization. Participant comments included:

- Lorenzo: “I saw a little bit . . . uh some more benefit to it, like I said. That was more . . . there was more benefits to being involved. So, I started being more actively involved.”
- Arturo: “So, um . . . with the fraternity, I held various positions . . . Until I felt I had the leadership quality, that’s when I took the position of President, which that’s where I felt it was another job. But at the end of the day, I mean, that’s where I think I grew the most as an individual and even, you know to others, as a leader. And to this day, I pride myself where, you know, that’s where I . . . it was a changing point in my education and within our fraternity.”
- Daniel: “I felt a lot more comfortable, like um . . . exploring my leadership skills and developing those skills as well, simultaneously. So, it was a good platform for . . . for us to experiment. Or at least for me to experiment what my capacities were.”
- Jesus: “Well, with the fraternity, I was involved for all four years over there . . . Fully committed, probably about two years and . . . and everything else was, uh . . . um . . . supporting it in anything else.”
- Ramon: “So . . . so the involvement was . . . 100%, again every semester; every year until I graduated. And that was the reason why, like I mentioned, it helped me a lot, because it made me the person who I am today, as far as leadership skills, uh . . . marketing skills. Because you know, obviously, you develop and market yourself out there.”
- Isaac: “Oh, my level of involvement . . . I was really involved . . . I was very engaged! I was full on engaged for four . . . for the full four years that I was there.

Yeah, so I was very engaged. That was, like I said, that was . . . that was my second family away from my first family. You know? So, I was involved in it.”

Question #7: How did your fraternity promote student success? How was this measured? The perception the study participants had on how their fraternity promoted success was wide-ranging. Many of the participants noted that one of the main goals, or pillars, of the fraternity was the promotion and focus on academics. While most participants identified some form of tool or mechanism for determining student progress and success, a few participants indicated a more comprehensive approach to measuring academic achievement. Study groups, library hours, incentives, partnering with others in the same major, advising each other on which courses to take, and sharing resources such as textbooks, were all methods the study participants identified as being used by the fraternity to help promote student success.

The use of a GPA was identified by six participants as the means of measuring student success. Three participants identified other means of measuring student success, such as tracking academic progress and grade checks. Another participant noted one on one talks and other means of open communication about progress were used to help measure student success. There was one participant who expressed mixed sentiments regarding the promotion and measurement of student success by the fraternity, noting that there was a gradual growth toward having standards and expectations. Responses provided by study participants included:

- Lorenzo: “One of the main goals of the frat was academics. So, definitely keeping in mind, I mean, what we’re originally there for. Um . . . there was a . . . there was a GPA requirement, um . . . in order to become part of the fraternity . . . But toward maybe the third year, fourth year, we started giving incentives, um . . . for best GPA

- and um . . . really making sure that we were keeping track and then even using it for promotional purposes, so we started trying to have a higher GPA.”
- Arturo: “We weren’t focusing on them with the same, um . . . strength we initiated the organization with. I think . . . I think, uh . . . the level of . . . of . . . I don’t know what you would call it. The level of importance that we were giving our education I feel wasn’t there.”
 - Javier: “Academics is definitely . . . it’s the . . . it’s the number one focus of the organization.”
 - Jesus: “The way that it’s measured, I think, it’s just by the students successful, you know, the student successfully um . . . you know, graduating from college. Um . . . actually making it.”
 - Ramon: “Well, one of our pillars is academics and obviously you have to maintain a certain GPA every single semester, uh, in order for you to be active. And before you could become a member, you must have uh . . . a certain GPA.”
 - Roberto: “Tracking each other’s grades . . . um . . . making sure everyone was able to succeed. And um . . . be able to intervene or um, you know, try to help those students who weren’t able to . . . who were having issues or trouble adapting to the environment or just to . . . uh . . . adapting to the school.”
 - Isaac: “Had grade checks, um . . . we have uh . . . at the end of the year, we have the academic brother of the year, so this is like a motivational thing”

Question #8: Do you think your involvement in social organizations while enrolled at university impacted your ability to earn a degree? Explain. The responses the study participants provided highlighted various perceptions as to whether or not their involvement in

social organizations at the university impacted their ability to earn a 4-year degree. These perceptions generally fell within the categories of personal growth, establishing a connection, supporting academic success, and building simulated familial bonds. While most of the participants believed that their involvement in social organizations did have an impact on their ability to earn a degree, two participants suggested that involvement does not necessarily ensure a person will earn a degree, emphasizing that a student can still obtain their degree without being engaged in social organizations. Nonetheless, all the study participants did highlight that engagement in social organizations while enrolled at university did have a positive impact on their university experiences, which in turn aided their pursuit of a university degree. Furthermore, all the participants noted that their involvement with their fraternity had the most significant impact while enrolled at university. Comments provided by the study participants included:

- Isaac: “It impacted it in a positive way for me. The organization pushed me to be successful, you know. Um . . . Like I said . . . if I ever needed support, and I knew that one of them could . . . one of my . . . members could support me, I would . . . I would ask him for support.”
- Roberto: “I think it helped. It . . . it helped in a way, um, it’s hard to describe. I would say that if it wasn’t for the fraternity, I would still be able to succeed and still get a degree. Um . . . but overall, I think it helped me and it guided me to just get a different experience, get knowledge from other people, from all the members . . . It had an impact on my . . . me achieving and having my degree . . . I felt more like home every time was in the university. So, it motivated me to keep going and actually achieve my . . . get my degree.”

- Jesus: “Yeah, definitely. I think so . . . just having a support group and have somebody to rely on . . . you have people who have been there for a couple of years . . . having those people kind of uh . . . guide you and . . . and tell you what the expectations are.”
- Javier: “Oh, yeah! Definitely. I think that school, I mean like I mentioned, I started a family, so my wife was pregnant in my third year and I was almost sure I was gonna drop out. Um then my social or connections or . . . allowed me to continue . . . And even though we never met each other prior to college and we’re in it together. The goal is for all of us to graduate.”
- Daniel: “Impacted? Yeah, um . . . how can I explain that? It gave me a lot of confidence. Um . . . being in the social organization and being well resourced. Um . . . and know how to get what I wanted, definitely allowed me to develop that confidence in finishing my degree and in knowing what I wanted and just being focused.”
- Arturo: “Uh, of course it did. I think . . . I think had I not been in an organization that academics comes first, even at a national level, um I don’t know if I’d get the same support that I . . . that I would have received it, uh, doing it by myself. I definitely think the organization and the individuals, whether it was individuals in the same university or others, I think the network we were able to build definitely impacted me to be able to achieve that diploma.”
- Leonardo: “I don’t think being able to earn a degree that . . . that’s more, um, on a personal dedication level. But um, it definitely helped ease some of the tension, you know? Some of the stress factors that are involved with the university, uh you know,

being able to unwind and being able to go out, go to a community service event, or something like that. And really give back to the community in that aspect, it helped the overall college experience. I don't think necessarily earning a degree.”

Summary

In Chapter 4, I provided an overview of this study, where through example responses I explored the perceptions Latino males have on the effects of social engagement on degree completion. In this chapter, I described the sample of the study used in data collection, which consisted of participants that were Latino males above 22 years of age, have earned a degree from a 4-year university in the Western United States, and were engaged in on-campus student organizations. An overview of the methodology I utilized for this study was also provided in this chapter, in addition to a discussion of the tools utilized in collecting the data and a description of the data analysis process. I provided a summary of the findings, which was used to answer the research question: how do Latino male university students perceive the effects of social engagement on degree completion? In order to obtain answers to the research question, I conducted a review of questionnaire responses provided by study participants, as well as an evaluation of interviews conducted with these individuals.

The questionnaire consisted of a total of 10 scaling and free response questions, which the participants completed online using Qualtrics. Responses to the questions indicated that the participants had a high level of involvement with on-campus groups, primarily with their fraternity. Additionally, most participants reported a GPA above 3.0, with nearly half of the participants noting that they have pursued or are currently pursuing graduate studies. Study participants also reported a high level of satisfaction with the organizations they identified being

involved with, in addition to indicating social engagement having an overwhelmingly positive effect on their university experience.

The interviews conducted with the study participants were semistructured, which allowed for freedom in order, question modification, and follow up for clarification. During the interviews, participants were asked a series of eight questions designed to explore the perceptions they have on the effects social engagement had on their ability to persist in higher education and earn a degree. Responses to the interview questions confirmed what the participants indicated in the questionnaire, elaborating further on how social engagement impacted their university experience. Although the majority of the participants indicated that they faced challenges and some difficulty in adjusting to university life, the majority shared that their experiences at the university were mostly positive. The study participants established that their social engagement centered primarily around their fraternity, a Latino-based organization, noting a high level of involvement with that group. Though the responses to how the fraternity promoted and measured student success was mixed, the study participants highlighted a positive influence from the group, identifying academics as one of the primary pillars of the organization. This coincides with the overall sentiment the study participants had of the positive impact social engagement had on their university experiences. While it was not unanimous that social engagement has a direct impact on degree attainment, most participants did note that their involvement in on-campus groups, mainly their fraternity, did have an influence on their pursuit of a university degree.

The findings indicated that social engagement has a positive impact on the university experiences of Latino male students, which in turn influences persistence to degree attainment. The majority of the study participants expressed contentment with their involvement in on-

campus student organizations, attributing this participation to greater feelings of belonging, connection with the university, guidance, and support. Although not all the participants agreed that there was a direct correlation between social engagement in student organizations and degree attainment, it was conceded that participation and membership in student groups did help the process. In Chapter 5, I discuss the findings of this study in detail, in addition to discussing the results and how they relate to the current literature. I also outline the limitations of this study, as well as the implications of the results for transformation, including implications on policy, practice, and theory. I conclude Chapter 5 with recommendations for further research.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this hermeneutic, phenomenological study was to explore how Latino male university students perceive the effects of social engagement on degree completion. As the number of Latino male students enrolling in higher education across the United States has grown in the last 40 years, those enrollment numbers are not directly translating into increased graduation rates, with Latino males trailing behind their peers of other racial and ethnic backgrounds in earning a 4-year university degree (Aguinaga & Gloria, 2015; Arbelo-Marrero & Milacci, 2016; Clayton, Medina, & Wiseman, 2017; Holloway-Friesen, 2018; Kim, Rennick, & Franco, 2014; Sanchez, Usinger, & Thornton, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2017a). In this study, I collected data from questionnaire responses and participant interviews and analyzed this data to answer the research question: how do Latino male university students perceive the effects of social engagement on degree completion? Through dialogue with study participants, the findings of this study offer awareness of how Latino male university students viewed their involvement with on-campus student groups, and how this engagement was perceived in relation to their ability to earn a university degree.

In this chapter, I provide a summary of the results of this study, outlining significant elements that were discovered and identified in the research. Additionally, I discuss the findings of this study and provide my interpretation of these results, in relation to the study participants' experiences and their understanding of these experiences. I also discuss in this chapter the results in relation to the current literature. Furthermore, I outline the limitations of this study and the implications of the results for transformation, specifically discussing the implications on policy, practice, and theory. Lastly, I conclude this chapter with recommendations for further research.

Summary of the Results

The findings of this qualitative study were revealed through a hermeneutic, phenomenological approach used to explore the university experiences as described by the Latino male study participants. Procedures for data collection and analysis were utilized to extract meaning from the study participants' perception of the importance they ascribe to the effects of social engagement during their enrollment at a 4-year university on their ability to earn a degree. The data sources used for this study consisted of a questionnaire and interviews. The study samples used in data collection was comprised of participants that were Latino males of at least 22 years of age, possessed a degree from a 4-year university in the Western United States, and were engaged in on-campus student organizations while enrolled. A total of 10 participants completed all aspects of the research study. Common themes were identified in both the questionnaire results and the interviews through a comprehensive data analysis process.

The questionnaire contained 10 scaling and open response questions. In their responses to the questions, study participants indicated that they had a high level of involvement with on-campus groups while enrolled at university. This involvement was primarily with their fraternity, a Latino-based organization. Most of the participants also reported having earned a grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 or above in their university studies, with only two out of the 10 participants noting grades and a GPA below that point. Out of the 10 participants that were involved in this study, four noted that they have pursued or are currently pursuing graduate studies. When asked about their satisfaction with the organizations they identified being involved with, the participants reported a high level of satisfaction. Furthermore, the study participants also indicated that social engagement had an overwhelmingly positive effect on their university experience.

In order to allow for freedom of question order, question modification, and follow-up for clarification, the interviews conducted with the study participants were semistructured. The interviews were composed of a series of eight questions designed to explore the perceptions the study participants have on the effects social engagement has on their ability to earn a degree. Follow up and clarifying questions were asked, in order to obtain full and rich responses from the study participants. Results from the interviews confirmed what was indicated in the questionnaire, with participants elaborating further on how social engagement impacted their university experience and the impact that had on persisting in higher education. Despite noting that their experiences at the university were mostly positive, eight of the participants identified challenges they faced regarding the difficulty they experienced in adjusting to university life. Again, the study participants acknowledged that their primary social engagement centered around involvement with their fraternity. Responses to the manner in which the fraternity promoted and measured student success were mixed. While some of the participants noted that the fraternity promoted academics as a primary pillar of the organizations, other participants mentioned that there was lack of consistency on how exactly this was promoted. Additionally, the manner in which academic success was measured among the membership was not uniform, with some participants discussing the use of GPAs to determine academic success, while others noted the lack of clearly defined metrics. Nonetheless, study participants highlighted a positive influence on achievement emanating from the group.

Attitudes regarding social engagement and the impact it had on degree attainment were mostly positive. All participants noted that their involvement with on-campus groups, primarily with their fraternity, did have a favorable influence on their pursuit of a university degree. Furthermore, most of the study participants expressed satisfaction with their involvement in on-

campus student organizations. Still, two participants believed that their social engagement was not necessarily the main factor in their decision to remain in higher education and earn a degree, although it did improve their university experience. Overall, the findings of this study, as derived from both the questionnaire responses and the interviews, indicate a helpful impact on the university experiences of Latino male students stemming from social engagement and involvement with on-campus groups while enrolled at university.

Discussion of the Results

Evident throughout the study participant responses to both the questionnaire and the interview questions were five common themes. The most prevalent theme was student perception. The study participants expressed various examples of their views of the campus environment, their sense of how they fit within the university community, and their preparedness to pursue higher education. Furthermore, the participants noted how they perceived their engagement with student groups on campus and the impact this interaction had on their academic success. The second most frequent theme to emerge from the participant responses was sense of belonging. The participants stressed the importance of belonging, noting the development of a connection with the university through their engagement with on-campus groups and interactions with peers. This connection also facilitated the creation of a family away from home through building bonds of brotherhood. Another theme evident in the participant responses was engagement and involvement with on-campus student groups. The study participants expressed an overall value to their participation with these groups. Specifically, involvement with a Greek-letter fraternal organization was noted as the primary source of impact or influence by the study participants. Overall sentiments with respect to the fraternity were positive, ranging from helpful

to a second family. These opinions led to perceived positive effects of social engagement on degree attainment.

The theme of racial microaggressions was evident in the responses provided by the study participants through their recounting of experiences of negative encounters with faculty and fellow students, and the lack of racial and ethnic diversity on campus. The participants noted hostile or tense interactions with professors and students, due to a perceived lack of cultural awareness. Language barriers were also identified as challenges that hindered positive exchanges with others within the classroom. The final theme identified within the participant responses was personal development. The concepts of growth and success were recognized as outcomes enjoyed by the study participants due to their engagement with on-campus student groups. The participants attributed the development of skills, confidence, and motivation through their involvement to the positive academic outcomes they experienced.

The study participants believed their university experience was positive, identifying several favorable outcomes due to being involved with on-campus groups. These outcomes included an increase in feelings of belonging, an improved connection with the university, a sense of personal growth, and a better focus on academics. In fact, one participant pointed out that he decided to remain longer at the university, due to becoming involved at such an early point in his time while enrolled at university. Another participant highlighted how involvement led to being more aware of the offerings of the university. Perceiving the university experience as positive lends to greater feelings of persistence, since the student has a much more favorable opinion of the university.

The overall university experience was described favorably as well. Some participants alluded to a bond of brotherhood with others, primarily with fraternity members, which

contributed to the positive experience. Overall, the involvement with on-campus groups and specifically with the fraternity, allowed the participants to feel better about their place as a student within the university setting, as well as member of a larger community. One participant noted that due to the group he was in, his college experience was both rewarding and comforting. This feeling of comfort permeated many of the responses provided by the study participants. The increased feeling of comfort can contribute to an overall sense of belonging, which contributes to increased decisions to persist. Despite the many positive experiences and perceptions, the study participants had of their time at university, there were moments of challenge and difficulty which could have translated into departure from higher education.

The initial impression of the university attended by the study participants was mixed, with some noting a good impression, while others noted being uncertain and insecure. Out of the 10 participants, three stressed they experienced a sense of culture shock, given that for them, this new environment was culturally different than their home communities. These impressions, coupled with identified challenges and difficulties in adjusting to university life, could easily lead to departure due to the feelings of loneliness and fear, as some participants noted. Coming to terms with being in an unfamiliar environment can be difficult for many students, a fact alluded to by the study participants. Naturally, any student in this predicament will gravitate toward groups and individuals that are familiar and possess a resemblance to home, or at the very least of the home community. This was the case for all the study participants, who sought out on-campus groups that made them feel welcomed and comfortable, something they all found in their fraternity. Gravitating toward this group, the study participants became more involved, leading to a sense of connection with both the organization and the university. Through this

connection, the impact involvement with on-campus groups has on degree attainment is most noticeable.

The study participants overwhelmingly, 80%, recognized the impact involvement with social organizations while enrolled at university had on their ability to earn a degree. While some did not believe there was a direct correlation between social engagement and degree completion, most participants did think there was a direct impact. This impact, however, was most evident in the study participants' involvement with their fraternity. This fraternal group provided an abundance of support, both socially and academically, which permitted the participants to be more secure on campus and confident in their ability to academically succeed. For those participants who did not believe a parallel between their on-campus involvement and their ability to earn a university degree existed, they still recognized the impact their association with their fraternity had on their time at university noting how members acted as mentors or guides and even served as inspiration or motivation to be academically successful. Overall, whether the impact was through personal growth, building a connection, academic support, developing pseudo-familial bonds, or a combination of two or more of these elements, on-campus involvement had a clear impact on the participants' experiences while at university, which improved their ability to persist and earn a degree.

Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature

In this study, the participants were all Latino males who successfully completed a university degree program and obtained a bachelor's degree, a fact that appears to contradict the current body of knowledge in relation to degree completion rates. While the authors highlighted in Chapter 2 of this dissertation do not specifically indicate that Latino male students are not earning 4-year degrees, they do indicate that Latino males are not completing higher education at

the same rates as their peers, despite an increase in enrollment numbers (Clayton et al., 2017; Holloway-Friesen, 2018; Michel & Durdella, 2018; Trevino & DeFreitas, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2017a). In other words, the degree completion rates do not match the enrollment rates for this particular student group.

The conceptual framework for this study centered around Astin's (1993) student involvement theory, Dweck's (2016) theory of motivation, and Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure. The use of these theories aided my understanding of the challenges and successes Latino male students face on university campuses and the impact their perception of social engagement can have on their ability to earn a degree. Furthermore, in the review of literature, I identified themes that permeate throughout the current body of literature, including: (a) a sense of belonging and community, (b) student involvement, engagement, and integration, (c) student development and psychological adjustment, (d) the impact of ethnic identity and racial microaggressions, and (e) the importance of student perception. These themes emerged in the participants' responses, granting insight into how these themes factor into the overall university experiences and the persistence decisions of Latino male students.

Astin (1993) recognized the impact collegiate environments have on student development, which are reinforced by the student's level of involvement with the campus culture. Astin (1997) also stressed the influence environmental factors within the university have on student retention rates. The participants of this study noted how their involvement led to personal growth, both in skills and in mindset. Developing leadership skills and building confidence were just a few of the key attributes the participants identified as being part of their growth process during their involvement with on-campus groups. Additionally, many of the study participants alluded to their involvement being a primary factor in their remaining in

higher education. Some participants even indicated that their involvement with the campus and surrounding community increased due to their participation with their fraternity, a factor that contributed to their decisions to stay in higher education. This fact is consistent with Astin's (1999) point on the link between increased time spent on campus and the greater likelihood of student persistence and retention. As an environmental factor, the peer group is an important element that has a profound effect on student development (Astin, 1993). Investing in the university experience, as Astin (1999) noted, including involvement in extracurricular activities, may lead to developing an attachment with the higher education institution, a fact that the participants confirmed in their responses. Through their peer group, the participants of this study built a stronger connection with the university, facilitating a positive overall experience, and easing their decisions to persist to degree completion.

Dweck (2016) outlines how the perception individuals have of their abilities can profoundly affect the manner in which they lead their lives, as well as how they cope with failure. These personally held beliefs of oneself and their abilities can provide meaning to lived experiences (Dweck, 2000). Upon entering university, many of the study participants expressed feelings of apprehension or uncertainty, leading to a negative mindset and dwindling motivation and amplifying fears of failure. Dweck (2012) noted that possessing certain mindsets can have an impact on motivation and achievement, including academic success. For many of the participants, the initial years of university were the most difficult, where sentiments of inadequacy and unpreparedness were rampant. These thoughts and attitudes can have a deleterious effect on persistence, since factors outside ability can influence withdrawal or persistence in the face of a challenge or difficulty (Dweck, 1986). For the participants of this study, feeling unprepared or out of place can impact their motivation to persist and therefore

achieve academic success. However, all of the participants indicated a surge of support or some level of influence emanating from their involvement with on-campus groups, primarily their fraternity. Some of the participants acknowledged a building of confidence in their own abilities and an increase in focus, which contributed to a change in personal mindset and therefore lead to success. Likewise, one participant noted being motivated by the success of others in the fraternity, leading to his desire to emulate them and thus changing the perceptions he has of his own ability. These examples confirm Dweck's (2007a) point, in that the development of a growth mindset can lead to increased motivation, improved grades, and higher achievement on assessment. The participants' involvement with their fraternity led to greater feelings of inspiration and motivation to persist, seeing other members being academically successful and demonstrating to them that they can achieve that success as well.

Tinto (1988) explained the manner in which social and academic forces shape the voluntary integration of students into the campus community. For Tinto (1993), student involvement is beneficial to the strengthening of student commitments to the goals of education. For the participants of this study, their social engagement, especially with their fraternity, helped them realize that academic achievement was obtainable. Yet, these opinions on education and academic success are not immediate. Tinto (1993) stressed that a decision to leave higher education can be attributed to factors that emerge during a student's initial entrance into the campus community, a point that many of the study participants alluded to in their responses to interview questions. As previously noted, for 90% of the participants, the first two years were the most difficult, given that the connections and networks they eventually established were not yet fully formed. Feelings of not fitting in and a disconnect with their surroundings certainly play to feelings of departure. A participant even noted the questions that would surface about his

place in higher education and whether or not he had made a mistake in trying to pursue a university degree; these sentiments are consistent with the barriers Tinto (1988) highlighted as threatening to persistence, including confusion, isolation, and a sense of loss. Tinto (2017) stressed that students who desire to persist will put effort into overcoming these barriers, something that all the study participants did by joining an on-campus group. Through their involvement with the fraternity, the Latino male participants recognized the academic benefit of being in this particular group. Many participants highlighted the academic support they received from other members, noting the advice they would receive on which courses to take, paring up with others in the same major, forming study groups, and even sharing resources such as textbooks. These actions all confirm Tinto's (1997) belief that persistence is heightened when the academic-social divide is bridged by students through increased academic and social involvement. Many participants stressed that this support helped their academic progress and eased the stress associated with academic study at the university.

The theme of belonging and community surfaced throughout the current literature. Establishing a sense of belonging was noted as necessary for positive student outcomes, including academic performance, persistence, psychological adjustment, and well-being (Gummadam, Pittman, & Ioffe, 2016; Kim, Rennick, & Franco, 2014; Murphy & Zirkel, 2015; Patterson, Perkins, Butler-Barnes, & Walker, 2017; Pichon, 2016; Thomas, Wolters, Horn, & Kennedy, 2014). Turner and Thompson (2014) noted that a sense of belonging can be cultivated through activities and events that create social connectedness, which in turn helps students to integrate and adapt to the university environment, as well as increasing their chances of persistence. Due to their involvement with student groups, most of the study participants noted feeling more connected to the university and experiencing an ease in adjustment to university

life. This was despite initial emotions of not fitting in and a sense of not belonging upon arrival at university, which was attributed to differences in cultural backgrounds. A number of participants, 30%, alluded to their Latino identity setting them apart, noting a lack of representation amongst faculty and the student body. A participant noted that he was unsure if his perception of not fitting in was solely in his mind or if others viewed him in this manner. These perceptions are fitting, agreeing with Vaccaro and Newman's (2016) assessment that minoritized students view and experience belonging differently than their privileged peers. Additionally, student perception of the campus environment is vital in the development of a sense of belonging (Murphy & Zirkel, 2015).

Allen and Stone (2016) noted that students are unlikely to integrate into the campus environment when their personal beliefs and values are not compatible with the university's values. This helps to explain why the study participants sought out student groups that consisted of individuals that were of the same racial and ethnic backgrounds. In essence, the participants integrated themselves with predominantly Latino groups, especially their fraternity, because of common and shared cultural values and beliefs. Their involvement with a Latino-dominant group allowed the study participants to feel like they belong and have a place on the campus community. One participant noted that it allowed him to have more ownership of his university, feeling a part of it. This coincides with both Clayton, Medina, and Wiseman's (2017) assertion that finding a sense of community can positively effect students' sense of belonging, ultimately affecting both persistence and resilience, and Gonzales, Brammer, and Sawilowsky's (2015) claim that a sense of belonging is crucial for building a connection with the university, increasing the likelihood of persistence in college.

In the present study, I highlighted the theme of student involvement, engagement, and integration, which was also emphasized in the review of literature. Faculty-student interaction and participation in student organizations are involvement factors that greatly influence collegiate success (Irlbeck, Adams, Akers, Burris, & Jones, 2014; Von Robertson, Bravo, & Chaney, 2016). Clayton, Medina, and Wiseman (2017) stressed that greater integration with the campus community can be linked to a decrease in the possibility of departure. This point is evidenced by the actions taken by the study participants, who became integrated with the university community through their involvement with student organizations on campus. A number of the participants noted an increase in involvement as their time at university progressed, further increasing their integration with the campus community, and decreasing the likelihood of departure. These positive outcomes are also evident when a student is involved in Greek-lettered organizations.

In the present study, all participants identified being involved with a Greek-letter, fraternal organization. In this case, the study participants identified the fraternity as a Latino-based organization. Walker, Martin, and Hussey (2015) noted that students who are members of social organizations like fraternities, are more likely to be involved on campus, displaying greater satisfaction with the social life on campus. All the participants noted a high level of satisfaction with the social groups they were involved in while at university. In addition, many of the participants reported a greater sense of belonging, positive academic and structural integration with the campus and completing a degree program; all benefits of being in a fraternity, as highlighted in the literature (Ribera, Miller, & Dumford, 2017; Von Robertson et al., 2016; Walker et al., 2015). Based on the responses they provided, the participants clearly noted that involvement with their fraternity while enrolled at university contributed to increased

engagement and integration with the campus community, which aided in building resilience and increased the likelihood of persistence in higher education.

Transitioning from secondary education into higher education can be a difficult time for many students, especially when trying to adjust and cope with university life (Tinto, 1988). This point is at the center of the theme of student development and psychological adjustment, a theme that I highlighted in both the review of literature and the present study. Ninety percent of the study participants voiced having experienced some difficulty or challenge when adjusting to university life. These experiences are reminiscent of the argument made by Salas, Aragon, Alandejani, and Timpson (2014), who stressed that Latinx students experience the challenges of feeling overwhelmed or disconnected during their transition into collegiate life. Some of the participants highlighted this fact in their responses, noting the transition from high school to university was particularly difficult, due to feeling unprepared academically, the lack of familial support, and feeling like they did not belong at the university when they first arrived. These encountered barriers can lead to feelings of frustration, alienation, marginalization, and fear of failure (Storlie, Moreno, & Portman, 2014). One participant expressed possessing a fear of failure while trying to adjust to university life. This is aside from the expressed feelings of unpreparedness and lacking the necessary skills to be academically successful coming from a few of the study participants. All these sentiments can be detrimental to the success of any student, especially students of color. Johnson, Wasserman, Yildirim, and Yonai (2014) pointed out that for students of color, experiencing stress that is related to the academic environment can lead to a negative effect on persistence.

The classroom is the main academic environment that students encounter while at university. When students have lower perceptions of self-efficacy, they will experience negative

emotions in the classroom (Wilson et al., 2015). Of all the participants, 70% discussed feeling a lack of preparedness and uncertainty in their own academic ability, upon entering the university classroom for the first time. These feelings were amplified by language barriers and the lack of cultural representation in the classroom among both peers and faculty. The study participants noted, however, that their anxieties were set aside when they became involved with on-campus groups, primarily with their fraternity. The academic support and advice they received from members of this group served to encourage them to remain steadfast and motivated them to keep working toward success. These facts confirm the arguments by Arbelo-Marrero and Milacci (2016), as well as Gummadam, Pittman, and Ioffe (2016), who noted that the fears and anxieties students have can be overcome by a strong sense of belonging and acceptance, which also improves psychological adjustment and well-being, further impacting persistence and academic outcomes.

Identity can have significant impact on development and well-being, not to mention belonging and overall experience. The impact of ethnic identity and racial microaggressions was a theme that emerged in the review of literature, as well as in the present study. According to Gummadam et al. (2016), the link between ethnic identity and self-worth can be tapped into by ethnically underrepresented students, in order to protect themselves when they feel disconnected from the university. This was evident when the study participants chose to be involved with on-campus student organizations that were predominantly Latino-based. Not only did this serve as a means to connect with the overall university community, but it also acted as protection from a perceived hostile environment. This safeguard is critical, given that the institutional climate can have a particular effect on racial and ethnic minority students in regard to their educational experiences, retention, and degree completion (Castellanos, Gloria, Besson, & Clark Harvey,

2016). As previously noted, many of the study participants felt out of place, due to a lack of racial and ethnic representation among their peers. Due to this lack of representation, their perception of the campus climate changed (Palmer & Maramba, 2015). Spruill, Hirt, and Mo (2014) noted, however, that when students do not feel or perceive they are not welcomed or supported because of their racial or ethnic identity, issues may arise, as was the case for a number of the participants of this study.

A number of study participants held certain sensitivities regarding their racial and ethnic identity and their place in higher education. As previously noted, many participants felt out of place due to a feeling of being unprepared, especially compared to their White peers, minimal cultural representation, and racial microaggressions. Cerezo, Lyda, Enriquez, Beristianos, and Connor (2015) noted that racial microaggressions emerge when students of color experience negative interactions with faculty, staff, or peers based on stereotypical views or opinions. For some of the participants of this study, these types of experiences led to a negative view of the university and a questioning of their own abilities and belonging. One participant recounted being laughed at during a presentation, where the professor did nothing to step in to discourage such behavior. Another participant described his experience with a professor who chastised his writing ability, failing to recognize that the participant was an English language learner. Additionally, two other participants noted English being their second language and how this was a concern in relation to their academics. These accounts all indicate the presence of both overt racial microaggressions, with the two participants experiencing a negative interaction with both faculty and peers, and more subtle forms of racial microaggressions, which stem from the fear of ridicule and rejection that the other two participants likely felt, due to their struggle with being an English language learner in higher education. These types of experiences all have a

detrimental effect on the social, cultural, and psychological adjustment of students, as well as a decreased feeling of detachment from the higher education institution (Palmer & Maramba, 2015; Von Robertson et al., 2016). Murphy and Zirkel (2015) also noted that students of color who are concerned with being stereotyped or of not fitting in, these concerns often interfere with academic performance. These points can help explain why the study participants all gravitated toward student groups that consisted of other individuals that were of the same racial and ethnic backgrounds.

The importance of student perception was the final theme that was identified in the review of literature and was evident in the responses provided by the participants of this study. The concept of perception was an important element in this study, given that the purpose of this study was to explore the perception of Latino male students on the effects of social engagement on degree completion. The idea of perception is highlighted throughout the present body of knowledge, indicating how perceptions of the campus environment can impact how a student relates and engages with other students, staff, faculty, and the university itself (Southwell et al., 2018; Tovar, 2015). For Latinx students, their wellbeing on campus is derived from the perceived feelings of welcome and comfort (Gloria, Castellanos, & Herrera, 2015). This point is confirmed through the perceptions the present study participants had of their university experience, who initially expressed discomfort and apprehension upon arriving at the university, enhancing fears of loneliness and failure. These perceptions eventually faded, due to initial and eventually prolonged involvement with on-campus groups, leading to a greater sense of wellbeing.

Approximately 60% of the study participants indicated a somewhat unfavorable initial impression of the university they attended. Some of the impressions included a sense of culture

shock, fear, uncertainty, feelings of not belonging or of not fitting in, discomfort, and remoteness. Conversely, when responding to how they describe their overall university experience, all of the participants provided positive comments, including statements of satisfaction, challenging but rewarding, pleasantness, and comfort. These sentiments, however, were all attributed to the participants' interaction with peers through their involvement in social organizations. The majority of the study participants, 80%, perceived that their involvement in social organizations while enrolled at university impacted their ability to earn a degree, whether due to providing motivation and inspiration, or direct academic support and familial bonds. These perceptions run akin to the argument by Tovar (2015), who indicated that when a student's psychosocial needs are met, there is an easing in the college transition experience and an improvement in the perception of being valued at the university. Likewise, Holloway-Friesen (2018) noted how the perception students have of the university environment determines how welcomed and comfortable they feel. Southwell et al. (2018) stressed how involvement in student organizations can have a positive association with students' perceptions of the campus environment, as was the case with all the study participants. Overall, their engagement with on-campus student organizations, primarily with their fraternity, vastly improved their perception of the university environment, minimizing the impact of experienced racial microaggressions, and increasing their sense of belonging and community, which in turn allowed for personal growth and psychological adjustment.

Limitations

There were specific limitations that existed in this study and with the findings. This study was limited by the Latino male student participants' recollection of their experiences while enrolled in a university and the impact these experiences had on their academic success. For

some of the participants, over five years have passed since they were enrolled as undergraduates, while for others it had been over 10 years since they were at university. As such, the participants may have had difficulty in remembering specific experiences of their time at the university. This fact became evident when there was a wide range of responses to certain interview questions, primarily the question that focused on the fraternity's promotion and measurement of student success. Still, this limitation could be part of my study, given that the focus and purpose of the study centered on the perceptions the participants had on their experience in social organizations and how they perceive this to impact their ability to earn a degree.

An additional limitation of this study draws stems from the study sample. Participants recruited for this study were Latino male students who were members of a Latino-based, Greek-lettered organization at a 4-year university in the Western United States. The selection of these individuals from this group limits the depth of the research, since it primarily examines the perspectives of individuals that were engaged with this fraternal organization. Additionally, given that the participants were all recruited from this one specific fraternal organization, this limits the study by excluding the perspectives from individuals who are members of other fraternities. This further limits this study, since it does not include viewpoints from individuals outside of a fraternal organization. Furthermore, since the study only explores the experiences of Latino males that have earned a 4-year degree, it excludes the experiences of current undergraduate students and the current perceptions they have of the impact their involvement with on-campus student organizations has on their present academic progress.

The use of a single site also limited this study. The present study explored the perspectives and experiences of Latino male university students at one university in the Western United States. The study did not include questionnaire results or interviews with Latino male

students at other universities located throughout the United States. Furthermore, with regard to the fraternal organization that the study participants were recruited from, none of the other universities where the fraternity is located were included as sites for this study, since this study only recruited from one particular chapter location. Limitations therefore exist, due to only one university and a select group of individuals from one chapter of the fraternity being used for this study.

As the primary researcher, my personal background could also be viewed as a limitation. As a Latino male who has earned a 4-year degree, I can relate to the participants and their experiences. In addition, as a member of the same fraternal organization that the study participants were recruited from, my personal knowledge of the group can also be seen as a limitation. Lastly, another limitation to this study is my having been a student at the same 4-year university in the Western United States that the study participants were recruited from. My experience as a student of the same institution the study participants attended contributes to this limitation. To limit bias and ensure confirmability, my personal thoughts and experiences were not communicated. Within my role as the researcher, objectivity is maintained by solely remaining an active listener to the participants and focusing on their lived experiences rather than my own.

Implications of the Results for Transformation

The results of this study indicate implications for transformation, including implications for policy, practice, and theory. The outcomes of this study informed how the participants perceived their on-campus engagement and the impact this had on their university experience. The results also provided valuable insight into the factors that influence and motivate Latino male students' decisions to persist in higher education. As a result, the knowledge gained

through the findings of this study can potentially assist academic policy makers in developing strategies and implement programming that aid Latino male university students to integrate with the campus community and cultivate relationships that ensure resoluteness to earn a university degree.

Implications on Policy

The implementation of new policy can be difficult, given the broad impact potential changes and additions to current policy can have on university campuses. Regardless of these complications, academic policy makers face the need to increase degree attainment rates for all students. Since Latino male students remain the student group with the lowest college completion rates, the demand for changes to current policy is urgent. While long-term policy changes require intensive planning and time to implement, certain changes can be made in the interim.

The effectiveness of current support programs needs to be examined and evaluated. Student engagement with all aspects of education, including with support programs, is not only beneficial, but pivotal to improved academic performance and degree completion (Escamilla & Trevino, 2014; Kim et al., 2014; Salas, Aragon, Alandejani, & Timpson, 2014). Still, Latino male students often refrain from seeking assistance, hindering their adjustment in the classroom (Rodriguez, Massey, & Sáenz, 2016). The availability of programming, including socially-oriented programs and student groups, are necessary for the success of Latino male students. Proper promotion of essential support programs is needed to ensure that this student group is aware of the support systems in place and at their disposal. The dissemination of information should not be limited to recruitment materials prior to matriculation, but should be available on

campus, both inside and outside the classroom, as well as in other communal spaces such as dining halls and dormitories.

Measures to improve graduation rates for all students, and especially for Latino males, cannot occur without continued commitment by personnel and policy makers at higher education institutions. Any pledge to increase degree completion among Latino male students cannot happen without adequate financial resources. The development and implementation of strategies designed to increase retention and degree attainment require that funding be available to support Latino male students. Having adequate funding is imperative, since students within this ethnic demographic have financial constraints and need economic assistance in order to attain a college degree (Wagner, 2015).

Implications on Practice

In this study, participants highlighted the impact social engagement had on their overall university experience, which can be used to guide practice. Both university personnel and university students can utilize the findings of this study to direct actions toward improving community on campus and assist students into integrating further with the university. Cultivating a welcoming and comfortable campus environment is important for improving adjustment into college life (Von Robertson et al., 2016). Efforts made by campus personnel and fully integrated students can support the creating of a sense of belonging for new students and for other students who have yet to be fully assimilate into the campus community.

Participants of this study noted a disconnect between themselves and the campus, faculty, and their peers. This was attributed to a sense of culture shock, unfamiliarity with the underpinnings of higher education, and a general sense of lacking preparedness. To combat these perceptions and insecurities, university personnel should partner with student-led on-

campus groups to formulate mentorship opportunities, where student leaders interact with other students and help them acclimate to higher education, serve as a resource, and build community. These efforts, and other similar strategies, can go a long way to providing Latino male students an avenue for support and increase their belonging with the university, thus impacting their ability to graduate.

Implications on Theory

The focus of the present study centered on Latino male university students, on-campus involvement and engagement, and degree completion. The literature highlighted a number of factors that influence or impact student persistence and retention in college, including (a) a sense of belonging and community, (b) student involvement, engagement, and integration, (c) student development and psychological adjustment, (d) the impact of ethnic identity and racial microaggressions, and (e) the importance of student perception. The participants of this study emphasized in their responses how these factors impacted their overall university experience and how these elements encouraged decisions of persistence. The study findings support the theories of Astin (1993), Dweck (2016), and Tinto (1993), through the allusion of the elements highlighted in the literature within the participants' responses.

The findings of this study support Astin's (1993) student involvement theory, who noted that environmental characteristics and on-campus experiences can be used to measure student involvement, and how these variables not only influence but enhance retention rates. Study participants stressed how their involvement, in particular with peer groups, led to an enriched university experience. This improved experience was credited as a factor leading to greater satisfaction and increased desires to persist. These sentiments support Astin's (1993) position, in that peer groups can have profound impacts on student development.

Dweck's (2016) theory of motivation, which outlines how personal perception on ability can affect outlooks on life and coping with failure, was supported by the responses provided by the study participants. A number of participants noted feelings of being underprepared and questioning ability, influencing how they saw themselves and their place in higher education. The participants indicated, however, that their experience with certain peers allowed for a change in mind-set, where support was received through their interactions. This is consistent with Dweck's (2016) stance that application and experience can lead to growth in aptitude and talent, improving learning and success through a growth mind-set.

Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure focused on the transition into college life and the impact certain factors during this time have on decisions to leave higher education, noting the importance of student engagement. The findings of this study support this theory, with participants mentioning the difficulties encountered during the college transition period. Study participants indicated how their engagement with social groups on-campus aided their decision to remain at university, reinforcing their desires to earn a degree. This determination reinforces Tinto's (1993) argument that engagement can strengthen students' commitment to education.

Recommendations for Further Research

The present study highlighted important factors that influence Latino male student retention in higher education and persistence to degree completion. While previous studies employed a deficit-based perspective to explain the low degree completion rates among Latino male students, such an approach can lead to the continued underrepresentation of Latinx students in higher education (Perez & Taylor, 2016; Salas et al., 2014). Without ignoring the factors that pose challenges to student persistence and contribute to student departure from university, utilizing an asset-based perspective to research ensures that the concentration is placed on

strengths that contribute to academic success for Latino males in higher education (Kouyoumdjian, Guzman, Garcia, & Talavera-Bustillos, 2017; Perez & Taylor, 2016). Future research should continue an asset-based focus on the aspects within higher education that lead to student growth and development, as well as on access and success.

Based on the limitations identified within this study, future research should expand on the study sample utilized, by including current students and their perception of engagement and its impact on degree attainment. This study drew from the experiences of Latino males who had already earned a university degree, limiting the findings to their experiences, while ignoring those of students currently matriculated at a 4-year university. Additionally, recruitment occurred within a select group of individuals who hold membership with a particular fraternal organization, leaving out the observations of non-Greek life affiliated male students. Future research should include the perceptions of Latino male university students who are currently enrolled and engaged in non-Greek life affiliated student organizations. Exploring these standpoints may uncover more insight on the impact social engagement has on degree completion among Latino male university students. Additional groups to incorporate for future research include Latina university students, to determine the parallels between their perceptions of social engagement and those of their male counterparts. This inclusion of perspective could allow for further insight into the Latinx experience on university campuses and the factors that lead to their success. Lastly, including the viewpoints of high school students, in particular the perspectives of Latino male high school students, could further inform on how social engagement on high school campuses can support the attainment of a secondary education diploma and serve as a precursor to determining future academic success.

An additional recommendation for future research includes exploring the perspectives and experiences of Latino male students at multiple universities across the United States. This study used one 4-year university in the Western United States as the sole study site. Expanding the research study site to include universities in other parts of the U.S. may reveal additional data on the themes explored in this study, including belonging, the impact of ethnic identity, and racial microaggressions, and how they may impact degree attainment. Lastly, future studies should focus on Latino-based fraternities and how this type of male-centered organization serves as support for Latino male students at university. The participants of the present study all noted involvement with a Latino-based fraternity and the role this group played on their decisions to persist to degree. By exploring fraternities as counterspaces on university campuses for Latino male students, future studies may uncover knowledge on how these groups can encourage positive development and outcomes.

Conclusion

In this study, I explored the perceptions of Latino male university students have on the impact of social engagement on degree completion. The participants provided descriptive responses to questionnaire and interview questions on personal experiences related to involvement in student-led organizations while at university. Through recounting their university experiences, the participants of this study provided valuable insight into the factors that contributed to their decisions to persist in higher education and earn a degree. These factors included: (a) a sense of belonging and community, (b) student involvement, engagement, and integration, (c) student development and psychological adjustment, (d) the impact of ethnic identity and racial microaggressions, and (e) the importance of student perception.

The findings indicated that social engagement has a favorable impact on the university experiences of Latino male students. This in turn has a positive influence on persistence decisions among this student group to attain a degree. Participants expressed satisfaction with their involvement in on-campus student organizations, noting that their engagement with these groups led to greater feelings of belonging, connection with the university, support, and comfort. Not all participants agreed that social engagement had a direct relationship with the ability to earn a degree. Nonetheless, there was a general consensus that holding membership with a student organization, in particular with a fraternity, did help the process of completing a degree program.

The findings of this study are expected to add to the current literature on the retention and academic success of Latino male university students. These findings provide valuable information on how Latino males are affected by the college experience and what actions they take to ensure their success. Additionally, the results of this study highlight how social engagement is an essential factor in contributing to the academic success of this particular student population. Future efforts taken to stimulate policy change and practice as a result of this research, may assist Latino male university students in earning a degree and improving the overall graduation rates for this group.

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Appendix A: Qualtrics Questionnaire Questions

Study: How Latino male students perceive the effects of social engagement on degree completion

Principal Investigator: Gerardo Lewis

Faculty Advisor: Christopher Maddox, Ph.D.

Questionnaire Questions:

1. What was your major at university?
2. What degree did you earn? (B.A., B.S., etc.)
3. What grades did you earn while at university? Identify undergraduate GPA if possible.
4. Are you currently enrolled in graduate studies? If so, what degree are you pursuing?
5. What was your level of involvement with extracurricular organizations at university?
6. Which organizations were you involved in? How many years?
7. How would you rate your overall experience with the organizations you identified being involved with?
8. Of the organizations you identified being involved in while at university, which one were you most involved in?
9. What was your level of your overall involvement in Latino or ethnically oriented organizations? Please describe.
10. Did your social engagement have a positive or negative effect on your experiences while at university?

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Study: How Latino male students perceive the effects of social engagement on degree completion

Principal Investigator: Gerardo Lewis

Faculty Advisor: Christopher Maddox, Ph.D.

Interview Questions:

1. Do you believe your on-campus involvement impacted your experiences at your university? If so, how?
2. What was the racial/ethnic make-up of the student organizations you participated in? How do you think this shaped your experience within these groups?
3. What was your initial impression of the university you attended? Did this impression change over time? How so?
4. How would you describe your overall experience at this university? Why do you describe it as such?
5. Did you experience any difficulty in adjusting to university life? How?
6. What was your level of involvement with your fraternity?
7. How did your fraternity promote student success? How was this measured?
8. Do you think your involvement in social organizations while enrolled at university impacted your ability to earn a degree? Explain.

Appendix C: Participant Consent Form

Research Study Title: How Latino male students perceive the effects of social engagement on degree completion

Principal Investigator: Gerardo Lewis

Research Institution: Concordia University, Portland

Faculty Advisor: Christopher Maddox, Ph.D.

Purpose and what you will be doing:

The purpose of this hermeneutic, phenomenological study will be to explore how Latino male university students perceive the effects of social engagement on degree completion. It is unclear if how Latino male students perceive the effects of social engagement on degree completion has an impact on their ability to earn a bachelor's degree. This study will provide vital information that can be used to develop strategies to best advise and assist this student population.

A total of 15 individuals are expected to participate in this study. No one will be paid for their participation. Enrollment will begin on May 1, 2019 and end on May 31, 2019. To be in the study, you will meet with the principal investigator to review study guidelines and requirements, complete a questionnaire, and undergo an individual interview. Doing these things should take less than 2 hours of your time.

Risks:

There are no risks to participating in this study other than providing your information. However, your information will be protected. Any personal information you provide will be coded so it cannot be linked to you. In addition, any name or identifying information you give will be kept securely via electronic encryption or locked inside a lockbox in a secure office location. When the data is reviewed, none of the information will have your name or identifying information. We will refer to your data with a code that only the principal investigator knows links to you. This way, your identifiable information will not be stored with the data. We will not identify you in any publication or report. Your information will be kept private at all times. Sessions will be recorded. Recordings will be deleted immediately following transcription and member checking. All other study-related documents will be kept securely for 3 years from the close of the study, and then will be destroyed.

Benefits:

Information you provide will help educational leaders and university personnel understand the experiences Latino male university students have while enrolled in a university and how this group's perception of the effects of social engagement on degree completion may impact their ability to attain a degree.

Confidentiality:

This information will not be distributed to any other agency and will be kept private and confidential. The only exception to this is if you disclose information regarding abuse or neglect that makes us seriously concerned for your immediate health and safety.

Right to Withdraw:

Your participation is greatly appreciated, but we acknowledge that the questions being asked are personal in nature. You are free at any point during this study to choose not to engage with or stop participation. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. This study is not required and there is no penalty for not participating. If at any time you experience a negative emotion from answering the questions, the process will be stopped and no further questions will be asked.

Contact Information:

You will receive a copy of this consent form. If you have questions you can talk to or write the principal investigator, Gerardo Lewis, at [redacted]. If you want to talk with a participant advocate other than the investigator, you can write or call the director of our institutional review board, Dr. OraLee Branch (email obranche@cu-portland.edu or call 503-493-6390).

Your Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I asked questions if I had them, and my questions were answered. I volunteer my consent for this study.

_____	_____
Participant Name	Date
_____	_____
Participant Signature	Date
_____	_____
Investigator Name	Date
_____	_____
Investigator Signature	Date



Investigator: Gerardo Lewis email: [redacted]
c/o: Professor Christopher Maddox, Ph.D.
Concordia University–Portland
2811 NE Holman Street
Portland, Oregon 97221

Appendix D: Participant Recruitment Email

Dear Potential Participant,

As a college graduate, I would like to invite you to participate in my study titled *How Latino male students perceive the effects of social engagement on degree completion*. For this study, I am seeking individuals who are interested in completing a questionnaire and partaking in an interview. Questions regarding social engagement while attending university and the experiences associated with this participation will be asked and discussed. Participation will require no more than 2 hours of your time.

The attached Participant Consent Form provides further details about this study, including the purpose of this study, the risks involved, and the potential benefits. Please note that your participation is completely voluntary and confidential. Your personal information will be kept private at all times. Any identifiable information will be coded to ensure that it cannot be linked to you.

If you are interested in participating in my study, please review the attached Participant Consent Form. If you have any questions regarding any aspect of the study and what your participation would entail, please contact me at [redacted] or you can email me at [redacted]. To communicate your interest in participating in this study, please sign and return the Participant Consent Form by June 1, 2019.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Gerardo Lewis
Doctoral Candidate
Concordia University–Portland

Appendix E: Statement of Original Work

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

Statement of academic integrity.

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

Explanations:

What does “fraudulent” mean?

“Fraudulent” work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one’s own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate’s final work without full and complete documentation.

What is “unauthorized” assistance?

“Unauthorized assistance” refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another’s work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

Statement of Original Work (Continued)

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University–Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.
2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*.

Gerardo Lewis

Digital Signature

Gerardo Lewis

Name (Typed)

September 7, 2019

Date