SUCCESS FACTORS AND STRATEGIES OF MEXICAN-AMERICAN MALES WHO HAVE EARNED A BACHELOR’S DEGREE

Fermin Irigoyen
B.A., California State University, Hayward, 1995
M.A., California State University, Hayward, 1997

Dissertation

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership

at

California State University, Sacramento

Spring 2014
SUCCESS FACTORS AND STRATEGIES OF MEXICAN-AMERICAN MALES WHO HAVE EARNED A BACHELOR’S DEGREE

A Dissertation

by

Fermin Irigoyen

Approved by Dissertation Committee:

__________________________
Rose M. Borunda, Ed.D., Chair

__________________________
Porfirio M. Loeza, Ph.D.

__________________________
Francisco C. Rodriguez, Ph.D.

SPRING 2014

iii
SUCCESS FACTORS AND STRATEGIES OF MEXICAN-AMERICAN MALES WHO HAVE EARNED A BACHELOR’S DEGREE

Student: Fermin Irigoyen

I certify that this student has met the requirements for format contained in the University format manual, and that this dissertation is suitable for shelving in the library and credit is to be awarded for the dissertation.

Dr. Caroline Sotello Viernes Turner

Date
DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my family.

Mom and Dad thank you so much for serving as an inspiration to me and instilling the strong work habits that have allowed me to achieve this goal and a great quality of life. I so appreciate all your sacrifices you have made so our family can achieve the many opportunities the United States of America have to offer. I’m so proud to say you are my parents and your legacy will last a very long time in our family history.

To my brother Bernard, thank you so much for your support of my educational endeavors.

Taigen and Eben… I’m so proud of you and I am so happy that you guys were along for the ride as I earned my Doctorate degree. I hope that earning this degree has inspired you to pursue your education. I look forward to seeing you walk across many stages as graduates in the future.

To my girl Denisse… I want to thank you for your endless love and support as we journeyed through this process together. Your love and encouragement throughout the process meant a lot to me, and I’m privileged to have had to opportunity to achieve my Doctorate with you by my side.

Together we did it!
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Dr. Borunda, thank you so very much for your time, patience and expertise. Your kind words and steady support have allowed me to complete this dissertation with respect and dignity. You are a credit to higher education and the Ed.D. program at Sacramento State University.

Dr. Loeza, it was an honor to have you on my committee. You have touched many lives in the most challenging of environments and with that you have my admiration.

Dr. Rodriguez, you taught me one of the greatest lessons during our first class together, “one thing at a time.” As life zoomed by completing this dissertation, your advice was with me… “one thing at a time.” It has paid big dividends and a message I will pay forward.

Dr. Nevarez, thank you in your confidence in me as a contributor to our Ed.D. program at Sacramento State. Your work in our field is an inspiration and a path I would like to follow.

Betty Ronayne, librarian extraordinaire, thank you so much for your hospitality and assistance from the first day I stepped on campus. Your support of my academic aspirations was significant and made my stay at Sacramento State a great experience.

To Jaime White, Director of the MEP program at Sacramento State, thank you for your guidance and enthusiasm with this study.
To Meredith, thank you for your formatting and editing efforts, you truly are an editorial wizard.

To the “V”… My cohort… my brothers and sisters, this experience was rich because I got the chance to work with you all. Your presence has left imprints on me that will last forever. The journey would not have been the same without all of you. I’m truly lucky and blessed to have shared this experience with Cohort V!

Yousef, keep your torch on the cigar!

Daren, it’s been real and through your example I have pushed through many personal boundaries in order to be my best – thank you!

Miguel Molina, thank you so very much for your help and guidance in the development of this dissertation.

Tim Haenny, my student activities coordinator at Cañada College, you were my inspiration to devote my life to education – thank you!

Chancellor Ron Galatolo, thank you for your belief in me and your confidence that I can make a difference. I can’t express how much I appreciate you investing in me. Your contributions to the San Mateo County Community College District are immeasurable and you have done our community proud. Again, thanks for your support.

Harry, thank you for listening and supporting me in my professional career. Your words of encouragement go a long way.

Peter, I will always cherish our times with great cigars, great conversation, and great fellowship.
Thank you Ryan and all of the staff at the Larkspur Landing hotel in Sacramento for the fantastic accommodations. Your outstanding customer service was critical to my success during my time in the Ed.D. program.

To Jessica, thanks for “keeping it real” during another photo finish project. Your guidance and support was helpful during the development of this dissertation.

Steve, thanks for keeping me on track and pounding the pavement.

Bonnie, thank you so very much for your guidance and support through this entire journey.

To the participants of this study, thank you for your time and generosity in helping me conduct this study. You guys are inspiring and true educational and transformational leaders.
CURRICULUM VITAE

Education

Bachelor of Arts, Speech Communication, California State University, Hayward, 1995

Masters of Arts, Speech Communication, California State University, Hayward, 1997

Employment

Communication Studies Professor
San Mateo County Community College District 1999-Present
Abstract

of

SUCCESS FACTORS AND STRATEGIES OF MEXICAN-AMERICAN MALES WHO HAVE EARNED A BACHELOR’S DEGREE

By

Fermin Irigoyen

Latinos are projected to have the lowest attainment of bachelor’s degrees at 12% by the year 2020. For every 100 Latino males in elementary school, only 10 will earn a bachelor’s degree compared to 28 Whites and 48 Asians. These figures reflect a disconcerting trend in that it is estimated Hispanics of Mexican origin make up 10% of the overall population in the United States and demographic projections estimate the gap between college education completion and demographic representation will only widen without concerted efforts to correct these outcomes.

This phenomenological study examined the success factors and strategies used by five Mexican-American males in Northern California who had earned a bachelor’s degree. Four of the five participants were born in Mexico and the remaining participant was born in the United States.

The theoretical frameworks for this study include LatCRIT, Cultural-Ecological theory, and the Resiliency theory. The research questions include Research Question #1: How does the family value system, family member roles, and expectations inform the Mexican-American male students’ experiences with achieving a bachelor’s degree from
an accredited institution of higher education? Research Question #2: How does your cultural identity inform your experience in attaining a bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution of higher education? Research Question #3: What has been your experience regarding the institutional academic and social resources available to Mexican-American men as they seek to attain a bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution of higher education?

The seven themes that emerged from the findings were immigration, high school preparedness and programs, social/family support in college, parental understanding of expectations of their sons, the role of high school and college counseling, the management of culture shock from attending a university, and formal programs in college in which the students participated.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum Vitae</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>xv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>xvi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature of the Successful Completion of a Bachelor’s Degree of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexican-American Males</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Statement</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature of the Study</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operational Definitions</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of Research and Literature</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

xii
Literature-based Descriptions ................................................................. 64
Methodology ............................................................................................ 66

3. METHODOLOGY .................................................................................. 68
   Introduction ............................................................................................ 68
   Research Design ..................................................................................... 68
   Role of the Researcher ........................................................................... 70
   Research Questions ................................................................................. 71
   Setting, Population, and Sample ........................................................... 72
   Data Collection and Instrumentation .................................................... 73
   Data Analysis .......................................................................................... 74
   Protection of Participants ...................................................................... 75

4. ANALYSIS OF THE DATA .................................................................... 78
   Introduction ............................................................................................ 78
   Organization of the Findings ................................................................. 78
   Adan ....................................................................................................... 84
   Osvaldo .................................................................................................. 106
   Jose ........................................................................................................ 125
   Andres ..................................................................................................... 138
   Ivan ........................................................................................................ 154
   Conclusion .............................................................................................. 171

5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS ....................................................... 172
Overview of the Study .................................................................172
Interpretation of the Findings......................................................176
Program Objectives .....................................................................216
Recommendations for Actions ....................................................221
Recommendations for Further Research ......................................222
Reflections of the Researcher’s Experience ..................................223
Conclusion .................................................................................225

6. APPENDICES

Appendix A. Letter from Dr. Heredia ..........................................228
Appendix B. Participant Letter and Flyer ......................................229
Appendix C. Interview Protocol ..................................................232
Appendix D. Second Interview Questions ....................................234
Appendix E. Consent to Participate in Research ............................235

REFERENCES ...........................................................................237
LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Percentage of Bachelor's Degrees Conferred by Degree-granting Institutions, by Race/Ethnicity in the United States</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Statistical Portrait of Hispanics In The United States, 2011</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Male Latino Educational Pipeline Compared to African-American, White and Asian Males</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Money income of households – percent distribution by income level, race, and Hispanic origin, in constant (2009) dollars: 1990 to 2009</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

According to data collected by the U.S. Department of Education, through the National Center for Education Statistics, the declining male college graduation rates from four-year universities commenced in the 1980s when the graduation rates were almost split 50/50 between men and women. Since then, a national problem has advanced; men currently represent 42% of the Bachelor’s degrees conferred in 2010-2011 and the downward trend continues (U.S. Department of Education [DOE], 2012). The largest racial groups of men with the lowest rates of bachelor degree attainment are Latinos and African-Americans.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>African-American</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000-2001</td>
<td>78.7</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-2011</td>
<td>73.5</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Latinos are a diverse group with Mexican-Americans, the focus of this dissertation, being the largest Latino sub-group in California. Given the significant number of Mexican-Americans represented in California and the disparity in college completion, the purpose of this study was to examine the success strategies and contributing factors that led Mexican-American males to navigate through higher education to attain a bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution of higher education.
Rodriguez (2008) identified six subgroups among the Latino population: Mexicans, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Spaniards, Central American, and South Americans. Latino is a term that encompasses many people of diverse histories, socio-economic statuses, and ethnicities. According to the U.S. Department of Commerce (1993), the three largest Latino groups are Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans. California had the largest Hispanic population of any state on July 1, 2011 (14.4 million), as well as the largest numeric increase within the Hispanic population since April 1, 2010 (346,000) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Table 2 shows the population of Hispanics in the United States with the Mexican population as the largest group at 64.6%.
Table 2

*Statistical Portrait of Hispanics In The United States, 2011*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hispanic Origin</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>33,539,1</td>
<td>64.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puerto Rican</td>
<td>4,916,25</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salvadoran</td>
<td>1,952,48</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuban</td>
<td>1,888,77</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Other</td>
<td>1,666,63</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish/Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>1,528,46</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominican</td>
<td>1,215,73</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guatemalan</td>
<td>989,231</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombian</td>
<td>707,264</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spaniard</td>
<td>702,394</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honduran</td>
<td>644,863</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecuadorian</td>
<td>556,386</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peruvian</td>
<td>395,376</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicaraguan</td>
<td>258,791</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venezuelan</td>
<td>242,221</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argentinian</td>
<td>180,471</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panamanian</td>
<td>148,532</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chilean</td>
<td>127,652</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costa Rican</td>
<td>114,094</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolivian</td>
<td>60,764</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uruguayan</td>
<td>40,001</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Central American</td>
<td>28,719</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other South American</td>
<td>22,876</td>
<td>&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>51,927,1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Hispanic origin is based on self-described ancestry, lineage, heritage, nationality group or country of birth.

**Source:** Pew Hispanic Center (2011, p. 7)

The impact of Mexican-American males not attaining a bachelor’s degree has the potential to cripple California’s future political and socioeconomic landscape.
California’s population is shifting toward a Latino majority, which historically has not achieved a college attendance or graduation rates in relation to its representation in the larger population. Latinos are expected to constitute 43% of the state’s population by 2025 and California became the first large “majority minority” state. Majority-minority is defined as more than half the population being of a group other than single-race, non-Hispanic white (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). After the 2000 Census, California has a Latino majority (Baldassare, Bonner, Petek, & Shrestha, 2012). The California Department of Finance projects that in 2016 Latinos will replace Whites as the largest ethnic group.

Improvement has been made intergenerationally in educational attainment among Latinos, yet rates of college attendance and especially college graduation remain fairly low, even within the second generation (Johnson & Sengupta, 2009). “Third-generation Mexicans also show substantial improvements in education over the second generation. Among third-generation Mexican who live with their parents, college graduation rates are twice those of their second-generation parents (although still relatively low at only 11 percent)” (Reed, Hill, Jepsen, & Johnson, 2005, p. 24). The above factors contribute to the urgency of assisting Mexican-American males in earning their bachelor’s degrees.

For Mexican-Americans to have more economic, social, and political influence, there is a strong need for their completion of higher education degrees. According to Kuh (2008), one primary measure of success in education is a person’s post-secondary degree attainment. Going to college and earning a degree is a significant predictor of

A bachelor’s degree is now considered a tie to “long term cognitive, social, and economic benefits to individuals…enhancing the quality of life of the families…and the larger society” (Kuh, Cruce, & Shoup, 2008, p. 540). Jongsung Kim (2002) said, “Higher education is one of the most important determinants in earning potential and has been viewed as a key variable in the earnings gap across different demographics” (p. 125). The Latino community tends to be on the lower end of the SES; hence, higher number of bachelor degrees awarded to men may change that social dynamic. According to a statistic from the U.S. Census Bureau, Latinos earn on average $38,039 in comparison to the Asian/Pacific Islander group who earn $65,469 on average. Figure 1 shows the breakdown of income using 2009 dollars.
Figure 1. Money income of households – percent distribution by income level, race, and Hispanic origin, in constant (2009) dollars: 1990 to 2009.

The most critical years for personal and professional growth are the college years (Astin, 1985, 1993; Liu & Yin, 2010; Weinberger & Reuter, 1980). Martinez and Fernandez (2004) found that Latino students attending community college who aspired to earn a bachelor’s degree understood that attaining the bachelor’s degree would allow them upward mobility, regardless of their current socioeconomic position. Since families who migrate to the United States do so to improve their economic conditions, they are likely to see education as the means to upward social and economic mobility (Caplan, Whitmore, & Choy, 1989). The projected demographic trends in California will work against future increases in the number of college graduates, particularly that of Latinos who now make up the largest group of young adults with historically low rates of college
completion. As for the future of the California economy, there will not be enough newcomers to California from abroad or from other states to close the skills gap (Johnson, 2013). Moreover, the voting patterns among California Latino voters reveal that half of Latino voters are under the age of 45, 22% are least likely to be college graduates, and 45% have a household income of less than $40,000 (Baldassare, Bonner, Petek, & Willcoxon, 2010). The evolution of demographics will change the political landscape for the state of California.

California’s workforce is distinct from the rest of the United States, because California employees are more likely to have a college degree. However, the California economy utilizes low-paid production workers from other countries, displacing less educated Californians (Feenstra, 2000). Hence, if this employment trend continues, the share of California workers with at least a bachelor’s degree would increase to almost 42% by the year 2025 (Reed, 2008). As a result, workers with a college degree will drive up wages and increase the resources of higher-income families, furthering the socioeconomic divide in California. Unfortunately, many workers without a college degree will have difficulty securing employment, which in turn limits their ability to contribute to the California economy.

A reason for the gap in the segment of college-educated adults is the low number of Latinos earning bachelor’s degrees. Mexican-American males make up a growing portion of the working-age population in California. The amount of Latinos with a bachelor’s degree increased from 7% in 1990 to 10% in 2006 and is projected to reach
only 12% in 2020. Despite these improvements, Latinos will continue to have the lowest college education levels of any of the major racial and ethnic groups in California. Over this period, Latino education is an increasingly important factor in overall education levels. Latinos grew from 22% of the working-age population in 1990 to 29% in 2006 and are projected to grow to 40% by 2020 (Reed, 2008).

The amount of Latinos in the working-age population is increasing. This group has relatively low levels of educational attainment, yet the demand for college-educated workers in the year 2025 could be equivalent to 41% of California workers (Reed, 2008). The supply of workers with a high school diploma or less is projected to exceed the demand for such workers.

These trends have serious implications for the resources available to low-income families and the demands on the state for social programs (Reed, 2008). Less educated adults have lower incomes, have lower labor force participation rates, and require more social services than do more highly educated adults. The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems projects that California’s changing demography and low educational attainment levels among fast-growing groups will translate into substantial declines in per capita income between 2000 and 2020, placing California last among 50 states in terms of change in per capita income (Kelly, 2005).

**Literature of the Successful Completion of a Bachelor’s Degree of Mexican-American Males**

In understanding the college completion of Mexican-American males, it is important to consider the previous literature related to successful completion of post-
secondary education. Benard (1997) wrote that three characteristics supporting growth and development are consistently found in environmental systems: caring relationships, high expectations, and participation. Ayro’s (2012) study concluded:

1. Positive relationships at school can have an influence on academic success
2. The focus of schools needs to be more student centered to assist in the development of a student’s self-efficacy and ethnic identity, and
3. Schools should continue to offer support and maintain extracurricular programs.

De Leon (2005) conducted interviews with 10 Mexican male immigrants who successfully navigated through their experiences in higher education. From this study, De Leon highlighted the following four themes that were prevalent from his participants’ responses:

1. Experience of School and Community. The participants of the study discussed the importance of the quality of their relationships with their teachers. A strong relationship with their teachers encouraged persistence and engagement with the educational system.
2. Family/Social Networks-Orientations & Educational Support Systems. The family serves an important social system. For families whose origin is Mexico, the extended family (grandparents, godparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins) serve as influential sources of emotional support in navigating through their higher education experience.
3. Preserving Self-Sustaining Hope (Resiliency). The hope for a better tomorrow served as a contributor to the character and resilience of the participants as they succeeded in navigating through higher education.

4. Maintaining Identity. In order to achieve academic success, the participants managed a dual frame identity style of embracing American life while maintaining their Mexican roots. By developing these identity strategies, they maintained a positive self-perception in earning a bachelor’s degree.

Moreover, the following findings have been found to be related to Latino/a college student performance or retention:

1. The student must have a strong sense of belonging and cultural congruence at the university. Cultural congruence refers to the degree of fit between students’ values, beliefs, and the values, beliefs of their surrounding environment (Constantine, Robinson, Wilton, & Caldwell, 2002; Gloria, Robinson-Kurpius, Hamilton, & Wilson, 1999).

2. A strong social network and perceived social support from friends, mentors, and family (familismo) along with fewer unsupportive interactions help Latino’s succeed in their college experience (Cole, Matheson, & Anisman, 2007; Gloria & Robinson-Kurpius, 1996).

A challenge facing this study is the literature and data that includes the Mexican-American group under the Latino label. In building on the previous literature, the core themes to be examined include the cultural dynamic of how these Mexican-American
males have negotiated their cultural identity; the role of the family and familism in their higher educational pursuits; and the role of campus climate, mentorship, and a sense of belonging in the overall environmental support of their educational goals. The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the successful strategies and resources used by Mexican-American males to earn a bachelor’s degree.

**Problem Statement**

For every 100 Latino male elementary school students, 51 will graduate from high school, 10 will graduate from college, four will obtain a graduate or professional degree, and 0.04 will graduate with a doctorate (Rivas, Perez, Alvarez, & Solorzano, 2007). Table 3 highlights and compares the educational pipelines of Latino, White, and Asian males.

**Table 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male Latino Educational Pipeline Compared to African-American, White and Asian Males</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary School Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate from High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate from College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate from Graduate School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate with Doctorate Degree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Rivas et al. (2007)
The lower college graduation rates of Latino males are prevalent throughout the United States. The State of California, holding a higher Mexican-American population per capita, speaks to the need for more Mexican-American males to graduate from college with a bachelor’s degree. The issue of Mexican-American males not graduating college is a social issue, an economic issue, and a higher education management issue. As discussed by Reed (2008), the share of Latinos in the working-age population is increasing, and this group has relatively low levels of educational attainment. A majority of Californians (56%) think that if current trends continue, in 20 years, California will not have enough college educated residents needed for the jobs and skills likely to be in demand. Projections by the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) researchers indicate that by 2025, only 35% of working-age adults in California will have college degrees, but 41% of jobs will require one (Baldassare et al., 2010).

**Developing College Aspirations**

Ogbu (as cited in Harris, 2009) noted that Native Americans, African-Americans, Mexican-Americans and Native Hawaiians “resent(ed) the loss of former freedom(s)...and perceive the socioeconomic barriers against them as part of their undeserved oppression” (p. 3). Through conquest and colonization these populations were relegated to a subservient class within the larger U.S. social hierarchy (Freire, 1995). The dynamic of marginalization and negative social mirroring as an experiential reality is an area to be examined by the participants of this study. An understanding of
this social dynamic may lead to strategies to better improve graduation rates among Mexican-American males.

A survey of Latino parents concluded that the level of “college knowledge” among Latino parents is “objectively low” (Tornatzky, Cutler, & Lee, 2002, p. 22). The survey shows that college knowledge deficits are higher among Hispanic immigrants than Hispanic native-born parents. This points to the need for educational leaders to build a bridge to Mexican-American families that expresses the importance of education and provides strategies to navigate through the educational system.

Among parents of children 18 or younger, nearly all hope their youngest child completes a college degree (42%) or post-graduate degree (46%) (Baldassare et al., 2010). Among racial/ethnic groups, strong majorities of both white and Latino parents hope their child attains a college degree (37% Whites, 52% Latinos) or post-graduate degree (54% Whites, 30% Latinos). Concern is especially high today among Latino parents with 72% very worried about being able to pay for college. The concern of how to pay for college has escalated from Latino families by 19 points since 2007 (Baldassare et al., 2010). Because Latino parents express hope for their children attaining higher education, stronger initiatives of educating families in navigating the educational system may improve efforts toward increasing the completion of bachelor degrees. The mutual effort between Latino families and educational institutions may contribute to a stronger educational culture among Latino family dynamics.
A barrier to the success of Latino males attaining a bachelor’s degree is the cultural roles and responsibilities they play in their families. Young Latino male undergraduates possess different family responsibilities than their white peers. They are nearly twice as likely as Whites to have children or elderly dependents and are more likely than white undergraduates to be single parents. Additional family responsibilities adversely affect college completion while having financial dependents and single parent status are known to be college persistence risk factors (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 1995).

Harris’s findings suggest three core issues as being responsible for low success rates among male students of color: universal shortcomings in the K-12 pipeline, insufficient knowledge about what works to successfully recruit and retain historically marginalized males, and inadequate institutional leadership and faculty support for initiatives targeting men of color (Harris, 2009). Given that Latino students continue to be severely underrepresented in post-secondary education, it is evident the educational system is failing to support this population (Fry, 2002; Martinez & Fernandez, 2004; Ornelas, 2002; Ornelas & Solórzano, 2004; Solórzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005; Yosso & Solórzano, 2006). Future research must continue to help the relationship between student perceptions and the presence or absence of opportunity structures within the institution be understood (Figueroa, 2004).

The community college offers a viable option for Mexican-American males as a vehicle to complete their bachelor’s degree. However, enrolling in community colleges
decreases their level of bachelor’s degree completion. Over 60% of Latino undergraduates begin their studies at two-year colleges, compared to 42% of Whites. A national study using detailed longitudinal information on the educational progress of Hispanic undergraduates in the 1980s concluded:

The chances of graduating with a four year degree are increased by enrolling in a four year program directly after graduating high school. Delaying entry and enrolling initially in a two year program will hinder a student in achieving a four-year degree. (Fry, 2002, p. 11)

For many Mexican-American males, the quest for a bachelor’s degree starts at the community colleges. In attainment of a bachelor’s degree, disparities are evident across the spectrum of higher education. For example, white youth beginning at community colleges are nearly twice as likely as Hispanic youth beginning at community colleges to finish a bachelor’s degree (Swail, Cabrera, & Lee, 2004). Students beginning their college education face additional obstacles in achieving their goal of earning a bachelor’s degree. For instance, transfer instructional neglect refers not only to the failure of community colleges to ensure transfer readiness but also to the failure of four-year institutions to provide outreach, recruitment, enrollment, and retention once transfer students reach a four-year institution (Rivas et al., 2007). In addition, it is vital the community colleges attended by the students adopt a “transfer culture” that provides accurate information regarding matriculation, and necessary support through tutoring and mentoring.
**Nature of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to understand in more detail the factors contributing to how five Mexican-American male participants successfully completed a bachelor’s degree as well as the particular characteristics of these individuals that promoted their persistence in earning their degree from an accredited institution of higher education. These men may have been born in Mexico but they would have needed to have experienced the K-12 United States educational system. Moreover, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to success strategies and factors of female Mexican-Americans.

This study addressed the following research questions:

- **Research Question 1:** How do the family value system, family member roles, and expectations inform the Mexican-American male student’s experience with achieving a bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution of higher education?

- **Research Question 2:** How does one’s cultural identity inform one’s experience in attaining a bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution of higher education?

- **Research Question 3:** What were Mexican-American males’ experiences regarding the institutional academic and social resources available to Mexican-American men as they sought to attain a bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution of higher education?
The research design was phenomenological qualitative research. According to Creswell (2009), this type of research is described as understanding the essence of an experience about a phenomenon and also provides themes related to the meaning of those experiences. In this type of study, the researcher finds testimonials about an individual’s experience of the topic and helps describe the meaning. The purpose of the study was to understand in more detail the dynamics of how the five Mexican-American male participants earned a Bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution of higher education.

Creswell (2009) discussed that in the interview format, participants can provide historical information that is filtered through the perception of the interviewees. There is an implicit recognition that the experiential knowledge of students of color is legitimate and appropriate. This is critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination in the field of education, in which this knowledge is viewed as a strength and draws explicitly on the lived experiences of the students of color by including storytelling, family history, biographies, scenarios, parables, and narratives (Bernal & Solorzano, 2001).

Phenomenological research explores human experience through the words and expressions of participants (Creswell, 2009). Phenomenological research was used in this study to understand the individual pathways of participants through open-ended questions. According to Merriam (2009), “Phenomenology focuses on the experience itself and how experiencing something is transformed into consciousness” (p. 24).
Therefore, this phenomenological study engaged participants to understand their experiences in earning a bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution of higher education. The phenomenological approach allows me to understand and gain insight into the participants’ perceptions as they journeyed to earning a bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution of higher education. Further detail regarding the methodology is discussed in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

**Theoretical Framework**

The review begins with an analysis of current literature for the theoretical constructs LatCrit, Cultural-Ecological theory, and resiliency theory used in examining the contributing factors leading to Mexican-American males earning a Bachelor’s degree. The following categories highlight and synthesize the links for Cultural-Ecological theory and resiliency theory: theoretical overview, culture, negotiation of cultural identity, and environmental support. These theories contribute to our understanding of the contributing success factors of Mexican-American males who have earned a bachelor’s degree. LatCrit theory provides a context in which to learn about the participants of this study’s perceptions and experiences in higher education.

**LatCrit**

The LatCrit framework shapes the methodology of this dissertation with regard to understanding the success strategies used by the Mexican-American males who have earned a bachelor’s degree. Using the LatCrit framework to explore the success of the five Mexican-Americans who earned a bachelor’s degree adds scholarship to the original
purposes of the LatCrit theory development. LatCrit was conceived as an anti-subordination and anti-essentialist project attempting to link theory with practice, scholarship with teaching, and the academy with the community (Bernal, 2002).

The attainment of higher education is a social justice and equity issue. Students without adequate educational skills will end up with low-income jobs, which will impact their long-term financial gains and stability (Jez, 2008). Freire (2011) said if the structure does not permit dialogue, the structure must be changed. The LatCrit framework provides an opportunity for the participants to share their educational experiences in attaining a college degree. In addition, the participants uncovered how the institutions of higher education served their needs appropriately in their path to a higher educational degree.

Using the LatCrit frame, I furthered the four-level “vision” of Frank Valdes, one of the principal founders of the LatCrit movement:

1. The Production of Knowledge
2. The Advancement of Transformation
3. The Expansion and Connection of Struggle(s); and

The subjects of this study, as Bernal (2002) advocates, are holders and creators of knowledge. Learning from the participants may be beneficial to other Mexican-American males working toward earning a Bachelor’s degree. In examining the struggles
and community of the research subjects, LatCrit lends itself to resiliency theory and Cultural-Ecological theory. As a qualitative study, interviews were a critical avenue to learning about the success strategies and ecological setting used by the Mexican-American bachelor degree holders as a guide in serving the underserved Mexican-American male student population across the United States. Creswell (2009) discussed that in the interview format, participants can provide historical information in addition to indirect information filtered through the views of the interviewees.

LatCrit methodology recognizes that the experiential knowledge of students of color is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination in the field of education. This knowledge is viewed as a strength. LatCrit draws explicitly on the lived experiences of the students of color by including storytelling, family history, biographies, scenarios, parables, and narratives (Bernal & Solorzano, 2001). Solórzano and Bernal’s assertion offers a pathway for learning from Mexican-American males who have successfully earned a bachelor’s degree. The insights from these men’s stories, family histories, and biographies may reveal the obstacles faced by these men and how they responded to those obstacles. The concepts contained in the Cultural-Ecological theory and the resiliency theory provides a perspective in understanding how the participants earned their bachelor’s degree.

Moreover, themes derived using LatCrit theory have the potential to alter how institutions of higher education across the country offer student support services to better serve the underserved Mexican-American male student. “One of the drawbacks in the
development of the LatCrit scholarship is that it has devolved into too much discourse about discourse, while failing to frequently and constructively engage the most serious social justice issues of our times” (Aoki & Johnson, 2008, p. 1160).

LatCrit is similar to Critical Race Theory (CRT). A piece of the Critical Race Theory (CRT) in Education offers researchers a perspective not presented by many other theoretical frameworks. CRT examines how various forms of oppression can overlap within the lives of people of color. In addition, CRT provides a means to understand how those overlaps reveal themselves in a person of color’s daily educational experiences. LatCrit originated from CRT as a means to allow researchers to examine the intersection of racism and nativism. LatCrit distinguishes itself from CRT by focusing on the experiences distinct to the Latino/a community. For instance, such experiences would include immigration, language, ethnicity, and culture. LatCrit is particularly concerned with a progressive sense of a coalitional Latina/Latino pan-ethnicity (Valdes, 1996), and it addresses issues often ignored by critical race theorists.

Moreover, LatCrit does not compete with CRT and is a theory that elucidates Latinas/Latinos’ multidimensional identities and can address the intersectionality of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression (Bernal & Solorzano, 2001). Studying Mexican-American males using the LatCrit method tailors questions from a Latino perspective for Latinos in learning about their perceptions of their college experiences. Boudah (2009) described the interviewing method as an opportunity for the
researcher to get information about beliefs, perspectives, and views from the participant as well as about strategies used explaining how task outcomes were achieved.

Stefanic (1997) cited 17 themes addressed in LatCrit:

The critique of liberalism, storytelling/counter-story telling, revisionism, critical social science, structural determinism, intersectionality, gender discrimination, Latino/a essentialism, language and bilingualism, separatism and nationalism, immigration and citizenship, educational issues, critical international and human rights law, black/brown tensions, assimilations and the colonized mind, Latino/a stereotypes, criticism, and response. (pp. 1511-1514)

Through the perspective of Stefanic, the 17 themes may be viewed in conjunction with the Cultural-Ecological theory regarding system and community forces (Ogbu & Simons, 1998) and provides a framework by which to examine the obstacles as well as the resiliency by which to overcome those obstacles (Benard, 2004; Cabrera & Padilla, 2004; Colbert, Hebert, & Reis, 2005; Rutter, 1999; Wolin & Wolin, 2008). LatCrit theory offers a framework and a method by which to contextualize the stories of the Mexican-American males who have successfully graduated with a bachelor’s degree. This context is specifically referenced from a Latino perspective.

LatCrit advocate Enid Trucios-Haynes urges Latinos to choose the road that leads to self-recognition, self-determination, and coalition. Graduating with a bachelor’s degree involves obstacles and hurdles; however, the LatCrit frame draws from the cultural perception of those obstacles and hurdles. In addition, the LatCrit frame works well with resiliency theory in understanding self-determination (Benard, 1993, 1995, 2004) and Ogbu’s Cultural-Ecological theory in examining self-recognition (Ogbu & Simons, 1998) and (Ogbu, 1991). The Mexican-American male success stories will
hopefully serve as an inspiration to those currently enrolled at or considering enrolling in institutions of higher education across the country.

The five themes derived from LatCrit as listed below (Bernal & Solórzano, 2001) provide a relevant way to learn about the participants of this study because they draw upon the lived experiences of students of color. The five themes used in education are as follows:

1. The centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination including gender and class discrimination;

2. challenging the traditional claims of the educational systems to objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity arguing that these traditional paradigms act as camouflage to the self-interest, power, and privilege of dominant groups in the US;

3. a commitment to social justice and a liberator or transformative response to racial, gender, and class oppression leading to the elimination of racism, sexism, and poverty empowering underrepresented minority groups;

4. the recognition that the experiential knowledge of students of color is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination in the field of education, viewing this knowledge as a strength and drawing explicitly on the lived experiences of the students of color by including storytelling, family history, biographies, scenarios, parables, and narratives; and
5. using interdisciplinary methods, race and racism in education are analyzed by placing them in both an historical and contemporary context challenging the ahistorical and unidisciplinary focus of most analyses of race and racism in education.

**Cultural-Ecological Theory**

**Overview.** The Cultural-Ecological theory developed by seminal author’s John Ogbu and Herbert Simons guides the understanding of the success of Mexican-American males graduating with a Bachelor’s degree. The Cultural-Ecological theory looks at two factors that contribute to minority school performance: how society at large and the school treats minorities (the system) and how minority groups respond, based on their perceptions, to those treatments and to schooling (community forces). “Cultural-Ecological theory further suggests that differences in school performance between immigrant and nonimmigrant minorities are partly due to differences in their community forces” (Ogbu, 1999, p. 156). Moreover, the Cultural-Ecological theory reveals the concept of voluntary and involuntary immigration status. In examining the concept of voluntary and involuntary immigration status, the notion of historical subordination through conquest and colonization is examined. Freire (2011) discussed conquest “in which the conqueror imposes his objectives on the vanquished, and makes of them his possession” (p. 138). In studying Mexican-American males who have graduated college with a bachelor’s degree, the Cultural-Ecological theory offers a perspective of understanding voluntary and involuntary immigration status.
Cultural influences. A major theme in the Cultural-Ecological theory is the distinction between voluntary and involuntary immigrants. Ogbu and Simons (1998) define voluntary immigrants as minorities who have more or less willingly moved to the United States because they expect better opportunities and futures than if they had stayed in their homeland; and involuntary immigrants are people who have been conquered or colonized. An additional characteristic of the involuntary immigrant is that they did not choose to come to the United States and they usually interpret their presence in the United States as forced on them by white people. This notion helps understand the historical distrust of the United States educational system and curriculum that omits the perspectives of non-European Americans (Ogbu & Simons, 1998).

Ogbu (1990) examined why some minorities do better in school than others and the relationship of how the schools respond to the child’s cultural background. In addition, Ogbu further explored how schools adapt to educate children from diverse cultural backgrounds (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). A better understanding of the successful student’s relationship with “the system” and “the community forces” may suggest consistent strategies across the sample group that may be highlighted and implemented to a wider range of Mexican-American males enrolled in institutions of higher education.

Ogbu (1995, 2003) suggested that voluntary minorities who interpret the cultural differences as barriers to be overcome to get ahead are more successful in crossing cultural boundaries. In contrast, the historical conflict and subjugation of involuntary minorities leads to an oppositional cultural frame of reference. This results in
ambivalence in their interpretation of cultural differences as barriers and markers of group identity. Subsequently, involuntary minorities may resist acquiring the skills and knowledge to navigate mainstream culture. Understanding these dynamics from Cultural-Ecological theory provides a helpful backdrop in understanding the low graduation rates among Mexican-American males.

**Negotiation of cultural identity.** Trueba (1987) critiqued the concept of Ogbu’s voluntary and involuntary immigrants. He suggested, “Ogbu does not account for the shifting of identities of individuals he would classify as involuntary or voluntary minorities—especially those individuals whose affiliations, genealogies and loyalties made it difficult to place them neatly into one category or another” (Trueba, 1987, pp. 9-10). Further insight into the success of these Bachelor degree holders may suggest whether they perceive themselves to “fit” in the voluntary or involuntary category. A challenge facing these men is the roots of Mexican culture emphasizing a collectivist ethic in which family and the familial hierarchy is valued and respected. Conversely, here in the United States there is an individualistic culture in which the individual’s needs are foremost and prominent. Transitioning between these two ends of a spectrum may be a challenge faced by Mexican-American males across institutions of higher education throughout the country.

Another criticism of Ogbu’s Cultural-Ecological theory is the notion that culture is static. Foster (2003) suggested, “Culture is thoroughly contested and constantly negotiated, from within and without, through inscription and ascription, and in conscious
response and involuntary reaction” (p. 379). This study allowed the impact of the negotiation of identity from the participants’ perspective as they earned a bachelor’s degree to be examined.

**Assimilation and acculturation.** An important aspect of understanding the resiliency of Mexican-American males who have earned a bachelor’s degree is the relationship between assimilation and acculturation. Assimilation may be defined as the merging of cultural traits from previously distinct cultural groups, not involving biological amalgamation. Acculturation, on the other hand, is a process in which members of one cultural group adopt the beliefs and behaviors of another group. Valenzuela (1999b) illustrated the concept of “subtractive assimilation,” which is based on the notion that assimilation is a non-neutral process and its widespread application negatively impacts the economic and political integration of minorities (Valenzuela, 1999b, p. 25). In addition, subtractive assimilation includes attacking a student’s native language skills and cultural identity (Cummins, 1988) further reinforcing Ogbu’s Cultural-Ecological theory in which cultural distrust of the United States educational system is created by the omission of non-European American perspectives (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Spring (1997) characterized the political context in which U.S. minorities have had to struggle for educational equality as one of “deculturalization.” “Spring illustrated how struggles over educational policy reflect deeper ideological debates about cultural forms that define, or should define, America” (Valenzuela, 1999b, p. 26).
The acculturation versus assimilation process of Mexican-American males has an influence on the positive identity development, which can have an effect on their capacity to persist in their pursuit of higher education. Warheit, Vega, Auth, and Meinhardt (1985) stated that the higher the level of acculturation (or “Americanization”), the greater the frequency of disorder such as alcohol and drug abuse or dependence, phobia, and antisocial personality. Disorders were significantly more customary among the U.S.-born Mexican-Americans than among immigrants, and the latter had a lower occurrence of major depression and dysthymia than natives as a whole, despite the immigrants’ lower incomes and educations. Less acculturated immigrants are not only less exposed to these practices, but are under the influence of the stronger families ties, social controls, and traditional values associated with their cultural heritage (Warheit et al., 1985).

Understanding the assimilation and acculturation experience connects with Ogbu’s (1999) Cultural-Ecological theory regarding how the system treats minorities and the perception of the minorities’ community forces in their higher educational experience.

**Support from the environment (institution of higher education).** A key element in the Cultural-Ecological theory that contextualizes the participants is the study of minority students’ perceptions of and responses to schooling (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). In understanding these participants who have successfully graduated from college, their perceptions of school from their experiences on campus and from their families may bring insight to the study to help develop programs or services to serve more Mexican-American males currently enrolled in college. Services offered by institutions of higher
education that meet the needs of Mexican-American males should be addressed. The Cultural-Ecological perspective allows this research to explore whether the services offered with the best intentions really meet the needs of the students. Furthermore, inquiries need to be made with regard to how institutions of higher education welcomed and nurtured student development through the “community” aspect of their college experience.

Resiliency Theory

Overview. Earning a Bachelor’s degree requires dedication, commitment, and support from family, friends, and the educational institution. An adjective that describes many students who achieve their educational goals is “resilience.” In learning more about the experiences of the Mexican-American males who have successfully completed their Bachelor’s degree, the resiliency theory offers a useful perspective in framing the way in which they responded to the obstacles they faced in achieving their academic goal.

Cultural-Ecological theory and resiliency theory intersect in the examination of the environment and the individual’s vulnerability and ability to overcome those forces. Moreover, how the individual perceives obstacles and/or the climate shapes one’s future as described in both theories. The participants of this study contend with forces outside their personal power, yet persevered to earn their Bachelor’s degrees.

Rutter (2006) defined resilience as reduced vulnerability to environmental risk experiences, the overcoming of stress or adversity, or a relatively good outcome despite
risk experiences. Benard (1995) defined resilience as “the ability to bounce back” and articulated, “we are all born with an innate capacity for resilience, by which we are able to develop social competence, problem solving skills, a critical consciousness, autonomy, and a sense of purpose” (p. 2). Pulley and Wakefield (2001) defined resilient people as able to recover quickly from change, hardship, or misfortune.

A seminal work in the resiliency field was the longitudinal study conducted by Werner and Smith (1992) that studied the psychological resiliency of at-risk children. Their longitudinal study involved a group of 700 children from multi-racial backgrounds born in 1955 on the island of Kauai in Hawaii who were monitored to determine the effects of risk factors such as low birth, chronic poverty, uneducated parents, a dysfunctional and disorganized family environment, divorce, parental alcoholism, and mental illness as well as the protective factors that helped these children rise above their adverse situations (Masten, 2001). Children in the study were followed by a research team of social workers, public health workers, pediatricians, and psychologists for over three decades until the subjects reached the age of 32 (Jones, 2003). The Kauai study relates to this study because the participants share a common history of conquest and colonization. Ogbu (as cited in Harris, 2009) noted that Native Americans, African-Americans, Mexican-Americans and Native Hawaiians “resent(ed) the loss of former freedom(s)… and perceive the socioeconomic barriers against them as part of their undeserved oppression” (p. 3).
Results from the Kauai study showed that at the age of 18 years, three out of four subjects with four or more risk factors developed problems, while one of four exhibited resiliency. The resilient individuals had protective factors that helped buffer the adversity in their lives. The follow-up study looked at the resilient children among high-risk groups after 32 years and identified successful coping mechanisms in the resilient cluster: (a) individual attributes; (b) strong ties to the family; and (c) external support systems at school, work, or church (Richardson, 2002). The coping mechanisms found from the Kauai study offer a frame in which to study resiliency strategies of Mexican males who have earned their Bachelor’s degrees.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher used Ungar’s (2005) definition of resilience in analyzing the Mexican-American males who have earned their Bachelor’s degree:

- The capacity of individuals to navigate their way to resources and maintain well-being;
- The capacity of individuals’ physical and social ecologies to provide those resources; and
- The capacity of individuals, their families, and communities to negotiate in culturally meaningful ways for those resources to be shared. (p. 3)

In using Ungar’s (2005) definition of resiliency, the researcher could dovetail concepts with the principles of the Cultural-Ecological theory such as culture, cultural identity, and support from the larger environment.
Culture. Understanding the distinctness of the Mexican-American culture provides a necessary backdrop for how the Mexican-American culture fosters their men’s navigational tools toward their educational goals. Ungar (2005) described resiliency as the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to resources and maintain well-being. Colbert et al. (2005) believed, “resiliency theory attempts to explain academic achievement among students who encounter negative psychological and environmental situations” (p. 111). Understanding the dynamics of the subjects in the areas of their culture, values taught to the subject from their upbringing, and perceptions while in the educational setting is important to understanding the resiliency of these students.

Negotiation of cultural identity. A challenge facing Mexican-American students is managing and negotiating their cultural identities. Coming from households with a strong Mexican cultural imprint then transitioning to University life offers challenges in expectations, roles, and responsibilities. Ungar (2005) discussed, in his definition of resiliency, the capacity of individuals, their families, and communities to negotiate in culturally meaningful ways for those resources to be shared.

Wolin and Wolin (2008) identified seven common resiliency themes: insight, independence, relationships, initiative, creativity, humor, and morality. The characteristics highlighted by Wolin and Wolin may suggest how these successful Mexican-American graduates negotiate their cultural identity.

Support from environment (institution of higher education). Ungar (2005) defined resiliency as the capacity of individuals’ physical and social ecologies to provide
those resources. Rutter (2006) defined resilience as reduced vulnerability to environmental risk experiences, the overcoming of a stress or adversity, or a relatively good outcome despite risk experiences. A leading researcher in the resiliency theory field is Bonnie Benard (1995) who views resiliency, in the educational realm, as “the belief that all humans possess an inborn developmental wisdom, and resilience theory seeks to better contextualize how teachers can tap into this wisdom” (p. 1). The teacher’s perspective of resiliency offers a point regarding how they perceive their students from the diverse backgrounds they teach. Benard (1991) articulated, “we are all born with an innate capacity for resilience, by which we are able to develop social competence, problem solving skills, a critical consciousness, autonomy, and a sense of purpose” (p. 11). Moreover, Benard (1993) defined resilience as “the ability to bounce back” (p. 44). Furthermore, Benard (2004) discussed personal traits such as social competence, problem-solving skills, autonomy, and a sense of purpose to bounce back from less than optimal situations.

Benard (2004) highlighted that many previous studies on resiliency used the deficiency model approach. The deficiency model concentrates on identifying and evaluating behaviors to determine possible factors that contributed to the negative conditions. The attention of resiliency research has shifted from a deficit-approach to a strengths-based approach. In other words, instead of isolating behaviors that contributed to problem behaviors, researchers focused on the protective factors that modified or even turned around the negative effects of living in at-risk environments (Rutter, 1999). As a
result, many studies began to look at success stories to see what those individuals had done to recreate or redirect their path of failure to one of success (Benard, 2004).

Cabrera and Padilla (2004) indicated that from an educational standpoint “resiliency refers to students who despite economic, cultural, and social barriers still succeed at high levels” (p. 152). Understanding the cultural perspective of Mexican-American males who have earned a Bachelor’s degree is important in furthering resiliency studies. In addition, understanding the cultural dynamic for these Mexican-American males can offer specific strategies to educators so more Mexican-American males earn a college degree.

LatCrit theory, Cultural-Ecological theory, and resiliency theory combine to provide an insightful perspective in reviewing existing literature in studying the phenomenon of Mexican-American males successful completion of a bachelor’s degree.

**Operational Definitions**

**Accredited Institution of Higher Education**

Accreditation is the recognition that an institution maintains standards requisite for its graduates to gain admission to other reputable institutions of higher learning or to achieve credentials for professional practice. The goal of accreditation is to ensure that education provided by institutions of higher education meets acceptable levels of quality (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).
**First-generation Immigrant**

Immigrant who migrated to the U.S.

**Latino**

“The ethnic groups of a person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American, or other Spanish culture of origin, regardless of race. In 1998-99, the title of this ethnic group was modified from Hispanic to reflect the new federal standards and more current use” (California Department of Education, 2010, para. 51). The term Latino is primarily used to describe the population throughout this study, although the term Hispanic is also used interchangeably when cited by a primary research source.

**Mexican-American**

A United States resident or citizen of Mexican descent born in the United States.

**Resilience**

This study uses Ungar’s definition of resilience to analyze the subjects of this study. Ungar (2005) defined resilience as:

- The capacity of individuals to navigate their way to resources and maintain well-being;
- The capacity of individuals’ physical and social ecologies to provide those resources; and
- The capacity of individual’s, their families and communities to negotiate in culturally meaningful ways for those resources to be shared. (p. 3)
Second Generation Immigrant

U.S.-born children of at least one foreign-born parent.

Third Generation Immigrant

U.S.-born children of two U.S.-born parents, where at least one grandparent is foreign-born (Cruz, 2009).

Limitations

The first limitation to this study was the use of a small sample of Mexican-American males (five) to understand the phenomena of their success. A typical sample size for a phenomenological study is from 5 to 25 individuals, all of whom have had direct experience with the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2007; Polkinghorne, 1989). Because of the nature of phenomenological research, the results of the study cannot be generalized to all Mexican-American male students and may not be applicable to Mexican-American women. An additional limitation to this study was how the researcher (Non-Mexican-American male) engaged with and built a trustworthy environment for the participants to speak candidly about their experiences earning a bachelor’s degree. Moreover, the cultural dynamic between the participants and the researcher may have influenced the comfort level of disclosure of the participants and the outcomes of this study.

The population for this study was Mexican-American male graduate students over the age of 18. Even though four of the men were born in Mexico, they would have needed to go through the American educational system. In addition, many of these men
may reside in the Sacramento, California area limiting the geographical scope of the participants.

An additional limitation to this study was the lack of existing research specifically pertaining to Mexican-American males. Access to literature concerning “Latinos” is abundant, yet there are various groups that make up the Latino population. Latinos are often viewed as a homogenous group (Santiago, 1996), but in fact Latinos are a very diverse group (De Leon, 2001; Rodriguez, 2008; Santiago, 1996; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010a) greatly influencing American society and culture (Rodriguez, 2008) and changing the political, economic, and educational American landscape with their record numbers.

As mentioned earlier, Rodriguez (2008) identified six subgroups among the Latino population: Mexicans, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Spaniards, Central American, and South Americans. Previously stated, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce, “The three largest Latino groups are Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans” (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1993, Table 6). Within California, those with a Mexican descent are abundant; hence the focus of this study.

**Significance of the Study**

This study will fill gaps in the literature by addressing the specific efforts of Mexican-American males who have successfully earned a bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution of higher education. Outside the literature on gang involvement and incarceration, knowledge on the education and schooling experiences of Latino males remains relatively scarce (Figueroa, 2004). This study examined and added to the
literature of positive characteristics and factors of Mexican-American men who have earned a bachelor’s degree. In addition, the success of Mexican-American males earning a bachelor’s degree is a social justice issue facing our education and policy leaders.

This study can influence educational policy makers and educational leaders in the hopes for organizational and cultural change in addressing the needs of Mexican-American males in higher education. Educational leaders need to examine the needs of these men and develop strategies to improve retention and success rates. For example, Ornelas (2002) found that students who took classes in the evening were unable to access institutional support, since most support services were unavailable during evening hours. As a result, the students not only expressed frustration at the lack of support offered but also felt as though they were the “forgotten group” on campus. Moreover, Ornelas (2002) suggested many Latino males pay for their tuition by working numerous jobs. Understanding the realities of these men’s lives offers educational leaders the opportunity to develop financial aid policies and procedures to better serve these Mexican-American male students.

Further research examining the community college experience may help in understanding the low graduation rates of Mexican-American men. For instance, Whites who begin their education at community colleges are nearly twice as likely as Hispanics who also start at the community colleges to finish a bachelor’s degree. Significant gaps in completion rates are evident among those starting in the four-year college sector as well (Fry, 2002). Though most higher education practitioners and advocates would agree
more knowledge is needed, especially regarding the experiences of Latino and Native males, they also emphasize the need for practical pathways to educational attainment for males of color (Harris, 2009).

A cultural dynamic overlooked by policy and educational leaders is the need for social connection on campus and a connection between the student’s family and the higher educational institution. The participants of Figueroa’s (2004) report suggest that Latinos needs socially responsive networks to succeed academically in higher education. The college persistence literature consistently finds that residing on campus enhances the probability of completion (Astin, 1993). This may be because students who live on campus are more socially engaged and integrated into college life, fostering a sense of belonging (Fry, 2002). Understanding the significance of the social connectivity needed for Mexican-American males can improve graduation rates across the country. In addition, understanding the family dynamics of Mexican-American males can help higher education administrators make more strategic decisions to improve the retention rates of their students. For instance, research suggests proximity to family and cost of education influence Latino students’ decisions to begin their postsecondary education at community college, but not enough research has documented the college choice process for transfer students (Martinez & Fernandez, 2004).

In short, as suggested by Harris’s (2009) research, higher educational institutional leaders must start to become proponents of the success of male students. In addition, improvements to success and retention rates of Mexican-American males can increase the
number of graduates with a bachelor’s degree and assist with the workforce needs in California.

**Conclusion**

The need for more Mexican-American males earning a bachelor’s degree is critical to the success of California’s future and is a social justice issue facing the State. Chapter 1 introduced the topic of study, described the problem statement, the nature of the study, the theoretical frameworks used in this study, the operational definitions, the study’s research limitations, and the significance of the success strategies used by the five Mexican-American males who have earned a bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution of higher education. Chapter 2 provides an overview of recent peer-reviewed literature pertaining to the successful strategies used by Mexican-American males who have earned a bachelor’s degree. Furthermore, the literature review includes the theoretical framework used in this study. Chapter 3 describes the details of the methodology including specific qualitative methods to understand the dynamics of the participants of this study. Chapter 4 presents the data collected through this qualitative study. Chapter 5 summarizes the research study’s findings and recommends future research regarding this topic.
Chapter 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This literature review provides a context to the factors contributing to the successful completion of a bachelor’s degree by Mexican-American males. The literature review consists of three sections: (a) the review of research and literature of Mexican-American males who have earned a bachelor’s degree, (b) literature-based descriptions of Mexican-American males who have graduated with a bachelor’s degree, and (c) a summary of the literature describing the methodology used in the study.

Review of Research and Literature

In understanding Mexican-American males’ successful completion of a college degree, it is important to see the previous literature on this topic. Benard (1997) wrote that three characteristics supporting growth and development are consistently found in environmental systems: caring relationships, high expectations, and participation. Ayro’s (2012) research examined five male Latino college students and their influences in their educational attainment. Ayro (2012) used the qualitative case study to understand their experiences. The study had the following findings: positive relationships at school can have an influence on academic success, the focus of schools needs to be more student centered to assist in the development of a student’s self-efficacy and ethnic identity, and schools should continue to offer support and maintain extracurricular programs.
The data from this study revealed that all five participants identified specific relationships that assisted them through their educational careers. All participants identified a nurturing relationship with one or both parental figure(s) that provided them with a structured home life during their upbringing, which impacted their educational success. Home life was important to the success of these students who preferred to live at home with their families because of their close relationships with them. This evidence supports research conducted by Fulton and Turner (2008) that investigated the connection between parenting style and academic motivation and success. Furthermore, the students’ success was attributed to their relationships with their teachers.

The participants showed persistence in their post-secondary educational experiences. One of the participants admitted pride would get in the way of seeking assistance and would not accept outside help from the resources provided by the educational institution. Instead of getting assistance, the participant adopted the philosophy of “if I don’t get it, I need to work harder.” Once the student started utilizing campus resources, his educational goals became more achievable. As part of the persistent finding, research by Ortero (2007) suggested that commitment to goals and integration into campus life are factors associated with the retention of college students. Data from these case studies appear to support Ortero’s (2007) research findings.

Findings from the Ortero (2007) study supported the research of Green and Walker (2009) and Astin (1984) that illustrated student engagement was a good predictor of a student’s success in school. Student engagement is an important attribute to
successfully attaining educational goals. The participants of the study were actively involved in athletics in high schools and four went on to play in college. In addition, each of the participants was involved in Greek life, furthering their social networks in the building of their social capital.

Each participant of the Ortero (2007) study learned about their ethnic identity, cultural values, and traditions through their parents and grandparents. A driving value learned by the participants from their parents was good morals and ethical values to make the right choices. These values are supported by the notion of educación. Educación refers to how Latinos raise their children on the ideals of good morals, respect, and understanding right from wrong to successfully function in a diverse society.

Each participant shared that language was important to maintain their cultural identity as Mexican-Americans. The participants all reported they were fluent in both English and Spanish, and Spanish was the primary language inside the home. Another form of establishing their ethnic identity was that their closest friends were other Latinos (Ortero, 2007).

According to Albert Bandura (2004), a person’s self-efficacy is his or her ability to self-manage and make choices on decisions that can affect his or her life. Several educational researchers correlated student success with self-efficacy. The participants in this study had the consistent theme of wanting to graduate from college, start and establish a career, and eventually raise a family.
De Leon’s (2005) research examined college retention and graduation rates of 13 Mexican-Americans. De Leon (2005) used the qualitative ethnographic narrative inquiry research design to understand the factors that led students to experiences reconciling their ethnic identities and academic identities in earning a college degree. De Leon’s (2005) study had the following themes: experience of School and Community, family/Social Networks-Orientations & Educational Support Systems, preserving Self-Sustaining Hope (Resiliency), and maintaining Identity.

All students received academic assistance such as tutoring, guidance, advice, counseling, and academic planning. The respondents identified an area that was lacking, and that was additional counseling helping them navigate through their college experience more smoothly. All the participants identified familial support while at the university through tuition assistance and encouragement. For students whose parents were not able to assist, they sought outside sources of financial aid to not burden their families (De Leon, 2005).

Many of the students felt comfortable at the university; however, some felt no acknowledgement of their culture on campus. Moreover, student participants hoped for a stronger connection on behalf of the university between their cultural identity and university life. Two students did not participate in student clubs or organizations, but those who did found the experience beneficial in their pursuit of a college degree (De Leon, 2005).
The participants offered this advice to future Mexican-Americans pursuing a college degree: take the initiative to ask questions and do not be afraid to seek help. In addition, future students should get involved in student leadership and academic life to build a sense of belonging to the university (De Leon, 2005).

Moreover, the following findings were found to be related to Latino/a college student performance or retention:

1. a strong sense of belonging at the university (Constantine, Robinson, Wilton, & Caldwell, 2002);
2. a positive university environment (Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 1999);
3. perceived social support from friends, mentors, and family (familismo) along with fewer unsupportive interactions (Cole et al., 2007; Gloria & Robinson-Kurpius, 1996).

In building on the previous literature, the core themes to be examined are the cultural dynamics of bridging home life and college life; how these Mexican-American males negotiate their cultural identity and the role of the family and familism in their higher educational pursuits; and the role of campus climate, mentorship, and a sense of belonging in the overall environmental support of their educational goals.

The Troublesome Culture in Higher Education with Latino/ Mexican-American Males

According to John Ogbu (1990), “minority groups in contemporary pluralistic societies face the problem of achieving educational parity with the dominant groups of society” (p. 45). Research has suggested that higher educational institutions need to build
a stronger bridge for success of a bachelor’s degree to meet the needs of Latino and, more specifically, Mexican-American males. Some of the protective factors for Latino males include: family, mother/son relationship, church, religion, extra-curricular activities, peers, role models, and schools (Loukas & Prelow, 2004; Potochinick & Perreira, 1987).

Zalaquett (2006) suggested Latino students may not have dropped out of school, but may have been “pushed out” due to the implementation of schools’ curricula and regulations that only meet the needs of mainstream students. Moreover, Zalaquett identified several factors that have an impact on student success, including family, education, a sense of accomplishment, friendships, community support, and school personnel. Culturally responsive instruction acknowledges and accommodates students’ culture, language, and learning styles in the classroom. This notion, reinforced by Ogbu and Simons (1998), is that teachers must understand their students’ culture and language for effective learning to take place. Freire (2011) discusses the “banking” style of education which has contributed to the Latino male student “vanishing from the American education system, a trend evident in higher education (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009).

Negotiation of Cultural Identity and Higher Education

First-generation Mexican immigrants with their firsthand recollection of the hardships back in Mexico appreciate more the opportunities available to them in the country compared with those they had back home (Buriel, 1984). As a result, immigrants come to the United States with a great deal of motivation to take advantage of all the
opportunities this country has to offer, which would have not been available in Mexico. Second-generation Mexican-Americans, on the other hand, may not have experienced first-hand struggles of living in Mexico.

For purposes of this study, immigrant generation definitions are:

1. First-generation immigrant – immigrant who migrated to the U.S.


3. Third-generation immigrant – U.S.-born children of two U.S.-born parents, where at least one grandparent is foreign-born (Cruz, 2009).

Olatunji (2000) suggested immigrants of Mexican descent who engaged in early work experience lowered self-esteem, increased delinquency, and stymied educational attainment, “thus Latinos develop attitudes and values that are dysfunctional for optimal educational achievement” (p. 87). Risks Latino males confront include poverty, violence, socially disorganized communities, poor/aggressive parenting styles, drugs and alcohol, access to firearms, gang involvement/exposure, lack of role models, and peer pressure (Potochnick & Perreira, 1987; Provitera, 2004; Youth, 1993). Because many Latino males see their peers and oftentimes, generations of family members fail, they may well accept the perceived inevitable failure, thereby declining to put forth much effort academically (Gonzalez, 2009).

Those students who are academically successful often minimize their achievement in order to be accepted by those peers who do not value educational success.
Additionally, a stigma is often attached to those who are successful; in some cases peers may be accused of taking attributes of other ethnic groups or, in the instance of Blacks and Hispanics, of “acting White” (Cooper, Coopere, Azmitia, Chavira, & Gullatt, 2002; Ford, 1996; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Walker & McCoy, 1997).

The concept of “acting White” was discussed widely by Fordham and Ogbu (1986) who argued that educational achievement for minority groups was often rejected because of the fear they would be perceived as sell outs to their ethnic/racial group. Hence, they suggested that those African Americans and Latinos who did achieve at higher academic levels adopted a “raceless persona.”

Flores-Gonzalez (2005) discussed the critiques of Fordham and Ogbu’s (1986) work. Much of the critique addressed a lack of attention paid to structural factors that impede minority academic success versus a cultural phenomenon or fear of “acting White” (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey, 1998; Carter, 2003; Conchas, 2001; Stanton-Salazar, 2000; Valenzuela, 1999b). Flores-Gonzalez argued that “these studies point to subtractive schooling process in which minority culture is devalued by administrators and teachers who sort, select, and reward students based on their proficiency with dominant cultural attributes” (p. 628).

The Role of Family in the Success of Mexican-American Males’ Bachelor Degree Attainment

A great deal has been written about the Hispanic family and its role in the academic achievement and underachievement of Latino children (Arellano & Padilla, 1996; Demos, 1962; Romero et al., 2004; Smokowski, Reynolds, & Bezruczko, 1999).
The value of family also appears to be higher for Latinos/as than it is for Whites, regardless of their acculturation or income levels (Ramirez et al., 2004; Rodriguez, Mira, Paez, & Myers, 2007; Sabogal, Otero-Sabogal, Marin, & Perez-Stable, 1987). In aforementioned studies, the strength and presence of family serves as a protective factor in achieving higher educational goals.

Latino families tend to be bigger in size with an average of 3.71 members compared with 2.4 for European Americans (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000; U.S. Department of Commerce, 1996). Mexican-Americans have more children per family than any other group in the United States (Buriel, 1984). It has been suggested by several studies that family size has a negative impact on academic achievement, with larger family having the lowest levels of educational attainment (Downey, 1995; Riala, Isohanni, Jokelainen, Jones, & Isohanni, 2003; Velez, 1989). De Leon (2005) suggested, however, that for Mexican immigrant families, the extended family members (godparents, aunts, uncles, and older cousins) are critical sources of tangible instrumental and emotional support.

Another study found that although most Mexican parents expected their children to succeed in school, they felt limited in their ability to help their children with many of their school assignments presumably due to their own low levels of education (Okagaki & Frensch, 1998). This problem might be especially true for parents who do not speak English and as a result are unable to help their children with even the simplest tasks (Duenas, 2005).
Goldenberg, Gallimore, Reese, and Garnier (2001) concluded that high levels of parental aspirations do not predict academic achievement among Latino children. Stanton-Salazar (2001) found that although low-income Mexican immigrant parents highly valued educational success for their children, few of them actually understood their children’s school experiences or the role they as parents had in facilitating their children’s access to postsecondary education. Contrary to popular belief that Mexican parents do not care about their children’s education, the Pew Hispanic Center’s study found that when comparing Mexican-American parents to European American parents, White parents reported helping their children with homework and meeting with their children’s teacher less often than Latino parents did (Pew Hispanic Center, 2004).

Goldenberg et al. (2001) stated that Latino parents do believe formal education is essential to becoming successful, but their priority as parents is placed on a child’s moral development, “which is seen as a super ordinate parental responsibility” (p. 48). Ceballo (2004) addressed the issue of parental support as a strategy for Latinos to persist in school. Parents who understand the value of education will excuse their children from all other commitments such as household chores and work.

Elizabeth Fulton and Lisa Turner (2008) found that an authoritative parenting style coupled with warmth, autonomy granting, and behavior supervision were positively correlated with a student’s academic motivation and success. A significant finding of the study was that parental supervision was the strongest predictor for lower rates of behavior problems.
Marin and Marin (1991) identified the most important social institution for Latinos as the family. Garcia-Reid, Reid, and Peterson (2005), validated that supportive parental behavior is associated with more positively engaged Latino students in school. Moreover, Latinos accept higher values and obligations to the family unit than European counterparts (Fuligni, Tseng, & Lam, 1999; Sabogal, Marin, & Otero-Sabogal, 1987).

**The Role of “Familism” in Higher Education**

Familism is a fundamental attribute of the Latino culture (Santiago-Rivera, Arredondo, & Gallardo-Cooper, 2002) and can be defined as:

A construct that reflects the collectivistic nature of Latino culture… (an orientation toward the welfare of the group… Latino families who express a higher degree of familism are characterized by positive interpersonal familial relations, high family unity, social support, interdependence in completion of daily activities, and close proximity with the extended family members. (Romero, Robinson, Haydel, Mendoza, & Killen, 2004, p. 3)

Marin and Marin (1991) found that attachment to the nuclear and extended family, also called familialism, is considered one of the most important of seven Latino values strongly associated with culture.

Familism may be beneficial to Mexican adolescents because of its association with condensed social networks and, hence, environmental opportunities that support academic achievement (Valenzuela & Dornbusch, 1994). Proximity to Latino family networks is crucial to relationships and continued support in life (Bempechat, 1998; Kurlaender, 2006; Person & Rosenbaum, 2006). Mina, Cabrales, Juarez, and Rodriguez-Vasquez (2004) interviewed Latino students and found that two important pieces of their culture that lead to academic success are community and family connections.
Community is considered part of the extended family for Latinos. Community also includes the immediate and extended family and expands to association with other individuals in social groups. Subsequently, community members play vital roles in the academic achievement.

Familismo, a strong identification and attachment to nuclear and extended family (Sabogal, Marin, & Otero-Sabogal, 1987) was found to be related to well-being, social capital, and school readiness for Latino/as (Desmond & Turley-Lopez, 2009; Rodríguez et al., 2007). Latino/as with high familismo were more likely to achieve higher grades than those with low familismo when their parents had at least 12 years of educational attainment and were of higher SES.

It was concluded that familism helps grades but only if parents attained at least a high school education. The authors suggested that the results could be due to the fact that parents who have higher levels of education might be better able to help their children with school assignments due to the fact that they might have more knowledge about specific subjects (Coleman, 1988).

Several characteristics often associated with la familia Latina (the Latino family) have been identified as having a negative impact on the academic attainment of students of Mexican descent (Baca Zinn, 1989; Bellah, 1985; Goode, 1970; Marin & Marin; 1991; Spence, 1985; Suro, 1990). Desmond and Turley (2009) said familismo may influence the decision-making process for Mexican-Americans regarding their college attendance based on geographical proximity of their family. Rodríguez et al. (2007) found that
family support was positively related to well-being when family conflict was low. Mulvaney-Day, Alegría, and Sribney (2007) found that those Latinos with a strong value of familismo tended to report a higher sense of well-being when the family support was positive, while negative support from family tended to have the opposite effect.

Familism has also been believed by some to impair the academic aspirations and the educational success of Mexican-American immigrant students (Kane, 1998; Marin & Marin, 1991). It has been proposed that perhaps the sense of family commitment that members of Mexican families have toward each other (Kane, 1998) may inhibit the individual aspirations of Latino adolescents, having a negative impact on their educational attainment (Martin & Martin, 1991). Moreover it has been claimed that the fact that familism seems to impair the upward mobility of Mexican-descent people helps explain the low socioeconomic status among this group (Baca Zinn, 1989; Bellah, 1985; Goode, 1970; Spence, 1985).

In summary, the literature seems to suggest that familism may help rather than impair the educational attainment of Latino students as it was once argued. However, it is also evident that the educational attainment of the Latino parents may also play an important role in the academic success of their children (Duenas, 2005).

**Male Mexican-Americans’ Roles and Responsibilities to the Family on their Paths to Earning a Bachelor’s Degree**

Latinos surveyed cited a need to work and earn money as one of the top reasons they did not enroll in college or, for those who did enroll, why they did not complete
college (Pew Hispanic Center, 2004). Another study cited the need for Latino students to contribute financially to their families as one explanation for why relatively few Latinos enrolled in college full time (Fry, 2002). Many Latinos attend part-time or hold a job when enrolled full-time. This is a significant factor that causes some to drop out of school (Kivisto & Ng, 2005).

The centrality of family among Latinos creates an environment ripe for the valuation of immediate participation in the labor force (Kivisto & Ng, 2005) and a lack of emphasis on higher education. Essentially, this creates a cycle of funneling Latinos away from higher education and toward moderately paying jobs. Further contributing to this funneling cycle is that Latinos are less likely to have parents who attended college (Schmidt, 2003). The organization of functional networks of families and their friends has been most instrumental to the survival of families during difficult economic times, but it has also served as a very strong emotional support system for retaining a strong Mexican identity in the face of the traumas encountered (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995).

Families are an important structure and are more accessible to students who live at home, which fills a cultural role expectation (Alfonso, 2006; Brown, Santiago, & Lopez, 2003; McGlynn, 2004). Ortiz (2004) found that the impact of missing out on celebrations can negatively affect Latino student achievement. Disconnection with family can lead to emotional problems that will in turn affect academic achievement. Ortiz further noted that “we learned long ago that the head and heart cannot be separated,
(so) we also have to learn not to encourage the separation of Latino students from their families and communities” (p. 97).

According to Harris (2009), the gender expectation for males is to be someone in control and a provider for his family. Boys are given free rein at a younger age when they quickly develop autonomy. In addition, males are also more likely to drop out of high school and college to get a job as a necessity to provide an income for their family. Over the years, this has contributed to the lack of degrees for men who are unable to attend or complete a college degree.

Sanchez (1992) discussed the responsibility to family as one of the factors leading to Hispanics dropping out of college. This responsibility may bring to bear substantial demands on students, leaving them with no perceived choice other than leaving college or performing so poorly that they are dismissed. The high level of responsibilities for family members at home (Blue & Cook, 2004) can affect students even earlier than college, often contributing to their dropping out of high school.

**Building the Bridge Between Higher Education and the Latino Family**

Fix and Passel (1994) cited discontinuities in values or beliefs between immigrant Latino families and schools. Moreover, the researchers interpreted these discontinuities within a framework of cultural differences not deficiencies. When schools make the effort to partner with families, family support for students can be enhanced (Gonzalez, 2009).
Hines (1992) and Carter (2004) concluded that new ways to involve families must be identified and implemented that honor and respect the Latino culture, customs, and ideals in order to establish and maintain Latino families’ involvement in school. Ortiz (2004) suggested that a parent outreach program on college campuses would enable more students to not only stay connected to their college, but also to serve as a resource for family support. Moreover, Latino students able to share their college experience with their family simultaneously achieve feelings of connectedness to their family and school.

**Support of the Educational Environment Toward Mexican-American Males’ Attainment of Bachelor Degrees**

Person and Rosenbaum’s (2006) research findings indicate that ethnic networks are crucial to Latino success; the less integrated an individual is with others, the less likely he or she is to rely on any other resources. Anderson (1981) noted a positive relationship between peers providing opposition for dropping out of college and students’ persistence. The development of a variety of relationships (e.g., faculty, peers, etc.) has been observed to be significant in assisting students to deal with difficulties of college as well as to positively influence students’ academic achievement (Fleming, 1985; Ostrow, Paul, Dark, & Berhman, 1986). “Specifically, perception of peer support appears to help Mexican-origin students become involved in and satisfied with campus activities enabling them to make a smooth social transition to college” (Kopperman, 2007, p. 105) through the establishment of relationships that allowed students to “feel more connected
to the university creating a sense of community which facilitates a feeling of satisfaction of being in college” (Kopperman, 2007, p. 106).

**Campus Climates and Mentorship**

Campus racial climate is defined by Solórzano, Ceja, and Yossa (2000) as “the overall racial environment of the college campus” (p. 60). Sylvia Hurtado (1992) has done extensive work looking at the campus racial climate and found that Latino students are more likely than their white counterparts to perceive the college environment as hostile and that “perceptions of the racial climate also differed by institutions although it appears that dimensions of location and ethnic composition of the student were confounded with group differences” (p. 546).

Davis’s (2002) research on racial diversity indicated that when there is not enough representation of human resources of color, Latinos are less likely to connect to college and seek help. Mina et al. (2004) noted that support services come from organizations on campus that keep Latinos connected to college outside of academics, yet they provide networks for leadership opportunities through sports or community outreach. The organizations in which Latinos get involved serve as a second family and build a sense of belonging within that institution, thereby supporting personally meaningful connections to school.

According to Castellanos and Gloria (2007), “specific to Latino students is effective mentorship that encompasses the personal and professional aspects of academic progress while integrating culture” (p. 390). When students see Latino role models, it
opens their eyes to visualize success beyond the talents they demonstrate in school to the core character of who they are and can be as professional people in the work force (Mina et al., 2004). The availability of positive mentors in the classroom and on the campus is an issue for minority males, particularly Latinos who see fewer successful Latinos in higher education (Kimmel, 2008).

Research shows it is highly essential that Latina students acclimated with their campus environments by way of meaningful affiliations. Morales and Trotman (2004) stated, “Mentorship outside the family, in its many forms, is a recurrent theme in academic resilience literature” (p. 13). Another primary source of support for Latino students is faculty or staff mentors (Gandara & Osugi, 1994; Hernandez, 2000). Latino staff who have navigated and succeeded within the educational system are models of academic success for Latino students (Gandara & Contreras, 2009). The availability of mentors who are Latino faculty or administrators, however, is limited (Castellanos & Jones, 2003).

The value of a caring teacher should not be underestimated; a teacher who displays care through action can make a tremendous impact on the lives of their students (Cummins, 1996; Mestre & Nieto, 1996; Valenzuela, 1999b). De Leon (2005) suggested that caring teachers’ expressions aligned with the parents’ to reinforce the message that these young men are expected to succeed and in doing so provide a culturally congruent environment.
The Need for a Sense of Belonging Key to Bachelor Degree Attainment

For ethnic minority groups, a sense of belonging has also been referred to as “cultural fit” (Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005) subsequently, the ability of a student to feel connected and supported while attending institutions of higher education is of prime concern in their academic matriculation and a strong predictor of college adjustment for Mexican-Americans (Schneider & Ward, 2003).

Velasquez (1999) found that the strongest contributing factor to a sense of belonging for Mexican-American students attending predominantly white institutions was students’ comfort level in social affiliations with White students. Additionally, parents’ cultural heritage correlated negatively with a sense of belonging, indicating that Mexican-American students whose parents were born in Mexico and were Spanish-language dominant were less likely to perceive a high level sense of belonging. Velasquez’s (1999) findings suggest that the level of acculturation to the mainstream may play a role in Mexican-American’s sense of belonging. For many Latino/a students, being valued may mean they feel their beliefs and ideas are valued. This can be communicated through the availability of culturally relevant courses, diversity in teaching methods, and culturally related activities or organizations on campus (Vasquez, 1993).

Stavan’s (2006) report on elite universities indicated that prestigious institutions fail Latino collegians when faculty members do not represent the diversity among the students. In addition, he found Latinos are among the least likely group to seek advisors in college. The final results of Rodriguez’s (2008) study conducted at Azusa Pacific
University could be used by colleges and universities toward the development of institutional resources to support Mexican-American males’ bachelor degree attainment. Along with the dearth of extensive research, there are few reliable national data sources that allow for an exhaustive analysis of Latino males, a glaring research need that should be addressed by future iterations of research on this student population (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009).

**Theoretical Frameworks**

The phenomenological approach lends itself to using the three theoretical frames for this study: LatCrit, Cultural-Ecological Theory, and Resiliency Theory. LatCrit offers a theoretical framework by which to understand the success strategies used by the Mexican-American males who have earned a bachelor’s degree. LatCrit was conceived as an anti-subordination and anti-essentialist project that attempts to link theory with practice, scholarship with teaching, and the academy with the community (Bernal, 2002).

The attainment of higher education is a social justice and equity issue, and using the LatCrit frame, the four-level “vision” of Frank Valdes, perhaps the principal founder of the LatCrit movement, can be furthered:

1. The Production of Knowledge
2. The Advancement of Transformation
3. The Expansion and Connection of Struggle(s); and
Solórzano and Bernal (2001) suggested that using five LatCrit themes is a sound technique in gathering information. The five themes also reinforce Valdes’s (1996) four-level vision of LatCrit, which draws upon the experiences lived by students of color. The five themes applied to education from a LatCrit lens include the following:

1. The centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination, including gender and class discrimination;
2. challenging the traditional claims of the educational systems to objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity, arguing that these traditional paradigms act as camouflage to the self-interest, power, and privilege of dominant groups in the US;
3. a commitment to social justice and a liberator or transformative response to racial, gender, and class oppression leading to the elimination of racism, sexism, and poverty empowering underrepresented minority groups;
4. the recognition that the experiential knowledge of students of color is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination in the field of education viewing this knowledge as a strength and drawing explicitly on the lived experiences of the students of color by including storytelling, family history, biographies, scenarios, parables, and narratives; and
5. using interdisciplinary methods, race and racism in education are analyzed by placing them in both a historical and contemporary context, challenging the
ahistorical and unidisciplinary focus of most analyses of race and racism in education.

Cultural-Ecological Theory, developed by seminal authors John Ogbu and Herbert Simons (1998), guides the understanding of the success of Mexican-American males graduating with a bachelor’s degree. Cultural-Ecological Theory considers two factors that contribute to minority school performance: how society at large and the school (the system) treat minorities and how minority groups respond, based on their perceptions, to those treatments and to schooling (community forces). Cultural-Ecological Theory further suggests that differences in school performance between immigrant and nonimmigrant minorities are partly due to differences in their community forces (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, p. 156).

Moreover, Cultural-Ecological Theory puts forth the concept of voluntary and involuntary immigration status. Ogbu and Simons (1998) defined voluntary immigrants as minorities who have more or less willingly moved to the United States because they expect better opportunities and a better future than if they had stayed in their homeland; involuntary immigrants are minorities who have been conquered, colonized, or enslaved and came to the United States against their will.

A key element in Cultural-Ecological Theory that provides a greater lens by which to understand the factors contributing to these successful Mexican-American males is the study of minority students’ perceptions of and responses to schooling (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Understanding these successful students’ perceptions of school of their
experiences on campus and from their families may bring insight for the development of programs or services to serve more Mexican-American males currently enrolled in college.

For the purpose of this study, Ungar’s (2005) definition of resilience was used in analyzing the Mexican-American males who have earned their Bachelor’s degrees:

- The capacity of individuals to navigate their way to resources and maintain well-being;
- The capacity of individuals’ physical and social ecologies to provide those resources; and
- The capacity of individuals, their families, and communities to negotiate in culturally meaningful ways for those resources to be shared. (p. 3)

Ungar’s (2005) definition of resiliency dovetails concepts with the principles of Cultural-Ecological Theory such as culture, cultural identity, and support from the larger environment. A challenge facing Mexican-American students is managing and negotiating their cultural identities (De Leon, 2005). Coming from households with a strong Mexican cultural imprint and then transitioning to university life offers challenges in expectations, roles, and responsibilities. Ungar (2005) supported this study by offering a lens through which the study of individuals and families need to negotiate situations through culturally meaningful ways.
Literature-based Descriptions

The existing literature is fairly limited when specifically addressing the needs of Mexican-American males attaining a Bachelor’s degree from an accredited university. However, in accessing the existing literature regarding “Latino” characteristics in the successful attainment of a Bachelor’s degree a window into the perception Mexican-American males may have in their journey in higher education was provided. In examining the research of successful Mexican-American males who have earned a bachelor’s degree, several themes emerge.

Self-efficacy and student engagement were themes that surfaced in the literature review as qualities needed for Mexican-American males to graduate with a bachelor’s degree. Albert Bandura’s (2004) study found that a person’s self-efficacy is his or her ability to self-manage and make choices and decisions that can affect his or her life. Findings from the Bandura (2004) study supported the research of Green and Walker (2009) and Astin (1984) that illustrated student engagement was a good predictor of a student’s success in school.

Ayro (2012) used the qualitative case study methodology and found positive relationships at school can have an influence on academic success. The student needed to connect with faculty staff and other students so they felt there was a “caring” aspect to their success in college. Moreover, Ayro (2012) found that students excelled in their development of self-efficacy and ethnic identity when institutions of higher learning were “student centered.” Lastly, the successful men who graduated from college found the
institution of higher learning’s commitment to extracurricular programs added an element of belonging to a community.

De Leon’s (2005) qualitative study regarding Mexican males who successfully navigated through higher education discovered four key themes. First, was the experience the student had with his school and community. The quality of relationships students had with teachers had a profound impact on their attainment of a bachelor’s degree. The bonds formed with their teachers fortified engagement and persistence with the formal educational system. Secondly, family/Social Networks-Orientations & Educational Support Systems were found to assist these men in completing their bachelor’s degree. The family support from grandparents, parents, children, aunts/uncles, and cousins served as strong support groups to assist in the perseverance of earning a bachelor’s degree. Moreover, engagement with the college community provided guidance along the way with regard to attainment of a bachelor’s degree. Thirdly was resiliency, in that a bright future awaits for the student is the completion of a bachelor’s degree. Finally, managing their cultural identity was important. The participants of this study embraced American life while maintaining their Mexican heritage.

Moreover, the following findings have been found to be related to Latino/a college student performance or retention in college: First, the student must have a strong sense of belonging and cultural congruence at the university. A cultural congruence refers to the degree of fit between students’ values, beliefs, and the values and beliefs of their surrounding environment (Constantine et al., 2002; Gloria et al., 1999). Second, a
strong social network and perceived social support from friends, mentors, and family (familismo) along with fewer unsupportive interactions help Latinos succeed in their college experiences (Cole et al., 2007; Gloria & Robinson-Kurpius, 1996).

Zalaquett (2006) identified six factors that have an impact on student success, including family, education, a sense of accomplishment, friendships, community support, and school personnel. Mina, Cabrales, Juarez, and Rodriguez-Vasquez (2004) interviewed Latino students through a qualitative study and found that two important pieces of their culture leading to academic success are community and family connections. From the above studies, themes such as the importance of family, community/school support/teacher/mentoring, maintaining cultural identity, and resiliency have materialized from the literature in examining the success of Mexican-American males’ attainment of a bachelor’s degree.

**Methodology**

The methodology used for this study is the phenomenological style of qualitative research. According to Creswell (2009), the phenomenological approach strives to understand and explore the human experience through words and expressions of the participants.

According to Merriam (2009), “Phenomenology focuses on the experience itself and how experiencing something is transformed into consciousness” (p. 24). The means by which to understand the participants’ consciousness of success strategies and factors with regard to earning a bachelor’s degree was through personal interviews. Creswell
(2009) discussed that in the interview format, participants can provide historical information, and it provides indirect information filtered through the views of the interviewees.

Based on the information derived from the interviews, I transcribed the interviews and identified emergent themes based on the responses of the participants. “These themes of similar phenomena will become concepts, and the units of analysis for making comparisons” (Boudah, 2011, p. 233). The emergent themes were then coded using the open-coding strategy.

The qualitative research design is supported by the literature and effectively captures the experiences of the five participants of this study in their success strategies leading to a bachelor’s degree. This research design provides the opportunity for others to understand “how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 5).

Chapter 3 discusses the research methodology used for this study, which has been shaped by this literature review. Chapter 4 reports on the findings from the interviews. Finally, interpretations of those findings as well as recommendations for future research are shared in Chapter 5.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter describes the methodology for studying the phenomenon of Mexican-American males who have earned a bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution of higher education. The men may have been born in Mexico; however, they would have had to experience the K-12 United States educational system. The qualitative approach was selected as a means to learn about the participants in understanding their pathways to successfully earning a bachelor’s degree. The main headings for this chapter include: the research design, the role of the researcher, the research questions, the setting, population and sample of the participants, the data collection process and instrumentation tools, data analysis measures, and the measure used to protect the participants of this study.

Research Design

The research design is a phenomenological type of qualitative research. According to Creswell (2009), this type of research is described as understanding the essence of an experience about a phenomenon and also provides themes of meaning. In this type of study, the researcher finds testimonials about an individual’s experience of the topic and helps describe the meaning. The purpose of the study is to understand in more detail the dynamics contributing to how the five Mexican-American male
participants successfully earned a bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution of higher education.

Phenomenological research explores human experience through the words and expressions of participants (Creswell, 2009). Phenomenological research used in this study contributes to understanding the individual pathways taken by participants as solicited through open-ended questions. According to Merriam (2009), “Phenomenology focuses on the experience itself and how experiencing something is transformed into consciousness” (p. 24). Therefore, this phenomenological study engaged participants to understand their experiences in earning a bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution of higher education. The phenomenological approach allowed me to understand and gain insight into the participants’ perceptions as they journeyed to earning a bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution of higher education.

The phenomenological research process required me to set aside my experience in order to understand the participants in the study (Nieswiadomy, 1993). Furthermore, the phenomenological research design allowed me to use interviews to gather information about beliefs, perceptions, and worldviews of my participants. Furthermore, the phenomenological method lends itself to drawing from the three theoretical frames for this study: LatCrit, Cultural-Ecological theory, and the Resiliency theory.

Creswell (2009) discussed that in the interview format, participants can provide historical information and indirect information filtered through the views of the interviewees. The recognition of the experiential knowledge of students of color is
legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination (Bernal & Solorzano, 2001). “In the field of education, viewing this knowledge as strength and drawing explicitly on the lived experiences of the students of color by including storytelling, family history, biographies, scenarios, parables, and narratives” (Bernal & Solorzano, 2001, p. 314).

A key element in the Cultural-Ecological theory that allowed the study of the successful Mexican-American males was the ability to study minority students’ perceptions of and responses to schooling (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). When examining the perception of a participant, interviewing participants provides the means by which to delve deeper into the experiences of earning a bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution of higher education.

In learning more about the experiences of the successful Mexican-American males who have completed their Bachelor’s degrees, resiliency theory offers a useful perspective in framing the obstacles they faced in achieving their academic goals. Resiliency theory allows for the examination of the environment, the individual’s vulnerability, and the ability to overcome those forces. This theory provides an appropriate lens by which to understand the experiences of Mexican-American male Bachelor’s degree holders from accredited institutions of higher education.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher is the “primary instrument for data collection and analysis” (Merriam, 2009, p. 15). The researcher does not know the
participants outside the context of the study. The researcher engaged with the participants through two one-on-one interviews with each interview lasting 60 minutes. These sessions were conducted solely for the purpose of gathering data for this dissertation. In addition, the researcher served as the transcriber of the interviews, and the researcher was directly involved in the coding, analysis, validity and reliability (member checking), and presentation of the findings of the data for the purpose of the completion of this study. After transcribing the interviews, the researcher then analyzed and developed the identification and grouping of themes.

The researcher is not of Mexican cultural origins and may not have been able to identify first-hand with the lived experiences of the participants. His worldview may have served as a bias in this study and for validity and reliability purposes, the researcher, along with the dissertation committee, monitored the potential impact on the data collection and analysis. Because of this limitation, the researcher leaned on the previous relationships the participants had with my committee members to allow him access and a path to developing a comfortable rapport with the participants.

**Research Questions**

This study addressed the following research questions:

- **Research Question 1:** How do the family value system, family member roles, and expectations inform the Mexican-American male student’s experience with achieving a bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution of higher education?
• Research Question 2: How does one’s cultural identity inform one’s experience in attaining a bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution of higher education?

• Research Question 3: What were Mexican-American males’ experiences regarding the institutional academic and social resources available to Mexican-American men as they sought to attain a bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution of higher education?

**Setting, Population, and Sample**

The setting for this study was California State University, Sacramento (CSUS). Sacramento State is one of 23 universities in the California State University system and has approximately 28,000 students, with over 24,000 undergraduates. The population for this study was Mexican-American male graduate students over the age of 18. The men may have been born in Mexico; however, they must have had experience with the K-12 United States educational system.

The purposeful quota and actual sample for this study was five Mexican-American males who earned a Bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution of higher education. A typical sample size is from 5 to 25 individuals, all of who had direct experience with the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2007; Polkinghorne, 1989). The researcher received an approval letter from Dr. Susan Heredia (see Appendix A), Department Chair of Graduate and Professional Studies in Education at Sacramento State University to assist me in identifying and recruiting Mexican-American male graduate
students. The researcher worked with my Chair, Dr. Rose Borunda, and committee member, Dr. Porfirio M. Loeza, through the College of Education network. Additionally, committee member, Dr. Francisco Rodriguez, assisted with the identification and recruitment of prospective participants through his academic networks.

The researcher posted a flyer (see Appendix B) to solicit participants and contacted interested individuals via email to request if they would volunteer in the study. Subjects were selected by those meeting the criteria of being Mexican-American males who earned a bachelor’s degree, were 18 years or older, and were able to commit the time to complete both interviews. The researcher kept track of those who responded first and drew from this group. The participants were given a $25 Visa/MasterCard gift card for their time after the completion of the initial interview, the follow-up interview, and participation throughout the duration of this study.

**Data Collection and Instrumentation**

The central instrument for this research was the interview protocol (see Appendix C). The researcher conducted five 60-minute one-on-one initial interviews at the campus of Sacramento State or within a public setting at the convenience of the participants. According to Merriam (2009), “The phenomenological interview is the primary method of data collection” (p. 25). The interview questions were driven by the research questions and were used for the initial interview. The researcher used a digital audio recorder for the purposes of transcription. After the initial interview was conducted, the researcher transcribed the interview and sent those transcripts to the participants, a process Gibbs
(2007) suggests is a reliability procedure. The goal is to have the transcripts reviewed so they did not contain obvious mistakes during the transcription process. Participants were given the opportunity to review the transcripts after the interview as a reliability procedure and provided a two-week time period to reply with any comments or edits. After the two-week period or once the researcher received confirmation from the participant stating the transcript was accurate, the researcher scheduled a follow-up interview with the participant.

The purpose of the second interview with the participant was to learn about the reflections the participants had from their initial interview using the semi-structured interview approach. During the second interview, the researcher went through the member checking process (see Appendix D). “Member checking does not mean referring back to the raw transcripts to check for accuracy; instead, the researcher uses parts of the polished product, such as the themes from the participants, and gives them an opportunity to comment on the findings” (Creswell, 2009, p. 191). Once that interview was completed, the digital audio recorder assisted in the transcription of that interview. Participants were given the opportunity to review the transcripts after the interview as my reliability procedure and were given a two-week time period to reply with any comments or edits.

**Data Analysis**

Because of the phenomenological nature of the study, the researcher transcribed and read through the data and identified emergent themes from the interview responses of
the participants. The researcher looked for repetitive words, phrases, and concepts throughout the transcripts and classified those themes. The themes derived from the interviews were divided into categories related to the literature, theoretical frameworks, and research questions using the open coding strategy. “These themes of similar phenomena will become concepts and the units of analysis for making comparisons” (Boudah, 2011, p. 233). A table was developed to display the themes found from participants who earned a bachelor’s degree.

As part of the data analysis portion of this study, the pledge to strengthen the validity and reliability of this study was critical (Creswell, 2009). Validity describes the accuracy of the findings and reliability which means that the study can be duplicated regardless of the researcher conducting the study. As mentioned earlier, after the data were collected, the researcher used the member checking process with the participants. Furthermore, the researcher used the triangulation strategy to authenticate the validity and reliability of the data. Triangulation uses multiple sources of data to examine evidence, justify themes, and crosscheck findings. The researcher drew from the dissertation committee members as a third party to review the data collection and analysis for accuracy purposes.

**Protection of Participants**

Sacramento State University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the research protocol for this study in October 2013. The purpose of submitting my research protocol to the IRB committee at Sacramento State before interviewing the participants
was to ensure the protection and safety of the participants, the researcher, the dissertation committee, and the University. As part of the approval process, the IRB approved the research procedures, interview questions, and the necessary consent forms before any data was collected for this study.

Each prospective participant was contacted by e-mail to determine if he would like to volunteer in the research study. Once verbal or e-mail permission was received, the researcher followed up with a written consent form (see Appendix E). If the participant did not bring a completed signed copy of the form, the researcher brought a blank form for him to fill out and sign before beginning with the interview. Moreover, it was completely voluntary for the participants to participate in this study and they had the opportunity to decline participation in the interview/study at any time. A $25 Visa/MasterCard stipend was awarded for the participation of this study. However, to receive the $25 Visa/MasterCard stipend, participants had to conduct the initial interview, the follow-up interview, and complete the study through its fruition.

Before each interview, the participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time with no penalties, avoid a question they did not feel comfortable answering, and that their identity would be protected. Participants were asked if they had any questions or concerns regarding the interview questions and the study. Participants were given the opportunity to review the transcripts after the interview, which constitutes the member-checking process. Each participant was given a two-week time period to reply with any comments or edits.
The transcription of the data is kept in a secure location and the audio recordings will be deleted after completion of the study. No identifiable information was credited by the participant’s name. Furthermore, the study did not cause physical, psychological, social, or economic harm to participants; hence, there was not a conflict of interest between the researcher and the participants.
Chapter 4

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Introduction

This research studied the success factors and contributing characteristics of Mexican-American males who have earned a bachelor’s degree. The stories and perceptions of five Mexican-American males who had earned bachelor’s degrees are presented in this chapter. The dissertation committee and staff members referred the participants in the study to the researcher through CSUS.

Organization of the Findings

This chapter presents the following ideas: the process by which the data were gathered and recorded, the evidence of the use of qualitative data, the themes derived from the findings, and a profile of each of the participants as they relate to the themes. The data generated from this research study were gathered through interview questions (see Appendix C) driven by the research questions of this study. The researcher listened closely as participants described their everyday experiences related to the phenomenon (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). The three research questions were as follows:

- Research Question #1: How do the family value system, family member roles, and expectations inform the Mexican-American male student’s experience with achieving a bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution of higher education?
- Research Question #2: How does your cultural identity inform your experience in attaining a bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution of higher education?
- Research Question #3: What has been your experience regarding the institutional, academic, and social resources available to Mexican-American men as they seek to attain a bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution of higher education?

The initial interviews were recorded on a digital recorder, transcribed by the researcher, and were then sent to the participants for accuracy checks. The goal was to have the transcripts reviewed by the participants so they could identify obvious errors that may have been made during the transcription process. After all the interviews were completed and the participants agreed the content was accurate, the researcher analyzed the data. Themes began to emerge from the data received from the participants as they reflected on the research questions.

A second set of interview questions were crafted (see Appendix D) based on the themes that emerged from the initial interviews. The researcher scheduled a second interview that lasted approximately one hour. Those interviews were recorded on a digital recorder, transcribed by the researcher, and sent to the participants for their approval of information accuracy.

The purpose of the second interview was to learn about the reflections the participants had from their initial interview. The researcher wanted to gain greater
insight as to what the participants learned about themselves from the previous interview and to highlight common experiences from the sample. Moustakas (1994) wrote about asking what the participants experienced and the contexts or situations in which they experienced it. A semi-structured interview approach was utilized at this point. Questions were developed to clarify individuals’ responses and to delve deeper into the themes that emerged from the first round of interviews. A member checking process was initiated. “Member checking does not mean taking back the raw transcripts to check for accuracy; instead, the researcher presents data, such as themes, gathered from the participants for their observations” (Creswell, 2009, p. 191).

The data gathered from the two participant interviews were used to identify and support the themes for this study. The coding generates a small number of themes or categories, perhaps five to seven for a research study (Boudah, 2011). The recurring themes emergent from the participants fall under seven categories: Immigration, High School Preparedness and Programs, Social/Family Support in College, Parental Understanding of Expectations of College on their Sons, The Role of Counseling in the Student’s Success, The Management of Culture Shock from Attending a University, and Formal Programs in College in which the Students Participated.

The first category, immigration, examines each of the participants’ paths toward the United States educational system. Their migration to the United States provided perceptual context as to how they viewed their educational opportunities in the United States. “Voluntary immigrant minorities are those who have more or less willingly
moved to the United States because they expect better opportunities than they had in their homelands or places of origin” (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, p. 164). “Involuntary nonimmigrant minorities are those who have been conquered colonized or enslaved” (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, p. 164). Two subthemes emerged in this category. A subtheme is a smaller division of data with characteristics shared within the larger category (Boudah, 2011). The first subtheme is the challenge of language acquisition, and the second subtheme under migration is related to the participant’s motivation in achieving his educational goals. Language acquisition served as the biggest barrier to success for each of the participants of this study. Nonetheless, their personal motivation to succeed in the United States served as a motivating factor in earning their bachelor’s degree. Part of their motivation entailed sacrificing immediate gratification in order to focus on behaviors that led to the possibility of better futures. This section clarifies the participant’s motivation to maximize the opportunities presented in the United States in earning their bachelor’s degree.

The second theme, high school preparedness and programs, examines how the participants’ high school experiences shaped their development as they entered into university life. Each year, nearly 300,000 Hispanics graduate from high school, yet fewer than 60,000 will earn a bachelor’s degree (Fry, 2004). Formal programs influenced the development of the participants’ preparedness to succeed at the university level toward their attainment of a bachelor’s degree. A subtheme all the participants discussed in their interview when discussing their high school experience was the presence of
gangs. The participants shared how they navigated around gang life and stayed focused toward a college education. This section explores how programs in high school shaped the participants’ preparedness on their academic path toward earning a bachelor’s degree.

The third theme of social/family support in college offers the importance of support for the participants by family and friends who influenced their attainment of a bachelor’s degree. Two subthemes emerged in this category: the development of a peer group on campus and their extended families’ perception of their college attainment aspirations. This section highlights the influence of relationships from family and friends on the participants’ completion of a bachelor’s degree.

The fourth theme is parental understanding of the expectations of college placed on their sons. The parents of these men who earned a bachelor’s degree did not fully understand the daily demands placed on their sons with regard to succeeding in college. Fifty-two percent of Latino parents (with children 18 years old or younger) hope their child gets a college degree (Baldassare et al., 2010). Parents wanted their sons to succeed but did not know how to specifically help. A subtheme that emerged from the fourth theme is the role of other siblings in college success. Oftentimes, either the participant or a sibling was the first in the family to attend a university. Through the process of learning from the first child attending college, the parents began to understand the demands of higher education, therefore becoming more informed supporters of their children.
The fifth theme is the role of counseling and academic advising in attaining a bachelor’s degree. Supportive relationships, particularly with the encouragement from school personnel, counselors, and other adults, serve as a protective factor in students succeeding in school (Johnson, 1997). Two subthemes that emerged illustrated the influences of high school and college counseling. This section highlights the critical role counselors have in the success of a participant’s goal of entering college and eventually earning a bachelor’s degree.

The sixth theme is the participants’ management of culture shock from attending a university. The transition from high school to the university required more of the participants, and they needed to grow to meet the demands of college life. Three subthemes emerged: the student’s social and academic adjustment, moving away from the family home to attend college, and the adjustments of their roles with their families while attending college. This section examines how resilient the participants were in adapting to their new environment in the face of adversity.

The seventh theme consists of the formal programs offered by the college in which the subjects participated. Two subthemes materialized from this category: managing their cultural identity through the various campus programs and instrumental university officials who impacted the participants. Many colleges aim to improve retention by increasing students’ academic and social integration into the campus environment; the idea reflects the influence of Tinto’s (1993) theories of college student departure. The formal programs on campus provided a necessary structure that helped
the participants’ transition and acculturation to a university community, leading them toward a bachelor’s degree.

The five participants were chosen because they successfully earned their bachelor’s degrees. They also had a strong desire to share their stories so more Mexican-American males can succeed in college and be positive contributors to society. Many of their stories, adversities, and paths toward their bachelor’s degree are similar yet distinct and relatable to the Mexican-American male experience. The participants’ names are Adan, Osvaldo, Jose, Andres, and Ivan. A brief introduction of the participants is presented followed by how their stories supported the emerging themes from the findings of this study.

**Adan**

Adan was born in Mexico and moved to Coachella Valley in southern California when he was nine years old. In the town of Coachella, Spanish was the primary language. Adan was one of four children, consisting of himself, one older brother, a younger brother, and a younger sister. His father earned a degree in Mexico and his mother went through elementary school. Adan’s role in the family was to follow the lead of his older brother and his father and to be a good example for his younger siblings. After earning his degree, Adan’s father worked in the political arena in Mexico. A few years later, their family moved to the United States for a better future. Since moving to the United States, Adan’s father has worked in the fields with no health benefits or raises.
Adan and his siblings also worked in the fields from their arrival to the United States through their high school years.

Education was a priority in their household. Conversely, while Adan attended high school, he was on a hospitality career track and not the college-bound track. In addition, speaking Spanish in high school was appropriate, slowing his progress in gaining command of the English language. Gangs were present in Adan’s high school, but he credits his strong family for his non-association with gangs. In contrast, members of his extended family did participate in gang activities.

After high school, Adan was accepted to the University of California (UC) at Davis, 10 hours away from home and became a first-generation college student. He was the only sibling to move more than two hours away from home to attend college. After transferring to UC Davis, Adan needed to adjust to speaking more English on a regular basis. Speaking English in classes with teachers and staff and other students proved to be the largest adjustment and obstacle to Adan obtaining his bachelor’s degree.

Adan’s poor command of the English language led him to start college as an engineering major, switch to psychology, and then switch to Spanish where he earned his degree. Adan selected Spanish as a major because he had a stronger command of the language and could focus on the course content instead of understanding English. An influential person in Adan’s academic development was his then girlfriend who worked with him on his translation of class material and encouraged him to stay in college and earn his degree during difficult times. While at UC Davis, Adan was a member of the
Gamma Zeta Alpha fraternity. The Gamma Zeta Alpha fraternity was established for the purposes of uniting and directing the promotion of the Latino culture and ethnic origins via community interaction and the educational system. Adan’s fraternity affiliation allowed him to make friends, maintain his cultural identity, and build a sense of community and connection to the university while earning his bachelor’s degree.

All of Adan’s siblings graduated from college with a bachelor’s degree from universities in Southern California. Adan’s parents still live in Southern California and continue to work in the fields. Through Adan’s perseverance and resilience, he later earned a Master’s degree in Career Counseling and serves as a counselor at CSUS.

Immigration

Adan’s father graduated from college in Mexico; however, he did not see opportunities for him to support his family there. He came to the United States and worked in the agricultural fields and has been in the same position with no raises or any health insurance since. Adan communicates the value of education as it was a motivating factor for his family’s move to the United States, “He had to migrate here but he did have a college degree and knew the importance of education here in the United States.” Adan’s father believed life for his family would be better in the United States than life in Mexico.

Adan’s father was working in the fields while the rest of the family was still in Mexico. Soon the rest of the family made its way across the border to start a new life, but that journey was not an easy journey and it impacted the whole family. The family
made its way across the border, which took Adan’s mother three days to walk. During this walk, she suffered and did her best to avoid being detected and captured. The children walked through the same border opening but it took them only one day to complete the trip. The children needed to find a place to sleep and wait for their mother to arrive safely. Adan recalled how nervous he was about his mother’s safety and the safety of him and his siblings. “While waiting for our mom to cross the border I realized the sacrifices my parents were making for us to have a future. When things get difficult I think about that experience and the opportunity my parents gave me to succeed in the United States.” Eventually his mother reunited with her children and they made their way to Coachella Valley where they joined Adan’s father. The Coachella Valley is predominately populated with Mexican-American families and Spanish is the common language spoken.

**Language challenge.** “The language barrier was the most difficult obstacle in my journey towards a bachelor’s degree.” Adan’s father knew the importance of an education here in the United States and he knew that if his children spoke English and went to college, his family would have better opportunities than he did in Mexico.

While living in the Coachella Valley, Spanish was the predominate language spoken in the community. Moreover, in high school, speaking Spanish with teachers, counselors, and administrators was acceptable. Adan said:

For me coming from a place where everything was in Spanish, including high school, made the transition (to the university) harder. You take English 1, 2, 3, 4, but the professor knew Spanish so it was easy to say “Qué dice aquí,” or, “No entiendo? Qué pasó comó estás?”
It was not until Adan attended UC Davis that he really had to learn English. Adan gained English experience when communicating with other students, professors, and being out on the town.

Adan’s poor command of the English language was his biggest barrier in his aspirations of earning a bachelor’s degree. Moreover, it was because of his weak language skills that he changed his major twice (engineering and psychology) before sticking with the Spanish major. UC Davis is on the quarter system so the academic pace is quick. Adan had difficulties keeping up with the rigor of his classwork because of his troubles with comprehending English. For example, Adan needed to take the introductory course in psychology three times because he could not keep up with the readings, exams, and assignments. It was customary for him to have to read and re-read the material five times with a dictionary to understand the material. This experience became increasingly frustrating for Adan because it was language and not intelligence getting in the way of his education. Despite his efforts, he became academically disqualified at UC Davis.

A seminal moment in Adan’s college journey came when he met with an advisor who point blank asked him, “What are you doing here?” When Adan asked for clarification because he did not understand the question, the advisor did not understand what he was doing at the university due to his poor grades and poor command of the language. Adan felt terrible and did not feel he deserved to be in college. The alternative of dropping out of college became a reality.
Adan was lucky to have the support of a then girlfriend who was also born in Mexico. She was more acculturated in the United States. She spoke English more, watched American television, and listened to English radio more frequently than Adan. She helped Adan with his studies by translating course content, showing him campus resources, and adjusting to university life. Through her support and drive for Adan to graduate college, she guided Adan to change his major to Spanish. Because Adan had a better command of the Spanish language, he could now focus on the course content in studying Spanish culture and its literature. Adan reflected on his past growing up in Coachella Valley, “I wish I would have spoken English or assimilated a lot more to the culture of the United States in high school.”

Motivation and future orientation. Adan is a highly motivated person who understood the sacrifices his parents made for him and his siblings to earn a bachelor’s degree and strive for a better life here in the United States. Adan often reflected on a quote his father would tell him, “This is the country of opportunities. Paiz de las oportunidades.”

The motivation for Adan to succeed in education was supported by his father. For a brief time in high school, Adan dropped out and worked in the fields. The fields offered Adan an opportunity to make money and help the family financially. Adan could not see beyond the fields; however, his father did. Adan’s father worked hard to persuade Adan to go back to school and complete his high school education and start college. Adan’s father scheduled a meeting with the principal so they could both talk to
Adan about the importance of his education and his future. Adan credits that experience as a turning point in his education and an opportunity to think about his future more seriously. Adan believes if it were not for the perseverance of his father and his high school principal, he would have never earned his Master’s degree.

Adan’s father instilled a future-oriented mindset with his children. Even though Adan’s father has a college degree from Mexico, his work life is in the agricultural fields. He wanted a better life for his children. All of Adan’s siblings have earned bachelor’s degrees and are working professional jobs in their respective fields. Adan’s parents have a great source of pride in their children’s futures, knowing their children do not have to work in the fields because they earned their college degrees. Adan learned to live with this thought, “When you don’t have to work hard for something you don’t see the value in it. When you see that value, you can say you earned it.”

**High School Preparedness and Programs**

When Adan started at UC Davis, he quickly realized he was not prepared for the academic rigors expected of him. At Adan’s high school, there were two tracks in which the students were placed: the academic track and the academy track. Adan was placed in the academy track geared toward a career in the hospitality industry.

The academic program prepared students to move toward the local universities such as University of California Riverside or California State University at San Bernardino. Though his high school had an AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) program in which Adan’s older brother participated, Adan’s path was set
for him to graduate high school and start a job in the hospitality industry after graduation. At the time of the study, Adan was a counselor at CSUS and reflected, “I can say that the system was against me getting a college degree by being placed in the Academy track.” However, at the time, the academy track offered opportunities for Adan so he would not have to work in the fields.

Adan participated in the hospitality program academy, which was gearing him to work at the resorts in Palm Springs. This program offered Adan options because he was not sure he would be going to college despite the support from his family. Every Tuesday and Thursday, the program would take students to the resorts in Palm Springs to work. Students were required to dress in professional attire and for their work they received a stipend and networking opportunities. Adan held positions in security, inside the kitchen, and as a pool attendant. The influence of his older brother who was attending California State University, San Bernardino and the high school’s career counseling center moved him toward a university pathway.

**Presence of gangs in high school.** Gangs were very active in Adan’s hometown and high school. Adan was tied to his Mexican culture, did not know much English, and was not integrating the United States culture. He saw that many of his classmates in the community were rebelling against the cultural norms and came from single-family homes where drugs were available in the neighborhood. Adan observed that since they had more “freedom,” they were the ones more inclined to join a gang for a sense of independence and belonging.
The home environment provided a buffer to the influence of gangs in Adan’s development. “I wasn’t scared of gangs, I didn’t see the purpose, and my whole family was stronger.” Adan further elaborated:

I didn’t have freedom. I lived on a ranch with two houses. I didn’t walk to the neighbors or down to the corner store or the street gangs. The people who live in the country don’t get involved in gangs because we are more tied to the family. Because of where Adan lived, he did not feel the pressure of his peers or his friends. In addition to having a stable home environment, Adan’s parents stressed the importance of education, which kept Adan and his siblings on a positive track.

The influence of gangs did touch Adan’s cousins. Adan reflected that his cousins took a road of dropping out of high school, joining a gang, and going to prison. “They did not understand and still don’t understand the importance of education.” Watching his cousins reminded him to stay on a positive path with his life.

Social/Family Support in College

Adan took a radically different approach than his siblings and cultural norms regarding where he went to college. Adan went to UC Davis, which was 10 hours away from home, to start a new life whereas his siblings went to college within two hours away to stay closer to home. Adan focused on life at the university so he would not be so ingrained with his family’s life back in Coachella Valley. There was still an expectation from his family that he help his parents. Often he would have to use money from his college loans to help his family with living expenses. “The reason I did not go home much, all of the cultural beliefs I did not believe in. I kind of rebelled against them and to
avoid conflict I did not go home much because of the cultural norms.” Adan stayed at school because of the freedom he enjoyed of doing and going where he wanted, when he wanted. He did not have that freedom at home. Adan is currently a father and as he moves forward with his life with his son, he does not expect his son to follow the cultural norm of the children financially helping the parents.

Another source of social support that helped Adan earn his bachelor’s degree was his relationship with his then girlfriend. Adan’s then girlfriend offered guidance, support (academically and emotionally), and companionship during Adan’s time at the university. Adan also belonged to a fraternity where his fraternity brothers offered friendship and support in navigating through university life.

The development of a peer group on campus. The two primary contributors to Adan’s success in earning his bachelor’s degree were his relationship with his girlfriend and the members of his fraternity. Adan’s girlfriend was born in Mexico and went to high school at Delano High School. She provided care and support for Adan as a person and a scholar. His girlfriend worked with him on his studies, tutored him, and encouraged him to complete his classes. Many times during Adan’s undergraduate experience he wanted to quit, go back home, and work to earn money. Yet, Adan’s girlfriend would not allow him to take that path and pushed him to complete his courses and eventually graduate with a bachelor’s degree. “I credit my then girlfriend as the person who made a difference and if it weren’t for her, I would not have graduated from college.”
Adan was drawn into joining the Gamma Zeta Alpha fraternity because of its Latino-based membership. The university Adan attended had a large Euro-American and Asian student population so he gravitated to other Latinos for a sense of belonging to the community. A strong reason Adan befriended other Latinos was because of the “feeling” and sense of understanding they had for each other. Yet, the Latino-based fraternity did not socialize very much with other fraternities or sororities that were not Latino-based. The members of his fraternity provided emotional and academic support. It was common through the fraternity membership for them to exchange information regarding what classes to take with which professor as well as to guide one another through the academic scheduling process. Adan was particularly proud of one of his fraternity brothers and his then girlfriend who had recently graduated from medical school.

**Extended family’s perception of college aspirations.** Adan’s immediate family were outliers within their extended family in that a college education was an important value to be achieved. Adan’s father earned a bachelor’s degree in Mexico, something his brothers and sisters did not achieve. Education was not a priority in Adan’s extended family’s life and their opinion was clear to Adan and his family.

As the only family in the extended family who pursued college educations, they were often ridiculed by other family members including their grandfather who would say, “You are wasting your time, you are lazy, you don’t want to work.” The extended family expected they work instead of study. Adan’s grandfather preferred that Adan and his siblings work and that strained their relationship with their grandfather. Adan’s
grandfather gave his children and their families who were working more attention than Adan’s family who studied. Adan’s grandfathers message to Adan’s family was, “You are wasting your time and you will be just like your dad, you will do nothing, even if you get your degree you will be like you dad working in the fields.” Adan’s extended family would always compare Adan and his siblings to Adan’s father, “You will graduate, get all this education and still be working in the fields. He’s nothing.” This was a message difficult for Adan to hear from his extended family. Nonetheless, despite the fact that Adan’s formal education from Mexico did not translate into greater opportunity for him in the United States, he had faith that his children earning an education in the United States would ultimately serve them well and ensure they would have prospects that would take them beyond the agricultural fields. He persisted in his vision of future orientation despite the need for immediate income that could have been gained from his children’s labor.

The negative opinions of education were present when Adan was on academic probation and wanted to drop out of college. Adan felt he was lazy; he was not working and not making money. Adan spent five years to earn his bachelor’s degree and at times he felt he was wasting time by not working and being able to help the family financially. It was challenging because his extended family was out doing physical labor and Adan would sit in class, sit and study, and sit and socialize with friends. Adan was conflicted as his two worlds collided. Adan saw this conflict with his Latino classmates and instead of staying and completing their degrees, they quit, moved back home, and made money
for the family in the fields. Oftentimes, Adan would hear his friends say, “School is not for me.” They then abandoned their education.

As the years have passed, Adan and all of his siblings have graduated with bachelor’s degrees and are now working professionals. As Adan’s extended family witnessed his family’s success, his extended family is reevaluating their views on education. Adan’s extended family now sees that with an education you can get a better paying job that is less physically demanding. His extended family now encourages their younger siblings and cousins to go to college. Because of Adan’s and his siblings’ successes, their extended family no longer perceives education as a joke or a badge of laziness; education is a vehicle for a better life.

**Parental Understanding of Expectations of College on their Sons**

Adan did not believe his parents understood the expectations college life had on him. Adan’s parents worked hard to be supportive but did not understand what it took on a day-to-day basis in order to succeed in college. They expected good grades but they did not understand his language barrier, his first-generation barrier, his cultural barrier, or adjusting to whole other world of college life. Adan’s parents did not understand the outside of class study hours required to graduate.

Even though Adan’s father graduated from college in Mexico, he did not understand the first-generation struggles his children endured because he was not well versed on how the educational system worked in the United States. Because Adan’s parents did not speak English, they were unable to talk to Adan about getting counseling,
tutoring, or utilizing programs for minority students. Adan’s parents wanted their children to go to college but did not know how to help them get through college.

Adan’s parents understood the importance of a bachelor’s degree and had expectations that Adan would go to work and start making money. Although when Adan announced he was going to continue his studies for a Master’s degree, his parents did not see the value of graduate school. They did not support his decision to continue his formal education but, in retrospect, are proud of their son and his accomplishments.

The role of other siblings in college success. Adan’s older brother was very influential in him attending college. Adan’s brother was a year older so Adan was able to observe his older brother when he went through the process of applying to college. Adan knew he had to apply and follow in the footsteps of his older brother when it was his turn to apply for college. Adan observed college social life when visiting his brother on the weekends during his first year at California State University, San Bernardino, but not the college academic life demands. Adan had an idea as to what to expect socially from college but not academically. While Adan observed, his older brother was figuring out how to navigate through the higher educational system.

Adan’s siblings received guidance from Adan’s older brother in how to navigate through higher education. On the other hand, when it came time for Adan’s sister (youngest sibling) to go to college, it required all the siblings to discuss the matter with their parents. “In the Mexican culture men have more freedom than women, and my
sister had a strong role in daily family life doing the cooking and cleaning from an early age.”

Adan and his brothers understood how college can shape and mold a person; it was two different worlds from Coachella. The brothers influenced their parents to let their younger sister attend California State University, San Marcos. After one year at San Marcos their sister blossomed and developed her own identity and independence.

All of Adan’s siblings earned bachelor’s degrees as first-generation college students overcoming long odds. The oldest brother graduated from California State University, San Bernardino, Adan from UC Davis, his younger brother from Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, and the youngest sister from California State University, San Marcos. In addition, they are all working professionals after graduating from college with their bachelor’s degrees.

**The Role of Counseling in the Student’s Success**

High school and college counseling played a significant role in Adan’s success of earning his bachelor’s degree. Though Adan’s interactions with his counselors were not always “positive,” they offered a platform for him to go in the positive direction toward his degree. Adan did not form a personal relationship with his high school counselors. Conversely, while at UC Davis as a Spanish major, his advisors became mentors in his success. Adan’s experiences with academic counselors inspired him to become a counselor at the university level after earning his Master’s degree.
High school. Adan was placed on a vocational track when entering high school. The school placed students in a college track or a vocational track. “It was not until my senior year that I wandered into the career center at school and became interested in looking at colleges and making friends at the center. I saw these other students filling out applications and looking at schools and I decided to do the same.” In meeting the staff, they helped him with applications and Adan eventually got accepted to the University of California at Davis.

A specific counselor was instrumental in helping Adan in becoming exposed to what UC Davis may be like. Once Adan was accepted at UC Davis, the counselor arranged for a trip for him to fly up to Davis for campus tours. The trip to Davis was Adan’s first visit outside of Mexico and Coachella Valley.

College. Advising made a strong impression on Adan with regard to his path of earning a bachelor’s degree. Adan struggled academically due to language barriers and the culture shock of the expectations at the university level. He spoke to an advisor, and the advisor asked, “What are you doing here? What are you doing here at Davis? You should not be here. You should have gone to a community college.” Those comments were difficult for Adan to hear because he needed help instead of being directed to leave. That encounter still had an impression on Adan.

After the stinging meeting with his advisor, Adan was not inclined to ask for assistance from the other resources available on campus, afraid he would be ridiculed again. When Adan struggled in his psychology classes, he would not ask for help from
his teachers for the fear of rejection. “I was afraid that my teachers would agree with my advisors and think I was not smart enough to be at the university.” Adan recognized his then girlfriend could offer support and assistance with his academics to help him earn his bachelor’s degree. Adan felt the institution let him down. He learned students were expected to find resources and create their own schedule on their own through the use of the college catalog. In addition, he learned that the combination of the college catalog and the use of the department chair were his vehicle to successfully navigate through his bachelor’s degree.

When Adan changed his major to Spanish, his experience and knowledge of counseling took hold. Adan began to reach out to his professors with confidence and they became mentors. If Adan had questions, his advisors would help him on an individual basis. Adan no longer felt he would be rejected but felt like a member of the university community. Because of his difficult experience in working with counselors at the university level, it inspired him to become a counselor at the university level. When working with his current students, he often thinks back to that difficult conversation he had with his counselor and treats his students with empathy, respect, and compassion.

**The Management of Culture Shock from Attending a University**

“Two different worlds,” is how Adan described his experience transitioning from life in Coachella Valley to life in Davis, California. Adan drove himself from Coachella to Davis using a map, as he had never been past Los Angeles. When he arrived at Davis, Adan witnessed other incoming freshman with their families moving into dormitories
with great excitement. Adan was alone. Adan’s parents could not make the trip to see
their son off to college; they needed to continue working so they could pay the rent and
other bills. It was difficult for Adan to see other students’ parents so involved in their
education and he felt alone. The primary adjustments Adan made when transitioning
from high school to college was integrating himself socially with other Mexican-
Americans and selecting a major in which Spanish was the primary language.

The student’s social and academic adjustment. At UC Davis, the prominent
cultural groups are Euro-Americans and Asians. Adan grew up in a community where
Latinos were the majority. Because of the small Mexican population on campus, Latinos
tended to gravitate to each other. Meeting other Latinos on campus helped Adan adjust
socially at the university. During Adan’s second year at UC Davis, he joined the Gamma
Zeta Alpha fraternity, a Latino interest fraternity emphasizing the success of Latino males
in higher education. Adan struggled socially even though his friends were Mexican,
because they did not speak much Spanish and Adan’s English was limited. Adan did not
socialize much with students outside his cultural group.

Adan’s major source of support and a key to his success was the relationship he
had with his then girlfriend. She was also of Mexican descent but had a stronger
command of the English language and the skills to meet the demands of being a
university student. Adan acknowledged her influence in his success and said, “She
should have gotten a degree in Spanish with the help she provided for me.”
“The biggest adjustment I needed to make academically was to develop my English skills.” Despite taking four years of English in high school, his skillset was not proficient enough for university-level work. In addition, Adan felt his high school did not expect much from him, whereas at the university level it was expected he excel in his studies. To close the gap in language skills, Adan needed to take linguistics and remedial classes. Yet he struggled with his studies until he changed his major to Spanish. The reading requirements proved to be overwhelming as well as the fast pace of the quarter system. Adan’s high school experience in which he took non-college preparatory academy track did not prepare him to be a student at the university level.

**Moving away from the family home.** Adan took a different approach than his siblings when selecting a college. Adan chose to move 10 hours away from home to attend school, whereas his siblings attended school within a two-hour radius of their hometown. The differences between life in Coachella and Davis were huge. While at Davis, Adan had the freedom to establish his own identity whereas at home he filled the role of abiding by his father and older brother. At home, he had to follow cultural norms with which he did not agree with, so his visits home became less frequent and he became more detached from his home life in Coachella. Living independently from his family allowed Adan to discover himself and develop his own identity. Adan felt free to explore the richness of diversity in other parts of California because of his freedom.

Adan believes living away from home was a major reason why he graduated from college because it forced him to focus on his academic and social life because life at the
university demanded it. If Adan lived at home while attending college, he believes he would have quit because of the need for him to work and help out financially to support the family. As a counselor, he strongly recommends his students live on or near campus so they are close to the college community and resources to help them succeed.

**Adjustments to their roles with their families.** Adan was the second child with an older brother and a younger brother and sister. Adan’s older brother was second in command while his father was the leader, though a large responsibility was placed on the younger sister to help with the cooking and cleaning for the household. Adan was expected to work at an early age to help support the family, which he did working in the fields from the time he arrived in the United States through high school.

When Adan moved 10 hours away for school, he was no longer available to work and help financially for the family back home, but it was still expected. When Adan received student loans, he explained, “You are expected to pay your tuition, your housing, your books, and you are still expected to help the family, whatever is left, $500 or a $1,000, you were still expected to help.” The financial burden was difficult for Adan to manage but often collectively with his siblings they helped the family. It was expected that when Adan completed his bachelor’s degree he would go to work immediately and help the family financially and not pursue his Master’s degree.

As Adan developed his own identity, he began to detach himself from his life in Coachella and the cultural norms that accompanied that life. Adan moved on with his education and earned a Master’s degree in Career Counseling and is working as a
counselor at CSUS. Moreover, Adan is exploring his options for obtaining a doctorate degree while serving as a role model for his son.

**Formal Programs in College in which the Students Participated**

Adan participated in a summer bridge program before entering his freshman year at UC Davis. The summer bridge concept involves an intensive experience at the university to prepare the student for the upcoming college experience. Moreover, the program highlights the support for the student and offers counseling for students regarding the various aspects of college life. After the initial meeting during the summer, Adan felt alone and did not recall the information provided by the university.

The other program in which Adan participated while at UC Davis was the Latino fraternity called Gamma Zeta Alpha. The fraternity provided a social network that offered social and academic support to help members with the rigors of university life. Adan discussed scheduling with his fraternity brothers, and the highs and lows of being a college student.

**Managing their cultural identity through the various campus programs.**

Through the Gamma Zeta Alpha fraternity, Adan was able to maintain his Mexican-American cultural identity. Gamma Zeta Alpha is a Latino-based fraternity that emphasizes Latino culture and the success of Latino males in higher education. The reason Adan got involved with the fraternity was because the prominent cultural groups on campus were Whites and Asians. “I had not grown up with these populations and I felt like an immediate outsider.” Adan’s primary social group on campus was the other
students with Mexican ancestry. Joining the fraternity his second year helped him build a sense of community and connection to the university, which played a pivotal role in graduating from college.

Though in Adan’s fraternity, a couple of his fraternity brothers became academically disqualified, went home, and did not graduate from college. Adan believes his fraternity brothers were not prepared for the rigors of being a college student. As first-generation students, they were not utilizing the campus resources to help them succeed in college. Conversely, Adan has had fraternity brothers who did graduate and have recently graduated from medical school. Participation in the Gamma Zeta Alpha fraternity provided a vehicle for Adan in maintaining his Mexican-American cultural identification roots while earning his bachelor’s degree.

**Instrumental university officials who impacted the men.** An instrumental university official who impacted Adan’s higher educational experience was an advisor at UC Davis. During his time there, Adan was struggling with his classes due to his poor command of the English language and was not familiar with the available student support resources or the fast pace of his classes. His advisor simply asked, “What are you doing here?” The advisor further advised Adan he should attend a community college if he wanted to complete his higher educational goals. The interaction with his advisor made it difficult for Adan to ask for help from the university because he felt like he did not belong.
When Adan changed his major to Spanish, he began to connect more with his professors and the department chair, and they became mentors to him. Any questions he had about class scheduling or course content he could ask his professors and the department chair for that guidance. The key link between Adan and his success with the new major was the shattering of the language barrier that held him back with the other majors (engineering and psychology) Adan attempted. Adan’s professors and department chair inspired confidence in Adan’s intellect and embraced his strength in the Spanish language.

Adan leaned more on his then girlfriend for tutoring and academic and emotional support when he did not feel the institutional support early in his university experience. Adan reflected on that pivotal experience with his academic advisor:

I wish I had an advisor of Mexican descent because they would have understood where I was coming from (the culture), they would have understood the language, and they would have pointed me toward the resources I needed to succeed.

That seminal experience in which he perceived insensitivity and lack of support from his advisor inspired Adan to pursue a career in counseling at CSUS. He works with all students but helps Mexican-American students with heightened empathy and compassion.

**Osvaldo**

Osvaldo was born in Mexico and came to the United States when he was 13 years old. “I was a self-motivated student who needed little discipline from my parents to do my homework when I was growing up.” Learning the language was the biggest obstacle in Osvaldo’s academic progress but he had cousins who spoke English and helped him
with homework. Though many of his cousins helped Osvaldo with homework, they did not earn bachelor’s degrees. Osvaldo has a younger brother, and Osvaldo provided leadership for him as he went to school and graduated with an Associate’s degree and a bachelor’s degree. Osvaldo’s father earned a degree in Mexico and earned a doctorate in homeopathic and allopathic medicine through the British Institute of Homeopathy in London via mail correspondence. Osvaldo’s mother went through middle school in Mexico. Similar to Adan’s father’s experience in which his higher degrees from Mexico did not articulate into higher opportunities for him in the United States, Osvaldo’s father also had to find employment that would support his family but was not compatible with the level of education he had attained. When the family first came to the United States for a better life, Osvaldo’s father first worked in a factory and then took courses to earn his degree and started his own homeopathic practice.

“I completed high school in three years.” Gangs were present in Osvaldo’s high school, hence the urgency to complete high school. After completing high school, Osvaldo moved on to Sacramento City College where he earned an Associate’s degree and was active in the EOPS program and the Puente project in preparation to transfer to a four-year university. Those two programs gave Osvaldo the opportunity to visit colleges in the area and allowed him to make informed decisions about the transfer process and his educational opportunities.

Osvaldo transferred from Sacramento City College to UC Davis. He decided to live with his family and commute to school. The distance between the university and his
family home was approximately 20 miles. When Osvaldo started at UC Davis, he knew no one on campus except one friend through the Mexican dance group he belonged to who encouraged him to get involved in EOP. “I was active in the EOP program serving as a peer advisor to other students attending the university and an active member of the LGBT center.” To serve as an EOP peer advisor, Osvaldo was required to take an academic quarter worth of classes to learn about the university. Osvaldo earned a bachelor’s degree in psychology and minors in anthropology and Spanish. After earning his bachelor’s degree, Osvaldo went on to earn his master’s degree in career counseling and he currently serves as a counselor at CSUS.

**Immigration**

Osvaldo was born in Guadalajara, Mexico and came to the United States when he was 13 years old. His family (mom, dad, Osvaldo, and a younger brother) left Mexico to take advantage of the opportunities the United States had to offer – a better alternative to life in Mexico. When Osvaldo’s family left Mexico, they needed to sell their house and their belongings and were still in $6,000 in debt. At the time, the financial burden was overwhelming.

When the family came to the United States, Osvaldo’s father could not practice medicine so he needed to earn additional educational credentials to practice. During their first year in the United States, the family needed to adjust to life in the United States so Osvaldo’s father worked at a factory. He soon was laid off from his position at the factory but because they were legal residents, the family had economic options. It was
then that Osvaldo’s father learned about a program through the British Institute that allowed him to take his courses via mail. Thus, he could earn the required educational credentials to practice medicine in the United States.

While the family transitioned to life in the United States, the children were required to learn English and thrive in their schooling. That requirement stayed intact throughout the time both brothers graduated with bachelor’s degrees. The family roles were clear; Osvaldo’s parents would take care of the household, the kids needed to learn English and complete their formal education to prepare themselves for the workforce. That forward thinking on behalf of Osvaldo’s parents did not burden the children to choose between work and school. “Me and my brother did not have pressure to work to help financially support the family. We had to concentrate on school.” Osvaldo’s father eventually graduated and is practicing medicine in the United States, allowing him to provide for the family on solid footing.

“I have always identified myself as a Mexican who needed to adapt to the United States’ cultural ways of doing things.” A struggle Osvaldo faced was adapting to things he learned in school in English, and then coming home and having to do things in Spanish. Osvaldo says, “Yes, I’m Mexican-American but my background is still Mexican 100%.” He has maintained a positive Mexican identity.

**Language challenge.** Language served as the biggest challenge in Osvaldo’s path toward a bachelor’s degree. When Osvaldo attended private school in Mexico, he took English courses from the first grade. He learned basic words in English such as
colors and simple expressions like “Where is the restroom?” and “This is a chair.” He was not able to write complete sentences and had a limited vocabulary when he came to the United States in the eighth grade. Osvaldo stated he would grow frustrated when having to write assignments about what he did over the summer because he could only comprehend words with the use of a dictionary; but assembling words in their proper grammatical format was difficult.

During Osvaldo’s first year in the United States, he focused his energies on learning the language. His efforts enabled him to do well in his classes. In Mexico, he was used to taking more subject matter during a semester and in the United States he did not have that same demand so that “extra time” was spent learning English. Osvaldo took the responsibility of learning the language seriously. He relied on a few friends to help him translate class assignments, a strategy that was successful throughout his path toward a bachelor’s degree. Osvaldo had cousins born in the United States who also helped him learn English. Osvaldo’s cousins spoke English but their Spanish was not fully understandable so they spoke to each other in their native languages. An example of Osvaldo’s determination to learn the English language was his consistent use of a dictionary to help him communicate with his classmates and complete assignments. The process of constantly looking up words was tedious but was the most effective tool in his English acquisition.

While in high school Osvaldo did not join any clubs because of the language barrier. Osvaldo knew that once he gained command of the English language, he could
achieve all his academic and professional goals in the future. Osvaldo was actively involved with his ESL teachers while in their classes. In addition, he developed a strong relationship with a counselor who worked with ESL students and who encouraged him to attend the community college to develop his English skills so he could attend a university and graduate with a bachelor’s degree. In the end, the weak language skills worked to Osvaldo’s advantage because he loved learning and did not get bored in any of his classes because he was learning both course content and language. “Once I completed my ESL courses at the community college I became more comfortable interacting with others in English.”

Motivation and future orientation. Osvaldo was a highly motivated individual. While a student in Mexico, Osvaldo attended a fast-paced private elementary school. In the seventh grade in Mexico, he took 15 subjects and when he came to the United States he was taking six subjects. Osvaldo constantly asked if there was more he could do; however, with his spare time he needed to learn the English language. While attending private school, Osvaldo learned discipline and time management in his studies. Osvaldo did not need to be told what to do when coming home from school; he simply did his homework. He did not need pressure from his parents to take care of his schoolwork.

Osvaldo demonstrated his motivation in his determination to finish high school in three years by taking extra credits during his junior year. He also worked his way through his ESL classes at the community college in three years and finished his upper division work toward bachelor’s degree and two minors in three years. The work
Osvaldo completed in high school and college has prepared him for his career in counseling at CSUS.

Osvaldo’s future orientation stemmed from his family’s philosophy of stressing education and preparing themselves for the workforce. For example, Osvaldo experienced leaving Mexico and immigrating to the United States for a better life. Moreover, Osvaldo knew education was needed to succeed in the United States and obtaining that goal entailed learning a new language. Osvaldo saw firsthand his father working on his Ph.D. to earn the necessary academic credentials to work in the United States. He understood the message that “education is important to his future,” but witnessing his father’s active studying, earning his Ph.D., and then attaining the fruits of his labor made a powerful impact on Osvaldo’s life.

**High School Preparedness and Programs**

Osvaldo graduated from high school in three years. He formed a strong relationship with his counselor who worked with ESL students. Osvaldo did not participate in any formal program that put him on a “college track” but spent his time learning English and making good friends.

“The presence of gangs influenced my desire to leave high school early. I feared for my safety and when I entered my junior year, so I worked with my counselor to find a way to graduate early.” During his junior year, he took classes in the afternoon, became a teacher’s assistant, participated in the Regional Occupational Program (ROP), and got all of his 225 credits required to graduate from high school. When Osvaldo left high
school he left with 245 units because he was motivated to be eligible for admission to the community college. His sole focus was his schooling. He credits his parents for their support, as they did not require Osvaldo to work and help support the family financially.

**Presence of gangs in High school.** Gangs were a prominent presence in Osvaldo’s high school. It was during his freshman year that he personally witnessed his first fight. He saw firsthand how rough it could be in high school, which implanted the seed to graduate early. Osvaldo had a difficult time understanding the gang philosophy in school since he had friends in both groups who participated in gang activity. Though he was friends with gang members, he never involved himself with gang activity. The violence he saw in school frightened him.

Osvaldo learned about the nuances of gang life and the distinction between the Norteños and the Sureños. Osvaldo reflected on a few occasions in which he was “chased and was going to get beat up.” He also recalled times when “classmates were stabbed which forced the school to go on lock down and the police came on campus with horses where some of his classmates got stabbed.” Osvaldo also witnessed guns and knives in classmates’ lockers. Moreover, Osvaldo saw acquaintances “get beat up” and he tried to stop the altercations “because I hated seeing people fight.”

Osvaldo worked with the vice principal in an effort to minimize the influence of gangs at his high school. Osvaldo organized a meeting of the parents of both sides, the Norteños and the Sureños, to mediate and de-escalate the hostility. Osvaldo was grateful he was never injured in his efforts to attend a safe high school. Osvaldo’s lack of safety
compelled him to leave high school early to foster his educational and professional goals at the community college instead.

**Social/Family Support in College**

Osvaldo enjoyed the overwhelming support from his family (immediate and extended) and friends toward his journey to a bachelor’s degree. “I was lucky to have family and friends attend my graduations and other ceremonies where I received awards or scholarships.” The moral support he received from his Mexican dance group and family provided the moral support he needed.

**The development of a peer group on campus.** Two prominent groups that served Osvaldo well on his path toward earning a bachelor’s degree was his active participation with the LGBT center and the Mexican dance group in which he participated while still at community college. Osvaldo’s friend Lorena from the Mexican dance group made Osvaldo’s transition from the community college to the university an easier one. They met through the dance group and furthered their relationship during Osvaldo’s first quarter at UC Davis. Many of the members of the dance group were attending either CSUS or UC Davis, though the dance group was formally affiliated with UC Davis. The dance group provided Osvaldo a sense of belonging to a group on campus. “It was through the dance group I learned of graduate programs at Sacramento State where I later attended and graduated with a Master’s in Career Counseling.” The dance group also provided a positive connection to his home culture. This was in sharp contrast to the gang identification of other Mexican-American young men.
During Osvaldo’s time at UC Davis, he announced to his family and friends that he was gay. He went through the process of empowering himself while at the university in working with the EOP and the LGBT center. The LGBT Center at UC Davis provided an open, safe, community committed to challenging sexism, genderism, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, and heterosexism. The LGBT community provided a safe place for Osvaldo to receive valuable support about his identity. The sense of “community” through the Mexican dance group and his participation with the LGBT Center offered Osvaldo a place to meet like-minded friends while completing his coursework to earn his bachelor’s degree.

**Extended family’s perception of college aspirations.** Osvaldo’s extended family is very supportive of his academic aspirations. His extended family includes his grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins. His aunts and uncles are employed in a variety of arenas including working in the fields, factory work, childcare, and construction. They have attended every graduation Osvaldo had: middle school, high school, community college, bachelor’s degree, and master’s degree. Moreover, his extended family would offer support to Osvaldo when the entire family would meet on Sundays at grandma’s house, a gathering Osvaldo rarely missed despite his busy schedule. Osvaldo’s extended family is proud of his accomplishments and pleasantly surprised to see how well he has adapted to life in the United States and in school.

When Osvaldo was going through college, he had a cousin who graduated from college explain complex processes like financial aid and the application procedures.
Osvaldo found his cousin’s guidance to be helpful yet he knew he was on his own to make his own decisions. Aside from this cousin, Osvaldo did not receive guidance from any other extended relative regarding his goal of earning a bachelor’s degree.

Osvaldo has 35 cousins and four of them have a bachelor’s degree. The rest of his cousins worked their way through high school, but never attained a bachelor’s degree. Osvaldo plays an active role with the children of his cousins encouraging them to go to college and pursue their formal education. Osvaldo is hoping future generations of his family will earn doctorates.

**Parental Understanding of Expectations of College on their Sons**

Osvaldo’s father graduated from college in Mexico and earned a Ph.D. from the British Institute of Homeopathy. Osvaldo’s mom went to school up to the middle school level in Mexico and was in charge of the household. “I witnessed my father working hard on his degree from the British Institute and that was a good model for me to follow.” While his father was studying, Osvaldo was in grade school and focused on learning English. Osvaldo learned an important lesson of commitment and dedication to academics through watching his father.

Though Osvaldo understood the necessary characteristics to succeed in college through observation of his father, Osvaldo was a first-generation college student in the United States. Osvaldo’s parents did not have the experience to help Osvaldo navigate through the student support services of higher education. In addition, since Osvaldo’s
parents did not complete a bachelor’s degree in the United States, they did not fully understand the daily academic demands placed on Osvaldo while attending college.

Osvaldo’s family placed education as a high priority and arranged their family so Osvaldo and his brother would succeed in school. Osvaldo and his brother were not required to work to help the family financially. Osvaldo’s parents took that responsibility so their sons could focus their energies on their academics and their futures.

**The role of other siblings in college success.** Osvaldo has a younger brother who also earned a bachelor’s degree. As the family moved to the United States and went through the process of learning English, Osvaldo’s younger brother picked up the language a little quicker. Osvaldo served as a mentor to his brother, guided him as he went through the application process, and served as a sounding board to help his younger brother navigate the college experience. They both went through the community college system on their way to bachelor’s degrees.

Osvaldo’s younger brother attended the community college where he earned an Associate’s degree. He then transferred to CSUS and earned a bachelor’s degree in Criminal Justice. After graduation, he furthered his education to prepare himself to work in the correctional system and is currently working at a jail in Central California.

**The Role of Counseling in the Student’s Success**

The role of counseling played an influential role in Osvaldo’s academic success. Osvaldo formed personal relationships with his counselors both in high school and in
college. The experience prepared him to serve as a peer counselor as an upper division student at UC Davis. Moreover, he is currently a counselor at CSUS.

**High school.** Two counselors impacted Osvaldo’s success in high school and provided the groundwork for him to be a successful college student. One of his counselors was a Euro-American of German descent who worked with students in the ESL program at Osvaldo’s high school. This counselor embraced Osvaldo’s determination to complete high school early and helped devise a plan to make this goal attainable. Because of the support of this counselor, Osvaldo graduated in the top 12 in his class and was the only ESL student to be bestowed this honor.

One counselor in particular had a profound impact on Osvaldo and in helping him envision his future. “The counselor showed me a clear attainable path to follow for me to earn my bachelor’s degree.” The counselor introduced him to great opportunities the community college could offer. For example, Osvaldo could go to the community college, finish learning English, earn an Associate’s degree, and transfer to a university or go into the workplace. Osvaldo figured that did not seem too bad because that would be just a few years and he would be done.

Osvaldo’s high school counselors were pivotal to his success in helping him realize his potential and clearly identifying the opportunities that college presented. Moreover, it was through this relationship that Osvaldo learned how to navigate through the higher education system. Osvaldo was formally introduced to his higher education options through CSUS and UC Davis campus tours provided by his high school.
Osvaldo’s high school counselors provided a path that enabled him to transfer to a community college. His high school counselor mentioned it would take Osvaldo two years to complete his community college course work. In reality, he needed three years of English courses (through his ESL classes) to catch up to the college level English proficiency. It was during the transition from ESL classes to regular classes that Osvaldo started talking to other people and listening to what they planned to do. “I was an active member of the Puente program and through my Puente counselor I visited 10 universities for a campus tour.” This experience exposed him to educational options beyond the community college.

In addition to his active participation in the Puente program, Osvaldo was a student in the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP). EOP is intended to improve access and retention of historically low-income and educationally disadvantaged students. The counseling provided by EOP taught Osvaldo how to navigate through higher education and it provided the necessary guidance through his community college experience. Moreover, his involvement with EOP guided him toward a successful upper division experience at the university. The guidance from the counselors in both the Puente program and the EOP program strengthened Osvaldo’s confidence in learning resources available to him to be a successful college student.

While at UC Davis, Osvaldo became an EOP advisor. He had the necessary skills and characteristics to serve his peers: he was bilingual, participated in EOP at the community college, and was eager to help others. During this phase in Osvaldo’s
education, “I relied on my major and minor advisors and mastering the college catalog”
to ensure his path to graduation in earning his degree in psychology. Osvaldo became an
class expert at surveying the catalog assisting himself in his efforts to earn his bachelor’s
degree.

**The Management of Culture Shock from Attending a University**

Osvaldo transferred from the community college to the university where his first
quarter became a time of adjustments. Osvaldo needed to adapt to his new commute
from Sacramento to Davis, going from a semester system to a quarter system, and learn
his new surroundings around campus. Yet, Osvaldo had the building blocks to ease that
transition to his new school, as he had strong family support, a social network, and
valuable experience with EOP.

**The student’s social and academic adjustment.** Some of the members of the
dance group in which Osvaldo participated attended UC Davis so that offered him a path
through which to connect. Osvaldo’s friend Lorena, whom he met the summer before
transferring, helped him get oriented to his new surroundings. The social network the
dance group offered provided Osvaldo a sense of comfort and belonging to a larger
university community. It was through the dance group that Osvaldo looked at other
groups to belong to while on campus, which is where he found the LGBT Center. There
he met a community of students who supported his coming out and where he supported
others’ sexual orientation and gender identity.
As Osvaldo became integrated socially, he connected to the university, which helped him make the necessary academic adjustments for him to earn his bachelor’s degree. Osvaldo was working in the semester system while at the community college and needed to adjust to a quarter system at the university.

Osvaldo’s path to his major was not direct. Osvaldo first started as a computer science major, influenced by his older cousin who earned a computer science degree. Osvaldo then became a business major and eventually changed to psychology. While taking his lower division work, he was exposed to many subjects and enjoyed anthropology and Spanish in which he subsequently earned minors while majoring in psychology. Osvaldo’s persistence through changing his majors provided a broad education and a pathway to learning about his eventual major of psychology. Osvaldo’s work with the EOP program at the community college provided him the tools to navigate through the university system. Osvaldo learned how to utilize the university catalog to learn about the student support services in helping him earn his bachelor’s degree.

Moving away from the family home. The support of his family played a prominent role in Osvaldo’s decision to stay in the family home while earning his bachelor’s degree. When Osvaldo thought of going to a university, he knew he did not want to go far from home because of the financial burden it would cause. Additional reasons he stayed with his family was that the United States was his second country and he did not know anything other than life in California. Moreover, Osvaldo had a good relationship with his family and their support and encouragement enriched his life.
Osvaldo commuted from Sacramento to Davis, California, a 20- to 30-minute drive from his house to campus. While at home, his primary responsibility was to excel in his studies and help out his parents with language translation of family affairs. In addition, they assigned him household chores, but the family was not dependent on Osvaldo working and earning money to support the family. Osvaldo believed that being with his family added to his college experience.

Adjustments to their roles with their families. The adjustment for the family when Osvaldo attended college was seamless. There was a strong cohesion between his family life and his university life. “Our family roles and responsibilities were consistent from the time we immigrated to the United States.” Osvaldo’s father earned the money to financially support the family while Osvaldo’s mom took care of the house and supported the children. Osvaldo and his brother’s role were to go to school and graduate from college. Moreover, Osvaldo and his brother explored new interests and developed their own identities in preparation to be contributors to society.

A common family gathering was going to their grandmother’s house every Sunday. There were 40-50 relatives who would visit on Sundays and Osvaldo was consistently available to attend despite the demands of going to college, dancing with his dance group, and working at various internships on campus. If Osvaldo was unable to attend a Sunday gathering, his family understood and supported Osvaldo’s decision without holding it against him.
Formal Programs in College in which the Students Participated

While at the community college, Osvaldo participated in the Educational Opportunity Programs (EOPS), the Puente Project, and the Mexican dance group (affiliated with UC Davis). The EOPS and Puente programs taught Osvaldo how to transfer to a university and navigate through higher education. The programs took Osvaldo to well over 10 field trips to different universities in the area. In addition, the programs offered counseling and tutoring services. These programs helped Osvaldo learn about different schools and the application process for him to transfer to a university.

When Osvaldo transferred to UC Davis, he participated with the Mexican dance group, the LGBT Center, and served an EOP internship. Through his EOP internship at UC Davis, Osvaldo gained an understanding of college from the perspective of an advisor. Osvaldo spent a summer taking courses in learning how to serve as an EOP advisor. From there he did advising internships for the career center, the LGBT Center, and a program called RISE (Respect, Integrity, Self-determination, and Education), which served the students at Sacramento City College. Osvaldo’s connection to the university put him on a track toward being invested in his success as well as of that of his classmates as a way of working toward a bachelor’s degree.

Managing their cultural identity through the various campus programs.

There were two campus programs that allowed Osvaldo to maintain his Mexican cultural identity while earning a bachelor’s degree: the Puente program and the Mexican dance group club. The Puente program originally began as a program that motivates and
supports Latino students in achieving academic success through writing, counseling, and mentoring. Osvaldo found the mentoring from a Latino male a motivating factor during his experience in the Puente program. “I was able to identify with this mentor and I believed I would be able to graduate from college too.” Moreover, other students who participated in the Puente program were also Latino. Experiencing college with students who had common interests, challenges, and goals promoted Osvaldo’s capacity to navigate through his lower division coursework with other students from similar cultural backgrounds.

The Mexican dance group offered Osvaldo an arena to celebrate his Mexican upbringing in the United States. Osvaldo kept a hectic pace in college as he juggled classes and internships. Subsequently, the dance group allowed him to stay centered and pay homage to his cultural heritage. Osvaldo’s best friends came from this dance group and the support system helped him during stressful times while earning his bachelor’s degree. The other group members were also determined to earn their degrees, so the peer group honored their Mexican roots as well as their higher educational aspirations.

**Instrumental university officials who impacted these men.** The university officials who had the most impact on Osvaldo’s success in earning his bachelor’s degrees were the counselors through the Puente program at the community college level. As part of the program, Osvaldo had a mentor, a college counselor, and an English professor who offered the guidance he needed at that time in his academic development. Through these three people, he was able to get letters of recommendations, guidance in the university
application process, assistance for the college admission essay, and scholarship information. The critical piece for Osvaldo was the three officials who were Latino, as he was able to relate to and connect with those mentors.

**Jose**

Jose was born in Mexico and came to the United States when he was 13 years old. He belongs to a family of six kids and is the only male. His parents left for the United States when Jose was born, leaving him under the care of his older sisters. Jose’s parents would return to Mexico several times a year and then return to the United States to work in the fields. Jose’s parents’ highest level of education was elementary school in Mexico. Jose’s immediate older sister began the college track and led Jose toward higher education while the two older sisters worked and took care of the family. Eventually after Jose earned his bachelor’s degree, he served as a mentor and supporter of his two younger sisters.

The biggest challenge facing Jose in his educational pursuits was learning the English language. Once he had a stronger command of the English language, Jose flourished in his education. “Once our entire family moved to the United States my goal was to do well in school because I knew that would help me be successful in the United States.”

Jose’s sister, a year and a half older, served as the family pioneer in higher educational attainment and served as a vital mentor in Jose’s education. When Jose’s sister was in the eighth grade, she was introduced to the idea of middle college, a
program allowing students to complete their high school education while earning lower division units toward college. Jose’s sister enrolled and became proficient with how to navigate the college experience while she was still in high school. Once she completed high school, she had already completed her first two years of her college education. She encouraged Jose to do the same, but at first Jose was reluctant. However, after his freshman year in high school, he entered into the middle college program through the community college (San Joaquin Delta College) located in their hometown (Stockton) in central California.

Jose’s adaption to college was made smoother due to his time at the community college’s middle college program. After completing his lower division classes at San Joaquin Delta College, Jose transferred to CSUS. At first, Jose was a business administration major and wanted to become a teacher. As he took more business administration courses, he learned business was not for him so he changed his major to Spanish. Soon, Jose started working on campus with the campus security department. As he progressed with his degree he worked in the financial aid office and later worked as an outreach recruiter. Jose went on to earn his bachelor’s degree in Spanish and completed his Master’s in Spanish from CSUS. At the time of the study, Jose was working as an EOP and Outreach counselor at CSUS.

Immigration

Jose was born in Mexico in 1988 and came to the United States when he was 13 years old. Jose’s family struggled financially in Mexico, which prompted Jose’s parents
to migrate to the United States as seasonal farmers. When Jose was 18 months old, his parents came to the United States only returning to Mexico a couple times a year, leaving the kids back in Mexico. Jose was taken care of by his three older sisters; the eldest being 12 years old at the time assumed the head of the household. “Until the time I was 13 years old, I took care of the family cattle and made sure the cows were milked.” Jose’s family knew they needed to come to the United States and capitalize on the opportunities it presented.

**Language challenge.** When Jose came to the United States, he started in the eighth grade and did not speak English. “I needed to find a way to fit in the culture so I began taking ESL courses.” Jose observed that many of his ESL classes were on a vocational track instead of a college-bound track. The biggest obstacle in Jose’s academic development was learning to speak English. Jose spent hours doing his homework and reading the dictionary in an effort to translate the content. “I would think about my homework and what I would have to say in class the next day and I looked up what I was going to say in class the next day the night before.” The practice of translating what he was going to say in class while at home became a habit.

**Motivation and future orientation.** When Jose came to the United States, his role within the family changed. The purpose for their immigration was to realize the “American Dream” for a better education and a better future. He helped his family every weekend and summer by working in the fields picking cherries and grapes and pruning tomatoes. Jose did not feel comfortable asking his parents for things; instead he worked
and saved enough money to purchase his own necessities. Jose knew what money represented to the family and what it could do to support the family with its basic needs; subsequently, Jose offered financial assistance to his family if needed. Jose was required to be self-sufficient from an early age and was motivated to succeed in life. The experience of working at an early age helped Jose develop a sense of independence, which carried through in his earning of a bachelor’s degree.

Jose believes he makes long-term decisions on a regular basis and not impulsive decisions that give him instant gratification. Jose learned to look at the bigger picture and develop plans to meet his vision. His family came to the United States for a better life and to buy a nice house, and his older sisters realized that family dream in purchasing a family home. Jose’s older sisters took the lead on supporting the family financially so their younger siblings could focus on their formal education.

When Jose started college, his objective was to graduate and he accomplished this. When he aspired to become a college professor, he needed to earn a master’s degree and he achieved that goal. Jose knew that earning a college degree would open job opportunities and elevate his ability to contribute to society as a successful person. Jose has a passion for learning and a strong work ethic to achieve his goals. “I see myself as future oriented, in that I set goals and figure out how to get there and pursue it.”

**High School Preparedness and Programs**

Jose started high school on a high school track but because of his older sister his educational path changed. During Jose’s freshman year, he played football and ran track
and was eager to learn as much as he could academically, as a typical freshman would. His older sister pushed their parents to have Jose enter middle college, so during his sophomore year, he was exposed to a college atmosphere. Jose began college and finished high school at the same time, and by the time he completed his high school requirements he had earned a “junior” standing in college.

Presence of gangs in high school. Jose grew up in Lodi, California where gangs were prominent during his eighth and ninth grade years. Jose noticed the gangs fought during and after school. This behavior convinced him he did not want to be a part of that environment. “I knew if I got into fights there would be consequences, and I learned that lesson from my parents when we were living in Mexico.”

Jose interacted with gang members who wore red, American-born Mexicans because they were able to speak English, and they helped him out with understanding homework. Jose appreciated that he could be friends with gang members, but he did not have to associate himself with gangs. Once Jose became a middle college student, his exposure to gangs ended.

Social/Family Support in College

Jose’s family support was the driving force for his success in earning his bachelor’s degree. Jose’s parents had elementary school educations, and his two oldest sisters also had elementary school educations. Though they had not acquired higher education, they had the vision to work and provide for the family financially. Jose’s parents did not financially support Jose’s education but offered the moral support and
encouragement to complete his education. “My older sister had the biggest influence on me in earning my bachelor’s degree.” Jose’s older sister guided and mentored him through the entire college process. Jose also has two younger sisters whom he mentors and encourages in their educational pursuits.

While at the university, Jose’s social support came from his association with the CAMP program. His peers in the program shared similar backgrounds of working in the fields, being of Mexican descent, and speaking Spanish. The social support made his university experience a positive one, and kept him engaged on his goal of earning his bachelor’s degree.

**The development of a peer group on campus.** When Jose first came to Sacramento State as a junior (after completing middle college), he became involved with the CAMP (College Assistance Migrant Program). Jose became friends with other students of Mexican descent who were involved with CAMP. They provided the necessary support while completing his bachelor’s degree. Older students through the CAMP program offered guidance as Jose adjusted to university life.

**Extended family’s perception of college aspirations.** Jose’s extended family was supportive and understanding with the demands placed on him while attending college. Jose needed to miss many of his cousins’ birthday celebrations and *quinceañeras* because he needed to study for exams, or catch up with homework. “My extended family understood, and now that I have my master’s degree I attend our family
functions regularly. I’m rebuilding those relationships.” Jose never experienced discouraging messages about pursuing his education from his extended family.

Parental Understanding of Expectations of College on their Sons

Jose’s parents did not go to college. His father attended high school in Mexico and his mom completed fourth grade in Mexico. Jose’s mom lived in a rural town where education was not accessible. Jose’s parents did not have a background in higher education, yet they had high expectations and were very supportive of their son in his academic endeavors. “I would get frustrated when I brought home good grades and my parents did not understand what those grades meant.” Jose saw how his neighbor friends would bring home average grades and their parents would show emotion and offer rewards for good grades.

Jose’s parents offered moral support but not financial support for their son to graduate with his bachelor’s degree. From an early age, Jose became financially independent and responsible for managing his money. Jose’s parents knew that if their son graduated from college, he would have a better job. In addition, having their son graduate college would be a positive reflection and sense of accomplishment on the decisions they made to come to the United States.

The role of other siblings in college success. Jose is the only male and the middle child in a family that has six children. The two older sisters did not complete high school either in Mexico or the United States; however, they were instrumental in helping Jose and their younger siblings earn a bachelor’s degree. The two eldest sisters, along
with the parents, took the leadership role of financially providing for the family in order to purchase a home for the family to live in the United States. “My oldest sisters sacrificed themselves so that the younger kids in the family could go to school and get good jobs afterward.”

Jose’s two younger sisters are on an educational path. One of his sisters is a freshman at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo and the youngest sibling is in the sixth grade. Jose offers guidance and support to his sisters as they journey through education. Education is a priority with his sisters.

“The biggest influence on me earning my bachelor’s degree was my older sister who was a year and half older.” It was because of her guidance and passion that Jose made education a high priority in his life and future. When Jose’s older sister was in the eighth grade, she had a guest speaker who talked about the middle college program. The program was through Delta College in Stockton in conjunction with Lodi High School. Jose’s sister studied the program through its catalog and decided she wanted to pursue this track to earn her general education courses while in high school and be ready to attend the university. She was drawn to attend college in the University of California system, eventually attending University of California, Davis.

The experience of middle college motivated her to push her younger brother and parents to enter the program when he became a sophomore in high school. “My sister helped me fill out my application, gather letters of recommendations, and offered me guidance through the middle college program.” Jose entered the middle college program
and was on his way toward earning his bachelor’s degree. While in middle college, Jose’s sister helped him with his homework and preparation for exams.

Jose’s sister transferred to UC Davis and majored in Spanish and in political science, though her original plan was to go to law school and become an immigration lawyer. Her direction impacted Jose in that it was expected he also follow in her footsteps. As Jose completed his studies, he had the plan to major in business administration and attend CSUS. During that time, Jose wanted to establish his own identity. Though Jose was at a different university, his sister’s influence was present. She guided Jose in his academic planning and with his financial aid forms. Her assistance helped Jose succeed while he earned his bachelor’s degree.

Jose eventually changed his major to Spanish with the influence of his sister. Jose’s sister’s plan was to earn a degree in Spanish and earn a credential so she could teach at the elementary school level, which is what she is doing now. That vision then became Jose’s vision. Although as Jose developed, he wanted to work in higher education so he wanted to earn a master’s degree after graduation. Jose and his sister eventually entered a program and completed a master’s degree in Spanish together at CSUS.

The Role of Counseling in the Student’s Success

Jose received academic guidance from counselors but they did not have a major influence in his success. “I participated in the middle school experience and was guided as to what classes to take, and that helped make my transition to the university
smoother.” Jose’s sister who went through the middle college program did much studying of the catalog to meet the requirements and she passed that knowledge on to her younger brother.

**High school.** Jose was involved in the middle college program at his high school. Jose took classes that helped him transition into college life. The program provided vital information relevant to the requirements to earn their high school diploma as well as the general education requirements for college. The middle college program guided Jose through the navigation process of his high school/college experience.

**College.** When Jose transferred to CSUS, he enrolled through CAMP and EOP. These programs were geared toward first-generation college students and offered academic planning support and social support to help Jose feel connected to the university. These programs guided Jose through the financial aid process and navigating through the university experience. As Jose worked through his upper division classes in his major, he worked with his academic advisors in the Spanish department.

**The Management of Culture Shock from Attending a University**

After Jose’s freshman year in high school, he transitioned into the middle college program. “My biggest lessons were the higher expectations of my school work and socializing with college age students.” Jose started the middle college program when he was 15 years old. Culturally, Jose was taught to obey elders and follow their lead so he struggled to find his voice when he was often the youngest student in his class.
Nevertheless, the structure of middle college provided the support to ease the transition from high school to college.

When Jose transferred from middle college to CSUS, he moved from his family home and chose not to attend the university his older sister attended. “I needed to learn to cook, and live with roommates. It was different from living with my family.” Though when he did transfer, Jose had the social support of CAMP that offered him the comfort of a community of other students going through the same first-year university experience.

**The student’s social and academic adjustment.** Jose’s roommates and association with the CAMP program offered him the social support to make his adjustment to university life easier. Jose’s sister attended another university in the area, but she was still close to her brother and offered him encouragement, support, and guidance. Jose credited his peer group who, due to their also being Latino and speaking Spanish, made his college experience a positive one.

The academic adjustment came from developing a stronger command of the English language and managing higher expectations from his professors. Because Jose participated in the middle college program, he was accustomed to navigating a Monday, Wednesday, Friday schedule and managing his time. When Jose came to the university as a “freshman,” though academically he had a “junior” standing, he was mentally prepared for what university life would look like. The biggest academic adjustment with which Jose walked away was learning how to be a college student. He learned the
importance of managing deadlines, preparing for exams, and learning about the consequences of student loans through the mentoring of the CAMP program.

**Moving away from the family home.** After Jose completed middle college and his first two years of college, he was 18 years old. He moved from Lodi to Sacramento but because he developed his independence so early in life the transition was smooth. Jose credits moving away with “helping in his maturity and independence.” Jose understood he would need to find a part-time job to pay for his expenses that financial aid did not cover. Moreover, the experience furthered his discipline regarding paying his bills on time which translated to his discipline in the classroom. The more challenging aspect of living away from home was his need to learn to cook.

Jose believes that living away from home helped him graduate from college. “Being away from home allowed me to focus on my university life. I didn’t get caught up in family affairs and working to help financially support the family.” Moving away from home allowed Jose to detach himself from his family home while he pursued his bachelor’s degree.

**Adjustments to their roles with their families.** The adjustment for Jose’s family was more social than financial when he moved away to college. Jose received financial aid and held part-time jobs to pay for his college experience. Being from a Latino community, Jose said, “It’s a family oriented culture.” At times, Jose struggled with not being able to attend family gatherings because he needed to study for an exam or do homework. Because he missed family events, the connection with family changed
while in college. Jose missed many events, and his family stopped inviting him. Since he graduated with his master’s degree, he began regularly attending family functions and his relationships strengthened.

**Formal Programs in College in which the Students Participated**

The seminal program in which Jose participated on his way toward earning a bachelor’s degree was middle college. The middle college Jose attended at San Joaquin Delta College is located in Stockton, California, and students take high school courses and community college courses at the community college. The students graduate from high school and leaves middle college with their lower division college requirements completed so when they leave San Joaquin Delta College, they have junior standing at a University.

When Jose transferred to CSUS, he participated in CAMP and EOP. “CAMP and EOP were beneficial to me because I was a first-generation, low-income student.” The services provided by these programs supported his goal of earning his bachelor’s degree. CAMP helped Jose with learning how to navigate the system. In addition, the program offered a social network so Jose felt a sense of belonging and a connection to the university. EOP helped Jose with financial aid matters and counseling assistance. EOP offered an outlet for Jose to feel connected with the University.

Jose’s connection to the university extended from the formal programs on campus to working for the university. He began working with the public safety office selling parking permits to students. He then started working with the financial aid office as a
student assistant helping students with the FAFSA application process and doing workshops for Spanish-speaking parents. His responsibilities helped Jose secure a job with the university after earning his bachelor’s degree where he began working with admissions and records leading to his current position as an EOP Outreach recruiter.

**Managing their cultural identity through the various campus programs.** Jose maintained his Mexican cultural identity through his participation in CAMP which provided the opportunity for Jose to meet other Mexican-American students, speak Spanish, and share cultural traditions. CAMP helped Jose feel a positive connection to his cultural identity and the university. As a student assistant for the financial aid office, Jose helped with workshops regarding navigation through the financial aid maze for Spanish-speaking parents.

**Instrumental university officials who impacted these men.** Jose did receive support from University officials; however, they did not have as much influence in his degree attainment than his older sister.

**Andres**

Andres was born in Mexico and came to the United States when he was 12 years old. Andres is the only male sibling and has three sisters, one older and two younger. His immediate younger sister earned a degree from CSUS. Andres’s youngest sister has started her degree at a community college, while the oldest sister attended cosmetology school. Andres’s father graduated from college in Mexico in Business Administration and his mother attended school to the seventh grade. Andres’s father left the family when
Andres was born to work in the United States until he brought the whole family to Tracy, California when Andres was 12 years old. His father worked at a golf course to support his family.

Andres attended Tracy high school and was introduced to college by the migrant education counselor who supported him in attending college visits around California. Andres gravitated to schools that had a diverse student body who also spoke Spanish and schools located in a quiet area of town with a backdrop of nature. The presence of gangs loomed at his high school where he heard the saying, “You will end up dead or at Yale.” He preferred to pursue the Yale path instead of dying in gang activity.

Andres, a first-generation college student, was accepted to CSUS, which is located about an hour and a half away from his home in Tracy. One of the biggest obstacles facing Andres was having to speak English in his classes with teachers, staff, and other students as well as hanging out with the “right crowd.” Serving as an educational leader in his family, his younger sister followed in his footsteps also attending CSUS. Andres’s parents still live in Tracy and continue to work at the golf course.

Andres earned his degree in communication studies and served as an intern at a local Spanish-speaking television station. Because the English language served as a difficult obstacle in Andres’s educational experience, “I selected communication studies as a major because I wanted a stronger command of the English language.” An influential person in Andres’s academic development was a peer he met through CAMP.
Moreover, they learned they came from the same town in Mexico but never met until they were students at CSUS. Andres faced a difficult time during his college experience where he contemplated leaving college, but his friend encouraged him to continue. Andres is exploring his educational opportunities for the future and part of that future involves earning a master’s degree. At the time of the study, Andres was working as a marketing communications specialist for the Degrees Project at CSUS.

**Immigration**

Andres’s father worked as an administrator in the private sector with the Mexican government. He decided to immigrate to the United States because of the corruption in Mexico. When Andres’s father came to the United States, he worked at a golf course and in the fields to earn a living. Andres was born in Mexico and did not move to the United States until he was 12 years old. Subsequently, for the first 12 years of Andres’s life, he did not have a male authority figure in the home. Andres, his mom, and three sisters eventually migrated to the United States.

As the only male in the house in Mexico, Andres took on a leadership role; however, when he came to the United States, his father assumed the leadership role. Friction arose as the family found its new normal. Andres’s father expected Andres to work to help the family financially, help take care of his sisters, and be on a college track in school.

The purpose of Andres’s family’s immigration to the United States was to have better job opportunities, make more money, and be successful. Andres’s family
sacrificed everything to leave their country and come to the United States for a better life. Because of this sacrifice, Andres consistently “thinks of being successful and realizing that the immigration process was worth our struggles.”

**Language challenge.** Language was the most difficult obstacle to overcome in Andres’s path to earn a bachelor’s degree. When Andres came to the United States, he needed to learn English. Andres had difficulty with the language in high school and remembers a science class he took when he asked the teacher if he could have someone help him with the translation of the material. The teacher, instead of offering assistance or support, recommended he take a different class. Andres stayed in the class without a translator and earned the highest grade in the class. The language barrier required Andres to consistently use the dictionary and to ask others who spoke both Spanish and English for translation help.

The language issue was a reason Andres chose to attend CSUS. When he toured colleges through his high school, he noticed the diversity at CSUS and saw a lot of people who looked like him and who spoke Spanish. He toured CAMP on campus and was able to meet other students with similar cultural backgrounds including that of speaking Spanish. The experience helped Andres see a bridge between his culture, including the Spanish language, and a university degree where he would need to improve his English skills.

Language also influenced Andres’s selection of a major, communication studies. For Andres, it was a scary choice because English was not his strongest language. “I
wanted to improve my English speaking skills and I see myself as a risk taker so I made the decision to study communication studies.” Andres was highly motivated to have a stronger command of English and embraced the challenge. Andres had a friend he met through CAMP who came from the same town in Mexico. This friend also pursued a degree in communication studies so they were able to rely on each other to help with the language and content of the subject matter. Despite earning his degree in communication studies, Andres prefers to speak Spanish; hence, he found friends who spoke Spanish so he does not have to speak English in social situations.

**Motivation and future orientation.** Andres recalled the sacrifices his family made for a better life and he is driven to succeed in any endeavor he tries. Andres has been independent most of his life because he knew his parents and sisters could not help with his schoolwork. Andres preferred to work independently in his schooling but did see value in working with study groups.

Completing his bachelor’s degree was an important priority for Andres and his family. Andres found motivation in knowing his relatives would be asking how school was going. Family members would consistently ask when Andres would be graduating; he grew frustrated because at the time he was a sophomore. “That pressure motivated me to finish, and finish strong. I always strive to do my best.”

Andres recalled that while he was living in Mexico, he saw people who were thinking of the future and educating themselves for a better future. That was an important life lesson he learned that was reinforced by his family. Andres came to the
United States to get an education, which was reinforced by his parents so he could have a prosperous future. Once in the U.S., Andres perceived that this mindset was not shared by many who were from the Mexican culture.

Andres observed that many of the families with Mexican ancestry were more present-oriented than future-oriented. The priorities were buying a new car, having children, and making enough money to cover the current month’s expenses. They were focused on present needs. In addition, he noticed many people would compare themselves to each other, and education was not a criteria used in the comparison. Oftentimes, education was considered a waste of time because it got in the way of working to purchase things. The mindset of Andres’s family is different; they are more patient in sacrificing time and investing their money to reach long-term goals. Andres tried to convince his Mexican male friends to go to college and graduate, and they would reply that they were not smart enough or they thought they were destined to work in construction for someone else.

High School Preparedness and Programs

Andres attended Tracy high school in the Central Valley where he was active in his studies and played on the soccer team. Andres was not part of any formal program that prepared him for college life. A relationship with his counselor who specialized in helping migrant students guided Andres and exposed him to college campus tours.

As a high school student, Andres visited UC Davis, Fresno State, San Jose State, San Francisco State, and Sacramento State. “The experience left me thinking about my
future and how I could realize my potential.” As he toured the different universities, he felt he belonged at CSUS. Andres liked the serenity of the trees and the peacefulness of the campus. Moreover, it was the diversity he saw on campus and the Latinos he met while on the tour that made him feel more comfortable. The tours inspired Andres to excel in his high school studies and prepared him for the next level.

Presence of gangs in high school. Andres made engaging with “good” friends a priority for his high school success. Andres wanted to have friends who were respectful and did not engage in trouble-making activities. Gangs were prominent in his high school and Andres did not want to get involved. Andres focused on his studies and playing soccer. Even though these gangs were Latinos, Andres did not understand them nor could he relate to them.

Gang life on his high school campus actually motivated Andres to do something in his life; he did not want to be a statistic. A common saying he would hear was “you are either going to die or go to Yale.” Andres did not want to die so he steered clear of gang activity, instead working toward higher education. Andres was aware that selecting good friends was critical to his present and future. This characteristic played a role in his college experience.

Social/Family Support in College

Andres was the only male sibling in the house with three sisters and his parents. His parents expected much from Andres both inside and outside the classroom. “I was the first in my family, extended and immediate, to attend college in the United States.”
Andres faced difficult challenges while attending the university. He was working to help pay for his education while his parents struggled financially. Andres had two part-time jobs, studied full-time, and still needed to visit his family on the weekends. Andres stopped attending class for a couple weeks so he could work more. At that time, he contemplated not coming back so he could help the family finances.

Fortunately, Andres had a classmate who noticed he had stopped coming to class. This classmate contacted Andres to see how he was doing and encouraged him to return to school. His friend, who Andres considers a brother, helped him get caught up with his coursework so he could finish the semester. Aside from learning the language, this experience was Andres’s most difficult challenge to overcome, but his friend helped him through.

**The development of a peer group on campus.** The CAMP program at CSUS provided the base for Andres’s peer group. The CAMP program helps students from migrant and seasonal farm worker backgrounds to develop the skills needed to graduate from college. Andres described CAMP as a “home away from home” that provided the needed support to graduate from college. Many of the students who belonged to CAMP were of Mexican descent, providing Andres a safe place to make friendships. Having a peer group come from a similar background made it easier for Andres to congregate and embrace their cultural upbringings including speaking Spanish.

Andres established one strong friendship through CAMP that served him well. His friend was born in the same town in Mexico but they did not know each other until
they met at CSUS’s orientation on their first day. They both studied Communication Studies and worked together at CAMP, a television station, a radio station, and graduated together in 2011. After graduation, they both went to work for the same company. Though Andres prefers to work independently and be on his own, he acknowledged the great influence his peers had on his goal of earning a bachelor’s degree. “In my mind I came here to graduate and I graduated nothing stopped me… but thanks to my friend he was there and we helped each other.”

**Extended family’s perception of college aspirations.** Andres was the first person in his extended family to graduate from college with a bachelor’s degree. From the time Andres came to the United States, he felt different from his relatives who were born here in the United States. Because Andres did not speak English when he came to the United States, his cousins did not think he would go anywhere. Yet it was Andres and not his cousins who earned a bachelor’s degree. Andres did not understand the reasons his cousins never continued their education after high school. Andres speculated their parents made “good money” without going to college; hence, they did not see the value of a college education.

Andres observed that his male cousins born in the United States did not have the same motivation he did. For example, they wanted to graduate from high school, start working, and follow the footsteps of their parents. When Andres came to the United States, his family had nothing and needed to start at the bottom; that served as a motivation to prepare him to be successful.
“When you are born in Mexico and go to another country and in this case the United States you want to be successful it’s the only reason you came here you need to stay focused on that ideology.” Andres’s success at the university has offered inspiration to his younger cousins to attend college. One of his younger cousins is now attending CSUS.

**Parental Understanding of Expectations of College on their Sons**

Andres’s father graduated from college in Mexico with a degree in business administration while his mom completed school to the seventh grade level. Andres’s parents did not fully understand the expectations of college placed on their son. During Andres’s first two years, they expected him to split his time between Sacramento and Tracy, which was frustrating for Andres. By the third year, they had a better grasp of the demands on Andres. Although Andres would get “stressed out” when he had homework to do and his parents wanted him to take care of chores on the weekends. His parents would ask how school was going and they needed to read Andres to see if he was overwhelmed or doing fine. At times, Andres felt overwhelmed so he would interpret their questioning as being bombarded by his family. Andres did not want to take his problems from Sacramento and bring them to Tracy so he told his family not to ask so many questions about school. The reason for this was to shield his family from the challenges he faced while earning his degree. Although when Andres did something good, he wanted to share that news with the family. Andres noticed when he shared his successes it helped the morale of the family but he did not want to share his struggles.
Andres’s parents did not understand the daily grind Andres was under while earning his degree. When Andres was studying until two in the morning, his parents had never seen this before and were skeptical of this requirement. Andres’s parents thought he was out having fun, going to parties, and not taking his studies seriously. Because Andres was the first in his family to go through the process of earning a bachelor’s degree, it was easier for his sisters to attend college. Andres’s parents are better prepared in how to support their daughters because Andres led the way.

The role of other siblings in college success. Andres led his siblings into college life. Andres’s parents always motivated all their children to attend college. Andres’s oldest sister attended cosmetology school, while his younger sister graduated from CSUS and his youngest sister started her higher education in the community college. Because Andres’s parents learned how to be parents of a college student with Andres, it served his younger sisters well because the parents better understood how to support their daughters. Andres’s role with his sisters is one of a mentor and supporter of their higher educational experience.

The Role of Counseling in the Student’s Success

The role of counseling played a big role in Andres’s higher educational experience. Because Andres participated in CAMP and EOP, the base guidance provided by these two programs helped Andres navigate through life at the university.

High school. Andres received support from his high school counselor who led the Migrant Education Program. This counselor worked specifically with students whose
parents worked in the fields or moved back and forth from the United States to Mexico due to seasons following the crops. It was through the relationship with this counselor that Andres was introduced and exposed to university life. “I knew I wanted to go to college, but did not know where or how.” The counselor worked with Andres and helped him with his college and scholarship applications.

His high school counselor was responsible for having Andres attend college campus tours. The campus tours opened his eyes to a future in education. Andres knew that one day he would be there and was happy that his counselor helped him realize his dream. Andres focused on doing well in his studies and he got accepted into CSUS.

**College.** Andres used the communication studies faculty for all academic advising. The faculty in the department mapped out his academic plan and Andres followed the plan. If Andres wanted to substitute courses, he would work directly with his department academic advisor. However, it was through CAMP that he learned about financial aid, internships, tutoring, and other student services on campus. The relationship he had with CAMP offered Andres an emotional connection to the university and a sense of belonging. “I felt good, safe, and not alone,” was the strongest sentiment Andres had about the impact of CAMP on his earning his bachelor’s degree. The program also provided a student network to discuss scheduling, assignments, and internship opportunities.

Andres also received counseling from EOP. He did not utilize the EOP program to its fullest because he did not identify with them. Andres received counseling from the
EOP counselor but did not feel as comfortable expressing himself in English as he did in Spanish. Andres found the experience frustrating, but it required him to push himself out of his comfort zone in speaking English. EOP helped Andres with financial aid and he is glad to have both CAMP and EOP as counseling resources.

**The Management of Culture Shock from Attending a University**

Attending CSUS and leaving home made Andres experience culture shock with regard to college life. Andres was not familiar with any programs or individuals to which he could latch on during his first few weeks of school. “My biggest motivation when I entered college was to make my parents proud and to earn validation from my father that I did a good job.” Andres did feel intimidated with the diversity on campus because he never saw so many Caucasians in one place; he really never socialized with cultural groups other than Latinos. It was important for Andres to break through his comfort zone and he began to interact with Caucasians and other members of different cultural groups on campus. He wanted to be comfortable with his classmates.

When Andres found CAMP, he knew he was home. Through CAMP, he met other students with similar backgrounds to his, and they spoke Spanish, which made his new surroundings more comfortable. The fellowship he developed with other students and the CAMP director eased his transition from life at Tracy to being a bachelor degree-bound student.

**The student’s social and academic adjustment.** Andres needed to make social and academic adjustments to succeed at CSUS. When Andres was in high school, many
of his male Latino friends thought getting an education was foolish. The priorities for
this particular group was to have many girlfriends, do well in soccer, and be tough, which
helped one to be popular. At the university, characteristics to be popular were different,
yet “I felt awkward when I would go back home to Tracy and see his high school
classmates.” Many of his classmates thought of Andres as foolish and had the
perspective that he was wasting his time pursuing a bachelor’s degree.

For Andres, the word “college” means opportunity, opening of doors, and opening
his eyes and mind to another world besides his community in Tracy. Andres further
elaborated that everything changed in his life when he came to college, the experience
made him a better person. He saw his growth when he visited Tracy when the same
conversations and topics were discussed with family and friends as if he had never left
after high school. His participation with CAMP helped Andres bridge the adjustment
socially and academically. The other students in the program were like-minded; they
wanted to grow intellectually yet maintain their cultural roots while earning a bachelor’s
degree.

During Andres’s first semester at CSUS, he realized his high school did not
prepare him for the academic demands required of him. He immediately realized his
professors had higher expectations of him than what was expected of him from his high
school teachers. A strategy Andres implemented in his classes was to actively participate
in class and speak up. Andres’s language barrier was a source of insecurity, so he faced
it and spoke up in class. When he realized his classmates did not really care but were
interested in his thoughts, he did not feel that tension of insecurity. Moreover, by participating in class, he demonstrated to his professors that he was doing his homework and was actively engaged in class discussion. An additional strategy Andres used was working in study groups to prepare for exams and projects. Andres preferred to work alone, yet stepped out of his comfort zone in order to work with his classmates.

Moving away from the family home. Andres moved from Tracy, California to Sacramento, which is about 75 minutes away, to attend college. Andres lived in an apartment within walking distance from campus and found that decision to be a wise one. Andres believes living alone with friends provided the necessary environment to focus on his goal of earning a bachelor’s degree without the distractions of home life. “I got detached from all of my personal responsibilities so I was able to focus on school and work 100%.” If he had been living at home he would have had to take care of his siblings, help out his parents, and handle other family responsibilities, which would have made doing his schoolwork more difficult, and he probably would have had a harder time graduating.

Adjustments to their roles with their families. Andres moved away from home so he could focus on his studies. When Andres was in high school, he was accessible to his family to help out so when he left for college, he was still expected to come home on the weekends to help out. That expectation was difficult because Andres needed time on the weekend to study or to work. Andres made the decision to get a weekend job in Tracy so he could visit the family but not have to help out around the house as much as
he would if he did not work. During the summer months, he helped his father at the golf course, but as Andres progressed closer to his bachelor’s degree, he earned internships geared toward his major. As Andres developed his own identity and professional path, the relational dynamics with his father changed. The family learned to function more without having Andres around as much to help.

**Formal Programs in College in which the Students Participated**

The two programs that impacted Andres’s success of earning a bachelor’s degree was EOP and CAMP. EOP helped Andres with financial aid matters and counseling assistance. He was appreciative of the services of EOP, but he really did not identify himself with it. CAMP helped Andres with learning how to navigate the system. In addition, the program offered a social network so Andres felt a sense of belonging and a connection to the university. Andres has high praises for how CAMP helped him earn his degree. “If it wasn’t for CAMP I probably would have dropped out of college. I knew I didn’t want to go back home, work, or be in a gang, I had to graduate from college.” Both programs offered relief to Andres because he knew he had support from both programs in helping him achieve his goal of earning a bachelor’s degree.

**Managing their cultural identity through the various campus programs.** The maintenance of Andres’s Mexican cultural identity was important as he earned his bachelor’s degree. “The CAMP program allowed me to be myself, speak Spanish, and share my cultural traditions with other students who are also Mexican.” When he
discovered CAMP, he felt like he was home, which helped him in not feeling like an outsider on campus.

**Instrumental university officials who impacted these men.** The director of CAMP provided the guidance needed for Andres to navigate through the university system. CAMP offered numerous networking opportunities and access to academic and student support services in his pathway toward his baccalaureate degree. Andres was able to meet many professionals who have opened up job opportunities for him through the networks established by the CAMP director. Specifically, the CAMP director helped Andres get an internship with the local Spanish-speaking television station.

**Ivan**

Ivan was born in Healdsburg, California, but his parents immigrated to the United States from Mexico. Spanish was Ivan’s first language and was the primary language spoken with his parents. As Ivan got older, he began to speak English more frequently with his siblings. Ivan is the youngest of three children and is the only male. His oldest sister (born in Mexico) earned a bachelor’s degree from Sonoma State University and is an elementary school teacher. Ivan’s second older sister earned her nursing license from Santa Rosa Junior College and is working toward an Associate’s degree in nursing. Both of his sisters have served as a role model and advocate for Ivan’s education.

One of the biggest challenges for Ivan was learning the English language. Spanish was Ivan’s first language and he struggled with English until the fourth grade. His elementary school was a bilingual school so from grades one through four, Ivan’s
lessons were in Spanish. From fifth through eighth grade, his lessons transitioned into English, but he still took one course in Spanish. Ivan received valuable academic assistance from his two older sisters while in elementary and high school.

Ivan’s parents attended school in Mexico until the seventh grade and have made their children’s education in the United States a top priority in their family. Ivan’s parents came to the United States in their late teens, after their first child was born, with the desire for a better life for their family. Ivan’s role in the family was to help his father with home improvement projects around the house and to excel in school. Ivan’s father was a strong presence in the house with his family. Since moving to the United States, Ivan’s father has worked at a local winery while Ivan’s mother cleaned houses.

Education was a priority in their family’s household and Ivan’s parents had high expectations for their children. Ivan attended Windsor high school and was active in the MESA (Mathematics Engineering and Science Achievement), AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination), AP (Advanced Placement), and Summer Search programs. AVID is a college readiness system for elementary through higher education that is designed to increase school-wide learning and performance. In high school, Ivan received academic assistance and mentoring from his AVID teacher. Summer Search is a national youth development program that works with low-income high school students. Summer Search’s objective is to develop the skills and character traits of their students to become college-educated leaders. “Through the Summer Search program I spent five weeks hiking the Teton Mountains in Wyoming and touring Hungary over the course of
two summers.” Ivan credits those experiences as building blocks to successfully transitioning and earning his bachelor’s degree. Moreover, Ivan earned a scholarship through Summer Search that helped pay for his tuition at CSUS.

As a child, Ivan had interest in taking electronics apart and putting them back together. Taking that interest into high school and participating in MESA and AVID led him to be an engineering major in college. When it was time to apply for college, he was accepted into two Northern Californian schools in the California State University system, and two schools in the University of California system. He chose CSUS, which is about two hours from his home in Windsor, California.

When Ivan entered CSUS, he continued to participate in academic programs while earning his bachelor’s degree. The summer before his first semester at CSUS, Ivan participated with the Alliance for Minority Participation (AMP) program, a program for underrepresented students pursuing service to the science professions. In addition to AMP, Ivan continued his participation with MESA, which is called MEP (Minority Educational Program) in the California State University system. Through his participation in AMP and MEP during the summer months, “I formed critical relationships that summer with guys who later became my fraternity brothers, my connection to the university and educational success.”

During Ivan’s freshman year, he joined the Gamma Zeta Alpha fraternity. The fraternity experience helped him transition from life away from his family to his new family at the university. The Gamma Zeta Alpha fraternity was established for the
purposes of uniting and directing all persons interested in the promotion of the Latino
culture and ethnic origins via community interaction and the educational system. As part
of the orientation process in the fraternity, pledges needed to familiarize themselves with
the landmarks of Sacramento. They also had to find key buildings on campus such as the
library, the student union, and the MEP center.

During his freshman year, Ivan struggled with the competing demands of his
family’s desire for him to come home and the need to stay on campus and meet the
requirements of being a college freshman. “I was lucky that my parents attended my
university and MESA orientations so they knew what the demands on me would be.”
Ivan earned his degree in electrical engineering from CSUS in 2012. Members from his
fraternity were influential in Ivan earning his degree and encouraging other Latinos to
also earn their degrees.

Immigration

Ivan was born in Healdsburg, California and was raised in Windsor, California.
Ivan’s parents immigrated to the United States from Mexico when Ivan’s father was 17
years old. Ivan’s father was working in the fields and his mom was back in Mexico
pregnant after she had her first daughter. Ivan’s mother and daughter later moved to the
United States and Ivan and his younger sister were born in the United States. Ivan’s
father worked for a local winery and his mother worked as a house cleaner in the area to
support the family. Ivan’s parents were eager for their children to maximize their
opportunities in the United States, including supporting them in learning about traditions held in the United States.

**Language challenge.** “Spanish was my first language and was the primary language spoken in the home.” Ivan struggled to learn English through the fourth grade because of his limited opportunities to speak English. Ivan attended a bilingual school, so from first through fourth grade, all his classes were in Spanish except one class was in English. From the fifth grade through the eighth grade, all his classes were in English except for one in Spanish. As he transitioned into speaking English he would ask his older sisters for help.

Once Ivan attended high school, he spoke more English because he had the opportunity and the need to speak English. Moreover, when he spoke to his sisters, English became the more prominent language among them. On the contrary, Ivan and his sisters needed to speak Spanish to their parents because they did not speak English.

**Motivation and future orientation.** Ivan’s parents sacrificed their life in Mexico to come to the United States for a better life. Ivan’s parents had the goal that all their children would be college educated, and that goal was achieved. Ivan’s oldest sister, who was born in Mexico, earned a bachelor’s degree. Ivan’s older sister earned her Associate’s degree in nursing from the community college. Ivan earned his bachelor’s degree in electrical engineering with the support of his parents who paid for his education. This required his mom to clean houses while his father worked at a local
Ivan is very appreciative of his parents’ efforts to provide him a good life. Ivan’s family is future-oriented in their decision making.

Ivan was determined to succeed in school to help secure his future after graduation. He did not want to work in the fields and wanted to make something of himself in the United States. During the last two years of his bachelor’s degree, Ivan started working to help pay the bills of his education, but was appreciative that his parents sacrificed to pay for his schooling.

**High School Preparedness and Programs**

Ivan was involved in Advanced Placement coursework, Summer Search, AVID, and MESA in high school. Collectively, all the programs prepared him for college. He did not participate in athletics so he focused his time and energy on his academics. Ivan decided to take AP courses at the encouragement of his sisters and counselors. “I decided to take the AP Arts core because I was interested in music and wanted the new experience of learning about the arts.” Ivan pushed himself into taking AP calculus, AP Spanish, and honors geometry and chemistry. Ivan made the observation that he was the only Mexican student in his AP courses at Windsor high school. When Ivan moved on to college, he realized taking those courses made a difference in his college experience.

Summer Search is a program that works with low-income students to develop characteristics to become college-educated leaders. Through Summer Search, Ivan spent five weeks in both Wyoming and Hungary. He learned much about himself and other cultures that prepared him for university life. When he moved away from home to attend
CSUS, the transition eased for Ivan. “They really pushed me out of my personal space.” Through the Summer Search experience, Ivan became a more confident high school student in preparation for becoming a college student. Summer Search granted Ivan a scholarship for $8,000 to come to CSUS and earn his BS in Electrical Engineering.

AVID is a college readiness program designed to increase school-wide learning and performance. Ivan was mentored by his AVID counselor to take classes that met the A-G requirements for high school graduation so it would prepare him for college. The relationships Ivan formed through the AVID program in high school are still intact even after their college graduations. The group of students felt connected because they all had the high school goal of graduating from college.

MESA is recognized for its effective academic development program that engages educationally disadvantaged students so they excel in math and science and graduate with math-based degrees. MESA partners with all segments of California higher education as well as K-12 institutions. Ivan was intrigued with engineering so the MESA program provided him the opportunity to learn more about engineering. When he was in high school and influenced by the AVID and MESA programs, Ivan knew he wanted to earn an engineering degree and was accepted into four universities, but selected CSUS.

**Presence of gangs in high school.** Gangs were present in the community where Ivan lived. Ivan’s father protected Ivan from the exposure to gangs by discouraging his son from participation in sports such as boxing. Ivan’s father was present and wanted his son to be in a safe environment focusing in on his academics and his future. “I did not
want any part of gang life but, I did have friends who participated in gangs.” Gangs were present and it was a pathway Ivan did not want to follow so he stayed in school.

Social/Family Support in College

Ivan received social support for his efforts toward earning his bachelor’s degree. Ivan surrounded himself with a community of people who cared for him and encouraged him to be his best and earn his bachelor’s degree. Ivan’s family and fraternity brothers were influential in his success.

The development of a peer group on campus. Ivan participated in a summer program and lived in Sacramento before the start of his first semester at CSUS. Through the AMP and MEP program, Ivan met other students who had an interest in engineering and would be attending CSUS in the fall. Those relationships established in the MEP stayed with Ivan throughout his time at CSUS.

During Ivan’s first semester, he joined a fraternity and developed relationships with his fraternity brothers. The fraternity Ivan joined was a Latino-based group allowing Ivan to meet other Latino males who had aspirations of earning a bachelor’s degree. The camaraderie helped build a bridge between his home life in Windsor and his new life in Sacramento. Though during his freshman year Ivan partied often and his grades suffered. It was during that time Ivan needed to make a decision to either stay on the path of partying or get serious and move toward his degree. “During my third semester I set goals and limited my extracurricular activities and I’m glad I made that choice.”
As a fraternity member, Ivan took special care to support his brothers in their efforts to graduate from college. Ivan made it a practice to attend the graduations of his friends and fraternity brothers as a show of support. The social networks to which Ivan belonged offered him the opportunity to support others while they reciprocally supported him in his academic goals.

The friends Ivan had in college were primarily other Latinos. It was not until Ivan was enrolled in his upper division engineering courses that he was required to work on group projects with other students. He began to interact with students of other cultural backgrounds, yet he felt as if he belonged with his classmates because engineering was a common thread.

**Extended family’s perception of college aspirations.** Ivan’s immediate family lives in the Windsor, California area and his extended family is either in Mexico or located around the country, like Texas, Nebraska, and Chicago. Ivan’s extended family had a minimal influence with their views of education and their perception on Ivan’s college aspirations. “My oldest sister who was born in Mexico set the family standard in earning her bachelor’s degree from Sonoma State University.” Ivan has seen his cousins watch his sister graduate and they have followed in her footsteps even though they are living in other parts of the United States.

**Parental Understanding of Expectations of College on their Sons**

Ivan’s parents went to school until approximately the seventh grade in Mexico. Ivan’s parents knew the value of a college education and pushed the value of higher
education on their children. They focused and sacrificed for their children to succeed and to better their futures. Moreover, Ivan’s parents understood the importance of his college education; they paid for his tuition and expenses so Ivan could concentrate on his classes and graduating.

Ivan’s parents were active in his success; they attended events when he was in high school through his participation in the AVID program. Ivan’s parents took the time to better understand what their son was experiencing in school so they could be a better support to him. In addition, they were active and attended Ivan’s orientations for CSUS and the MEP program orientations. Ivan’s parents made it a priority to understand what would be expected of his son in his educational pursuits. An advantage Ivan had in comparison to his sisters was that Ivan was the youngest and his parents watched their oldest daughter go through the college process. Because of that experience, they knew what to expect with their youngest son when he went to college.

The role of other siblings in college success. Ivan’s older sister was very influential in Ivan’s academic success. During Ivan’s elementary school years, his sister helped him with his homework. In addition, she helped him during his time when he transitioned from Spanish courses to English courses before high school. Ivan’s oldest sister graduated from Sonoma State University and is an elementary school teacher. Ivan’s older sister was in the process of getting her associate’s degree in nursing and was working in the medical field at the time of the study. As the youngest child, Ivan learned how to navigate through higher education from his siblings. “Seeing my sisters become
college educated provided the support, the expectation, and the pressure to follow in their footsteps.”

The Role of Counseling in the Student’s Success

Ivan’s counselors were influential on his pathway to earning a bachelor’s degree. Yet, Ivan’s counseling experience came through the formal programs to which he belonged and not through the general counseling offered at his high school and university.

High school. Ivan’s most influential counselors came from the AVID program. One counselor in the program advised Ivan to take the A-G requirement route and followed his progress to make sure he was receiving the appropriate support to complete his A-G requirements. In addition, this particular counselor encouraged Ivan to take AP courses that helped him while he was at the university.

Another counselor through the AVID program was always pushing Ivan to think about college. “She spent time with me working on my college applications, college personal statements, SAT preparation, and letters of recommendations. She coordinated tours to universities in the area like San Francisco State, UC Berkeley, and St. Mary’s.” Through the experience at his high school, Ivan was exposed to a variety of colleges, which helped him make an informed decision to attend CSUS.

College. Ivan received counseling support from the program director of the MEP and the Dean of the Engineering department. A critical piece of advice Ivan received from the MEP director was to repeat courses he completed in high school. “At first I
didn’t understand why I had to retake an AP Trigonometry class I took in high school.” Nevertheless, Ivan retook the class and gained a stronger command of the material and excelled in his calculus and differential equations course. He went through the same process with his physics courses. Ivan credits that advice to making his upper division work “more manageable and instilled confidence in my abilities.” Ivan was an active member of the MEP allowing him to form a relationship with the program director and that mentorship helped him succeed in earning his bachelor’s degree.

The Dean of the Engineering department offered Ivan advising as he matriculated through his engineering degree. Ivan relied on the guidance and mentoring of the Dean. Ivan felt a connection to the Dean because he was Latino and the University official to Ivan’s Gama Zeta Alpha fraternity. The relationship Ivan formed with the Dean has carried over after Ivan graduated and the Dean is working with Ivan in finding employment.

**The Management of Culture Shock from Attending a University**

Ivan’s summer trips through Summer Search and his AP classes in high school prepared him for the rigors of university life. Ivan viewed moving to Sacramento as another summer trip but longer. Participating in the summer AMP and MEP before the start of the fall semester helped Ivan transition to the campus surroundings before the entire student body returned to campus. Through his summer experience at CSUS, he met friends and was able to connect with others on campus making his first semester a smoother transition. Ivan struggled during his freshman year juggling his family life in
Windsor and campus life in Sacramento. Ivan’s parents wanted to see their son on the weekends, but Ivan had homework and other school responsibilities requiring him to stay on campus.

**The student’s social and academic adjustment.** As a freshman, Ivan would try to make it home two hours away to see his family. Conversely, as the demands of being a university student grew, he was able to make it home only about once a month. In addition, Ivan’s parents respected that their son was in college and it required him to be on campus more. During Ivan’s earlier academic career he could count on his sisters to help with his studies; however, when Ivan started with his engineering courses, he needed to rely on the MEP center, his professors, and his peers for academic support.

Ivan’s affiliation with his fraternity served as a critical piece to his social and academic transition to university life. For example, “during my freshman year our fraternity had mandatory study hours (10 per week) on the quietest floor in the library.” If Ivan was not in the library, he was in the MEP center to which he had access 24/7 and there were other engineering students utilizing the center. If his fraternity brothers could not help him with his studies, the other students at the MEP center were available. He would ask his fraternity what classes to take with which professors and that support helped Ivan earn his bachelor’s degree. In addition, among the fraternity they would share textbooks with their brothers as a money saving strategy.

Another strategy Ivan implemented was participating in study groups. It was a friend who transferred to CSUS and pushed him to participate in study groups. Ivan
credits this experience as getting him through his engineering classes and eventually through college. His peers in the study groups pushed him to excel and gain a stronger command of the course content.

A group project that made the biggest impact on Ivan’s college experience was his senior project. “The group came together and made a device from scratch and it was a great achievement I shared with my classmates.” One of the biggest lessons Ivan learned was working with students from different cultural backgrounds than him. He was the only Mexican on the team, but he felt like one of the members of the group. He felt good because all the group members had the common interest of being electrical engineers and the goal of wanting to graduate college. Upon reflection on earning his bachelor’s degree, Ivan acknowledged, “earning my degree was a big accomplishment, and I didn’t do by myself, but with the support of my family and friends.”

Moving away from the family home. Ivan moved away to college the summer before his first semester. He participated in a summer program called AMP. He got a reference for housing through the MEP. Ivan began his transition to university life early and lived with his roommates for two and a half years. During Ivan’s freshman year, he would make the two-hour drive back home to visit his family, and that tapered off as he became more involved in life at the university. He now visits about once a month. After living with roommates, he moved in with a few of his fraternity brothers and then later moved in with his girlfriend.
Moving away from home provided Ivan with the opportunity to develop his own identity and learn about the city of Sacramento. Many of the socials for his fraternity were at venues around the city and the capitol. Living near campus required Ivan to be on campus more and utilize the student support services to help with his classes. Living with his family would have changed his university experience, “I probably would have come to class and maybe studied for a little bit, if that and go back home.” The adjustment of living away from home was relatively smooth and he credits his Summer Search program for preparing him to be away from home.

**Adjustments to their roles with their families.** As Ivan became more ingrained in his university life, it became harder for him to visit his family in Windsor. Ivan’s family makes an annual trip to Mexico to visit their relatives; however, Ivan has not been back to Mexico in approximately 10 years due to his academic undertakings. Ivan’s family has adapted to him not making the annual trip and respects his other commitments. Because Ivan was away at school, he was not available to help his father around the house with various projects. “I was the youngest in the house so I was not required to look after my siblings.” The family has adjusted now that Ivan no longer lives in the family home.

**Formal Programs in College in which the Students Participated**

The formal programs in which Ivan participated while at CSUS were Alliance for Minority Participation (AMP), Minority Education Program (MEP) (formerly MESA), and the Gamma Zeta Alpha fraternity. Ivan participated in the AMP program the
summer before his first semester at CSUS. AMP is a program that helps students of diversity to explore careers in the STEM fields. The AMP at CSUS is funded through the National Science Foundation.

The MEP provided the mentoring and peer support that helped Ivan through his bachelor’s degree experience. The MEP director offered Ivan guidance regarding which classes to take and he helped him with housing. Through MEP, Ivan worked with other students with robotics competitions outside the classroom. The MEP center is a place where students congregate and study, and the center was accessible 24/7. One of the strongest contributions the MEP offered Ivan was the guest speakers who would come and talk to the students about careers in the STEM fields. Moreover, the Latino speakers particularly influenced Ivan, “I was able to identify with the speakers, and see my own future working in the STEM field.”

The Gamma Zeta Alpha fraternity offered Ivan the social support he needed to feel connected to the university and his Latino culture. As a member of this fraternity, members were required to spend evenings in the library studying. The study practice bridged the social and academic parts of being a college student. In addition, “through the fraternity I developed a strong relationship with the Dean of Engineering who advised me academically and served as a mentor.”

Managing their cultural identity through the various campus programs. His affiliation with the Latino-based Gamma Zeta Alpha provided Ivan a means to maintain his Mexican heritage while at the university. His fraternity brothers were of Mexican
descent so that was a common bond he shared with his peer group. In addition, Gamma Zeta Alpha would also socialize with other Latino-based fraternities and sororities on campus to maintain their cultural identity while at the university. “I am very proud to be associated with the Gamma Zeta Alpha fraternity.” He believes his fraternity, recognized throughout the state of California, is helping more Latinos graduate from college, proclaiming a 97% graduation rate.

**Instrumental university officials who impacted these men.** There were two instrumental university officials who impacted Ivan’s goal of earning a bachelor’s degree in electrical engineering: the Dean of Engineering and the program director for the MEP. The Dean of Engineering at CSUS served as a mentor for Ivan through the fraternity to which he belonged. The Dean was active in the Gamma Zeta Alpha fraternity and later became an honorary brother of the fraternity. Ivan noted how important it was to him to have a Latino male in a position of authority be a mentor to him. “Since I’ve graduated, the Dean has helped me with networking opportunities for a job.”

The Director of the MEP helped Ivan get housing the summer before his first semester at CSUS. In addition, as Director she was in regular contact with Ivan and specifically was engaged in his math, science, and engineering courses. She served as a resource for Ivan as he matriculated through his upper division engineering courses on his way to his bachelor’s degree. Ivan appreciated that a person in charge of the MEP program was of Mexican descent, which made his time comfortable.
Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to better understand the success factors and strategies of Mexican-American males who have earned a bachelor’s degree. The goal of this qualitative research study was to identify central themes that materialized from the participants’ experiences and to describe those experiences to improve graduation rates of Mexican-American males in colleges and universities around the country.

Five Mexican-American males participated in the study. Four of the participants were born in Mexico and one was born the United States. Each of the five participants earned their bachelor’s degree, and three of those five went on to earn a master’s degree. Two rounds of interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach. The first round of interviews used questions tied to the research questions. The second round of interviews was conducted for the participants to clarify previous thoughts, capture reflections, and to further discuss the seven themes that emerged from the first round of interviews. All interviews were recorded on a digital audio recorder, transcribed by the researcher, and delivered to the participant for their review for accuracy.

Chapter 5 concludes this study covering the following objectives: an overview of the study including the research questions, interpretations of the findings using the theoretical frameworks, how this study is congruent with the CSUS Ed.D. program objectives, recommendations for actions for educational leaders, recommendations for further study, reflections from the researcher about his experience, and a closing statement regarding this study.
Chapter 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Overview of the Study

This study examines the factors and strategies applied by five Mexican-American males that enabled them to successfully earn a bachelor’s degree. Men represent 42% of the bachelor’s degrees conferred in 2010-2011 and the downward trend continues (U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education [DOEIES], 2012). The largest racial groups of men with the lowest rates of bachelor degree completion are Latinos and African-Americans.

The impact of Mexican-American males not attaining a bachelor’s degree has the potential to cripple California’s future political and socioeconomic landscape. The volume of Latinos with a bachelor’s degree has increased from 7% in 1990 to 10% in 2006 and is projected to reach only 12% in 2020 (Reed, 2008). Despite these improvements, Latinos will continue to have the lowest college education levels of any of the major racial and ethnic groups in California (Reed, 2008). In relation to the workplace, Latinos grew from 22% of the working-age population in 1990 to 29% in 2006 and are projected to grow by 40% by 2020. Projections of educational attainment for the California working-age population suggest that the share with a college education will increase from 28% in 2000 to only 33% in 2020 (Johnson, 2005). The projected workforce skills gap results from a continuation of growth trends in the demand for college-educated workers combined with a slowdown in the growth of the share of
college-educated adults in the population. More Mexican-American males earning bachelor’s degree can fill this gap needed by the State of California.

The application of the LatCrit, Cultural-Ecological theory, and the Resiliency theory was used in contextualizing the findings of this study. LatCrit methodology recognizes that the experiential knowledge of students of color is legitimate by including storytelling, family history, biographies, scenarios, parables, and narratives (Bernal & Solórzano, 2001). The stories provided by the participants offer this study factors and strategies used to earn a bachelor’s degree from a Mexican-American male perspective. The Cultural-Ecological theory looks at two factors that contribute to minority school performance: how society at large and the school treat minorities (the system) and how minority groups respond, based on their perceptions, to those treatments and to schooling (community forces). Moreover, the Cultural-Ecological theory reveals the concept of voluntary and involuntary immigration status. In examining the concept of voluntary and involuntary immigration status, the notion of historical subordination through conquest and colonization is examined. The immigration process offers insight as to how the participants’ viewed obstacles of earning their bachelor’s degree in the United States educational system. Rutter (2006) defined resilience as reduced vulnerability to environmental risk experiences, the overcoming of a stress or adversity, or relatively good outcome despite risk experiences. This study reveals the adversity the participants experienced and how they overcame those adversities in earning their bachelor’s degree.
For this phenomenological qualitative study, data were collected from five participants by means of two semi-structured individual interviews. During the first interview, questions were based on the three research questions of this study. Each interview lasted approximately one hour, and the responses from these interviews formed the emergent themes. The second interview covered the participants’ reflections of the first interview in which they addressed themes that emerged from the initial round of interviews. This constituted one step in the member-checking process, which enhanced the reliability and validity of the data collected for this study.

The sample of participants included five Mexican-American males who have earned a bachelor’s degree. Four of the five men were born in Mexico, and the remaining participant was born in the United States. Their degrees included engineering, communication studies, psychology, and Spanish. The participants obtained their degrees from CSUS or from UC Davis. Adan was the only participant who grew up in Southern California while the other participants were raised in Northern California. Four of the five participants currently work at CSUS in the area of student support counseling, and the fifth participant is currently seeking employment in the engineering field. The five participants were secured through initial connections from this dissertation committee, the counseling department at CSUS, and through the CSUS MEP program.

Seven major themes emerged from the interviews. They consisted of acculturation factors related to immigration, high school preparedness and programs, social/family support in college, parental understanding of expectations of their sons, the
role of high school and college counseling, the management of culture shock from attending a university, and formal programs in college in which the students participated.

The researcher of this study wanted to understand the experiences of Mexican-American males who have earned a bachelor’s degree. In doing so, the following research questions guided the study:

- Research Question #1: How do the family value system, family member roles, and expectations inform the Mexican-American male student’s experience with achieving a bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution of higher education?
- Research Question #2: How does cultural identity inform one’s experience in attaining a bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution of higher education?
- Research Question #3: What have been one’s experiences regarding the institutional academic and social resources available to Mexican-American men as they seek to attain a bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution of higher education?

This chapter includes interpretations of the findings from Chapter 4 as they relate to the research questions and the theoretical frameworks used in this study. Implications of the findings are summarized through the frames of transformational leadership, policy, and data-based decision-making practices, the foundation of the Doctorate in Educational Leadership program at California State University, Sacramento. Recommendations
directed to educational leaders for further action as well as recommendations for further study are offered based on the findings of this study. Reflections based on the researcher’s experience and a conclusion of the study are presented.

**Interpretation of the Findings**

**Research Question One**

How do the family value system, family member roles, and expectations inform the Mexican-American male student’s experience with achieving a bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution of higher education?

**Familismo.** A core value demonstrated by the participants of this study was familismo, a strong sense of commitment, obligation, and responsibility toward their family and extended kinship relations (Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002). Familismo may operate as a socio-cultural benefit to assist Mexican-American males and their families in navigating the educational system.

In Jose’s case, his older sisters’ collective belief system was critical to their family’s success despite not attending college themselves. Their material and emotional support were vital in supporting the family system. Without their commitment to the family goal, the ability of younger family members to achieve their educational goals would have been even more challenging.

When we came from Mexico my two older sisters were probably 18 and the oldest was probably 21 years old. They couldn’t go to high school and they did not obtain a GED or high school diploma. So their idea was if we couldn’t do it, we will work with my mom and dad to buy a house so the rest of you guys (the four younger siblings) can go to college.
Andres felt pressure to earn his bachelor’s degree because of the high expectations placed on him by his family. “I was the first in my family to go to college, and I felt the pressure from my whole family.” In addition, Ivan’s parents made many sacrifices to support their son in obtaining his bachelor’s degree. “Tuition is not cheap. My mom being a housemaid doesn’t make that much money. My dad’s paycheck went to Sac State, my rent, food, and gas. My parents made sacrifices to get me through school.” This further supports the notion of collectivism in which the family makes sacrifices to support other family members.

For Latino males, the value of familismo can be an asset because of its correlation with strong social and family networks. This asset can ultimately be accessed to support their academic achievement (Valenzuela & Dornbusch, 1994). While evidence points to the positive impact on the participants’ goal orientation, it also extends beyond the immediate family. The participants of this study, through their higher educational experiences, now serve as resources for younger siblings and extended family members who have decided to make a college education a priority. Family members carry significant influence regarding the attainment of a bachelor’s degree. Ivan revealed the expectations placed on him by his parents.

I’m the only male, so to me that was my parents’ sign of a big responsibility even though I was the youngest child. Seeing my sisters going to college and graduating I had that pressure on me like I had to do that.

“A strong influence for the participants to earn their bachelor’s degrees came from their families. Students reported they were especially influenced by male role
models (e.g., father, brother, or uncle)” (Castillo, Conoley, Cepeda, Ivy, & Archeleta, 2010, p. 65). “The power of family mentoring remains unnoticed until children get older and reflect on the determination that it takes to succeed in a new country, with a new culture and a new language” (De La Cruz, 2008, p. 36). Adan recognized his older brother’s influence on his higher education. “I knew I had to go to college, my brother was a year older so he had gone to San Bernardino. I saw it. I knew I had to go, I knew I had to follow in his footsteps.”

A pattern appears from the data related to the importance of family support for college attendance. In the case of the participants, once a college-oriented culture has been attained, the internal familial resources and college goal orientation are validated and strengthened. Once attained, the person achieving the goal serves as a mentor and model for younger family members. A turning point for the participants is when extended family members witnessed the academic success and professional prospects after graduation as something of which they would want their family members to partake.

Parents. The support of the family has been a foundation upon which to build personal and academic success (Prelow & Loukas, 2003). The parents of these participants have filled that role for their sons. Family support becomes critical for Hispanic immigrant children who are challenged by a new country, a new language, and a new culture (Chavkin & Feyl-Gonzalez, 2000; Sands & Plunkett, 2005). Aside from Ivan, the remaining participants arrived to the United States as adolescent boys having to
learn a new country, a new language, and a new culture. Their parents were there to assist their families in this life-changing transition to the best of their abilities.

Parents are integral players in the success of Mexican-origin college students (Arellano & Padilla, 1996). Qualitative interviews of 30 academically successful Mexican-American undergraduates demonstrated that their parents were the most influential and motivating force in students’ lives when it came to their education (Sanchez, Reyes, & Singh, 2006). Although many of the parents had limited resources and academic experience, they stressed that education was the key to a better future (Zalaquett, 2006). Ivan evoked, “it was not just going to school that was expected, but doing good in school that mattered.” Limited resources impacted Adan as he transitioned to life at the university.

I drove 10 hours to my first day at Davis. I get there and I saw all these students with their families, moms and dads helping them move in—all excited. My parents couldn’t come because they couldn’t stop working. If they stop working, they won’t get paid and they can’t pay the rent. That was tough at the beginning seeing friends in college whose parents were always involved, it was kind of hard.

Parents may aspire for their children to attend college, but they find it difficult to provide academic support due to their lack of higher education experience and potential language barriers (Perna & Titus, 2005). Though the parents of the participants may not have had the skillset or financial resources to help their sons, they were a source of motivation and support. In Jose’s case, his parents offered moral support and encouragement but not financial support.

My parents had no background in higher education and neither did my oldest siblings. My parents knew that once I started college I had to find a way to
finance it. If I had to work full-time or part-time for school…I could, I couldn’t go back to my parents and ask for eight-thousand dollars for my tuition because I knew they were not going to provide it for me.

Andres shared, “my parents or my older sister could not help me with my school work, because they did not understand the coursework, I had to develop my independence in my studies.”

Ivan remembered the challenges his parents had in helping him with his assignments, “In the fifth grade it got more difficult because they did not know what the course materials we were covering, so I got help from my sisters.” Adan revealed, “My parents were proud of me. That is for sure, but they didn’t know what was going on, but they were proud.” In both cases, it is evident the parents provided as much support as they could even if it was demonstrating pride in their sons while they were limited in their ability to assist their sons with the material being covered in their classes.

Alfaro, Umana-Taylor, and Bamaca (2006) used an ecological methodology to discover the role of family members and teachers on student academic motivation. They established generational status, gender (parent and child), and teacher support as having bearing on Latino student academic motivation. Mothers influenced their daughter’s academic motivation to a higher degree, where fathers had a stronger influence on their male children (Ortiz, Valerio, & Lopez, 2012). The most positive influence for school came from the family. Each of the participants of this study spoke more prominently about their father’s influence in their educational pursuits and upbringing than of their mother’s.
**Fathers.** “Mexican-American fathers are an integral element to the Hispanic population. Father-child interactions were too often disregarded and it was assumed that the fathers’ involvement did not influence the children’s development” (Saracho & Spodek, 2008, p. 80). Research on the importance of the fathers’ contributions to their children’s academic success has stimulated a series of studies that examined the nature, backgrounds, and consequences of father involvement with children from low-income families (Cabrera & Garcia-Coll, 2004; Shannon, Tamis-LeMonda, London, & Cabrera, 2002; Tamis-LeMonda, Shannon, Cabrera, & Lamb, 2004). The participants of this particular study indicate that their fathers’ influence had bearing on their desires to earn their bachelor’s degrees.

Andres described one of his motivations for earning his bachelor’s degree.

I had a hard time with my dad because I could never get him to say he was proud of me for something-anything. So that was a goal, I wanted him to be proud of me. Once I graduated he told me he was proud of me.

Ivan’s desire to earn his father’s approval is demonstrated by his abiding his father’s instruction:

My dad is very goal oriented. He is very strict. He actually pushed me to do a lot of what I did. When I was in middle school I wanted to do boxing, but my dad would not let me because of the gang presence in Windsor, so he made me focus on my academics.

Adan articulated how prominent his father was in his educational pursuits.

He was the first in his whole family to graduate from college in Mexico. We came to the United States so that our family can be educated and have more opportunities than were available in Mexico. My father did not have a future in Mexico so he wanted us to have that opportunity here, he wanted to see every one of his children graduate and be successful.
All three of Adan’s siblings earned a bachelor’s degree and have professional careers. Osvaldo’s educational path was inspired and shaped by his father who went back to school when Osvaldo was 13. “By the time I finished high school, my dad also graduated from the British Institute of Homeopathy and I got to go to England and I saw him get his graduation medal, it was pretty cool.”

Mexican-American fathers often work in high-risk industries (e.g., construction, agriculture, and low paying factory labor) that are dangerous and physically demanding (Guzman & McConnell, 2002; Taylor & Behnke, 2005). Such jobs frequently require Mexican-American fathers to work long hours and odd shifts (Guzman & McConnell, 2002). All the fathers of the participants had either worked or were working, at the time of the study, in factories, in the fields with the crops, or doing manual labor to earn a living. Ivan found life in manual labor as a motivator, “I did not want to work in the fields. I wanted to make something of myself.” These professions motivated the participants to earn a degree and obtain jobs after graduation that do not require physical labor. Four of the five participants currently work in higher education in the area of counseling or in student support services, and the fifth participant is striving to gain employment in the engineering field.

In the case of Latino migrant farm workers, economic motivation for a college education is driven by the desire to provide their families with a better life (Zalaquett, McHatton, & Cranston-Gringas, 2007). All the families involved in this study came to the United States for the sole purpose of acquiring a better life for their families. Their
entrance into the work force meant working as factory workers, farm workers, or manual laborers. Jose recalled when he immigrated to the United States:

My roles changed when we came to America because the number one reason we came to America was because they call it the ‘American Dream.’ My parents brought us here to have a better education, a better future so when we started I was still working every weekend in the fields that I had off from school.

**Roles and responsibilities of the children.**

Young Latino males are raised with the expectations that they are to be family oriented, strong, brave, hardworking, and family contributors. The expectations are for them to work, to contribute to the family, and to assume traditional gender roles, predominant characteristics of the young Latino male experience. (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009, p. 63)

Andres was expected to be a prominent contributor to the family:

My father expected a lot from me as the only male. He wanted me to take care of my sisters, help bring income to the house, but at the same time he wanted me to go to college and graduate and eventually start a career.

Family obligations for the participants also included attending family gatherings regularly. Jose recalled:

There were times I had to skip family celebrations, and birthdays because I was either busy with work, or I was doing homework, or preparing for an exam. I felt like at my cousins birthdays they didn’t invite me because they knew I wasn’t going to show up because I had other priorities. After I graduated I was able to reconnect.

The cultural model of expected responsibilities in Latino families include language/cultural brokering (Buriel, Perez, Ment, Chavez, & Moran, 1998; Orellana, 2001), sibling caretaking (Gandara, 1995, 1999; Valenzuela, 1999a), and financial assistance (Fuligni & Petersen, 2002). Espinoza (2001) also found that Latino family obligations include spending time with family and staying close to home. An area in
which cultural brokering took place is when Adan and his brothers discussed with their parents the need to allow their younger sister to go away to college.

My brothers and I understood our mentality changed when we went to college. It was two different worlds and we convinced our parents to let her go to college, so they let her go to CSU San Marcos. She grew so much from that experience.

Adan took a different approach than his siblings. He moved as far as he could from his family to pursue his education. “I came to Davis 10 hours away. My brother was an hour away. My other brother was an hour and a half, and my sister moved two hours away.” Conversely, Osvaldo stayed close to home: “I helped my parents out with translation of things, and chores around the house.”

The financial aspect for many Mexican-American families often drives their educational decisions. Mexican-Americans may feel the necessity to work in order to financially support their families instead of attending college. Pew Hispanic Center (2004) indicated Latinos are inclined to work while enrolled in college at higher rates than college students of other racial and ethnic backgrounds. Latino males are more likely to drop out of high school, to join the workforce rather than attend college, and to leave college before graduating (Solórzano et al., 2005; Yosso & Solórzano, 2006). If the student’s family is in financial distress, the male is culturally expected to leave school and return home to financially support the family (U.S. Maternal and Child Health Bureau [MCHB], 1999). Jose talked about his role as a male in his family while in college. “If I were living at home and I saw my parents struggling, as a male in the
family I would have got a full-time job to help them out, and I could see that I may not have graduated from college.”

Many studies explore the family obligations of Latino children and they consistently echo that family responsibilities are more likely to fall with the girls than with the boys (Buriel et al., 1998; Raffaelli & Ontai, 2004; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999a). Adan discussed how his role was different than that of his younger sister.

My sister had to learn to cook, to clean. It was expected of her to do it. She had it tough. I followed my older brother but at the same time I didn’t have it tough like my younger sister.

Zalaquett (2006) studied successful Latina/o students obtaining a bachelor’s degree and found that “pursuing an education and achieving a career is a means to honor their parents and help their siblings” (p. 41). Ivan reflected on the importance his bachelor’s degree was to his parents:

I knew I was not going to give up and so for me getting a degree was for them (parents) to show them that they are done, they succeeded. All three of their kids went to school and got a degree.

This further supports the value of family and collectivism in that the achievements of the individual member are done to honor the contributions of everyone.

**Research Question Two**

How does your cultural identity inform your experience in attaining a bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution of higher education?
Acculturation to the United States. All the participants’ families voluntarily emigrated from Mexico to the United States. The purpose of their migration was to start a new and better life than they had in Mexico. The cornerstone of a better life was obtaining an education in the United States, and the struggles the families faced while entering the United States required them to adapt to life in the United States.

Immigrant minorities do not experience long-lasting school performance difficulty and long-lasting cultural and language problems. Some examples of voluntary minorities in the United States are immigrants from Central and South America, the Caribbean, and Mexico. (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, p. 164)

The participants of this study did struggle with cultural adaptation and language acquisition. Yet, once they overcame those obstacles they excelled in college earning their bachelor’s degree, and three participants went further in their education and earned a Master’s degree.

Adan’s family made its way across the border in one day but it took his mother three days to complete the journey. Adan’s mom suffered during this trek and did her best not to be captured by the border patrol. Adan recalled:

While waiting for our mom to cross the border I realized the sacrifices my parents were making for us to have a future. When things get difficult I think about that experience and the opportunity my parents gave me to succeed in the United States.

Jose conveyed his immigration story, “We came to America to fulfill the American dream, a better education, and a better future.” Andres was clear about his reasons his family came to the United States, “I came to this country to have a better job, better opportunities, make money, and to be successful.”
One of the most difficult obstacles in the participants’ acculturation processes was the acquisition of the English language while forming a new identity. “As students struggle to define their identity and deal with the pressures of acculturation, the issue of language becomes a significant one” (Delgado-Romero & Hernandez, 2002, p. 147).

“Along with linguistic and experiential differences, culture can obviously be a mitigating factor, especially for those Latinos who are themselves immigrants or whose parents immigrated later in life” (Pappamihiel & Moreno, 2011, p. 338). Osvaldo communicated a sense of clarity related to his cultural identity, which served as an anchor as he endeavored to learn English and cultural values that exited outside his home.

I have always identified myself as Mexican, I just needed to adapt to the United States ways of doing things, so I had to learn that in school and do things in English, and at home things needed to be done in Spanish.

Customarily, the United States has been a country that has insisted on immigrants learning and using English exclusively. Yet, many Hispanic immigrants are averse to let their native language evaporate as a way to guard their self-esteem from what they view as an oppressive non-Hispanic majority (Garcia-Preto, 1996). Adan slowly acculturated to the culture of the United States.

I don’t listen to English music, I listen to Spanish music. Even now when I go home I speak Spanish… watch Spanish news. I watch sports and movies in English here and there, but the main thing for me is Spanish music and television. All of that hurt my progress through college. I wish I would have spoken English or assimilated a lot more or faster. Thinking now in my high school, I should have listened to English music rather than Mexican music.

Adan recognized that his slower acquisition of English served as a barrier to overcome as he sought to obtain his bachelor’s degree.
As the participants of this study migrated to the United States to reap the opportunities of this country, their first task was to start learning the English language. Buttaro (2004) indicated that new English learners benefitted from being with Americans to help them understand the language and the culture. A strategy Jose used in his English language acquisition was his interaction with gangs in high school though he was not a gang member. Jose befriended members of the Norteños because they were American born and spoke both English and Spanish. “If I didn’t understand an assignment in class they would help me understand the homework and they encouraged me in doing my homework.”

Although language measures only one dimension of acculturation, previous studies have found that English language use is comparable with multidimensional measures because it accounts for the majority of the change in acculturation status (Epstein, Botvin, & Diaz, 1998; Rogler, Cortes, & Malgady, 1991; Samaniego & Gonzales, 1999; Serrano & Anderson, 2003). Language, or linguistic capital, is also tied to notions of power, status, statehood, and citizenship (Bourdieu, 1991). Higher levels of linguistic acculturation may indicate increased exposure to the majority culture because English fluency can facilitate interaction with English speakers of the majority culture (Becerra, 2010).

**Acculturation to the United States educational system.** Ivan was the lone participant born in the United States, though his parents immigrated to the United States from Mexico. Ivan is a product of the United States educational system from the
kindergarten level through his attainment of his bachelor’s degree. Despite English being Ivan’s second language, he had the opportunity to adjust socially in school and form friendships at his bi-lingual elementary school. The remaining participants immigrated to the United States in their adolescent years and needed to adjust to life in the United States and life in the United States educational system. Due to the participants’ need to learn English, their schools enrolled them in ESL courses to help them grasp the English language.

It can be equally challenging for immigrant students who are trying to be both academically successful and fit in socially at school. At the high school level, the academic and social needs of immigrant students are intensified by the way the school days are structured. (Daoud, 2003, p. 293)

Separating ESL students away from the rest of the student body makes the assimilation process more challenging.

Cultural adjustments refer to situations in which people attempt to deal with the shock of living in a new cultural environment, one that is confusing and sometimes hostile (de Castell & Luke, 1987; Freire, 1973; Giroux, 1987; Ogbu, 1978). A shocking adjustment for Osvaldo was the exposure to gangs when he entered high school. During Osvaldo’s freshman year, he witnessed his first fight and the violence frightened him. That experience moved Osvaldo to start the process of graduating high school in three years so he would not be exposed to that environment.

Confusion for Jose came from negotiating life at school and his family life at home. Jose grew frustrated with his parents because they did not understand how the
United States educational grading system worked. At school, Jose would earn praise for his good grades, but at home the message was different.

They had no concept of what a B means, or what a C means. I would come home with straight A’s and my mom would not show any emotions. My parents would look at me and say we came to the United States to do this, stay on top of it.

Jose did not allow the adjustment to life in the United States serve as an obstacle to his educational pursuits.

I remember when I was in high school I would come to my parents with straight A’s and I think it (academic achievement) was already in me, even though I did not speak the language, there were no obstacles for me not to do my homework.

Ivan’s parents understood the need for their son to acclimate to the educational system in the United States. “They saw in order to succeed here and have a better future you need to have that degree, so they really pushed me to it.”

Latina/o students are vulnerable to culture shock and feelings of doubt about their ability to succeed in the higher education environment that reflects Eurocentric traditions (Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Gloria et al., 2005; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Jalomo & Rendon, 2004). Andres shared his perspective of college as a high school student.

I wanted to be different. I wanted to be that one Latino who did it. I thought college was for Caucasians and Asians. It was difficult to imagine a Latino in higher education. I did not have role models to look up to. I wanted to accomplish something that was difficult.

The process of navigating the path from high school to college was puzzling for Andres.

I knew I wanted to go somewhere, but I had no idea where or how. I wished that one day I could get there, but I did not ask how or why. I just knew I wanted to be
there. A counselor who worked with migrant farmworker children helped me with the application process.

Having someone provide clarity and direction to the path was part of the equation to Andres’s success. The steps necessary to make the transition from high school to college need to be taught to the first member of a family who does not have experience with college attendance. As they are lacking this experience, they are unable to transmit the knowledge to further their child’s and family’s goal orientation.

Adan had difficulty acculturating to higher education in the United States.

I felt like I was wasting my time and I wanted to drop out. I always felt I was being lazy not working, not making money. It goes back to my grandfather who would tell me that I should be working and contributing to the family. Many of my other friends went back home because they felt ‘school was not for them’ without graduating.

The tension of the male in the family being needed to help financially support the family along with the goal of succeeding in the educational realm is tested when obstacles present themselves and support services are not readily identified to assist during times of doubt.

Osvaldo faced an adjustment period when he transferred to UC Davis from the community college.

I didn’t know anybody there when I transferred except a friend I met through the Mexican dance group who told me to apply to be a peer EOP advisor. I had one counselor in high school and I think she was my biggest motivation to go to college because she told me after this you can go to community college, finish learning English, you can get a degree and start working.
Osvaldo was able to follow a path set forth by his counselor toward succeeding in the United States educational system. This points to, again, the need for resources that, when present, can propel young men to achieve the goal of obtaining higher education.

Torres (2006) found that Latina/o college students at predominately white institutions navigate simultaneously the responsibilities and expectations of their communities of origin and the culture of higher education. “As first-generation Latino students make the transition from high school to college, a reconfiguration of relationships and constructive social ties transpires” (Saunders & Serna, 2004, p. 149) In high school, Ivan participated in AP courses due to the challenging nature of those courses. “Just taking those classes in high school made me different. I decided to take those classes and they (other Mexican-Americans) didn’t. When I did take those classes I was the only Mexican student in my classes.” Taking Advanced Placement courses not only instilled in Ivan a sense of confidence in being able to succeed in demanding coursework but enabled him to have an acculturative experience while still being in the familiar surroundings of his high school and community. This transferred to his capacity to succeed in realms beyond his community as he built his confidence in a wider range of learning spaces.

While Jose attended middle college, he needed to make the social adjustment of being in a college setting even though he was a sophomore in high school. Adjustments came from the formality of how he addressed teachers and his classmates who were adults and not his chronological peers from diverse cultural backgrounds. Cummins
(1997) wrote that the construction of knowledge will only effectively take place in an educational environment where the students’ identities are affirmed. Andres recalled his experience of coming to Sacramento State on a campus tour. “I came on a field trip and I saw a lot people who looked like me and spoke Spanish, and I really liked that so I came to Sacramento State.” Campus programs such as CAMP, Puente, EOP, MEP, MESA, and the Gamma Zeta Alpha fraternity offered an environment in which the participants could thrive during their academic aspirations of earning a bachelor’s degree. These organizations where many of the students were of Latino backgrounds offered the participants an educational environment where their cultural identities were affirmed and celebrated.

**Outreach efforts.** Outreach from the educational institutions to the families of the participants was limited. Yet when those relationships were cultivated, the parents of the participants became more informed parents who could better support their sons. Schools, colleges, and programs rarely reach out to Latino parents in meaningful, culturally appropriate ways to help narrow the information gap and level the playing field for college access (Tierney & Auerbach, 2004). Promoting a connection between Hispanic students, their families, and the K-12 educational system and resources may improve high school graduation rates, two-year college enrollment, and increase transfer to and enrollment in four-year institutions (Woolley, 2009).

Jose, currently an outreach counselor for CSUS, believes institutions can do more to connect the parents to their children’s educational futures:
I think if you teach the parents they will get involved in their children’s education and they are going to be more supportive and they are going to make sure their kids are on top of their deadlines. There is a chain reaction to this outreach strategy. If you teach the parents they can teach their kids, their neighbors, their siblings, so that they can be more aware of higher education.

Zalaquett (2006) stated, “the Latina/o parent is the driving force behind their children’s success in high school and college” (p. 44). Ivan’s parents had an understanding of the expectations that were placed on their son when entering the university.

My parents attended my MESA and University orientations, and I was not the first one in the family to come to college, so they had that experience from my older sister.” Ivan adds, “When I was in high school my AVID program had a lot of parent-teacher events about college that they attended. I think my parents understood the expectations that were expected of me.

Family, relatives, peers, teachers, counselors, school staff, and other close social relationships of Latina/o students play a fundamental role in shaping their college planning/enrollment decisions (Gandara, 1995; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995; Valenzuela, 1999a). Auerbach (2007); Ceja (2004); and Gonzalez, Stone, and Jovel (2003) noted how parents and siblings negotiate college academic preparation with high school and inform students’ college transition. The influence of family members was critical to the success of the participants in earning their bachelor’s degrees. It was by following the lead of an older sibling or extended family member that their knowledge of how to navigate through the institutional channels en route to earning their bachelor’s degree was facilitated.
Mexican-American males finding their voices in their educational experiences in the United States. Slocumb (2004) suggested boys have a lack of emotional language and literacy with which to effectively express their feelings or ask for help, yet another sign of weakness. Adan had an experience when he met with an advisor who asked him what he was doing at Davis. Adan was not doing well in his classes and struggled with the English language; hence the question, “What are you doing here?” from his academic advisor. The meeting with his advisor left Adan scarred.

I never forgot that experience and that is why I’m a counselor here at Sacramento State. Going through that experience… how do you think I felt having to ask for help at Davis? I couldn’t, I felt like I didn’t deserve it and that I was dumb at Davis.” Once Adan changed his major to Spanish he was able to reach out to his professors and seek guidance. “When I started to reach out to my professors they became mentors.

Through his experience working with EOP, Osvaldo learned how to navigate through his university life.

I think one of the things in our Latin American culture is we don’t ask enough questions. I think we come here from a culture of staying quiet and don’t say anything unless we really need to and even if you need to it’s just leave it alone like maybe this is not for you.

A transition Ivan made in his development as a college student was working with study groups. Ivan recognized he did not have to complete his course work alone; he could seek assistance from his peers and it was not a sign of weakness.

A friend of mine who transferred here actually pushed me to start doing study groups, she graduated one semester before me. I think it was two years that we were always studying together and she really pushed me a lot. It was really the networking with friends and having study groups. I would say study groups were a key thing that got me through college.
In the Latino culture, challenging full professors and older colleagues may be culturally interpreted as disrespectful (Stein, 1983). Adan reinforced this point, “In the Mexican culture we listen to older people. If you are older than me, I have to show you respect. I have to say Usted and never tú, so we always listen to our older or successful person in the family.”

Seeking clarification to someone in a position of authority might not be a viable option for Latino’s (De Luca & Escoto, 2012). Jose decided to attend middle college during his sophomore year in high school, and was accustomed to how to socialize with students his own age.

I needed to learn how to function in a college atmosphere so you have transfer students there from ages 20-50, and you are a sophomore in high school trying to function and learn your role. I’m this young student versus somebody else who is older and I would ask, “Who’s right and who’s wrong when students had different views?”

Respect or “respeto” is defined as the value of placing high regard for the authority of parents and elders, coupled with the expectations of politeness, obedience, and lack of contention in all aspects pertaining to interactions with elders (Allen, Svetz, Hardeman, & Resnick, 2008). The participants of this study held their elders and school administrators in high regard while navigating through the educational system. These elders or mentors were representatives of CAMP, MEP, EOP, Puente, and their academic advisors.

**Identity affirmed through campus groups.** The most prominent way in which the participants maintained their cultural identity while earning their bachelor’s degree
was through Latino campus groups. The creation of multicultural, international, or Latino clubs that provided opportunities for Latina/o students to meet and develop camaraderie and friendships with similar others served them well (Clements, 2000; Garcia & Figueroa, 2002). The universities the participants attended (UC Davis and CSUS) have formal programs, clubs, and organizations that foster their Latino students’ heritages such as CAMP, Puente, EOP, MEP, MESA, and the Gamma Zeta Alpha fraternity.

Both Andres and Jose participated in EOP and CAMP while attending CSUS. Osvaldo participated in EOP, Puente, and the Mexican dance group through his affiliation with Sacramento City College and UC Davis. Ivan was active in MEP and the Gamma Zeta Alpha fraternity at CSUS. Adan was a member of the Gamma Zeta Alpha fraternity at UC Davis.

Participants in the Hernandez (2000) study described how finding a Latino community at college was a strong motivator for persistence in college; “peers helped participants develop positive outlooks on college and feel more connected to their university enviroment” (Bordes-Edgar, Arredondo, Robinson-Kurpius, & Rund, 2011, p. 74). Students’ perceptions of campus climates influence their achievement, self-esteem, and a sense of belonging (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, & Allen, 1996; Nunez, 2009; Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003). Andres recalled his first semester at CSUS, “It took me only a week to find CAMP, any time I had a question navigating the system they helped me out.” The student organizations in which the participants engaged allowed
them to develop a sense of belonging. These organizations bridged their Mexican-American cultural identity and their academic goals in the United States educational system.

**The negotiation of cultural “pull factors” in earning a bachelor’s degree.**

Nora and Wedham (1991) also identified family responsibilities, commuting, and other off-campus work obligations as pull factors. These factors affect a student’s drive toward completing their college education (Cerna, Perez, & Saenz, 2009). Lopez (1995) stated Latinos face constant struggles in balancing family obligations and college requirements and, as a result, face negative outcomes in college. Cultural factors, such as parents prioritizing obligations to help with family chores and spending time with family members before schoolwork, may present additional challenges in higher educational attainment (Fuligni & Tseng, 1999, Phinney, Ong, & Madden, 2000; Tseng, 2004).

Andres moved away from home so he could focus on his higher education.

My father expected a lot from me as the only male, he wanted me to take care of my sisters, help bring income to the house, but at the same time he wanted me to go to college and graduate and eventually start a career. I got detached from all of my personal responsibilities so I was able to focus on school and work 100%. Instead of having my family and having to do all these things, take care of my siblings, help my dad with other responsibilities, I focused on school and work.

Jose articulated how his higher education experience would have been different if he lived with his family:

I think it would have had a negative impact because I would be relying more on my parents. If anything came up I would have to help with my sisters their homework, so moving away from home allowed me to detach from that environment.
Ivan expressed how living near campus served him well in earning his bachelor’s degree:

I got a lot of help from Sac State, and I feel that if I were to be back home I would have not been able to explore my surroundings as much. I probably would have come to class and maybe studied for a little bit and head home.

Adan recalled that even though he was 10 hours away at Davis, he was still expected to help the family. “You get loans, you are expected to pay tuition, housing, books, and you are still expected to help out the family. Whatever is left $500 or $1,000, you are still expected to help.” The strategy of moving away from their family homes helped eliminate pull factors that would have served as a barrier to earning their bachelor’s degrees. Living away from home offered the participants’ opportunities to focus on their studies, maximize the resources on campus, and attain their bachelor’s degree.

Mentors. De La Cruz (2008) found the Latino counselor served as a valuable mentor (to the participants in the De La Cruz study) because “this mentor had been the first in his family to receive a university education and was committed to helping Latino students make it through the university system” (p. 36). Ivan shared that a valuable mentor in his development was the Dean of Engineering who was Latino. “The Dean not only became our mentor; he is our fraternity brother.” Adan talked about how a Latino advisor would have made his college experience different.

Can you imagine if I had a Mexican advisor who understood where I was coming from who understood the language, the culture? I don’t think he would have said, “You don’t belong here.” I think he would have said, “I understand what you are going through. Let’s connect you with a tutor and other resources.

A pro-college culture consists of the people and activities that support college readiness and enrollment (Thorngren, Nelson, & Baker, 2004). Osvaldo was influenced
by a pro-college culture while enrolled at the community college. “When I was at Sac City we had the EOP and Puente program, and the Puente program targeted Latino students and we had a mentor, a college counselor, and our English professor for support in transferring to a university.” Participation in such programs provided the skillset to navigate through the higher education system toward earning a bachelor’s degree.

A finding from De La Cruz’s (2008) study found that respondents were surprised that so few Latino advisors were at their university. “The respondents would have preferred to work with someone from their own cultural group, but were willing to work with anyone who could have helped them navigate their experiences while attending the university” (p. 37). Through the CAMP program, Andres found comfort in working with Latino advisors. “The program director for CAMP helped me with learning about financial aid, and even helped me get an internship with a Spanish speaking television station.”

Latino students need mentors who take a special and unique interest in their success (Alva & Padilla, 1995; Arellano & Padilla, 1996; Moll & Diaz, 1985). Arrellano and Padilla’s qualitative study revealed that many of the academically successful Mexican undergraduates, especially those whose parents had a high school education or less, had a mentor or role model in their lives who had taken a particular interest in them. These individuals tended to be teachers, counselors, or program personnel who took an interest in the participants (Sanchez, Reyes, & Singh, 2006). Ivan participated in the MEP program at CSUS. An invaluable component of the MEP program was they invited
successful Latino professionals in the STEM fields to come and talk to the students and offer networking opportunities. “I saw them as successful and I thought to myself I want to be like that and their success is doable in my life.” An additional mentor for Ivan in the MEP program was the MEP program director, who was also Latina. “If I needed assistance with anything regarding school she was the person to go to.”

Stanton-Salazar (1997, 2001) has documented the critical role of relationships with institutional agents who can help negotiate school or college in the upward mobility of student of lower socioeconomic means. “If students have a mentor at the beginning of their college career, they are more likely to succeed” (Bordes-Edgar et al., 2011, p. 365). The study participants benefited because they were in contact with key programs (CAMP, MESA, MEP, and Puente) and counselors during the early stages of their college education. Those relationships formed the foundation of support to achieve their academic goals.

Santos and Reigadas (2002) found that greater frequency of contact with a faculty mentor was instrumental in Latina/o students’ academic efforts, contributing to increased college self-efficacy, better-defined academic goals, and a higher level of concern to perform well and meet academic obligations. The importance of mentoring was also supported by the research of Torres and Hernandez (2010) and Torres et al. (2009). Each of these studies found that having a mentor or perceiving that someone on campus cared about one’s academic success was strongly related to staying in school. Latino students
who reported feeling mentored also reported feeling better adjusted to college life (Bordes & Arredondo, 2005).

Participants Jose and Andres were both a part of the EOP and CAMP programs and benefited from the mentoring and counseling component of the programs. Jose was appreciative of the guidance of both of those programs, “I took advantage of their services. They (the mentors) were willing to help me and would always be there for me.” Ivan participated in the MEP program at CSUS. He valued the MEP Directors mentoring when advising him on coursework or college life. Osvaldo maximized his time with the Puente program, “I had a mentor and available tutoring” as he earned his bachelor’s degree.

**Peer groups.** Studies have shown that friends have a significant influence on a Latino adolescent’s decision to enroll in college as well as the type of college they choose to attend (Perez & McDonough, 2008). A finding from De La Cruz’s (2008) study indicates that all of the respondents mentioned “an older student who served as a mentor offering words of advice and encouragement during vulnerable times” (p. 38). Osvaldo gained valuable assistance from an older friend with whom he danced in the Mexican dance group. Osvaldo’s friend offered support to make his transition to UC Davis a smoother one. She showed him around campus and encouraged him to serve as an EOP counselor due to his experience at Sacramento City College. Ivan developed academically and personally as he worked with study groups in his upper division work toward his degree in engineering.
Adan’s strongest supporter of his academic achievement was his then girlfriend who was also from Mexico.

Obviously my ex-girlfriend helped me through it. She was my mentor, my advisor, my resource, and my tutor. She was in the medical field and if you could get me a degree in Spanish, then she could have earned a lot of degrees with all the courses she helped me with. It was embarrassing struggling in my classes. I wanted to go back home. I wanted to drop out. If it weren’t for my ex-girlfriend she was the one who convinced me to stay; one, two, three, four times to stay. I needed to stay and she said, “You need to finish. You are here for a reason. Just do it and that was it until you finish.”

Students and their peers were reciprocally supportive with regard to school. Peers were particularly helpful in tutoring and teaching the participants in their course work. Rodriguez, Mira, Myers, Morris, and Cardoza (2003) found that Latino college students were more likely to turn to their friends for support than family members. Andres disclosed a time when he wanted to quit college, but because of the support and encouragement of his friend through the CAMP program, he did not.

I almost dropped out of college, my parents were facing financial difficulties, and I had other family issues. I was taking nineteen units working thirty-hours a week and I stopped coming to class for two weeks. My friend noticed and talked me back into school, helped me with my assignments. I can say he’s my brother.

Ivan maintained his cultural identity through his peer groups on campus, which evolved while in college.

I would hang out with just Latinos when I came to Sac State, but as I grew older I realized some of these students are doing different degrees than me, so I needed to start getting in contact with other engineering students in my field, and it turns out there is a lot of diversity there.
Research Question Three

What has been your experience regarding the institutional academic and social resources available to Mexican-American men as they seek to attain a bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution of higher education?

The challenges of learning the English language. The biggest obstacle for the participants to overcome while earning their bachelor’s degrees was learning the English language. Spanish was all the participants’ first language. The process of learning English was difficult and required them to take ESL courses, which posed additional challenges. The participants of this study gained stronger command of the English language through their social network than through the ESL process at school.

According to Gee (2004), teachers often assume all students who enter a learning situation are at the same level of experience. ESL courses are multileveled; learners begin with varying degrees of competencies and educational backgrounds. They also show different rates in each of the language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Wrigley & Guth, 1992). Ivan attended a bilingual elementary school and imparted his language acquisition frustrations:

When I was younger I would ask a lot for help from my sisters. My first language was Spanish and I struggled with English up until the fourth grade. I was not until the fifth grade that English became the language of my classes.

Jose recalled his desire to learn the English language.

I would sit there for hours and hours reading a dictionary trying to translate everything the teacher wanted us to do for an assignment. Translating everything to Spanish, then translating everything I was going to say in class from one language to another. It became a habit.
Through his friendships at school, he would rely on other students who spoke both English and Spanish for homework assistance. Learning the English language was the biggest obstacle in Adan’s pursuit of a bachelor’s degree. In the Coachella Valley, speaking English was not required for daily living.

It wasn’t until I got to UC Davis that I really learned English. That is where I was challenged to speak with other Mexican-Americans, with other students, with professors, going to the grocery store, going anywhere really. Most of my friends at Davis did not speak Spanish and they were Mexican-Americans. It was a culture shock to see so many Caucasians and Asians at Davis; I had to learn the language. I struggled at Davis because of the language, not because I was not smart. While I was at Davis I had to start with Linguistic classes, (remedial courses).

Osvaldo shared that language was his biggest academic obstacle. “Not being able to write or say anything, and you are being asked to write a one page paper what you did over the summer was frustrating. I struggled with baby words because I could comprehend and understand.” Osvaldo also relied on his extended family for his English language acquisition.

I got help from my cousins who spoke English. Their Spanish was not fully understandable so it was a mutual teaching. I did have friends who lived close by so I did homework with them so in case I needed help they were there.

Osvaldo maximized his time at Sacramento City College taking three years of ESL to formally gain a stronger command of the English language.

An additional challenge the participants of this study confronted were they had to orally participate in class, though their confidence in their English speaking skills was not strong. Some of the deterring factors impeding participants’ learning of English were being in mixed-level classes, fear of speaking, fear of ridicule, difficult classes, and
programs that did not offer flexible scheduling and thus were too demanding (Buttaro, 2004). Those learning English as a second language are especially at risk of judgments by others that they cannot learn. “Students who feel rejected by society find their own ways of coping with this rejection, even though these ways may be harmful to the self” (De La Cruz, 2008, p. 34).

Andres revealed his language speaking inclinations. “I prefer to speak Spanish so I found friends who speak Spanish so I don’t have to speak English. I feel comfortable with people who speak Spanish.” In addition:

I did feel intimidated when I saw the diversity, especially when I saw Caucasians because I was not used to hanging out with them. In the classroom I tried to participate in class as soon as possible so that they knew who I was and that I did not speak correct English so I did not feel that tension the whole semester. I wanted to feel comfortable.

**Family communication with the educational institution.** Communication between parents and the school serves as a strong link for student success. However, if the parents do not speak English, this may offer potential barriers to the needed communication between the educational institution and the progress of the child. Language may also serve as a barrier with regard to parents helping their children make informed decisions about their college choices. The lack of English proficiency and little knowledge of school logistics and expectations among some parents served as a barrier to interactions with school personnel (Sanchez et al., 2006).

Zalaquett (2006) stated, “many Latino parents did not speak English, or have a limited vocabulary, all of which made helping their children a very challenging task in a
process that is complex and often overwhelming to even the most experienced” (p. 38).

Adan’s father took a courageous stand in support of his son’s educational plans. Adan decided to drop out of high school so he could work in the fields and earn money. Adan recalled his father intervening with his limited English skills.

My father went to talk to the principal and had meetings to try to convince the principal to get me back to school. They both sat me down in the principal’s office and told me why I had to stay in school. If it was not for his perseverance I would not have graduated from college, earned my Master’s degree. He knew the importance of education even though he did not continue his education here in the United States.

Motivation and academic support from parents, teachers, and other school staff may help enhance students’ academic achievement (Behnke, Gonzalez, & Cox, 2010). It is crucial that programs aiming to prepare Hispanic students and families for higher education make efforts to increase their social capital (Auerbach, 2004) and promote an understanding of how to navigate the higher education system as a first-generation student. The greatest benefit of outreach to Latino parents in college access programs may be in their potential to develop parents as more knowledgeable, committed allies of students in their quest for higher education (Tierney & Auerbach, 2004). The MEP at CSUS encouraged students’ parents to attend their orientation during the summer semester. Ivan and his parents participated in the orientation and the experience helped Ivan’s parents better understand the expectations he would be facing as a college student.

Latino parents in particular may be inclined to let school officials decide their children’s academic tracks because of a limited capacity to communicate in English, a belief that it is primarily the school’s role to determine curricular placement, or a
perception that school staff know what is best for the child (Auerbach, 2004; Ceja, 2004; Oliva, 2007). Many educators provide little guidance about higher education or show little interest in the future of the Latina/o students (Zalaquett, 2006). Conversely, the high school counselors that worked with the participants of this study guided them to college through college campus tours and assistance with their applications.

**High school and a college-going culture.** High school served as a pivotal experience in guiding the participants to college and eventually earning their bachelor’s degrees. High school students who sensed they were accepted members of the school community performed better academically than those who did not feel accepted (Booker, 2004). The participants participated in a variety of activities and programs that allowed them to feel a sense of belonging to their school. Ivan participated in MESA, AVID, and AP courses that helped him be accepted in his school community; Andres participated in soccer; Adan was a member of a vocational academy; Osvaldo built strong relationships with his school’s administration; and Jose participated in sports during his freshman year before beginning middle college.

A seminal moment in Andres’ realization of getting involved in higher education came when a high school counselor specializing in migrant farmworker children approached him with an invitation to tour local universities. “I was at Tracy high school, and I met the counselor and there was a seat open on the bus so I came to Sacramento State. She eventually helped me with my application to attend Sacramento State.” Andres felt a sense of belonging to his high school because of his counselor’s outreach
efforts. The high expectations she projected on him not only affirmed his family’s goals to achieve the American Dream but the trip allowed him to see himself fulfilling that Dream by actually being on a college campus.

Literature indicated that despite disparities in skills and resources to support their achievement, Latina/o students have as much desire to succeed in school as their White and Asian counterparts (Black Issues, 2002). Often students have high career and academic expectations, but the lack of relevant high school programs and school structures may doom them to a cycle of failure (Oakes et al., 2006; Solorzano, 1992a, 1992b). Martinez (2003) illustrated that Latino college students were exposed to low expectations from high school teachers and counselors. Jose conveyed his experiences regarding how the formal programs he belonged to in college shaped his maturity:

“Transitioning from high school to college is when they would talk about expectations, staying on top of your deadlines, making sure you study, and don’t get in debt.”

Adan was not on a college track while in high school.

I belonged to the hospitality program that prepared you to work at the resorts at Palm Springs. The program was geared for students not going to college but to just graduate from high school and work at the hotels. The system was against me getting a college degree because I was placed in the academy.

“Extensive empirical evidence exists on how the high school environment—what we identify as the school culture, exerts powerful influences on students’ college aspirations and preparation” (McClafferty-Jarzky, McDonough, & Nunez, 2009, p. 360). Having early college plans substantially increases the likelihood of taking a college preparatory curriculum and enrolling in college (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000). Schools that
encourage what McDonough (1997) identified as a college choice habitus or school climate of high expectations provide adequate opportunities for students to be eligible for and to take college preparatory and advanced-level courses taught by qualified teachers (Talbot & Kuehn, 2002).

Jose imparted how middle college impacted his college experience:

A middle school recruiter went to my sisters’ class explaining how you can take college courses in high school. Because my sister was interested, I soon followed and enrolled in the program. Middle college prepared me for college, it made the transition smoother, and it also helped me socializing with college aged students.

Andres recalled:

I was surprised at how unprepared I was when I first took my college courses. It was really difficult and I needed to step it up and assimilate to the new environment and system. High school can do more than it already does. They did not have much expectations of us. I was shocked to see the expectations of my professors in college.

The AVID program was instrumental in Ivan’s high school development as he became college bound. “The mission of such programs (AVID) is to reduce the numbers of students who are underrepresented in colleges and universities by providing college access, readiness, and other forms of preparation in middle schools and high schools” (Mendiola, Watt, & Huerta, 2010, p. 210). “AVID offers students opportunities to acquire skills that will assist in the transition from high school to college through an academic and social support elective class, college tutors, and highly trained team of teachers” (Mendiola et al., 2010, p. 211). Research on AVID’s impact on high school seniors and graduates revealed that the skills and strategies learned in AVID have assisted in transitioning into college (Lozano, Watt, & Huerta, 2009; Watt, Johnston,
Huerta, Mendiola, & Alkan, 2008). AVID high school graduates were more likely to be on track for college graduation if they obtained college credits while in high school.

Ivan credits his experience in the AVID program with helping him achieve his goal of earning his bachelor’s degree. “Thanks to my AVID counselor who told me to stay with my A-G requirements and pursue AP courses. I pushed myself into taking AP Calculus, AP Spanish, and the AP Arts Core. I’m happy I did it!” Ivan further explained the impact AVID had on him in high school, “My AVID counselor was constantly pushing us about visiting colleges, we went to nearby universities in San Francisco, Sacramento, Berkeley, and St. Mary’s in Moraga. These tours helped me make my college decisions a more informed one.”

**Formal programs serving Mexican-Americans.** “First-generation Latino students, who are at a low socioeconomic-level, frequently make all of the decisions about their educational future themselves, with little adult guidance” (Zalaquett, 2006, p. 39). The participants of this study engaged in formal programs that guided them through their bachelor’s degrees. The prominent programs include: MEP, Puente, EOP, Summer Bridge, CAMP, and the Gamma Zeta Alpha fraternity.

Tinto (1975, 1993, 2000) has long argued that the social integration of students to campus is as important as academic integration. The university is not simply a campus; it is a culture (Barzun, 1968; Gettman, 1992; Readings, 1996). Tinto, Russo, and Kadel (1994) wrote that students who develop a network with their professors are more likely to remain in classes. Student groups not only provide a supportive social outlet, they also
provide opportunities for networking, building leadership skills, and the development of practical competence (Dunkel & Schuh, 1998). For instance, the summer before Ivan attended CSUS, he was accepted into the MESA program. “I went to the orientation, and got to meet some of the other students that were in the program, and I fit right in.” The summer orientation offered a solid transition for Ivan to be accepted making his first semester a more fulfilling one.

Oseguera, Locks, and Vega (2009) specifically recognize Summer Bridge, College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP), Puente Program, and MESA as effective retention programs. All the participants of this study participated in one or more of these retention programs. Padilla (2007) accounted that students with higher levels of cultural congruity perceive fewer educational barriers. Miville and Constantine (2006) found that Mexican-American college students with higher levels of cultural congruity also exhibit higher help-seeking attitudes. These formal programs can play important roles on a college campus by identifying student academic and social needs and assisting in student recruitment and retention (Dunkel & Schuh, 1998).

Jose recalled when he first came to CSUS:

I was part of CAMP and I was part of EOP. These programs offered to help me because I was a first-generation student so I took advantage of their services. They were willing to help me and would always be there for me.

Andres illustrated the impact the CAMP program had on him when he said, “If it weren’t for CAMP I would have dropped out of college.”
Ivan participated in the MEP program and the Gamma Zeta Alpha fraternity at CSUS. The MEP director was Latina and she offered support in his course selection and was able to work with students who shared similar backgrounds. “We had unlimited access, 24/7 to the MEP center, and for the most part there was always someone there, I felt accepted there.” Adan was a member of the Gamma Zeta Alpha fraternity at UC Davis. “The reason I got involved was I needed support in terms of other Latinos going through the same things as far as studying and academics and for socializing.”

Osvaldo attended the community college before transferring to UC Davis and participated in EOP and the Puente program.

Through Puente, they took us on trips to ten universities. I had a mentor and available tutoring. I went through the whole process of empowering myself when I was at Davis working with the EOP program and the LGBT center. Through UC Davis I belonged to a Mexican dance group, and I joined them while I was at Sacramento City College; the people I dance with are my best friends.

**Interpretation of Findings through the Theoretical Frameworks**

The findings of this study were viewed and interpreted through three theoretical frameworks: LatCrit, Cultural-Ecological theory, and resiliency theory. LatCrit draws explicitly on the lived experiences of students of color by including storytelling, family history, biographies, scenarios, parables, and narratives (Bernal & Solórzano, 2001).

Stefanic (1997) cited 17 themes addressed in LatCrit:

The critique of liberalism, storytelling/counter-story telling, revisionism, critical social science, structural determinism, inter-sectionality, gender discrimination, Latino/a essentialism, language and bilingualism, separatism and nationalism, immigration and citizenship, educational issues, critical international and human rights law, black/brown tensions, assimilations and the colonized mind, Latino/a stereotypes, criticism, and response. (pp. 1511–1514)
The Cultural-Ecological theory developed by John Ogbu guides the understanding of the success of Mexican-American males graduating with a bachelor’s degree. The Cultural-Ecological theory looks at two factors that contribute to minority school performance: how society at large and the school treat minorities (the system) and how minority groups respond, based on their perceptions, to those treatments and to schooling (community forces). Ogbu and Simons (1998) defined voluntary immigrants as minorities who have more or less willingly moved to the United States because they expect better opportunities and future than if they had stayed in their homeland and involuntary immigrants are people who have been conquered or colonized.

The third theoretical framework used to interpret these findings comes from the resiliency theory, using Ungar’s (2005) definition of resilience in analyzing the Mexican-American males who have earned their Bachelor’s degree:

- The capacity of individuals to navigate their way to resources and maintain well-being;
- The capacity of individuals’ physical and social ecologies to provide those resources; and
- The capacity of individuals, their families, and communities to negotiate in culturally meaningful ways for those resources to be shared. (p. 3)

The stories and biographies of the participants have allowed the researcher to better understand how Mexican-American males have earned bachelor’s degrees. The
LatCrit framework guided the research in capturing the Latino experience, the subjects of this study, as Bernal (2002) advocated are holders and creators of knowledge.

The Cultural-Ecological theory examines the system and the community forces impacting minority school performance. The colleges and universities the participants attended served Latino students well by having formal programs on campus to specifically meet the academic and social needs of Latino students. The programs offered the participants a place to connect with others who shared the same cultural backgrounds while offering academic support navigating the educational system. The participants responded well to partake in these programs as they obtained their bachelor’s degrees. Contributing to these formal programs offered the participants social, emotional, and academic support while acquiring their bachelor’s degrees. Moreover, these programs provided the necessary mentoring the participants valued in their personal development.

Ogbu and Simons (1998) defined voluntary immigrants as minorities who have more or less willingly moved to the United States because they expected better opportunities and future than if they had stayed in their homeland; and involuntary immigrants are people who have been conquered or colonized. The families of the participants migrated to the United States for a better life than was available in Mexico. Because they migrated to the United States voluntarily, they expected better opportunities and to face obstacles willingly. The roles of the participants’ family members reinforced the resiliency theory. “The capacities of individuals, their families and communities to
negotiate in culturally meaningful ways for those resources to be shared” (Ungar, 2005, p. 3) represents the resourcefulness of the families to earn college degrees. Family members supported each other in navigating through the United States educational system in attaining their bachelor’s degrees.

The most prominent obstacle in the participants’ experiences was the acquisition of the English language. Ogbu (1995, 2003) suggested that voluntary minorities who interpret cultural differences as barriers to be overcome and get ahead are more successful in crossing cultural boundaries. The participants learned English as a means to reap the opportunities their families sacrificed for them to succeed in the United States. Overcoming this insurmountable obstacle highlights the resiliency theory. The participants demonstrated the capacity to navigate their way to resources via the educational institution and their families to develop the skills to earn a bachelor’s degree. The three theoretical frames provided distinct insight into the success of these Mexican-American males who have earned a bachelor’s degree that may serve educational leaders in decision and policymaking.

**Program Objectives**

The three pillars of the Ed.D. program at CSUS are transformational leadership, critical policy analysis and action, and informed use of data in decision making. Central values of the Ed.D. program at CSUS are the promotion of learning, equity, and achievement for all students. This study examining the success factors and strategies used by Mexican-American males who have earned a bachelor’s degree fills a hole in the
research related to the achievement gap of Mexican-American males not earning their bachelor’s degree.

**Transformational Leadership**

Successfully addressing the educational challenges of graduating more Mexican-American males with a bachelor’s degree requires transformational leadership from our educational leaders. Growing the number of Mexican-American males earning bachelor’s degrees entails an assimilation of theory and practice from the K-12 through the university systems. Nevarez and Wood (2010) maintained that transformational leadership includes three fundamentals. First is the team approach to leadership, second is the emphasis of follower empowerment, and third is providing individualized attention and support to each member of the institution.

The first fundamental is the team approach to leadership toward understanding and improving the baccalaureate graduation rates of Mexican-American males. Through this study, it was presented that these individuals who successfully completed their bachelor’s degrees had the assistance from a group of people who cared for their well-being ranging from family members, friends, and educational mentors. Educational leaders from the K-12 and four-year university systems collectively must work together seamlessly to improve the graduation rates of Mexican-American males in a team approach.

The second fundamental of transformational leadership is follower empowerment. The participants of this study followed the lead of a sibling or an extended family
member in pursuing their higher education. Once the participants obtained their degrees, they became leaders and mentors to other members of their immediate or extended family in obtaining a degree. Transformational leaders in the education field must recognize the power of follower empowerment to attract and retain Mexican-American males in the United States educational system.

The third fundamental of transformational leadership is providing individualized attention and support to each member of the institution. Individualized attention from the college agent to the individual student is needed for supporting and encouraging the objective of improving graduate rates of Mexican-American males. One of the concerns from this study and the literature is the importance of having advisors, counselors, and faculty members who are of Mexican descent, yet few are in the educational institutions. Cultural sensitivity is a critical link between individualized attention from the college agent and the success of Mexican-American male students. For example, in Adan’s situation in which his academic advisor questioned and dismissed his presence at UC Davis, the cultural sensitivity element was lacking between a non-Mexican-American counselor and a Mexican-American male student.

A challenge for advisors, counselors, and faculty members who are of Mexican descent is the lack of support for them working with the large volumes of students who seek their assistance. Mexican-American male students need individual attention in the support of their goal of earning their bachelor’s degree. Support includes academic
advising and student services support with guidance in financial aid and other non-academic matters required for completion with a bachelor’s degree.

**Critical Policy Analysis and Action**

As a transformational leader, the implementation of educational policy to improve the educational system is necessary. For example, four of the five participants moved away from home to earn their degrees and became focused on their studies, and minimized “pull-factors” from their family lives in obtaining their bachelor’s degrees. The college persistence literature consistently finds that residing on campus enhances the probability of completion (Astin, 1993). Universities may consider a policy of a one-year requirement living on campus to have better access to resources to become more acclimated to college life.

A larger political movement is needed in our educational system (K-16) to impact more Mexican-American males earning a bachelor’s degree. Harris (2009) suggested higher educational institutional leaders must start to become proponents of the success of male students. In addition, improvements to success and retention rates of Mexican-American males can increase the number of graduates with a bachelor’s degree and assist with the workforce needs in California and the United States.

**Informed Use of Data in Decision Making**

Transformational leaders must use data to make decisions. One must consider the impact and consequences of the various stakeholders while analyzing and implementing the data. Educational leaders in California need to address how data are accessed and
used from the different systems (K-12, community college, CSU, and UC). The access of information is soloed from the other systems making decision making more difficult for California educational leaders. “A ‘culture of data,’ is probably easier to foster in states such as Florida and Texas with comparatively strong traditions of state direction of education, in contrast with California’s greater emphasis in local control” (Hansen, 2007, p. 22). California would benefit from analyzing students’ academic progress from the time they enter the system through the time they earn their bachelor’s degrees.

The use of data can inform educational leaders of lagging groups who are not earning their bachelor’s degrees. For example, men represented 42% of the bachelor’s degrees conferred in 2010–2011 academic year continuing a downward trend through a national database (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). When disaggregating this data, the lowest rates of bachelor degrees obtained came from Latinos and African-Americans. The critical information presented should lead educational leaders to aggressively develop strategies to close the achievement gap. Data derived from the present study may be used by educational leaders to increase the number of Mexican-American males who will earn a bachelor’s degree in the future.

The three pillars of the Ed.D. program at CSUS are transformational leadership, critical policy analysis and action, and informed use of data in decision making. They provide graduates of the program a strong base upon which to implement change in the promotion of learning, equity, and achievement for all students.
Recommendations for Actions

Based on the findings, implications, and previous literature used in this study, a number of recommendations are made to increase the number of Mexican-American males earning a bachelor’s degree. These recommendations include:

1. Develop intrusive, research-based high school academic programs that link Mexican-American males to college-bound pathways that may also serve as gang deterrents. The purpose of these programs would be to build a sense of belonging so the students feel a sense of connection to their school community.

2. Public Schools have the capacity of enhancing protective factors by creating a climate of acceptance that promotes cultural affirmation and subsequently, the sense of belonging. This would undermine the pull of gang identification which is opposition to the home cultural identity as well pro-school identity.

3. Redesign ESL programs in elementary schools, high schools, and community colleges to focus on their students entering a baccalaureate track and not a vocational track.

4. Universities and colleges must develop outreach strategies to elementary, high school and college parents and families of Mexican-American males orienting them to the opportunities and expectations of college life. The universities and colleges must present information so parents and families understand the academic requirements, financial aid process, and the overall expectations their
sons will need to earn a bachelor’s degree. Moreover, universities and colleges must present these outreach initiatives in Spanish.

5. Require students to live on campus for at least one year so they can be fully engaged in the college community and have access to campus resources supporting their academic goals.

6. Develop academic and financial incentives for community colleges to implement middle college programs and aggressively recruit Mexican-American male high school students for attendance.

7. Further develop and cultivate Latino-based student organizations such as fraternities, clubs, and academic enrichment programs such as Puente, EOP, CAMP, MESA, and AMP at the university, and aggressively market those organizations on campus and into the high schools.

8. Design a “student success and transition” course through the counseling department that is mandatory during the students’ first semester, probing the college catalog in detail so students gain a strong command of the resources and academic planning expectations of being a university student.

9. Universities and colleges need to develop incentives for Mexican-American males to pursue higher education as a professional path after earning their bachelor’s degrees.

10. Provide training to existing K-12, community college, and University personnel as to the challenges and barriers faced by Mexican-American males in obtaining a
bachelor’s degree. The necessary cultural sensitivity and competency training is to leverage the cultural capital brought by students and to avert prejudicial attitudes and stereotypes that thwart the educational achievement of the Mexican-American males and perpetuate social reproduction of stratified career preparation and lower socioeconomic status.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

Based on the findings of this study and previous literature on successful strategies used by Mexican-American males who have earned a bachelor’s degree, there are a number of recommendations for further research. These recommendations follow:

1. A study examining Mexican-American students born in the United States who did *not* earn a bachelor’s degree would offer educators insights and strategies to serve this growing demographic.

2. A study examining second- or third-generation Mexican-American males born in the United States who *did* earn a bachelor’s degree would uncover rich data to help educators reevaluate educational policies and practices.

3. An analysis of successful methods and educational strategies used in Latino programs (such as Puente, MESA, and EOP) that have supported Mexican-American males in earning their bachelor’s degree and should be broadly disseminated.

4. A study that examines how the role of family sacrifices assisted in the success of Mexican-American males who have earned a bachelor’s degree.
5. A study of methodologies used in ESL programs that may be enhanced to ease the academic and social transition of Mexican-American males into a college setting.

6. A study examining successful high school academic and student support programs that promote Latinos into college.

7. A study of successful strategies minimizing the negative impact of gangs in high schools should be broadly disseminated.

**Reflections of the Researcher’s Experience**

The researcher grew personally and professionally because of the experience of this study. The researcher personally benefited by gaining more expertise and a better understanding of the application of the theoretical frames used in this study: LatCrit, Cultural-Ecological theory, and Resiliency theory.

The researcher found the experience of interviewing these five men intellectually stimulating and enriching. When the study commenced, the researcher speculated the research sample would have been driven by participants born in the United States. Four of the five participants were born in Mexico then immigrated to the United States. While learning about the participants’ stories, the researcher became more empathic and gained an admiration of their determination to succeed in the United States. In addition, his admiration for the participants grew while listening to their stories about their struggles in learning the English language. A take-away message was the distinction between intellect and command of the English language.
Though the researcher is not of Mexican-American descent, he was able to relate to the stories of the participants. The researcher’s parents immigrated to the United States for a better life for themselves and their children. The researcher’s parents wanted their children to have a good education, but did not know how to help with homework or how to maximize the opportunities for which he was eligible. The challenges of having a strong command of the English language served as an obstacle between the researcher and his parents throughout his educational pursuits. Like the participants of this study, the researcher also felt he had to figure out how to navigate his education on his own. The researcher was able to identify with the participants with regard to their determination and drive to succeed in the United States.

An interesting attribute learned by the researcher was how the family network guided the navigation process in their educations. The support of siblings and extended family influenced the participants’ educational experiences. The researcher was impressed with the participants’ willingness to share their stories so other Mexican-American males may benefit from their lives. There was a sense of responsibility on behalf of the participants to help other Mexican-American males on their pathway to higher education. The participants’ desires to help and make themselves so accessible to this study was greatly appreciated and admired.

**Conclusion**

The issue of Mexican-American males not earning their bachelor’s degree is a serious matter that needs to be addressed by educational leaders across the country. Our
country is losing valuable contributors to society along with the needed intellectual capital to add to the innovation and the creation of opportunities in the United States. Analyzing the resiliency demonstrated by the participants and their families may offer insight into closing the academic achievement gap within the Mexican-American community.

This study illuminates the success factors and strategies used by Mexican-American males who have earned a bachelor’s degree. The strategies shared by participants and the recommendations offered by the research provide suggested methodologies that may improve the baccalaureate graduation rates of Mexican-American males. Current educational policies and strategies have proven not to be effective in propelling this segment of the educational attainment pie.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

Letter from Dr. Heredia

MEMORANDUM:

Date: October 10, 2013
To: IRB
From: Susan Heredia, Chair
Graduate and Professional Studies in Education
Re: Doctoral student, Fermin Iriyoyen

I am in support of Fermin Iriyoyen’s request for assistance from the Graduate and Professional Studies in Education division to identify and recruit participants for his study. I understand that no identifiable information about the subjects will be credited by the use of their name. His research about the academic success of Mexican-American males who earn a bachelor of arts degree from an accredited institution of higher learning is of significance and timely.

cc: Dr. Rose Borunda
    Dr. Porfirio Loera
Dear Prospective Participant,

My name is Fermin Irigoyen, and I am a Doctoral student in the Doctorate in Educational Leadership program at California State University, Sacramento. I am conducting research to explore the personal experience of Mexican-American males who have earned a bachelor’s degree from an accredited college/university.

I was hoping that you would be willing to be interviewed, at a time and place convenient to you as part of this research during the months of November and December of 2013. The initial interview should take 60-120 minutes, and shortly afterward, a follow-up interview based on your reflections of your initial interview will be conducted. In exchange for your time and effort you will be given a $25 Visa/MasterCard gift card. For you to receive the $25 gift card, both interviews must be completed and are available throughout the completion of the study.

As a participant in this study your anonymity will be maintained at all times. You will be assigned a code number known only to the researcher. No comments will be ascribed to you by name in any written document or verbal presentation. Nor will any data be used from the interview that might identify you to a third party. You can skip any question or stop the interview at any time. If you choose to stop the interview, your data will be destroyed immediately. With your permission, the interview will be recorded using an audio digital media device. My dissertation will be available electronically through California State University, Sacramento Scholarworks.

Findings from this study will benefit the field of higher education as a whole and will be used to further the understanding of Mexican-American males who have earned a bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution of higher education. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation. However, if you become emotional or distressed due to the nature of the questions, please contact the California Board of Psychology, 2005 Evergreen Street, Suite 1400. Sacramento, CA 95815. (916) 263-2699. (www.psychboard.ca.gov)

If you have any questions concerning the nature of the research or are unclear about the extent of your involvement in it please contact email me at irigoyen@smccd.edu or call me at (650) 738-4276 or contact my dissertation chairperson Dr. Rose Borunda at rborunda@csus.edu or (916) 278-6310.
Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. If you have read this document and agree to participate, please e-mail me at Irigoyen@smccd.edu or call me at 650-738-4276 so that we can arrange for you to sign the consent form before we begin the interview.

Finally, I thank you for taking the time to consider my request. I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,
Fermin Irigoyen
Volunteers Needed for Research Study

We need participants for a research study: “Success Factors and Strategies of Mexican-American Males Who Have Earned a Bachelor’s Degree”

Description of Project: We are researching success strategies and factors of Mexican-American males who have earned a bachelor’s degree. Your participation will take about two hours through (2) one-on-one interviews on the campus of Sacramento State University.

To participate: You must be a Mexican-American male, be at least 18 years old, and have earned a bachelor’s degree from an accredited college/university.

Participants will receive a $25 VISA/MasterCard gift card for their participation of the project.

To learn more, contact the principle investigator of the study, Fermin Irigoyen, (student in the Ed.D. program at Sacramento State) at 650-738-4276 or Irigoyen@smccd.edu

This research is conducted under the direction of Dr. Rose Borunda, Counselor Education Department, and has been reviewed and approved by the Sacramento State University Institutional Review Board.
APPENDIX C

Interview Protocol

Interview Questions for Qualitative Study-Fermin Irigoyen

Research Question #1: How does the family value system, family member roles, and expectations inform the Mexican-American male student’s experience with achieving a bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution of higher education?

- What was your role in your family and how was that similar and different from your siblings?
- How did gender roles influence their higher educational path?
- Was a future or present orientation prominent in your family philosophy? Please elaborate.
- What was their family member’s educational background?
- How did you juggle family life and university life when completing your degree?

Research Question #2: How does your cultural identity inform your experience in attaining a bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution of higher education?

- Were there cultural contradictions in their pursuit of earning a bachelor’s degree?
- Were there times when you felt you had to juggle your Mexican identity with your American identity?

Research Question #3: What has been your experience regarding the institutional
academic and social resources available to Mexican-American men as they seek to attain a bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution of higher education? How did college officials reach out to you, to encourage and support your goal of graduating college?

- Did you sense a feeling of belonging socially and academically to the college?
- Were there any programs and services that propelled you to earn your bachelor’s degree?
- What recommendations would you make to college administrators to help more Mexican-American males to earn a bachelor’s degree?
- What advice would you give other Mexican-American males who are entering college?
APPENDIX D

Second Interview Questions

Interview Questions Round 2

Please elaborate on your reflections from our first interview?

Can you go over your biographical information one more time for clarification?

(Participant Profile Overview)

What were your perceptions of college before entering the university? (Themes 2, 5, & 6)

Did you ever feel any discrimination while attending the university? If so, how? (Themes 1, 2, 3, 6, & 7)

Did you feel a culture shock coming to the university as a first time college student? If so how did you cope to your new surroundings? (Themes 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, & 7)

How did high school prepare you to be a successful university student? (Themes 2, & 5)

How did your living on campus (away from home) help you achieve your goal of graduating from college? (Themes 3, 4, & 6)

What is your philosophy about higher education and what does the word “college” mean or represent to you? (Themes 1 & 6)

Why do you think more Mexican-American males are not graduating from college? (Themes 1, 2, 3, 4, & 5)

What are the contributing factors leading to low graduation rates among Mexican-American males? (Themes-all)

How old were you when you came to the United States? (Theme 1)

What do you think are the distinctions or characteristics between Mexican-American males who were born in Mexico and the United States in higher education completion? (Themes-All)

Did you feel that your family understood the expectation required of you attending college? (Themes 1, 3, 4, & 6)

How did the presence of gangs influence your decision to pursue your education? (Themes 1, 2, 3, & 5)
My name is Fermin Irigoyen, and I am a Doctoral student in the Doctorate in Educational Leadership program at California State University, Sacramento. I am conducting research to explore the personal experience of Mexican-American males who have earned a bachelor’s degree from an accredited college/university.

I was hoping that you would be willing to be interviewed, at a time and place convenient to you as part of this research during the months of November and December of 2013. The initial interview should take 60-120 minutes, and shortly afterward, a follow-up interview based on your reflections of your initial interview will be conducted. In exchange for your time and effort you will be given a $25 Visa/MasterCard gift card. For you to receive the $25 gift card, both interviews must be completed and are available throughout the completion of the study.

As a participant in this study your anonymity will be maintained at all times. You will be assigned a code number known only to the researcher. No comments will be ascribed to you by name in any written document or verbal presentation. Nor will any data be used from the interview that might identify you to a third party. You can skip any question or stop the interview at any time. If you choose to stop the interview, your data will be destroyed immediately. With your permission, the interview will be recorded using an audio digital media device. My dissertation will be available electronically through California State University, Sacramento Scholarworks.

Findings from this study will benefit the field of higher education as a whole and will be used to further the understanding of Mexican-American males who have earned a bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution of higher education. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation. However, if you become emotional or distressed due to the nature of the questions, please contact the California Board of Psychology. 2005 Evergreen Street, Suite 1400. Sacramento, CA 95815. (916) 263-2699. (www.psychboard.ca.gov)

If you have any questions concerning the nature of the research or are unclear about the extent of your involvement in it please contact email me at or call me at or contact my dissertation chairperson Dr. Rose Borunda at or (916) 278-6310.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. If you have read this document and agree to participate, please e-mail me at or call me at
so that we can arrange for you to sign the consent form before we begin the interview.

Finally, I thank you for taking the time to consider my request. I look forward to your reply.

**Giving of Consent**

I certify that I am at least 18 years of age. I have read this two-page consent form to participate in the study and I understand what is being requested of me as a participant in this study. I freely consent to participate. I have been given satisfactory answers to my questions. The investigator provided me with a copy of this form.

☐ I give consent to be *interviewed* for this research.

____________________________    ______________
Name of Participant (Printed)    Date

____________________________    ______________
Name of Participant (Signed)    Date

☐ I give consent to be *audio taped* during my interview.

____________________________
Name of Participant (Printed)

____________________________    ______________
Name of Participant (Signed)    Date

____________________________
Name of Researcher (Signed)    Date
REFERENCES


http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/cb/glossary.asp#hisp


Moving up the economic ladder: Latino workers and the nation's future
prosperity: State of Hispanic America 1999 (pp. 35-60). Washington, DC:
National Council of La Raza.


and health among Latinos in the United States. Social Science and Medicine, 64,
477-495.

U.S. postsecondary education institutions: 1992-1993, with an essay on

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). (2012, June). Bachelor's degrees
conferred by degree-granting institutions, by race/ethnicity and sex of student:
Selected years, 1976-77 through 2010-11. Retrieved from National Center for

Nevarez, C., & Wood, L. (2010). Community college leadership and administration:

Lange.


http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/population/cb09-76.html


U.S. Census Bureau. (2012, May 17). *Most children younger than age 1 are minorities, Census Bureau reports.* Retrieved from The U.S. Census Bureau:


