EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE AND/OR IMPACT OF FAMILY ON THE ATTAINMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION FOR LATINO STUDENTS

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Josue Leonardo Acosta

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EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE AND/OR IMPACT OF FAMILY ON THE ATTAINMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION FOR LATINO STUDENTS

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Graduate and Professional Studies in Education
Abstract

of

EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE AND/OR IMPACT OF FAMILY ON THE
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by

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Brief Literature Review

The attainment of higher education for Latinos has been a popular topic of
discussion in current years. In less than 40 years, Latino students have gone from being
an almost unobserved racial/ethnic group to being the largest and fastest growing
racial/ethnic group in the United States (Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2011). In their senior
year of high school, 53% of underrepresented students expect to receive a bachelor’s
degree compared to 90% of their peers. Only 31.9% of Latinos aged 18 to 24 enroll in
higher education compared to 38% of African American, 43.3% White, and 62.2% Asian
students (Pew Hispanic Center, 2011). California has the second lowest high school
graduating rate for Latinos in the country. The Master Plan in California specifically
outlines that the top 12.5% of all high school graduates are eligible for the University of
California (UC) system (Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004). During the past 40 years, the
Latino population has increased their graduation rate from 9% to only 11% (U.S. Census
Bureau, 2010). Therefore, improving the educational success of the Latino population is
imperative to ensure America’s future prosperity.
Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to understand the role of family in the attainment of higher education for Latino students. Family composition and cultural expectations affect the decisions Latinos make as they pertain to higher education, regardless of their aspirations. Understanding the Latino culture is needed by educational leaders to tackle the barriers this population encounters through education.

Methodology

The mixed-methods study took place at a 4-year university campus in Northern California. The sample was comprised of Latino students enrolled in their second semester or later at the university. A questionnaire, including questions related to the educational experience and family involvement, was sent out to 52 Latino students who were members of a Latino Greek organization on the campus. From that population, six students then participated in a one-on-one interview pertaining to their personal educational experience.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Findings from the study showed that even though many Latino parents are not educated on the college process, their support is crucial in the success of their students. Most students agreed that family was one of the main reasons they were successful in attaining a higher education. The study showed that persistence is a factor that contributes to the attainment of higher education for Latino students. Despite difficulties in attaining a higher education, persistence is needed for students to have interest in
looking for programs or services to help guide them through the process. One recommendation for future studies is to gather information from community colleges and compare family involvement to see if there is a difference in family influence. Finally, future researchers should consider gathering data from parents or guardians to consider their experiences and learn about their needs regarding their student’s education.

______________, Committee Chair
Geni Cowan, Ph.D.

___________________________
Date
DEDICATION

The countless time and sacrifice invested in this thesis is dedicated to my three brothers: Jacobo, Rafael, and Luis. As the older brother, it has always been my goal to set a positive example for you three in an effort for you to follow your dreams and be a light to others through your success. I want to exemplify the infinite possibilities and convey that anything is possible through Christ who gives us strength. Follow God and trust Him and He will open doors you never imagined.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This process has by far been one of the most difficult journeys in my life. Tested mentally, physically, and emotionally, I know I would not have been able to do this alone. I am so grateful for the opportunity and the people who stood beside me during this season of my life.

I would like to thank God for blessing me with the opportunity to embark and master this journey. It has been through His grace that He has given me the strength to accomplish something I never imagined possible.

Thanks to my parents, Patricia Miranda and Leonardo Acosta, who have supported me every step of the way, sacrificing anything for my brothers and I to have a better life, and for always believing that I would accomplish much more than I ever believed for myself.

Thank you to my awesome friends and family, from the Bay and Sac, your motivation and encouragement through this journey has meant so much to me. I value the relationships I have built and appreciate all the love and support given to me.

Thanks to my professors and advisors, Dr. José Chávez, Dr. Geni Cowan, and Dr. Albert Lozano for guiding and believing in me through this process. I am honored to have conquered this journey through your leadership.
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Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

Background

Latinos are the fastest-growing historically underrepresented population in the nation but also yield the lowest percentage of graduating students. During the past 40 years, the Latino population has increased their graduation rate from 9% to only 11% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Although Latino students have the same potential to pursue a higher education as their counterparts, the percentage of bachelor’s degree attainment is low in the Latino community. Having a large undereducated Latino population in this country will hinder this nation’s possibility to compete globally (Abrego, 2008).

There is much research on low-achieving, low-income Latino students and the various barriers encountered through their educational journeys, but there is a need to focus on successful Latino students who have attained a higher education at a 4-year university to explore their experiences and the role of their families in their attainment. It was the purpose of this study to understand the influence and/or impact of family on the higher education attainment of Latino students. Family is considered one of the most valuable cultural attributes of the Latino culture. Family provides the sense of security and trust by providing the individual with the necessities as well as develops a sense of independence by allowing the individual to make decisions and learn from them, consequently creating a positive identity for the individual (Para, 2008). For some Latino
students, life goals may include providing and supporting their families. In some cases, students’ academic and career goals may conflict with the needs of their families (Azmitia, 2013). This study will help educational leaders, administrators, and Latino families acknowledge how much of an influence and/or impact family makes to the attainment of higher education for Latino students to better serve this population in an effort to increase Latino higher education attainment and graduation rates.

**Statement of the Problem**

The purpose of this study was to understand the effects of family and how it can influence the decision of Latino students to pursue a higher education at a 4-year university. The researcher looked at what ways family expectations and cultural norms influence and/or impact the decision to pursue a higher education at a 4-year university of their choice. The study focused on the educational experience of Latino students and the role their families play in their educational success. Additionally, the researcher will describe the cultural barriers that Latino students face, preventing many from pursuing a higher education. Latinos are considered the largest and fastest growing historically underrepresented population, according to the 2010 census (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Although, Latinos are the fastest growing population, they are academically underprepared in comparison to other ethnic sub-groups (Cárdenas & Kerby, 2012). This study aims to isolate how highly influential family is for Latino students pursuing a higher education and for educating future Latino families and educational leaders. The
study discusses the importance of parental support and engagement in their children’s education as a crucial factor for closing the achievement gap for Latinos. As the fastest growing population, it is imperative to educate Latino students and provide an equal opportunity to higher education so they may become effective leaders. The primary focus of this study was to determine what factors related to family contribute to the attainment of higher education for Latino students. Specifically, the research addresses the following questions:

1. To what extent does family influence personal choice?
2. What relationship exists between family knowledge of education and student persistence?
3. In what ways, if any, does family contribute to the attainment of higher education for Latino students?

**Definition of Terms**

**Achievement Gap**

Refers to the disparity in academic performance between Latino students and other subgroups

**Consejos**

Nurturing advice from parents or elderly family members

**First Generation**

First person in the immediate family to attend a 4-year university
High-Achieving

Latino students who are eligible and qualify for attendance at a 4-year university

Higher Education Attainment

Enrolling at and attending a 4-year university

Latino

A term used to identify a Spanish-speaking population who consider themselves of Latin descent from countries in Central America, South America, and Mexico

Parent Engagement

The act of parents attending school events and interacting with education leaders to prepare their student for higher education

Student Support Programs

Programs designed to assist historically underrepresented students academically and preparation for college. These programs also aid the increase in retention by provided services needed for underserved students and includes such programs as Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID), Puente, Education Opportunity Program (EOP), and College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP).

Underrepresented Students

Students from a lower socioeconomic family, students with a disability, students of color, students who are immigrants, and students who are first-generation in college are at a disadvantage over most students.
Limitations

The limitations presented in this study are many to consider. One was the sample size, which was not an adequate representation of the Latino population. The sample was derived from a university in Northern California, which forced the researcher to only focus on the population available on the campus. Other institutions and types of colleges should also be included in the sample to gather more extensive data. All the students identified themselves as Latino students; the majority were of Mexican descent. Gathering a wider pool of data from different Latino subgroups could make the data more accurate regarding Latinos and not just one subgroup. Another limitation of this study was the decision to gather data from just the student as opposed to gathering it from the parents as well. Data from parents can give a clearer insight to the Latino experience through the parents’ perspective. Both perspectives would then provide more profound data to analyze. Lastly, only six respondents were interviewed out of the 52 who initially completed the questionnaire. Interviewing more respondents would have provided more data to analyze.

Significance of Study

There seems to be a correlation between Latino students and low college graduation rates. In defiance of the increase in population, Latino students continue to rank low amongst those students receiving a college education (Saenz, Perez, & Cerna, 2007). Considering that Latinos are on the way to becoming the largest population in
California, it raises concern regarding an increase in higher education attainment and graduations rates. Latinos compose the largest population of school-aged children, college-aged students and recent entries in the workforce and it continues to grow (Chapa & Schink, 2006). The intent of this study was to explore the Latino culture and the influence family has on students with regard to pursuing a higher education at a 4-year institution. The purpose of this study was to understand the strong family dynamic that is found within the Latino culture and how it influences and/or impacts higher education for students.

In some cases, students living at home while attending college can be deprived of the experience of venturing for themselves and the independence of making decisions on their own without the influence of their family. In some cases, youths’ academic and career goals may be in conflict with the needs of their families and friends. For example, families of college-bound youth may pressure them to attend a college close to home so they can continue to help the family economically, provide childcare, or serve as English translators (Azmitia, 2013). Many Latino students aspire to attend higher education at a 4-year institution but for reasons involving family, decide to not enroll. Many students are not educated about the financial opportunities or options available and may consider higher education a burden for their families. Financial considerations are significant barriers for Latinos. In order for many of these families to make ends meet, everyone has to contribute (White, 2012). Some students may feel guilt about leaving their family to go away to college, so they decide to enroll in the local community college or work to
help support the family. Latino students’ desire to help support their families is the number one reason they do not enroll in post-secondary programs (White, 2012). Some parents are not supportive of the careers students want to pursue because they are not educated themselves and do not understand the process. Literature suggests that many Latino parents—especially those who recently immigrated to the United States—find it difficult to understand aspects of the U.S. education system (Pstross, Rodríguez, Knopf, & Paris, 2014). This study will contribute to previous research on Latino students but focus more on the role of family in their higher education attainment.

With student support programs compensating low parental engagement of Latino families, there should be an increase in college attainment and graduation. Student support, especially from parents and family is crucial in the educational success of Latino students. The more educated parents are about the college process, the more they can support their students and encourage them to pursue a higher education at a 4-year institution. This research will contribute to the field of education within the Latino community, which continues to grow at a fast pace but have low higher education attainment and graduation rates in California. Through this study, educational leaders can understand how family highly influences Latino students and then use this information to better prepare programs to serve this population in an effort to increase Latinos in higher education.
Chapter 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the historical perspective of Latino students and their struggle to pursue a higher education. With various barriers that exist for an underrepresented student, an “achievement gap” is created that differentiates students of color from white students. This study focuses on Latino students. The major transitions including childhood to adolescence and from elementary to middle and high school and into college can be challenging for all youth. In particular, they can be especially difficult for youth from low-income, ethnic minority, or immigrant families (Azmitia, 2013). This chapter explores the reasons for the significant difference in the amount of Latino students attaining higher education versus all other students.

There are many factors to consider that affect higher education attainment for Latino students, including finance, language barriers, lack of resources, lack of guidance, and family influences to name a few. This research predominantly focuses on family and how family influences and/or impacts Latino student’s higher education attainment. To understand why Latino students, as members of one of the highest populations in the country, are not attending or graduating from college, it is crucial to examine cultural differences.
Family is an essential aspect of the Latino culture and can have significant influence on the choice to go to college for Latino students. This chapter goes into depth about family influence within the Latino culture as it pertains to education, including the topics of Familismo, expectations of roles, family involvement, lack of educational knowledge, and perception of affordability. These areas are some key factors that Latino students consider when the idea of higher education comes to their mind. Parental involvement can increase the opportunity for Latino students to pursue higher education but the lack of knowledge and perception of affordability can make the journey difficult, if not impossible, for most Latino students. This study is designed to understand the influence and/or impact of family and how it can affect higher education attainment for Latino students. Specifically the research addressed the following questions:

1. To what extent does family influence personal choice?
2. What relationship exists between family knowledge of education and student persistence?
3. In what ways, if any, does family contribute to the attainment of higher education for Latino students?

**Historical Perspective**

By 2025, it is projected that Latinos will comprise 36.6% of the state’s population. California and other states must place a focus on the transition of high school seniors into post-secondary education (Rosso, 2011). In California, about 50% of the
fourth-grade population is of Hispanic descent (Hemphill, Vanneman, & Rahman, 2011). For some underrepresented cultures, including Latinos, a high school diploma is all they expect before students must enter the workforce and support either themselves or the family. Gender can also inhibit academic persistence as students expect to fulfill certain roles in the family or community. In some cases, youth’s academic and career goals may be in conflict with the needs of their families and friends. For example, families of college-bound youth may pressure them to attend a college close to home so they can continue to help the family economically, provide childcare, or serve as English translators (Azmitia, 2013). It is critical to address the issue of Latino student access as an issue of social justice and equity as well as a necessity for economic stability, especially as the Latino student population continues to grow in the United States (Kimura-Walsh, Yamamura, Griffin, & Allen, 2009).

**The Achievement Gap**

In less than 40 years, Hispanic students have gone from being an almost unobserved racial/ethnic group to being the largest and fastest growing racial/ethnic group in the United States (Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2011). In their senior year of high school, 53% of underrepresented students expect to receive a bachelor’s degree compared to 90% of their peers. Only 31.9% of Latinos aged 18 to 24 enroll in higher education compared to 38% African American, 43.3% White, and 62.2% Asian students (Pew Hispanic Center, 2011). California has the second lowest high school graduation rate for
Latinos in the country. Several factors may contribute to this downfall: a fast increasing Latino population, larger than normal English-language learner population, and the high school exit exam. The Master Plan in California specifically notes the top 12.5% of all high school graduates are eligible for the University of California (UC) system, and in 1996, only 3.5% of those students were Latinos (Cooper, Cooper, Azmitia, Chavira, & Gullatt, 2002). Solorzano and Ornelas (2004) found that schools that are largely populated by underrepresented students offer fewer resources known to enhance college enrollment.

The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES; U.S. Department of Education, 2005) reported that all racial and ethnic groups from 1974 to 2003 increased participation in postsecondary education but increases in participation for white students were larger, indicating an achievement gap between these groups. Azmitia (2013) found that the school achievement gap poses a significant challenge for public policy in the United States. This challenge allows underserved students to receive a less rigorous curriculum than their peers (Reese & Goldenberg, 2008). This achievement gap often makes Latino students feel they have little in common with their high-achieving counterparts, which can lead to a disconnect from their education and community (Azmitia, 2013). Through the years, there has been increased interest in understanding what helps increase higher education attainment for Latino students specifically because they are the ethnic group that is least likely to pursue college (Gonzalez, 2012).
In addition, previous research validates that students from homes of higher income levels are more likely to attend college (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Most Latino families are in the workforce and consider themselves part of the lower income class. In the upcoming years, America’s Latino population will only continue to grow and will provide an increase in the labor force. Therefore, it would be wise for Federal and State policymakers, educators, and communities to better prepare this population during this sizable demographic shift in order to position the United States into a position of economic and social prosperity (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2011). As Saenz and Ponjuan (2011) stated, “if we do not act strategically and collaboratively, Latino males may continue to vanish from the American higher education landscape” (p. 4).

**Family Influence**

**Familismo**

*Familismo* is a Latino value that promotes loyalty, cohesiveness, and obedience within the family (Stein, Gonzalez, Cupito, Kiang, & Supple, 2013). Familismo is one of the most studied cultural values (Marín & Marín, 1991); it acknowledges the importance of immediate and extended family ties to the Latino community (Young, 2015). Family provides a sense of security and trust by providing the individual with the necessities as well as aiding in the development of independence by allowing the individual to make decisions and learn from them, hence creating a positive identity for the individual (Para, 2008). Due to the level of involvement of family in the development of self-image,
positive relationships between family and the individual are key to developing a positive self-image (Kenny, Gallagher, Alvarez-Salvat, & Silsby, 2002). According to Young (2015), Familismo includes the mother, father, grandparents, aunts, and uncles going to their children’s doctor visits, and all may have some say in how the child is cared for.

Family is an important factor to consider in decision making within the Latino culture. Latino families are rich in moral capital, which is a term for the message of strict work ethics, studying, and staying on the right path (Pstross et al., 2014). Specifically, as pointed out by Delgado-Gaitan (1994), Latinos receive advice or “consejos” from their parents. Familismo is a multifaceted traditional Latino cultural value that dictates norms, expectations, and beliefs about the family. A central feature of familismo is the subjugation of personal needs to those of the family. Familismo also promotes feelings of unity and cohesiveness in family (Lugo Steidel & Contreras, 2003). This concept of familismo is multidimensional, can be displayed attitudinally, is the belief in family interconnectedness, and can be carried out through behavior, which includes family contact (Lugo Steidel & Contreras, 2003). A study with Mexican American adolescents found family support is related to life satisfaction (Edwards & Lopez, 2006). The role of Familismo is one of the more important and abiding cultural values for Latinos in the United States (Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2011). Strong loyalty and obligation to family is often followed by strong desires to provide financial support for the family, qualities that hold constant across generational lines and immigrant status (Marín & Marín, 1991). These cultural desires are contrary to those of students who desire to attend college away from
In some cases, students’ academic and career goals may conflict with the needs of their families (Azmitia, 2013).

**Role Expectations**

For many Latino families, the student is expected to work to help support the family. Students are often placed in a difficult situation of deciding to either pursue higher education or support the family. White (2015) revealed that across the country, smart, capable Hispanic students face immense obstacles to fulfilling their collegiate dreams. Culturally, Latinos are supposed to live at home and not leave their parents. Parents rely on their children for various things, including communication and caring for younger siblings. There is an expectation in many Latino families that the older children will help support the family (White, 2015). Smith (2008) believed that research on this topic has to refuse an assimilationist perspective that has historically argued that low school and college achievement of Latinos are based on the students’ inability to accept the values, morals, and ethics of the American culture. From a social perspective, the continued education struggle for Latinos ultimately undermines the ability for Latino parents to fulfill their critical roles as fathers, community leaders, and role models for young Latinos (Sáenz, 2011). The pressing reality is that Latino males significantly lag behind their Latino woman peers in regard to both higher education attainment and graduation (Ojeda & Piña-Watson, 2013). This gender gap is not unique to Latino male students, but it has largely gone unnoticed and is under-examined by policymakers and educational leaders (Sáenz, 2011).
Family Involvement

Black and Latino parents are viewed as too disinterested and unsupportive to help; parents are problematized and summarily written off (Smith, 2008). The parents’ level of education creates a dissonance between their reality and the importance of a college education for their children. At this level, it is crucial for families to support students in the pursuit of higher education but it may not always be the case. Latino families are more likely to have parents with lower levels of education and jobs that are less stable and low paying (Stein et al., 2013). Perna and Titus (2005) further noted, “most approaches to parental involvement rely on a cultural deficit approach that emphasizes traditional forms of parental involvement may vary across groups” (p. 491). When parents are involved in other things besides school, it sends the message to students, specifically Latino students who may get influences elsewhere, that college is not important. Assisting parents with learning the necessary knowledge and skills to frame the education of their children can have a transformative impact on the children’s future (Pstross et al., 2014). The lack of English language proficiency has a negative effect on their ability to be involved with their children’s school (Turney & Kao, 2009).

Parents also play a pivotal role in shaping college aspirations for their children (Henderson & Berla, 1994; Kimura-Walsh et al., 2009). Hossler (1999) created the College Choice model, which explains ways that parents can encourage and promote higher education with their student, starting in the first year of high school. In addition, Treviño (2000) showed how some Latino parents of high-achieving students created a
supportive home environment for education in their home. Similarly, Lopez (2001) found Latino parents instill values of resilience, perseverance, and hard work in their children. In recent literature, Kiyama (2010) described how knowledge and skillsets that are learned in the Latino household develop educational ideologies, which include college aspirations.

Parental involvement is known to positively correlate with student academic achievement (Dornbush & Ritter, 1988; Kimuraa-Walsh et al., 2009; Rodriguez, 2002; Rosado & Aaron, 1991; Trusty, Plata, & Salazar, 2003). Cultural values may be critical in helping Latino youth in immigrant families overcome stressors, as adolescents may draw on their family connectedness and sense of support to deal with these stressors (Stein, 2013). Other scholars have focused on student success, noting that Latino students often rely on family support along with family networks to persist within higher education (Yosso, 2005). Based on their review of psychological theory and research, Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler, and Hoover-Dempsey (2005) concluded that parents’ involvement in their children’s elementary and secondary education is influenced by their role as parents, self-efficacy, and perception that their school encourages their involvement. Student achievement, as measured by grades or standardized achievement test, has often been correlated with parental involvement. Many researchers have reported positive relationships between the involvement of parents and higher test scores (Christenson, Rounds, & Gorney, 1992). Gonzalez (2002) found that first-generation Latino students received cultural nourishment from their family, which helped facilitate
their adjustment and persistence at a predominantly white institution. In addition, the Tinto (1975) model views the process of voluntary student departure as longitudinal. Tinto postulates that students bring with them to college a set of traits (e.g., ethnicity, secondary school achievement, parental encouragement for college, and family socioeconomic status) that influences their initial levels of commitment to the institution of attendance and to the goal of college graduation. Family involvement, especially by the parents is a gateway for Latinos to start pondering the idea of higher education.

**Lack of Educational Knowledge**

Lack of college knowledge may not allow parents to understand the process and the seriousness of college. Literature suggests that many Latino parents, especially those who recently immigrated to the United States, find it difficult to understand aspects of the U.S. education system (Hill & Torres, 2010). To see sustained educational success and attainment in Latino communities, Latino leaders must be equipped with the tools and opportunities to help see changes through (Sáenz, 2011). Privileged students have access to certain educational resources such as private schools and tutoring, while students from underrepresented and historically disadvantaged families find acquiring information about and applying for financial aid to be quite a daunting process (Enberg & Allen, 2011). Teachers often have limited professional training in this area or have personal dispositions about race, ethnicity, and SES, and make decisions about certain groups, ability to learn, interest in learning and chances for success in college and beyond
(Camblin, 2003) based on their limited experiences. This limits the opportunities for many students to gain the knowledge needed to go to college.

With the fast growing population, there are not enough teachers and faculty for every student who needs extra aid in becoming prepared for college. Twenty-nine percent of California school districts have no counseling programs at all. The ratio of students per counselor in this state averages 945 to 1, compared to the national average of 477 to 1, ranking California last in the nation (California Department of Education, 2015). According to the NCES, only 14.7% of students enrolled in private 4-year institutions have parents who did not attend a postsecondary institution themselves (Bergerson, 2009). Using the National Education Longitudinal Study for 1988-1992, Stearns, Jha, and Potochnick (2013) posited that significant differences in academic achievement led to gaps in the types of information to which students had access, which then influenced the range of postsecondary options available to them. However, strong family ties and obligations can be a liability when youth accepted into prestigious colleges choose to attend colleges closer to home or less prestigious colleges that the children of family friends have attended because they do not understand the career and social network implications of attending a prestigious university. This is associated with the unease families feel when their children enroll in college or university about which they know nothing and leave home for the first time. It may also contribute to the fear that mothers may have in losing the closeness they have with their children when they move away (Auerbach, 2006). Latino families must be informed of the opportunities a
higher education provides their students to better support them and feel comfortable that their children may end up away from home to further their education.

Theoretical Framework

College Choice

College choice model, as introduced by Hossler and Gallagher (1987), focuses on the stages in which students, particularly those of underrepresented ethnic groups, make choices about what university they want and actually can attend after high school. Many Latino students often have the aspirations of attending college early on, but as they are exposed to others in their community for whom higher education does not make a significant economic difference, their aspirations decline (Bergerson, 2009). A study by Hossler and Gallagher drew upon and outlined the following three stages:

1. Predisposition: Students’ aspirations to continue their formal education after high school.
2. Search: The process of considering to which types of postsecondary educational institutions to apply.
3. Choice: The selection of an institution to attend.

The predisposition stage refers to the earliest stage of the college choice process when students make the decision and aspire to continue their education past high school. Hossler, Schmidt, and Vesper (1999) found many factors that influenced the predisposition stage of student college choice. According to Hossler and Gallagher
(1987), family income, parental levels of education, the student’s academic achievement/ability, and parental encouragement were all positively associated with the decision and aspirations to pursue a higher education. It is during this initial stage that parents or family involvement and encouragement is crucial for Latino students as they develop a disposition of habits regarding higher education. It has been widely discussed that family plays a major role in the decision and aspirations of higher education for Latino students. Latinas have revealed that parents were key in encouraging them to pursue higher education (Ceja, 2001; Escobedo & Ceja, 2007).

The second stage of Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) model of college choice is “search”. As part of the search stage, which is primarily during 9th and 10th grades, students begin to compile a list of colleges and universities where they are interested in attending. This stage allows students to compare and prepare for what their future may look like following high school. By the time students enter 11th and 12th grade, students enter into the final stage, which is considered the choice stage in which students narrow down their list of options to realistic choices. These realistic choices often consider location and affordability as factors in choosing a particular institution. Research has revealed that Latino students’ choices consider post-secondary institutions that are affordable for their family or based on what is “closer, cheaper, and convenient” (Perez, 2010, p. 23). Providing encouragement, active support and setting aspirations, are three broadly defined activities that cultivate parental involvement in college choice (Hossler et al., 1999). These actions require participation by parents in the preparation and
discussions of higher education at home and in their children’s school. Parents and family members must consider and embrace the possibility of their students attending a higher education institution away from home, which is contrary to their cultural norms. Parental engagement with educational leaders can help ease the transition by implanting these expectations and encouraging parents to discuss those options with their students at home. While there is more than one path to obtaining a college degree, it is well known in the field of education that it is more likely for students to complete a bachelor’s degree when starting at 4-year university versus 2-year colleges. Alon and Tienda (2005) found that students were more likely to obtain a 4-year degree if they attended selected 4-year institutions versus choosing an institution based on how close it was to home or affordability.

To further understand Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) college choice model as it relates to Latino students, the scenario in which these students are able to make an effective choice on their higher education aspirations requires a more elaborate discussion. The majority of high schools serving Latino students in California are often under-resourced and lack Spanish-speaking faculty. The information about college given to parents and students is often limited and redirected to student services programs to educate students, if such programs exist on the high school campus. It appears that many high schools that mostly serve Latino students do not have enough resources to sustain college preparedness programs for all students, which puts an emphasis on the influence of family on college choice. Specifically, college choice research has demonstrated that
families and relatives, peers, and school personnel influence which postsecondary institutions students will attend. Which specific institution depends on the networks to which these constituencies have access (Perez, 2007; Perez & Mcdonough, 2008). A student’s college expectations reflect, in part, interests and personal investments parents make for their children (Sandefur, Meier, & Campbell, 2006). If the families, in particular parents and educators can all agree that education is the best path for the student, it may alleviate the pressures some students feel to meet cultural demands that often constrain their choice to attain a higher education.

**Summary**

The attainment of higher education for Latinos has been a popular topic of discussion in current years. With population size of Latinos projected in the upcoming years, it is imperative for the well being of this country to educate as many Latinos as possible. Besides slowing U.S. population aging, Hispanic fertility has set in motion an unprecedented yet pivotal generational transition whose social and economic significance will depend crucially on educational investments in the children (and grandchildren) of immigrants (Tienda, 2009). Within the context of college-aged Latino males, a recent report by the U.S. Census Bureau (2006) found that the ratio of Latino males in jail dormitories versus college dormitories is 2.7 to 1 (Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2011). Therefore, improving the educational success of the Latino population is imperative to ensure America’s future prosperity. Understanding the Latino culture is needed by educational
leaders to tackle the barriers this population encounters through education. While other students have resources available to them through their school, Latino students encounter a language barrier and lack of knowledge that may hinder higher education attainment. Family composition and cultural expectations affect the decisions Latinos make as they pertains to higher education, regardless of their aspirations. Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) college choice model better explains how parental involvement greatly impacts college attainment for students. Considering this model, reaching out to parents and informing them of the college opportunities is crucial for the success of Latino students. Latino students who do not have the support of their parents are less likely to attain higher education. Most Latino students have some desire to attain higher education but may not fully grasp the concept or need encouragement from their parents or family members to make their aspirations a reality.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The research methodology used in this study is described in the next three sections. The first section elaborates on the setting of the study. The second section focuses on the population and the sample for this study. The third section discusses the design of the study, which is divided into three sub-sections and includes data collection, instrumentation, and data analysis procedures. The researcher collected data during the spring of 2015.

The purpose of this study was to understand the influence and/or impact of family and how it can affect higher education attainment for Latino students. The researcher looked at the ways in which family expectations and cultural norms influence the decision to pursue higher education at a 4-year university. Additionally, this study describes the cultural barriers Latino students faced that may prevent other Latino students without family support from pursuing a higher education. The study focused on the importance of parental and family engagement for Latino students in the attempt to close the gap between the increasing Latino population and other populations regarding low higher education attainment and graduation rates. There is ample research that supports the benefits of parental involvement within education with regard to students and their higher education attainment. However, the focus on successful Latinos is limited. This study gathered data from Latino students who have overcome the cultural barriers and have been successful in attending a 4-year university.
Setting of the Study

The study was conducted on the campus of a 4-year university in Northern California with a population of approximately 29,300 undergraduate and graduate students. Forty-three percent (43%) of the student population consisted of males and 57% were females. Latinos constituted 22% of the entire student population on this campus.

Population and Sample

The population of this study consisted of a sample from the Latino student population at a single campus and does not represent the Latino population as a whole. The sample consisted of undergraduate Latino students enrolled in their second semester or later at the Northern California University campus. For the purpose of this study, the sample selected were students who were in either a Latino based fraternity or sorority at this particular campus, meaning the students were actively affiliated with a Greek organization on the campus. This sample included both male and female Latino students from various Latino Greek organizations and excluded undergraduate Latino students who were enrolled in their first semester, non-Latino undergraduate students, postgraduate students, alumni, faculty, and staff on this campus. The sample provides unique experiences primarily of students away from home and how their family affected their decision to attend this university, deviating from the cultural norms.
The sample for this study was taken from a university campus in Northern California with a population of 29,300 students during the 2014-2015 academic school year. Figure 1 illustrates the demographics of the participants, which include Latino students who were enrolled in their second semester or later at the university. The survey was provided to those students who were members of a fraternity or sorority on the campus. The sample size of 52 participants coincidentally consisted of 26 males and 26 females. Figure 2 demonstrates the large majority of respondents (98%) identified themselves as Mexican for their Latino subgroup. This questionnaire (see Appendix A) yielded 43 respondents (82.6%) who classified themselves as “first-generation” students. These students were the first ones in their immediate families to attend a 4-year university. Twenty-two (42.3%) of them considered themselves and their families as being lower socioeconomic status (SES), compared to the other 30 (57.7%) respondents who considered their families to be of middle socioeconomic status. None of the students from the population considered themselves part of the privileged higher socioeconomic status. All participants reported at least a bachelor’s degree as their academic goal with the majority 29 (54.7%) having aspirations to achieve an advanced degree as their academic goal.
Of the 52 participants, 30 provided email addresses or phone numbers to indicate their interest in a follow-up interview. These students were then contacted for an
opportunity to participate in the follow-up interview; five females and one male responded. The interviews consisted of 21 questions focused on each student’s personal educational experience and whether their family influenced and/or affected their higher education attainment (see Appendix B).

Upon approval, the researcher contacted several Latino-based fraternities and sororities at the Northern California University campus in search for potential participants. The researcher requested contact information for their respective members who met the desired characteristics of the study. Once the contact information was collected, an invitation to participate in the study was sent out to all potential participants (see Appendix C). The participants were then asked to refer to the researcher other potential participants who might fit the desirable characteristics. This method, known as “snowball sampling,” was the method used in this study to recruit participants.

**Design of the Study**

**Data Collection**

In accordance with the Institutional Review Board process at the university, the researcher submitted the necessary forms and was approved to begin the study through mixed methods. The researcher chose a mixed-method study to better understand the experience of the participants; the qualitative data can be used to better support and elaborate on the quantitative data.
Instrumentation

The instruments used for this quantitative and qualitative research method were an online questionnaire and a follow-up interview. The questions in the questionnaire and interview were developed to respond to the research questions. Considering these previously mentioned areas, the researcher developed a questionnaire that consisted of 45 questions to garner responses needed to elaborate on the influence and/or impact of family on higher education attainment for Latino students (see Appendix A). Questions 1-11 addressed the demographics and background of the students. Questions 12-14 requested information about siblings. Questions 15-27 focused on the influence and/or impact of family before college. Questions 28-43 focused on the influence and/or impact of family in college. Questions 44-45 asked to rate the amount of influence and impact the student’s family had on their higher education attainment. From these 45 questions, the researcher determined that to obtain more elaborate thoughts and experiences from the participants, it would be wise to conduct a follow-up face-to-face interview.

At the end of the questionnaire, the researcher provided an opportunity for the participant to include an email address or phone number if they were interested in participating in a follow-up interview. The researcher contacted six willing participants, which included one male and five females. The researcher conducted all the interviews face-to-face in a secure location chosen by the participant. Most interviews were conducted on campus in an empty room. The interview consisted of three open-ended questions. The first question focused on parents, the second question focused on siblings,
and the third question focused on extended family members. The researcher used open-ended questions in hopes that the participants would identify additional factors that aided their higher education attainment. These questions provided an opportunity for participants to share their thoughts and experiences. Participants could also elaborate on the questions that were asked in the questionnaire and provide information the researcher may not have addressed that was significant to their educational journey.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

The purpose of this study was to gather and analyze data from undergraduate Latino students to identify the influence and/or impact family has on their higher education attainment. The data gathered from the questionnaire was compiled and analyzed through Google Forms. The follow-up interviews were recorded to fully ensure the accuracy of the participant responses. The recording was then transcribed to allow the researcher to fully analyze and review the gathered data. Each participant was issued a number as a preventative measure to protect their confidentiality. Lastly, after thorough analysis of the data, the researcher selected concise quotes from the participants to include in the analysis of the findings, which is in the next chapter.
Chapter 4

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to further understand the effects of family and how family can largely influence higher education attainment for Latino students who have the qualifications and aspirations to attend a 4-year university. Using the following questions, this study was tailored to understand how family plays a role in the higher education attainment for Latino students and what can support what is now the largest and fastest growing population.

1. To what extent does family influence personal choice?
2. What relationship exists between family knowledge of education and student persistence?
3. In what ways, if any, does family contribute to the attainment of higher education for Latino students?

This chapter discusses the data gathered from the questionnaire and interviews and concludes with a summary of the findings. The data are presented beginning with the results followed by a discussion and ending with a summary of the findings. A full analysis of the questionnaire and interviews includes common themes found in the data that seem relevant to Latino students and their educational experience. Although all participants in this study consider themselves Latino, they do not represent the Latino
population as a whole. They represent a small population at the university, which does not take into consideration whether students were born out of the country or in the United States, another factor not mentioned in this study that can have an affect on higher education attainment.

**Results**

Results from both the questionnaire and the interviews were coded into common themes, which elaborate on the importance of family in higher education attainment for Latino students. These findings contribute knowledge from the personal experiences of Latino students who completed the first step of attaining higher education by currently pursuing their degree at a 4-year university. Though these students had not yet graduated at the time of this study, they were among the small percentage of Latino students on the path to graduate from a 4-year university. The experiences of these students can be reviewed to explore the role of family for Latino students in regard to higher education attainment in this particular population. Even though this population is considered Latino, the results are only specific to this sample and not to the Latino population as a whole. This chapter reviews the difficulties these under privileged Latino students encountered in their educational journey to attain a higher education and how their family influenced and/or impacted their higher education attainment. With the language barrier and low level of parental knowledge in higher education, students in this study were able to compensate with persistence and interest in college to attain higher education and
sought guidance from other resources including support services and educational programs. The support of their family, whether minimal or on a large scale, contributed to the success of their students. This chapter elaborates on the role family played in the success of these students, despite the language barrier and low parental knowledge on higher education.

**Language Barrier**

The respondents in this study were all Latino male and female students who spoke English as a second language. Most of these students spoke Spanish at home or to their families and spoke English everywhere else. In contrast to most of their parents, these students learned English at a very young age and practiced the language in school most of their lives. The students mentioned that most of their parents migrated to this country at an older age and do not have much, if any, formal education of the English language. Most parents of study participants were not particularly proficient in English. English proficiency for Latinos can vary depending on many variables, including location of birth, level of education, and location of education to name a few. The lack of proficiency can create a barrier between the Latino household and the educational system as English is the primary language in this country.

According to the results from this study, as shown in Figure 3, 35 respondents, which are more than 67%, said language was a barrier for them in their educational experience. Language barriers included translating for their parents, which can also add a lot of pressure for children. Translation can easily be lost between educational leaders
and families who do not fluently speak a mutual language. This is found to be commonly true amongst Latino families and schools with limited translating resources. It is often too much to expect translation from children, regardless of the age. Everyday, children of immigrants are thrown into these situations where they need to translate sensitive topics and are forced to grow up all too quickly (Herrera, 2011). Latino parents who do not speak English fluently often have their children translate Spanish to English or in reverse for them, often in conversations of which children should not be a part. While most children may not have a problem translating for their parents, translation can sometimes be difficult and not properly communicated. Poor communication creates disconnect between schools and home. Parents who are not fluent in English often feel uncomfortable attending school functions because of this language barrier and omit learning about the college process, which can contribute to the low parental knowledge on higher education further discussed in this chapter.
Language barriers can present a large variety of disadvantages for the higher education attainment of Latinos whose families speak Spanish as a first language and are not fluent in English. Most of the respondents from the interviews mentioned they had to translate for their parents in school because there was a lack of Spanish-speaking teachers and administrators. The lack of Spanish-speaking faculty also discouraged the parents from participating in most school activities, including parent/teacher conferences, informational workshops, and college prep classes. As mentioned earlier, the disconnection between languages can create an uncomfortable environment for parents who do not speak English fluently, especially when the students are not present to translate for them. When interviewing the participants in this study, one of the participants shared, “Having translators [for parents] would be helpful because a lot of
parents don’t go [to back to school nights] because they have no way to communicate with the teachers because they are English speaking only.”

In addition, this language barrier can prevent Spanish-speaking parents from learning invaluable information that can help them prepare to be more involved in their children’s education as they embark on the process of attaining a higher education. The disconnection between parents and school then manifests as parents having little knowledge of the higher education process; this is a disadvantage that the many Latinos and other underrepresented sub groups can relate to. In an effort to increase Latino parent and family engagement, it is imperative for educational institutions to provide Spanish-speaking resources or have faculty who speak the language.

**Parent Knowledge In Higher Education**

Of the 52 participants, more than 88% said they knew more about college than their parents did. Two major factors can contribute to this; one is the language barrier, which has already been discussed, and the other is parents’ insufficient knowledge of educational attainment levels. Represented in Figure 4 are the students’ parents’ educational attainment, which clearly shows that the majority of these parents attained less than a high school degree.
Parents’ educational attainment

There is previously conducted research on parents as one of the largest contributors to the academic success of their student. Parental involvement becomes increasingly critical for Latino students. In some situations, Latino parents experience disconnect in an effort to assist their student navigate the college preparation process because many have not attended college themselves. Some interview questions asked were designed for students to explain the effect of their parents’ lack of higher education knowledge. Participants mentioned that something that would have been helpful in their higher education attainment process was if their parents were more knowledgeable in the process to attain higher education and how to prepare. Over 77% of respondents mentioned they did not go to their families to answer college-related questions. When asked if something needed to change so more Latinos would go to college, one of the participants eloquently responded, “Yes! Educate the parents and they will educate their
children. Once you educate those parents they let their extended members know and then the extended family members also educate their children of the possibilities available within education.”

Parents have a large influence on the success of their children, especially in the Latino culture. Students rely heavily on parents for questions they do not know how to answer. They have grown up listening to their parents’ “consejos” about life in times of doubt and growth. Consejos are considered pieces of nurturing advice from parents or elderly family (Pstross et al., 2014). The more knowledge parents are equipped with about college, the more likely it is for their children to go. Previous research has indicated that there are positive academic outcomes stemming from parent involvement ranging from benefits in early childhood to adolescence and beyond (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Patrikakou, Weissberg, Redding, & Walberg, 2005). One of the participants in the interviews said, “At the end of the day, the parents are the highest influence on their children so if the parents know the benefits of going to college they can promote college to them at a young age.”

With Latino immigrants comprising 16.9% of the total U.S. population in 2012 (Cárdenas & Kerby, 2012), it is likely some parents have low educational attainment because they came to this country primarily to work and provide for their families in their home country. One of the participants clearly supported this, stating:

My parents grew up having nothing. They literally started from scratch working the agriculture life in the fields to provide for their families back in Mexico. Once
they had a family of their own, all they wanted from that work was not money, but their three children, including myself to succeed in life. They’ve always emphasized that they didn’t want us to live the lives that they did.

The same participant was then asked what needs to change in order for more Latinos to go to college and replied, “Parents need to be informed of all the help that is available for Latino students because most of our parents never had a formal education and have no idea how to help us.”

It is imperative for educational leaders to make it a priority to inform Latino parents about the opportunities available to their children. Although Latino students may come from loving homes, limited education and resources affect their education outcomes (Gandara, 2010). Without this knowledge, it is very difficult for Latino students to attain a higher education. There is no better predictor of how well children will fare in school than parents' education attainment (Murnane, Maynard, & Ohls, 1981).

Another factor contributing to parents’ low knowledge of higher education is that many Latino parents expect children to contribute to the family income. Many Latino immigrants drop out of school at a young age because of the necessity to work and provide for their families. Some Latino families become migrant farmworkers and begin working from the time they enter the United States. One of the participants mentioned how this was true for his parents:

Both of my parents were raised in more than ten sibling households and the reason for that was because of the hardships in Mexico. They needed more hands
to grow crops, to milk the cows, the feed the cows, which is why they needed more kids so they are used to work ethic because if they didn’t have enough people in their family, they wouldn’t be successful in providing food for their family. In addition, when they came to the United States they kept the same mentality.

Another participant mentioned, “It would have been definitely helpful [if my parents knew more about college] because any questions I had about school or how to fill out paperwork, I could go to them, but I could not because they didn’t know.” Even though many Latino parents do not have the knowledge to provide their children, any support they can provide toward a higher education can be helpful.

**Influence and Impact of Family**

Family involvement, whether it is abundant or close to none, has an extensive influence and impact on the attainment of higher education for students. The Latino culture instills the importance of family at a young age. This attribute often influences students to make important life decisions considering the impact on their family, especially for Latinos. According to the results, close to 96.1% of participants agreed that their family is one of the main reasons they are in college. More than half, 55.8%, said they would not be in college if their family did not support them. This includes support from their family both financially and emotionally. Parents are sometimes unable to engage in their children’s education because of their limited availability. Even though parents sometimes cannot fully engage, their support can be sufficient for students
to be successful. Parental support can be a large contributor to the success of their children. This information is represented in Figure 5.

Figure 5 Family impact

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family is one of the main reasons I am in college.</th>
<th>My family understands the benefits of college.</th>
<th>My family is not aware of the demands I face in college.</th>
<th>I am considered a role model to my family.</th>
<th>I would not be in college if my family did not help me.</th>
<th>I would not be in college if my family did not support me.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>96.1%</td>
<td>96.1%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>90.4%</td>
<td>55.8%</td>
<td>52.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the 52 participants in this study who were all attaining a higher education, 100% of the females said their family encouraged them to go to college as did 84.6% of the males, which encompasses the majority of the population (see Figure 6).
Most students in this study expressed that their family supported their higher education aspirations, which strengthens the argument that family makes a positive influence in higher education attainment. Most of their family did not have knowledge of higher education but they did aspire for their children to have a better life and supported them toward a higher education. In contrast to other students who do not attain higher education, it may correlate with little to no support from their family. It is important for educational leaders to inform parents and family members of the importance of family support and their role in their students’ success. With support from home, students can persist, aspire to a higher education, and seek guidance from student services programs if available, or other resources. The students in this study mentioned that most of their family did not know how to help them get into college but that they still supported and
encouraged them to attain a higher education. One of the participants shared that the influence and impact of their family:

Started when we were working in the field. [My parents] wanted me to better myself and wanted me to become something better because no one in my family had gone to college and did not know anything about college. They just knew that college could get me out of the lifestyle that they were living.

A common factor that contributed to the attainment of higher education for the students in this study was that their families understood the benefits of college. About 96.1% of the participants’ families were aware of, or had some knowledge of, the opportunities that higher education could provide for their students. Parents often learn this information from Spanish “noticias,” which is the Spanish news many Latinos watch regularly.

Another form of family support toward a higher education is financial. The majority of students said that someone in their family was helping them pay for college. In addition, more than half (52%) of those students said that by them attending college, it was affecting their family financially. The effect takes place in the sacrifice the parents make to work overtime or multiple jobs to make enough money to provide for their family and help pay for their children’s education. Students who come from low-income backgrounds often encounter extra pressure in college when they rely on the support of their family because they may feel they are hindering their family financially. Many students in these scenarios think about dropping out of school to work and help support
their families instead of burdening their family with the high cost of higher education. Students often consider the negative impact to their family’s finances when they are considering a higher education. America’s colleges and universities are quietly shifting the burden of their big tuition increases onto low-income students (Marcus & Hacker, 2014). Without the support and sacrifice of their family, many students do not attain a higher education and end up working low-paying jobs. Many low-income, underrepresented students do not go to college or if they do, they drop out because they cannot afford tuition, living expenses, or mounting debt (Azmitia, 2013). However, this research points out the benefits of family support in overcoming barriers as a Latino student. Many parents show support through working overtime or not retiring until their children graduate from college. A participant confirmed this type of support to be true by sharing, “My dad is really big on education. He said that he will not retire until all three of his children are graduated from college.”

This type of support can influence or motivate the student to exert all of their efforts to graduate from college. The participant compared herself to the rest of her class in high school, which was predominantly Latino, and said that, “[she] was 5% of [her] graduating class that went to college, not because they didn’t want to, but because they did not know how to and did not receive support from their parents.”

Figure 7 shows the percentage of students who agreed that their families made sacrifices for them to attain a higher education. Ninety-two and three-tenths percent (92.3%) of males agreed to this statement in addition to 88.5% of females. This figure
also shows the percentage of students who agreed that they are attaining a higher education to help their family, which includes 100% for males and 92.3% for females. The majority of the students in this study claimed they are pursuing a degree for their family, which confirms again the influence and role family plays in the success of students. One participant in particular mentioned:

I feel like my family always motivated me in some way. They were always in the back of my mind. I want to be successful and have a good job so I can help them or buy them a home in the future. They have served as motivation and helped me overcome many obstacles.

Figure 7  Family influence

Student Persistence

Much research has been conducted on the importance of parental involvement in the education of underprivileged students, especially Latinos. Students who come from
these backgrounds need additional support and guidance through their education to prepare them for a higher education. When educational engagement is not available from the family or parents, students must find another resource to assist them when they have higher education aspirations, including college access programs or student services programs. Otherwise, it becomes more difficult for Latinos students to be successful without guidance. Tinto (1998) stated, “One thing we know about persistence is that involvement matters. The more academically and socially involved individuals are, the more likely they are to persist” (p. 168). Programs such as Early Academic Outreach Program (EAOP), Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID), Future Farmers of America (FFA), and Migrant Education Program (MEP) are some of the programs in which the students in this study were engaged during their high school and middle school years. Programs like these provided services and resources necessary for these underprivileged students to be successful when their parents were unable to provide this knowledge. Students services programs mostly specialize in equipping underprivileged students with the resources needed to attain and be successful in higher education. They provide resources that some parents and family members cannot provide. When family is unable to provide resources pertaining to higher education, family support and persistence become important factors for students seeking guidance through student services programs. One participant mentioned:

Since seventh grade our AVID director would encourage us to look at different colleges and he would have us write to them for more information. He would
have us do presentations to the class on the different Universities that we were interested in. We would present on where they were located, what they offered, and why we were interested in that school. In high school they also made sure I filled out all of my college application correctly and that I submitted them by the deadline.

Another participant also mentioned how much of an impact these programs made on her higher education attainment:

In sixth grade, my teacher recommended me to AVID, and I know it was because of them that I received all the information that my parents could not provide me with. I think we need more programs like AVID and more colleges reaching out to high schools, middles schools, and elementary schools. I knew everything because of AVID.

AVID is a well-known program that has provided aid for many students, but other programs like EAOP also make a positive impact on students’ lives. One of the respondents from the interview shared their experience with EAOP:

I knew I wanted to go to college but I didn’t know what to do or how to get there but I faced that barrier by going to counselors and people who could help me like the EAOP program. It was tough because even though my parents wanted to help, they did not know how. If I could have done something different, I would have been in the EAOP program from a younger age to take full advantage of all the benefits from the beginning.
Not being able to connect with parents or family at home about educational aspirations can lead student to seek programs that can provide the necessary tools and resources to be successful.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the influence and/or impact of family on the attainment of higher education for Latino students. There is much research on the barriers Latino students encounter through education and this study focused on the role family plays in the attainment of higher education. Parents play a pivotal role in shaping college aspirations for their children (Henderson & Berla, 1994; Kimura-Walsh et al., 2009). Understanding the hurdles Latino students face to attain a higher education helped frame the structure of the study. This study sought to better understand the Latino culture and the importance of family on the success of students using the following three questions.

To what extent does family influence personal choice?

This study was developed with the intention of understanding the influence of family and the role family plays in the attainment of higher education for Latino students. This study found family support to have the most influence on the personal choice. Almost all participants (96.1%) agreed that their family is one of the main reasons they are in college and more than half of these students (55.8%) said they would not be in college if their family did not support them. With family support, students are able to
seek programs to aid them in the process of getting into college. The support of family is imperative in the Latino culture, as family is one of the most important aspects of life to them. Students who have family support are more likely to succeed educationally when programs are available to aid them through the process of attaining a higher education. The role of family in the success of Latino students is something to note for educational leaders to better serve the underrepresented population. As educational leaders begin to address the issue of closing the gap between the fastest growing population and lowest higher education attainment, they need to consider how to gain the support of families to allow students with higher education aspirations to engage in their programs.

**What relationship exists between family knowledge of education and student persistence?**

Parents of underrepresented subgroups may often feel disconnected from the education system because they have little knowledge about higher education and there is a language barrier that can make it difficult to communicate with administrators and faculty. Although parents may not be able to provide the resources needed to attain a higher education, this study illustrates that support from parents toward a higher education is often enough for students to follow through with their aspirations and seek programs that will provide the missing resources. As seen in the past, there has been disconnect between the Latino household and schools because of the language barrier and parents’ lack of knowledge, previously mentioned in this study. To bridge that gap, students may need to persist with the support of their family to locate other avenues of
resources. Students need to compensate for the lack of knowledge their parents have to be successful. Even though some Latino parents may not be knowledgeable about the requirements or nuances of attaining a higher education, their support or encouragement makes a positive difference in student success; it allows students to persist in their aspirations away from home. Even though educating parent with knowledge about college can also have a positive impact, this study provides data from students whose parents did not have that knowledge but did provide support for them to engage in student services programs. Student persistence in addition to family support is found to be a large contributor to student success in this study.

**In what ways, if any, does family contribute to the attainment of higher education for Latino students?**

With encouragement or support of parents and family, the Latino students in this study were all able to overcome barriers and seek out student services programs to provided the knowledge and resources needed to be successful. The data captured from the students in this mixed-methods study has provided both qualitative and quantitative data to reinforce the positive influence and impact family has on higher education attainment for Latino students. In addition, if parents become more involved in their students’ education, it increases the likelihood of them pursing a higher education. Involving parents in the college-planning process is essential to increasing access for students from low-income communities of color (Hallett & Griffen, 2015). It is imperative for educational leaders and programs to reach out to underrepresented
families, especially Latinos, and inform them of the possibilities and importance of a higher education. When parents are not available to provide those resources for their students, it is critical for programs to compensate and reach out to students who are in need of the additional support.

Nearly all participants and respondents from this study agreed that their family’s support, in addition to some student services program, contributed to their success. The respondents all mentioned the need for more outreach to parents and family members who do not speak English. With outreach, parents can become aware of the higher education process and become involved or at least be supportive of their student’s aspirations. In an effort to increase the Latino population in higher education, most students from the study mentioned they understood the importance of family support and when they have children of their own, will instill higher education from a young age and will provide the resources needed for them to be successful. As the generations continue to grow and become educated, Latino higher education attainment and graduation rates will rapidly increase because of the knowledge passed down from Latino students who have overcome those same barriers and paved the way for the rest. Many Latino students who are obtaining a college education are becoming aware of the needs of the Latino population and want to give back.

Summary of Findings

Family support, whether it is parental engagement in education or support of higher education aspirations, is important for student success. Many students do not
receive resources needed to be successful from the home, but the support they receive from family is crucial for students finding such resources elsewhere. Family support allows students to persist in their higher education aspirations by seeking student services programs that will provide the resources needed to be successful. This study provides an elaborate examination of the experience of Latino students who have attained a higher education at a 4-year university through the support of their family and resources provided by a student services programs. The data from students in this study exemplify that even though parents are not able to provide resources to their students, they do want their children to be successful, and they provide the support they can. These students were given the support from their parents, which allowed them to engage in programs that provided them with the knowledge to attain a higher education. Through this analysis, it can be concluded, that family support has a positive influence on the success of students.
Chapter 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

With Latinos being the fastest growing population with the lowest higher education attainment and graduation rate, it is advantageous to explore this area of education to decrease the achievement gap. Hispanic students have gone from being an almost unobserved racial/ethnic group to being the largest and fastest growing racial/ethnic group in the United States (Humes et al., 2011). As more student services programs are being developed to aid underrepresented students including Latinos, it is imperative to acknowledge the role of family and its importance in student success. The role of Familismo is one of the more important and abiding cultural values for Latinos in the United States (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2011). In some cases, students’ academic and career goals may conflict with the needs of their families (Azmitia, 2013). Assisting parents in learning the necessary knowledge and skills to frame the education of their children can have a transformative impact on the children’s future (Pstross et al., 2014). This study focused on exploring the influences and/or impact of family in higher education attainment for Latino students. Findings were analyzed from a mixed methods study that consisted of results from 52 respondents to a questionnaire and six interviews. These participants all considered themselves Latino and were in their second semester or later at a university in Northern California. The participants were asked to answer a
series of questions related to the influence and impact of their family on their higher education attainment. Through the interviews, the researcher was able to delve further into the specific aspects of contributing to the students’ success and what can be done to increase college graduation and attainment rates for future Latinos.

**Conclusions**

The findings of this study included examined experiences of Latino students in their journey into higher education and the role of family in their educational success. By using a population of Latino students who were already at a 4-year university, the researcher anticipated gathering experiences of parental support provided to those students and how it affected their success. The intent was to look at the experiences of Latino students who were successful in attaining a higher education through a 4-year university and highlight family involvement or whether other factors contributed to their success.

This study credited the importance of family support as a crucial factor in student success. Even if families are not knowledgeable about the college process, parental support and encouragement is the first step in helping students to persist in their higher education aspirations. As an underrepresented subgroup, Latinos are already at a disadvantage in education, but with the support of family, students are able to seek resources outside the family. Although, some parents are uneducated and lack the college experience, respondents in this study stated the importance of their family’s
support toward their success. Many mentioned that without their family’s support, it is very likely they would not have attained a higher education.

The support students receive from parents is crucial for the development of the student’s values and points of views (Bosma, Kunnen, & Saskia, 2001). It is apparent that family has an immense influence on the success of their students. Parental engagement or support of their children’s higher education aspirations are found to be highly effective influences on student success. Therefore, parents and families should be educated of the process and benefits of higher education in order to engage in their children’s education or support them while they seek resources from programs. Family support, in addition to persistence, can increase the amount of Latino students graduating and attaining a higher education. Educational leaders must become aware of the needs of the underrepresented subgroups, especially Latinos, in order to provide the adequate resources those students are not receiving from home. All the respondents indicated that they would like to see more outreach to parents, especially in Spanish. Unfortunately, with the lack of Spanish-speaking educators, it leaves many parents who do not speak English fluently with little knowledge of the higher education process and uncertainty of their role in the success of their students.

To see sustained educational success and attainment in Latino communities, Latino leaders must be equipped with the tools and opportunities to help see changes through (Saenz & Ponjoun, 2011). Students’ academic achievement/ability, and parental encouragement are positively associated with the decision and aspirations to pursue a
higher education (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Family support and engagement in student services programs like AVID appears to have a positive impact on student success.

Most of the respondents indicated that from their experience, they have learned about the importance of family support in their success and they will provide parental engagement or support for their children’s education to ensure their academic success. They will share their knowledge and experience with not only their children, but also with other family and friends in an effort to aid the growth of an educated Latino population. As more Latinos are becoming educated, they are becoming aware of the importance of family support and the need for student services programs to compensate when knowledge is not received from the home.

Latinos in this study have proven to be successful despite the challenges they faced in their pursuit of a higher education. Family has played a critical role in the success of these students through support of their higher education aspiration even though most of the students’ parents in this study did not have knowledge about the higher education process. Previous research has concluded the importance of integrating family in the college preparation process in order to increase the chances for Latino students to attain a higher education, but this study has identified that family support is enough for students to persist in their higher education aspirations. Even though the respondents’ families lacked the college experience and resources, most supported them in some way.
Recommendations

The Latino population is growing at a fast rate. To effectively close the achievement gap in California, educational leaders need to be aware of the importance of family support in student success. As an underrepresented population, Latinos are faced with extra challenges already, so the support of family becomes a necessity for them in their pursuit of a higher education. The more support students receive from their family, the more likely they are to attain a higher education. The implementation of student services programs that consider the importance of family and incorporate family engagement and support are essential to the success of Latino students. Outreaching directly to this population will directly affect the future of this country.

Further research on this population would include data from Latino students who did not pursue a higher education. It would be interesting to learn about the educational experience of Latino students who did not attain a higher education and how their family influenced and or impacted their decision. Comparing the experience of Latino students who are successful versus Latino students who are not would give greater insight into the influence of family in education. The contrast can also help identify if there are specific barriers that prevent Latino students from attaining a higher education.

This study only focused on the experiences of students already at a 4-year university. Further research would also include gathering data from Latino students enrolled in community college. The experiences of Latino students at a community college would also give additional insight into the influence of family and their choice to
attend a 2-year college over a 4-year university. It may provide a different perspective on family influence. Some students who attend a community college work full-time or choose that college to stay close to home. The opportunity to compare family influences from students at a 2-year college versus a 4-year university could provide more robust data.

Future research for this study would also explore student services programs and their effectiveness on Latino students. At the end of the study, the researcher ponders what resources and services these programs are offering to students that are effective for higher education attainment. More research on these programs can identify what works well in ensuring students are well prepared for college. Latino students are capable of becoming successful as much as any other subgroup, it is time to reach out to students and families and educate them about higher education.
APPENDIX A

Questionnaire

I would like to participate in the study.
Select your gender
Select your age group
I am the first in my immediate family to go to college?
How many semesters have you been in college?
What is your academic goal?
Has anyone in your family helped you financially while you were in college?
Yes, please let their relation to you.
Who influenced your decision to attend college?
Did your family influence you to attend a college close to home?
Who in your family influenced you to attend a college close to home?
College was talked about in my home?
Attending college affects my family financially?
The financial effect to my family influenced my choice of college?
What is the extent of your father's education?
What is the extent of your mother's education?
How often do you communicate with your parents?
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My parents encouraged me to go to college.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My parents are excited that I am in college.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My parents stressed the importance of having a college degree.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My parents were involved in my education during high school.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My parents are the reason I am in college.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My parents helped me prepare for college.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My parents expect me to earn good grades in college.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My parents expect me to go home when I have breaks from school including weekends.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My parents are aware of the demands I face in college.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My parents influenced my choice of major.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [I knew more about college than my parents.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My parents come visit me?]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My parents frequently ask when I will graduate.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My parents prefer that I work to help support the family financially.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My parents are proud of me.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My parents encourage me to graduate from college.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My parents serve as motivation for me to graduate from college.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My parents treat me different now that I am in college.]
Do you have siblings?
Are you the oldest of your siblings?
Are you the youngest of your siblings?
Are you the youngest of your siblings?
What is the highest educational level that any of your siblings have completed?
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My siblings encouraged me to go to college.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My siblings are excited about me being in college.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My siblings stressed the importance of having a college degree.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My siblings were involved in my education during high school.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My siblings helped me prepare for college.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [I can go to my siblings with school-related questions.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My siblings expect me to earn good grades in college.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My siblings expect me to go home when I have breaks from school including weekends.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My siblings are aware of the demands I face in college.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My siblings support my major.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My siblings come visit me.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My siblings influenced my choice of major.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My siblings frequently ask when I will graduate.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My siblings look up to me because I am in college.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My siblings are proud of me.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My siblings encourage me to graduate from college.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My siblings serve as motivation for me to graduate from college.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [I am a role model to my siblings.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My siblings are the reason I am in college.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My siblings treat me different now that I am in college.]
What is the highest educational level that any of your extended family members have completed?
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My extended family members encouraged me to go to college.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My extended family members are excited about me being in college.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My extended family members stressed the importance of having a college degree.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My extended family members helped me prepare for college.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [I can go to my extended family members with school-related questions.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My extended family members expect me to earn good grades in college.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My extended family members are aware of the demands I face in college.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My extended family members support my major.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My extended family members come visit me.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My extended family members influenced my choice of major.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My extended family members frequently ask when I will graduate.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My extended family members look up to me because I am in college.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My extended family members are proud of me.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My extended family members encourage me to graduate from college.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My extended family members motivate me to continue my education.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My extended family members serve as motivation for me to graduate from college.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [I am a role model to my extended family members.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My extended family members are the reason I am in college.]
Please choose the option that best represents your experience. [My extended family members treat me different now that I am in college.]
APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

How did your parents influence and/or impact your higher education attainment?

How did your siblings influence and/or impact your higher education attainment?

How did your extended family members influence and/or impact your higher education attainment?

What barriers did you face to get into college?

How did you overcome those barriers?

Did your family play a role in overcoming any of those obstacles?

Did your parent know how to prepare you for higher education?

Do you think it would have been different if you parents had knowledge about college and how to prepare you?

Why do you think that Latinos are the highest in population but the lowest in higher education attainment?

Is there something that you feel needs to be changed in order for more Latinos to go to college?

What do you think can be done to bring awareness to parents?
What do you wish would have been done differently in your education experience to better prepare you for college?

When you have a family, what would you do differently?

Is there anything you want to add from your experience?
APPENDIX C

Invitation to Participate and Consent

Invitation
March 1, 2015

Dear Participant,

You are being invited to participate in a research study about the influence/impact of family on the attainment of Higher Education for Latino students. This research is being conducted by Josue Acosta, a graduate student at California State University, Sacramento. The objective of this research is to further understand how family influences the attainment of higher education for Latino students. This study is being conducted at California State University, Sacramento. The questionnaire is being administered to Latino students who are currently enrolled in their second semester or higher at California State University, Sacramento.

There are no known risks for participation in this study. There are neither costs nor compensations for participating in the study. The information you provide will assist with the understanding of what factors are most important for Latino students as well as obstacles encountered when attaining a higher education including family. The information collected may not benefit you directly, but what it is learned from this study should provide general benefits to future students, colleges and universities.

I am requesting that you participate in a questionnaire that consist of 79 questions. The questionnaire should take approximately 15-25 minutes. This questionnaire is anonymous. Any collected data will be destroyed after it has been thoroughly reviewed and analyzed.

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact Josue Acosta at [phone number] or by e-mail [email address] or Dr. Geni Cowan, CSUS faculty advisor for this investigation at (916) 278-6154 or e-mail at gcowan@csus.edu.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate, or decide at a later time to stop participating. The researcher may also end your participation at any time. By checking below, you are acknowledging that you understand the risks involved in this research and agree to participate in it.

I have read and understand the above consent.

☐ I agree

☐ I do not agree
Consent
April 27, 2015

Dear Participant,

You have consented to participate in a research study about the influence/impact of family on the attainment of Higher Education for Latino students. This research is being conducted by Josue Acosta, a graduate student at California State University, Sacramento. The objective of this research is to further understand how family influences the attainment of higher education for Latino students. This study is being conducted at California State University, Sacramento. The interview is being administered to up to 10 Latino students who have completed the questionnaire and have selected to participate in the follow-up interview.

There are no known risks for participation in this study. There are neither costs nor compensations for participating in the study. The information you provide will assist with the understanding of what factors are most important for Latino students as well as obstacles encountered when attaining a higher education including family. The information collected may not benefit you directly, but what it is learned from this study should provide general benefits to future students, colleges and universities.

I am requesting that you participate in a face-to-face semi-structured interview. The interview should take approximately 30-45 minutes. The interview will be digitally recorded and transcribed. This interview is anonymous. Your rights to privacy and safety will be protected through the use of pseudo names in the research. Any audio recordings will be destroyed after data has been thoroughly reviewed and analyzed.

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact Josue Acosta at [redacted] or by e-mail [redacted] or Dr. Geni Cowan, CSUS faculty advisor for this investigation at (916) 278-6154 or e-mail at gcowan@csus.edu.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate, or decide at a later time to stop participating. If you feel any type of emotional discomfort during the study, you may decide to stop participating. The researcher may also end your participation at any time. By signing below, you are acknowledging that you understand the risks involved in this research and agree to participate in it.

I have read, understood, and received a copy of the above consent.

________________________________  ________________
Signature of Participant            Date
REFERENCES


