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Validation: Latino Voices in Higher Education

by

Krista Navarrette

A Thesis

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Validation: Latino Voices in Higher Education

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This qualitative study explored Latino men's experiences in higher education and their capacity to succeed at a Predominately White Institution (PWI) in the Midwest region of the United States. The study focused on six participants as they navigate through college and how they viewed their validation as Latino males in college. The literature review discusses the current state of Latino/a's in higher education and how they are lacking in the education race in regards to white students. The researcher used Validation Theory to investigate Latino males - deemed the "invisible population"—in order to find new implications for persistence, pursuit, and achievement for Latinos in higher education

Through a semi-structured interview protocol, qualitative interviews were conducted with each of the participants. Participants shared their experiences -being a Latino man in higher education and how they viewed their self-worth, confidence, and the ability to succeed. Findings indicated that validation was found in the classroom, out of the classroom, and internalized as they persisted through the educational pipeline. Validation occurred among professors, coursework, peers, family, mentors, and through student involvement. In addition, a theme emerged from the data that examined participants own inner validation. This research challenges institution to become active

agents in validating students as they navigate the campus environment and places responsibility on faculty, staff, administrators to actively engage with their students to provide support, and offers recommendations for future research and best practices.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to those who remind me why I work so hard to overcome my obstacles as they rise above theirs.

In memoriam to my grandmother who always had faith in my ability to succeed and supported me along the way.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to the participants of this study. Without those individuals, I would not have the opportunity to walk across the stage and received my diploma. There were moments when I thought I couldn't finish and I thought about how my participants never gave up, and for that inspiration, I thank you all with all my heart. Your continued dedication to higher education is what drives my passion and commitment to helping others.

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Finally, to my students, I wake up each morning excited to go to work and see all the impact that you make within our community. I have learned so much from the Multicultural Greek Council and will cherish the time that I've had with you. I am blessed to have the opportunity to be your advisor and see each and every one of you grow. You remind me each day why I love being in the Student Affairs profession.

And to all of you who know me, I leave you with this, "Started from the bottom now we here!"

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Real education should consist of drawing the goodness and the best out of our own students. What better books can there be than the book of humanity?
-Cesar Chavez

The statistics on Latino men in higher education are alarming. Generally speaking females have outpaced males in degree attainment since 1998 (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). More specifically, according to Saenz and Ponjuan (2011) “men of color, and Latino males in particular, lag significantly behind their female peers in terms of both college access and degree attainment” (p. 3). Seventy-five percent (75%) of Latinos who obtained degrees in 2009 were females (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Researchers also found that the gender-gaps are still increasing even though there has been an increase in degree attainment for the Latino community in general (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Latino/a’s are now the largest minority population, however, Latino men are still falling behind in the education race overall. The following shows some of the recent statistics for Latino men’s educational achievement rates:

- Hispanic Bachelor’ degree attainment 11.3% women vs. 9.4% men;
- Advanced degree attainment 4.5% women vs. 3.9% men;
- 86.7% of Hispanic men have less than a Bachelors degree;
- White men have a 22.3% Bachelor degree attainment;
- White women 21.7% Bachelor degree attainment;
- 13.2% of White men have an advance degree attainment; and
- 11.8% of White women have an advance degree attainment. (U.S Census Bureau, 2012)

Previous research has found, Latino males are farther behind than females in college degree attainment and they have a significantly lower degree attainment rate when

compared to white males (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2011). In addition, research on Latino males tends to focus on the negative aspects of Latino men in higher education rather than how these particular individuals are validated or not validated through their experiences. Harper and Williams (2014), noted that statistics about African American and Latino males are endless pages of negative research and statistics on these two populations (p. 5).

Validation Theory can provide a lens to help understand the Latino male population in college. Harper and Williams (2014) looked at the positive aspects of students in education and how they were able to be successful. Using Validation Theory as a way to examine how Latino males view their educational experiences let me focus on the positive aspects of the Latino college student experiences and allowed me to explore the experiences of this particular population in a different way. In addition, Validation theory was used to look at what the institution was doing to support Latino students and what higher education professionals can do to provide further support based on the findings of this research. This thesis research sought to understand “how these student might find success in college” (Linares Rendón & Muñoz, 2011, p.12) and focused on Latino males specially.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how Latino men experienced going to college at a Predominately White Institution (PWI) in the Midwest. The researcher investigated how Latino men viewed their own validation through campus

experiences. In addition, the study will look at how participants obtained self-worth, confidence, and the capability to succeed in college at a PWI.

Significance of Study

The Latino male achievement gap is increasing and research on Latino males needs to be a priority for investigators to increase Latino persistence in higher education. In addition, many authors have argued that although persistence for Latinos in higher education has become an issue there is still a lack of research in that area (Noguera & Hurtado, 2012). Lastly, Latino males have become an “invisible” population that is not recognized in higher education (Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2009).

Past research has addressed the reasons Latino males might be falling behind on and not persisting in college (Harper & Williams, 2004; Linares Rendón & Muñoz, 2011; Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2009; U.S. Department of Education 2011). However, researchers agree this is an issue that needs to be explored in more depth through additional research. In addition, research addresses how Latino males navigate through higher education but further research is needed to identify alternative ways they can persist in higher education. Furthermore, this study expands on the use of Validation Theory to help understand a specific population’s experiences while, providing a lens to explore Latino males experiences in higher education.

Research Question

In order to frame the topic of validation of Latino student on a Predominately White Institution (PWI) the following research question guided this inquiry:

- How do Latino students feel validated in college at a Predominately White Institution in the Midwest?

The research question shaped the qualitative research study to focus on Latino males and how they felt validated on a college campus. One research question was provided in order to allow flexibility of the study and informed in-depth qualitative interview questions for participants. Through the qualitative interview process participants were able to share their experiences and views as they navigated through college. This research contributes to existing research on Latino males in higher education and the use of validation on specific populations (i.e., Latino men).

Research Design

A qualitative research design was used for this research project in order to capture participants' experiences and their meaning making process. Merten's (2010) explained that qualitative methods provide researchers with the resources for uncovering forms of oppression, institutional racism, and other forms of inequities that impact people of color inside and outside of the classroom. Although the participants' identity was kept anonymous, many participants were eager to recommend or reach out to others to volunteer for the study. In the midst of that, I realized how my role as a member of the Latina/o community played a role in the recruitment process. As the researcher, I felt comfortable engaging with members from my own community and shared some of their experiences. I recognize that not all of the participants had the same experience, but the common bond of Latino values connected me to the participants.

Definitions of Terms

Defining terminology for this qualitative research study is important in understanding the findings and perspectives of Latino voices. Definitions are as follows:

Latino: The racial term “Latino” was chosen to be inclusive of all ethnic backgrounds that identify with the Latino identity and as a male. In Spanish, the “o” gives the word a masculine identity. Therefore, Latino will be used to describe a Latino who also identifies as a male.

Latina: The racial term “Latina” was chosen to be inclusive of all ethnic backgrounds that identify with the Latino identity and as a female. In Spanish, the (a) gives the word a feminine identity. Therefore, Latina will be used to describe a female who identifies as a member of the Latina/o community.

Latina/o: Refers to the racial term for the Latino/a male and female community as a whole. For the purposes of this study the term Latino will be used throughout to refer to men including the participants in the study.

Hispanic: “Refers to people whose origin is Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Spanish-speaking Central or South American countries, or other Hispanic/Latino, regardless of race” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). For the purpose of this study, the researcher will use Latina/o. However, some previous researchers use the term Hispanic.

Validation: Refers to whether a student does or does not feel capable of learning inside and/or outside of the classroom (Rendón, 1994).

Persistence: Refers to a person’s ability to overcome obstacles and obtain their desired goal, such as a college education.

Machismo: Refers to a variety of individual definitions ranging from gender roles, sexuality, socioeconomic classes, which relate to power/control and rejection of any feminine traits (Felix-Ortiz, Ankney, Brodie, & Rodinsky, 2012, p. 137).

Dropout Rates: Percentages of students who withdraw from an institution and do not return.

Graduation Rates: For the purposes of this study, graduation rates refer to percentages of students broken down by race/ethnicity who graduate from an institution.

Familismo (Family): “Strong desires to provide financial and emotional support to the family” (DeGarmo & Martinez, 2006, p. 62).

Delimitations

There were six participants in this study who all self-identified as Latino males, and these were the only demographics represented in the study. In addition, the majority of the participants were upperclassmen students due to age limitations on the study. The primary investigator sought out Latinos who were 19 years of age or older. This was ideal because placing a minimum age allowed for more experienced upperclassmen to share their experiences over a wider range of years. In addition, they might have more experience in overcoming obstacles, and ideas as to how they navigated through college. The participants all studied at Midwest University, a (PWI) located in the Midwest region of the United States. At the time of this study, the institution had 12% minority students, a multicultural center on campus, and over 400 organizations. Three of the participants were attending Midwest University as a graduate students, and as such, some of their undergraduate experiences and validation came while they were attending Hispanic

Serving Institutions (HSIs) and other diversely populated Midwestern institutions. Data collection did not reach outside of this context. Five of the six of participants were Greek affiliated. Although a Greek affiliation was not a requirement to participate in the study, many of the men were a part of a Latino founded fraternity. One participant was a member of a historically White fraternity, and the sixth non-Greek participant remained unaffiliated. In addition, half of the participants were members of the same Greek organization.

Limitations

There were several limitations in this study, including that the study only took place at one Midwestern, PWI. Because of the one research site location and number of participants, findings from this study should not be generalized to all Latino males at Midwestern PWI or other institutional types. Time was an additional limitation due to the duration of the study, which was conducted during two semesters prior to my graduation. If the study was conducted during a longer period of time, the researcher could have reached out to additional institutions and potentially interviewed more participants.

My positionality as a Latina woman could have been another possible limitation because I do not identify with as a man. The fact that the researcher was not a male possibly created a separation because of differences in gender. Some Latino males are often raised with specific gender roles such as machismo-like characteristics that would prevent participants from sharing distress, feelings, and lack of control (Felix-Ortiz et al., 2012, p. 137). Participants may have chosen to share surface-level experiences and views

because the researcher is a woman and they did not want to appear “out of control” or vulnerable. Regardless, their shared cultural identity, values, and sense of community may have contributed to the researcher establishing a trusting relationship with participants. Despite gender differences, the researcher was able to establish rapport with the participants and glean rich data from them. In addition, she was able to create trust through the use of pseudonyms, one-on-one interviews, and a genuine desire to hear what the participants had to say. The researcher believed that one of her strengths was authenticity and her ability to appear genuine in her interactions with the participants.

Conclusion

Higher education scholars have researched many areas of Latino males in higher education. This study will focus on six Latinos experiences in college and how they view validation on their campus. The findings of this study will provide additional research on how validation occurs on campus and to what extent it affects Latinos in their pursuit of a college degree. Furthermore, understanding and researching how Latino men are being validated or invalidated while pursuing their college education is a necessary step to improve the quality of education for Latinos in higher education.

In Chapter 2, the literature review will describe research on Latino persistence in higher education and explore the gaps between gender roles. In addition, Chapter 2 will examine research specifically on Latino men and the types of obstacles they face while pursuing their education. Finally, the literature review will provide an overview of the theoretical framework of Rendón’s (1994) Validation Theory, which provided the foundation for this qualitative research. Chapter 3 will discuss methodology and explain

how the research was conducted, as well as the rationale of the study. In Chapter 4, participants will be introduced and themes will be presented based on the analysis of the data. Chapter 5 will discuss the findings and how they relate to previous literature. Finally, the author will explain implications, make recommendations for future research, and provide final thoughts.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this literature review is to provide context for the study and addresses the current national trends of the Latino population as it relates to college degree attainment. In addition, I will highlight research and literature on Latino academic success, engagement, identity development, and how validation theory has been applied to this population. Although much of the research is focused on the Latino population, the literature review will focus primarily on Latino males and their low educational attainment rates, as well as their achievement gap. Latino males have one of the lowest graduation rates of any subpopulation in higher education and are still underrepresented in pursuing degrees compared to other racial/ethnic groups, women, and White men.

Approach to Literature

A preliminary document search identified various articles through Academic Search Premier, Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), Journal Storage (JSTOR), GoogleScholar, and Project MUSE databases. In addition, the researcher obtained multiple books such as *The Latino Education Crisis*, *Invisible No More: Understanding the Disenfranchisement of Latino Men and Boys*, *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*, and *Critical Race Theory*. Search items included “Latinos,” “Latino men,” “Latino persistence,” “Latino’s in higher education,” “Validation Theory,” “Latino at a PWI,” “men of color,” “Latino engagement,” “success,” “educational inequalities,”

“diversity,” “attainment,” “social support,” “barriers,” “Latino experiences,” “Latino engagement,” “Latino graduation rates,” “Critical Race Theory,” “LatCrit,” “family,” “familismo,” “Latino Persistence,” “mentoring,” and “men in education.” These sources provided the researcher with sufficient research and literature on the relevant barriers and support that Latino males face in higher education. In addition, literature was reviewed to further explore theories relevant to the Latino population, such as ethnic identity development, validation, the impact of campus ecology, and using LatCrit to further explore injustices and inequities within the U.S. higher education system.

A Brief History and Context of Latina/o’s in U.S. Higher Education

In the United States 2012 Census, Latinos were the largest minority group in the United States numbering 52 million individuals, or approximately 16.9% of the total population in the United States (United States Census, 2014). “By 2050, the U.S. Census estimates, one out of four individuals living in the United States will be of Latino heritage” (Garrod, Kilkenny, & Gómez, 2007, p. 1). However, Latino and African American males are shown to have the smallest percentage of participation when it comes to pursuing higher education and college degree attainment (Noguera, Hurtado, & Fergus, 2012).

After 1945, the United States went through major changes in higher education (Thelin & Gasman, 2011, p. 13). The G.I. Bill caused a ripple effect, which created expansion in higher education (Thelin & Gasman, 2011, p. 13). Not only did the G.I Bill increase student enrollment, but also the bill allowed the government to open doors to new ways of expanding higher education (Thelin & Gasman, 2011, p. 13). This opened

up access for not only veterans, but also first generation, low-income, and minority students (Turner & Bound, 2003). The G.I. Bill increased access to higher education for Latina/os however, the program was primarily set up to benefit White communities (Hurtado, Sáenz, Santos, & Cabrera, 2008).

In 1960, el movimiento also known as the Chicano movement focused on a series of issues but the primary focus targeted public education (Gutiérrez, 2010; Hurtado et al., 2008). The Chicano movement provided educational improvements and helped create a voice for Latino's in the United States. Despite, the progress from el movimiento through boycotts, strikes, and demonstrations, the public education structures in the United States still maintained its Anglo-centric foundation that is not inclusive for all the current students today (Gutiérrez, 2010, p. 26). According to Rendón (1994), the campus environment is still designed for traditional students who come from privileged backgrounds where the pursuit of college is common. Student activities, organizations, and curriculum has not shifted its focus from the traditional upper class white male event though "today's student body represents a tapestry of differentiation in social background, race/ethnicity, gender, disability, lifestyle, and sexual orientation" (Rendón, 1994, p. 33). Due to the nature of higher education institutions Latina/o students still have to navigate through a system that does not adequately serve the Latina/o student population. Garcia and Bayer (2005) argued, "access to the public schools does not guarantee an individual equal educational opportunity" (p. 513).

Barriers for Latino Students

Understanding the barriers and support for Latina/o students is crucial to increasing the success and persistence of this student population in college. According to Castellanos and Gloria (2007), many Latina/o students must overcome multiple obstacles during their college experience. In addition to their challenges leading up to college, Latina/o students are forced to navigate invalidation in and outside the classroom, ranging from unsupportive faculty and staff, cultural insensitivity, and being viewed as unimportant members of the campus community (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Rendón, 2002).

Latina/os Pursuing College

According to Castellanos and Gloria (2007), previous literature on Latina/os suggested that “cultural values or cognitive skills [were] responsible for their lagging behind their counterparts across the educational pipeline” (p. 382). However, current research suggests that the lack of success in higher education remains because of the inequalities embedded in our educational system and additional challenges that Latina/os face prior to and during their time in college (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Rendón, 1994; Solórzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005). In the last decade, enrollment of Latina/o students has significantly increased at four-year institutions. However, Latino males are still behind in enrollment compared to Latinas and the traditional white male student (Hurtado, Sáenz, Santos, & Cabrera, 2008; Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2011; United States Census, 2014). Overall, Latina/o enrollment rates have increased, but Latinas/os are still more likely to attend two-year institutions compared to

four-year colleges and universities (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Haro, 1994; Solórzano et al., 2005). This is problematic because research explained that most Latina/os at two-year institutions are pushed into “terminal” degree/certificates, the option to transfer to four-year institutions remains low, and most community colleges focus on the “in classroom experience” versus helping to make the necessary connections which have been shown to aid in student success (Barnett, 2011; Solórzano et al., 2005, p. 281). In addition, students who attend four-year institutions are more likely to obtain a Bachelor’s degree than students who start college at a community college (Nuñez, 2009; Solórzano et al., 2005). Obtaining a degree is also more difficult for students who come from community college due to the lack of support when students transfer from a two-year institution to four-year institution (Solórzano et al., 2005). Solórzano et al. (2005) explained:

Of the 100 Latina/o students at the elementary level, 48 drop out of high school and 52 continue on to graduate. Of those 52 who graduate from high school, about 31, or 60% continue on to some form of postsecondary education. Of those 31, about 20, or 65%, move on to community colleges and 11, or 35%, will go to a 4-year institution. Of those 20 in community colleges, only 2 will transfer to a 4-year college. Of those 11 students who went to a 4-year college and 2 who transferred, 10 will graduate from college with a baccalaureate degree. Finally, 4 students will continue on and graduate from graduate or professional school and less than 1 will receive a doctorate. (p. 277)

Gándara and Contreras (2009) also discussed that Latina/os and African Americans often do not make it to the 12th grade, and that many Latina/o students have ambitions to attend college, but do not actually pursue or obtain a degree. Fifty-five of those Latina/o students who do pursue higher education attend (PWIs) (Torres 2003, p. 532). Many of these Latina/o students who do enter college are limited on where they can attend based

on low socioeconomic status, language barriers, and admissions restrictions (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Research showed that Latina/o students tended to settle for less, attending less selective institutions when they were academically capable or qualified for more selective colleges (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Solórzano et al., 2005). As a general rule, more Latina/os are concerned with financing college and are more likely to be first generation students than their White counterparts (Hurtado et al., 2008). In addition, Latina/o students are not encouraged to attend college by teachers/staff, do not have information about college selection, come from lower-income families who cannot afford the costs associated with college and/or knowledge about the admissions process (Gándara & Contreras, 2009).

Familia (Family) Economics

Familial ties impact Latina/o students' educational attainment based on the parents' educational level and social economic status (Garcia & Bayer, 2005). Latina/o students who have parents with a college education are more likely to graduate high school and pursue college (Garcia & Bayer, 2005). Parents who have higher education degrees have navigated through college and are able to understand the system enough in order to provide resources for their child (Gándara & Contreras, 2009, p. 51; Hurtado et al., 2008). Latina/os are more likely than any other racial group to be in poverty (Garcia & Bayer, 2005; Haro, 1994). "Parent education is essential because it is tied to class, and class privilege is tied to social and cultural capital—access to power and authority" (Gándara & Contreras, 2009, p. 51). Therefore, Latina/o students who do get into college face additional challenges if they are the first in their immediate family to

pursue a degree (Terenzini et al., 1994). In the past the overwhelming majority of Latina/o students were first generation college students, studies show that the number of second generation Latina/o students enrolling in higher education institutions is increasing (Hurtado et al., 2008). Overall, students are affected by the economic and educational support associated with being a low-income first generation Latina/o student.

Latino Persistence and Support Systems

According to Conchas (2001), “students who became engaged in institutional support programs impact the student’s ability to achieve regardless of their social economic class” (p. 500). Tinto (1993) and Astin (1993) explained that students who were activity engaged at their institutions were more likely to graduate and find support systems along the way. In addition, Tinto (1993) highlighted that students would be more likely to succeed if they had clear expectations, maintained a sense of connectedness to the university, and had an environment that actively encourage their involvement in college activities (Tinto, 1998). Models that actively engage students range from clubs, student organizations, fraternities or sororities, scholarship programs, mentors and staff/faculty who regularly interact with their students. Some of these components incorporate mentoring within programs that allows students to make connections with the campus and peers at these institutions.

Mentoring

According to Castellanos and Gloria (2007), students who do not find mentors are less likely to understand the campus environment and feel welcome through their experiences. Castellanos and Gloria explained that support systems such as

organizations, peers, mentors, family and faculty are salient relationships for Latina/o students that positively influence their persistence in college. Mentoring emphasized academic success and interpersonal relationships related to the Latina/o culture (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007). Bordes-Edgar, Arredondo, Kurpius, and Rund (2011) also noted that students are more likely to persist if they have someone on campus who is invested in the individual and care for the student's success. High schools and colleges need to bridge the gap and collaborate in order to provide incoming freshmen a mentor (Bordes-Edgar et al., 2011). Research has shown that mentoring was a key component when establishing cultural values and support for Latina/o students (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007). Mentoring was also seen as a way to facilitate familial values within the school environment (Bordes-Edgar et al., 2011; Castellanos & Gloria, 2007). Mentor programs can serve as support systems for students and help them persist in higher education.

Apoyo a la familia (Family Support)

Despite other obstacles, families of Latina/os college students have provided a significant level of support for students. According to DeGarmo and Martinez (2006), "The family and the value orientation of familism, *familismo*, are major sources of identity, self worth, and social support" (p. 269). Castellanos and Gloria (2007) explained that *familismo* ensures that Latino students are more connected to the institution if the campus culture fosters *comunidad* (community) values such as caring, respect, loyalty, and responsibility. Mothers provided a support system for persistence through the encouragement they offered their children who were enrolled in college

(Castellanos & Gloria, 2007). Latino families were the key predictor in determining the persistence of Latina/o students and were more likely to persist if they had families that valued education (Bordes-Edgar et al., 2011; Haro, 1994). In addition, Latina/o families were found to have positive attitudes and support postsecondary endeavors (Haro, 1994). Multiple studies suggested that implementing “family-like roles as a means of infusing family into the college culture” (Ojeda, Castillo, Rosales Meza, & Piña-Watson, 2014, p. 13). Ojeda et al. (2014) emphasized that PWIs might not foster these identities and values of Latina/o students. However, HSIs are known to uphold family values of Latina/os (Ojeda et al., 2014). Among Latino family dynamics, Latino research has also explored sex and gender roles within Latino men in higher education.

Latino Male Research

The representation of Latino males in higher education is one of the most alarming statistics among underrepresented groups in college. According to Saenz and Ponjuan (2009), Latino males are more likely to drop out of K-12 education, enter the workforce, and receive lower paying jobs than attend college and obtain a degree (p. 54). Multiple resources note that black and Latino males have the highest incarceration rates, and this has had an impact on Latino male enrollment rates and persistence in higher education (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Noguera, Hurtado, & Fergus, 2012). According to Gándara and Contreras (2009), enrollment of Latino men was 10% for Midwestern institutions compared to 40% at higher education institutions in the West.

As Latino males vanish within the education pipeline, researchers ask: What happens to these Latino men who are not present within our educational system?

“Literature on Latinos generally contain a plethora of deficiency-focused or maladaptive-behavior-based articles on issues of violence” and other factors that impact persistence for Latino males (Gloria, Castellanos, Scull, & Villegas, 2009). Research on Latino men is much more likely to highlight their negative behavior or academic challenges, reinforcing the cycle of institutionalized racism that often leads to instructor intervention in the first place. Some examples of institutionalized racism, which favors White men over Latino men, in the literature include Latino men being suspended from school and diagnosed with learning disabilities at higher rates than average compared to White males (Torres & Fergus, 2012, p. 26). White males were also more likely to be placed in gifted and talented programs while in school (p. 26). As a result of such perceptions and incidences, Latino males often reject academia because they perceive academia as “White” or want to fit in with the masculine expectations of their own culture (Oyserman et al., 2006; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). According to Hurtado, Sáenz, Santos, and Cabrera (2008), Latino males obtained lower grades compared to Latinas and non-Hispanic White males in their study. In addition, K-12 academic preparation significantly determined Latino persistence in college and that Latino males are more likely to succeed when they have family support (Strayhorn, 2010). Strayhorn (2010) explained the following:

Latino males who talk about college with their parents have more realistic expectations about higher education and, as a result, are better prepared for the academic and social demands of college which allow them to manage most challenges successfully while earning or maintain good grades. (p. 331)

As mentioned previously, *Familismo* represents the strong cultural values and beliefs within Latino families, often carrying with it defined gender roles for each family member. Latino men are taught through cultural influences to “establish a powerful

position within a hierarchy” (Félix-Ortiz et al., 2012, p. 137). Due to power dynamics of the household, many Latino males play the role of the provider and protector, and hold the ideal that family needs are to be held above their own (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). These gender roles often place pressure on Latino men to be the primary support for financial assistance for their family (Félix-Ortiz et al., 2012). Although, *Familismo*’s cultural pressure can be in conflict with their educational goals it can also be a critical support system and encourage persistence.

Validation Theory

Concerned with minority students, institutional racism, and retention, Rendón (1994) conducted a study that examined how students obtain self-worth and the capacity to feel confident in their education. The research explored both in- and out-of-classroom experiences. Validation is used to understand how students are being included or not in the classroom learning environments as well as the campus climate and co-curricular activities that the institution provides. Validation focuses on how students obtain self-worth, confidence, and capability to succeed in higher education. Linares Rendón & Muñoz (2011) described validation for minority groups as being broken down into two forms, which included the “academic” experience and “interpersonal.”

Rendón’s (1994) validation theory first came about as a result of the changing demographics in institutions where women, minorities, and non-traditional students enrollment was increasing, but the institutional structure was not changing to meet the needs of a diverse student population. Linares Rendón and Muñoz (2011) described how scholars and practitioners saw validation theory as a valuable asset for underrepresented

populations. Validation theory places responsibility on faculty and staff to provide opportunities for validation instead of offering resources in a passive way. Rendón (1994) summarized her findings as follows:

- Traditional students expressed few, if any concerns about succeeding in college, while nontraditional students, particularly those in community college and predominately African American four-year college, communicated some doubts about their ability to succeed.
- Some students are quite independent and can function within academic and social infrastructures quite easily, but many non-traditional students need active intervention from significant others to help them negotiate institutional life.
- Success during the critical first year of college appears contingent upon whether students can get involved in institutional life on their own or whether external agents can validate students, in academic and/or interpersonal way.
- Even the most vulnerable nontraditional students can be transformed into powerful learners through in- and out-of-class academic and/or interpersonal validation.
- Involvement in college is not easy for nontraditional students. Validation may be the missing link to involvement, and may be a prerequisite for involvement to occur. (p. 37)

Rendón (1994) found that “external agents” invested in the student to build confidence in their ability to succeed in the academic and co-curricular realm. Validation was also seen in students who were involved with activities on campus and established relationships with their professors. However, not all students can or find it easy to engage within academic and co-curricular activities. Therefore, “external agents” are important for the success of non-traditional students (Rendón, 1994, pp. 39-40). Rendón (1994) described external agents in the classroom as faculty members who demonstrated the following:

- faculty who demonstrate a genuine concern for teaching students,
- faculty who were personable and approachable toward students,
- faculty who treated students equally,
- faculty who structured learning experiences that allowed students to experience themselves as capable of learning,

- faculty who worked individually with those students needing extra help, and
- faculty who provided meaningful feedback to students. (Rendón, 1994, p. 40)

Although faculty members were a key component in validating students in the classroom setting, peers were also seen as another validating agent for students. “Many times, low-income students are reluctant to ask questions because they have been treated as incompetent in the past and because they are unfamiliar with how the higher education system works” (Rendón, 2002, p. 644). Faculty members can be seen as an invalidating presence in the classroom if students do not feel comfortable to ask questions. Barnette’s (2011) study showed that faculty validation was one of the strongest predictor for student success and their persistence (p. 213). Rendón (1994) found that peer-to-peer relationships were also a factor in the support and validation of students’ success in the classroom.

Another source of validation is seen within out-of-classroom experiences. For example, students in Rendón’s (1994) study explained that family, mothers in particular, played a significant role in their education and validation as students. In addition, peers were also seen in the out-of-classroom experience by providing an opportunity to connect with others in their program. Peers were able to communicate outside the classroom, create study groups, support each other, and use each other as resources (p. 42). Rendón (1994) also noted that many students discussed interpersonal validation being present in- and out-of-the-classroom. Rendón (1994) explained, “Faculty, friends, parents and siblings played particularly important roles in interpersonal validation” (p. 42). According to Nuñez (2009), “the impression that faculty have taken an interest in

students' development is among the strongest predictors of a sense of belonging" (p. 38).

Validation as defined by Rendón (1994) provides the following elements:

- Validation is an enabling, confirming and supportive process initiated by in- and out-of-class agents that foster academic and interpersonal development.
- When validation is present, students feel capable of learning; they experience a feeling of self worth and feel that they, and everything that they bring to the college experience, are accepted and recognized as valuable. Lacking validation, students feel crippled, silenced, subordinate, and/or mistrusted.
- Like involvement, validation is prerequisite to student development.
- Validation can occur both in- and out-of class. In-class validating agents include faculty, classmates, lab instructors, and teaching assistants. Out-of-class validating agents can be 1) significant other, such as a spouse, boyfriend, or girlfriend; 2) family members, such as parents, siblings, relatives, and children; 3) friends, such as classmates and friend attending and not attending college; and, 4) college staff, including faculty who meet with students out-of-class, counselors/advisors, coaches, tutors, teaching assistances, and resident advisors.
- Validation suggests a development process. It is not an end itself. The students get validated, the richer the academic and interpersonal experiences.
- Validation is most effective when offered early on in the student's college experience, during the first year of college and during the first weeks of class. (pp. 43-45)

Unlike student involvement theories, Rendón's (1994) validation theory recognized that students might not have the mindset, access, or ability to find the resources in order to get involved. Validation encourages students to feel successful by "external agents" reaching out to students in and outside of the classroom. In terms of involvement, students are expected to reach out to organizations for the help that they need and the involvement theories do not take into account that faculty, staff, and other administrators need be active agent in this process. Validation takes into account the classroom environment, involvement outside the classroom, relationship building with faculty, staff, peers, family members and other external agents that invest time in the student (Rendón, 1994).

Validation continues to look at the importance of both in and out of the classroom

experiences. Validation plays an important role in the success of individuals ability to succeed in college and “recognizes that not all students can be expected to learn or to get involved in institutional life the same way” (Rendón, 1994, p. 51).

Conclusion

This research study was focused on Latino men at Midwest University, a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) located in the Midwestern part of the United States. Further exploration on validation for Latino males is critical to the field of higher education research. Linares and Muñoz (2011), discussed that an “effective way to theorize student success, as well as to understand and work with underserved students, validation theory holds great promise and merits increased research attention” (p.28). This research is necessary to understanding the barriers and achievement of Latino men in college today. Chapter 3 will describe the study methodology, data collection, and analysis procedures.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

This qualitative research study examined how Latino males view their ability to be successful in college. In this research study, the researcher focused on how Latino men perceived themselves as capable learners, their success, and confidence in pursuing higher education. Semi-structured interviews were utilized to examine what motivates and influences Latino college males to feel validated or invalidated as they navigate through college.

Validation Theory was used as the theoretical framework to guide the research that sought to understand how young Latino men experience validation during the process of their college education. Through a semi-structured interview approach and intentionally constructed protocol questions, the researcher gained insight into how Latino males viewed the sources of their validating experiences in and out of classroom at Midwest University, a Predominately White Institution (PWI) in the Midwest.

Research Questions

The research question guiding this study was: How do Latino males feel validated on a PWI as they pursue their college degree? The research question guided the study by addressing how Latino men view their experiences within the classroom and outside of the classroom. Furthermore, validation theory was used to develop the semi-structured interview protocol. The semi-structured interview questions were divided and asked during two separate interviews. The first set of questions were designed to establish

rapport with the participants and examine their experiences prior to college.

Demographic questions were also used to ascertain the nationalities and age of participants, and their year in college. The second set of questions focused on the participants' higher education experiences in and outside of the classroom. Please see Appendix D for the interview protocol.

Constructivist Approach

This study was designed and carried out using a constructivist paradigm as the philosophical assumption, providing a foundation for this study. Mertens (2010) noted, "Constructivist paradigm is influenced by facets of the transformative paradigm such as action research, critical theory, participatory research, and feminist theory" (Mertens, 2010, p. 226). The constructivist paradigm recognizes that "reality is not absolute" and there are multiple realities (p. 226). The constructivist paradigm was an important foundation for this qualitative research study because the researcher felt that in order to do justice to the research, the constructivist paradigm was needed to recognize individual meaning-making experiences. As the researcher, I recognized each participant had various experiences that made up their individual realities and that these experiences ultimately shaped participants' values, morals, and how they view their own reality. I wanted the research process to value and validate all of the participants' experiences, even if the researcher did not experience them or relate to their individual experiences.

The constructivist approach focuses on "relativist ontology" and the ability to have a "mutual understanding of the experience" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 24). The researcher believes individuals make meaning through their experiences, and they create

perceptions of those experiences. In addition, those experiences can be influenced by the social norms of society, which can impact the way individuals make meaning, especially if they do not fit within the status quo. Mertens (2012) described the following, “Knowledge is socially constructed by people active in the research process, and that researcher should attempt to understand the complex world of lived experiences from the point of view of those who live it” (p. 16). I believe there is no definite, accurate, or inaccurate perception, but there are multiple realities based on an individual’s past and present experiences. Recognizing social constructs of experience were vital to accurately representing and interpreting the experiences and perceptions of the six Latino men in this study.

Research Approach

The qualitative research design was necessary to understanding multiple realities within an underrepresented population (Mertens, 2012). More importantly, qualitative methods can provide participants or underrepresented populations a voice and give them the opportunity to matter in such a majority-driven system. Merriam (2009) believed that qualitative research “focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making a difference in peoples’ lives” (p. 3). Through the phenomenological approach, the primary investigator sought out the participants’ “individual’s perceptions and meaning of a phenomenon or experience” (Mertens, 2010, p. 226). The researcher attempted to understand the participants “subjective understanding” by their voiced experiences in the interviews (Seidman, 1998, p. 17). Phenomenological research captures four major themes within

the qualitative theoretical approach, (1) transitory nature of human experience, (2) subjective understanding, (3) lived experiences, and (4) meaning making (Seidman, 1998, pp. 17-19). Through these four themes, the phenomenological approach allowed participants and the researcher to engage in a thorough and genuine dialogue.

Methods of Data Collection

Data collection was conducted in the Spring 2014 semester at Midwest University. There were two semi-structured interviews conducted with each participant designed to establish rapport and investigate prior experiences that shaped the participants perceptions. The semi-structured interview method allowed the researcher to follow up with questions to clarify any data that was unclear. Semi-structured interviews also allowed the researcher to explore relevant topics that appeared during the course of the interview (Merriam, 2009). The majority of the protocol questions were written with Merriam's (2009) suggestions on semi-structured interviews in mind:

- experience and behavior questions,
- opinion and values questions,
- feeling questions, and
- demographic questions.

The interview protocol can be found in Appendix D. During the first interview, the primary investigator used open-ended and direct questions to help participants feel comfortable in the interview process. The open-ended questions gave participants the flexibility to describe and elaborate on their experiences.

Prior to interviews, the primary researcher discussed the informed consent form that would be given to the participants so they were aware of the study and their right to disengage in the study at any time. This study was approved by the Institutional Review

Board at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln (the approval letter and informed consent document are available in Appendix A and D). The second interview consisted of open-ended questions that were intended to evoke in-depth information on how the participants shared and experienced validation at a PWI. The first interview ranged from 30 to 45 minutes long. The second interview ranged from 45 minutes to an hour long.

Data Analysis

All interview sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed by a selected transcriptionist. Pseudonyms were selected for each participant for identification purposes and to protect the anonymity of the participants. The researcher reviewed each audio recording and transcript to check accuracy of the transcriptionist. In preparation for data analysis, the researcher took time to listen, process, and reflect on the data as it was being collected. For example, after each interview, the investigator wrote down basic information for each participant and notes from each interview, processing the information internally. After data was obtained, the following data analysis strategy from Charmaz (2006) was used to identify themes:

- remain open,
- stay close to the data,
- keep your codes simple and precise,
- construct short codes,
- preserve actions,
- compare data with data, and
- move quickly through data. (p. 49)

The data was placed in an Excel spreadsheet located in a password-protected computer. After data was compiled into the spreadsheet, the researcher identified overlapping categories and connections from all of the interviews. Another document was then used

to compare data and categories to ensure that the emerging sections were represented in the data. Themes were identified and classified with an emphasis on student experiences in and out of the classroom. The researcher practiced a comparative method approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) when analyzing the data. The comparative method approach allowed the investigator to immerse herself in the data and identify themes that emerged from the data analysis process. The validation theory was also a guide utilized to identify and sort emerging themes.

Researcher Reflexivity

As the primary researcher, my ability to recognize my own experiences and biases that could impact or influence the research was a vital of the qualitative inquiry process (Mertens, 2010). The first and most important piece of my reflexivity is that I identify as a member of the Latino/a community. However, my identity might not align with others' perceptions of how they would categorize me because of I also identify as biracial. As a biracial woman, other individuals have identified me as white, Native American, Indian, and Latina. However, I identify as a Mexican American because Mexican American traditions, values, and experiences have been dominate throughout my life and were a significant part of my upbringing. Therefore, my ability to understand the cultural background of my participants provides me with an insider's perception as a member of the Latino culture.

I was raised in the Southwestern part of the United States and attended a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) as an undergraduate. It is important to note that my experience

at an HSI differs from my graduate experience at a PWI because of the difference in campus climate and ecology for students of color.

As a researcher who has experienced a PWI and an HSI, my experiences shaped how I viewed both institutional types. In my opinion, the major differences between the campus environments were the demographics of the student populations and the availability of welcoming spaces that the institutions provided or lacked for Latina/o students. At my undergraduate university, the buildings displayed murals inside of them and the Spanish-Pueblo Revival influenced the structure. I struggled developing an identity within the new PWI environment and did not have the support system that I had developed at my undergraduate university. My extended family was no longer 15 minutes away and my parents were no longer just a couple of hours away. This was the first time that I was away from family, and my sorority that I relied on was not present at my graduate institution. During my transition, I had challenges relating to others because they had very different upbringings and experiences. I struggled personally to stay confident and was not able to find a strong source of validation at the PWI. These experiences have influenced my perception of the way I view access, support, and resources at Midwest University.

Through my personal experiences, I view validation as a key component in my own persistence through college, and I do not believe that I would be in graduate school if it was not for my mentor encouraging my abilities to do so. As a first generation student with low ACT scores, I came into higher education feeling invalidated until I had staff and peers take interest in my ability to succeed. As a student navigating through

college, I continue to have many doubts over my ability to succeed because of the lack of Latina role models, especially as I pursue higher education. In addition, many of my peers from high school did not pursue their undergraduate degrees and ended up residing in my hometown working minimum wage jobs. I was often unaware of resources until staff and peers validated my background, perseverance, and recognition of my ability. Although this is my experience, it is important that I am aware of my personal perceptions with validation as the researcher.

Overall, my identity and experiences push me to be passionate about my research and the direction I will take it. In addition, I am aware of my biases, but strive to work with them and continue to keep an open mind. Although I am heavily influenced by my own identity, background, and experiences, I realize not everyone has the same point of view as I do. In my research, I focused on having participants' thoughts and experiences heard through their own voices versus the assumptions others, including myself, may have of them.

Trustworthiness

In order to address the trustworthiness of the research, the primary investigator was CITI trained, and submitted protocol questions, information on how participants were recruited, purpose, and an informed consent form to the IRB. I also made sure that any information that could directly identify participants was stored in a password-protected computer. At the end of the study, all records linking the participants name and their pseudonym were erased. In addition, the interviews recorded only identified participants' by their pseudonyms. Thus, the transcriptionist would only have access to

the recordings that used pseudonyms. Access to files was limited and password-protected, and the transcriptionist was required to sign and agree to keep audio recordings confidential, even though they do not include the real name of the participant.

In addition, the researcher used multiple approaches to strengthen the credibility of the study. The researcher asked clarifying questions and paraphrased to ensure that she understood information being shared during the interviews. Credibility of the findings was also established through prolonged engagement by conducting two interviews and conducting member checks after the data analysis was completed (Lincoln & Guba, 1994). The two interviews were used to establish rapport and trust with the participants, in order to facilitate more in-depth conversations. In order to make sure that the data was accurate, the researcher sent the findings to each participant to ensure they did not have concerns of how they were represented or the accuracy of the themes that emerged from the interviews. As an in-group member, the researcher's own identity provided further trust with participants, as she was not only a member of the Latino community, but also an advisor in the Office of Greek Affairs. These identities provided a sense of understanding and trustworthiness, as well as provided some commonalities when seeking the experiences of the participants. According to previous research, prolonged engagement, member checks and one-on-one interviews serve as sources to obtain trustworthiness and credibility (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

Conclusion

This chapter described the direction the primary investigator took in order to conduct the qualitative research. The methodology section described how the author recruited participants and conducted interviews in order to collect data rich, meaningful data. In addition, the author was able to discuss limitations and potential biases, in order to recognize the role she played in the research. In Chapter 4, the primary investigator will describe the findings of the study based on the data analysis process. In Chapter 5, the author will discuss the findings in relationship to prior research, implications for practice, and make recommendations for future research.

Chapter 4

Findings

Introduction

This qualitative research study explored the experiences of Latino men as they navigated through college at Midwest University, a large, Predominately White Institution in the Midwest region of the United States. The primary research question in this study was: how do Latino students feel validated on a college campus? This question was designed to examine how Latinos obtain support and guidance as they pursue higher education. The researcher chose to focus on one research question in order to allow flexibility to explore multiple factors of how Latino men felt validated or invalidated within their campus environment. Themes that emerged from this qualitative research study served to address how some Latinos persist and what types of support are necessary in order for them to succeed.

Introduction to Participants

To recruit participants, the investigator reached out to all of the campus fraternities and cultural groups via emails from the Greek Affairs and Multicultural Affairs offices. Interviews were scheduled with six participants, three undergraduates and three graduate students, at various locations and times during the month of February. All participants were interviewed in private locations at the Midwest University ranging from student offices, the Multicultural Center, Greek Affairs, and the university library. With a limited Latino student population on campus, snowball sampling was utilized to recruit participants (McMillan, 2012, p. 105). The researcher's in-group status was

beneficial, as participants were eager to find other members of the community to aid “one of their own.”

The participants in this study shared multiple commonalities, among which were that they each came from areas with a high Latino population. All participants described their hometown communities as being in heavily Latino populated areas, as well as being highly diverse in terms of race and ethnicity. In addition, two of the graduate participants attended Hispanic Serving Institutions for their undergraduate programs. The third graduate participant attended a private, PWI located in a more urban area than Midwest University.

Another commonality for the participants was that they were all upperclassmen or graduate students in their respective academic programs. This allowed participants to reflect on many interactions and experiences, verses if they had been new to college. As seasoned students, the participants were able to compare some of their previous experiences with their current experiences as upper class or graduate students.

All of the men in this study shared the racial category of “Latino,” although four identified as Mexican American, one as Mexican, and one as Puerto Rican. Please see Table 1 for additional information.

Five out of six participants were working while being enrolled full-time. Daniel mentioned that he had to work in order to pay for his college, and that his parents helped to pay for some of his schooling as well. José explained that he was also employed and that the financial struggle was particularly difficult this semester. In addition,

Table 1

Participants Background Information

Participant Pseudonyms	Year	Age	Generation in College	Ethnicity
Pablo	Senior	22	1 st Gen.	Mexican American
Daniel	Junior	20	2 nd Gen.	Mexican American
José	Senior	22	1 st Gen.	Mexican American
Simón	Graduate Student	23	2 nd Gen.	Mexican American
Jonathan	Graduate Student	25	1 st Gen.	Mexican
Luis	Graduate Student	27	1 st Gen.	Puerto Rican

Source: Information compiled from interview transcriptions.

Simón, Jonathan, and Luis came from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and explained that finances were a perpetual concern throughout their childhoods. For example, Simón talked about not being able to attend certain music schools because he could not afford to attend, nor could his parents support him to go.

Most of the participants viewed their high school experiences as an easy process. Several mentioned that they just cruised by, while others stated that high school was never really challenging. José explained, “High school was really easy, and when you come to college it’s super hard, and I wasn’t ready for that.” Participants further explained that they did not hold any expectations, and did not realize how difficult college would be until they arrived. Jonathan said, “I really, I honestly . . . had no idea what I was getting myself into.” For many participants, their only impressions of college were what they saw on television. Luis stated, “Nobody in my family had really [pursued

education] in a way that could inform my experience.” Although they had unclear expectations, many of the participant’s families expected them to go to college. Simón reflected on the following:

I remember senior year filling out my applications, like, he would ask me oh have you worked on your applications . . . he would ask me in the same way that he would he would ask me like oh have you, have you eaten today.

Similarly, Luis described how his family taught him to value schooling, saying “K-12 was . . . well-structured for me because my mom and dad were really engaged in my education.” All the participants placed high value on being family-oriented and expressed how family was an important part of their lives.

Introduction to Themes

The three themes that emerged from this study helped to answer the primary research question of how Latino students experience validation in college. These three themes are (a) in-classroom validation, (b) out-of-classroom validation, and (c) internal validation. The researcher chose these themes to help identify moments of impact and to highlight how these six students were validated throughout their education. The themes and subthemes are summarized in Table 2.

In-classroom validation. The classroom environment provided many memorable experiences for the participants in this study. Many participants felt a wide-range of validation from peers, faculty, and the classroom environment as a whole. Although the relationships that were developed in the classroom provided validation for the participants in a myriad of ways, it is important to note that classroom validation was limited, as most participants obtained their major support outside of the classroom. Nonetheless, faculty and coursework helped participants feel validated in the classroom.

Table 2

Research Themes and Subthemes

Theme	Subtheme
Theme 1: In-Classroom Validation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peers • Faculty/Classroom Environment
Theme 2: Out-of-Classroom Validation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family (Familia) • Mentors • Involvement
Theme 3: Internal Validation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-motivation • Community Responsibility

Source: Information compiled from interview transcriptions.

Peers. Peer support and validation was a subtheme that came up when talking about support and how students viewed themselves through the eyes of others. Though participants did not spend much time talking about support they found in their classmates, peers were certainly mentioned as an added source of validation. Relationships with peers who were academically motivated helped the participants to be more engaged in the classroom. Daniel highlighted the following:

And like just being around a group a kids who like take their work as seriously as I do really helps . . . it's really hard for me to inspire myself to work on something if I'm just sitting there in a room by myself. So that's another reason I'm always at our college, 'cause there's always kids in my studio there who take it just as seriously as I am . . . whether it be to 2:00 in the morning, whether it be to 5:00 in the morning, we were just always there. So having like that group of friends that'll be like that I know is gonna be there when I'm doing work, whether, whether I talk to them or not, is really . . . really helpful as well, and helps me, I don't know, see myself as successful, get my work done.

Daniel was able find the validation that he needed from his peers because these students and classmates were going through similar experiences. The idea that these peers were

working as hard as him made him feel confident as a student. In addition, working alongside his peers created a sense of belonging to the academic college and ultimately the university.

José talked about utilizing his friends as resources rather than professors because he was able to understand how they explained the content. He added that the professors were very unwelcoming at first, but that he eventually became comfortable with them as he persisted through his major. He shared the following:

For me, like, I'm not the kind a person to ask questions to the teacher. I usually ask my friends, and they explain things in a way that I can understand 'em better than what a teacher would. Um . . . I don't know. And then that's really how, like, I've always felt capable of learning; it's just dedicating the time to it. And finding out ways that you're able to pick it up.

José viewed learning as something that he was capable of doing, but he needed to put the extra time and effort in to be successful. By using his classmates, he was not only able to obtain the knowledge, but he was able to explain classwork to other peers as well. José was able to see himself as a capable student because he could teach others, and obtaining information from his peers created a sense of belonging due to the collaboration they shared.

Simón also talked about his experience with one of his section leaders (students who help lead his section of instruments) and learning from his success. The section leader was his age and explained the importance of having peers you can look to for support and inspiration. He described the following:

Yo, I know I feel like a lot of times I've talked about the people who've influenced me . . . they've usually been you know like older people. But even people my own age, and actually even people who are younger I have a lot in— 'Cause like the, I mean the younger you are, the, the more thirsty you are to prove yourself, you know what? I mean.

Simón wanted to be the best viola player possible, and seeing talent from people his age and younger gave him motivation to become a better musician. He used peers to influence and inspire his own work, regardless of their age:

And that, you know, the reason you have section leaders in orchestra, is because you watch them to see what they're doing in order to have a unified sound in the section . . . it's 12 people who have had different experiences in life, who have different concepts of sound, who have had different training. So you designate one person to watch him . . . But even when we weren't playing, I would sorta just like pay attention to him, 'cause it's like, what is this guy doing right that, you know, he's my age, but he's, you know, he obviously was good enough to be the section leader. Like what, what's he, what's his deal, you know what I mean. And . . . and you know, he was, the whole time during rehearsal, he would be so focused, so engaged.

His section leader indirectly influenced the way Simón approached music and how he wanted to improve as violist. Simón's section leader taught him to engage and focus on what was going on around him. He did not simply focus on his music, but how the rest of the sections were playing and the sound of the symphony as a whole. Seeing someone his own age that he identified with in a leadership role provided Simón validation by giving him the confidence and challenge he needed to work on his own skills.

Faculty/classroom environment. Luis explained that his classroom interactions in graduate school played a significant factor in his ability to relate those experiences to his current and future roles. He additionally noted that his graduate classroom experiences were far more engaging than his previous courses as an undergraduate, and he provided the following description:

Pretty much everything that I do in class now has an, a direct impact on how I facilitate my role as a graduate assistant, and we even practice those skills in class. So it's like we talk about it, okay, let's do it. So that's a big difference between undergrad and grad, and I think that's why I'm more engaged.

Luis highlighted how his graduate-level classes provided him with knowledge that was relevant for him and that was delivered to meet his needs. His classroom experience at Midwest University added the hands-on approach that would be applicable for him when he graduated and proceeded into his profession. The structure of the classroom helped validate his experiences, and his interactions with this type of learning because he felt capable of learning through the dialogue and engagement inside the classroom. In another one of his classroom experiences, he highlighted:

She didn't let you sit there and be quiet, you had to talk. And in order to be able to participate, you needed to be engaged in the material. So it was just like, that dialogue class, she, she used to talk about the . . . banking method of teaching, where you just deposit information and you expect to withdraw it at some point, which was not her pedagogy. She believed in dialogue, because for her, dialogue engaged the brain, engaged your creative thought process, it engaged your critical thinking skills, like, you needed to talk through things.

The professor Luis described was one of the only professors in his undergraduate program who did not use tests as a measurement to determine their grade. Instead, the professor recognized the different learning styles of the students, and helped students like Luis gain confidence in their ability as students. Jonathan referred to his undergraduate classroom experience as a validating one as well. He spoke about how a particular class was focused on social justice and explained that he felt encouraged to participate.

I took her class, and it was a . . . it was actually social justice and self-citizenship class. And, um . . . I was able to really connect with her. And I think a lot of it, that was when I was really first introduced. I was introduced to social justice stuff, but like in her class it was, like more in-depth conversations. Um . . . and I remember like I always like wanna participating, or sharing my perspectives and stuff.

Jonathan mentioned that the majority of his classes were lecture-style and he did not learn well in that environment. In this particular class, he was able to be engaged in the topic and feel validated through his contributions:

But in that class, that's the first time I really felt validated or like that I could just talk about my experiences. And that's why I really enjoy that class, and that's why I really . . . and the teacher would validate me. So . . . I don't know like that was nice.

Jonathan explained that his learning style encompassed metaphors, connections, and visuals, and that he feels validated when his learning style is appreciated and accepted in the classroom.

Simón and Daniel provided examples of instances when they felt validated and inspired by faculty within the classroom. Daniel refers to his professor:

The single most important professor I've ever had in my life was . . . I guess he's a doctor . . . in the School of Architecture. He . . . he's like one of the most smartest people I've ever met. He's like a genius. He got his doctorate. I walked into his class, and I was like, I got inspired as I would walk into this class, because he literally cares about his students.

Daniel walked into the classroom and instantly felt the genuine care that the professor had for him and other students. This professor showed up to class as a faculty member wanting to teach students and do so with authenticity. Daniel clearly saw his architecture professor as a crucial part of the positive dynamics that could be represented in the classroom. Another highlight of Daniel's experience within the classroom related to instruction was with the Teaching Assistant for one of his classes. He explained:

The first thing he said is 'I'm here to push you guys to become better designers, and to lead you through this four-year process so you can move on to be a graduate student'. Like, 'I'm here for you to be successful'. So that right there and in, in and of itself was really inspirational. And then the fact that he didn't even need to do it . . . he was there because he just wanted us to, see us be

successful was like really cool to me. And like, he was always available. He always had good feedback. He like, you could like tell that he was invested in his students.

Daniel's instructor provided genuine care and affirmation for the students' ability to become successful. This provided Daniel with the confidence and validation he needed to push himself in his design work.

José mentioned that he wished there were more Latino professors, specifically for STEM fields, not only for himself but also for other Latina/o students. He explained the following:

I wish there were more Latino professors. Somebody that I could relate to. Not only me, but like . . . the students that are . . . even thinking about going into engineering or whatever. 'Cause . . . you look in the STEM fields here . . . and there's like hardly anybody that's Hispanic, Latino, whatever.

The need for Latino professors in STEM fields has left an everlasting impression on José as he navigates through his major. Although he experiences validation through peer-to-peer networks, the reality of seeing a professor like him instructing one of his classes is slim-to-none at Midwest University. Not having faculty whom he can identify with is a source of invalidation for José in the classroom.

Pablo also expressed concerns with invalidating experiences in the classroom. The lack of representation of Latino men in STEM fields has become an invalidating experience and can sometimes cause feelings of alienation.

We noticed that there's not a lot of Hispanics, like hardly anyone at all that's in Engineering or like Science major. Everyone, I feel like a lot of people do like Psychology and all that stuff, which is nice and all that, but like, we need a better representation in the STEM fields as well.

As Pablo perceived a lack of representation in his field and among his faculty, Jonathan also described his lack of validating experiences in the classroom:

I just didn't really have good experiences in classrooms . . . didn't really feel like . . . I fit in, in a way . . . just feel like an outcast. I don't know where like that word, word came from, I just felt that way.

For Jonathan, he expressed that the majority of his classroom experiences were not validating and made him feel like he did not belong. The classroom environment Jonathan experienced was not designed to validate him as a student.

This theme provided examples of the validating experiences participants experienced through interactions with their peers and instructors. When faculty expressed genuine care and concern for their students' success, the participants felt supported. Faculty members who invested time and energy into their students demonstrated that their students were valuable. Validation inside the classroom provided the participants with motivation, confidence, and the opportunity to engage with their materials on a deeper level.

Out-of-classroom validation. Participants received the majority of their validation from out-of-classroom experiences. Family, mentors, and involvement validated all of the participants in some shape or form, and made them feel capable of pushing forward and graduating from college. The data showed participants valued the advice of their loved ones, and felt validation from individuals who inspired them to accomplish their goals.

Familia. The primary focus and most reoccurring theme among participants emphasized the importance their family played in their academics. Familia were validating agents for participants, sometimes even counteracting the invalidating interactions they had on campus. Daniel explained the following:

My mom has always pushed me to be the best I can be in college and stuff like that. So I mean my, my parents have always been successful, so I've never actually felt like I couldn't go to college, or couldn't succeed in college.

Daniel's parents helped him establish confidence as he pursued his degree by setting an example and constantly encouraging him. Pablo also mentioned his parents being a huge factor in pushing him to focus on his education and obtain a degree:

I feel like my biggest influence is just my mom. Like I wanna . . . be able to graduate and give her my diploma. Um, 'cause that's ultimately I think what she wanted. And then, my brother just 'cause, you know, he's always big competition for me. No one else really motivated me I guess.

Although Pablo's mother did not pursue a higher level of education, she emphasized the importance of earning a degree. His mother and brother established a strong sense of support and motivation for Pablo during his K-12 experience, and continued to be his main sources of validation through college. Luis also describe his mother as being an important part of his education:

I think my mom influenced my education more than I'll ever be able to . . . explain. One, just by being a presence. Showing up to stuff. You know what I mean? Like . . . it showed me that it was important. And I mean, like, my mom was making time that was scarce to go to parent/teacher conferences, and to, you know, attend school functions and to be a part of those experiences.

Luis pointed out the influence that his mother had on his academics and how her support made him feel capable of pursuing his degree. He added, "My mother, although she hadn't completed school, really, really cared about us doing well academically, and so she kind of threw all a her weight behind makin' sure that I committed myself to, to my studies." Luis highlighted the sacrifices his family made in order to ensure that he was supported in pursuing higher education.

José noted that his mother played a crucial and necessary factor in the pursuit of his degree. He explained:

My biggest influence is my mom 'cause she always told us, 'You guys need to get a degree'. She never pushed us on it, she was just like . . . just get a degree or whatever. I, I didn't feel pressured or anything to go to college or anything by my mom, but, uh . . . she was our biggest support, biggest influence.

The importance José's mother placed on education was something that was established during his K-12 experience, and remained pertinent to his success and validation in college. José shared that when he doubted himself, he would think about not wanting to fail or let his mother down. He further shared, "[I] can't wait till I graduate and am able to return the favor," referring to the encouragement and financial support his mother had provided. José mentioned his brother impacted his education as well, and noted that they competed with each other in their education. From his standpoint, José viewed their competitiveness as a good source of support and viewed it as something important to his degree attainment. The competitive relationship, particularly the idea of winning and losing between José and his brother offered him opportunities for validation and increased self.

For Jonathan, familia were also a significant support system, as they provided motivation for him to pursue his goals and encouragement of his potential:

They couldn't really help me with my homework, they couldn't really help me financially, but they always were like, 'Yeah, we're proud of you . . .' Especially for my mom, it seemed like, 'You should keep goin' to school.' But that was like about the extent of . . . that was the extent of what they could actually help. And to this day, they're still supportive, and they're really happy that I'm still goin' to school . . . but it doesn't really go beyond . . . beyond that, 'cause they just don't really know what I do.

As a first generation student, Jonathan did not always feel confident as a student because he was unable to get help with homework at home. However, he valued the continued support family members offered him as a child throughout undergraduate and graduate school.

Simón looked up to family members, his father in particular, and felt that family had influenced and impacted his education:

Well, here's the thing . . . with my dad, it was always not a question of whether or not I was gonna go to college, it was just, 'You're gonna go to college', you know? . . . He wasn't constantly like, 'Oh you gotta go to college', it was like, 'When you get to college', you know what I mean?

The expectation that Simón's father had for him to pursue his degree reassured him that he was capable of being successful. He explained that his father's work ethic also inspired his own work ethic as a student:

My dad was like, and he's still, was and is and probably always will be such a good influence, and an important part in my life as far as . . . and not just that, but, I mean, in many ways he is. But one thing that I admire the most is his work ethic.

Along with his father, Simón's sister and aunt were also college graduates. He explained that his aunt had overcome a lot of challenges to get her degree, but pushed forward and inspired him in the process. Witnessing his family overcome their own obstacles to earn their degrees was a large source of encouragement and validation for Simón.

The Latino men in this study considered familia an important component to how they received validation out of the classroom. Family members offered participants support and encouragement from early education through their time in college. The participants explained that going to college was never a question for them, and that enrolling in college and obtaining a degree was expected in their family. Family

expectations provided participants with the confidence and ability to visualize their own success.

Mentors. For the participants in this study, mentors and individuals who showed a genuine concern for them served as validation mechanisms. Many spoke about how instrumental mentors were in their success as they navigated through higher education. Pablo described how one administrator had a significant impact on him, and reflected on the following moment when he was worried about changing his major:

I told him . . . ‘I’m switchin’ to Engineering, but I don’t know’.... And he was like, ‘The important thing is to finish. It doesn’t matter how long it takes’. And he told me his story about how he did, uh . . . archeology and some other stuff, and took years off and stuff like that, and he said, ‘You gotta enjoy life . . . school’s important, but make sure you’re goin’ at your pace, not the pace that society wants you to go’. So, I thought that was really important for me to know and to hear from him.

Pablo’s mentor validated Pablo’s experience by encouraging him to pursue his goals and take care of himself. His mentor established care, trust, and took off some of the societal pressures that sometimes invalidate non-traditional or minority students.

Similar to Pablo, Luis articulated academic insecurities he had that he discussed with his mentor. His mentor was a support system during his undergraduate experience, wrote his letter of recommendation for graduate school, and continues to be active in his life. He expressed the following:

She challenged every insecurity I ever had. I was always really insecure because I wasn’t performing well academically... And her response to me was often, ‘Your GPA is important, but it doesn’t define you, and you need to stop letting it define you because it’s based in a system of oppression that was not made for you’.

In addition, Luis mentioned that his mentor was a major support system and was someone who pushed him to graduate college. When he was around his mentor, he felt that his doubts about his success disappeared. He went on to say:

Were it not for my fraternity and for her, I probably wouldn't of graduated from my undergraduate experience, 'cause it's so easy to get discouraged when you just don't see the results in your GPA.

Luis' mentor helped him to understand that his GPA did not necessarily reflect what he was capable of, explaining that the system of higher education was not meant or made for underrepresented populations. Not only did Luis' mentor help him realize his true potential, but she also validated him as a student who could persist through college.

Jonathan mentioned support he received from a Greek Life advisor who advocated for him and his experience. During application process for graduate school, his was unable to pay his own way for professional development and networking opportunities, his mentor advocated for him to obtain funding through the institution.

My Greek advisor, I became really close with, with her. And . . . she was really an advocate. Um . . . even introducin' me to NASPA, bein' part of . . . like an undergraduate program that'll introduce me to be part of the Student Affairs. And she just really guided me through... when I talked about funding trips, she was the one that actually will reach out of the like the office budget for me to send me to these trips.

Among the support he received during his undergraduate career, Jonathan described his mentor as his "go to" person who supported his application for graduate school and is still actively involved in his life. Jonathan's mentor not only validated him by showing him that she cared and recognized his academic worth, but also made him feel like a valuable member of the Greek community.

To this day, like I still keep up, keep in touch with her, so she's been really instrumental . . . I would have to say like in college, it would have to be for sure my mentor and my two fraternity brothers that really were a huge impact.

Jonathan explained that his fraternity brothers also served as mentors and sources of validation because they were driven Latinos pursuing the same degree. He looked to his mentors in the fraternity for advice, resources, and guidance.

José also spoke of a mentor who influenced him as a student pursuing his degree at a PWI. He explained that his mentor was educated and actually cared about students:

I just look up to him. He's . . . he's educated. He comes from a small town. . . . Education has been his life, and . . . to me that's inspiring. Um . . . and he's always willing to help. Like, he has a . . . very kind heart. He's always willing, has his door open to any student that wants to come in and talk to him. He's willing to give up time out of his day to . . . I mean do whatever for his students. Every time I . . . I say I wanna talk to him or see him around, he's always friendly and then, he always asks me what can I do for you. And . . . I mean . . . there's, there's not much I can say because . . . I mean he's always been there. If I ever need anything I know he's always there. Um . . . I don't know he's just a good person.

In addition, one of José's fraternity brothers also served as a mentor for him. He explained:

[My mentor] was my biggest role model for actually getting my degree and doing something good with it. Because that, every time I saw him on campus, he . . . he seemed like he was on top of everything, and I was like I wanna be like that . . . I mean look at him now, he has his Master's Degree and he's working for the university, and . . . I don't know he seems happy. So I'd like that . . . I've already come this far, so, there's no reason not to get a degree.

When José reached college, his mentor was the one who took him under his wing and provided him with guidance that helped him develop his leadership skills. The investment that José mentor put in to his success not only validated him as a student but developed also as a potential leader.

As a student who did not have a mentor in his major or field of study, Pablo explained the impact this lack of validation had on his experience:

I really wish I would have had a . . . a mentor that was involved with the STEM fields. 'Cause then they could actually . . . recommend things for me. 'Cause like I felt like when I switched to Engineering there was no one really I could talk to about Engineering aside from my advisor and I hated my advisor.

For Pablo, having someone to talk to about his field was important, and without a mentor, he felt as though he was going through the process on his own. He did not receive a lot of validation from his academic advisors and mentioned that he had to switch advisers. His poor relationship with his academic advisor was one he was unable to solve by switching to another professional, and a mentor he identified with would have helped him to feel less isolated academically.

Involvement. Campus involvement was another subtheme that emerged from the data collected during the interviews. Many participants referred to their organizations as an influence or source of validation in their educational process. José explained the following:

Being a part of [a student group for Mexican Americans] . . . it was the first student organization that I was a part of that really made me feel like I belong on this campus. It . . . it was a support system. Um . . . yeah, that support system was probably the biggest factor that really . . . It also opened up a lot of opportunities for me to network.

José explained that he felt connected as a Latino on campus through his membership in this student organization. He not only felt a sense of belonging, but he had found a place where he was able to obtain additional resources. José also became involved in a fraternity on campus, and mentioned his involvement had positive benefits:

[My fraternity] was another big [source of support] 'cause . . . again, the networking aspect, but also, the family, the brotherhood. Um . . . there's a support system always there for you. That not even just on this university, like any other university that has an active chapter, or maybe a city that you go to visit . . . there's brothers there and you connect with them . . . I think as a Latino student in college, I mean, the numbers are already small, so it's better to be united than divided.

Networking and being able to ask his brothers for advice was a key component to the support and opportunities provided to José. He highlighted the concept of unity among Latinos being stronger than division.

Transferring from a community college his fraternity was an important support system as he navigated through a larger four-year institution. His fraternity also played a significant role in Jonathan's college experience:

After I transferred, my support became through my fraternity. . . . So I just reached out cause I know they were on campus . . . at that point is when I met like my Line brothers, and so I had friendships right there. And then after I was initiated, then I had my Line brothers plus other chapter brothers, so that's where I was getting my support system.

Jonathan credited his fraternity for getting him through college and being able to provide him with the support that he needed. He valued having other Latinos around to validate some of his experiences and to share his culture.

Luis also received support from his fraternity during his college experience. He highlighted the following about the support he received toward his ethnic identity development from the group:

The fraternity was the, the biggest connection for me when it came to the fraternity. And it . . . helped develop my ethnic identity I think because, one, my fraternity's process is heavily focused on cultural aspects, and so it's like I learned more about what it meant to be Latino, and what it meant to be Puerto Rican, and what it meant to be a part of different aspects of the, you know, the Latino community.

Luis noted that his fraternity was important to his Latino identity development at his HSI undergraduate institution, and this prepared him for his experiences at his PWI graduate institution.

Pablo emphasized his involvement with a Latino student organization specific to his major on his campus. His involvement with the campus organization, as well as his fraternity, provided him with leadership roles, social networking, and connections to the university. The combination of these organizations provided him with a place where he belonged and comfort among other students like himself. When asked what, if any, activities impacted him as a Latino, he stated the following:

I feel like [the Latino student organization] did . . . 'cause it provided me a bigger leadership role than any other organization so far. Because we basically had to start from scratch and work our way up to where we're at now, and like we still got a lot a work to do, still. Um . . . and then, I guess [the Mexican American student group] was more of the social organization that I joined that . . . helped me network with people. Like at [the Latino conference] and stuff like that. And to actually meet people. And that's how . . . that's how we basically started [a Latino student organization for STEM majors] was because we went to [a Hispanic Leadership Conference] and we were, my brother went to a workshop focusing on STEM fields.

Pablo's involvement with a Latino organization on campus was essential to his persistence, and something that pushed him and his brother to create more opportunities for Latinos in STEM fields at Midwest University. Campus involvement played an important role in the validation the participants received. Organizations gave most participants the opportunity to create a relationship with members of the campus community. Building and being apart of a campus community validated the student's ability to fit into the campus, develop strong leadership skills, and create a family away from home.

Internal validation. Although many of the findings were consistent with Rendón's (1994) *Validation Theory*, the final theme that emerged from the data was not represented in her research. Internal validation as defined by the researcher is an encouraging, reassuring internal voice that provided participants with a needed sense of validation. Internal validation was mentioned throughout the interviews with the participants. Related to this internal process, participants appeared to internalize or take on the responsibility of creating more opportunities for other Latinos on campus. Internal validation is a sense of validating and reassuring oneself

Self-validation. Participants spoke about an internal voice that pushed them to reach their goals and persist through higher education. Several mentioned feeling as though they relied on themselves for support and encouragement.

Simón talked about persistently pushing himself, working toward his own aspirations and vision. He explained his satisfaction of his progress, saying, "Now that I'm here, it's like well this is it, you know, the time is now, so I really, really have to push myself. And I have been. I've been really happy with the work I've done." In addition, he spoke about dropping out of college but had to tell himself that he just needed to do what he had to get done and put in the time and effort for it. He continued to express how he pushed himself to put in the work, and was able to see the end result through his own validation. "And that, that moment for me like when I got that email, I like . . . I was like wow, like, this worked, and this works, you know what I mean, like, I think I can do this. And yeah, that was probably, yeah, that was that moment."

Jonathan spoke about sticking to his study system that he made, and additionally encouraged himself by relying on his own internal thoughts to succeed. He said internal monologue tells him things like this: “If you don’t do well, they’re probably gonna kick out, and then you’re really not gonna have nothing goin’ for yourself, like nothing.”

Jonathan relied on internal validation to encourage himself to accomplish his goals.

Daniel talked about his architecture projects and how he would often have to stand behind what he made. In order to do this, he had to force himself to take ownership of what he made and make it a positive experience:

By the end of it, you just gotta own it. It’s like, whether, whether you like it or not, you have to, you have to present it as if you think it’s the greatest thing on earth, ‘cause if you can’t convince someone else to think it’s good, then why should I think it’s good?

As an architecture major, Daniel had to develop a large amount of self-confidence to withstand criticism. From this, he also appeared to have a reassuring voice that validated him and reminded him he was a capable designer.

Community responsibility. Community responsibility was another subtheme of Internal validation. Participants felt the duty to give back to the community, and provide further access to college for the Latino population. José took pride in the fact that he overcame many challenges being the only Latino in his program. However, he emphasized the importance of being a role model for Latino youth:

To know that I’m the only Latino in my class – I think I’m the only Latino in Civil Engineering at this university. Um, and I’m one of the few Latinos within the College of Engineering at this university . . . For me it’s . . . getting the degree is not so much the big thing, it’s . . . all the little steps that I’ve taken to get there. With the people that have impacted and things like that, I definitely wanna continue that . . . you look at the [at risk youth organizations] and they look up to me. They’re like, ‘You’re in engineering?’ Like they don’t—they’re shocked

because, I mean one, they don't . . . they don't know what engineering is. They always just think it's hard. And then two . . . they don't, they don't remember seeing a Latino in engineering.

It was important for José to make an impact on the community and provide that support system that was not in STEM for him. He added, "Being able to impact your community. Like I realized . . . that you don't need a college degree to do something good, to help somebody else." José's impact on the Latino community allowed him to feel validated by his influence as a role model and encouraged him to continue his community outreach.

Simón was one of the only if not the only Latino musician in his symphony classes and felt obligated to pave the way for future Latinos coming into the music profession. He said this of his responsibility:

In my area of study, there aren't very many Latinos. And so that just impacted me in . . . because of the lack of Latinos in my area of study, it's in a way . . . in a way, I am sort of pioneering this area for people like of similar background, where you know, I come from this neighborhood, come from, you know like my family's from Mexico.

Through his experiences, Simón realized that he was one of the only Latinos in his profession and felt that he was in a position to create a path for future musicians. By becoming a role model Simón felt encouraged and obtained self-worth by being the only Latino in his field. Simón worked towards becoming a better musician, saw those improvements in his skills, and valued his work enough to become a role model for others.

Daniel also talked about the potential of impacting others and how he wanted to inspire others through his work. He noted:

I would say my love for architecture comes from . . . my desire to want to impact at least one person's life in this world. Or, like, inspire at least one person in this world. And I think like through architecture, that's something that I could easily do.

Daniel gained confidence by the opportunity to impact others. He also felt he had the opportunity, as an architecture student, to influence others and have confidence in the work that he created. His architecture work encouraged him to design buildings that would speak to others' needs and showed him that he was a top student in architecture.

Jonathan chose his future profession to help college students who share similar obstacles and struggles to his own succeed in higher education. His passion and perceived responsibility to reach out to students like him came from his own internal thoughts and commitment to serving others:

I feel like if I'm blessed enough to be goin' through this, through the system right now and understanding the struggle. I wanna make sure I can help others . . . that is one of the reasons why I got into Student Affairs . . . and why I wanna pursue that. It, it really goes back to . . . I really don't want people to have a shitty experience like mine. Especially . . . like underrepresented students. So if I can . . . help in a way, that's what kinda makes it all worth it.

Jonathan expressed the opportunity he had as an underrepresented person in the educational pipeline to help others like him, and hoped to make changes to help others who were pursuing their college degree. The pressure he felt to serve others was internalized and a constant validating voice, reminding him that he needed to be successful for others.

Conclusion

Validation is a key component to the development and confidence in Latino males journey through higher education. For the participants in this study validation happened in the classroom, outside of the classroom, and through their internal dialogue. Each of

the themes described in this chapter, helped participants feel encouraged and capable of achieving their ambitions. The researcher highlighted each theme with quotes, stories, and internal thought processes of each participant in order to demonstrate the validating experiences in their pursuit of higher education.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Introduction

The final chapter of this study focuses on the five thematic findings and discusses them in relationship with previous literature presented in Chapter 2. The research conducted used a qualitative methodological approach, and data was collected using a semi-structured interview protocol to establish trust with the participants. Through my role as the researcher, I explored participants' experiences in college, ranging from access and support to invalidating structures in higher education.

Research in this area is necessary to explore why Latino persistence in higher education has historically been low (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Previous research focused primarily on statistics and challenges of Latinos in the K-12 educational system, invalidating experiences for underrepresented populations, and roles within the Latina/o community. More specifically, Latino males have often been referred to as the “invisible” population (Noguera, Hurtado, & Fergus, 2012). Scholars have attributed the exceedingly low representation of Latinos in college to institutional racism (Turner & Bound, 2002; Solórzano et al., 2005), lack of validation (Rendón, 1994) transfer rates to and from colleges (Gándara & Contreras, 2009), and low socioeconomic status (Torres & Fergus, 2012). The systems of oppression that many Latinos must overcome in pursuit of higher education are multilayered and complex. This research study investigated the experiences of Latino males who persist through college, and highlighted validation techniques provided through positive support systems. The thematic findings discussed

in Chapter 4 provided important insights and information to more effectively support Latinos at institutions of higher education.

Summary of Findings

The primary research question of this study explored the level of validation the participants received as they navigated through higher education. Using validation theory, a framework to understand those experiences, the following question was posed:

- How do Latino students feel validated on a college campus?

Reflecting on my initial thoughts for this study, I did not expect my participants to go into too much depth explaining their experiences. However, the two semi-structured interviews allowed the participants to really dig deep into how they felt as Latino students pursuing a college degree.

The findings of the study presented in Chapter 4 were organized into three themes that described how participants experienced support and validation through in-classroom, out-of-classroom, and internal sources while in college. Two of the themes were consistent with past research on validation (Rendón, 1994) and described participants' in and out-of-classroom experiences with *peers, faculty/classroom environment, family (familia), mentors, and involvement*. The third theme, internal validation, was a finding that was not evident based upon my review of the literature. Subthemes were discussed to provide a deeper understanding of the overarching themes and participants' experiences as they navigated the college environment. The next section of this chapter will discuss the thematic findings in more detail and their link to past research and literature.

Summary of Themes and Links to Literature

Three themes emerged from the data collection process that helped conceptualize Latino validation and persistence in higher education. Participants in the study shared stories of events, people, and organizations they connected to their experiences in college. The first two themes highlighted in-classroom and out-of-classroom validation and were consistent with Validation Theory (Rendón, 1994). The third theme that emerged was internal validation. Internal Validation as defined by the researcher is an encouraging, reassuring internal voice that provided participants with a needed sense of validation. Students felt their own sense of validation from their inner thought process as they navigated through college. The subthemes connected *peers, faculty/classroom environment, family (familia), mentors, involvement, self-motivation, and community responsibility* with positive, supportive experiences and their impact on the participants' educational journey. The following were the major points that were identified from the findings of the study:

- Peers were a form of support when participants looked for further understanding of the material presented in class and also provided students with confidence and the ability to succeed in their classes.
- Relationships with faculty provided inspiration for participants and allowed room for engagement inside the classroom that validated their individual learning styles.

- Familia (Family) was another driving force for the majority of participants that provided support for their education at an early age and continued validation throughout their college experience.
- Mentors were significant validating agents for students outside the classroom setting. Mentors ranged from fraternity brothers, campus administrators, and career role models.
- Involvement outside the classroom had a profound impact on participants' feelings of self-worth, connecting them with opportunities to develop holistically.
- In-classroom experiences were less salient sources of validation for participants than out-of-classroom experiences. However, validating in-classroom experiences did appear within the research.
- Internal validation provided another form of validation for participants, often appearing as a supportive inner monologue that pushed them through challenges and reminded them of their own potential.

In-classroom validation. The overarching question inquired as to how Latinos in this study experienced validation on campus and how it influenced their persistence in higher education. The findings suggested that participants felt validated by peers, faculty, and the classroom environment. Rendón's research (1994, 2002) highlighted the importance of students obtaining validation from in-classroom experiences.

Peer support networks were an important theme that came out of the classroom experience. Many participants sought out classroom peers to understand material that

was provided in the coursework. Rendón (2002) explained that although students in her study gained the majority of their validation from the classroom, they also experienced validation through peers. She noted that not all students felt comfortable asking professors questions because previous professors treated them as inadequate students (Rendón, 2002). José noted that he felt more comfortable utilizing his peers because he could understand their explanations better than if he asked the professor. Other participants learned techniques to be more successful students from their peers such as study tips, encouragement, and life skills.

Faculty and classroom environment also impacted student validation within the classroom setting for participants in this study. Faculty and student relationships are some of the most salient relationships to Latina/os student success (Barnette, 2011; Castellanos & Gloria 2007; Rendón, 1994, 2002), however in this study the impact of validating faculty relationships was infrequent and limited. Participants expressed that they found one or two faculty to be supportive in their pursuit for higher education, but had few faculty relationships they felt were validating. Participants also noted that some of their classes facilitated active dialogue that encouraged their engagement, but the majority of classes were lecture-based. In addition, participants highlighted faculty members who expressed a genuine care for students, and felt inspired by those interactions in the classroom.

Previous research suggested that students persisted through education at higher rates when faculty invested in them by offering mentoring, academic assistance, and interaction within the classroom (Bordes-Edgar et al., 2011; Castellanos & Gloria, 2007;

Rendón, 1994, 2002). Though students occasionally felt validated by faculty and the classroom environment, they expressed that that majority of their professors and classrooms lacked this validation. Many scholars agree that the education system currently in place is not constructed for underrepresented students and serves the majority White male (Gurtiérrez, 2010; Hurtado et al., 2008; Rendón, 1994; Solórzano et al., 2005).

Out-of-classroom validation. Past research has emphasized the importance of familial ties to Latino student persistence. Rendón (1994, 2002) explained family relationships were a significant factor on how students felt validated through their process. Research has shown that strong cultural values, caring, and loyalty from family provided supportive structures for Latina/o college persistence before and during college (Bordes-Edgar et al., 2011; Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; DeGarmo & Martinez, 2006; Haro, 1994; Ojeda et al., 2014; Rendón, 1994). Participants in this study talked about their family experiences and highlighted that their parents were essential to their success. Several participants emphasized the relationship they had with their mothers and how education was valued within their family.

Parents' education and socioeconomic status are prominent predictors for Latino persistence (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Garcia & Bayer, 2005; Hurtado et al., 2008). In this study, some participants identified as first generation students and came from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Although families of the participants in this study were not able to provide financial assistance, their encouragement validated the students' abilities and experiences. Participants noted that their parents expected them to attend college,

often holding high expectations for their grades during their K-12 education. In contrast, some scholars have written about Latinos in K-12 not wanting to engage in school because of the social norms tied to being a masculine male (Gloria & Castellanos, 2009; Hurtado et al., 2008; Noguera & Hurtado, 2012; Oyserman et al., 2006; Sáenz & Pojuan, 2009). However, in this particular study family members countered the social norms and the participants did not appear to be affected by their peer's lack of participations in K-12.

Another out-of-classroom experience highlighted by participants was the mentoring offered by fraternity brothers, administrators, and career role models. The participants in this study mentioned that fraternity brothers played an important role by offering them networking skills, resources, and mentoring. A couple of participants shared that they found older members in their fraternity who provided direction and cared about their success. Some mentors were administrators on their campus and others were found through social media sites that allowed them to network.

Other influential people identified by participants that really impacted the student's self-worth were mentors who were employed at the institution. College administrators served as role models, as well as someone participants could relate to who had a genuine concern and advocated for the needs of students. Some of these administrators were staff members working under the student affairs division, fraternity brothers, and mentors working in the student's field of study. Regardless, these mentors remained an influential part of participants' lives. The findings of this study were consistent with past research that found that mentors played a significant role in the

persistence of Latina/o college students (Bordes-Edgar, 2011; Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Linares Rendón & Muñoz, 2011; Rendón 1994, 2002).

Student involvement built confidence in participants' ability to obtain resources and get connected to the university. Some participants noted that they were involved in Latino-based organizations, and that these groups helped them build a peer network and network with other professionals. Those participants that mentioned involvement in a Mexican American student group also noted that the organization provided them with a sense of belonging at the university. Other participants mentioned their fraternities were a key component to their success. Two of the graduate students stated that their fraternity membership was one of the primary reasons they were able to persist and graduate from college. Others stated that their fraternity helped them obtain unique resources and connections that were only offered through their involvement with the fraternity. Participants also mentioned that their fraternities provided them with a connection to other Latino college students like them. This validated their experience as a Latino on campus, as well as gave them an opportunity to connect to Midwest University. These findings support previous research that demonstrated outside classroom experiences and validation within student organizations can have a positive influence on student persistence (Barnette, 2011; Conchas, 2001; Rendón, 1994, 2002).

Internal validation. The third major theme of internal validation that emerged from the data was not found in the literature. Through internal validation, participants of the study pushed themselves to achieve whatever necessary to accomplish their goals and earn their degree. When asked how they overcame obstacles, they shared how they relied

on a supportive inner monologue and motivation to get through difficult times. Although validation from external agents was an essential part of their validation, students expressed an internal drive to focus on coursework and overcome challenges. Students in the study explained they knew what they had to get done and relied on themselves to do so. Some participants convinced themselves they would get the work done, and pushed themselves to be confident when they were feeling challenged or discouraged. Even if participants did not feel confident in academics, their inner voice reassured them to keep trying and they would be successful.

Participants also recognized their responsibility to the Latino community as educated members and roles models for others. Participants took on this self-identified role and responsibility to make improvements in the community or to be a role model for young Latinos. Participants described that being the only Latino in their field pushed them to do the best they could because they had a personal responsibility to pave the way for others. Proceeding through higher education, they developed or obtained an ability to validate themselves when they needed that extra push.

Implications of Current Study for Future Practice

There are a number of implications for practice based upon the findings of this study. Higher education professionals including administrators, faculty, and student affairs practitioners should consider the following when looking to develop or improve areas that foster validation:

1. Key faculty members and classroom structures were helpful in creating some validation for Latino students in this study. Hiring more diverse faculty

members would allow minority students and Latino students to build additional relationships and identify role models on campus. In addition, faculty members need to provide more resources and supportive practices such as increasing face-to-face interactions, provide in and out-of-classroom activities, hold extra office hours, and re-examine classroom structure. Hiring more diverse faculty could result in an enrollment increase of more minority students. In addition, classroom changes designed to build relationship could foster validation and consequently increase student retention.

2. Providing further services, resources, and creating buy-in for parents of students pursuing higher education is essential to the persistence of Latino males because they are one of the most salient forms of support. More one-on-one conversations with parents related to the value of education can be a tool to help parents understand the process. Research supports the importance of including parents as a strategy to increase the persistence of Latino college students. Familia (family) or parents have the ability to validate students, and creating more buy-in for Latino parents can result in further support and retention for Latino males.
3. A mentoring program for minority men would be beneficial in creating more validation and guidance for them at the institution. Identifying mentors to help students navigate through college and obtain familial relationships through program models such as mentor groups, cohorts, and other community-based activities may increase their out-of-classroom validation.

Familial structures are important to provide Latino students with acceptance, relationships, and a sense of belonging at the institution. These structures would likely benefit the retention of Latino males, as well as minority males in general. Mentoring programs could also utilize Latino or multicultural fraternities to provide peer to peer mentoring but also connect them to other students of color at the institution. In addition, a task force could be created as well for administrators to serve as mentors. Providing administrators and career roles models is vital to strengthening relationships between the students and their educators.

4. Promotion of Latino engagement on campus is crucial for retention and persistence. Providing further resources for engagement in Latino organization is important to receive external support from out-of-the classroom validation. Creating a Latino student engagement fair that goes out to students could provide further outreach for student involvement on campus.

This study supported the need for further studies focused on Latino student validation in college. The next section of this chapter will discuss recommendations for future research.

Recommendations for Future Research

Research exploring validation of Latino college student experiences should continue to be conducted because there is still a lack of research on validation and how it affects persistence. As this study has indicated, multiple areas have been identified as possible sources of validation and how that validation can occur. Further studies

following this line of inquiry would provide valuable information and effective resources for Latino college students persistence. In addition, future research should investigate K-12 validation to measure the level of support that students have coming into college. Further exploration of internal validation among Latino males and how this concept relates to cultural and gender norms is also suggested.

Past research has not focused much on Latino male validation and how internal validation can increase persistence as they navigate the institution. Furthermore, exploring family, mentors, and in-classroom dynamics of Latino experiences through research should be a priority for scholars interested in college student persistence.

The research study has provided new insight to validation of Latino college students and how Latino men might provide their own source of internal validation. Future research on this population should be done to understand how internal validation occurs within Latino men and the ways in which a positive inner monologue can be encouraged among students. In addition, research on this population should continue to be conducted to understand how educators ranging from K-12 to higher education could be active agents in providing validation in and outside of the classroom.

Limitations

There were a number of limitations to this study, which need to be discussed. My identity as a member in the Latino community may have helped me to establish a level of trust with participants that would not have been possible if I was not an in-group member of that community. As a Latina and biracial woman, the researcher was accepted as a part of my participants' *comunidad* (community). However, this might have provided

some restrictions with how in-depth that the participants wanted to go into with their experiences because she did not identify with their sex and gender expression. Despite gender and gender expression differences, the researcher related to her experience as a Latina/o person who studied at a PWI, as well as an HSI. The researcher's genuine concern for providing a welcoming environment and the first interview allowed for the researcher to establish rapport.

Time constraints were also a limitation to the study. With additional time and resources, I would have conducted additional interviews with participants in order to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences and the themes that emerged from the data.

The research was conducted at Midwest University, a Predominately White Institution, and all participants were students at this particular college. However, half of the participants were graduate students who attended Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), and may have referred to some of their experiences at their undergraduate university.

Conclusion

This study sought to better understand how Latinos feel validated at Predominately White Institutions. The researcher provided three themes, which were in-classroom validation, out-of-classroom validation, and internal validation. Subthemes explained how relationships in and out of the classroom, as well as internal sources of support were crucial for Latino men and their persistence in higher education. The researcher provided information that provided a deeper understanding of student

experiences and urged educators to incorporate encouraging practices for Latino persistence and validation within their educational policies.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

IRB Approval #:13983

Title:

Validation: Latino Voices in Higher Education

Purpose:

This research project will explore how Latino males are validated through their experiences in college and how the participants obtain self-worth, confidence, and capability to succeed in college. You are invited to participate in this study because you are over the age of 19, and self identified as a Latino male pursuing a degree in higher education.

Procedures:

Participation in this study will engage in 2 semi-structured interviews both will be conducted by the primary investigator. During the first interview the primary investigator will focus on demographic questions and general experiences. The second interview will look at experiences at the institution. Interview will be guided by pre determine questions created by the primary investigator. Interviews are estimated to last about one hour for each interview and both interviews will be audio-taped/recorded. Both interview will be conducted in a quiet, private space at an agreed upon location.

Benefits:

This study has no direct benefits.

Risks and/or Discomforts:

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

Confidentiality:

Any information obtained during this study, which could identify you, will be kept confidential. The data will be stored in a password-protected computer and in a password protected storage database. The data will only be seen by the principal and secondary investigators during the study, and will be discarded one year after the study is complete. The information obtained in this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at professional conferences but the data will be unidentifiable.

Opportunity to Ask Questions:

You may ask any questions concerning this research by contacting one of the investigator(s) listed below. If you would like to speak to someone else, please contact Research Compliance Services Office at (402) 472 -6965 or irb@unl.edu.

Freedom to Withdraw:

Participation in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, or in any other way receive a penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Consent, Right to Receive a Copy:

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Check to consent to be audio-recorded during interviews

Signature of Participant:

Signature of Research Participant

Date

Name and Phone number of investigator(s)

Krista Navarrette, Graduate Assistant, Principal Investigator.

██████████ or Cell: ██████████.

Corey Rumann, Phd, Assistant Professor of Practice ██████████ or ██████████
██████████

141 Teachers College Hall / P.O. Box 880360 / Lincoln, NE 68588 -0360 / (402) 472-3726 / FAX (402) 472-4300

Appendix B

Recruitment Email

Recruitment Email*Recruitment Email*

Dear (Student),

Krista Navarrette is conducting a study to examine how Latino men view validation through their campus experiences. Participation will entail two separate Interviews and will take approximately 1 hour for each interview. If you are interested in participating, please reply to Krista Navarrette [REDACTED]

Further instructions will follow in a separate email. There are no known risks involved in this research.

If you have any questions, please let Krista Navarrette know.

Krista Navarrette, Graduate Assistant, Principal Investigator.
[REDACTED]

Corey Rumann, PhD, Assistant Professor of Practice. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Regards,

[Office Name]

Appendix C

Transcriptionist Confidentiality Statement

Transcriptionist Confidentiality Statement

I _____ (name of transcriptionist) agree to hold all information contained on audio recorded tapes/ and in interviews received from Krista Navarrette (Name of PI), primary investigator for Validation: Latino voices in Higher Education (Name of the project) in confidence with regard to the individual and institutions involved in the research study. I understand that to violate this agreement would constitute a serious and unethical infringement on the informant's right to privacy.

I also certify that I have completed the CITI Limited Research Worker training in Human Research Protections.

Signature of Transcriptionist

Date

Signature of Principle Investigator

Date

Appendix D
Semi-structured Interview Protocol

Semi-structured Interview Protocol

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine how Latino men experience higher education on a Predominately White Institution. The researcher will to explore how Latino men view their own validation through campus experiences. In addition, the study will look at how the participants obtain self-worth, confidence, and capability to succeed in a Predominately White Institution.

Purpose Statement Questions

- How do Latino students feel validated on a college campus?

Protocol Questions

Interview 1

(Pseudonym will be designated to participants at the first interview and legal name will not be recorded on Protocol).

1. What is your Pseudonym?
2. How you identify racially/ethnically?
3. Are you a first generation student?
4. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?
5. Can you tell me what your k-12 experiences has been like?
6. Did you start out at a two year or four year institution? Can you please describe that experience?
7. Please describe your admissions process to the University?

Interview 2

1. What are your initial thoughts about pursuing your degree?
2. What were some of your expectations for college?
3. What are some activities that have impacted you as Latino in college?
4. Reflecting on your (college experience thus far) what stood out for you as you pursued college overall?
5. Were there any people who influenced you while you pursue your degree?
6. “When did you believe/know that you could be a capable college student?”(Redon & Munoz, 2011, p. 19).
7. When, if you do, did you feel capable of learning in college?
8. What were some challenges that you’ve faced during college?
9. What helped you feel self worth in the academic setting?
10. What makes you feel confident as a college student? (If you feel confident)?
11. Have you had or do you have any doubts in your ability to succeed in college?
 - Please explain why or why not?
 - What made you overcome these doubts?
 - What made you have doubts initially?