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Examining the Experiences and Perceptions of Latino Males Pursuing a PhD in the Social Sciences/Humanities at a Predominately White, Research-Intensive, Public University

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Examining the Experiences and Perceptions of Latino Males Pursuing a PhD in the Social Sciences/Humanities at a Predominately White, Research-Intensive, Public University

by

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my unborn daughter, Layla. Though we have not yet met, you are and will continue to be one of my greatest inspirations. I hope this dissertation makes you proud and inspires you to pursue your own dreams as well.

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Examining the Experiences and Perceptions of Latino Males Pursuing a PhD in the Social Sciences/Humanities at a Predominately White, Research-Intensive, Public University

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2014

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The struggles of Latino males along the education pipeline have been well documented in recent history. Despite this increased research focus, gaps continue to exist in the literature on Latino males in education settings. Currently, the literature predominately centers on the Latino male experience in the K-12, community college, and 4-year college environments. The educational experiences of Latino males in doctoral education settings have not yet been presented. This study examines and provides insight into the Latino male doctoral student journey by detailing Latino male doctoral student experiences and perceptions at a predominately White, research-intensive, public university. In light of the deficit model research surrounding men of color, it is imperative to present the narratives of successful, high achieving Latino males along their pursuit of a doctoral degree.

This study critically examines the experiences and perceptions of Latino males in pursuit of a PhD within the humanities or social sciences at a predominately White, research-intensive, public university. The mission of the study was to shed light on thematic influences, factors, and emotions that led these individuals to take interest and pursue a doctoral degree. The study's findings are presented under the lens of Latino

critical race theory and gender role conflict in order to develop a thorough understanding of the internal and external influences on the Latino male doctoral student experience. My dissertation's unique contributions are its addition of the Latino male doctoral student experience to the literature on Latino males in educational contexts. Furthermore, this study's unique contributions include a new perspective on how Latino males perceive their gender roles and responsibilities as successful doctoral students.

The Latino male doctoral students in this study displayed resilience during moments of vulnerability and embrace responsibility during challenging circumstances. These actions were efforts to maintain control of their doctoral education experience and to create a new image for Latino masculinity. As the findings indicate, the Latino male doctoral student experience at a large predominately White, research-intensive, public university is filled with complexity, adversity, and determination.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction

As the United States strives to maintain its position as one of the global leaders in education, the importance of doctoral education cannot be overestimated. Doctoral degree holders' expand the frontiers of knowledge while simultaneously educating and inspiring future generations of scholars through research and innovation. Ultimately, doctoral degree holders have created an intellectual community that serves to benefit society through their groundbreaking discoveries. Currently, society's perception of doctoral education remains positive as individuals recognize the value of advanced research. Though many individuals continue to place a high value on research, doctoral education is not devoid of challenges it must overcome. One of the most pressing concerns facing doctoral education is the ability to conform and accommodate to the unique needs of an evolving and increasingly diverse doctoral student population.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reports that graduate and doctoral degree enrollment and degree conferment has become increasingly diverse over the past few decades (2011). While all racial and ethnic communities have increased their enrollment numbers and completion rates in graduate and doctoral degree programs according to the NCES, the Latino[1] community has experienced some of the most dramatic increases. NCES data (2011) indicates that in the United States in 1977, 522 of the 33,126 doctoral degrees conferred were awarded to Latino men and women. By 2009, 2,540 of the 67,716 doctoral degrees conferred in the U.S. were awarded to Latino men

[1] Throughout this dissertation, I will employ the term Latina/os and Hispanics interchangeably. A clarification of the differences between Latina/os and Hispanics will be provided in this chapter.

and women. Despite this increase in graduate degree enrollment and degree conferment numbers for the Latino community, Latinos continue to lag behind other racial and ethnic groups in enrollment and completion rates (Fry, 2002). As Latino students begin to enroll in graduate and doctoral degrees at higher rates than previously reported (NCES, 2011), it is imperative for doctoral programs to address the unique pressures and challenges these students face. If universities fail to meet these needs, the nation's intellectual community will falter and inevitably lag behind in the expansion of research and knowledge.

Despite having increased graduate enrollment numbers, a Pew Hispanic Center report (2004) notes that Latino participation in doctoral education was among the lowest of all ethnic groups in the United States. The National Center for Education Statistics (2011) confirms the Latino community's graduate education struggles by noting that in 2009, Latinos earned six percent of all masters degrees, five percent of all first-professional degrees earned, and four percent of all doctorates earned. The Latino community has been identified as the fastest growing demographic in the United States (Fry, 2002), however due to issues within the education system across the nation, this community has not been able to achieve similar growth in academic achievement and degree completion.

As previously indicated, the Latino community continues to increase its presence within doctoral education. This progress is attributed to the growing number of Latinas who have persevered and achieved academic success at the highest academic levels. According to a NCES report (2011), 60 percent of the graduate and doctoral degrees conferred to the Latino community were awarded to Latinas. These numbers reflect a

growing education crisis facing the Latino community that will also reverberate across society.

The College Board has recently focused its attention on the growing gender achievement gap in education across the United States (Lee & Ransom, 2011). While various racial and ethnic communities report growing gender disparities across the education pipeline, figures indicate that the Latino community has a greater challenge with this phenomenon. The pervasiveness of male disengagement in education across the nation, in conjunction with the rapid growth of the Latino population, has given impetus to scholars and policy makers to investigate this crisis.

While the Latino community is the fastest growing racial/ethnic population in the United States, Latino males have underperformed at all levels of education as compared to Latinas and non-Hispanic males (Sáenz & Ponjuán, 2009; Swail, Cabrera, & Lee, 2004). According to Sáenz and Ponjuán (2011), the academic achievement gap spans from early childhood development to higher education. Sáenz and Ponjuán note that allowing this community's gender achievement gap to persist will have a staggering economic and social result for the nation in the near and distant future. Sáenz and Ponjuán state:

> From an economic perspective, the Latino gender gap in educational attainment could curtail the skilled labor force as well as decrease labor productivity…from a social perspective, the role of Latino males as spouses, fathers, community leaders, and role models for young men could be usurped as a result of continual education struggles, ultimately undermining their ability to fulfill the critical economic and social roles key to securing upwardly mobile families and communities. (p. 17).

Sáenz and Ponjuán indicate that the Latino male education crisis has far-reaching effects on society beyond economics. They suggest the education attainment of Latino males impacts the Latino community and the nation in various ways.

Efforts to research and address Latino male academic achievement have increased since 2008. This increased focus has most notably come in the form of President Obama's educational platform. President Obama has called for a national campaign to improve opportunities for black and Latino boys and young men in his 2014 Presidential Memorandum "Creating and Expanding Ladders of Opportunity for Boys and Young Men of Color." Known as the "My Brother's Keeper" initiative, President Obama has targeted the socioeconomic conditions that prevent young males of color from thriving in education. Additionally, in accordance with the Obama administration's 2020 plan to regain the highest share of higher education graduates of any nation in the world, the United States Department of Education is tasked to improve higher education attendance and completion among underrepresented populations (Executive Order No.13555 2010).

President Obama's initiatives suggest the critical importance of addressing the Latino male education crisis from a federal policy level before the problem becomes a burden to society. Additionally, the President's concern indicates the importance of societal engagement and involvement in addressing this issue. This dissertation study focuses on one of the areas of education that exhibits the lowest attendance, persistence, and completion rates for Latino males: doctoral education.

There is a growing imperativeness to investigate the lived experiences of Latino male doctoral students. Despite being one of the fastest growing demographics within the

education pipeline (Fry, 2002), Latino males continue to struggle with underrepresentation and underperformance in advanced degree programs (NCES, 2011). If the Latino community continues to experience rapid growth, Latino males will be among the increasing numbers of students needed to fill the nation's intellectual community.

Additionally, in order to meet President Obama's goal to regain "First in the World" education status by 2020, a focus must be placed on addressing the unique challenges and pressures faced by Latino males. As indicated by NCES data (2011), Latino males report higher rates of attrition in graduate education than other racial and ethnic communities. As Gándara and Contreras (2009) note, Latinos are inextricably linked to the future success of the United States. With this connection to the nation's future success, a focus must be placed on how to help Latino males achieve similar levels of success as their Latina counterparts.

The following section provides perspective to the experiences and issues faced by Latino male doctoral students. This contextual understanding is critical for accurate analysis of the Latino male doctoral student experience. The section focuses on thematic experiences along the Latino male education journey. The subsequent sections provide historical background to the Latino male experience along the education pipeline. A description of the dissertation's research problem, an explanation of the purpose of the study, and details regarding the importance of investigating Latino male doctoral students will also be addressed.

Chapter two of this dissertation study provides a review of the relevant literature that informed the study. The literature includes sections regarding Latino male identity, doctoral student persistence, Latino critical race theory, and gender role strain/conflict theory. Chapter three outlines the qualitative research methods that were utilized to collect and interpret the data for this phenomenological study. Chapter four reports the thematic findings from the qualitative research that was conducted as part of this study. Lastly, chapter five provides an analysis of the major findings based off the interview data collected from the Latino male doctoral students.

Background

Prior to investigating the experiences and issues faced by Latino males as they pursue doctoral degrees, it is critical to develop an understanding of their educational experiences leading up to their graduate degree pursuit. An examination of Latino male experiences along the education pipeline reveals themes surrounding masculinity, perceived gender roles, and the growing gender achievement gap. The following section discusses the thematic experiences Latino males encounter throughout their educational journey.

The State of Education in the Latino Community

Despite being the fastest growing demographic in America and representing the largest percentage of students in the American education system (Fry, 2011), the Latinos face systemic hurdles and societal challenges that hinder academic success for the

community. A review of the literature highlights disparities of degree attainment across all levels of education between Latino and non-Hispanic White students. The disparities are frequently attributed to internal pressures and external influences.

Internally, Latina/o students throughout the education pipeline are challenged with anxieties and insecurities as well as feelings of isolation and guilt depending on the educational context (Gándara, 1982, 1995; Arellano & Padilla, 1996; Schneider & Ward, 2003; McHatton, 2004; Sáenz & Ponjuán, 2009). These emotions have been shown to hinder complete engagement in academic studies (Morales, 1988; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Figueroa, González, Marin, Moreno, Navia, & Perez, 2001; González, Marin, Figueroa, Moreno, & Navia, 2002). Externally, issues such as unsupportive, and at times racist, schooling environments have negatively impacted Latino academic success (Trueba, 1991; Solórzano & Solórzano, 1995; Valenzuela, 1999; Rodriguez, Guido-DiBrito, Torres & Talbot, 2000; Valencia, 2002; Hernandez & Lopez, 2004; Yosso & Solórzano, 2006). Additionally, the lack of peer-support networks and mentoring opportunities from faculty have thwarted Latina/o student success across all levels of education (Valenzuela, 1999, González, Marin, Figueroa, Moreno, & Navia, 2002; Hernandez & Lopez, 2004; Yosso & Solórzano, 2006).

Researchers note that the education journey for Latina/o students is filled with systemic barriers that undermine success. The select Latina/o students who have achieved academic success and enroll in doctoral degree programs frequently report struggling to complete their advanced degrees (Castellanos, Gloria, & Kamimura, 2006). While the entire Latino community grapples with low representation in graduate studies, Latino

males are reporting lower rates of doctoral degree admission, persistence, and completion (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). According to NCES data, Latino males have become one of the lowest doctoral degree earners within all racial subgroups. Conversely, the proportion of Latinas receiving doctoral degrees has increased from 49 percent in 1997 to 56 percent in 2007. Additionally, data indicates that Latinas have been awarded more doctoral degrees than Latino males since 1999 (Survey of Earned Doctorates, 2007). In order to support similar levels of academic success among Latino males, attention must be directed to identifying and addressing the issues preventing Latino male success in doctoral education.

Latino Males and the Gender Achievement Gap

As alluded to previously, the education attainment statistics for the Latino community are of serious concern. The data suggest that a critical examination should be focused on Latino males. As indicated by the 2007 *Latino Males in Higher Education* report from Excelencia in Education, Latino male achievement lags behind that of their Latina counterparts. The report states that, "as an overall number of Latinas/os enrolled in college, Latino male enrollment has fallen from 55% of total Latina/o enrollment to 44%." This decrease in enrollment percentage indicates that Latinas have accomplished greater access to higher education and have consistently achieved academic success. Conversely, Latino male enrollment in post-secondary education has remained stagnant (Excelencia in Education, 2007).

Over the course of several decades, an adverse educational trend within the Latino community has appeared. While the Latino community has increased its number of postsecondary enrollees and graduates over decades, disaggregated data indicates that a majority of this growth is a result of Latina academic success (Sáenz & Ponjuán, 2009; Castellanos, Gloria, & Kamimura, 2006). According to Sáenz and Ponjuán, Latino males comprised 38 percent of the college degrees conferred to the Latino community (2011). Similar achievement gaps are evident as early as the elementary classroom setting. Sáenz and Ponjuán (2011) note that the gender achievement gaps begin as early as five years old as a result of disparate enrollment numbers in early childhood education. According to Sáenz and Ponjuán, only 39 percent of young Latino males under the age of five were enrolled full- or part-time in school compared to 44 percent of Latinas in 2009. This achievement gap is noteworthy due to the link between early childhood education and school readiness. As researchers have proven, school readiness, as defined by a child's preparation at school entry, is essential for later academic achievement (Duncan et al., 2007; Le, Kirby, Barney, Setodji, & Gershwin, 2006; Lonigan, 2006). Additionally, scholars suggest that school readiness elements have the ability to set the stage for later academic achievement. As noted by Bowman, Donovan, & Burns (2000), children who have a broad base of school readiness acquire complex skills more rapidly than those who do not. NCES data indicates that by the third grade, boys are an average of a year to a year and a half behind girls in reading and writing abilities (2000). NCES data also notes that Latino young males in grade 4 through grade 8 are twice as likely to be held back a

grade as compared to Latinas (NCES, 2006). Latino males frequently lag behind their peers at early ages due to their lack of exposure to early childhood education.

Latino young males continue to encounter educational disparities in their highs-school education environments. According to a study conducted by Orfield, Losen, Wald, and Swanson (2004), “the national graduation rate for Hispanics who enroll in 9th grade was 53 percent, 58 percent for Latinas and 48 percent for Latino males." These figures further magnify the differences in educational attainment between Latinas and Latino young males. As Sáenz and Ponjuán indicate in their 2011 Perspectivas report, 34.2 percent of 18- to 24-year-old Latino males had not completed high school or its equivalent in 2010. Comparatively, Sáenz and Ponjuán also note that only 27.1 percent of Latina females between 18- to 24-year-old had failed to complete high school or its equivalent in 2010. These statistics highlight the struggles that the Latino community still encounters in secondary degree attainment. Specifically, the data highlight the Latino male education crisis. With a majority of Latino males exiting high school without diplomas, these young men are not providing themselves with the tools necessary to address the future needs of their communities.

Two decades ago, Latino males were achieving academic success at comparable rates to Latina females (Cammarota, 2004). Latino males now lag behind Latinas in both undergraduate college enrollment and graduate school enrollment. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the percentage of Latinas with a bachelor’s degree or higher within the general population has jumped from 8.4 percent in 1995 to 14.9 percent in 2010 (NCES, 2010). In stark contrast, NCES data indicates that the

percentage of Latino males with a bachelor's degree or higher within the general population has increased marginally from 10.1 percent to 12.9 percent during that same time (2010). Despite the population growth and increased presence throughout the education pipeline, the postsecondary academic performance and level of degree attainment for Latino males has remained stagnant (Cammarota, 2004; González, Jovel, & Stoner, 2004).

Scholarship suggests that today's Latino male is "vanishing" from higher education (Sáenz & Ponjuán, 2009). According to Sáenz and Ponjuán, the decreased presence is a result of systemic issues associated with America's K-12 educational pipeline. Leaks throughout the educational pipeline have resulted in Latino males between the ages of 18-25 having a higher probability of dropping out of high school, working hourly-wage employment, entering the military, entering the prison system, and committing suicide (Sáenz & Ponjuán, 2009). The data indicate that despite having a large presence within the K-12 education system, the pathway to higher education for Latino males is still filled with impediments preventing easy access.

The Latino gender achievement gap is particularly evident under the lens of college enrollment. Despite encountering their own unique circumstances along their educational journey, Latina enrollment in two- and four- year institutions has now surpassed Latino enrollment by approximately 368,000 students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). Additionally, the Latino gender achievement gap is noted in the disparate degree completion numbers. According to NCES data, in 2009, Latinas earned 140,080 associates and bachelors degrees. In comparison, Latino males earned

87,367 associates and bachelors degrees. Sáenz and Ponjuán (2011) estimate that if the current status of Latino education remains unchanged, Latinas will earn 65,000 more bachelors degrees annually than their male counterparts by 2040. The role of Latino males as spouses, fathers, community leaders and role models for young men is in jeopardy as a result of these pervasive education struggles. If left unaddressed, Latino men may be unable to participate in addressing critical economic and social roles important to securing upwardly mobile families and communities.

Statement of Problem: Latino Males & Graduate Education

The economic future of the United States in today's global economy depends greatly on the quality of education its citizens receive. While college degree attainment has become a requirement for an individual's success, doctoral degree attainment has become critical for society's success. Despite this growing interest in doctoral education, the Latino community, the fastest growing and largest student demographic, continues to lag behind other racial and ethnic sub-groups as the most underrepresented population within graduate education (NCES, 2011). In particular, NCES data notes that Latino males are among the most underrepresented racial subgroup within America's doctoral student population (2001).

There were 53 million Latinos residing in the United States in 2010 (Pew Hispanic Center, 2011). The Pew Hispanic Center noted that between 2000 and 2010, the number of Latinos in the United States increased 43 percent. With this rapidly growing presence, the lack of representation and success of Latino doctoral students becomes a

critical concern for the entire nation. Ultimately, the rates of academic attendance, completion, and success for Latino doctoral students will have positive or negative implications for the United States.

Over the past two decades, the Latino community has experienced marginal improvements in its presence and success in doctoral, graduate, and professional programs. Despite the success, the Latino community still lags behind in degree completion when compared to the general doctoral student population. Nearly half of all doctoral students complete their degrees, however, Latina/o doctoral students struggle with an attrition rate that is much greater than that (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Lovitts, 2001; Fry, 2002). While there has been increased interest in developing an understanding on the general challenges of graduate school socialization, graduate student attrition, and the impact of support networks for doctoral students, there has been limited effort to focus specifically on subpopulations of graduate students.

The National Center for Education Statistics (2011) reported that between 1977 and 2009, the number of doctoral degrees conferred increased for students of all racial/ethnic groups. Between those years, Latina/o doctoral degree conferment increased 386 percent from 522 degrees to 2,540 degrees (NCES, 2011). Though this increase in doctoral degree enrollment and degree conferment marks improvement towards educational access for the Latino community, Latinos continue to lag behind other racial/ethnic groups in these categories (Fry, 2002). As reported by the Pew Hispanic Center (2004), Latina/o students in graduate education continue to lag in representation and degree attainment.

Increases in enrollment numbers and total degrees conferred have been marginal for Latina/o doctoral students as compared to peers. These figures indicate progress for the Latino community, however at a much slower rate relative to other communities. Much of Latino community's progress is attributed to the strides Latinas have made in doctoral education. According to NCES (2011), the number of advanced degrees earned by Latinas compared to Latino males exhibited one of the largest growing gender disparities within a racial/ethnic community. NCES data indicated that Latinas earned 64 percent of master's degrees and 57 percent of doctoral degrees awarded to the Latino community. Additional NCES data indicates that Latino males struggle to keep pace with Latinas in attendance, persistence, and completion in doctoral education. The following tables provide data that highlight the doctoral degree trends over the past decade within the Latino community:

Table 1.1 Number and distribution of doctoral degrees conferred by race/ethnicity between 1999–2000 and 2009–2010

	1999–2000		2009–10	
Degree & Race/Ethnicity	**# of Degrees**	**%**	**# of Degrees**	**%**
Doctoral*	106,494	100.0%	140,505	100.0%
White	82,984	77.9%	104,426	74.3%
Black	7,080	6.6%	10,417	7.4%
Hispanic	**5,039**	**4.7%**	**8,085**	**5.8%**
Asian/Pacific Islander	10,684	10.0%	16,625	11.8%
American Indian/Alaska Native	707	0.7%	952	0.7%

Source. National Center for Education Statistics (2012)
Note: Includes Ph.D., Ed.D., and comparable degrees at the doctoral level. Includes most degrees formerly classified as first-professional, such as M.D., D.D.S., and law degrees.

Table 1.2 Percentage of doctoral degrees conferred to males by race/ethnicity between 1999–2000 and 2009–2010

	Percent Conferred to Males	
Degree & Race/Ethnicity	**1999–2000**	**2009–10**
Doctoral*	53.0%	46.7%
White	54.6%	48.6%
Black	39.0%	34.8%
Hispanic	**51.6%**	**45.0%**
Asian/Pacific Islander	51.2%	43.5%
American Indian/Alaska Native	47.1%	45.2%

Source. National Center for Education Statistics (2012)
Note: Includes Ph.D., Ed.D., and comparable degrees at the doctoral level. Includes most degrees formerly classified as first-professional, such as M.D., D.D.S., and law degrees.

In order to improve the rates of educational attainment for Latino male doctoral students, it is imperative to investigate the unique experiences, external challenges, and

internal pressures these students encounter throughout their pursuit of the doctorate. Existing research on doctoral education attainment has been minimal; however, there is an increase in the number of scholars studying the complexities of graduate education (Golde & Dore, 2001; Gardner, 2008; Gardner, 2009; Jazvac-Martek, 2009). This dissertation focused on examining the Latino male doctoral experience at a tier-one, public research institution. The choice of examining the Latino male doctoral student experience at a tier-one, public research institution was strategic as these institutions prepare and train world-class scholars in the most rigorous and competitive academic environments. The research site that was selected was an institution identified by U.S. News & World Report as a nationally ranked premier research university (U.S. News & World Report, 2012). Additionally, the research site was selected because of it being identified as one of the largest awarders of doctorates to Latina/o students (Cooper, 2012).

This dissertation investigated the experiences and perceptions of Latino males pursuing a doctorate of philosophy (PhD) in the social sciences or humanities at a predominately White, research-intensive, public university. While doctoral degrees can refer to a number of terminal degrees across disciplines, the PhD is a unique degree due to its focus on a student's presentation of innovative and pioneering research (Lovitts, 1996). According to the Council of Graduate Studies (2010), there is a need to focus on doctoral research (i.e. PhD research) due to its role in fueling the engine of a highly skilled national workforce.

Currently, the research examining the experiences of one the fastest growing doctoral demographics, Latino students, is minimal and predominately focused on the experiences of both genders, if not exclusively Latinas (Ramirez Lango, 1995; Figueroa, González, Marin, Moreno, Navia, & Pérez, 2001; González, 2006; Espino, 2008). By examining Latino male doctoral students, this dissertation identified the thematic experiences and perceptions that supported and challenged academic success for Latino males in doctoral education. Additionally, this study identified the most impactful resources and tools utilized by Latino male doctoral students as they navigated their doctoral journey.

In summary, the brief overview of the socio-political and historical context showcased how the Latino male education experience is filled with various support networks and many hurdles. These experiences have uniquely shaped how Latino males perceive doctoral education and a pursuit of a doctorate. Ultimately, Latino males must steer through education institutions that are unprepared to support their unique needs. This context indicates the need for further investigation of the experiences of Latino males in doctoral programs in order to identify the thematic experiences and perceptions that influence their doctoral degree attainment.

Purpose of the Study

The scope of this study focused on the experiences and self-perceptions of Latino males pursuing a doctoral degree in the social sciences or humanities at a tier-one institution. This study investigated the thematic experiences and challenges encountered

by Latino males as underrepresented students in pursuit of a doctorate. The study focused on the unique internal and external perceptions and pressures these students faced in applying to and navigating their doctoral programs. Gender role strain/conflict theory and Latino critical race theory served as guiding theoretical frameworks for this study as indicated by the dissertation's central research questions. A more thorough description of the theoretical frameworks guiding this study is provided in chapter two.

The central research questions were:

- What experiences do Latino male doctoral students identify as influential to their doctoral education journey at a predominantly White, research-intensive public institution?
- How do Latino male doctoral students perceive their academic experiences as doctoral students attending a predominantly White, research-intensive public institution?

Additional sub-questions explored how Latino male doctoral students experience and manage the pressures associated with Latino community engagement, doctoral education navigation, male gender role conflict, and power/oppression dynamics. An interest was placed on identifying the most impactful and influential experiences and resources utilized by these students along their doctoral journey.

This dissertation followed a phenomenological research approach. A phenomenological approach was selected in order to develop a thorough understanding of how Latino males, individuals with complex gender and racial roles and perspectives, experienced graduate school. As Holloway and Wheeler (1996) note, the essence of

phenomenology is to discover and describe various meanings of human experiences as they are lived in everyday life. Through qualitative data collected from interviews with Latino male doctoral students at the predominantly White, research-intensive public institution research site, this phenomenological study developed deeper insight into the complex experiences and meanings attributed to Latino male doctoral students.

The participants of this study were Latino male doctoral students from various graduate programs across a predominantly White, research-intensive public institution. This decision to select participants from across various academic disciplines was a deliberate effort to "condense individual experiences with a phenomenon to a complete description of the universal essence" (Creswell, 2006, p. 58). It was imperative for the qualitative data to be presented in a matter that elucidates the experiences of all Latino male doctoral students, rather than generalize and simplify them.

Significance of the Study

Gándara and Contreras (2009) have provided commentary on how the Latino community has become one of the most critical components for national and state economies. As a result of rapid demographic growth and becoming the largest racial minority population in the United States, increased focus must be targeted toward addressing the Latino educational crisis. While it is imperative to improve the educational attainment of all Latinos across the education pipeline, a particular focus must be placed on the individuals who are faltering the most in education: Latino males.

This study was critical to raising the awareness of the experiences encountered by Latino male doctoral students, one of the most underrepresented and underserved student demographics currently in graduate education. As the Latino community continues to grow, it becomes increasingly necessary for graduate programs to improve enrollment, retention, and doctoral degree attainment for Latino males. For decades, Latino males had garnered only marginal attention by scholars interested in identifying the factors associated with the Latino male education crisis. The increased awareness of the potential impact these students can have on society has created a stronger call to investigate the experiences of these men.

This dissertation used qualitative data inquiry methods in order to examine the experiences and self-perceptions encountered by Latino male students during their pursuit of a doctoral degree. Through the use of qualitative research, scholars, administrators, and policy makers now have access to literature that can improve their understanding of the barriers and resources used by these often-marginalized students. The results of the study can aid in increasing persistence and completion rates for Latino male students pursuing a doctoral education at world-class, research-intensive public institution.

This study informs researchers and administrators of the unique internal and external challenges regularly encountered by Latino male doctoral students. Through this study, researchers gain empirical insight into the unique experiences of Latino male doctoral students, a demographic that has become increasingly important in the social and economic fabric of the nation. For administrators, this study assists in the strategic development of institutional services and resources that can improve doctoral degree

attainment for Latino males. Additionally, this study provides policy makers with context regarding the thematic experiences and challenges encountered by Latino male doctoral students.

The experiences and self-perceptions examined in this study have connections to the stresses associated with managing racial and gender identities (O'Neil, 1981). This study reshaped the archaic perceptions of masculinity within the Latino community through the application of O'Neil's gender role conflict framework. In utilizing O'Neil's gender role conflict framework, this study identifies factors that hindered Latino male student success and resources that supported student success. Through this dissertation study, higher education administrators and faculty advisors interested in improving attendance, persistence, and degree completion for Latino male doctoral students gain perspective on how to develop a supportive doctoral student environment for Latino male doctoral students.

In the following chapter, a review of the literature surrounding the Latino college experiences and perceptions of Latino masculinity provides context to the Latino male doctoral experience. Furthermore, a critical review of the literature surrounding doctoral education and persistence provides background on the grueling and unsympathetic journey towards a doctorate. These sections form the backdrop for an introduction into O'Neil's (1981) gender role conflict framework that is utilized for this study.

With the pressures of maintaining global competitiveness in education, the development of a highly trained workforce across institutions and industries has become critical in the United States. Once viewed as an extra qualification for those who sought

to work in academia, the doctorate has become vital to the economic and cultural advancement of society. With the Latino community continuing to grow across the nation at an accelerating rate, the need to address the struggles of Latino males in doctoral education is urgent. These men are critical to educating future undergraduates, inspiring generations of scholars, and advancing the frontiers of knowledge. The significance of what is at stake for our country's future is illustrated in this study.

Definition of Key Terms

There are a number of complex key terms referenced throughout this study. The following section is an abbreviated list of the terms that require an understanding in order to better decipher this study's findings. The key terms are: Hispanic/Latino, boy/male code, male gender role strain/conflict, graduate/doctoral education, and academic success.

Hispanic/Latino

The term *Hispanic* is generally applied to all Spanish-speaking people and implies a cultural heritage or lineage from Spain. The term *Latino* is used to refer to people of Central American, South American, and/or Caribbean descent. While the two are frequently used interchangeably, it is important to note the subtle differences. With the overwhelming majority of the Unites States' Hispanic population hailing from the Caribbean, Central America, and South American (i.e. Latin America) rather than Spain, the label *Latino* has become increasingly preferred and perceived as more accurate. Since

self-identifying as *Hispanic* or *Latino* is a matter of preference and many previous researchers referenced in this study have used the term interchangeably, the terms *Latino* and *Hispanic* are used interchangeably throughout this study as well.

Male Code

The "Boy/Man Code" concept refers to the complex set of attitudes, behaviors, and self-presentation methods ascribed to by males as a result of socialization. These attitudes and behaviors include prescriptions for ways to act (toughness), attitudes to hold (stoic), and ways to look (muscular). The Male Code also includes prescriptions for ways *not* to act (vulnerable), attitudes *not* to hold (emotional), and ways *not* to present oneself (weak).

Male Gender Role Strain/Conflict

Gender role strain and conflict are two concepts that note the negative consequences that emerge for men during their experiences with socialized masculine gender responsibilities (O'Neil, 1981; Pleck, 1981). O'Neil and Pleck both note that as a result of prescribed gender behaviors, males of all ages experience pressure, strain, and internal conflict to abide by a restrictive male code. For purposes of this study, the terms *Gender Role Conflict* and *Gender Role Strain* were used interchangeably when discussing the negative consequences associated with male gender roles.

Graduate and Doctoral Education

Within the hierarchy of education, graduate education is considered advanced education. Graduate education is undertaken after the completion of a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution of higher education. Students enrolled in graduate education are in pursuit of either their master's or doctoral degree. It is important to note that this study focused on Latino male students in pursuit of their doctoral degree. The terms were not used interchangeably. Any references to graduate education in this study were an effort to note the systemic issues facing Latino male students in graduate education that may be hindering the pipeline flow to doctoral education. The terms *doctorate* and *doctoral degree* were used interchangeably however.

Academic Success

Within the field of education research, academic success has been determined by a variety of metrics. Success as defined for this study was completion of all degree requirements and successful defense of a dissertation, resulting in the awarding of a doctoral degree. Metrics such as GPA or number of peer-reviewed publications could be considered as measures for doctoral academic success; however, since this study focused on the phenomenon impacting doctoral attrition and persistence, doctoral degree completion was identified as the best measure for doctoral student academic success.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to provide a context for the experiences Latino males encounter as they navigate the American education pipeline. This review focuses on the various hurdles that Latino males encounter from early childhood education to graduate education. In order to provide perspective to the experiences of these individuals, this overview sheds light on the individual, institutional, and environmental challenges that lead to large rates of program attrition for Latino male doctoral students. Lastly, this chapter details the study's theoretical frameworks, O'Neil's male gender role conflict/strain (1981) and Latino critical race theory. The frameworks provide context to the issues Latino males face in educational settings today.

Latino Male Gender Identity Development

The role of masculinity in the lives of males of color is a subject that has been under close examination (Abreu, Goodyear, Campos, & Newcomb, 2000; Connell, 2005; Ferguson, 2000; Goode, Borst, & Wallace, 1994; Levant, 1996; Thompson, Pleck, 1995). Pleck, Sonenstein, and Ku (1993) propose that masculinity is defined as the "endorsement and internalization of cultural belief systems about masculinity and the male gender, rooted in the structural relationship between the two sexes" (p. 88). The key to Pleck, Sonenstein, and Ku's research is that masculinity is unique to a cultural belief system. This cultural belief system can vary between racial and ethnic communities. Levant (1996) builds upon this notion by stating that, "because masculinity is a social construction, ideals of manhood may differ for men of different social classes, races,

ethnic groups, sexual orientations, life stages, and historical eras" (p. 261). Thompson and Pleck (1995) confirm Levant's assertion as they also suggest that expectations for being a man differ "for men of different racial, ethnic, and religious groups, as well as social class" (p. 134). These scholars note that there are unique gender norms, characteristics, and challenges associated with each culture and community. This research substantiates the uniqueness of the Latino male experience as compared to other male experiences.

Machismo and caballerismo

According to Spence (1993), internalized gender role norms function as a way which males categorize and process information about themselves and the external world. As a result, elements such as behavior, identity, and relationships are influenced by gender. In today's society, gender norms are created and reinforced by traditional perceptions of masculinity. Males feel as though they must emulate masculine traits and behaviors (i.e. aggression, assertiveness, etc.) or risk being associated with female traits and behaviors (i.e. fragility, sensitivity, etc.) (Levant, 1996). Levant, Hirsch, Celentano, Cozza, Hill, and MacEachern (1992) indicate that males believe they must adhere to "seven dimensions of masculinity" or face stigmatization by society as being "less manly." The seven dimensions are: avoiding all things feminine; constraining one's emotional life; having aggression and toughness; being self-reliant; achieving status above all else; accepting objectifying attitudes toward sexuality; and having an uncompromising fear and hatred of homosexuals. Strict conformity to these dimensions

within the Latino community is associated with *machismo*; a term associated with hegemonic masculinity within the Latino community (Arciniega, Anderson, Tovar-Blank, & Tracey, 2008). As a result of pervasive hyper-masculine traits and behaviors, Latino males are placed in a strict mold of masculinity with limited flexibility or opportunity to express themselves otherwise.

While males of various racial and cultural backgrounds in the United States navigate constrained perceptions of masculinity, researchers note that Latino males in the U.S. endorse traditional male gender roles more frequently than White males and African American males (Abreu, Goodyear, Campos, & Newcomb, 2000). Issues with *machismo* are exacerbated for Latino males in the United States as a result of managing perceptions of masculinity from their countries of origin as well. *Machismo* is derived from social and psychological literature on Mexican males (Diaz, 1966; Diaz-Guerrero, 1955; Paz, 1961; Penalosa, 1968). As noted by Boulding (1990) and Mosher (1991), *machismo* is linked to exaggerated forms of male gender role behaviors such as heavy drinking, toughness, aggressiveness, risk taking, and virility. Arciniega, Anderson, Tovar-Blank, and Tracey (2008) indicate that *machismo* is also associated with sexist, chauvinistic, and hypermasculine attitudes and behaviors. As suggested by the research on Latino males in educational studies, gender roles and traits associated with *machismo* can be linked to issues preventing classroom engagement, participation, and academic success (Cammarota, 2004; González, Marin, Figueroa, Moreno, & Navia, 2002; Lopez, 2003; Reyes, 2000; Rios, 2011; Sáenz & Ponjuán, 2009).

Despite the negative tone frequently associated with Latino masculinity research, scholars have recently expanded upon positive traits linked to Latino male identity and *machismo*. While Arcinega, Anderson, Tovar-Blank, and Tracey (2008) provide a description of the negative aspects of the *machismo* archetype, their research also reveals the presence of a complementary archetype that supports male community-building, *caballerismo*. *Caballerismo* is a Latino male archetype that is closely associated with *machismo*, however with more positive traits and characteristics for Latino males such as resilient work ethic, family-centric, pride and honor, and responsibility (Arcinega. Anderson, Tovar-Blank, & Tracey, 2008). This research enhances the previously narrow understanding of *machismo* that associate males with less tolerance of other ethnic groups, antisocial behavioral tendencies, and an inability to cope with emotions and problems. In contrast to the machismo archetype, the *caballerismo* archetype is linked to greater acceptance of other communities, increased peer connectedness, greater emotional literacy, and more proactive problem-solving coping strategies. The two archetypes combine to form a more comprehensive perspective of Latino masculinity.

The *machismo* and *caballerismo* archetypes are critical to note when investigating Latino male education success. These archetypes provide more thorough context for the gender roles encountered by young Latino males. Through the constant exposure of negative and positive traits associated with masculinity, young males develop their own understanding of gender roles and responsibilities (Arcinega, Anderson, Tovar-Blank, & Tracey, 2008).

Prior to Arcinega et al.'s development of the *machismo/caballerismo* scale, research portrayed Mexican American males as destined to perpetuate hyper-masculine, patriarchal attitudes. The development of the *caballerismo* archetype displays more accurately the complexity of masculinity by showcasing positive Mexican American male traits and attributes that were previously unreported. Arcinega et al.'s research is critical to the understanding of the Latino male doctoral student experience. Arcinega et al.'s research explains the difficult challenges Latino male doctoral students encounter in balancing the complex, positive and negative gender roles associated with *machismo* and *caballerismo*.

Summary

Developing context around the Latino male gender identity development process is vital to any study that examines the experiences and self-perceptions of Latino males in education. Whether in early education or higher education, researchers must understand the complexities of Latino masculinity. As Levant (1996) notes, masculinity is a social construction with ideals of manhood differing between social classes, races, ethnic groups, sexual orientations, life stages, and historical eras. As a result of this uniqueness in defining masculinity, Arcinega, Anderson, Tovar-Blank, and Tracey's (2008) work is critical to this dissertation. Arcinega et al.'s study is vital due to its explanation of Latino masculinity, in particular dispelling previously held notions of hyper-masculinity. This dissertation continued this research and sheds light on the complex Latino male doctoral student identity and experience. With Latino critical race theory and male gender role

conflict as guiding frameworks, this dissertation provides additional attention and validation to the Latino male doctoral student experience.

Educational Experiences of Latino Males

Understanding the educational expectations and schooling experiences of young Latino males will help provide contextual background as to how Latino males perceive the pursuit of a doctoral degree. Latino males face unique experiences and challenges throughout their educational journey. Despite the Latino community becoming the largest ethnic population educated within the U.S. educational system, systemic issues related to resources, administration, faculty, and communities prevent these young men from having the same success as their peers.

Today's teachers are unprepared to effectively engage Latino male students. Schools are frequently ill-equipped to train their faculty on how to bridge this growing disconnection. According to Valenzuela (1999), this disconnection in the American education system is creating a "subtractive schooling" experience for Latino students. Forcing Latino students to relinquish their cultural norms and identity creates this "subtractive schooling" experience. This schooling experience has created a growing rift between the education system and the students who struggle to assimilate with the long-established ideals and goals of American society. Valenzuela argues that schools place challenging burdens upon Latino students by asking them to assimilate or struggle along their educational journey.

A lack of cultural competency by faculty members is not the only challenge Latino students encounter during their educational pursuits. Based on property value and community wealth, the current education finance system produces substantial variation in educational resources and quality across the nation. With wealth providing access to educational opportunities not afforded to low-income communities, structural barriers impede the academic success of Latino youth from poor and marginalized communities (Kozol, 1991). Sáenz (2005) expands on Kozol's assertion by recognizing that schools in these communities are understaffed and under resourced as they attempt to educate a poverty stricken and neglected Latino community. Schools that serve low-income Latino communities cope with issues ranging from teacher turnover to inexperienced leadership, all of which are detrimental for Latino students and their academic pursuits.

In addition to the previously mentioned schooling challenges, Latino male students navigate an educational system that provides them with few educators that share their identities. According to a survey by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2007), two percent of K-12 teachers identified as Latino male. These figures indicate that it is possible for a Latino male student to never come in contact with a Latino male educator during their educational journey. While teachers with dissimilar backgrounds and identities can serve as excellent mentors for Latino males, Zapata (1988) suggests that Latino male educators are necessary for young Latino males. Zapata acknowledges that educators who come from similar marginalized communities are more effective and equipped to meeting the learning and mentoring needs of student populations who reside in those same communities. Ultimately, the nonexistence of Latino males in the teaching

profession has limited the opportunities for Latino males to comfortably communicate with educators and connect with others in classroom settings.

The inability for administrators and teachers to effectively communicate and connect with Latino male students has also led to disparate management and treatment of these students in schooling contexts. Research indicates that one of the factors preventing the academic success of Latino males is the overrepresentation of these students in special education schooling tracks. Latino males constitute 67 percent of the special education population as a result of being classified as learning disabled and diagnosed with attention deficit disorders at higher rates than Latinas and male peers, (Gurian & Stevens, 2005; Noguera, 2008; Sáenz & Ponjuán, 2009). Placed in special education tracks, Latino males are removed from their peers in standard schooling tracks and assigned to a classroom setting with lower academic success standards. As the researchers indicate in their studies, Latino males, as a result of special education, are unprepared for upper level curriculum and are become increasingly disengaged from school with time spent in this academic track.

A byproduct of academic disengagement is a feeling of academic inferiority. Pollack suggests that feelings of inferiority in school settings produce psychological issues for students that can go undetected (1998). According to Pollack, these feelings of inferiority lead students to disengage themselves from classroom settings mentally and lead students to remove themselves physically by dropping out. Pollack's research indicates that a welcoming environment is critical for young males to succeed at levels similar to their female peers. According to Pollock, "boys will thrive at school if there is

a pervasive sense that they are welcome, that they are liked, and that who they *really* are–and how they *really* enjoy learning–will be embraced in a genuine way by their teachers" (p. 248). Pollack continues to explain if young males do not feel welcome, they will often hide their lack of academic confidence through false bravado in order to mask their shortcomings and perceived weaknesses in school. This provides some insight as to why Latino males drop out at higher rates than Latinas.

The mass displacement of Latino men into special education tracks is also related to the disparate treatment of disciplinary issues involving young men of color in schools. Research shows that African American and Latino young males are not engaged in classrooms by teachers in the same manner that their white and female peers are (Ferguson, 2000; Noguera, 2008). Additionally, young men of color are policed and monitored continuously in a manner that overtly seeks to criminalize any transgression (Cammarota, 2004; Rios, 2011). This treatment of young men of color leads to teachers and administrators placing lower expectations and standards on students. As a result of these lowered expectations, students internalize the negativity and hostility targeted toward them. According to Tatum (2003), the internalization of lowered expectations over time can lead to students developing an oppositional identity that rebels against schooling rather than embracing education. As young Latino males develop an oppositional identity in school, they seek other outlets for social and financial success. Rios notes that Latino males may not perceive education as a means of social mobility due to the negative treatment they frequently receive throughout their schooling (2011).

According to Weis and Fine (2000), Latinas view education as a necessary and valuable credential in order to accomplish career and life goals. Conversely, young Latino males reportedly believe that education is unnecessary to achieve career and life success. The perceived disconnection between educational success and life success held by Latino males supports Lopez's (1999) findings that indicate that Latinas are more engaged in classroom settings and report greater academic success compared to Latino males. According to Lopez, Latinas are also provided with greater classroom support as a result of being more engaged in the classroom compared to their male counterparts. A growing disinterest in academics paired with a limited degree of support from faculty results in Latino males becoming increasingly disengaged in classroom settings as they advance along the education pipeline.

The oppositional identity Latino males create within classroom settings has been connected with aspects of racial identity as well. As males of color experience unsupportive academic environments in urban communities, these individuals have not only dissociated themselves from educational pursuits, but they have also associated academic pursuits with "acting White" (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986, Osborne, 1999). The association of academic success with White racial identity stigmatizes classroom participation for young males of color. When males of color encounter academic success, it can be received negatively by peers and seen as the individual rejecting the community for a White identity. According to Shaffer & Gordon (2006), the identity of males of color is frequently associated with negative behavior, pessimistic attitude, and limited academic ability. Latino males who seek to dispel the negative stereotypes placed on

them by faculty will have little support from their peers. Horvat & O'Connor (2006) indicate that young males of color will utilize the phrase "acting White" in order to disprove of peers who they deem as "sell-outs" to their community. This association of academic disengagement to the identity of many Latino males perpetuates the challenge Latino males face as they progress through their education.

Despite the presence of two distinct archetypes for Latino masculinity, *machismo* frequently serves as the default standard for many young Latino men. Due to its rigid and hypermasculine nature, *machismo* frequently prevents young Latino males from attaining levels of academic success comparable to their peers (Sáenz & Ponjuán, 2009). Gender plays an influential role in the academic engagement and performance of Latino students throughout all levels of education. The hyper-masculinity expressed by *machismo* in the Latino community exacerbates the insecurity and false bravado referenced by Pollock (1998). This identity often results in feelings of shame, helplessness, and depression (O'Neil, 1981; Pleck, 1995). As a result of these mixed signals, young Latino males struggle with developing emotional literacy and are unable to communicate their feelings or seek help regarding their insecurity and depression in classroom and community settings.

Though most of the existing literature on Latino males in education examines their experiences through a deficit framework, Figueroa, Perez, and Vega (2010, Under Review) challenge previous literature by (re)constructing Latino masculinity. In their study, Figueroa, Perez, and Vega utilize student narratives to examine the impact of race and gender of undergraduate students in academic environments. Figueroa, Perez, and

Vega's study places a focus on Latino males as a result of their constant state of negotiating contradictory notions of masculinity. Their findings suggest that three main components are integral to the educational experiences of Latino males in college: 1) expectation fulfillment; 2) the emasculation of education; and 3) racialization in higher education. This study is critical for the understanding of the Latino male doctoral student experience as it provides insight into how Latino males navigated their undergraduate education. Figueroa, Perez, and Vega highlight the challenges these Latino male students faced in fulfilling community and personal expectations. Additionally, these students were required to navigate racialized academic environments and gender role conflicts in order to achieve success and complete their college degree. Because of its direct relation to Latino male experiences, Figueroa, Perez, and Vega's study provided a critical foundation to this dissertation's examination of the experiences and self-perceptions of Latino males in pursuit of a doctorate. This dissertation builds on the foundation created by Figueroa, Perez, and Vega and expands on their research to uncover the experiences of Latino male doctoral students.

Summary

As the literature indicates, there are a number of systemic hurdles for Latino males throughout their education journey. At various times in their lives, Latino males will be faced with the difficult task of processing the mixed messages espoused by *machismo* and *caballerismo* while also navigating the education pipeline. While much of the current literature regarding the educational experiences of Latino males centers on the

challenges they encounter, it is critical to reference Figueroa, Perez, and Vega's (2010, Under Review) attempts to (re)construct Latino masculinity. The inclusion of their work provided this study with an example of how to qualitatively investigate Latino male educational experiences and a model of how to positively frame findings in order to reconstruct Latino masculinity.

Challenges within Doctoral Education

Currently, there is an increasingly diverse pool of admitted students and recent graduates in graduate education (NCES, 2011). Graduate programs must adjust to the changing demographics of American doctoral education in order to adequately meet doctoral student needs. As Rice (2003) notes, today's average student no longer fits the college student archetype from previous decades. Today's students represent a range of ages, socioeconomic backgrounds, and ethnicities. In order to meet the changing needs of doctoral students, it is critical to develop an understanding of the motivations, goals, and perceptions of these students as they pursue their doctorate. Furthermore, it is critical to understand the institutional hurdles and systemic barriers that can lead to doctoral student attrition.

Personal priorities

According Gardner (2009) the most challenging aspect of doctoral education can be a student's management of personal issues prior to and throughout their doctoral pursuit. Gardner notes that, "about one third of the students discussed personal problems

as their main attribution for student departure" (p. 106). Gardner's findings are based off a study of sixty doctoral students and thirty-four faculty members in graduate departments identified as having high and low doctoral student completion rates at one institution in the United States. Gardner's interviews discovered that a graduate program's cultural contexts, structures, and community either facilitate or hinder doctoral student success.

Younes and Asay (1998) also investigated the effect of life priorities in their study of resilience in female graduate students. In their study, Younes and Asay explored the process of role negotiation and how it influences academic success. The authors noted:

> The women painted an enlightening picture of not only the daily struggles that all women face as they attempt to integrate their multiple roles, but the added struggle of graduate work. This seems to be a turbulent process filled with paradoxes … The polarization stems from the commitment and obligation that these women feel towards their families while trying to nurture their education needs and career aspirations. (p. 38)

This study is significant due to the attention Younes and Asay draw on the multiple roles and responsibilities of doctoral students. In particular, this study notes the conflicts between familial responsibilities and pursuit of career aspirations. As indicated earlier, these two elements resonated strongly with Latino males as a result of their associations with *machismo* and *caballerismo*.

In order to have success in graduate school, doctoral students must become proficient at negotiating priorities and making sacrifices. According to Polson (2003), "graduate students often juggle the demands of adulthood (including parenting, full-time employment, and elder care) with those imposed by seeking an advanced degree. Their

success is influenced by a realistic assessment of existing loads" (p. 63). Polson indicates that a doctoral student's ability to assess, reassess, and negotiate priorities with family, friends, employers, and co-workers is critical for doctoral degree completion. Challenges can occur when external factors are no longer supportive of an individual's degree pursuit. Polson suggests that without adequate support from peer and family networks, graduate students will inevitably struggle academically, while also facing emotional and mental health issues related to the decisions made regarding their personal priorities.

Community and support

A doctoral student's sense of support and sense of community are also important factors that contribute to graduate student success. As noted by a study on doctoral student mentoring conducted by Boyle and Boice (1998), doctoral student interactions with other doctoral students related positively to academic achievement and career development. According to the findings based on the development and assessment of two mentoring programs, Boyle and Boice suggest that focusing efforts to create graduate student pairings and group meetings produced promising results for the creation of a mentoring and support system. Cheng (2004) confirms the positive influence of support and community through a quantitative examination of 26 elements of student life on campus. Through this study, Cheng indicates that, "the most important principle of community involves faculty and students in a common commitment to teaching and learning" (p. 228). A sense of community and support can be an integral part of a graduate student's pursuit of a doctorate.

Successful navigation of the doctoral process requires more than a strong sense of community. Jazvac-Martek's (2009) study of doctoral students in an education doctoral program suggested that the availability of internal support services, through formal and informal venues, facilitated greater doctoral student success. Jazvac-Martek's findings were based off qualitative thematic analysis of questionnaire and interview data that highlighted doctoral student agency in the PhD process. The study found that doctoral students benefited academically from the opportunity to discuss experiences and share insights about the transitional nature of graduate school with other students (Jazvac-Martek, 2009). Though this support was generated through peer discussion and interaction, the forums were in association with the graduate program as a means to assist in doctoral student transitions.

In 2006, Castellanos, Gloria, and Kamimura developed a book that discusses the history, status, and experiences of Latinas/os in doctoral education. The rationale for the book was to better understand the experiences, conditions, and support (or lack thereof) within the academic community in which Latino doctoral students navigated. According to the authors:

> The dearth of Latinas/os in the PhD pipeline is a serious concern for the Latina/o community as academics play an important role within higher education and the community as mentors, scholars, industry leaders, and leading researchers on issues pertinent to the Latina/o community as well as the society as a whole. (p. 106)

Castellanos, Gloria, and Kamimura suggest that the incorporation of psychosociocultural (PSC) factors into the daily practices of a graduate program improve the success rates of Latina/o doctoral students. According to the authors, the consideration of PSC factors

create positive educational environments and experiences that encourage Latina/o doctoral students to seek advanced degrees and improve the issue of doctoral student attrition. Castellanos, Gloria, and Kamimura's work include recommendations for creating a sense of community by inviting family more frequently to campus, diversifying the graduate curriculum, and pursing research regarding diverse topics. The authors indicate that these PSC factors improve the pathway to the PhD. Ultimately Castellanos, Gloria, and Kamimura suggest that the dimensions of the PSC model individually and holistically provide a better understanding of the experiences of Latinas/os in graduate education.

Castellanos, Gloria, and Kamimura's work is critical to this dissertation as it provided greater context to the systemic pipeline hurdles between undergraduate and doctoral education. Additionally, the authors' recommendations regarding implementation of a PSC framework provided this study with suggested resources on how to create a more inclusive and supportive community for Latino doctoral students. Though the authors' book provides a wealth of research on the pathway to a doctorate for all Latino students, there is a lack of focus on the uniqueness of Latino male doctoral students. This dissertation provides context of the pathway and experiences of a Latino male doctoral student.

Another integral study regarding Latino community and support within a doctoral education setting is González's (2006) study on the socialization of Latina doctoral students. In his study, González investigates the schooling experiences of thirteen Latinas enrolled as doctoral students at public research institutions throughout the United States.

An emphasis was placed on the challenges and hurdles these women faced outside of their graduate programs as well as with their academic socialization. As part of the research design, only women who self-identified as Latinas and had completed at least three years of doctoral coursework and/or schooling were included in the study. This decision was made in order to accurately capture the challenges of socialization and not the unique initial challenges of transition to doctoral education.

Through the use of phenomenological research methods, González (2006) found that academic socialization, in the form of opportunities and challenges, contributed to success and failure of Latinas in doctoral programs. González's findings suggest that there were two types of resistance to doctoral socialization. The first type of resistance was identified as "successful resistance" which resulted in Latina doctoral students discovering their intellectual and social confidence as a consequence of finding a voice and networks of resistance. This successful resistance results in the acquisition of allies with similar views, the use of the Spanish language to express themselves, and ultimately the embracement of a "rebel" persona against the hierarchy of academia. This successful resistance includes the creation of a community for one's self. González identifies the second type of resistance as "unsuccessful resistance". Unsuccessful resistance was marked by isolation, marginalization, and alienation. As a response to this hostility and lack of community, González notes that unsuccessful resistance frequently leads to disdain of graduate education and doctoral attrition.

González's (2006) study was critical to this dissertation as it provided literature on the strengths and challenges of socialization and community establishment in doctoral

education. Additionally, González's use of phenomenological framework to guide the research design provided an example of how to successfully investigate and analyze the unexplored experiences of marginalized doctoral students. González's use of phenomenology and his findings regarding Latina doctoral socialization experiences provided a critical foundation for this dissertation's examination of the experiences of Latino male doctoral students.

González, Marin, Perez, Figueroa, Moreno, and Navia (2001) provide one of the first pieces of literature on the Latino educational experience at the doctoral level in their investigation of the nature and context of Latina/o doctoral student experiences. In this study, the authors utilize auto-ethnographies to focus on significant aspects and discernments about their doctoral education. One of the most significant aspects of their doctoral experience is the establishment of a community and support network. The authors serve as the study participants and represented six different research-intensive institutions across the nation. Of these six participants, three identified as male and three identified as female. Additionally, most of the participants had completed coursework and were able to reflect on the arduous journey they experienced as marginalized Latina/o doctoral students.

According to their findings, González, Marin, Perez, Figueroa, Moreno, and Navia (2001) found that Latina/o doctoral students commonly shared a feeling of fragility and vulnerability upon entering their doctoral programs. Elements that contributed to this sense of vulnerability included lack of family understanding of doctoral education or purpose for doctoral education, unfamiliarity with the graduate and doctoral education

process, feelings of isolation, and feelings of tokenization as a result of being one of the few Latina/o students in their program. In the face of this adversity, González et al. suggest that Latinas/os endure their doctoral experiences by developing an identity and sense of self-motivation "through their own sense of hope, obligation and determination" (p. 575).

González, Marin, Perez, Figueroa, Moreno, and Navia's (2001) research was significant to this dissertation because it is one of the foundational studies on the Latina/o doctoral student experience. Furthermore, González et al.'s use of auto-ethnographies as a methodology validated this dissertation's use of qualitative methods to capture the experiences of Latino male doctoral students. What González et al.'s study lacked was a focus on the unique experiences of Latino male doctoral students, especially with regards to gender role conflict. This dissertation expands González et al.'s article by providing a more in-depth context of the Latino male doctoral student experience.

An important study to reference within the literature on Latino doctoral student community and experiences is Espino's (2008) dissertation regarding the narratives and counter-narratives of Mexican Americans pursuing doctorates. In her qualitative study of thirty-three Mexican American doctoral students who successfully navigated educational systems and obtained their doctorates in a variety of disciplines at fifteen universities across the United States, Espino challenges the dominant culture's master narratives of Mexican Americans. According to Espino, the dominant culture's master narratives are predominately negative and suggest false stereotypes such as Mexican American families

do not value education; Mexican American women are not allowed to get an education; if Mexican Americans would work harder, they could succeed in education; etc.

Espino's use of *testimonios* (life narratives) allow for the dismantling of existing master narratives. Espino's *testimonios* also allow for the validation of experiences of her participants. This validation results in the creation of counter-narratives that more accurately reflect the experiences of Mexican Americans pursuing a doctorate. These counter-narratives highlight how the Mexican American educational journey includes struggle and survival, privilege and merit, as well as overcoming obstacles and not finding any barriers along the way.

Espino's (2008) study was important to this dissertation due to its findings and its research design. As one of the first works to utilize *testimonios* to empower participants' voice, Espino successfully develops counter-narratives that elucidate the difficult experiences associated with doctoral education for Mexican Americans. This was significant to this dissertation to dispel the negative master narrative around Latino males and their engagement in education. Additionally, Espino's work provided a blueprint for using Latino critical race theory (LatCrit) as a theoretical framework. Espino's LatCrit framework helped examine power relations, multiple forms of oppression, and the intersections of race, social class, and gender within educational contexts. Through a similar use of LatCrit as a theoretical framework, this dissertation develops counter-narratives for marginalized Latino male doctoral students.

Attrition

Attrition in doctoral education has garnered research attention as a result of its high rate across all graduate student demographics. According to researchers, doctoral attrition ranges between 40 percent and 70 percent depending on the program of study (Gardner, 2004; Golde, 2005; Lovitts, 2001; Maher, Ford, & Thompson, 2004). Though issues with graduate student attrition may not appear to be as grave as those in other areas of the education pipeline, Berelson (1960) suggests that doctoral student attrition should be of great concern. According to Berelson, doctoral student attrition is serious because "its selection is supposed to be better; its type of education is more expensive, and…its drop-outs stay around longer" (p. 169). Identifying the factors most significant in doctoral attrition is difficult. This challenge is due to the diversity of doctoral student backgrounds, program supports, access to resources, and various other factors. Despite this challenge, researchers have established literature on thematic issues that influence the general doctoral student population.

Attrition is embedded in the institutional culture of graduate school and the process of doctoral education. Lovitts' (1996) examination of the causes of graduate student attrition is an integral piece of the literature surrounding doctoral education. Through her investigation, Lovitts examines the issues associated with high rates of attrition for doctoral students. Lovitts' study surveys doctoral degree completers and non-completers who entered their graduate programs between 1982-1984 at two top doctoral granting institutions. The research design for the study includes a survey instrument, hour-long phone interviews, and site visits with participants and faculty members.

Lovitts' qualitative design allows her study to tell the stories of success and failure directly from doctoral students.

Lovitts' (1996) findings highlight many themes such as lack of confidence, dissatisfaction of the program/faculty advising, and familial struggles. Lovitts notes that differences exist within departments' attrition rates as well, suggesting that each graduate program utilizes different structures and opportunities to integrate a student into the doctoral community. The strengths in Lovitts' study are in the identification of general causes and consequences of a student's departure from a doctoral program. These strengths are also weaknesses however, due to the generalization of the findings. Lovitts' study does not allow for the investigation of challenges faced by students of a certain gender or racial and ethnic population. This dissertation study expands upon Lovitts' groundbreaking work by delving deeper into the issues Latino males face in doctoral education and why Latino males have higher rates of attrition in doctoral programs than many other doctoral demographics (NCES, 2011).

According to Lovitts and Nelson (2000), fundamental weaknesses in the doctoral degree process have led to half of graduate students leaving without completing their doctoral degrees. Based on a survey of 816 students (511 completers and 305 non-completers) who entered doctoral degree programs at two doctoral degree granting institutions from 1982 to 1984, Lovitts and Nelson determine that attrition can be attributed to four thematic items: program fit, types of student supports, program quality, and faculty interaction. Despite prevalent misconceptions that suggested attrition was the result of a doctoral student's poor performance, Lovitts and Nelson state that, "students

leave less because of what they bring with them to the university than because of what happens to them after they arrive" (p. 50). Lovitts and Nelson's research is noteworthy as it challenges the long held faculty opinion suggesting attrition was the result of a student's lack of ability. Their research is also noteworthy for identifying the areas that graduate programs can address in order to improve degree completion.

While Lovitts and Nelson's findings highlight thematic areas that influence doctoral student attrition through their quantitative research study, Gardner (2009) provides missing context to the doctoral dropout phenomenon. Gardner's qualitative investigation of sixty doctoral students and thirty-four faculty members at a doctoral degree granting institution in the United States uncovers disconnect between students and faculty regarding the root causes associated with doctoral student attrition. Gardner states that faculty members believe that "the onus for the attrition falls solely upon the shoulders of the student leaving. Students, on the other hand, were quick to point to programmatic, departmental, and even institutional issues related to student departure" (p. 111). Gardner's findings reinforce Lovitts and Nelson's (2000) study by highlighting similar areas that can facilitate or hinder academic success (i.e. program fit, types of student supports, program quality, and faculty interaction). Gardner's research is significant to the literature on doctoral student attrition due to its recognition of the faculty and doctoral student disconnect. Similar to Lovitts' (2001) and Berelson's (1960) findings, the faculty members in this study do not place culpability on the graduate program or the institution for the student's departure but rather place the responsibility for the departure on the student.

Faculty advising

Research indicates that faculty support, interaction, and mentorship are all positively connected to degree completion and career success (Lovitts, 2001; Gardner, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Swanson, 2006). In addition to these elements, Cryer (2000) indicates that a doctoral student's education quality is greatly enhanced if the student receives good academic advising at all stages of their program: recruitment, registration, dissertation, and post-graduation. Cryer's research is supported in Swanson's investigation of advising. Swanson notes that faculty advising is particularly important to doctoral students due to graduate programs being "heavily focused on scholarship and research", areas that are unfamiliar to new doctoral students. Cryer indicates that high levels of anxiety are reported by students who are unfamiliar with the doctoral journey. As Cryer notes, this anxiety can be alleviated through "student-supervisor relationships." According to Cryer, "mutual respect and trust can and should develop, together with a working relationship that can continue, as between equals, long after the research is completed. It is in every student's interests to develop and nurture this relationship" (p. 44). Cryer's research on successful doctoral degree completion is critical due to its exploration of effective strategies for doctoral student success. In particular, Cryer emphasizes the utilization of faculty advisors as mentors instead of as exclusively supervisors.

Faculty interaction and advising come in different shapes and forms. The complexity of faculty supervision is a result of factors ranging from the unique needs of doctoral students to the time commitments and limited flexibility of faculty advisors. In

Grant's (2005) study on graduate advising pedagogy, Grant uses qualitative data from interviews of faculty-student pairs from disciplines within the humanities and social sciences to "explore the 'and' that relates 'supervisor and student'" (p. 3). Grant challenges the misconception that the doctoral supervision process is solely transference of knowledge from a faculty advisor to a doctoral student. Instead, Grant proposes that graduate advising is a managing of various "layered" relationships. Grant describes graduate advising as:

> a palimpsest-like triangular field of intersecting layers of relationships, some 'old' (that is, they pre-exist supervision like gender relations for instance), some 'new' (in masters supervision, nearly always the supervision relation itself for at least one of its participants). These relations are always present in the moment of encounter between supervisor and student and inflect the goings-on between them in unpredictable, often indefinable, ways. (p. 27)

Grant's study indicates that a successful faculty-student pairing is fluid with research, information, and feedback freely communicated in both directions. This research is critical to the academic success and development of doctoral students. Grant's research adds to the literature on graduate education significantly by providing a greater understanding of graduate advising pedagogy.

The supervision of doctoral students is often challenging for faculty members to master also due to the constant evolution of the relationship. Research notes that in order for a faculty advisor to effectively serve a doctoral student advisee, the faculty member must "wean" a doctoral student into independence. The challenge is balancing an emphasis for students to become self-reliant while also supporting students and ensuring doctoral degree persistence. According to Cryer (2000) and Grant (2005), successful

harmonization of faculty support and doctoral student independence is difficult to achieve due to the unique needs and insecurities each doctoral student may possess. This suggests that successful faculty supervisors have the ability to provide varying levels of support dependent on the student. This research is significant to providing a greater understanding regarding the unscripted nature of the student-supervisor relationship and how faculty advising is not a uniform practice.

Though a strong relationship is often sustained between a doctoral student and a faculty advisor post degree completion (Cryer, 2000; Grant, 2005), the formal student-supervisor relationship ends with the successful completion of a student's dissertation. The successful defense of a dissertation is not a simple task, however, and requires strong guidance from a faculty advisor. According to D'Andrea (2002), the dissertation is the culmination of arduous doctoral research, completed under the guidance of a faculty advisor that results in original scholarly work. As the capstone assignment for a doctoral degree, the dissertation process is identified as the most critical piece for degree completion. According to D'Andrea's survey of 215 faculty members regarding their perceptions of the barriers to completion for a doctoral degree, faculty members reported that a student's inability to effectively plan or write were the main factors preventing degree completion. D'Andrea states that faculty believe that "difficulty with planning and writing, working independently, and financial and personal-relationship pressures were the major obstacles" for a student writing their dissertation (p. 42).

D'Andrea's study is key to the understanding of faculty perceptions on doctoral student effort during the dissertation stage and identifying areas that faculty advisors can

proactively address to improve dissertation completion. D'Andrea's investigation proposes that the student-supervisor relationship could improve doctoral degree completion if faculty members would utilize their influential relationship on doctoral students and anticipate the obstacles that cause their students to withdraw from a doctoral program. D'Andrea's research suggests that there is joint ownership of a dissertation's success or failure by both the doctoral student and the faculty advisor. This study is critical due to its proposition that the student-supervisor relationship must be mutually beneficial for all parties involved.

Summary

Though the literature on the doctoral student experience and graduate education is limited, the available research provides a glimpse into the growing challenges of graduate degree completion. A review of the literature indicates that a focus has been placed on the impact of personal student issues, the presence of graduate student community and support, the role of the faculty advisor, and the major causes of graduate attrition. As noted by the research, the pressures associated with doctoral education can stem from different sources such as the community expectations, gender role conflict, power & oppression dynamics, or unfamiliarity with doctoral education. These combined pressures can result in constant feelings of anxiety and stress for Latino male doctoral students. Although the research on doctoral education is limited, the studies referenced shaped this dissertation study's interview protocol.

The literature regarding graduate education continues to grow but large gaps remain in the research on Latino male graduate students. This dissertation adds to the research conducted by Castellanos, Gloria, and Kamimura (2006), Espino's (2008), Figueroa, Perez, and Vega (2010, Under Review), González (2006), and González, Marin, Perez, Figueroa, Moreno, and Navia (2001). These studies establish a strong foundation for future researchers of Latino education issues. Despite their work, gaps remain in the research regarding Latino males in doctoral education. This dissertation investigated Latino male doctoral student experiences in a manner similar to the qualitative studies conducted by the authors referenced.

Theoretical Frameworks

This study examined the experiences and self-perceptions of Latino males pursuing a PhD in the social sciences or humanities at a research-intensive university. It was imperative to analyze their experiences through gender and ethnicity frameworks in order to investigate the influence of gender roles and responsibilities and examine the influence of race in their educational experience. The theoretical frameworks utilized were male gender role conflict and Latino critical race theory (LatCrit). The selection of male gender role conflict and LatCrit as frameworks was strategic and influenced by the literature surrounding Latina/o education attainment and Latino male education engagement.

Sáenz and Ponjuán (2009) note that Latino males are struggling across the K-12 education pipeline and vanishing from higher education. Studies by Figueroa, Perez, and

Vega (2010, Under Review), Cammarota (2004), and Rios (2011) also suggest that Latino masculinity and gender roles significantly influence the engagement of Latino males in educational settings. Due to the influence Latino masculinity (i.e. *machismo* and *caballerismo*) has in the academic progress of Latino males, an examination of Latino male doctoral students required an examination of how these students navigated gender role conflict. Prior studies utilized gender role conflict to examine how college males perceive manhood and masculinity (Harris and Edwards, 2010); however, gender role conflict was not yet utilized to examine the experiences of Latino male doctoral students.

Similar to male gender role conflict, Latino critical race theory has been used to examine topics related to Latino male doctoral students (Espino, 2008; Figueroa, Perez, & Vega, 2010; González, 2006; González, Marin, Perez, Figueroa, Moreno, & Navia, 2001). The selection of LatCrit as a guiding theoretical framework was purposeful due to its ability to validate the experiences of marginalized populations. Investigating Latino male doctoral student experiences requires processing information associated with power relations, forms of oppression, and intersections of race, social class, and gender. LatCrit allowed this dissertation to examine Latino male doctoral student experiences from their perspective rather than from an outsider's misinformed perspective. The following sections justify the use of male gender role conflict and Latino critical race theory as theoretical frameworks for this study.

Male gender role conflict

There is a growing body of literature around the concept of gender role conflict and strain. According to Pleck (1981), gender role strain is the collection of pressures both men and women experience as a result of violating or failing to fulfill gender expectations. Although males and females experience gender role strain, males report a greater difficulty with managing the pressures associated with their gender expectations according to Pleck. The origins of current conceptions of masculinity in the United States can be traced to the ideologies of White, middle-class, Protestant, heterosexual males (Kimmel, 1996). After centuries of gender role perpetuation rooted in these historical gender ideologies, a strict hegemonic masculinity was created for males of all ages to follow (Connell, 2005). As Connell notes, hegemonic masculinity emerges from the hypothesis that there is a hierarchy of masculine behavior with men being encouraged to embody the most dominant version of masculinity. For young males, hegemonic masculinity results in the socialization of boys being taught that masculinity requires strength, independence, emotional control/disconnection, and power over one's surroundings (Kimmel, 1996). Kimmel also notes that males encounter mixed messages regarding their masculinity, such as when men are encouraged to be emotionally connected in their relationships with significant others and children. The strict parameters surrounding "acceptable" male behavior as well as the challenges that result in juggling contradictory messages highlights the viability of Pleck's gender role strain model in analyzing the challenges faced by Latino male doctoral students navigating the doctorate.

Following Pleck's (1981) gender role strain model, Levant and Pollack (1995) note that a gender role identity model served as the fundamental basis for all gender studies research for decades. The gender role identity model suggests that individuals have an inherent psychological need to develop a gender identity. The model further notes that this gender identity ultimately directs an individual's behaviors and personality throughout their future in both settings and relationships (1995). While gender role identity model is consistent with essentialist theories of gender development, Pleck (1981) adds that gender role creation is restrictive, in particular for men. Pleck documents this through his ten propositions regarding gender role strain:

1) Gender role stereotypes and norms define sex roles operationally.
2) Gender roles are contradictory and inconsistent.
3) The proportion of individuals who violate gender roles is high.
4) The violation of gender roles leads to social condemnation.
5) The violation of gender roles leads to negative psychological consequences.
6) Actual or perceived violation of gender roles leads individuals to over-conform to them.
7) Violating gender roles has greater consequences for males than females.
8) Certain gender role characteristics are psychologically dysfunctional.
9) Gender role strain is experience by males and females in work and familial roles.
10) Historical change causes gender role strain.

With his ten propositions taken into consideration, Pleck reaffirms that cause of gender role strain is due to the misconception that there is one single masculinity ideology. According to Pleck, the concept of multiple male ideologies stems from the body of literature that suggests there can be varying degrees and manners in which males adhere to their gender roles. The explanation for the variance of behavior can be accredited to external surroundings and influences such as peers, venue, and familiarity with environment.

Though Pleck suggests the presence of multiple masculinity ideologies, Pleck also notes that there are thematic items that loosely unite standards and expectations of masculinity. The author lists common traits of masculinity ideology as emotional restraint, homophobia, and anti-femininity. Despite the identification of various "common" traits, Pleck indicates that there is not a uniform consensus or adherence to any of the traits by society. However, Pleck does suggest that an individual's degree of conferment to the common traits of traditional masculinity ideology translates into the standards by which he judges himself. This suggests that masculinity ideology is closely responsible for psychological issues men develop in association with attempting to understand the spectrum of socially acceptable behavior for males. Masculinity ideology influences the degree to which males attempt to meet the gender role expectations in spite of the negative consequences that may occur.

O'Neil, Good, and Holmes' (1995) gender role conflict theory expands on Pleck's (1981) conceptualization of gender role strain by identifying and defining the various gender role conflict areas that were created as a result of gender role violations.

According to O'Neil, Good, and Holmes, gender role conflict can be defined as a "psychological state in which socialized gender roles have negative consequences on the person or others [that] ... occurs when rigid, sexist, or restrictive gender roles result in personal restrictions, devaluation, or violation of others or self" (p. 165-166). O'Neil (1995) reaffirms Pleck's gender role strain theory by suggesting that gender role conflict can occur when socialized, intractable gender roles prevent an individual from developing their true identity. O'Neil states that this dissonance "occurs when rigid, sexist, or restrictive gender roles, learned during socialization, result in personal restriction, devaluation or violation of others or self" (p. 25). O'Neil further indicates that individuals who subscribe to socialized, restrictive gender norms reinforce them internally while simultaneously perpetuating them for others. Individuals who chose not to conform to gender norms risk encountering conflict, punishment, and at times exclusion by those who chose to uphold traditional gender roles.

In addition to confirming Pleck's (1981) gender role strain theory, O'Neil's (1981) research on gender role conflict expands the understanding of masculinity within gender psychology. Observing the need to define the "masculine mystique and value system", O'Neil proposes a collection of values that define masculinity in society (p. 67). O'Neil's proposes a masculine value set that includes the following:

1) Men are biologically superior to women

2) Masculinity is a the dominant and valued gender

3) Strength, power, control, competition, and dominance are essential to demonstrating masculinity

4) Weakness and emotion are signs of femininity and must be avoided by men

5) Interpersonal communication that highlights feelings, sensitivity, and physical contact is considered feminine and must be avoided by men

6) Sex is the primary way of proving one's masculinity

7) Vulnerability and intimacy with men must be avoided due to competition among males and the fear of homosexuality

8) Men's life accomplishments are measures of their masculinity

9) Men are superior to women in all abilities and thus are more suited to be the providers for the family.

O'Neil's research on the masculine mystique suggests that the values of masculinity are detrimental to men due to their strict regulations against femininity and expressions of vulnerability. With the devaluation of feminine associations at the crux of the masculine mystique's value set, connection to femininity by men is perceived as weakness. As males note the devaluing of females by peers, males will attempt to avoid female association for fear of being devalued as well. As a result, O'Neil suggests that these values create gender role conflict and are detrimental to men's relationships with men, women, and children.

O'Neil adds that these values have caused internal strife for men who do not agree with the masculine mystique value set but do not want to risk ridicule. O'Neil notes there are six patterns of gender role conflict that resonate with men as a result of their fear associated with exhibiting feminine traits. The six patterns stemming from male gender role conflict:

1) Restrictive emotionality

2) Socialized control, power, and competition

3) Homophobia

4) Restrictive sexual and affectionate behavior

5) Obsession with achievement and success

6) Health care problems

Few studies have investigated the college male experience from a gender role conflict framework. Harris and Edwards (2010) provide one of the first pieces of literature in this area with their qualitative study of college men and their conceptualizations of manhood and masculinity. Through open-ended interviews and focus groups with college men from large public and private institutions, Harris and Edwards explore participants' concepts of "what it meant for them to be a man, how their understandings of what being a man meant changed over time, and the influences that prompted these changes" (Harris & Edwards, 2010, p.46). Harris and Edwards' findings indicate that male students face constant pressures associated with external expectations of manliness. According to the participants, meeting expectations often include unproductive acts such as "partying and not preparing for class." (p.47). Harris and Edwards also discover that definitions for manliness include "being respected," "being confident and self-assured," "assuming responsibility," "embodying physical prowess," and fulfilling "the traditional breadwinner role" (p.48). Harris and Edward note the criticism of an individual's masculinity if these definitions of masculinity are not satisfied.

Harris and Edwards' (2010) study is significant to the literature on gender role conflict in education because it highlights how male concepts of masculinity are influenced through socialization. Additionally, the study demonstrates several consequences of hegemonic masculinity. The first consequence is the degradation and demeaning of women and "female" virtues by college males as a result of the sensitivity of being associated with femininity. The second consequence is the limited connectedness with other males, including fathers, friends, and classmates, as a result of the hegemonic male emphasis on emotional detachment.

Harris and Edwards' (2010) study is crucial to the understanding of Latino males as they pursue doctoral education as it sheds light on the internal pressures associated with masculinity. Some of the pressures identified in the Harris and Edwards study are pressures that are also identified within doctoral education (i.e. confidence, self-assuredness, independence, etc.). While Harris and Edwards provide a successful research design to investigate gender role conflict experienced by males in education, their study does not delve into doctoral education. This dissertation utilized Harris and Edwards' study as a foundation for how to examine the challenges and experiences associated with gender role conflict for Latino male doctoral students.

Gender role conflict results in many negative behaviors and outcomes for males of all ages. Negative outcomes include low self-esteem, depression, stress, dissatisfaction in relationships, stress and conflict in work, struggles for power, and control within relationships (O'Neil, Good, & Holmes, 1995). These negative outcomes highlight the contradiction that exists between the traditional ideology males are socialized to follow

and the realities that males face. This dissertation utilized O'Neil's (1981) male gender role conflict framework to gain insight on the internal challenges Latino male doctoral students face in completing their doctoral studies.

Latino critical race theory

The literature on masculinity and male gender role conflict has mostly overlooked the uniqueness of the Latino experience. In order to successfully examine the experiences and perceptions of Latino male doctoral students, it is critical that this study incorporates a frame that provides cultural context to these participants' narratives. This dissertation accomplishes this by utilizing Latino critical race theory as a complimentary framework to the male gender role conflict framework discussed previously.

Prior to discussing the specifics surrounding Latino critical race theory (LatCrit), a foundational understanding of critical race theory (CRT) is needed. CRT is an extension of critical legal studies (CLS), an area of study created from a general dissatisfaction with the foundations of classical legal thought. CLS examines and analyzes the societal and cultural dynamics that influence law (Delgado, 1995; Delgado & Stefanic, 1998, Delgado & Stefanic, 2001; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). According to Tate (1997), CLS argues that previous law and legal doctrine privileged a white perspective of society. This white privilege created numerous contradictions for other racial and ethnic communities. CRT expands CLS to other academic fields and allows for the investigation of the hegemonic role of racism in sociology, history, ethnic studies, and education. As an analytical framework, CRT literature in education focuses on the widespread presence of prejudice

in school settings. CRT enables various cultural and racial frames of reference to guide research questions on discrimination in education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Consequently, the employment of critical theory as a theoretical lens in this study was purposeful in order to thoroughly understand the experiences and self-perceptions of Latino males pursuing a PhD in the social sciences or humanities at a research-intensive university.

In CRT education literature, Solórzano (1997, 1998) identifies five tenets of CRT that are central to educational theory and research:

1) The intercentricity of race and racism

2) The challenge to dominant ideology

3) The commitment to social justice

4) The centrality of experiential knowledge

5) The utilization of interdisciplinary approaches

Scholars of CRT utilize these tenets to investigate racial discrimination across all levels of education, ranging from elementary and secondary education (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001) to higher education (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Teranishi, Allen, & Solórzano, 2000; Villalpando, 2003; Yosso, 2002). These researchers examine racialized barriers within educational institutions and highlight the false reality of race-neutral institutional policies and practices (Villalpando, 2004). While CRT remains a principal instrument in critiquing racialized barriers in

education and society, related sub-groupings of CRT, such as LatCrit, examine issues that fall outside the paradigm of black-white race relations.

LatCrit was established to examine unique Latino community issues ranging from bilingualism in schools to immigration reform (Johnson & Martinez, 1999; Valdes, 1996). According to Solórzano and Bernal (2001), LatCrit is viewed as a more valid and reliable lens through which to analyze the intersections of Latinos' identities, specifically addressing Latino intersection with oppression of race, gender, and class. Valdes proposes that the "guideposts" of LatCrit are the foundational concepts of CRT, which include:

> The embrace of subjectivity, particularity, multiplicity, and intersectionality; the acceptance of legal scholarship's inevitable implication of power politics; the emphasis on praxis, social justice, reconstruction and transformation; the navigation of sameness and difference to build self-empowered communities; and the recognition of self critique's continuing importance to intellectual integrity. (p. 57)

Selecting Latino critical race theory (LatCrit) as a theoretical framework was a strategic decision due to its ability to present a story that is not frequently told. In this dissertation, LatCrit articulated the complex experience of a marginalized group.

LatCrit establishes an effective framework to research Latino graduate student experiences. Solórzano (1998) utilizes LatCrit to examine race and gender *microaggressions* experienced by Chicana and Chicano scholars during their graduate school journey. In his study, Solórzano identifies racial and gender *microaggressions* and determines their cumulative effect on the participants' educational experiences. Solórzano's initial survey gathered responses from sixty-six Chicana/o participants in

order to distinguish information regarding instances of racial and gender discrimination. The second part of Solórzano's study followed with interviews of six Chicanas and six Chicanos in order to capture the experiences of these individuals in a way that the positivist survey data could not. Through Solórzano's use of LatCrit, thematic experiences for Latino graduate students were identified. LatCrit allowed the survey participants to express their recurrent and shared feelings of vulnerability and insecurity throughout graduate school. LatCrit's centrality on race and racism and how they intersect with other forms of subordination allowed Solórzano to successfully capture how the structures, processes, and discourses of graduate education reinforce racial, gender, and class inequality. LatCrit's effectiveness in capturing the counter-narratives of marginalized graduate students and analyzing the power dynamics within hierarchical advisor/advisee structures made it an ideal framework for examining the experiences and self-perceptions of Latino males pursuing a doctorate in the social sciences or humanities at a research-intensive university.

LatCrit scholars note the presence of daily, underhanded forms of oppression that people of color experience. While most forms of racism in education are not explicit, scholars recognize the frequent encounters students of color have with these racial *microaggressions* (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004; Chang, Astin, & Kim, 2004; Fischer, 2007; Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009). According to scholars, racial battle fatigue occurs when students of color experience exhaustion from frequent confrontations with racial *microaggressions*. Inevitably, racial battle fatigue can lead to a student's

desensitization or disillusionment with interactions with others who perpetrate racial *microaggressions*.

LatCrit scholars note that Latino students form cohesive relationships with peers that have experienced similar incidents (Villalpando, 2004). An unintentional outcome of the formation of these peer support groups is the perception that students of color prefer self-exclusion from the normative, White surroundings. CRT scholars study this self-segregation by students of color in an effort to dispel misconceptions surrounding "racial balkanization" (Altbach & Lomotey, 1991; Astin & Oseguera, 2004; Duster, 1991, 1995; Foley, 1997; Villalpando, 2004). The leading misconception that CRT scholars seek to address is the belief that when students of color affiliate with their ethnic/racial peers, they absorb behaviors that negatively influence their work ethic and values (Bloom, 1987; Duster, 1995; Schlesinger, 1993). LatCrit literature notes the inaccuracy of the racial balkanization model by demonstrating how the concept is based in racist, white ideology and influenced by cultural deprivation and deficit theories of students of color (Villalpando, 2001; hooks, 1995).

Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado and Crenshaw (1993) discuss how CRT challenges ahistoricism and provides historical context to current research. Consequently, LatCrit assists in providing the context and understanding of the Latino male doctoral student experience. The employment of a LatCrit theoretical framework allowed this study to critically examine the context behind the experiences of Latino male doctoral students. Through the use of a LatCrit framework, this study validated the experiences and self-

perceptions of Latino males pursuing a doctorate in the social sciences or humanities at a research-intensive university.

Summary

The educational journey of Latino male students is filled with complex and unique experiences. Since there is great diversity in these student experiences, a variety of theoretical frameworks can be utilized to examine them. This dissertation utilized Latino critical race theory and male gender role conflict as two complementary frameworks to investigate the experiences of Latino male doctoral students. Through the use of the male gender role conflict and Latino critical race theory, this study examined how Latino male doctoral students experienced and managed the pressures associated with doctoral education navigation, male gender role conflict, and power/oppression dynamics.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to address the gap in our understanding of the challenges facing Latino males in pursuit of doctoral education. As the Latino population in the United States continues to grow at a rapid pace (Fry, 2008) and the need for advanced research and technology becomes increasingly essential for global competitiveness (Wendler, Bridgeman, Markle, Cline, Bell, McAllister, & Kent, 2012), understanding the issues facing Latino males in doctoral education is critical to the success of the Latino community and the nation. This dissertation advanced the conversation and contributed to a body of literature regarding Latino males as integral components of America's economic and educational future.

As previously mentioned, the intention of this study was to examine the experiences and self-perceptions of Latino males pursuing a doctorate in the social sciences or humanities at a research-intensive university. In order to conduct a thorough examination of these items, I conducted face-to-face interviews with eight Latino male doctoral students currently enrolled and pursuing a PhD at one of the nation's premier public research institutions and one of the largest awarders of Latino doctoral degrees (Cooper. 2012). The selection of eight participants was purposeful and strategic. According to Creswell (1998), a qualitative researcher should interview up to 10 participants in order to capture their lived experiences in a phenomenological study. Dukes (1984) echoes this recommendation by suggesting that three, five, or up to 10 participants are needed for a phenomenological study. The studies I reviewed ranged from one participant to ten participants. I ultimately conducted two interviews with eight

participants in order to document the Latino male doctoral student narrative. These interviews allowed me to examine the participants' self-perceptions and experiences throughout their doctoral education in order to gain insight regarding the phenomena that is leading to the high-rate of degree attrition for Latino male doctoral students (NCES, 2010). A particular focus was placed on examining the subjects' perceptions of Latino community influence, male gender identity, doctoral education navigation, and power/oppression dynamics in order to determine the impact on their doctoral education experience.

In using a phenomenological approach, this dissertation study added the currently missing voice of Latino male doctoral students to the existing body of literature concerning both the educational experiences of the Latino community and the issues of persistence in doctoral education. While a phenomenological methodology has been utilized before to examine the experiences of Latino graduate students in higher education contexts (Bitar, Kimball, Gee, & Bermudez, 2008; Espino, 2008; González, 2006; Malott, 2009; Rosas & Hamrick, 2002; Vasquez, 2007), there was a shortage of research on Latino males in doctoral programs prior to this study.

The employment of qualitative methods for this study was purposeful and a direct response to the current body of literature concerning educational experiences of Latino graduate students. Prior to recent efforts, research on Latino doctoral education had been primarily cursory and focused on demographic representation, total degrees awarded, and rates of degree attrition. Recent studies by researchers include qualitative research designs that have investigated Latinas and sub-ethnic demographics within the Latino

community (Espino, 2008; González, 2006; Malott, 2009; Rosas & Hamrick, 2002). In these studies, qualitative methods were selected in order to provide context to the issues facing the Latino community in graduate education settings.

This study served as one of the first studies that will focus on Latino men in doctoral education. The research design provides an essential addition to the existing literature due to its role in examining how Latino males experience and perceive being doctoral students at an elite, public research institution. The study's findings informs administrators, faculty, and researchers on the unique experiences of Latino male doctoral students and assists stakeholders in developing strategies aimed at improving doctoral degree persistence and completion for these students.

This chapter provides an overview of the research questions that guided this study. Additionally, this chapter provides the rationale behind the institutional site selection and the participant selection process as well. This chapter also focuses on the research approach utilized and includes the specifics concerning the data collection and analysis processes. The final section of this chapter identifies the limitations of this study in an effort to provide a guidepost for future researchers.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to use a qualitative approach to develop a greater understanding of the experiences and self-perceptions of Latino males pursuing a PhD in the social sciences or humanities at a research-intensive, public university. A focus was centered on the education journey these students navigated and their experiences with

doctoral education, male gender role conflict, and power/oppression dynamics. The central research questions were: What experiences do Latino male doctoral students identify as influential to their doctoral education journey at a predominantly White, research-intensive public institution? How do Latino male doctoral students perceive their academic experiences as doctoral students attending a predominantly White, research-intensive public institution? An interest was placed on identifying the most useful resources and tools utilized by these students along their doctoral journey.

Research Design

This study utilized phenomenology as the research design in order to examine the experiences of Latino male doctoral students. Through the use of phenomenology, this dissertation investigated conscious experience as encountered from a first person perspective. Phenomenology was selected as a result of the level of interpretivism required to examine the “essence” of these men throughout their doctoral degree pursuit.

This study was grounded in the epistemological assumption that the world is made up of phenomena and experiences. According to Van Manen (1990), phenomenology seeks to uncover “the meanings in our everyday life” in order to “fulfill our human nature and to become more fully who we are" (p. 12). Van Manen also notes that phenomenology can "ward off any tendency toward constructing a predetermined set of fixed procedures, techniques and concepts that would rule-govern a research project" (p. 29). Crotty (1998) adds that phenomenology is critical to narrative research as it allows for an individual to “go back to the things themselves” and experience the

phenomenon from a fresh perspective free from bias and judgments (p. 59). Through the use of phenomenology, this study provided a thorough understanding of the experiences and self-perceptions of Latino males pursuing a PhD in the social sciences or humanities at a predominately White, research-intensive, public university.

Site Selection

Much consideration was taken in the study's selection of a predominately White, research-intensive, public university. The institution selected for this phenomenological study was picked as a result of its reputation as one of the nation's highest-ranked public research universities (U.S. News & World Report, 2012) and being one of the largest awarders of PhDs to Hispanics in the United States (Cooper, 2012). According to the institution's Office of Information and Analysis (2012), of the more than 800 doctoral degrees awarded yearly, 16% are awarded to Hispanic doctoral students. The combination of academic prestige and large Latino doctoral student population provided ease in identifying and selecting participants for this study.

Participant Sample Selection & Recruitment

Eight Latino males currently enrolled as doctoral degree seeking students or candidates were selected to participate in this study through the process of purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002). The eight participants represented unique doctoral degree granting programs at the site selected. The diversity of graduate programs provided a greater understanding of the thematic experiences and self-perceptions encountered by

Latino male doctoral students pursuing PhDs in the social sciences or humanities at a predominately White, research-intensive, public university.

In order to participate in the study, participants were required to identify as male, Latino or Hispanic, and be enrolled as a doctoral degree-seeking student in a social science or humanities graduate department. No selection requirements were placed on identification items such as nationality and ethnicity, geographic origin, family experience, perspective on race and ethnicity, or undergraduate experiences. Additionally, no participation requirements were placed on length of time spent by participants in their doctoral program. This decision was strategic in an effort to accurately gather emerging themes and self-perceptions experienced by new doctoral students and veteran doctoral candidates.

Recruitment of these eight Latino male doctoral students pursuing PhDs in the social sciences or humanities at a predominately White, research-intensive, public university came primarily in the form of email communication. Utilizing the graduate student organizations with Latino graduate student presence such as the Graduate Student Assembly, Latino Graduate Student Association, and the Latino Leadership Council, I contacted student leaders and asked for their assistance in disseminating an email request for subject participation (Appendix A). Similarly, I contacted faculty and staff within academic departments/organizations such as the Center for Mexican American Studies, Latin American Studies graduate program, and the Hispanic Faculty and Staff Association, with a request to forward my email call for participants to their students and classes. Lastly, I contacted colleagues and classmates from the Education Administration

department to forward my email request to any individual they believed to be an ideal participant for this study.

Data Collection

In order to successfully examine Latino male doctoral student experiences through a phenomenological lens, this study used semi-structured participant interviews to collect data. This dissertation's interview protocol can be reviewed in the Appendices section. The semi-structured interview protocol employed open-ended questions related specifically to the guiding research questions. Students were asked to participate twice in this study. A targeted effort was placed to schedule the first interview during the summer in order to accommodate for the busy schedules doctoral students frequently experience in the fall and spring semesters. The summer session was also identified as the ideal time for the first interview due to the anticipated time requirement for the initial interview.

The first round of semi-structured interviews spanned between 60 and 90 minutes. The length of these interviews provided the time needed to build rapport with each of the eight subjects and discuss in-depth information regarding their subject doctoral experiences. The second round of semi-structured interviews with each participant also spanned between 60 and 90 minutes. Though, this interview length was unexpected as the time initially allotted for the second round of semi-structured interviews was less than 60-90 minutes. With rapport already established, these interviews focused on elaborating on previously mentioned information and addressing new interview questions. These second

round interviews took place in the fall semester to provide the eight participants with time to reflect on their first semi-structured interview.

The interview protocol used during each round of interviews allowed for valuable insight to be collected regarding Latino male experiences and perceptions of the Latino community obligations, doctoral education navigation, male gender identity, and power/oppression dynamics encountered. Confidentiality was ensured to participants as a result of the highly sensitive nature of their interview responses. To guarantee confidentiality, multiple identity protection measures were employed. Participant interview consent forms were stored in a locked cabinet in a locked office space. Pseudonyms were assigned to each student interviewed. The dissertation researcher was the only individual with access to the digital recordings and written transcriptions of the interviews. Furthermore, all digital information was encrypted with high security and audio files were deleted once the study was complete.

Data Analysis

The selection of a qualitative research approach was strategic for this study in order to generate themes, patterns, and provide meaning to the participants' doctoral student experience (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Following the transcription of the participant interviews, the qualitative data was analyzed through a process of organization, pattern identification, and synthesis. These steps assisted in the development of key thematic experiences and self-perceptions encountered by the participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

The analysis of the interview transcripts occurred through a two-step process known as coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Coding allowed for the critical interpretation and examination of the qualitative data gathered (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this phenomenological study, the qualitative data was gathered through a series of semi-structured interviews with the Latino male doctoral student participants. The initial analytical step, also known as "open coding", identified dominant patterns and themes based from the raw data. During this initial process, the data collected was broken down into manageable units. The manageable units included a code list, a line-by-line assignment of codes, and identification of broad themes that emerged across the interviews. This initial coding process established a foundation to better understand the thematic experiences and self-perceptions encountered by Latino male doctoral students pursuing PhDs in the social sciences or humanities at a predominately White, research-intensive, public university.

The second portion of the coding process, also known as "axial coding" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), began after the initial codes were identified. The axial coding process expanded upon the initial codes and established connections, themes, and sub-themes within the interview data. Axial coding uncovered and detailed the full experience and perspective of Latino male doctoral students along their journey towards a doctoral degree. The full coding process established superficial and significant themes regarding the Latino male doctoral student experience.

Dependability & Validity Concerns

This dissertation study followed the phenomenological investigation process Creswell (1998) recommended to ensure validity. The purpose of the study was to seek authenticity, dependability, and trustworthiness within the participants' interviews. Data analysis precautions included prolonging contact with the participants, triangulating the interview data with other references, briefing with other researchers, explaining researcher bias, confirming the findings with the research participants, providing a comprehensive description of the research findings, and conducting external audits (Creswell, 1998, p. 207-208). Additionally, dependability was confirmed through the process that Creswell (1998) recommended ensuring a successful phenomenological inquiry:

- The researcher developed an understanding of the philosophical tenets of phenomenology.
- The researcher wrote research questions that articulated a clear "phenomenon" to study that is articulated in a concise way.
- The researcher collected data from individuals who experienced the phenomenon under investigation in the form of long interviews.
- The researcher conveyed the essence of the participants' experiences through general and textual descriptions.
- The researcher provided the reader with the essential, invariant structure of the phenomenological experience.

Triangulation

The process of triangulation ensured the accuracy of the data collected. Triangulation occurred by utilizing multiple sources to investigate the phenomena (e.g. various in-depth interviews). An accurate assessment of the participants' experiences and self-perceptions was established through the process of finding common themes throughout each participant interview. Ultimately, triangulation assisted in the identification and omission of extreme outlying experiences that could have potentially impaired the trustworthiness of the study.

Peer Debrief

Phenomenological studies lend themselves to the threat of researcher bias as a result of its interpretivist tone. This dissertation study utilized the process of "peer debrief" to limit the impact of researcher bias. The insight of scholars outside of this study provided unprejudiced insight and allowed for a more accurate description of the participants' experiences and self-perceptions. These peers reviewed the dissertation's research protocol and findings throughout the study. Additionally, these scholars identified and removed research bias when evident in order to safeguard accurate presentation of the data. The process of peer debriefing guaranteed this dissertation study is free from internal prejudice or preconception.

Member Checking

Lastly, this dissertation study addressed validity concerns by utilizing participant checks of the data. Participant checks were conducted throughout the study and confirmed that data collected was correctly documented and depicted. These checks were done via email communication and allowed the participants to review the dependability of the interview transcriptions. The process of member checking allowed the participants to provide feedback concerning accuracy and authenticity of the study's data. This process was critical during the analysis portion of the findings due to the amount of interpretation that was required during this process.

Positionality

It was critical to recognize my positionality as the researcher for this study to ensure the validity of the findings. A researcher's positionality can skew a study's findings if poorly addressed (Creswell, 2009; Maxwell, 2009). The disclosure of my background information and the acknowledgment of my positionality reduced the potential effect of research bias.

This dissertation study examined the experiences and self-perceptions encountered by Latino male doctoral students pursuing PhDs in the social sciences or humanities at a predominately White, research-intensive, public university. As a Latino male doctoral student in the social sciences, I acknowledge having a familiarity in this dissertation's research focus. Though, this familiarity had the potential to skew the data

findings, my recognition of this challenge allowed me to avoid the dangers of preconceived research bias.

My interest in this dissertation study's research topic began with my reflection of my experiences within education. Throughout my journey, I struggled with a number of issues as a result of my identity. The challenges I encountered were related to my unfamiliarity with my education surroundings, my internal battle with my Latino identity at predominately White institutions, my insecurities with not fulfilling a *machismo* archetype at home, and the stress associated with daily *microaggressions* in classroom settings. These concerns caused me to question my ability as a student throughout my schooling.

My connection with a group of fellow Latino males in college provided me the greatest sense of home and purpose during my most formidable years in education. My *compadres* provided me with the confidence and support I needed during my challenging times. We drew strength from each other as we recognized our privileged and isolated existence in higher education. The strength of those experiences, emotions, and bonds we shared with each other served as the inspiration for this dissertation study.

Over the years I have encountered Latino males pursuing their PhD at peer institutions across the nation. Through conversations and sharing of anecdotes regarding their journey as Latino male doctoral students at their respective institutions, I have discovered that my experiences and perceptions of my education journey are similar to theirs. This discovery was liberating as it validated years of personal strife in higher education. The intention of this dissertation was to provide a stronger voice to the

experiences of fellow Latino male doctoral students and potentially validate their years as graduate students in their field.

My positionality provided me with a familiarity and strong association to the study. It is critical to acknowledge the threats avoided that had the potential of skewing the findings. One of the biggest threats related to my positionality was the potential for predetermination of findings based on my own experience. The process of "peer debriefing" prevented predetermination from occurring. Peer debriefing allowed the study to utilize the impartiality of an objective peer to validate the initial findings and final conclusions.

My male gender posed an additional challenge with my positionality. As noted by researchers (Pleck, 1981; O'Neil 1981; Arcinega, Anderson, Tovar-Blank, & Tracey, 2008), open communication about experiences, perceptions, and emotions between males can be restricted as a result of the associations with vulnerability. In order to minimize this potential hesitancy of emotional disclosure between men, I provided assurance of confidentiality of their identities and experiences. This was done to establish a sense of security and allow the participants to share their vulnerability without fear of receiving detrimental reactions from others. I also began the interviews with self-disclosure of my positionality in order to share my own vulnerability, establish rapport, and set the tone for the interview.

The close proximity of my personal experiences to that of the study participants created some challenges as well as opportunities. By being aware of my personal experiences and biases, I strategically addressed how to prevent my positionality from

skewing the study's findings. My positionality also provided me with the opportunity, resources, and credibility to openly engage with the study's participants in an in-depth and thorough manner that other researchers would not be able to achieve.

Limitations

This study was an effort to investigate the unknown phenomenon causing the academic underperformance of Latino male doctoral students. This study provided a greater understanding of this phenomenon; however, there were three limitations that were encountered. The limitations of the study were related to the sample requirements for participants, site location, and my positionality as the researcher.

This study investigated the experiences and self-perceptions of eight Latino males pursuing a PhD in the social sciences or humanities at a predominately White, research-intensive, public university. While this study captured the essence of the experiences and challenges these students regularly encountered, the complexity of Hispanic/Latino ethnicity served as a limitation. The wealth of ethnic diversity within the Latino community prevented the complete generalization of this study's findings. While there are many commonalities between Latino communities, it was important to note the uniqueness of each ethnic identity. Some experiences were unique to Mexican-Americans and not common for all Latino male doctoral students.

The site selection of the host institution provided some limitations to the study. The selected site is a prestigious public, tier-one research institution located in the southwest. The site's proximity to Mexico provided a context that is not afforded to

institutions in other regions of the nation. The higher density of citizens who identify as Latino creates an environment unique to this institution in the southwest. It was important to note the impact of the environmental context for this study.

In addition to the demographics of the institution and region, the research efforts of the selected site provided some limitations for the findings of this study. Though there are many institutions that confer doctoral degrees, the Association of American Universities identified a select few as research-intensive universities (Association of American Universities, 2012). As an institutional member of this association, the site selected was identified as one of the fifty-nine institutions on the leading edge of innovation and scholarship. According to the Association of American Universities, membership was by invitation only and was based off of the amount of federal research dollars at an institution. The research-intensive environment of doctoral programs at the site selected created unique environments for these Latino male doctoral students. Similar to the demographics of the southwest region, it was important to take into consideration the intensive academic context of this site.

Summary

In this chapter, I outlined this study's methodological framework and research design. I also provided rationale for the selection of phenomenology as the guiding framework for this investigation. This framework was the most effective in providing a voice for the experiences and self-perceptions of Latino males pursuing a PhD in the social sciences or humanities at a predominately White, research-intensive, public

university. Subsections of this chapter outlined the data collection and the data analysis processes. An emphasis was placed on justifying the selection of semi-structured interviews as the best methodology to capture the experiences of these Latino male doctoral students. In addition to providing the rationale for this study's data collection and data analysis processes, chapter three discussed the rationale behind the site selection for this study. Furthermore, chapter three included subsections on dependability, positionality, and potential limitations of this study. Lastly, chapter three highlighted the current void this research filled in the literature on the experiences of Latino males in academic settings.

Chapter 4: Documenting the Experiences and Perceptions Encountered by Latino Male Doctoral Students in the Social Sciences/Humanities at a Predominately White, Research-Intensive, Public University

The key focus of phenomenological research is to capture the research subject's personal narrative and history. The following chapter provides an in-depth narrative of the lived experiences and self-perceptions of eight Latino males pursuing a PhD in the social sciences or humanities at a predominately White, research-intensive, public university. This chapter is structured into three sections: Biographies, Influential Experiences along the Latino Male Doctoral Student Journey, and Feelings and Self-Perceptions of the Latino Male Doctoral Student Experience.

Chapter four begins with the participant biographies and provides context to their experiences and reported self-perceptions. The remaining two sections will address the study's research questions: What experiences do Latino male doctoral students identify as influential to their doctoral education journey at a predominantly White, research-intensive public institution in the Southwest? How do Latino male doctoral students perceive their academic experiences as doctoral students attending a predominantly White, research-intensive public institution in the Southwest? The second section within chapter four provides in-depth perspective regarding the factors and experiences the participants identified as influential to their doctoral education journey. A particular focus is placed on the thematic presence and impact of 1) mentorship guidance, 2) family involvement, and 3) university environment. The third section examines how the eight participants perceive their academic experiences as doctoral students in their

surroundings. This section will focus on their 1) Feelings of Responsibility, 2) Feelings of Vulnerability, and 3) Feelings of Validation.

Biographies

Alex

Alex is a 26 year old doctoral student pursuing his PhD within a graduate program in a social science department. Prior to graduate school, Alex worked as a financial consultant for a non-profit in Central Texas that assisted low-income families with financial literacy. Alex found this work rewarding, but "felt the urge to do more and in a different city." Based off of the encouragement of his parents, Alex became interested in graduate school. Prior to starting his doctoral program, Alex believed that a graduate degree would be an excellent way to pursue his academic interests, expand his knowledge, and explore research he didn't have time for as an undergraduate. Additionally, Alex believed that a doctoral degree would provide him with a "competitive edge in the job market." Currently in his second year of coursework, Alex has developed a better understanding of the expectations of a doctoral student. Alex pledges to finish his doctoral degree in the scheduled timeframe his faculty advisor has set out for him (spring 2017).

Carlos

Carlos is a 33 year old doctoral student in a social science field. Carlos is pursuing his PhD for two reasons: his family and his "thirst for knowledge." Carlos' parents are Mexican immigrants with limited formal education who came to the United States in

hopes to provide a greater future for the family they hoped to have. According to Carlos, "my parents, despite not going to school, have always been strong believers in education being the key to success." Carlos attributes his passion for education to his parents being actively involved throughout his academic journey. Prior to pursuing a doctoral degree, Carlos served as a middle school teacher in west Texas in his hometown. Carlos enjoyed being in the classroom with students but felt that he needed a graduate degree in order to enact change on a larger scale. Prior to beginning graduate school in the fall 2012 semester, Carlos, his wife, and their four year old daughter "took a leap of faith" together and moved so that Carlos could pursue his academic and career aspirations.

David

David is a 29 year old, fourth-year doctoral student in a department from within a professional school. Both pairs of David's grandparents immigrated to the United States from Mexico in search of greater opportunities for their families. David's parents shared similar sentiments for their son and worked multiple jobs in order to send David to a prestigious private school in Central Texas. Though he did not think anything of it at the time, David recognizes that his schooling experience would have been different had he attended the public high school for which he was zoned. David indicated that one of the biggest influences on his graduate school plans were the mentors he encountered post-college. David plans on completing his doctoral degree within the next year or two.

Jay

Jay is a 31 year old, fourth-year graduate student pursuing his doctoral degree in a social science field. Jay's parents were Mexican immigrants who came to the United

States at separate times as part of a migrant worker program. Jay was raised by his mother most of his adolescent life in a single parent household after his father passed away in a sudden work-related accident. During those initial months after the accident, Jay switched from being a stellar, engaged student to a being a disconnected recluse. Jay credits the transformation back to his original self to a teacher who "went above and beyond his call of duty and reached out to an old student." Jay believes it was that interaction that made him want to become an educator. After eight years of classroom instruction, Jay decided it was time to seek a doctoral degree in order to continue his professional aspiration of inspiring future teachers and educators to have a similar impact on the lives of students. Jay and his wife are expecting their first child and both hope to have this doctoral degree completed "sooner rather than later."

Jose

Jose is a 29 year old doctoral student in a humanities department. Jose is currently in his fifth and final year of his graduate work and is beginning his search for post-graduate school employment. As the son of two educators, Jose never questioned the notion of going to college. Both of Jose's parents worked at a community college in Houston and frequently brought Jose to campus when he was a child. Jose recalls always being on that campus, "whether it was afterschool doing homework or during summers as part of an enrichment camp." Though Jose was not always thrilled at the prospect of spending summer days doing school work as a youth, he recognizes that being exposed to a college environment early and constantly prepared him to have academic success in the future. In college, Jose gravitated to professors and frequently enjoyed conversing with

the graduate student teaching assistants about their research and daily schedules. During his undergraduate career, Jose took on opportunities offered to him by a teaching assistant to do undergraduate research for him. These positive experiences inspired Jose to pursue a doctoral degree and seek a career in academia.

Junior

Junior is a 26 year old doctoral student in a humanities field. Junior is currently facing a crossroad in his academic career as a third year doctoral student. Within the year, Junior must pass his comprehensive exams in order to continue with his degree plan. Junior stated that a number of difficult experiences with his department and his assigned faculty advisor have left him unsure if he would like to continue with his graduate degree. Junior is revaluating his future plans and is determining if a doctoral degree is necessary for reaching his career aspirations. Being an out-of-state student from California, Junior often feels disconnected from his family. Junior still loves the knowledge and information he is gaining from his graduate classes, however outside of class, he often feels isolated. Junior often wonders if he should have worked in a full-time job after college instead of immediately applying to graduate school.

Matthew

Matthew is a 32 year old, second year doctoral student in a social science department. Prior to graduate school, Matthew worked as a school counselor at a low-income school in Central Texas. In his role as a counselor, Matthew frequently worked with students who were facing difficult circumstances in their home environment. Matthew grew interested in this line of work in college after seeing his mother, who is a

social worker and school volunteer, help others. Matthew enjoyed his time as a counselor; however, with a wife and two children, the time and resource demands became too overwhelming to balance. Matthew believes that a graduate degree will allow him to advance his career, gain more time with his family, and still have a positive influence on students' lives in an indirect way. Matthew is unsure when he will finish his degree due to the sometimes-conflicting demands of fatherhood and coursework, in addition to the constant uncertainty of graduate school finances.

Ricky

Ricky is a 28 year old doctoral student in a social science field. Finishing up his third year of graduate work, Ricky is eager to finish up his doctoral degree as quickly as possible so that he can "take on the world." Prior to graduate school, Ricky worked in Washington D.C. with an international non-profit organization. Ricky knew that he wanted to work on global issues after he had a "life-changing experience" studying abroad in Latin America as an undergraduate student. Prior to his study abroad experience, Ricky had only considered a career in accounting since both of his parents worked in that field and pressured him to take over their small family business. Ricky acknowledges that listening to friends and professors helped him experience more of the world that he never considered or knew existed.

Summary

As noted in Tables 4.1 and 4.2, the eight Latino male doctoral students in this study represent a variety of academic disciplines, career aspirations, socioeconomic

upbringings, familial backgrounds, and educational experiences. Though Carlos, Jay, and Matthew worked in school environments early in their careers, none of them had seriously considered pursuing more school until years after their undergraduate careers. Conversely, Jose and Junior immediately believed that graduate school was the path for them post-college; however, Jose has transitioned much easier into his department compared to Junior. Alex, David, Jay, and Ricky strive to make a big impact on the lives of others, although each hopes to do it in a unique manner. The next section provides in-depth perspective regarding the factors and experiences the participants identified as influential to their doctoral education journey.

Table 4.1 Participants' Background Information

Participants' Background Information				
Name	**Age**	**Graduate Degree Area of Study**	**Years in Grad School**	**Previous Employment**
Alex	26	Social Science	2	Financial Consultant
Carlos	33	Social Science	2	Middle School Teacher
David	29	Social Science	4	Communication Assistant
Jay	31	Social Science	4	High School Teacher
Jose	29	Humanities	5	Undergraduate Student
Junior	26	Humanities	3	Undergraduate Student
Matthew	32	Social Science	2	School Counselor
Ricky	28	Social Science	3	Policy Analyst

Table 4.2 Participants' Family Information

Participants' Family Information			
Name	**Dependent Status**	**Family Education Background**	**Family Immigration Background**
Alex	Single / No Children	Mother (B.A.) / Father (B.A.)	Mother (U.S.) / Father (Mexico)
Carlos	Married / 1 Child	Mother (H.S.Diploma) / Father (Some H.S.)	Mother (Mexico) / Father (Mexico)
David	Single / No Children	Mother (B.S.) / Father (A.A.)	Mother (U.S.) / Father (U.S.)
Jay	Married / Expecting 1st	Mother (B.S.) / Father (Some H.S.)	Mother (Mexico) / Father (Mexico)
Jose	Single / No Children	Mother (M.Ed.) / Father (M.S.)	Mother (Mexico) / Father (Mexico)
Junior	Single / No Children	Mother (B.S.) / Father (B.A.)	Mother (U.S.) / Father (Mexico)
Matthew	Married / 2 Children	Mother (M.S.W.) / Father (H.S. Diploma)	Mother (Mexico) / Father (Mexico)
Ricky	Single / No Children	Mother (B.A.) / Father (B.A.)	Mother (U.S.) / Father (U.S.)

Influences along the Journey: What Experiences Do Latino Male Doctoral Students Identify as Impactful?

All of the participants in this study discussed various experiences that influenced their pursuit of a PhD in the social sciences or humanities at a predominantly White, research-intensive, public university. The data suggests that the eight participants each developed positive opinions regarding attending graduate school despite limited understanding of the process or requirements related to earning a doctoral degree. These experiences ultimately steered the participants to enroll in doctoral programs at this predominantly White, research-intensive, public institution.

As referenced previously, each of the eight participants in this study reported having an optimistic perception of graduate school prior to enrolling in their respective doctoral programs. Despite having this positive outlook of graduate school, three participants in this study did not foresee themselves attending school beyond their undergraduate degrees. Experiences with mentors and family members would steer each of these participants towards seeking more information regarding graduate school. Furthermore, experiences within their university environment with peers and their departments would impact their time as doctoral students. The sum of these experiences provides a backdrop for their perception of doctoral education and their self-perceptions as doctoral students.

This section addresses the first research question for this study: What experiences do Latino male doctoral students identify as influential to their doctoral education journey at a predominantly White, research-intensive public institution in the Southwest? This

section details the influential experiences along the Latino male educational journey that helped the participants arrive at their decision to pursue a doctoral degree. Additionally, this section displays how some of the participants recognized their interest in graduate school early in their educational journey and how the others recognized their interest later in their professional careers. Lastly, this section highlights the influences that helped and hindered their doctoral experience. The section centers on three thematic influences that emerged from the participants' interviews: 1) the guidance of mentors in the initial stages of the doctoral journey, 2) the complex impact of Latino family involvement throughout the doctoral pursuit, and 3) the effect of the university environment on Latino male doctoral student academic persistence and success. Figure 4.1 provides a conceptualization of the thematic influences along the Latino male doctoral student experience based on the narratives of the eight participants. The themes are presented throughout this chapter in order of relevance and emergence.

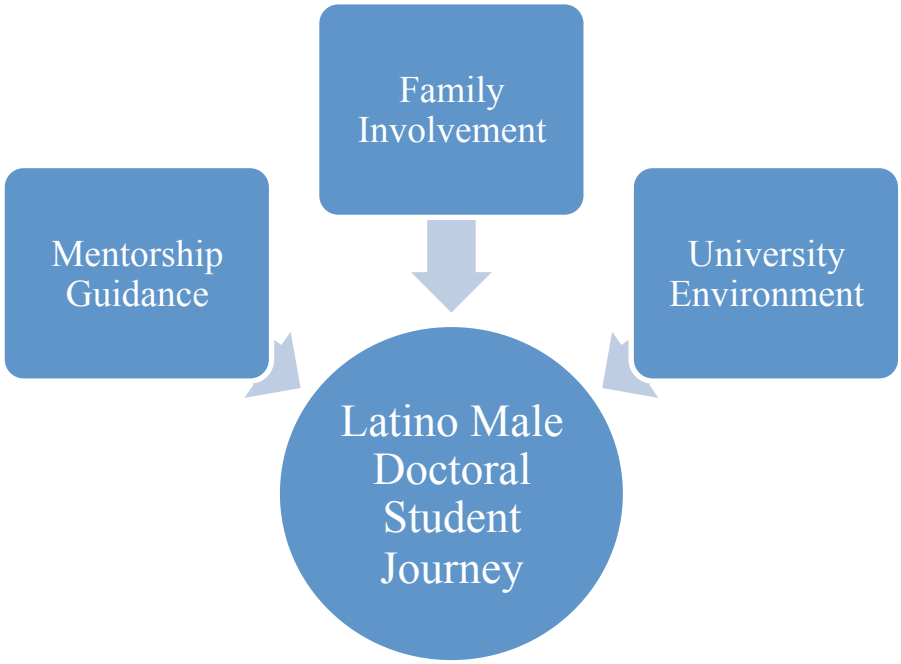

Figure 4.1. Conceptualization of the Thematic Influences along the Latino Male Doctoral Student Experience

Mentorship Guidance

Each of the eight participants in this study listed a mentor's influence among the factors in their decision to pursue a doctoral degree. The pervasiveness of this data in each of the participants' narratives suggests that mentors served as the initiators of the participants' consideration process to apply to graduate school. According to the participants, the mentors presented themselves in the form of professors, supervisors, and

graduate students. The participants indicated their interactions with mentors served as the catalyst for their doctoral program enrollment. The point in the participants' lives when the mentorship interactions happened did not seem to matter. For some participants the mentorship interactions took place during their undergraduate degree pursuits and for others, during their graduate degree pursuits.

Of the eight participants interviewed in this study, five indicated that they intended to apply to graduate school soon after their undergraduate graduation. These participants described how their decision was influenced by their regular interaction with individuals they identified as mentors. These five participants viewed their mentors' influence on their lives as transformational. This is the result of the participants discovering opportunities they didn't know existed prior to their relationship with their mentor. Similarly, the three participants who indicated they originally had no intention of applying to graduate school post-college described a mentor's influence as a factor in their interest in pursuing a doctoral degree. Though each of these participants embraced the notion of applying to a doctoral program at different times in their lives, they all indicated that mentors were instrumental in their eventual decision to pursue a doctoral degree.

This subsection describes the common experiences of five participants who considered a doctoral degree post-college as a result of the mentorship they received. This subsection also describes the common experiences of the three participants who did not consider graduate school post-college but ultimately applied to a doctoral program as a result of a workplace mentor's influence.

Alex, Carlos, Jose, Junior, and Ricky each achieved academic success during their undergraduate careers. These five participants described themselves as engaged students in the classroom and involved students within their respective universities. As a result of their activities and level of engagement, each of these students indicated developing a rapport with a professor or a teaching assistant while in college. In each of these instances, the rapport created transformed into an informal mentoring bond between student and faculty member or student and graduate assistant. This mentorship played an influential role in the participant's interest in and application to a doctoral program after college.

Alex described his first two years in college as "a chaotic mess." Though Alex attended the same university where his mother and father received their undergraduate degrees, he constantly felt out-of-place and overwhelmed by the number of students in all of his classes. The initial shift to college was difficult for Alex as he transitioned from a high school with small enrollment size to one of the largest public universities in the state. Alex explained, "At least once a week for a while, I was looking up information about how to transfer to a school either back home or where my friends went." Alex indicated that his feelings of being out-of-place continued until he entered an upper division course with a teaching assistant that was "a young laid-back cool guy that kinda looked just like me."

Alex described his connection with this teaching assistant (Oscar) as "the brother I never had." After years of struggling with feelings of isolation, Alex immediately felt a sense of connection with Oscar:

> From the moment I got to campus, I never really felt like I fit in. It was really hard. I mean, no one would ever say anything to make me feel unwanted, but I would look around and always be the guy in class that just looked a little different…so on the first day of class when the professor introduced [Oscar], it was a trip! I mean not only did we look like each other, but we were from the same city! It was such a big deal and relief to me that I had to go introduce myself after class.

Throughout that semester, Alex relied on Oscar as a sounding board for homework assignments and life advice. Alex explained,

> Being a good student, I would always go to the [teaching assistant] office hours to ask questions about the readings, but once I got my questions answered, me and Oscar would just chat about random stuff: sports, movies, you know stuff like that. He was just a cool guy to hang out with. I looked up to him because he seemed to always have the answers, I mean like even for the stuff outside of the classroom…[Oscar] became a friend and by nature of being the older, smart guy I knew, he became the go-to person for anything I needed help with. I considered him a mentor and I always valued his insight.

As Alex noted, his rapport with Oscar ultimately helped him beyond the course that semester. This influence was particularly evident when Alex sought advice on what do post-graduation. Oscar provided Alex with insight to a future Alex had never seriously considered while in college: pursuing a doctoral degree.

Although Alex had always known he would graduate from college from an early age, he had never really considered what he would do post-graduation. Alex enjoyed class lectures and readings and at one point researched applying to law school, but ultimately that career path did not inspire him. Oscar recognized Alex's frustration with his post-graduation uncertainty and suggested Alex look into graduate school based off the constant engagement and academic success Alex displayed in class and during office hours. Alex explained, "I never thought of getting a PhD until that moment when Oscar

told me that a lot of what I was doing in class was what doctoral students do every day." Alex explained that up to that point he had little awareness of the daily life of a doctoral student or the application requirements to pursue a doctoral degree. Through his connection with his mentor, Alex developed a greater interest and greater understanding of graduate school.

Ultimately, Alex did not apply to graduate school immediately after college due to being late with application deadlines. Nonetheless, Alex was not deterred from pursuing his new desire: earning a doctoral degree. Alex explained, "I didn't apply [to graduate school] right after college, but I did keep up with Oscar and used him as my reference point on how to do everything: Prepare for the GRE, write a statement of purpose, pick references, you name it." Alex recognized Oscar as his main influence for applying to graduate school. Alex stated, "the thing [Oscar] did was open a new world to me and show me that I could be successful in it just like him…That always sticks with me. Even when I struggle now, I know I can still call him." Oscar's mentorship transformed Alex's perceptions of graduate school and convinced him to pursue a PhD.

Similar to Alex, Junior's interest in pursuing doctoral degree can be attributed to his interactions with graduate students and teaching assistants. As an undergraduate, Junior had a part-time student job working on campus as an administrative assistant for an academic department. The flexibility of Junior's work provided him with the opportunity to "take a peek" into graduate school life as a result of being in the constant presence of doctoral students who served as teaching assistants for the department. Junior explained:

> When I was finished [with my work] at the front desk, I would make the rounds to see if anyone else needed anything covered and man, without fail, when I would drop by the doc student "pit", it would look like they were having a blast! I mean I knew they worked hard and they always complained about terrible, late hours writing and reading. But they looked like they enjoyed their research or work or whatever it was they were doing! I mean those doc students were like a nerdy team that liked to be in school and I remember thinking to myself, "Man, I like school too. Maybe I should look into getting PhD, too.

Junior explained he had little interest in graduate school prior to working in close proximity to doctoral students in his work-study job. Junior explained:

> I never really thought of getting PhD as something I wanted to do. I mean most of my professors up to that point in college weren't very engaging and they definitely didn't look like they enjoyed what they did for a living. Why would I want any part of that?

Ultimately Junior changed his opinion of graduate school based off the teaching assistants he spoke with regularly in the office. He described them as men and women who "made 'being smart' cool." Junior explained, "I remember during school breaks always having a hard time going back home and fitting in around my friends and even cousins…they would pick on me for talking 'white' and being smart, but I couldn't help it." Junior's statement supports Horvat and O'Connor's (2006) findings that suggest that young males of color will utilize the phrase "acting White" in order to disprove of peers who they deem as "sell-outs" to their community.

Junior had fared well academically throughout his life and had been "playfully teased" by his neighborhood friends for being smart. Junior described how relieved he felt once he could "embrace being smart" as a result of the camaraderie the doctoral students displayed with each other and him. Junior applied to graduate school despite not

truly being committed to pursuing a doctoral degree. Junior explained that his doctoral student friends were a strong influence on his decision to do so.

As the son of two educators, Jose's parents emphasized earning an education. Jose explained how this was evident throughout his childhood, "My family framed any and every [academic] award my sisters and I won growing up. They celebrated our success and that made us always want to do more." The celebration of academic success, combined with having parents who were educators, provided Jose with tools that ensured him success at all grade levels. Jose noted that much of his success in school could be attributed to being able to comfortably engage with his teachers. Although Jose frequently developed strong connections with his teachers throughout his academic career, the rapport established with a teaching assistant [Steve] was particularly unique as it influenced his decision to pursue a doctoral degree.

Similar to Alex, Jose gravitated to a teaching assistant during one of his upper division courses. As with previous courses, Jose enjoyed discussing the course material with the teacher; however, Jose noted, "this was different." According to Jose, the difference was that the teaching assistant was only a couple of years older. "That blew my mind," Jose stated, "Here I was thinking he was thirty-something but it turns out we were in college at the same time." As a result of this "revelation", Jose developed a friendship with Steve and referred to him as an "informal mentor." The proximity in age allowed Jose to feel comfortable befriending Steve and approaching him about questions regarding doctoral education.

Jose considered this informal mentorship unique due to the mutual respect Steve displayed for Jose's work. This mutual respect paved the way for an experience that would expose Jose to graduate school and being a doctoral student. Recognizing the high quality and effort in Jose's work, Steve inquired to Jose and asked if Jose had an interest in assisting with a graduate research project as an independent study for a semester. Jose recalled:

> I was surprised when he asked me to help him out with that research project...I was actually trying to muster up the courage to ask him if I could pick his brain about being a doc student and shadow him for a day or two to get an idea of what he did when he wasn't teaching. Then all of a sudden before I can ask, he asks me if I want to follow him for a semester. It was perfect timing.

Ultimately Jose's unofficial apprenticeship would influence his decision to pursue a doctoral degree. Jose explained,

> Before that independent study, I had no clue what a doctoral student did on a regular basis. I had always assumed they just read all day long, maybe taught a few classes here and there… What I discovered was that there was this whole new world of research out there, and it was filled with young ambitious, grad students who where exchanging new and big ideas every day. I knew I just had to be part of it. I wanted to be one of them.

Just as with Alex and Junior, Jose's decision to apply to a doctoral program was spurred on by the influence of a mentor. In Jose's case, Jose was intrigued with the idea of following in his mentor's footsteps. As Jose noted, "What was cool for me was that I was able to go from being his student to being his peer."

Carlos and Ricky had an impactful mentorship experience in college similar to Alex, Junior, and Jose. While Alex, Junior, and Jose found influential direction from graduate students who could have been their peers under different circumstances, Carlos

and Ricky found their guidance through interactions with faculty members. Prior to connecting with these faculty members, Carlos and Ricky had never considered pursuing a doctoral degree as a realistic endeavor. Carlos and Ricky expressed little awareness or understanding of the careers for individuals with PhDs. With the help of mentorship guidance from professors who saw potential in them, Carlos and Ricky eventually recognized their unique potential.

Despite taking nine years off between the end of his undergraduate degree and the beginning of his doctoral education, Carlos knew he was going to pursue a PhD. According to Carlos, "It's never been a question of if, it's been a question of when", regarding his decision to attend graduate school. Carlos credited this sense of purpose to "mentors who believed [in him]." One of Carlos' most influential mentors was a professor [Dr. Hernandez] who Carlos could identify with as a result of the professor's gender and ethnicity. Carlos explained:

> Up to that moment, I don't think I ever had a teacher that I felt that comfortable with from the start of class. Um, I mean I always got along with teachers and stuff, but there was something familiar about [Dr. Hernandez's] class. It took me a few weeks to finally figure out that what I liked about him was that he reminded me of my uncles on my dad's side who live in San Luis Potosí[2]. Like if he wore some boots and jeans instead of his suit, he would have looked like them.

This established level of comfort allowed Carlos to inquire more about Dr. Hernandez's background, educational experiences, and job. It also helped Carlos become more introspective regarding his own career prospects and opportunities Carlos noted:

> I realized that [Dr. Hernandez] was just like me. We both came from poor families where our parents only had a high school education. We both struggled

[2] San Luis Potosí is the capital of, and most populous city in the Mexican state of San Luis Potosí.

> with English growing up and were labeled 'slow learners' by teachers. We both made up for our 'lack of intelligence' with hard work and stubbornness…Before that, I assumed that professors were the type of people that never struggled in school and then here I learn that this professor was the opposite of all of that. It made me wonder about what else I had a wrong impression about.

Although his course ended with Dr. Hernandez, Carlos continued to stay close and drop-in to his office on occasion for the remainder of his undergraduate career. Carlos became a teacher immediately after graduating and attributed that decision to "three role models: [his] parents and Dr. H." After years of teaching, Carlos decided to pursue a PhD. According to Carlos, "when I decided I needed a change from work, I knew it was time for me to try grad school. That's something I don't think I would have considered though had it not been for [Dr. Hernandez]." Carlos observed that Dr. Hernandez's informal mentorship was instrumental to his applying to a doctoral program.

Ricky also discussed a connection with a faculty member that impacted his decision to apply to a doctoral program. As the son of small business owners, Ricky was raised with the belief that he would have to work in business. Ricky explained, "I know that [my parents'] intention was always for me to take [the family accounting business] over at some point." Ricky believed he had limited decision-making ability in this situation and rebelled in college by seeking opportunities to learn about the world outside of accounting.

In his quest to "defy" his parents, Ricky pursued a study abroad experience as a means to explore the world free from his parents' expectations. Ricky believed that this study abroad experience was "life-changing". Ricky noted, "I changed and grew up a lot while abroad that semester thanks to the freedom we had and the faculty sponsor we were

assigned." Ricky explained that on this trip abroad, the faculty advisor served more as a travel guide facilitating "experiential learning" instead of a professor. As a result of this relaxed learning experience, Ricky felt a greater ease approaching the faculty advisor. Ricky recalled "I learned a lot about grad school and career options because of that experience because when we weren't in a classroom or lecture hall, I would be talking to our [faculty advisor] about her work." Ricky stated that while on this trip, he developed a better understanding of what "the world had to offer." Specifically, Ricky realized the opportunity of pursuing a doctoral degree in order to work in a field he was now passionate about: international affairs. Ultimately, Ricky's connection with his study abroad advisor influenced him and affirmed his decision to pursue a career outside of the family business. Ricky's decision was instead to pursue a doctoral degree in a field that inspired him.

While David, Jay, and Matthew have unique educational experiences and family backgrounds, their interest in pursuing a doctoral degree stemmed from similar mentor interactions. The interactions vary slightly from the interactions Alex, Junior, Jose, Carlos, and Ricky experienced with their influential mentors. Whereas graduate student teachers and professors inspired Alex, Junior, Jose, Carlos, and Ricky during their undergraduate careers, David, Jay, and Matthew were influenced by supervisors and co-workers to pursue their doctoral degree.

Working as a communication assistant for a nonprofit for four years after college, David believed that he was "in a rut." Despite having a college degree, David struggled to improve his status within the organization he worked in. To compound difficulties,

David also indicated struggling to find engaging work elsewhere. David experienced constant "frustration and helplessness" as a result of this inability to find engaging work. David explained:

> I didn't have issue with administrative or entry-level work. I guess what I had frustration with was that here I was with a college degree and I felt like I couldn't do anything with it. I was stuck. I mean, I wasn't qualified enough for the jobs I wanted elsewhere or in another field or organization, and I was way overqualified for the work I was doing. It was terrible.

According to David, his depression lasted almost a year and there was little assistance family could provide. For the entire year, David stated that he continued to work diligently in his "dead-end" job but actively looked for any connection that could change his work trajectory.

A connection for David eventually came in the form of a new supervisor who recently completed his doctoral education. Prior to meeting his new supervisor, David had previously never interacted with a doctoral degree holder outside of a classroom setting. David expressed being fascinated by his novel notion of having a PhD but not working as a faculty member. David explained:

> I never thought of getting a PhD mostly because I didn't know what it was, you know? I mean I knew my professors had them and I knew they were a big deal, but I didn't have a clue about any specifics, like what do you have do to get one? Or what do you even do for a career once you have it? At that time in my life, I remember that all I cared about was money and I heard about the high costs of going to med school. I figured getting a PhD had to cost the same. I didn't want any part of that.

David's awareness of doctoral education and the opportunities for a PhD increased with the guidance from a new supervisor. David inquired about his supervisors' graduate school experience once the he felt comfortable talking with his supervisor. Quickly,

David had many of his misconceptions regarding doctoral education addressed while simultaneously having many of his new questions answered. David stated:

> It's funny how naïve I was about grad school when I think back to it. I mean I had no idea of how the application process was or how to even start the process. How messed up is that? I mean how are you supposed play the "application game" if you don't even know the rules or that the game even exists? Thank God for my boss, he gave me inside tips about everything when he didn't have to. I'll always owe him for that.

David acknowledged that he was still initially skeptical about pursuing a PhD despite having more information regarding the process. Although, he had his supervisor as a direct example of a PhD degree holder who was not in academia, David was still unsure about the practicality of a doctoral degree in the general workforce. David's opinion regarding the practicality of a doctoral degree in the workforce changed after his supervisor shared information regarding employment statistics and average salary of individuals based off education levels. David noted that this was the "final straw" he needed to apply to a doctoral program. Due to the influence of a supervisor who became a mentor, David's motivation to pursue a doctoral program increased and led to his eventual enrollment in graduate school.

Like David's initial opinion, Jay and Matthew's initial impressions of doctoral education were misguided as a result of unfamiliarity of and limited exposure to graduate school. Jay and Matthew were both exceptional students in college and drawn to the field of education for employment but neither had seriously considered doctoral education as option for their respective futures. Jay explained, "I never really thought of [getting a PhD] because I didn't think I needed to for what I wanted to do at the time, which was

teach in high school." Matthew shared similar sentiments, "I wanted to be a school counselor, I had no interest in being a therapist or psychiatrist or anything else I needed a PhD for. I wanted to be in schools making a difference." Jay and Matthew did not fully recognize the opportunities in education afforded to someone with a doctoral degree. Their limited awareness of possibilities initially prevented their pursuit of further education in their fields.

After working in education for multiple years, Jay and Matthew's perceptions of doctoral education eventually changed as a result of interactions with supervisors they identified as mentors. These mentors were successful administrators who attributed their employment preparation and career success to their doctoral experiences. Jay noted,

> [My supervisor] seemed to always have the answers, and in a good way. Like, sometimes bosses can come off as always making up excuses or making up answers on the fly. This guy wasn't like that; he legitimately knew his stuff and was always cool under pressure. He told me that he owed his success fifty-percent to grad school and fifty-percent to experience. Now I wasn't a math teacher, but I could do enough math to know that I was missing fifty-percent if I wanted to be in his shoes someday.

Jay developed a growing interest in pursuing a doctoral degree after witnessing the training and career path it provided his supervisor, a professional he grew to admire.

Matthew developed a similar interest in doctoral education after observing a successful professional. During a district-wide professional development conference, Matthew attended a workshop session organized by a colleague from another school who recently completed her PhD. Matthew stated:

> Professional development workshops are typically boring and filled with the same regurgitated information we've seen over and over again, you know?...This was different though because [the facilitator] put on a really engaging presentation that

> had us all interested all the way through. She told us afterward that this was all part of her recent dissertation and that it was her "five year old baby." We all had a good laugh as we left, but before I walked out the door, I asked if I could keep in touch with her about her presentation materials and work. I think that's where it all started, my interest in going back to school.

Matthew's exposure to a successful peer who recently completed her doctoral degree inspired him to think about pursuing the same journey. Matthew stayed in touch with this peer and used her as an initial reference point for graduate school applications. Matthew explained

> I met up with her a few times over coffee to ask more about her work and what all it took to finish school. She gave me honest, straightforward answers and then would apologize after saying, 'I hope this doesn't scare you away from grad school!'…I was just excited to be learning more about the behind-the-scenes stuff I had never heard about before.

Matthew gained a greater appreciation for doctoral education and utilized his newly acquired interest as a motivating factor to apply to graduate school. Jay's and Matthew's opinion of doctoral degree holders changed greatly once they were exposed to successful professionals they admired and wanted to follow. In Jay's case, Jay became intrigued by his supervisor's success and influence in their work setting. In Matthew's case, his colleague's expertise and research interests intrigued him. Ultimately, individuals they wished to follow and emulate influenced Jay and Matthew's perception of doctoral education.

Summary. In this study, each of the participants detailed their interactions and experiences that influenced their expectations of doctoral education. A powerful thematic presence in each of the participants' narratives was mentorship guidance. These mentors were represented in various forms in each individual's journey. Mentorship

guidance came from graduate students, faculty members, supervisors, and work colleagues. Five of the participants noted their mentors interacted with them under academic context while in college. The remaining three participants indicated their interactions with mentors in their professional careers spurred their interest in pursuing a doctoral degree. Though each participant displayed potential to have academic success in graduate school, it took the influence of mentors at various points in their lives to spark their aspiration for a doctoral degree.

This section addressed the impact of mentors in influencing and encouraging the pursuit of a doctoral degree for these Latino males. The next section presents key findings regarding family involvement and its impact on the participants' educational journey towards a doctoral degree. The ways in which family involvement assisted and hindered the participants' pursuit of a PhD will be depicted.

Family involvement

As noted in the data, each of the eight participants indicated that family presence was one of the main factors impacting their experiences prior and during their doctoral education. The commonality of this theme suggests that family members played a key influence on the stability of these individuals as they strived towards their doctoral degree. While the participants' family involvement often served as support, the participants also indicated their family's involvement indirectly impaired their graduate work at times. The following section details the complexity of family involvement on the

experiences of Latino males in pursuit of a PhD in the social sciences or humanities at a predominantly White, research-intensive, public university.

The participants in this study all indicated that their family's involvement impacted their experiences as doctoral students. Seven participants reported their family involvement came in the form of positive emotional and financial support. This support improved the participants' experiences as doctoral students by alleviating pressures associated with doctoral education. However, it was not the only contribution family made to the participants' doctoral degree pursuit. Five participants noted how family involvement added stress to the pursuit of their doctoral degree. According to the participants, this stress hindered their ability to make progress within their doctoral program.

As Lovitts (1996) and Polson (2003) note, a doctoral student's family involvement can provide support and conflict throughout their academic journey. The following subsections detail how the participants' family involvement aided and hindered their academic pursuits at various times throughout their doctoral education. One subsection focuses on the support family involvement provided the participants through their pride and encouragement. The second subsection focuses on the challenges the participants overcame in dealing with family disconnection and guilt.

Pride, encouragement, and support. Each of the participants attributed many of their academic successes throughout their lives to the support and involvement of their family. The participants noted that regardless of the level of formal education their parents reached, their parents provided encouragement and resources to the best of their

ability. Despite having limited understanding of doctoral education, the participants' stated their families attempted to empathize and assist in any way they were able.

Jose indicated having a deep appreciation for his family's involvement during his graduate work. As educators themselves, Jose's parents emphasized the importance of family involvement throughout a student's education to parents in the community. Jose noted that his parents' "practiced what they preached" when it came to parental involvement in education. Jose explained:

> My parents have been a tremendous help just by being good parents, you know, they're the type of parents that go out of their way to ask how things are going and what you're learning about, and they ask if there's anything they can do to help, which there never is, but they ask anyway…They've always been there, which I look back now and see is really great.

Over the years, Jose understood that he benefited greatly from his parents' involvement in his education. Despite initially being oblivious to this benefit, Jose stated that he now draws strength from his parents' constant participation in his doctoral pursuit.

Supporting Polson's (2003) research on graduate students, Jose recognized that his pursuit of a doctoral degree has been a family affair. Though he works independently from his family, Jose draws constant strength from them. Jose stated, "…while I may be doing this on my own here on campus, I know that I have my parents with me whenever I need them…that helps me get through the really tough times." Jose noted the ability to utilize family's presence as a means of support during challenging circumstances.

Jose's parents provide an unwavering presence that helps prevent Jose from encountering feelings of isolation or desperation while in graduate school. Their constant inquiry of Jose's doctoral work allows Jose to share his accomplishments and struggles

rather than "bottling" everything internally. Ultimately, Jose noted that, "just having someone else to talk to about what I'm going through helps out tremendously."

David indicated how his family has also played an integral part in his experiences as a doctoral student. According to David, the first year of his doctoral education was filled with systemic hurdles and hidden challenges. Lovitts and Nelson (1996) described how these issues could significantly impact a doctoral student's experience. As David noted, "I always felt lost and way behind during my first semester and I can remember not being sure of myself or knowing who I could even talk to or ask questions to. I mean it was a hopeless feeling." During these trying semesters, David noted that the emotional support his family provided him was among the most important factors in his doctoral degree persistence. David elaborated, "Having my family [support me] during that time saved me from falling off the edge and quitting." David acknowledged it was his family's involvement that helped him develop the confidence he needed in his first year of coursework.

David's family involvement influenced his perception and experiences of doctoral education. Just as with his previous educational experiences, David acknowledged that his family's constant presence assured him he was not alone in his academic endeavors. David stated how he was initially unsure if a doctoral degree was possible when he started his doctoral coursework. Through their emotional encouragement and support, David's perception of the possibility of earning a doctorate changed as he developed confidence in his abilities. David explained:

> You know, having my parents around those first couple of semesters really helped me get through all the stress of those first couple of semesters...After I went back home for that first holiday break, it must have been Thanksgiving, I remember how proud they were of everything I was doing, they wanted to tell everyone about where I had been. It reminded me of how accomplished I was and how successful I was going to be, and that was something I needed then.

The pride David's family exhibited regarding David's academic journey instilled in him a sense of confidence that he had lacked. With the assistance of family involvement, David believed pursuing a doctoral degree was not only possible, but an amazing privilege.

Just as David's family involvement and pride positively influenced David's experiences of doctoral education, Alex also reported how his family's pride in his work influenced his own experiences as a doctoral student. Unlike David, Alex did not struggle with his first few semesters of coursework. Although, Alex noted that initially, he did not fully comprehend the gravity of all his academic success. Alex elaborated:

> I think I took being in graduate school for granted when I started, like it never really dawned on me of what I was doing or about to accomplish as a PhD student. Like, I was proud, don't get me wrong, but I didn't think it was that big a deal.

Alex reported maintaining this indifferent perception of his doctoral pursuit until the end of first semester when he overheard his father talking about his son's academic accomplishments. Alex noted:

> My perception of [my doctoral pursuit] changed one morning during my first Christmas break home when I overheard my dad talking to some of our neighbors about everything that I was studying and researching. It was funny because he butchered most of what I had told him the night before, but it still made me feel good. I mean, clearly he was proud of me… hearing him talk like that made me realize that what I was doing was a pretty big deal.

Although Alex's father had limited understanding of the complexities of Alex's research and coursework, he did take a great interest in learning about his son's work and sharing it with others. Alex explained this level of engagement and involvement has continued throughout his two years of coursework. According to Alex, "whenever I hear him ask about my work or talk to other people about it reminds me of how big this doctoral degree is for the family."

The unwavering involvement of Alex's family impacted his perception of his doctoral experience. Alex took pride in his achievement of being admitted to a doctoral program; however, Alex did not fully grasp the magnitude of his accomplishment until he considered the pride his family had in his endeavor. Alex expressed that a greater sense of the significance of his doctoral pursuit developed through his father's constant inquiry and engagement. As a result of his family's involvement, Alex perceives his doctoral education as an endeavor of family pride and achievement.

Jose, David, and Alex's families have involved themselves in their sons' education through displays of pride. While similar, Junior's family support has come in a slightly different form. Experiencing a greater amount of strife during his doctoral journey, Junior reported his three years of doctoral education have not been as positive as he had anticipated. Junior suggested that his experiences have not lived up to his previous expectations of graduate school. Junior noted:

> I had no idea that getting a PhD was going to be like this. Like, I knew there would be lots of work and reading and writing and stuff like that, but I mean I didn't realize how alone I would feel constantly or how unhelpful some of my professors or even classmates would be.

Junior discussed how the stark realization of his doctoral education experience left him frequently questioning whether he should continue this academic pursuit or not. Junior noted his family constantly plays a critical role in his mental and emotional stability. As Junior explained:

> What has kept me going all this time is my family, I keep in touch with them all of the time because I know that they care and they understand what I'm going through. I feel like they're the only ones I can be honest with and breakdown to. With everyone else, I just keep up a mask so that they don't see how burnt out I am.

Junior's fear of being perceived by his peers as emotionally unstable has drawn him closer to his family during his pursuit of a doctorate. This fear resonates with Levant's (1996) findings regarding males and their fear of being emasculated through "feminine" behaviors.

Junior noted this family involvement has been vital to his persistence in his doctoral program. Junior elaborated, "If it weren't for [my family], I definitely wouldn't still be here today." Junior recognized his pursuit of a doctoral degree is possible as a result of his family's encouragement and emotional support. Despite his on-going battle with his emotional stability, Junior continues to perceive his doctoral education as possible due to the strong support and involvement his family displays.

While Jose, David, Alex, and Junior experienced family involvement through emotional support and stability, Carlos, Matthew, and Jay reported having strong family involvement in the form of various resources. Carlos, Matthew, and Jay indicated their success as doctoral students was greatly impacted by the financial and time resources provided by their family members. Though these participants reported having emotional

and mental support from relatives, they suggested time and financial support provided by family offered greater benefit.

Carlos stated that his family's involvement in his doctoral education has been a "saving grace." The first semester of doctoral coursework was a vast undertaking for Carlos as he was a husband and father of a two year old at the time. Carlos recalled numerous sleepless nights of trying to balance both fatherhood and doctoral student. Carlos stated, "I almost quit after a few months, it was almost too much to manage and figure out all at once." As Gardner (2009) indicates, the most challenging aspect of doctoral education can be a student's management of personal issues prior to and throughout their doctoral pursuit. Carlos' initial feelings of being overwhelmed were eventually relieved by his family's eagerness to assist and be supportive in their son's pursuit of a doctoral degree. Carlos explained:

> My parents would go out of their way and drive four hours into town to stay with us for extended weekends or whenever they could come in. They said they just wanted to be around their little granddaughter and that they also wanted to help us out in any way they could…They still let us know that they can't give much in money or advice, but they can give in stuff like time or babysitting, which is also really nice.

Carlos indicated having great appreciation for his family's constant support and their eagerness to assist in any way they can. According to Carlos, "knowing that my family will be there whenever I need them is really comforting, and it really helped me get through that first few months too." Though they have limited formal education, Carlos' family understood the value of education and consistently provided unwavering support. This family involvement positively impacted Carlos' experiences within his doctoral

program as he had less stress to manage. Once he began to embrace the support and involvement his parents' wanted to provide, Carlos perceived his doctoral degree to be less daunting and a more reasonable pursuit.

Similar to Carlos, Matthew indicated that his family's support and involvement has been equally influential in his management of doctoral education stress and his maintenance of a positive mental health state. As an older doctoral student with a wife and two children, Matthew acknowledged the pressure to balance work, school, and life is difficult. Though the sum of these factors nearly prevented Matthew from pursuing his doctoral degree, Matthew suggested that a guarantee of support from his wife and parents convinced him to continue with his academic goal. Matthew explained:

> [My wife and family] knew that I was on the fence about [applying to graduate school] because of everything I had going on and was stressing out about, and so they stopped me one day and just flat out told me, "Don't worry about it, we'll help you with anything we can." And I guess that's when I realized right then that I wasn't on my own and that I didn't have to do this by myself.

Matthew expressed feeling a sense of "relief" when he realized his family would be involved in his doctoral journey through their unwavering support. As Gardner (2009) notes, balancing these personal issues allows for greater success in a doctoral program. According to Matthew, his family involvement made him confident that he could accomplish his goal of earning his doctoral degree. Matthew's change in perception regarding the likelihood of his doctoral education success was a result of his family's willingness to assist.

Jay's mother and extended family were supportively involved in his doctoral education. Jay noted that his situation was unique because of the financial support that he

was provided, in addition to the emotional support he was constantly given. After the passing of his father, Jay indicated that there was an outcry of support from all of his extended family. According to Jay, this support came in the form of financial support to pay for tuition, fees, and school items. Jay explained that this support was provided because of the appreciation his family had for education. Jay noted, "Giving money and helping out with stuff was [my family's] way of celebrating and rewarding doing well in school."

Though Jay had been far removed from his undergraduate years and had been living on his own with a wife, Jay stated his family's financial support returned when he left his job to pursue graduate school. Despite having initial hesitations about accepting money from his family, Jay welcomed the financial assistance as a means to avoid a larger student debt burden. According to Jay:

> I didn't want to accept any of [the money] at first because, I mean, I was adult now, not a broke college kid, but after [my family] constantly insisted, I took it. I mean, we needed it since my wife was just finishing her own degree and hadn't found a full-time job yet.

Jay feared tough financial times for his wife and himself similar to what he experienced after his father's passing. While Jay did not want to amass a large amount of student debt, his pride did not allow for him to initially accept the offer of money from his family. As Levant (1996) indicates, men struggle to allow themselves to be perceived as vulnerable for fear of being identified as less masculine. Jay ultimately overcame these feelings however and accepted the financial support his family provided. Jay stated the financial

support helped his family substantially as it covered the cost of bills and gas money. Jay explained:

> They helped pay for some of our bills for awhile there and even gave us money for gas whenever we came out and visited them. All of that was completely unnecessary and never asked for, but they wanted to help me and my wife like they used to when I was younger.

Jay further explained the financial assistance may have appeared "minimal" for his family, "it always saved us some stress at the end of the month with one less thing to worry about." Jay believed his family's involvement helped him succeed during those initial semesters of doctoral coursework. Without this involvement, Jay suggested his future as a doctoral student would have been something he considered with uncertainty.

This subsection displayed the positive influence of family involvement on the experiences of Latino males pursuing a PhD in the social sciences or humanities at a research-intensive, public university. Seven of the eight participants discussed how their family members provided support that ranged from emotional encouragement to financial assistance. Despite how minimal the family assistance may have appeared, the participants' narratives suggest their involvement provided the participants with confidence and the belief that doctoral success was possible. Though family involvement provided the participants with strength, the participants also noted their family's involvement provided strain at times. The following subsection discusses how family involvement created stress for five participants during their pursuit of a doctoral degree.

Disconnection and guilt. A number of participants indicated their family's involvement created tension leading up to and during their doctoral experience. These

participants noted they experienced instances of increased stress due to feelings of disconnection and guilt brought upon them by their family interactions. The participants who experienced this also recognized their families did not intend to create additional burdens. Instead, these feelings were the indirect product of various actions and conversations with family members. This subsection discusses how the participants' family involvement at times resulted in the participants experiencing feelings of disconnection and guilt during their pursuit of a doctoral degree and how those feelings impacted their experiences as Latino males pursuing a PhD in the social sciences or humanities at a research-intensive, public university.

Ricky began his doctoral degree despite having little encouragement from his father. Ricky suggested his father's indifference toward his graduate degree pursuit stemmed from a disagreement had between him and his father during his undergraduate career. The disagreement surfaced when Ricky stated he had no interest in following in his father's footsteps and working in their family-owned business. Ricky explained:

> [My parents] were happy that I graduated college and was going to grad school and all, but they never really would show it after that big fight in college. I mean my mom was cool about it, but I could tell that my dad would get annoyed whenever I would say something about what I was studying or doing. Even years later, he still doesn't want to talk about it.

Ricky further detailed the disconnection he experienced with his father:

> Sometimes things will be cool between me and my dad when we're talking at like family get-togethers and stuff but then when like one of my uncles comes over and starts asking me about how's school going, he'll chime in with some little joke about the worthlessness of my degree or how much I'm in going to be in debt, you know, like really ridiculous stuff, and I'll just roll my eyes and answer the question.

Ricky noted these types of interactions with his father were infrequent; however, when they occurred, they left him feeling disconnected from his father. Ricky stated, "Most of the time things are good, but I try not to talk about my future plans with him because I know he's still annoyed."

While Ricky's father's involvement has been minimal in his doctoral education, his involvement has been impactful. Ricky stated that although he finds enjoyment and fulfillment in his research work, his father's remarks occasionally spark moments of doubt regarding his professional trajectory. Ricky explained, "I love what I do, but sometimes I wonder about where I would be if I just stayed with the business after graduating." Ricky believed this ongoing question is a byproduct of his father's strong initial insistence that his son reconsider his decision to not work in accounting. Though Ricky does not regret his decision, he does acknowledge this decision has strained his relationship with his father and left him with feelings of disconnection.

Despite having parents who have been involved throughout his doctoral education by way of support, David reported his family's involvement has occasionally created tension and strain amongst them. David's family expressed pride and happiness in their son's pursuit of a doctoral degree. According to David, this family pride helped him develop confidence in his academic abilities and helped him persevere through the difficult initial semesters of doctoral coursework. Although David benefited a great deal from his family's supportive involvement, David stated he experienced moments of frustration and disconnect with his family as a result of unexpected unsupportive statements made by them. David explained:

> I would get really annoyed with [my parents] sometimes because they would, like, say things that they didn't know bothered me. Like, they would ask, "How much longer is your degree going to take?" And I mean, I guess that sounds like an innocent question, but I mean, the way they would say it with attitude and would make me feel like they thought I was aimlessly floating around grad school with no plans or something.

While David acknowledged being "overly-sensitive" at times to his parents' frequent inquiry about his expected graduation date, David noted other times when he felt equally agitated and disconnected with his parents' inquiry and involvement. David elaborated:

> What really annoyed me was when [my parents] would forward me job postings for things that were completely outside of my research area or nowhere close to where I was hoping to go with my career. Like, they would just send me postings based on salary or based on what they thought I was studying. For instance, they would send me marketing and advertising job openings because I was in the College of Communication. That wasn't even close to what I wanted to do! It was like they never really listened to what I told them I was hoping to do!

David credited these moments of disconnect to his parents having a limited awareness of the life of a doctoral student. David noted that despite his efforts to transition seamlessly between his home life and his school life, there was always a barrier that prevented the two worlds from completely integrating. David stated, "I had my family life and I had my grad school life, and while they were connected most of the time, they never fit together all that well."

David expressed feelings of frustration and disconnect because he believed no matter how hard he tried to articulate the details of his doctoral student experience to his family, they would not be able to fully comprehend the challenges of his academic life. Despite occasionally having these feelings, David indicated that a majority of his family's involvement was uplifting and supportive.

Junior also indicated how he experienced feeling disconnected from his extended family at times during his pursuit of his doctoral degree. Similar to David, Junior benefited from the emotional support his parents provided; however, Junior also expressed feelings of isolation and disconnect from the rest of his family as a result of his decision to earn a doctorate. Specifically, Junior expressed how occasional interactions with his cousins left him feeling discouraged about his doctoral studies. Junior provided additional insight to the dynamic of the relationship with his cousins:

> I've always had a hard time fitting in with my cousins, and I hate saying it, but I think it was mostly because of school. I mean, I don't want it to come off like I don't like them, or like, I think I'm better than them, but really, I think there's this huge divide between us because I went to college and did well and now I'm trying to get a PhD, and they, well, they decided they didn't need to be in school for this long. And all of that is fine, as long as they're happy, but like they make me feel like I'm not like them just because I decided to keep going [to school].

Junior's feelings of isolation affirm Fordham and Ogbu's (1986) and Osburne's (1999) findings regarding males of color and unsupportive academic environments in urban communities. The researchers noted the association of academic success with White racial identity has stigmatized educational success for young males of color. The men who choose to continue to engage in school often feel isolated as a result of this decision. Junior indicated feeling isolated for much of his college and graduate school career in part because of this dynamic between himself and his extended family. Junior explained, "I stood out at school and I stood out at home, it was like I couldn't find a place where I felt comfortable just being me." Junior noted that he stood out at home because his cousins believed he "talked white." Junior stated:

> My cousins would joke that I was *El Guero* because I was light-skinned and talked differently. They would always tease and say that I talked "white", whatever that means. Like, they would give me a hard time because I would say "big" words but I mean, it wasn't like they were ridiculous words, I just used the words that I heard my friends, or my teachers, or my professors use, but they made it seem like I was from outer space or something.

As suggested, Junior's disconnection stemmed from different experiences he and his cousins encountered throughout their educational careers. Junior believed that his decision to pursue a doctoral degree created a larger rift between himself and his extended family. This rift led to a cultural divide and Junior feeling isolated from the cousins he interacted with throughout his adolescence. Although Junior recognized many of his cousins' remarks were "innocent", the jokes did leave him feeling disconnected from his family. Junior indicated this family dynamic caused him to occasionally question his decision to pursue a doctorate.

In each of their narratives, Carlos and Jay expressed experiencing feelings of guilt regarding their pursuit of a doctoral degree. These feelings were a result of regular family interactions that negatively impacted their desire to continue. Carlos stated his feelings of guilt were an outcome of comments made by his father about money and about Carlos' ability to serve as the family's financial provider. Carlos recalled:

> My dad is an old school kind of guy. He was definitely progressive about some things like pushing me to go to school, but there were still a lot of things he was more traditional about, like money and providing for a family.

Carlos's father exhibited *machismo*, the hyper-masculine mindset and behaviors often associated with Latino males. Arciniega, Anderson, Tovar-Blank, and Tracey (2008) note how Latino males feel as though they must adhere to this strict mold of masculinity or

face criticism from fellow Latino males. Carlos' interactions with his father highlight this challenge that Latino males often encounter. Carlos suggested his father's "old school" mentality regarding family gender roles initiated some of the guilt he felt for choosing doctoral education over serving as the main provider for his family. Carlos elaborated, "My dad would joke around about how I should be wearing an apron and cooking and all these other sexist stereotypes because my wife was now the breadwinner since I was in school." Although Carlos knew that his father was proud of his academic achievements and pursuits, Carlos recalled feeling frustrated with his father's remarks. Carlos' commented on how his father's words began to resonate with him, "After the first few times, it started to get to me and made me want to reconsider grad school. I mean, who wants to be a drain on their family?" Eventually, Carlos recognized his father's comments were inconsequential as Carlos' became invested in his pursuit of a doctoral degree. Although his father was involved in his academic pursuits in a supportive manner, at times Carlos' father's interactions discouraged him from continuing with his doctoral degree.

Similar to Carlos' experiences with his father, Jay faced challenges within his family that stemmed from *machismo* beliefs. Jay discussed how male family members provoked a feeling of guilt in him about his doctoral student experience. After his father's passing, Jay frequently sought the guidance and advice from his uncles. These males played an influential role in Jay's life as they filled the void that was left. While Jay valued the opinions of these men, he acknowledged they held different philosophical

beliefs than him. These men were from "another country and an older generation." Jay's uncles adhered to a restricted perception of masculinity and male gender roles.

Jay stated this difference was most evident with his decision to pursue a doctoral degree, "[My uncles] always wanted the best for me, and I think that's why they always gave me crap about not making much money as a PhD student. They wanted me to be able to support my wife and family." According to Jay, these comments, in addition to the money that was provided to him by his uncles, made him feel worthless and guilty at times. Jay elaborated, "Those comments made me feel like a failure as a man, you know? Like I was less of a man because I needed help from other men." The gender role conflict experienced by Jay was difficult to overcome. Jay indicated having mixed feelings about continuing his doctoral degree at times and questioned whether it was better to be a "mediocre" family provider in his current capacity or to be a "greater" family provider with a doctoral degree.

Much like Carlos, Jay explained these comments regarding his inability to serve as a stereotypical male provider made him briefly reconsider his doctoral pursuits. Ultimately, Jay recognized the value of an advanced degree and recalled his original reasoning for pursuing a doctorate. Despite adding a strain to his doctoral experience, Jay emphasized how his family's involvement throughout his years of coursework has provided him greater support than it has caused him stress.

This subsection discussed how family involvement impacted the educational journey of Latino males pursuing a PhD in the social sciences or humanities at a research-intensive, public university. The data indicated that stress and strain resulted

from feelings of disconnection and guilt experienced by the participants. The five participants who experienced feelings of disconnect and guilt suggested these feelings were connected to their decision to pursue a doctoral degree. It is worth noting the participants felt it was not the intention of their family members to cause these feelings. Though, the participants indicated they were impactful, regardless of the intent. Despite having these responses to their family's involvement, the participants noted their family's involvement ultimately had a supportive impact.

Summary. Though there was a greater response highlighting the supportive nature of family involvement, some of the participants acknowledged their family provided undue stress. In summary, this section showcased the power of family involvement and how these participants revered input from family members. In the narratives showcasing supportive family involvement, emotional support and family pride were key themes that assisted the participants. In the narratives showcasing strained family involvement, the family's limited awareness of doctoral education and the participant's inability to fill perceived gender roles were key themes that created strife for the participant.

This section addressed the influence of family involvement on the experiences for these Latino male doctoral students. The next section details the impact of the university environment on their experience as Latino males pursuing a PhD in the social sciences or humanities at a research-intensive, public university. The next section highlights the influence of a supportive community and peer network, in addition to the influence of isolation and social exclusion.

University environment

The participants' narratives suggested the university's environment was one of the key thematic influences on the experiences of Latino males pursuing a PhD in the social sciences or humanities at a research-intensive, public university. Though the influence of the university's environment was mentioned throughout each narrative, the data indicates the type of impact varied. While some participants noted the strength of the feeling of community within their doctoral program, other participants noted the feeling of social exclusion throughout their doctoral experience. These experiences improved the doctoral experience for some of the participants, and hindered the progress of the other participants. The following section discusses how the university's environment played a factor in the integration or segregation of the Latino male doctoral students. Overall, this section details how certain aspects of the university environment had a significant impact on the participants' doctoral student experience during their first days on campus and throughout their pursuit of a doctoral degree.

Six of the participants reported the university environment critically impacted their experiences along their doctoral journey. Three participants suggested the university's environment assisted in their initial transition as doctoral students and their integration into the graduate student community. In contrast, three other participants suggested the university's environment facilitated their feelings of insecurity throughout their doctoral journey. The following subsections detail the influence of the university's environment on the participants' doctoral student experience, detailing how some

participants experienced feelings of community and other participants experienced feelings of isolation.

Department community and peer networks. As Boyle and Boice (1998) and Lovitts and Nelson (2000) note, doctoral student integration and attrition can be strongly impacted by program fit, student supports, and peer networks. The participants in this subsection credit their positive experiences to these factors. Three of the participants credited the university's environment as a strong reason for their positive experiences and successful integration as doctoral students. In particular, these participants highlighted how their department community and their peer networks helped to establish them as successful students in their fields. The narratives displayed how these participants experienced seamless transitions into their doctoral programs as a result of the flow of information and social capital from the department community and their peer networks.

After working as a financial consultant following the completion of his undergraduate degree, Alex described experiencing a range of emotions prior to starting his doctoral coursework. According to Alex, these emotions ranged from anxiety and nervousness of entering an unfamiliar environment to excitement and eagerness to begin his doctoral endeavor. Alex talked about uneasiness being one of the strongest emotions he experienced during the weeks leading to the start of his doctoral pursuit. As explained by Alex, "I felt really uneasy about [starting graduate school] because I didn't know anyone there. It was like the first day of college all over again. Exciting, but definitely unnerving." By comparing his first day as a doctoral student to his first day as a college student, Alex drew comparisons between the moments of initial insecurity. Alex

continued this analogy to articulate how the university environment, specifically his department community, eased his transition to becoming a doctoral student. Alex explained:

> When I showed up to my first day of our department's orientation, I remember thinking how glad I was being a part of smaller community. I mean, it reminded me of how in college, they split us up into smaller orientation groups that we had to stick with our entire first year. And the groups were based off our majors and interests and they helped us create and connect with a smaller, close knit group early so we wouldn't feel so lost on campus.

Just as Boyle and Boice (1998) highlighted, doctoral student interactions with other doctoral students related positively to academic integration and achievement. Alex established connections with peers and identified a support group during the start of his doctoral education. These connections engaged Alex in his department community, which also helped integrate him into the larger graduate student population. Despite feeling uneasy about graduate school prior to starting his program, Alex immediately experienced a sense of connection to the university as a result of the environment that welcomed him. As Alex described:

> I was pumped about starting my PhD immediately after those days of orientation. All of those nerves and anxieties I had were gone! Ha, I even remember that last day of orientation because I remember feeling such a huge sense of pride being part of this "community of scholars" they kept talking about, that I immediately went to the Co-op to buy some more UT swag!

Alex transitioned smoothly to his doctoral program as a result of the connection he established with the university environment through his department community. Alex noted that throughout his time as a doctoral student, this community has been the support network for important class information and also emotional stability. This community has

improved his experiences as a doctoral student by providing him encouragement and support when times have been challenging.

Alex indicated he was unsure of how he would have transitioned or fared as a doctoral student had it not been for the supportive department and peers he was connected to. As Alex stated, "I've heard of horror stories about departments with cutthroat students and coldhearted faculty and stuff like that. I don't know how they do it, I don't think I could hack it if I were in their shoes." Had it not been for this environment, Alex believed his doctoral student success would likely have been less.

Matthew also acknowledged his doctoral education experiences have been greatly impacted by the university's environment. Similar to Alex, Matthew reported feeling nervous prior to beginning his doctoral program. Matthew attributed feeling nervous to his perception that by beginning his doctoral program, he was entering a state of high vulnerability. According to Matthew, "When I started the program, I remember hating the feeling that I constantly had, this feeling of being helpless. The worst part about it all was I couldn't do anything about it, I was ignorant to the whole process." As Matthew indicated, his initial feelings of insecurity were the result of having limited information about his doctoral program and little awareness of where he could acquire the information he wanted to know.

Although Matthew experienced feelings of vulnerability upon starting his doctoral program, Matthew indicated these feelings were dismissed during his first month of coursework. Matthew explained his feelings of vulnerability began to dissipate as a result of his department connecting him with a doctoral student mentor. Supporting Boyle and

Boice's (1996) assertions, Matthew's interactions with fellow doctoral students, specifically a mentor, related positively to academic achievement and career development. According to Matthew, the mentorship he was provided helped him feel more confident in his ability to succeed in his program and also helped him feel more connected to the department. Matthew explained:

> Being paired up with a mentor was probably one of the best things that happened early on. I mean, I went from not knowing who I could ask questions to, to now having someone that I could count on to help me out with advice on anything, regardless if it was class or school related. Plus, it made me feel like I was part of the department team too. Before that, I thought I was just going to have to do this solo. It was nice knowing I would be a part of a group.

Matthew's initial perceptions regarding his doctoral experience changed as a result of the community and peer network he was afforded by his department. With access to a mentor and a peer support network, Matthew's initial transition into his doctoral program was much easier than he originally anticipated. Matthew acknowledged the supportive university environment he was provided helped him "survive" his first years of doctoral education.

Similar to the previous narratives, Jay's experiences as a doctoral student were influenced by the university environment he was welcomed into during his first semester. Jay explained that through the usage of a cohort model, his graduate program was able to establish a community and personality amongst themselves.

Jay's experience confirms Cheng's (2004) findings. Cheng reports the most important principle of community involves faculty and students in a common commitment to teaching and learning. This cohort model and community that Jay joined

shared this commitment. The cohort helped Jay and his colleagues unify as a community and integrate into the university. As Jay noted:

> The cohort was perfect for us because we were all new and we were all lost, but at least we were all lost together, and in the end if one of us ever figured out how it all was supposed to work, then we were sure the rest of us would learn from them eventually too. I guess we just immediately gelled and stuck together.

Jay acknowledged that he felt a greater sense of comfort with his doctoral studies as a result of being connected with a support network of peers through this cohort model. Jay explained:

> Since we're all going through this together, I don't get as overwhelmed with stuff like projects or deadlines because I know that we're all suffering through the same stuff. It's kind of like that cliché "misery loves company." Without them, I guess it's just misery solo.

As Jay noticed, the department cohort model helped foster a community and support network for these doctoral students within the greater student population. Jay's university environment maintained a constant sense of optimism and support that quelled Jay's initial uncertainty about pursuing a doctoral degree. Ultimately, the cohort positively influenced Jay's experience as a doctoral student.

This subsection highlighted the university environment and its ability to positively impact the experiences of Latino male doctoral students. This impact was through the establishment of department communities and peer support networks. These participants reported how their initial reservations regarding their doctoral journey were immediately addressed as a result of being connected to a welcoming environment. Furthermore, these participants indicated that they attributed their positive experiences along their doctoral education to the communities they were connected with. The establishment of

communities and peer networks varied between the participants; however, the participants' narratives suggested they felt supported and more confident in their doctoral student experiences as a result of their university environment. Though these participants reported experiencing strong support and community as a result of their university surroundings, the following subsection discusses how the university environment can also create feelings of isolation and social exclusion for Latino male doctoral students.

Isolation and social exclusion. The following subsection discusses the reported isolation and social exclusion experienced by three participants as a result of their university environment. According to the data, these participants suggested their feelings of insecurity and loneliness were a result of their daily experiences as doctoral students in their graduate programs. The narratives imply the participants perceived themselves as doctoral student imposters within the university environment as a result of the social exclusion they constantly experienced.

As a father and a husband, Carlos began his doctoral education with a small amount of skepticism. Carlos admitted this skepticism stemmed from his limited understanding of the doctoral education process. As Carlos noted, "I didn't know what I was supposed to do, but I figured no one else did either, so I was ok with that. Plus I was sure I'd get any info I needed sooner or later." With this false hope, Carlos pushed forward with his doctoral education believing that his peers were experiencing similar challenges. However, Carlos discovered his peers were not struggling with the same issues he faced. Carlos elaborated on this discovery:

> I remember struggling with everything from the start. You name it, figuring out what classes I needed to take, registering for them, buying books, logging into Blackboard, it was all a mess to me, you know? But I thought for sure everyone else was having the same issues, but I was wrong. I found out when I got to class that first day that I was the only one that was missing out on things, on emails, I didn't do the reading. I was THAT guy, and it was a rude awakening.

Upon this discovery, Carlos described feeling an increased level of insecurity and isolation. Lovitts (1996) suggests that graduate programs utilize different structures and opportunities to integrate a student into the doctoral community; however, some fail to provide adequate support. Carlos' experience showcases the lack of support Lovitts addressed. Furthermore, Lovitts notes programs that fail to integrate students, foster feelings of insecurity and isolation among its students. Carlos explained he began feeling like a "fraud" of a doctoral student following that initial moment because his peers seemed to have their affairs in order, while he struggled to "stay afloat." Regarding the dynamic between himself and his peers, Carlos stated:

> I had no clue where they were getting their info or how they were adjusting so quickly [to being doctoral students], but regardless, it made me feel like I was missing something or doing something wrong, and after awhile of that, you start feeling like maybe you're an outsider, or a fraud, or that you don't belong.

Carlos noted these struggles negatively impacted his self-confidence and his initial experiences within his doctoral program. Although Carlos eventually gained the knowledge and the confidence required to navigate the doctoral degree logistics, Carlos indicated that he frequently hid his feelings of insecurity and isolation. As Levant (1996) notes, males attempt to hide their vulnerability for fear of being stigmatized as "less manly." As the data indicated, the university environment Carlos experienced did little to integrate him into any sort of campus community. As a result of being exposed to this

unaccommodating environment, Carlos perceived his doctoral education to be a challenging, isolating endeavor.

Similar to Carlos' experience, David encountered instances during his doctoral education that left him believing he was an "imposter." Though Carlos' insecurity stemmed from his lack of knowledge and awareness of certain aspects of doctoral education, David stated his feelings of insecurity stemmed from his inability to identify and connect with classmates. As David explained:

> I felt out of place when I started mostly because there wasn't a single person that looked like me or came from the same background as me, which I remember thinking was weird because that never really bothered me before, but I guess since I was already nervous about starting grad school, the fact that I stood out made me wonder if I knew what I was doing.

David acknowledged the limited diversity in his program occasionally left him feeling isolated and socially excluded. David described the challenge of integrating himself into his peer community during his program's orientation:

> There weren't many guys in my program, and actually when you break it down, it's like ninety percent white guys. Which is fine, no big deal, but it was just that it felt like no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't connect with them. I mean, they didn't really get me, and I didn't really get them.

David further elaborated on this challenge of integrating himself into the department community:

> It seemed like [my male peers] all had something in common and just connected so easily with each other, and when I would try to chime in, it would be like crickets. And it's funny because I feel like for the most part, people think that this isn't a big deal, because when you're going to school, especially grad school, it should be just about schoolwork, but in reality, people can't do this alone.

The poor program fit as alluded to by Lovitts and Nelson (2000) addresses David's feelings of isolation. These feelings nearly resulted in David's attrition from the doctoral program. David's reflection indicated he understood the value of a peer support network in graduate school. Though David's peers never intentionally excluded him, David did express feeling alone and isolated within his doctoral program. David expressed how the constant feeling of isolation made him question whether he was an "imposter" within his department. David explained further:

> Between standing out all the time and struggling with the work, I felt like I didn't belong in the program, like I was an imposter or phony doc student. I mean, like everybody else seemed to know what they were doing or seemed to at least have people they could talk to about stuff and I just kept to myself. I didn't want anybody knowing how much I worried about things, especially since they were all making grad school look so easy.

David believed his insecurity was a consequence of the university environment he was a member of. As one of the only men of color in his program, David perceived himself as an outsider. As one of the few students that struggled with assignments and tasks, David also perceived himself as an imposter. David acknowledged these experiences impacted his initial semesters as a doctoral student as he constantly questioned his ability to complete his degree.

As a doctoral student who struggled to integrate into the university community, Junior's experiences reflect challenges similar to those faced by Carlos and David. While Carlos and David struggled to integrate themselves into their university environment, Junior stated his challenge was coping with the inflexible atmosphere of his department community. Jazvac-Martek's (2009) stated the availability of internal support services,

through formal and informal venues, facilitated greater doctoral student success. Junior's experience reveals neither formal nor informal support services were provided to students in his department.

Immediately upon arrival, Junior noted a stark contrast between the warm environment where he worked as an undergraduate work-study and this unsympathetic environment where he would be working as a doctoral student researcher. Junior explained the difference between the two environments:

> I went from being at a place where doc students interacted with each other all the time and collaborated with each other on all sorts of projects and stuff, to being in this new environment where it seemed like everyone kept to themselves and had little interest in helping each other out.

Based off the limited opportunities for collaborative work and limited guidance from faculty advisors and staff, Junior believed that the unofficial philosophy of the department was "sink or swim." Junior explained how the unsupportive culture of the department changed his perceptions of doctoral education:

> When I started applying to programs, I guess I was naïve in thinking that grad school was a welcoming place where it was cool to be smart, everybody worked together, and nobody would have any sort of agenda, because in reality, it's been the opposite.

Junior explained further:

> It feels like nobody is eager to help out around here and they just want you to figure it out on your own. People just keep to themselves and act annoyed if you ask about anything. And what's frustrating is that I feel like I have to ask about EVERYTHING! I mean, there's so much red tape or paperwork or hoops you have to go through for even important stuff like financial aid, or registering for classes, getting funding for travel, you name it. I feel like I'm always annoying people asking for help on stuff.

Junior expressed how he constantly felt mentally and emotionally drained as a result of this unsupportive university environment. Due to the unsupportive culture of the department community, Junior also expressed frustration with having to navigate the challenges of doctoral education in isolation. According to Junior, the university environment and its "uncaring bureaucracy" has hindered his doctoral degree completion.

This subsection discussed how these participants experienced isolation and social exclusion as Latino male doctoral students due to their university environment. According to the data, the participants state their environments influenced their experiences and potential for academic success. Prior to beginning their programs, all of the participants indicated having confidence in the likelihood of their degree completion. As a result of negative experiences, some participants communicated uncertainty about their degree completion. The participants' narratives explain that an unsupportive university environment can be equally impactful on the experiences of Latino males pursuing a PhD in the social sciences or humanities at a research-intensive, public university.

Summary. Six of the participants in this study indicated how their university environment impacted their experiences as doctoral students in the social sciences or humanities at a research-intensive, public university. According to the data, the university environment was credited with supporting some of the participants while also discouraging other participants. This dichotomy suggests the culture of the environment is a powerful influence on the experiences of Latino male doctoral students. As this section highlighted, participants reported feeling confident and integrated as doctoral

students when they encountered strong community ties and peer support networks within their university environment. Conversely, participants reported feeling insecure in their abilities and isolated as doctoral students when they encountered unsupportive doctoral communities and peers within their university environment. This section addressed the impact of university environments on experiences of Latino males pursuing a PhD in the social sciences or humanities at a research-intensive, public university.

Perceptions of the Doctoral Student Journey: How Do Latino Male Doctoral Students Perceive Their Academic Experiences?

Each of the participants in this study detailed their perceptions of their experience as a doctoral student in the social sciences or humanities at a predominantly White, research-intensive, public university. The data reflects the eight participants experienced a spectrum of emotions regarding their doctoral experiences; however, three thematic perceptions of doctoral education were formed from the participants' interviews. The participants perceived their doctoral education as: 1) a venture of responsibility and necessity, 2) a struggle with vulnerability, and 3) a fight for validation. These perceptions impacted and shaped the academic experiences for each of these Latino male doctoral students.

This section addresses the second research question for this study: How do Latino male doctoral students perceive their academic experiences as doctoral students attending a predominantly White, research-intensive public institution in the Southwest? This section details how the participants perceived their experiences as doctoral students

through three distinct lenses: responsibility, vulnerability, and validation. The first subsection examines how participants perceived their doctoral experience as a venture of responsibility and necessity to achieve their life aspirations and goals. The second subsection examines how participants perceived their doctoral experiences as a constant struggle with insecurity and vulnerability that challenged their will to complete their PhD requirements. Lastly, the third subsection examines how participants perceived their doctoral experience as a fight for validation of their presence as academic peers and professionals. These three thematic perceptions are presented in order of relevance and emergence within the participants' narratives. Figure 4.2 is a conceptualization of the Latino male perceptions of the doctoral student experience based of the study's findings.

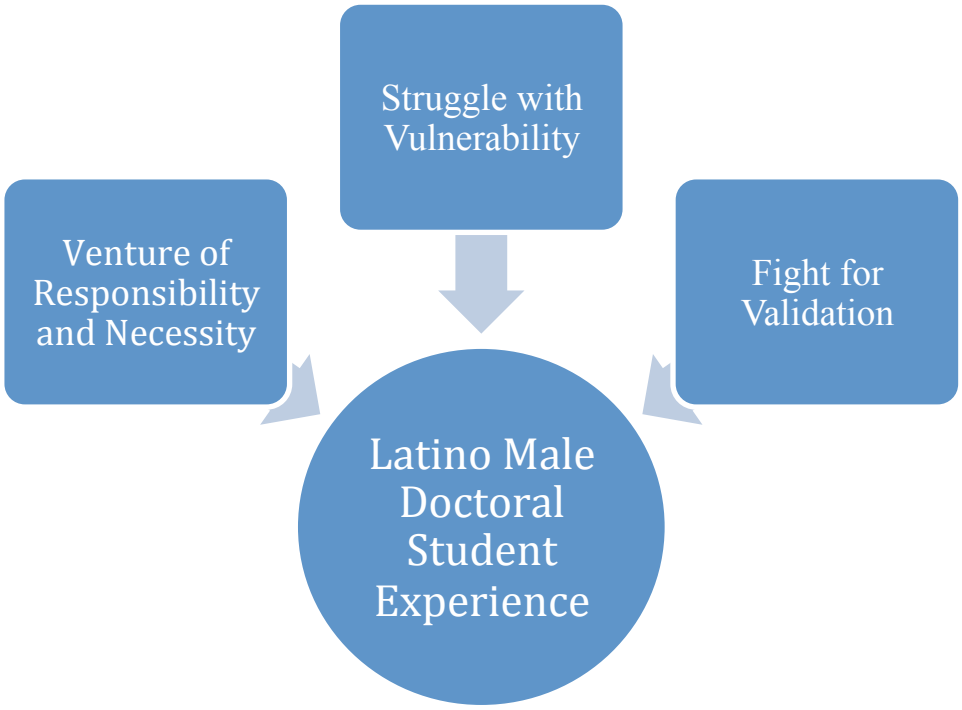

Figure 4.2. Conceptualization of the Latino Male Perceptions of the Doctoral Student Experience

Venture of responsibility and necessity

The data indicated six of the eight participants perceived their doctoral education as a venture of responsibility and necessity. These participants expressed how their

pursuit of a doctoral degree was an effort to achieve aspirations and goals they desired. These participants explained their motivations and experiences were uniquely different from departmental peers. Contrary to their peers' motivations, the participants suggested their main motivations for pursuing a doctoral degree were to achieve future financial stability and future job security. The importance of financial stability and job security was marked by the participants' strong desire to support a family and serve as the primary household provider. This data supports the research that indicates men, in particular Latino males, desire to fulfill the masculine gender role of family provider (Levant, Hirsch, Celentano, Cozza, Hill, and MacEachern, 1992; Levant, 1996; Arciniega, Anderson, Tovar-Blank, & Tracey, 2008). The following sections discuss the influence future financial stability and job security had on the participants' perceptions of their doctoral education.

Financial stability. According to the narratives of three participants, a desire to attain future financial security served as a key motivator for their initial interest into graduate school and doctoral education. The participants' perceived their doctoral degree as a means to ensure future financial stability. The participants' desire to earn money was not for individualistic purposes. It is the result of their interest in being able to provide financially to their families and fill the role of responsible family provider (Levant, Hirsch, Celentano, Cozza, Hill, and MacEachern, 1992; Levant, 1996; Arciniega, Anderson, Tovar-Blank, & Tracey, 2008). These participants indicated their motivations for financial stability were the result of various experiences related to previous economic hardships. The participants noted their direct and indirect exposure to the adversity of

low-income communities influenced their consideration of a doctoral degree. As a result, these participants viewed earning a doctoral degree a venture of responsibility in order to avoid economic hardships in the future. The following subsection highlights the thematic findings related to financial security that influenced the participants to perceive their doctoral experience as a venture of responsibility and necessity.

As a husband and a father of two, Matthew indicated that a "desire to provide more for [his family]" was a motivating factor in his decision to pursue a doctoral degree. Matthew served as a school counselor in a low-income community prior to pursuing his doctoral degree. Although Matthew found this work emotionally rewarding, the financial costs for a family of four became increasingly challenging on his counselor's salary. Matthew mentioned his career reached a precipice when staff salary freezes were announced as a result of decreased district support and decreased state funding for education. Seeking security at this point in his career, Matthew decided to investigate the costs and benefits of a doctoral degree through the lens of being a husband and a father. Matthew stated:

> It was clear that things weren't going to get better for me [at my school] and so I started to think more and more about different ways I could support my wife and kids. But the thing was that most of the jobs that I was interested in needed an advanced degree of some sort, and I mean, I guess I could have gone for a masters and tried my luck at those jobs with that, but I figured, "why not go big and really make sure I'm competitive for any job", you know?

Matthew's drive for a doctoral degree stemmed from his desire to have a more financially rewarding job. Matthew perceived earning a doctoral degree as a necessity in order to continue providing financially for his family. Matthew understood the competitiveness of

the job market in his field and believed his educational level could impact his likelihood for a new job position. Matthew emphasized how financial obligations were his motivation to earn a doctorate. Matthew perceived his doctoral education as a necessity in order to meet these obligations.

Matthew's desire to achieve financial security through earning a doctoral degree also stemmed from difficult childhood memories of watching his family struggle financially. Matthew's parents were both Mexican immigrants who came to the United States with hopes of providing a better future for their children. Matthew recounted childhood memories of financially challenging times for the family as a result of his father's limited education. These challenges existed despite his father's "unwavering work ethic." Matthew noted,

> We didn't think anything of it at the time, but when I think back now to when I was a kid, it's obvious that we barely got by…And it wasn't because [my dad] not working hard, he was the toughest guy on the block, but you know, he had limited work he could do after awhile…Especially as he got older.

Matthew's father's work ethic continued to serve as inspiration during his adult years. Despite having admiration and reverence for his father, Matthew also indicated that he did not want to struggle financially as his father did. This sentiment was evident by Matthew's desire to adequately serve as the family's "breadwinner." Matthew stated:

> I had a great childhood, and I wouldn't be where I am today without my family, but there were things that we couldn't do because of the little money we had. Now that I'm a father, and I'm a husband, and I'm the breadwinner of my family, I want to make sure my kids are happy and can do all the little things that I couldn't do growing up.

Matthew's aspiration to be a successful provider for his family depicts a key motivator in his decision to pursue a doctoral degree. Matthew used his childhood memories of economic hard times as a reference for his future family goals and planned to use his doctoral degree to achieve the financial stability he desired. Matthew believed it was his responsibility to provide for his family and viewed his doctoral education as a way to do so.

Sharing similar ambitions to be a strong provider for his family, Jay indicated that having access to a "more lucrative career" was a strong motivational factor in his decision to pursue a doctoral degree. Similar to Matthew, Jay's ambition was to provide comfortably for his family. Jay perceived his doctoral degree as a means to fulfill his responsibility as financial provider for his family.

Prior to beginning his doctoral degree, Jay worked tirelessly for eight years as a high school teacher. Jay stated working with students was "gratifying" but "taxing." Jay explained, "I loved working with the students, but man, it got to a point towards the end where I was just burnt out with everything." At this point in his career, Jay reassessed his priorities and recognized that a change was necessary. Jay stated, "I was recently married and we were wanting to start a family and so I started seriously thinking about what all I could do to make things work." After considering options such as a change in teaching location and a move to a different school district, Jay decided that pursuing a doctoral degree would be the best option to become more competitive for well-paying job opportunities. Jay explained:

> I decided to go get my PhD after talking with co-workers about the work that goes on at the district office. …Between the shorter work hours and the better pay, I knew I wanted to figure out how I could get a job there.

Jay's ambition to work at a higher level and earn a greater salary fueled his desire to pursue a doctorate degree. Although Jay felt that his work was emotionally satisfying, he recognized his inability to provide for his family in a manner he desired. Jay viewed the pursuit of a doctoral degree as a means to achieve a lifestyle for his family and embrace the role of household provider.

Jay's motivation to attain financial stability also stemmed from previous life experiences with economic hardships. Jay recognized the challenge of living in a household with a limited income based on his childhood in a single-parent household. Similar to Matthew's experience, Jay recalled difficult times during his adolescent years as a result of his family's financial instability. Now with a family of his own, Jay indicated that his hope was to always be able to provide a comfortable lifestyle for his wife and future child. Jay stated:

> It was hard during for a while there when it was just me and my mom. I mean, we couldn't do much and we definitely had to rely on my aunts, and uncles, and cousins, and our church for stuff like meals or rides to school, or you know stuff that normally is taken for granted. So that's part of the reason why I wanted to keep going with school, so I could get a better job and make sure that my family will hopefully never have to go something hard like that for whatever reason.

Jay's experiences with generosity inspired him to become an educator so that he could impact others in a positive manner as he was during those hard family times. Unfortunately, Jay noted that the lifestyle he wished to provide for his family was unsustainable if he remained in his position. Ultimately, Jay viewed seeking a doctoral

degree as a means to achieve the financial stability he desired in the future, while also remaining in the field of education.

Similar to Matthew and Jay, Carlos experienced family economic hardships while growing up. Carlos is the son of Mexican immigrants with limited formal education. Carlos' parents' limited education left his family under the constant stress of financial instability. Though shielded from many of his parents' stresses and financial troubles, Carlos recalled how he "never wanted to be a burden" for his family. Carlos explained:

> I knew when times were getting tough with [my parents], and so during those times, I would try extra hard to help out where I could. I would try and give them some of the money I had earned from summer jobs and stuff, but they never accepted it, no matter how hard I insisted.

These memories resonated with Carlos throughout college and especially once he had a family of his own. Carlos used his family's financial hardships as a motivational tool when times were difficult for him. Carlos noted, "[my parents] did so much to make sure I was happy, even if it meant trying to hide their [financial] struggles...I always try to be strong like they were." Carlos explained that while he wanted to emulate his parents' strength, he did not want his daughter to experience the same challenges he did as a child. The desire to financially provide for his daughter pushed Carlos to strive for a more economically stable job opportunity. Carlos perceived his pursuit of a doctoral degree as a necessity to satisfy the role of financial provider for his family.

Though Carlos was initially nervous about the costs of a doctoral degree, he recognized that he needed to pursue this endeavor in order to achieve the level of financial stability he wanted for his family. Carlos explained:

> Even though I wasn't sure how to pay for [graduate school], I knew I wanted to do this so that I could move on to a bigger and better job where I could actually make a bigger impact on people and also make a better life for my wife and daughter.

Carlos' concerns regarding the initial cost of graduate school were ultimately trumped by his goal of being a greater financial provider for his family. Carlos believed a doctoral degree would ensure access to high paying jobs he was previously unable to apply for. Carlos's aspiration of financial security for his family influenced his desire for a doctoral degree.

This subsection detailed the motivating sentiment of financial responsibility. The participants' desire to achieve financial stability led them to pursue a doctoral degree. The participants perceived their doctoral education as a necessity to satisfy the masculine gender role of family provider. Using previous life challenges as reference points, these participants expressed a desire to secure financially stable lifestyles for their families to avoid the economic hardships they encountered as children. The following subsection discusses how the desire to achieve job security motivated the participants to pursue a doctoral degree. Similar to financial stability, the participants perceived earning a doctoral degree as a necessity to ensure their future job security.

Job security. The desire to ensure future job security was a common motivating theme that appeared in three participants' narratives. Similar to the theme of financial security that was discussed previously, these participants perceived their doctoral education as a necessity for future job security. The participants indicated their future job security was a vital motivation for their doctoral pursuits. This subsection highlights how

the desire for job security influenced these participants' perceptions of doctoral education.

David's initial interest in pursuing a doctoral degree came after years spent working as an entry-level administrator post-college. During these years, David recalled experiencing anxiety and depression as a result of the "mindlessness" of his tasks. David explained:

> I would get to work, be the first one in the office and the last one out, and in between, I would spend my day taking care of assignments or projects that really didn't need any thinking at all, let alone critical thinking that I thought I would be doing with my work after college.

Though David grew frustrated with this work, he began finding solace through his increased interactions with co-workers. David's increased interactions at work resulted in the creation of informal mentoring bonds with co-workers who had earned advanced degrees in fields related to David's undergraduate degree and his career interests. David believed these interactions exposed him to career paths he had not previously considered. At this point, David believed a doctoral degree was necessary to acquire future job opportunities he desired. David noted:

> I worked with some of the smartest people I had ever met and they showed me jobs that sparked my interest. The challenge for me was that I would need more school, but to be honest, at that point, I thought to myself "anything was better than what I was doing."

David recognized he had little information regarding the requirements for a doctoral degree; however, he noted his desire to have a fulfilling career "outweighed" the barriers that stood in front of him. David explained, "I wanted to do something worthwhile and fulfilling with my life, and I knew that more school was what I would need to get to be

where I wanted to be." Despite having limited information about doctoral education, David's experiences with co-workers and mentors led him to believe that a doctoral degree provided access to job opportunities that were not afforded to him. David perceived his doctoral degree as a means to achieve future job security. David believed future job security was a personal mission he needed to accomplish.

Like David, Ricky's desire to pursue a doctoral degree was related to having increased access to job opportunities. Initially, as a college student, Ricky believed his career choices were limited to the accounting profession. This sentiment was a result of Ricky's parents and their pressuring him to follow in their career footsteps. Though Ricky wanted to be of assistance to his family and their small business, Ricky found no enjoyment in their line of work. Ricky stated, "[My family] had always had the idea that I would help them out and eventually take over the business, but man, that was the last thing I wanted to do. The stuff they did was not fun at all." Ricky's hesitation to follow in his parents footsteps led him to seek opportunities that would provide him with a more fulfilling career path.

Ricky encountered the pathway to a more fulfilling career while studying abroad as an undergraduate in college. Through the mentorship of the trip's advisor, Ricky began to consider the idea of pursuing a doctoral degree and the future opportunities that could be associated with a terminal degree. Ricky stated:

> After talking with [the trip advisor], I started thinking more and more about things I could do outside of accounting that were related to what I actually enjoyed learning about…I started to get excited about the idea of learning and working on things I enjoyed like international issues rather than working on things I was obligated to like business.

Ricky's revelation during this study abroad trip laid the foundation to his interest in a doctoral degree. Ricky believed a doctoral education would provide him with the opportunity to increase his knowledge of content in an area he was passionate about, while also increasing his probably of working in a field he found to be more intrinsically rewarding. Ricky explained, "I viewed getting my PhD as a way to become an expert in a field that I wanted to work in and could make a difference in…I don't think I could have the same impact without this degree."

Ricky's desire to improve his probability of working in a field related to his research interests impacted his perceptions and expectations of a doctoral degree. Ricky perceived a doctoral degree as a means to access increased job opportunities. Ricky believed he had a personal responsibility to ensure he would have job opportunities after making a choice to not follow in his family's business footsteps. Additionally, Ricky perceived his doctoral education as a means to fulfill the personal calling he felt to improve the lives of others.

Sharing similar sentiments to Ricky and David, Junior indicated his initial reasoning for a doctoral degree was interconnected with his desire for future job security. According to Junior, job security became an important issue during his adolescence after watching his father struggle with unemployment. Junior explained:

> At the time, [my parents] were struggling through a divorce and my dad had just lost his job, and it felt like every time I stayed with him, he was looking beat up by the world. That kind of image just stuck with me and is still with me all these years later.

Junior noted that seeing his father deal with the financial challenges "haunted" him. This sentiment stuck with Junior until years later when he witnessed his father complete his bachelor's degree and secure full-time employment. Junior suggested this was the moment that confirmed his belief that "higher education leads to higher likelihood of employment." Junior stated:

> I was always told that, that higher education leads to a higher likelihood of employment, but I really didn't fully buy it until I saw how quickly [my dad] was able to get work after finishing his bachelor's degree after years of working part-time or night-time jobs.

Junior stated this revelation motivated him to do well academically in college. Junior also indicated this revelation spurred his interest in pursuing a doctoral degree once he was made aware of the possibilities of attending graduate school. According to Junior, "Those doctoral students I worked with initially raised my interest in grad school, but that lesson, that lesson that I had learned from my dad was a big reason why I ended up applying." Junior acknowledged his interest in a doctoral degree was to ensure a future with job security. Junior perceived his doctoral degree as a means to guarantee full-time employment for life. Wanting to always be a family provider with full-time employment, Junior believed it was his responsibility to earn a doctoral degree.

This subsection discussed how aspirations of job security factored in the participants' perceptions of their doctoral education. Similar to the subsection regarding financial responsibility the participants perceived their doctoral education as a venture of responsibility. The participants believed a doctoral degree would provide them the future job security they desired. The participants drew from previous life experiences and

perceived doctoral education as a solution to avoid "meaningless" work and as a way to guarantee an endless list of job opportunities.

Summary. The participants' narratives in this section showcased how financial stability and job security influenced their perceptions of doctoral education. These participants discussed how their feelings of responsibility, for their family and themselves, impacted their decision to pursue a doctoral degree. The participants drew from previous life experiences and desired to achieve stability not provided to them as children and adolescents. The participants perceived doctoral education as a conduit to a future with higher earnings and stable careers. Each of the participants perceived their doctoral education as a necessary venture to avoid the challenges they faced through previous life experiences.

Struggle with vulnerability

The participants' feelings of vulnerability exemplify the findings by González, Marin, Perez, Figueroa, Moreno, and Navia (2001) that indicate how Latino doctoral students commonly share a feeling of fragility and vulnerability upon entering their doctoral programs. While each of the participants in this study achieved academic success prior to enrolling in their doctoral programs, their narratives indicated a thematic struggle with vulnerability. According to the data, the participants' reported feelings of insecurity and self-doubt throughout their doctoral experience. The participants' acknowledged battling a constant fear of failure and fear of being recognized as an imposter doctoral student. As a result of these fears and insecurities, the participants

perceived their doctoral education as a constant struggle to overcome their feelings of vulnerability. This section details how feelings of self-doubt and fear influenced the participants' perceptions of their doctoral student experience.

Self-doubt. The data indicates that recurrent feelings of self-doubt impacted the participants' perceptions of their doctoral education. This section details how the participants managed this emotion in light of their perceived gender norms as Latinos and males. Under the pressures associated with machismo, gender role strain, and Latino critical race theory, the participants' challenges with self-doubt appeared more arduous than those typically encountered. Despite having academic success previously in college, six participants discussed how they questioned their academic preparedness and intellectual ability throughout their doctoral experience. The following subsection details the participants' encounters with self-doubt as doctoral students at a predominately White, research-intensive, public university. Furthermore, this subsection discusses how the participants' feelings of vulnerability and self-doubt influenced their perceptions of their doctoral education.

Currently in his third year of coursework, Junior indicated he frequently questions his decision to pursue a doctoral degree. Throughout his academic career, Junior achieved various awards and honors as a result of his academic achievements. According to Junior, academic success came naturally for him prior to his doctoral degree pursuit. Junior explained he "had to do very little to do well [in school]." Junior took great pride in being an exceptional student. Despite previously being an exceptional student, Junior began questioning his abilities due to the challenges he faced in his doctoral degree experience.

Junior explained despite doing well in school throughout his life, the unfamiliarity of doctoral education constantly made him feel "anxious" and unsure of himself. Junior discussed how this feeling of uneasiness has been a challenge to overcome since he began his doctoral journey. Junior explained:

> I knew about grad school because of the [teaching assistants] that I worked around, and I knew it looked fun from the outside, but I didn't really know what they were doing. But at that point, it was late in the semester and I had already committed to the idea of applying to a couple of schools then, so I just went along with it, but the entire time I started to wonder if I could really do this, which was really weird because I always was the smart kid back in the day. This all just started to feel different.

Although he never struggled with confidence in academic settings, Junior's anxiety and self-doubt left him questioning if pursuing a doctoral degree was a "realistic" pursuit. Junior explained, "No matter how hard I've tried, I never seem to be as successful as I used to be [in school]. I've started to wonder if [a doctoral degree] is just not for me." Unfamiliarity and self-doubt now permeate throughout Junior's doctoral experience.

According to Junior, his new self-doubt has impacted his perception of his doctoral degree pursuit. Junior explained that his constant self-doubt has led to a "decrease in self-confidence" in his intelligence and academic preparedness. Junior detailed how he now views his doctoral journey as a daily struggle to overcome his insecurities and "survive another day." Uncertain about his academic abilities and the likelihood of completing his doctoral journey, Junior perceives his doctoral experience as an "overwhelming battle with the unknown."

Feelings of self-doubt also resonated throughout Carlos' initial consideration of a doctoral degree. Although Carlos had always maintained a "thirst for knowledge" and

acquired a mentor in the form of a professor, he was unsure of how to navigate the doctoral process. This feeling of uncertainty was common throughout his educational journey and often led to a feeling of self-doubt and fear. Carlos explained:

> My parents were *de Michoacán*; they came to the U.S. because of education, but they didn't know anything about schools. They knew about hard work and they knew what that looked like, but they couldn't help me with school stuff, especially stuff like college. That was a different foreign language to them. I've always had to do the research and application stuff on my own, and that's always been scary for me… it's just me there and I'm by myself. I mean, I didn't have anyone to ask for help really.

Similar to the feelings he experienced while applying to college, Carlos indicated feeling uncertain and nervous about pursuing a doctoral degree due to a limited understanding of the doctoral admissions process. Carlos' uncertainty about a doctoral degree was compounded by the fact he had limited awareness of what he could achieve with a doctoral degree compared to an undergraduate degree. As Carlos noted:

> I knew I had to get a college degree because that's what my parents always wanted and my teachers always said was important, but getting a doctoral degree? That's different. I wondered a lot of I could do this, let alone do I need this.

Carlos' unfamiliarity with the doctoral education process provoked a feeling of vulnerability. This sentiment was experienced as a result of the constant educational struggle Carlos has faced in isolation. Though Carlos' parents were always supportive of his educational journey, their support was stifled at times as a result of their limited formal education. Carlos noted battling feelings of insecurity when faced with new educational experiences. This insecurity left Carlos questioning if a doctoral degree was for him. As Carlos explained, "from the start, it's just been me, and that's been scary…It makes you wonder if you have what it takes to finish." Carlos' constant self-doubt has

forced him to think critically of his likelihood to finish his doctoral degree. Carlos perceives his doctoral degree as a constant internal battle where he must overcome his self-doubt in order to finish.

Matthew's self-doubt about his abilities to earn a doctoral degree also began early with the doctoral admissions process. Despite having a mother with a graduate degree, Matthew recognized her assistance was limited due to her unfamiliarity of doctoral education. Matthew noted, "My mom would try and help as much as she could, but she was in a different field and I learned that there was a big difference between getting a masters and getting a PhD." With this revelation, Matthew recognized that he would have to seek guidance elsewhere. Unable to connect with previous faculty members from college due to distance and unable to consult with family or friends due to their lack of experience with doctoral education, Matthew questioned whether pursuing a doctoral degree was "a pipedream." Matthew explained:

> I had gotten to a point in life where I needed a change and I was inspired to do something big, but then it hit me: I had no idea what to do next. No one really talks to you about grad school growing up, they talk about college but that's it. That's the end point. Now that I was thinking about going to grad school, I realized I only knew OF grad school, I didn't know ABOUT grad school. That made me think that "maybe there were some people who were meant to go to grad school and I wasn't one of them."

Never having doctoral education explained to him, Matthew began to doubt this venture was a realistic possibility for someone with his background. Matthew stated, "What I began to think was that grad school wasn't for guys like me, it was for people who had parents who went to grad school and knew all the secrets of getting in." Matthew was

negatively impacted by the limited knowledge he had of the doctoral education process and his exclusionary perception of doctoral education.

Matthew eventually gathered enough information about the doctoral degree process and applied to his program. With the help of mentors, Matthew gradually overcame the anxiety he regularly faced in his new environment. As Matthew stated, "It was rocky at first, but thanks to [my mentors] I was able to get the hang of things slowly." Despite successfully integrating into his program, Matthew explained feelings of self-doubt crept into his consciousness regularly. Matthew stated, "Every now and then when things get rough, I have to just take a deep breath and tell myself 'You can do this.'" Matthew's routine of reminding himself of his abilities highlights his struggle with his insecurity and vulnerability. Although Matthew has overcome initial challenges to get into his doctoral program, he still struggles to believe in his ability to have success. This internal battle has left Matthew perceiving his doctoral experience as a constant struggle within himself.

Comparable to Matthew's experience, Ricky indicated he was also unsure whether earning a doctorate was a realistic possibility. Unfamiliar with doctoral education until late during his undergraduate career, Ricky never interacted with a doctoral student and had little understanding of the requirements needed for a PhD. Ricky noted:

> I guess you could say I lucked into grad school because I don't think I was supposed to be here. What I mean by that is that I didn't know anything about grad school. ANYTHING. I mean I didn't know where to start, I didn't know anybody who went, I didn't know what I would need to do. The cards were stacked against me! So had I not gone on that study abroad trip and connected

> with a professor who could give me info about grad school and give me suggestions on how to apply, I don't think I would be here.

Ricky's perception that luck played the key role in his introduction to doctoral education demonstrates his lack of confidence in his initial ability to pursue a doctoral degree.

Despite being admitted to his doctoral program, Ricky's lack of confidence continued to resonate during his doctoral experience. As Ricky stated, "I remember thinking throughout that first year, 'Oh well, if this doesn't work, I wasn't supposed to be here anyway.'" Ricky's statement suggests that he did not deserve to be admitted into his doctoral program. Ricky explained he held on to this belief as a defense mechanism in case he was unable to continue with his doctoral pursuit. Ricky noted, "I was always nervous and unsure of everything, so I used to say that to myself so I'd relax." Ricky's initial struggle with insecurity and nervousness exhibits his battle with vulnerability. Although he is successful now, Ricky initially perceived his doctoral education as a relentless battle to suppress feelings of helplessness.

David also indicated he was unsure of his probability and success of pursuing a doctoral degree. David's parents always encouraged him to do well in school and worked multiple jobs in order to afford his private school education. However, their awareness of and advocacy for post-undergraduate education was limited. David recalled feeling lost and alone about the doctoral application process from the beginning. As David noted, "My parents worked hard to give me the best education they could, but at the end of the day there was only so much they could do. I was on my own if I wanted to do this." This feeling of isolation and insecurity continued for David beyond the application process.

David detailed how he struggled to identify allies or resources that could help with even the most basic questions such as "how to get from one side of campus to the other." David noticeably struggled to integrate himself in his surroundings and questioned his presence within his department.

David experienced depression and a sense of "helplessness" after college as a result of the lack of direction he had with his life goals and career aspirations. Though David eventually gained some direction regarding his future goals and aspirations, the sense of helplessness continued in his doctoral education. As David indicated, "I constantly felt skeptical about the possibility of finishing [my degree] those first semesters." David explained this skepticism was a result of "not having any guidance." David elaborated, "No one told me what to do next…they didn't point me in any direction, they just expected you to know how to do things or figure it out yourself." David explained his limited awareness of navigating the pipeline and his constant state of confusion caused him to doubt his doctoral pursuit. David said had it not been for the eventual support of a faculty member, he would have fallen victim to his poor mental health and self-confidence and quit his program. David believed that a "true" doctoral experience was one where an individual overcomes internal turmoil and conflict in order to achieve success.

Jay questioned whether doctoral education was a realistic endeavor for him from the beginning of the application process. Jay was initially inspired to research doctoral programs after witnessing the leadership and intelligence of a supervisor he admired. Jay

recalled his supervisor provided him with encouragement and advice regarding pursuing a doctoral degree, but that he was unable to accept these kind words. According to Jay:

> [My supervisor] was really nice, he gave me advice and really encouraged me to think about grad school, but it pretty much went in one ear and out the other. I mean, I was appreciative of what he was saying and trying to do for me, but it was like I still couldn't see myself going to school for a PhD. I mean, that seemed so foreign to me.

Jay further explained:

> I had no idea where I was supposed to even start, I mean how do you finish a degree that you don't even know where to begin from? I wanted to believe I could do it and I was excited about what it would look like if I did, but there were a lot of steps in between that I had no clue about. That scared me.

Jay's initial hesitancy of pursuing a PhD was connected to his unfamiliarity with the doctoral education process. This left Jay with self-doubt regarding whether a PhD was a possible venture for him. Unaware of the steps required to complete a doctoral degree, Jay expressed skepticism in his ability to navigate "uncharted territory." As Jay noted:

> It was just going to be me out there and if I failed, it would be all on me, which I was normally ok with, but it felt like I had no control if I committed to [a doctoral program]. That was the tough part for me.

Jay's hesitation and nervousness in applying to a doctoral program suggests a level of anxiety associated with vulnerability. Jay perceived the pursuit of a doctoral degree as a challenge in which he had no control over. As Jay suggested, his feelings of helplessness nearly prevented him from applying to his doctoral program.

This subsection discussed the participants' encounters with self-doubt as doctoral students in in the social sciences or humanities at a research-intensive, public university. These feelings influenced the participants' perceptions of their doctoral education and led

to them doubting their ability to succeed in a doctoral program. Similar to the thematic presence of self-doubt, participants also expressed a "fear of failure" as a constant presence in their doctoral education. The following subsection discusses how the fear of failure influenced several participants' perceptions of their doctoral experience.

Fear of failure. In addition to self-doubt, the data indicates participants encountered recurring "fear of failure" feelings throughout their doctoral experience. Similar to self-doubt, fear of failure is a sentiment that is experienced by a number of doctoral students regardless of race or gender. With this similarity in mind, this subsection details the unique dynamic between the Latino male doctoral students and their fear of failure. Under the lens of *machismo*, gender role strain, and Latino critical race theory, the participants in this study discuss their unique experiences and struggles with managing their fear of failure. The following subsection discusses how the participants' vulnerability and fears impacted their initial perceptions of and experiences within their doctoral programs. This subsection will also discuss how the participants managed and overcame feelings of insecurity in order to begin their pursuit of a doctoral degree.

While Jose expressed always having a confidence in his academic abilities, Jose did indicate constantly feeling anxious about the gravity of his doctoral education. Jose's experience shadowing and working alongside a graduate student mentor prepared Jose for the challenges of research he would encounter; however, his early exposure did not make these challenges any less difficult. Jose noted:

> When I was getting ready to start this PhD program, I felt excited and ready to start, but I also felt a little worried and nervous…I was eager to jump into the work I had kinda been doing already as an undergrad, but now it felt like the stakes were getting bigger…I guess it felt that way because I knew I would be on my own. If I failed, I had no backup plan.

Jose further elaborated, "I kinda put all my eggs in this one grad school basket and it was scary to think it could possibly not work out." Jose noted his fear of failure was the consequence of his lack of having an alternative career plan in the event he was not successful in graduate school. As a result of the mentoring he had received while in college, Jose knew he wanted to work in the field of academia conducting research. However, Jose understood doctoral coursework and research were challenges that were much more difficult than what he experienced as an undergraduate. Jose noted, "My undergrad experience got me ready for [doctoral education], but I had to remind myself that this was the 'big leagues'. Stakes were higher." Jose feared failing in his doctoral degree because he had no recourse prepared. Jose indicated this fear remained with him until he began working closely with his faculty advisor. Prior to having his presence validated by his faculty advisor, Jose perceived his doctoral experience to be an everyday struggle to justify his presence and persist towards his career ambition.

Similar to Jose, David was motivated by career aspirations to pursue a doctoral degree. David was motivated to earn a PhD because of his desire to escape from administrative work. David indicated that prior to entering his doctoral program, he "felt miserable and like a zombie" every day at his previous job. Not wanting to return to the work he was doing, David used fear of failing as a motivational tool to succeed in his doctoral program. David stated:

> Yeah, I was scared, mostly of failing out of the program. I knew that if I failed, I would probably have to go back to the work I was doing before [graduate school] or something along those lines. I didn't want to do that at all. So I used that as my motivation to get through all those hard times.

Though David indicated using fear of failure as a motivational tool, David noted his fear of failure has also added uncomfortable levels of stress in his daily academic life. According to David, "I feel like I'm suffocating sometimes because I'm stressed out about school, but then I'm scared of not finishing too." David notes that he is in a constant state of exhaustion due to feeling overwhelmed by internal stress and external pressures. David suggests that he has limited control over his anxiety and is forced to take his doctoral experience "one day at a time."

As a husband and a father, Carlos recalled approaching the prospect of doctoral education with caution. Carlos worked as full-time educator in a public school environment prior to pursuing his doctorate. Carlos feared failure because he feared being unable to financially support his family. Carlos noted:

> I had to have a serious conversation with my wife about finances because I knew I would have to quit working full-time if I was going to make [graduate school] happen. So she said she was ok because she knew I was serious about [graduate school], but that didn't make it that much easier on me…I worried about…'how am I going to pay for school?", "how am I not going to be a drain on my family?"

Carlos' fear of failure and financial made him question if doctoral education could be achieved by "someone who was older, married, and had needed to be financially responsible." Carlos' perceived a doctoral degree to be nearly impossible for someone who, as he stated, "looked like me." Carlos noted, "I feel like in order to be successful in grad school, you need to be single, young, and willing to live poor and take out loans.

That's not something you can do when you're married." Carlos noted he constantly doubted himself during his initial months of doctoral coursework but overcame his feelings of vulnerability by remembering his reasoning for applying to his doctoral program: To become a better provider for his family. Though Carlos initially perceived his doctoral experience as a struggle to combat his insecurities, his perception changed when he remembered his family motivation.

This subsection highlighted fear of failure in the narratives of these participants. Jose, David, and Carlos all perceived graduate school as a high-risk endeavor due to the fears they had of doctoral education. Each of these participants expressed anxieties about different aspects of doctoral education prior to their enrollment in graduate school, and while some of these anxieties were based on observations, many of these fears were also grounded in misperception. Fear of failure impacted the participants' perceptions of doctoral education and left them in a constant state of vulnerability as a result.

Summary. In this section, the participants discussed how feelings of vulnerability impacted their perceptions of pursuing a PhD in the social sciences or humanities at a research-intensive, public university. These feelings of vulnerability manifested themselves through self-doubt and fear of failure. The self-doubt experienced was due to perceiving doctoral education as an overwhelming endeavor with limited support. The fear of failure experienced was due to perceiving doctoral education as a high-stakes struggle with adverse consequences should failure occur. Ultimately, the participants' perceived their doctoral education as a constant struggle because of their incessant feelings of vulnerability and insecurity.

This section depicted how participants perceived their education as a daily battle with insecurity and feelings of helplessness. As González, Marin, Perez, Figueroa, Moreno, and Navia (2001) note, feelings of fragility are common among Latino doctoral students upon entering their doctoral programs. Unfortunately, these feelings are also difficult for Latino males to cope with as a result of their desire to fulfill masculine gender roles and their fear of vulnerability (Levant, Hirsch, Celentano, Cozza, Hill, and MacEachern, 1992; Levant, 1996; Arciniega, Anderson, Tovar-Blank, & Tracey, 2008). The data and the research suggest the Latino male doctoral experience is filled with conflicting perceptions and emotions as they relate to vulnerability. The following section discusses how Latino males perceive the end of their doctoral education as a pursuit for validation.

Fight for validation

According to the data, participants reported interactions with faculty members and advisors among the most impactful influences on their doctoral student experience. The participants indicated these interactions were critical to their integration and success as doctoral students. This data supports research findings that suggest how faculty-student mentorship notably impacts doctoral student persistence, engagement, and success (Cryer, 2000; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; Grant, 2005). As a result of these interactions, the participants reported feeling validated as doctoral students, and in the case of some participants, accepted as peers. This section details how the participants perceived their

doctoral education as a fight for validation, accomplished with the help of faculty members and advisors.

The participants in this section indicated their interactions with faculty members influenced their perceptions of themselves as doctoral students and their experiences within their doctoral programs. Some participants highlighted how interactions with faculty members validated their presence as doctoral students and provided them with the confidence needed to succeed in their program. The validation by faculty members greatly impacted these participants who originally reported struggling with feelings ranging from insecurity to self-doubt. Participants also noted how faculty members impacted their doctoral student experiences by confirming them as peers upon completion of noteworthy academic accomplishments. Ultimately, this section acknowledges how the participants perceived their doctoral experience as a fight for validation, a fight that was won with the guidance of faculty members and advisors.

As referenced earlier, David indicated he experienced feelings of insecurity throughout his initial years as a doctoral student. David's self-perception of being an "imposter" within his program stemmed from David's inability to integrate into the doctoral student community. David believed this inability to connect with peers led to his reoccurring feelings of self-doubt throughout his first year of coursework.

David suggested his self-perception began to change when he switched faculty advisors and was paired with a faculty member who interacted with him more frequently. Prior to switching advisors, David was assigned to an advisor who rarely contacted him. According to David, his new faculty advisor engaged him immediately through his

efforts to gain a better understanding of David's professional goals and academic interests. David explained how his faculty advisor's genuine interests and increased interaction impacted his academic confidence and self-perception from the start of their relationship:

> [My new advisor] really wanted to get to know me and figure out what I did outside of being a grad student. So we met up for coffee and had a good chat. He wanted me to know that while he was going to stay on top of my work, he still wanted me to enjoy being young and living in Austin and in particular, being surrounded by all of the smart and talented doc students like me. And that's when it hit me, he was including me in that group.

David further explained why this simple interaction impacted his self-perception:

> That was a big deal. I mean, it probably didn't mean anything and he was probably just making conversation, but having that conversation made me feel more comfortable in the department since I knew that a faculty member had my back. It kind of sounds silly, but it made me excited about being a doc student again.

After struggling with insecurity and self-doubt his entire first year in his doctoral program, David noted his experience immediately improved with every interaction he had with his faculty advisor. David also noted the confidence he gained through his regular interaction with his faculty advisor permeated throughout all of his interactions with peers and faculty. David explained, "As soon as I started to change the way I viewed things, you know, more positively and with more confidence, that's when I noticed things got better and I just felt more comfortable." David believed his faculty advisor's validation of his presence in the program was a major factor of his improved attitude and perception of doctoral education. Prior to this validation, David struggled with vulnerability and limited guidance. David finally began believing in himself after having

his faculty advisor affirm him as a "smart and talented doc student." David indicated his outlook and experience within his graduate program noticeably changed as a result of his presence being validated.

Similar to David, Carlos reported coping with an "inferiority complex" upon beginning his doctoral coursework. Carlos perceived himself as inferior to his classmates due to the constant challenges he struggled with. As referenced, these challenges were issues Carlos believed his peers seemed to overcome with ease. Carlos explained these feelings of insecurity persisted until he established a connection with a faculty member. Carlos explained:

> Things started to change for me when I bonded with a professor in our department over the challenges of work/life balance. It was more of just small talk at first but after I brought up having a little girl at home, he opened up big time. We commiserated for a while about fatherhood after that.

Although the connection between Carlos and this faculty member was originally predicated on non-academic grounds, Carlos explained the connection eventually evolved into an informal mentoring pairing. This organic mentorship provided Carlos with the advice and guidance he needed to overcome the issues he struggled with. Carlos stated, "I became less anxious and stressed about things because I didn't feel so isolated anymore."

According to Carlos, regular faculty interaction and mentorship helped him overcome feelings of insecurity. Carlos expressed how he felt fully integrated into his doctoral program once a faculty member established a connection with him. Prior to this regular communication, Carlos perceived doctoral education to be a challenging and

isolating endeavor. Carlos' regular interactions with faculty members validated his presence as a graduate student and improved his doctoral education experience.

Though Alex did not struggle with the same feelings of insecurity that David and Carlos experienced, Alex did note feeling unsure upon starting his doctoral degree. Alex indicated this mild hesitation was a byproduct of beginning his doctoral journey and not a byproduct of low self-esteem. Alex described this feeling of mild stress as "butterflies." Alex elaborated, "I felt these butterflies because I was never fully sure of what I was doing or where I was going. I just tried to keep my head down and tried to learn as I went." According to Alex, these nervous butterflies continued throughout his initial weeks of doctoral coursework until he eventually was able to connect with his faculty advisor. Alex described this initial interaction as "relieving" because it alleviated his stress. Alex elaborated:

> I usually think of that first meeting [with my advisor] as relieving because I remember as soon as I left his office, all of those little nervous feelings that I had inside me from the start of the semester were gone. It was as if he lifted this cloud of pressure off me and then I was able to focus on being a grad student.

As Alex described, this faculty interaction and relief impacted him greatly. It enabled him to focus on his coursework. Prior to meeting with his advisor, Alex noted feeling stresses from different directions. Though Alex continued to feel stress from his doctoral coursework, Alex indicated the stress was much more manageable now that it was from fewer sources. Alex explained:

> That meeting, and a few others I had with him throughout that first semester, helped me be a better student because I was able to get a grip on what I needed to focus on and what I could put off until later.

Alex's faculty advisor was able to impact Alex's doctoral experience by addressing his nerves and validating his presence. Though Alex was not struggling with his coursework at the time of his meeting with his faculty advisor, Alex indicated feeling a greater sense of purpose once he and his advisor interacted more regularly. By validating Alex's presence and allowing Alex to center his attention on research and coursework, Alex's faculty advisor facilitated Alex's full transition as a doctoral student.

Unlike the previous participants' narratives, Ricky felt his doctoral student presence was not validated until further along in his doctoral journey. Ricky stated throughout his first two years of doctoral coursework, he merely accomplished the bare minimum of what was expected of him. Ricky explained, "I was a full-time doctoral student but I was just doing papers and presentations that didn't go anywhere after the semester was done. I just felt like an undergrad." While Ricky was excited to be making progress as a doctoral student during these initial years, Ricky believed he was not gaining a "true" doctoral student experience.

During his first two years of coursework, Ricky indicated having a difficult time identifying himself as a "true" doctoral student. Eventually, Ricky stated his doctoral student experience changed when a faculty member inquired if Ricky wanted to submit his end-of-year paper for an upcoming conference. Feeling surprised and flattered, Ricky explained how this interaction validated his presence as a doctoral student:

> I was shocked when [my professor] asked me if I was interested in submitting that paper for a conference. She said it wasn't a big conference, it was a regional one, but I didn't care, I mean this was big for me. It made me feel like what I was doing was worth something.

Ricky stated his excitement came from finally being able to consider himself as a scholar. Prior to this faculty interaction, Ricky believed he was an exceptional student but noted he had not yet proven himself as a researcher despite being enrolled in a doctoral program. As Ricky stated, "I was finally able to feel confident about my research and writing. I mean before that, I wasn't sure I was good enough to call myself a doc student, but then I was like, where do we go from here?"

This faculty interaction between Ricky and the professor who believed in his research and writing ability was impactful on Ricky's experience as a doctoral student. Having his abilities and his presence validated by a faculty member allowed Ricky to change his self-perception and provided him with the opportunity to finally identify as a scholar. This validation strengthened Ricky's confidence in his academic identity and provided him the strength to pursue additional research opportunities during his doctoral experience.

Over the course of his entire education, Jose recognized he has benefited from various inspirational educators. Jose expressed great admiration for these educators for they served as guides, leaders, and role models throughout his academic career. Jose commented that he admired these teachers so much and often sought their approval and praise. Now in his fifth year of his doctoral education, Jose acknowledged his faculty advisor was among the educators he held in highest regard. Jose attempted to explain his relationship with his revered advisor:

> It's hard to describe the special bond I have with [my faculty advisor]. I mean when I think back to the beginning, it's changed so much because I went from being just another overly eager first-year advisee to now good friends with him.

> And throughout it all, he's always looked out for me and had my back. I'll always be in debt to him.

Jose held his faculty advisor in such high regard, that he suggested his admiration was only outmatched by his desire to receive his faculty advisor's approval. Jose elaborated, "Since he's such a role model to me, hearing him speak highly of me really makes me feel like I've accomplished a great deal." Jose recalled the first time he received the approval of his faculty advisor and the impact that it had on his self-perception as a doctoral student:

> We were at a conference last year and we had just finished presenting together and afterwards when we were doing the whole meet-and-greet, shake-hands thing with the people who attended our session, he kept introducing me as a "current advisee and soon-to-be colleague". And I remember trying to play it cool, but I'm sure I was grinning really big. It was like I got the stamp of approval from him that day.

Jose acknowledged that his advisor's affirmation of his academic ability was among the highest compliments he had ever received. Jose stated, "There's a huge difference between doctoral student and faculty peer, and though I'll always be one of his advisees, I was happy he finally saw me as more than a student." Jose recognized being considered a peer was among the final validations he could receive as a doctoral student. This faculty interaction impacted his self-perception as a doctoral student. It made him more confident in his abilities and what his future will be upon finishing his degree.

This section detailed how the academic validation of faculty members impacted the self-perceptions and student experiences of these Latino male doctoral students. As the data suggests, the participants encountered internal challenges that initially prevented

them from embracing their academic identity. With the help of a faculty member's support and encouragement, the participants were ultimately able to overcome these hurdles and gain confidence in their standing as doctoral students and scholars. Ultimately, these participants viewed their doctoral experience as a fight for validation that was eventually won through the guidance of faculty members and advisors.

Summary. As the data suggested, faculty involvement was a key factor that influenced and impacted the participants' perceptions of their doctoral student experience. Prior to their engagement with faculty and advisors, the participants questioned their presence within their department. Additionally, these participants questioned their academic ability and identity. Through regular faculty interactions, the participants reported feeling increased levels of confidence in their academic abilities. Furthermore, the participants also reported experiencing a greater sense of purpose within their doctoral programs. This section highlighted the integral role of faculty involvement in the doctoral student evolution for these participants. Ultimately, faculty interaction assisted the participants in reaching a higher level of self-perception, from "imposter" to validated student, and from validated student to academic peer.

Summary

The purpose of this findings chapter was to fully document the experiences and perceptions of Latino males pursuing a PhD in the social sciences or humanities at a research-intensive, public university. The first section of this chapter provided background and context for each of the study's participants. The second section of this

chapter answered the first research question of this study: What experiences do Latino male doctoral students identify as influential to their doctoral education journey at a predominantly White, research-intensive public institution? This section discussed the thematic experiences the participants encountered throughout their doctoral education. The section highlighted how the Latino male doctoral students in this study experienced thematic influences in the form of mentorship guidance, family involvement, and university environments that each impacted their doctoral student journey in unique ways. The third section of this chapter answered the study's second research question: How do Latino male doctoral students perceive their academic experiences as doctoral students attending a predominantly White, research-intensive public institution? This section detailed how the participants perceived their doctoral education to be a venture of responsibility and necessity, a struggle with vulnerability, and a fight for validation.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

This study addressed a critical gap in the literature by seeking to understand the experiences and perceptions of Latino males pursuing a PhD in the social sciences or humanities at predominately White, research-intensive, public university. This final chapter provides an overview of the current study and presents the six key findings for Latino males pursuing a PhD in the social sciences or humanities at predominately White, research-intensive, public university. These findings include: (1) the utilization of mentors as the inspiration for Latino males to pursue a doctorate; (2) the support and strain of family involvement on Latino male doctoral student success; (3) the influence of peer networks as a critical source of encouragement and social capital; (4) the use of self-responsibility as motivation to pursue a doctorate; (5) the role of faculty-student interactions in validating the Latino male doctoral student presence. The chapter concludes with research, practice, and policy implications, areas of future research, and concluding thoughts.

Overview of the Study

The amount of current research examining the experiences of Latino students is minimal. Futhermore, the current research has predominately focused on the experiences of both genders or exclusively Latinas (Ramirez Lango, 1995; Figueroa, González, Marin, Moreno, Navia, & Pérez, 2001; González, 2006; Espino, 2008). This study added to the literature by investigating the thematic experiences and perceptions that impacted

the academic journey for Latino male doctoral students. The study asked participants to reflect on what influenced and motivated them to pursue a doctorate; detail their experiences as doctoral students at a predominately White, research-intensive, public university; and discuss how they perceived themselves and their journey within a doctoral education setting. Employing a phenomenological methodology and utilizing gender role strain and Latino critical race theory as theoretical frameworks, this study sought to develop a deep and comprehensive understanding of the Latino male doctoral student experience through first-hand narratives.

In order to develop a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences and perceptions as Latino male doctoral students, the study examined the various influential interactions, events, and emotions these individuals encountered along their doctoral education journey. The study utilized Pleck (1981) and O'Neil's (1981) gender role strain/conflict frameworks, in addition to Solórzano & Delgado Bernal's (2001) Latino critical theory framework as lenses to understand the experiences participants encountered as Latino male doctoral students at a predominately White, research-intensive, public university. Furthermore, the study used gender role strain and Latino critical race theory to better understand how Latino male doctoral students perceived their academic journey. This study incorporated an interpretivist epistemology (Crotty, 1998) and phenomenological approach (Creswell, 1998; Creswell, 2007) to present a detailed narrative of eight Latino males pursuing a PhD in the social sciences or humanities at predominately White, research-intensive, public university.

The central research questions were: What experiences do Latino male doctoral students identify as influential to their doctoral education journey at a predominantly White, research-intensive public institution? How do Latino male doctoral students perceive their academic experiences as doctoral students attending a predominantly White, research-intensive public institution? Additional sub-questions explored how Latino male doctoral students experience and manage the pressures associated with Latino community engagement, doctoral education navigation, male gender role conflict, and power/oppression dynamics.

Eight Latino males currently enrolled as doctoral degree seeking students or candidates at a predominantly White, research-intensive public institution were selected to participate in this phenomenological study through the process of purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002). The institution selected for this phenomenological study was picked as a result of its reputation as one of the nation's highest-ranked public research universities (U.S. News & World Report, 2012) and being one of the largest awarders of PhDs to Hispanics in the United States (Cooper, 2012). In order to participate in the study, participants were required to identify as male, Latino or Hispanic, and enrolled as a doctoral degree-seeking student in a social science or humanities graduate department.

Data collection & analysis

In order to successfully examine Latino male doctoral student experiences through a phenomenological lens, this study used semi-structured participant interviews to collect data. These interviews allowed the participants to share perceptions of their

journey in order to provide a holistic understanding of the Latino male doctoral student experience at a predominately White, research-intensive, public university. Pleck (1981) and O'Neil's (1981) gender role strain/conflict frameworks, in addition to Solórzano & Delgado Bernal's (2001) Latino critical theory framework, influenced the interview protocols.

Each of the participants' interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Following the transcription of the participant interviews, the qualitative data was analyzed through a process of organization, pattern identification, and synthesis. These steps assisted in the development of key thematic experiences and self-perceptions encountered by the participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). The next section addresses the six key findings that emerged from this study.

Discussion of Findings

Four major findings emerged from the participants' interviews based off of the interpretivist data analysis. The findings elucidate the Latino male doctoral student experience at a predominately White, research-intensive, public university. The findings showcase the critical impact of mentors, peer support networks, and faculty validation on the participants' engagement and success within their doctoral programs. Additionally, the findings highlight the complex internal challenges encountered by Latino males as a result of their perceived gender roles and ethnic identity.

Major finding #1: Mentors serve as validators of Latino male doctoral student potential, presence, and success. The first major finding from this

phenomenological study showcases the critical impact of mentors on Latino male doctoral student potential, presence, and success. As the data indicated, the participants frequently battled with moments of vulnerability, self-doubt, and general insecurity. These struggles began prior to their application to their doctoral program and throughout their time as doctoral students.

The participants' mentors served as the inspiration and initial contact for the participants' doctoral education pursuit. Each of the participants in this study listed a mentor's influence among the factors in their decision to pursue a doctoral degree. According to the participants, their mentors validated their academic potential and provided them with the courage necessary to begin their doctoral pursuit. The participants' frequent interactions with their mentors suggested that mentorship serves as the catalyst and validation for Latino male doctoral students to pursue doctoral program enrollment.

Once admitted to their doctoral program, the participants credited their mentors with providing them the confidence and social capital necessary to succeed as doctoral students. The data indicated that mentors assisted in "demystifying the unknown" and providing the participants with the information to succeed. The participants suggested their mentors validated their presence when they shared the social capital necessary to navigate the doctoral process. These findings indicated a Latino male's presence within their doctoral program was ultimately validated by mentors who believed in the ability to succeed.

Furthermore, the data suggested mentors served as the validation of success for Latino male doctoral students. According to the findings, the participants encountered feelings of insecurity and low self-worth throughout their doctoral journey. These feelings of vulnerability were the result of having limited guidance and limited support networks. According to the participants' interviews, the ultimate validation of their presence came as result of interactions with academic mentors. The participants indicated faculty-student mentorship supported their doctoral student persistence, engagement, and success (Cryer, 2000; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; Grant, 2005). The participants also noted their academic mentors impacted their doctoral student experiences by confirming them as peers upon completion of noteworthy academic accomplishments. This data suggested that Latino male doctoral student success is validated by mentors such as faculty members or academic colleagues. In light of the research on masculinity that suggests that men, in particular men of color, prefer working in isolation as means to prove independence and strength, this finding indicates the contrary. Latino males embrace the validation their mentors can provide.

Major finding #2: Latino male doctoral students at predominately White, research-intensive, public universities seek out peer networks comprised of fellow Latino male doctoral students. Each participant detailed the overwhelming nature of a predominately White, research-intensive, public university. Despite being successful in their previous academic and professional settings, the participants often exhibited feelings of nervousness and anxiety in their new surroundings. According to the participants, feelings of isolation and social exclusion were common during their initial

doctoral experiences. The participants expressed initial feelings of insecurity and loneliness as a result of their inability to connect with peers (Boyle & Boice, 1998; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; Gardner, 2009; Jazvac-Martek, 2009). Prior to beginning their programs, all participants indicated having confidence in the likelihood of their degree completion; however, participants suggested they began to question their success as a result of their inability to navigate logistical departmental hurdles associated with their doctoral pursuits.

The data suggested peer networks were critical to their successful integration into the doctoral student community within this predominately White, research-intensive, public university. Participants noted they sought out peers with whom they could identify with but frequently struggled to find colleagues with similar backgrounds. The participants who struggled to establish connections reported experiencing social exclusion and feeling insecure and anxious within their academic departments.

In contrast, the participants able to establish peer networks detailed how they felt engaged and supported from the onset of their doctoral pursuit. These participants noted how they were able to foster a sense of community among themselves. This data suggested Latino male doctoral students struggle to integrate themselves within a large predominately White, research-intensive, public university without the aid of a peer community. This finding dispels the previous research on Latino men in education by highlighting that Latino males do actively engage others in their academic settings and choose to navigate their education journey with peers, rather than in isolation.

Major finding #3: Aspects of family interaction can provide support and strain on Latino male doctoral student success. As indicated throughout the participants' interviews, family involvement was one of the central influences on the doctoral experience of the eight Latino males pursuing a PhD in the social sciences or humanities at predominately White, research-intensive, public university. While family involvement often served as a supportive force for the participants, the participants encountered challenges associated with their family's involvement (Lovitts, 1996; Polson, 2003). The participants suggested these challenges stemmed from their family's limited understanding of the doctoral education process. The participants drew emotional strength and support from their family members who encouraged their education; however, the participants also faced judgmental remarks and criticism from family members who did not understand their doctoral education motivations.

Some of the individuals detailed how their family supported their pursuits of a doctorate. These participants noted their family provided positive emotional and financial support during times of need. According to the participants, family involvement and support alleviated some of the pressures associated with their doctoral education ranging from isolation to financial insecurity. The participants highlighted their family, despite having a limited understanding of doctoral education, attempted to empathize with the doctoral struggle to the best of their ability.

A number of participants also expressed a level of family disconnection and guilt experienced as a result of their decision to pursue a doctorate. According to these narratives, the decision to pursue a doctorate created tension and strain with certain

family members. The participants explained this tension stemmed from their interactions with older male family members. As the participants noted, these older males often had a limited understanding of the value of a doctoral education. These older males criticized the decision to pursue a doctoral degree because it impaired the participants' ability to financially provide for a family. The participants indicated feeling tension with these family members due to the disconnection of ideals. The participants also acknowledged these older male family members were not opposed to educational pursuits, but rather had a firm belief and set of expectations of gender roles for their family (Arcinega. Anderson, Tovar-Blank, & Tracey, 2008). The Latino male doctoral students in this study explained their family members' jokes and comments, regardless of intent, created an overwhelming feeling of frustration and exhaustion at times. Similar emotions have been noted in Solórzano's (1998) discussion of *microaggressions* and "racial battle fatigue".

Ultimately, the data highlighted the power of family involvement on the Latino male doctoral student experience. Though there were a greater number of responses highlighting the supportive nature of family involvement, it is important to acknowledge family provided undue stress as well. The data suggested aspects of family interaction can provide both support and strain on Latino male doctoral student success. This finding adds to research adds to the literature on family involvement by showcasing how family interaction can sometimes have adverse effects on a graduate student's academic progress.

Major finding #4: Latino male doctoral students recognize *machismo* (i.e. traditional Latino male gender roles) and strive to reinvent the image of Latino

masculinity. According to the data, each participant understood the general gender role dynamics associated with *machismo*, or as sometimes referred to as "traditional Latino male gender roles." The participants commented that *machismo* and its gender norms frequently influenced their actions and emotions throughout their doctoral journey. In particular, the participants discussed how *machismo* caused them to struggle with perceptions of vulnerability and low self-worth throughout their doctoral experience.

Feelings of fragility were common among the Latino doctoral students upon entering their doctoral programs. As they indicated in their narratives, these feelings were often difficult to cope with. The difficulty was a result of their identity as Latino males and their desire to fulfill perceived masculine gender roles (Levant, Hirsch, Celentano, Cozza, Hill, and MacEachern, 1992; Levant, 1996; Arciniega, Anderson, Tovar-Blank, & Tracey, 2008). The participants said their understanding of *machismo* left them internally conflicted. They recognized the expectation to be strong and confident in the face of doctoral education adversity; however, they faced a reality of constant self-doubt as doctoral students and as family providers.

Rather than allowing perceived Latino male gender roles to negatively impact their doctoral pursuit, the participants sought to establish a new definition for *machismo*. The participants sought to create a new example of masculinity for future Latino males through their academic pursuits and success. The data suggested the participants successfully coped with their vulnerability along their pursuit of a doctoral degree by becoming less defensive of their masculinity. Examples of this are evident in the passive interactions with family members who criticized their decision to pursue a doctorate.

Despite initially struggling with being perceived as vulnerable, the participants utilized their desire to support their family to trump their feelings of insecurity. This was done to embrace the positive characteristics such as responsibility associated with Latino male gender roles (Arciniega, Anderson, Tovar-Blank, & Tracey, 2008). Furthermore, the participants embraced their identity as doctoral students in hopes to provide positive examples of academic success for young Latino males. These actions indicate that Latino male doctoral students recognize the traditional narrative of *machismo* and strive to create a new narrative of Latino masculinity that focuses on positive aspects such as support and responsibility.

Reflections on the Research

This section addresses my reflections on the overall research experience, the major findings, and the areas of investigation for this study. As I reflect on the process of conducting this research, I have a greater understanding of the importance of rapport building as a means to access sensitive information about personal experiences. As an outside researcher gathering personal narratives of vulnerability, I encountered initial reservation by the Latino male doctoral student participants. Rapport building was critical in order to the successfully engage with these individuals. As a result of the transparency and purpose of the study, the participants gained a sense of comfort, dropped their internal defenses, and revealed emotions and feelings they had previously never shared. In these moments, I recognized the importance of confidentiality as the participants confided in me enough to share secrets and powerful experiences.

Additionally, the use of qualitative research methods allowed for the development of the Latino male doctoral student narrative. Prior to this study, the research on Latino males in higher education was limited. This study's qualitative data collection and analysis provided a comprehensive foundation for future research on Latino males in education. Through a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis, this study gained a detailed understanding of the Latino male doctoral student experience at a predominately White, research-intensive, public university. Identifying the thematic experiences that influenced the participants' doctoral journey and understanding the participants' perceptions of their doctoral degree pursuit provided this comprehensive insight.

These findings provided me the opportunity to reflect on my journey towards a doctorate facing similar hurdles of vulnerability and isolation. The participants' narratives helped me recognize the value of a peer support network, specifically a peer network with fellow Latino male doctoral students. These networks allow for the sharing of social capital and, more importantly, provide a group of individuals to confide in and share experiences of anxiety and accomplishment.

The study also detailed the complex experiences of Latino male doctoral students with dependents. This subpopulation emerged as a result of the study's recruitment methods and open-ended selection criteria. These participants expressed an eagerness to participate in the study as they recognized the unique challenges they faced as husbands and fathers. Though they were initially unaware of the research on Latino male gender roles, each of these participants did acknowledge having a familiarity with the

predominate definition of *machismo*. These participants also recognized their conceptualization of Latino male gender roles deferred from that of their older male family members. This disconnection was the basis for some of the family strain they experienced throughout their life as they attempted to redefine *machismo* themselves.

This mission of this study was to critically investigate the experiences and perceptions of Latino males pursuing a PhD in the social sciences or humanities at predominately White, research-intensive, public university. By utilizing qualitative data collection and analysis, this study detailed influential encounters and resources that assisted the participants along their educational journey towards a PhD. Furthermore, this study shed light on how the participants perceived themselves and their academic pursuits as underrepresented doctoral students in a large, predominately White institution. This study's findings will provide the groundwork for future research and practice in higher education as indicated in the following section.

Implications for Research and Practice

This study examined the Latino male doctoral student journey as a means to improve outreach and support resources for these individuals so that Latino male doctoral students can see improvements in doctoral enrollment, persistence, and success. It is critical that predominately White, research-intensive, public universities are aware of the systemic challenges faced by Latino male doctoral students within their academic settings and within their family communities. With this awareness, administrators, faculty, and staff can provide more effective academic support to these students and address issues

associated with social exclusion and isolation. The purpose of this section is to provide implications for research and practice based on the findings in this study. The first section presents how this study adds to the literature on the experiences and perceptions of Latino males along their education journey. The second section provides recommendations for predominately White, research-intensive, public universities on how to improve their support services for Latino male doctoral students.

Implications for research. This study adds to the literature on Latino males in education, as well as the literature on issues within graduate education. This study contributed to the research by detailing the experiences and challenges faced by Latino male doctoral students, an understudied demographic. By creating a comprehensive narrative of the Latino male doctoral student journey, this study provided a qualitative analysis of the experiences and perceptions these individuals encountered along their pursuit of a PhD.

This study exposed the unique hurdles and conflicting influences encountered by Latino males in pursuit of a PhD at a predominately White, research-intensive, public university. While Polson (2003) noted that successful graduate students juggle the demands of adulthood by assessing and negotiating priorities with family, friends, employers, and co-workers, Polson did not detail the challenges encountered when graduate students faced conflicting opinions of priorities from these individuals. The study highlighted how the participants struggled to establish themselves as Latino male doctoral students in the face of conflicting internal and external messages. These messages evolved from perceived gender roles and responsibilities within the Latino

community. The participants acknowledged the antiquity of "traditional" Latino male gender roles and expectations and sought to create new examples of *machismo* for the community (Arciniega, Anderson, Tovar-Blank, & Tracey, 2008). Despite their efforts to fight these antiquated Latino male gender roles, the participants described falling victim to external pressures at times and conforming to the gender norms placed on them by friends and family members (Levant, 1996; Levant, Hirsch, Celentano, Cozza, Hill, & MacEachern, 1992). For Latino male doctoral students in this study, the struggle to break preconceived notions of Latino masculinity was a formidable challenge.

Additionally, this study added to the literature on graduate education, specifically navigating the doctoral education process. While previous research has focused on the efficacy of institutional support services and interactions (Lovitts, 1996; Cryer, 2000; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; Grant, 2005; Jazvac-Martek, 2009), this study provided a qualitative narrative that showcases the influence of community environment and peer support for Latino male doctoral students at a predominately White, research-intensive, public university. This study provided insight to help Latino male doctoral students improve their likelihood for retention and success within the confines of a doctoral program. The implications for the theories in this study not only assist in examining Latino males in academic contexts, but they also assist in investigating Latino masculinity for future generations of Latino males.

Implications for practice. This study's findings identify and provide insight on the factors that impact Latino male doctoral student experiences and perceptions at a predominately White, research-intensive, public university. The findings offer

implications that can assist administrators and faculty members in supporting this underrepresented student demographic along their academic journey. The findings highlight the need to expand current successful practices and the need to create new initiatives to support Latino male doctoral students. The recommendations are associated with four items: (1) creation of community building initiatives across the graduate student community, (2) effective advising and diversity training for faculty advisors, (3) advancement of diversity mentor programs, and (4) implementation of diversity-focused committees at predominately White, research-intensive, public universities. These recommendations are informed by the research findings about the power of mentorship, the influence of peer networks, and the impact of faculty advisors on Latino male doctoral students.

Scholars have previously identified the critical impact of a sense of community on a doctoral student's academic success (Lovitts, 1996; Boyle & Boice, 1998; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; Cheng, 2004), however these scholars fail to discuss the importance of identifying with the community members. The Latino males in this study noted the positive impact of having individuals (i.e. students, staff, faculty) they could identify and engage with. The participants who noted having a network of Latino male peers indicated having greater ease in transitioning into their academic surroundings. In contrast, the participants who indicated struggling to identify with peers and faculty members reported having constant feelings of "isolation" and stress.

This study identified the critical impact a community can have on the academic integration and success of Latino male doctoral students at a predominately White,

research-intensive, public institution. The participants in this study recognized the presence of fellow Latino males helped alleviate their skepticism and internal doubts about their presence in their doctoral program. Additionally, the presence of fellow Latino males affirmed their ability to succeed within their doctoral program. Predominately White, research-intensive, public universities should be mindful of the diversity of today's incoming graduate student population and understand how underrepresented students battle with isolation and vulnerability as a result of having limited access to peers. These institutions should create a greater sense of community among its underrepresented student populations across the graduate student community in order to bridge gaps that may exist within small academic departments. Additionally, initiatives and efforts to create communities and connect underrepresented graduate students with peers should be implemented during a student's orientation period in order to avoid having students begin their graduate work without a peer network.

Furthermore, predominately White, research-intensive, public universities should provide faculty members with advanced trainings on how to effectively engage, advise, and mentor diverse student populations. Grant (2005) explains how faculty advisors have a critical impact on doctoral students via their graduate advising. While faculty advising pedagogy has been researched, it has not been analyzed under the lens of diversity and multiculturalism. This study indicates that Latino male doctoral students have unique needs and anxieties compared to their peers. Predominately White, research-intensive, public universities should investigate the needs of their diverse student populations with regards to faculty advising and ensure that faculty members are cognizant of the diversity

within their group of doctoral student advisees. Ultimately, faculty members must look beyond their role as dissertation supervisor and embrace their role as mentors and guides for doctoral students. Doctoral advisors can assist their advisees with greater success through additional training on the diversity and complexity of their students' experiences and perceptions of doctoral education.

The study's findings showcased how underrepresented doctoral students struggle initially along their doctoral journey as a result of having a limited understanding and awareness of the doctoral education process. Underrepresented doctoral students, such as Latino male doctoral students, said their limited social capital prevents them from easily integrating into their doctoral programs. This struggle to find comfort as a doctoral student often leads underrepresented doctoral students to experience feelings of fragility and vulnerability upon entering their doctoral programs (González, Marin, Perez, Figueroa, Moreno, & Navia, 2001). The participants who indicated having a seamless transition into their doctoral studies were individuals who shadowed mentors, formally and informally. The participants were able to gain insight into the doctoral education process prior to beginning their pursuit through the exchange of social capital from their mentors. Graduate schools should seek opportunities to demystify doctoral education for interested underrepresented doctoral students through mentor programs. Through mentor programs, institutions can break down barriers preventing underrepresented students from pursuing doctoral degrees by exposing these students to program characteristics such as the daily life of doctoral education, the process to apply to a doctoral program, or potential opportunities for employment post-graduation. Mentor programs can empower

underrepresented students to pursue their PhD aspirations by connecting them to a peer who can provide a wealth of social capital for them as well as a model of academic success. Additionally, mentor programs can benefit doctoral student mentors by proving their ability to guide others along the doctoral education process. This can assist in validating the mentor's academic presence and feelings of self-worth.

Lastly, the findings from this study highlight the need for diversity-focused committees within predominately White, research-intensive, public universities. At institutions such as these, it is not uncommon for underrepresented students to feel overwhelmed and isolated. Feelings of vulnerability and isolation are frequently compounded in doctoral programs as a result of the academic rigor and limited diversity of students. As the P-16 education pipeline becomes increasingly multicultural and diverse, predominately White, research-intensive, public universities must not overlook the struggles encountered by underrepresented students throughout the doctoral process. These institutions should create diversity-focused committees tasked with examining and addressing the issues faced by underrepresented doctoral students throughout their doctoral journey, from as early as the admissions process to the end of their dissertation process. These committees must be allowed to collect data on entering students, assess their needs and concerns, and partner with institutional offices that can assist in supporting these students. It is also critical for these committees to recognize the unique experiences and needs of various underrepresented populations. These committees must avoid "one size fits all" strategies and instead examine the specific needs for various underrepresented student demographics.

Future Research

This study's purpose was to examine the experiences and perceptions of Latino males pursuing a PhD in the social sciences or humanities at predominately White, research-intensive, public university. Through qualitative data collection and analysis, this study detailed influential encounters and resources that assisted the participants along their educational journey towards a PhD. Furthermore, this study shed light on the way in which participants perceived themselves and their academic pursuits as underrepresented doctoral students in a large, predominately White institution. Additional areas of investigation related to Latino male doctoral students emerged throughout the study. These areas of investigation for future research are related to Latino males in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) doctoral programs; Latino male doctoral student family dynamics; and Latino male academic identity formation.

The first recommendation for future research focuses on expanding this study and investigating the experiences and perceptions of Latino male pursuing PhDs in STEM academic disciplines. This study has exposed the unique narrative of Latino males pursuing PhDs in a social science or humanities academic discipline. Though there will most likely be some common experiences prior to beginning a doctoral pursuit for all Latino males, Latino male doctoral students in the STEM fields will inevitably have unique experiences and challenges that were not identified in this study. As NCES (2011) data indicates, Latino males are among the lowest in enrollment and degree completion within STEM doctoral student statistics. Understanding why Latino males lag behind in the STEM fields is critical to ensuring that Latino males, one of the fastest growing K-12

student demographics (Fry, 2008), can increase their presence in the doctoral school ranks. An increased presence of Latino males in STEM doctoral programs is critical to the educational success of the nation.

In addition to Latino male doctoral students in STEM fields, future research should be directed at examining Latino male doctoral student family dynamics. As the findings of this study indicated, family involvement can be both supportive and unsupportive to Latino male doctoral student success. The participants explained these conflicting messages stemmed from the complex gender identity of *machismo* and the perceived Latino gender roles and dynamics within their families (Arciniega, Anderson, Tovar-Blank, & Tracey, 2008). The disconnection between Latino male doctoral students and their family members created gender role strain (Pleck, 1981; O'Neil, 1981) frequently as the participants utilized "unconventional" methods (i.e. doctoral education) to support their families. Though the participants' family members never directly criticized the participants' decision to pursue a doctoral degree, at times family members would hint at a divergence of opinion by joking about the participants' inability to provide for their family. The Latino male doctoral students in this study explained their family members' jokes and comments, regardless of intent, created an overwhelming feeling of frustration and exhaustion at times. Similar emotions have been mentioned in Solórzano's (1998) discussion of *microaggressions* and "racial battle fatigue". Solórzano explains racial battle fatigue occurs when students of color experience exhaustion from frequent confrontations with racial microaggressions in school environments. A more

thorough examination of the impact of family dynamics on Latino male doctoral students may shed light on the complexity of this relationship.

Lastly, the final recommendation for future research focuses on the Latino male academic identity formation. This study has showcased the struggle Latino male doctoral students have socializing and identifying in their surroundings. At times, the participants discussed struggling to connect with family and community members who may not have had the opportunity to experience similar levels of academic achievement. Additionally, the participants noted challenges in connecting with departmental peers who had few common life experiences and/or family dynamics. The participants explained this disconnect left them unsure of their own identity. Though the participants mentioned experiencing this identity struggle at some point along their doctoral journey, they said they eventually became comfortable in their identities as Latino male doctoral students. This study did not have the opportunity to fully examine Latino male doctoral student identity development. Future research may shed light on the evolutionary process of creating and embracing a new academic identity and determining its place within the *machismo* archetype.

Ultimately, there are various opportunities to expand upon the research in this study. As Sáenz and Ponjuán (2009) state, Latino males are "vanishing" in higher education and it is necessary to understand why. The academic success of Latino males in K-12, community college, higher education, and graduate education is critical to the nation's future prosperity. While arguments can be made about the importance of focusing on any of the education pipeline access points, it is imperative to further

examine doctoral education in order to inspire and connect future generations of Latino male doctoral students and scholars. A larger multi-site study that includes predominately White, research-intensive, public universities from across the nation can identify broader challenges and resources that impact Latino male doctoral students along their pursuit of a doctoral degree.

Concluding Thoughts

I cannot help feeling a deep connection with the research I uncovered and with the participants I interviewed over the past two years. In the beginning of this process, I was anxious and nervous about my ability to embark on this journey alone. In time, I have grown as a researcher, discovered my own academic voice, and developed a greater understanding of experiences and perceptions of my academic brothers, Latino male doctoral students. Professionally, my intention for this study was to expand upon the literature regarding a critical and underrepresented doctoral student population. Personally, my intention for this study was to develop a greater understanding of my own personal experiences and challenges as a Latino male pursuing a PhD.

The study's findings shed light on the unique journey experienced by Latino males in pursuit of a PhD in the social sciences or humanities at a predominately White, research-intensive, public university. Through in-depth interviews with the participants, a comprehensive Latino male doctoral student narrative was produced. This narrative provides the groundwork for future studies that seek to examine issues, experiences, and perceptions encountered by Latino males in doctoral programs. In helping to improve the

understanding of the Latino male education journey, I feel a sense of fulfillment in shedding light on this portion of their journey. Being a Latino male, I previously struggled to articulate my personal academic journey. With the help of the strong participants in this study, I have developed a better understanding of myself while also developing a holistic perspective of this academic pursuit for Latino males.

I encountered a number of influential peers and mentors that helped shape my understanding of the Latino male doctoral student journey. Though I initially struggled to find meaning in my own pursuit of a PhD, these encounters helped me shed light on my narrative as a doctoral student. Interactions with peers helped me process the personal experiences I previously struggled to articulate. Through these interactions, I recognized that I was not the only one who experienced exhaustion and self-doubt as a result of external pressures and internal anxieties. My peers helped me recognize I was not in a silo within a massive institution. My mentors helped me recognize my potential and academic identity.

Based on personal experiences with peers and mentors, I realized that I was not alone in having feelings of insecurity as an underrepresented doctoral student of color in a predominately White, research-intensive, public university. Despite coming to this realization, I recognized each doctoral student experiences unique circumstances. As universities face an increasingly diverse student population within their doctoral programs, they have a responsibility to understand the experiences and perceptions of these students along their pursuit of a PhD. A thorough knowledge of their experiences can assist in ensuring their academic success.

The inspiration for this dissertation topic stemmed from my personal aspirations of addressing challenges faced by Latino males along their education journey and assisting with the academic success of future Latino male doctoral students. My interest in these efforts is a result of my life experiences as an underrepresented student. Whether it was my years as a young boy attending a private, college-preparatory school in Houston or my years as a doctoral student/candidate at the University of Texas-Austin, I have always been cognizant of my underrepresented status. My hope through my dissertation journey was to develop a better understanding why this always appeared to be the case regardless of my surroundings. During the literature review, I gained a greater awareness of the issues that went beyond my personal experiences as a student. I gained a greater appreciation for the individuals who helped me along my academic journey. I gained a greater sense of urgency to address the issues I discovered. Where the literature on Latino males in education ended is where I wanted this study to continue. Though an increased focus has been placed on Latino males in higher education in recent years, it is critical to also focus on Latino males in doctoral education.

Upon meeting with the participants, I recognized both commonality and uniqueness of their experiences as doctoral students as they detailed their academic pursuits. Each of the participants represented diverse family backgrounds and upbringings; however, they all shared similar stories of vulnerability and validation. I remained neutral in my role as interviewer throughout the study but it always appeared as though the participants recognized how we had significant life achievements, moments, and emotions in common. This helped me maintain comfort and rapport with each

participant throughout the study and helped me develop an in-depth understanding of their academic experiences and perceptions of their doctoral degree.

I was comforted to see the Latino male doctoral students I interviewed frequently reflected back on their academic journey. Like me, they struggled to develop a complete understanding of their experiences. Despite this, the participants recognized the significance and took pride in their standing as doctoral students at a research-intensive university. The participants understood the uniqueness of their academic success and were looking forward to the day they completed their doctorate. With their doctorate, each participant hoped to be a better provider for their family and a better role model within their community.

Since interviewing these participants and identifying these findings, I have reflected on my own personal doctoral journey under a new light. I can now put words to the feelings and emotions I previously struggled to identify. With this sense of clarity this dissertation has brought, I have developed a greater interest in examining Latino male students in higher education settings, more specifically within doctoral education. Ultimately, my hope is institutions take note of the Latino male doctoral student experience and create institutional resources and support systems to improve the doctoral enrollment, persistence, and success of this underrepresented student demographic.

Appendix A

Email to Recruit Participants

Hello (Participant's name),

My name is Manny González and I am a doctoral student at The University of Texas at Austin. I am emailing you today because I am working on my dissertation that focuses on the experiences and challenges faced by Latino males as they pursue doctoral education.

First, I would like to congratulate you on all of the great academic successes you have achieved to date. Gaining admission to one of the elite doctoral granting institutions in the nation, is not a simple feat and requires a great deal of hard work and dedication. This accomplishment alone is a testament to your character and passion for education. Second, I would like to invite you to participate in my dissertation study. Participation in the study is strictly voluntary, anonymous, and you may opt out at any given time without any consequences or repercussions.

If you decide to participate in my study, I will interview you twice (2) over the duration of the study. The first interview will be during the summer 2013 semester. A follow-up interview will occur during the fall 2013 semester. Each interview will last approximately one (1) hour and you will receive a copy of the interview questions prior to our meeting should you feel the need to prepare.

In order to participate in my dissertation study, please answer the following questions:

1. Do you identify as Latino/Hispanic/Chicano? *Yes* *No*
2. Are you male? *Yes* *No*
3. Are you currently enrolled as a doctoral student/candidate? *Yes* *No*

If you answered yes to these questions, you meet the requirements to participate in this study. Please reply with your responses to this email in order to confirm eligibility. Additionally, if you could, please include your best available dates/times so that I can work with your schedule and identify the most convenient time to schedule an interview.

Thank you very much for considering being part of my study. Should you have any questions or concerns, I can be reached via email at manuel.gonzalez@utexas.edu or telephone at (713) 817-8935.

I look forward to hearing from you and to working together on this project. Take care!

Best,

Manny González
Doctoral Student, Higher Education Administration
The University of Texas at Austin

Appendix B

Confirmation for Interview Participation

Dear (Participant's name),

Thank you for your prompt response to my previous email and for your interest in participating in my study! Your involvement is truly appreciated, as it will help this study's efforts to shed light on the Latino male doctoral student experience.

The purpose of this email is to notify you that you have been selected to participate in my study. At this time, I would like to schedule a one-on-one interview with you on (date, time, place) or (date, time, place). Please let me know your preference at your earliest convenience.

This email has an attachment for your review prior to our interview:

1. A list of interview questions that will be asked during our interview.

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns, regarding this study, the attached questions, or your participation in general, feel free to contact me via email at manuel.gonzalez@utexas.edu or via phone call at (713) 817-8935.

Again, thank you for your prompt response and participation, both are greatly appreciated. I look forward to meeting with you in the near future and discussing your doctoral student experience. Take care!

Best,
Manny González
Doctoral Student, Higher Education Administration
The University of Texas at Austin

Appendix C

Thank You Email

Dear (Name),
I wanted to send you a quick note to thank you for your participation in my study regarding Latino males and their experiences in pursuit of a doctorate. Words cannot describe how grateful I am for your participation. Because of your contribution, I was able to capture information for my study, but most importantly, I was able to get to know you and connect with a fellow Latino male who is navigating the doctoral education experience.

As a fellow Latino male doctoral student, I have shared many of the same experiences you mentioned during the interview. While doctoral education can sometimes be an isolating endeavor, I hope you take solace in knowing that you are a pioneer in your field and in the community. Future Latino males will follow in your footsteps and inevitably look to your experience as an example of determination and success in education.

If I can be of further assistance to you in any way, feel free to contact me at anytime.

Again, thank you so much for your participation in my study and best of luck in the remainder of your studies.

Best,
Manny González
Doctoral Student, Higher Education Administration
The University of Texas at Austin

Appendix D

Email Attachment to Participant: Interview #1 Protocol

1. Could you tell me a brief family history, particularly as you were growing up?

2. Could you tell me about your decision to pursue a doctoral degree?

3. What influenced you to consider a doctoral degree?

4. Could you tell me about you experience applying to doctoral programs?

5. Could you describe any individuals, groups, programs, etc. that helped you with the application process? How did they help you?

6. Could you tell me about your experience selecting a graduate school/program? What influenced your decision to select the University of Texas at Austin?

7. Could you tell me about your experience being a doctoral student?

8. Could you describe any individuals, groups, programs, etc. that have affected your doctoral student experience? How have they affected it?

9. Do you feel as though you were prepared to be a doctoral student prior to arriving at the University of Texas at Austin? Why or why not?

10. Do you feel there are any obstacles or barriers affecting your current experience as a doctoral student at the University of Texas at Austin?

11. Is there anything you would like to add, or do you have any questions for me?

Appendix E

Interview #1 Script and Protocol

Welcoming Comments
I'd like to start by thanking you for taking time out of your schedule to meet with me and for your interest in assisting me with my study on the experiences of Latino males in pursuit of doctoral education. Before we move forward, I would like to share a little more about myself and provide you some background information regarding my dissertation so that you can have some context regarding your participation.

My name is Manny González, and I am a doctoral student in the Higher Education Administration program at The University of Texas at Austin. During my years as a doctoral student, I have worked in a number of student affairs and diversity-related assistantships around campus; however, the one that inspired me to pursue my doctorate and this dissertation topic was my work with Project MALES (Mentoring to Achieve Latino Education Success). While working with Project MALES, I developed a greater understanding of the experiences and issues facing Latino males across the education pipeline. Being a Latino male myself, I found that I shared many similar experiences with the young men who I mentored. While research does exist on the experiences of Latino males in higher education, there is currently no research focused on the Latino male doctoral student experience. This study seeks to change that. I am looking forward to learning about your experiences as a Latino male doctoral student over the course of our two interviews.

As mentioned, the purpose of my study is to examine and capture the experiences of Latino male doctoral students. I am particularly interested in discovering how your racial/ethnic background and how your gender have affected your doctoral experiences. The questions I will ask will inquire about your experiences within your graduate department, as well as outside of an academic setting. Your answers will help provide a better understanding of the various items that can affect doctoral education.

At this point, let me remind you that your participation is completely voluntary and you may stop participating at any time. You are welcome to share as much as you would like; however, if at any time you feel uncomfortable with a questions, please feel free to say, "I would prefer to not answer that question." We will simply move on to the next question if this occurs.

Lastly, I would like to inform you that this conversation will be digitally recorded for coding and analysis purposes. By participating in my study, you are giving me permission to record the interview. Is this still the case? If yes, we can proceed. If not, we can stop your involvement in the study here.

In an effort to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, you can choose a pseudonym or I can assign you one. What will you prefer?

Do you have any questions before we begin? If not, let us begin the interview.

Opening Question:

1. Could you tell me a brief family history, particularly as you were growing up?

Key Questions:

2. Could you tell me about your decision to pursue a doctoral degree?
    a. *Probe*: What influenced you to consider a doctoral degree?
    b. *Probe*: Could you describe any individuals, groups, programs, experiences, etc. that affected your decision?
    c. *Probe*: Did you feel there were any obstacles or barriers affecting your decision?
        i. *Probe*: If yes, what were they?
            1. *Probe*: How did you deal with these barriers?
            2. *Probe*: Were these barriers connected to your racial/ethnic background? Your gender? How so?
        ii. *Probe*: If no, why do you feel there were no obstacles or barriers affecting your decision?

3. Could you tell me about you experience applying to doctoral programs?
    a. *Probe*: Could you describe any individuals, groups, programs, etc. that helped you in the process?
    b. *Probe*: Did you experience any obstacles or barriers during the application process?
        i. *Probe*: If yes, what were they?
            1. *Probe*: How did you deal with these barriers?
            2. *Probe*: Were these barriers connected to your racial/ethnic background? Your gender? How so?
        ii. *Probe*: If no, why do you feel there were no obstacles or barriers affecting your experience?

4. Could you tell me about your experience selecting a graduate school/program?
    a. *Probe*: What influenced your decision to select the University of Texas at Austin?
    b. *Probe*: Could you describe any individuals, groups, programs, experiences, etc. that also affected your decision?
    c. *Probe*: Did your racial/ethnic background or gender affect your selection? If so, how?

5. Could you tell me about your experience being a doctoral student?
    a. *Probe*: Do you feel as though you were prepared to be a doctoral student prior to starting? Why or why not?
    b. *Probe*: Could you describe any individuals, groups, programs, experiences, etc. that have affected your experience as a doctoral student?
    c. *Probe*: Do you feel there are any obstacles or barriers affecting your experience as a doctoral student?
        i. *Probe*: If yes, what are they?
            1. *Probe*: How do you deal with these barriers?
            2. *Probe*: Are these barriers connected to your racial/ethnic background? Your gender? How so?
        ii. *Probe*: If no, why do you feel there are no obstacles or barriers affecting your experience?

6. Is there anything you would like to add, or do you have any questions for me?

Appendix F

Interview #2 Script and Protocol

Welcoming Comments

Thank you again for meeting with me for this second interview. The last time we met, you shared with me some of your journey towards a doctoral degree. In particular you shared with me (fill in with key points). For our second interview, I am going to ask you to reflect on those experiences and share some of your thoughts regarding your goals and aspirations once you have completed your doctoral degree. Before we begin, we will review the transcript and/or notes from the first interview because I want to be sure I understand you correctly. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Key Questions:

1. Follow up on questions from first interview.

2. Could you tell me about your thoughts on completing your doctoral degree?
    a. *Probe*: How does completing your doctoral degree make you feel?
    b. *Probe*: Could you describe any individuals, groups, programs, experiences, etc. that have helped you complete your doctoral degree?
    c. *Probe*: Do you feel there are any obstacles or barriers affecting the completion of your doctoral degree?
        i. *Probe*: If yes, what are they?
            1. *Probe*: How do you deal with these barriers?
            2. *Probe*: Are these barriers connected to your racial/ethnic background? Your gender? How so?
        ii. *Probe*: If no, why do you feel there are no obstacles or barriers affecting your completion?

3. Could you tell me about your post-doctoral degree plans, aspirations, or goals?
    a. *Probe*: What do you hope to pursue once you have completed your degree?
    b. *Probe*: Has your racial/ethnic background or gender affected your plans, aspirations, or goals in anyway? If so, how?

4. If you could go back and change anything about your doctoral experience, beginning with your decision to pursue a doctoral education up to your current status as doctoral student, would you? If yes, what would it be?

5. What words of advice would you give to future Latino male doctoral students that follow in your footsteps?

6. Is there anything you would like to add, or do you have any questions for me?

7. Is it OK if I call/email you if I have further questions or need additional clarification?

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