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ABSTRACT

Graduation rates nationally for community college students have continued to be low. This is an issue that has perplexed policy makers and college administrators alike for quite some time. In this phenomenological study, eight first-generation Latinos—one sector of the diverse groups that constitute the community college student population—were interviewed to discover how their perceived sense of self as mediated through their lived experiences shaped their decisions to persist at a community college in the southeastern United States.

The four themes that emerged from the data revealed that although the study's participants experienced college in different ways—some rewarding, others stressful, some encouraging, others disappointing,—all of them had fundamental beliefs coupled with determined spirits, which were strong enough to keep them focused on their goal of persisting in college.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

According to the 2000 U.S. census data, the population percentages of the three major ethnic groups in the United States are Whites 75.1%, Blacks or African Americans 12.3%, and Hispanics or Latinos 12.5% (Grieco & Cassidy, 2001). The Black or African American terminology is used to refer to a group of people whose ancestral heritage is primarily from Africa. According to Larkey, Hecht, and Martin (1993), those who identify with the term Black feel “a sense of unity and acceptability,” and those who identify with the term African American feel a connection with “a blended heritage” (p. 302). I have used either term interchangeably in this study. The Hispanic or Latino terminology refers to a group of people who in addition to speaking Spanish, share a similar “culture and heritage” (Taylor, Lopez, Martinez, and Velasco, 2012, p. 9). I have also used these terms interchangeably.

In the decade following the 2000 census, the above percentages have changed, and in 2009 Hispanics were declared to have surpassed Blacks to become the country’s largest minority group at 15.5% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011a). Of note is that 68% of the Hispanic growth in 2009 was attributed to births (Johnson & Lichter, 2010). That number paints a picture of what the ethnic composition of the elementary and secondary schools will be like in the coming decades. Already, Hispanics account for 20% of the students in the schools (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011a) but based on current reports, Hispanics have been faltering in the educational pipeline leading from high school to higher education. Approximately 64% of Hispanic students graduated from public high schools in 2008 when 81% of White students graduated (Stillwell, 2010).

Llagas and Synder (2003) wrote in a National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) report that of those students, aged 25 to 29, who graduated with a baccalaureate degree in 2000, 10% were Hispanics, 34% were Whites and 18% were Blacks. The authors did not give an account for the ethnic identities of the remaining 38% of graduates. Though none of these college graduation figures is commendable, the Hispanic trend is alarming since Hispanics, because of their projected growth, are expected to define the political, economic, scientific, and technological future of the United States. Besides, for the U.S. to compete with other countries and maintain its strength in the global market, higher education will have to play an active role in preparing U.S. students to meet the demands of the knowledge economy of the 21st century (Duderstadt, 2008). Hispanic students are not exempt from becoming the qualified educated resources that the country needs in order to prosper.

Statement of the Problem

The enrollment of Latino students has been increasing at community colleges (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012a; Fry, 2009). Fifty-one percent of Latinos in community colleges are first-generation students, students whose parents did not attend a postsecondary institution (Staklis & Horn, 2012). In NCES sponsored reports that compared first-generation students with non-first-generation students, first-generation students are: (a) usually older than the traditional-aged students of 18 to 25; (b) more likely to attend a two-year public institution; (c) from low-income backgrounds; (d) more often African American or Latino, in which case English is not their first language (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Chen, 2005); and (e) more likely to be academically underprepared, and, therefore, are more likely to be placed in at least one developmental education course (Inman & Mayes, 1999). Historically, the degree attainment of first-generation college students has always been low. Evidence of this

is seen in a study done by Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin in 1998. Five years after first enrolling in a public two-year institution in the 1989-1990 academic year, 46% of first-generation students had either graduated or were still enrolled in comparison with 60% of non-first-generation students. Current data continue to show that despite the surge in enrollment, the graduation rates of Latino students remains substantially lower than the graduation rates of White students though in comparison with Black students there is only a one percentage point difference (Fry & Taylor, 2013). This information is based on the U.S. Census Bureau's, March 2012 educational attainment report. Whereas 22% of White 22-24 year-old students had attained at least a baccalaureate degree in 2012, only 12% of Blacks and 11% of Hispanics in the same age group had similar degree attainment in 2012 (Fry & Taylor, 2013).

One may argue that the lack of persistence to graduation of Latino students is an issue that has plagued higher education in the United States for decades. That is very true, and many notable scholars (Cabrera, Nora, & Castaneda, 1992a; Oseguera, Locks, & Vega, 2009) have done extensive research in this area. Notwithstanding, their research focused on Latino students in 4-year undergraduate colleges and universities. Many of those research studies were conducted in the states that border Mexico—Texas, Arizona, and California. A majority of the students in those studies were of Mexican or Chicano heritage. What those studies revealed is that the cultural background of the Latino students plays a significant role in how those students value postsecondary education (Nora, 1987).

Similar research has not been as prolific for the Latino students who populate the eastern region of the United States. Such students tend to originate from Caribbean countries, such as Cuba and the Dominican Republic; Central American countries, such as Guatemala and Honduras; and South American countries, such as Colombia and Venezuela. Therefore, there is

need for more research on those Latino students in the eastern United States who choose to begin their postsecondary studies at a community college rather than at a baccalaureate degree granting institution.

In recent articles, other researchers have expressed similar sentiments to the one above. Zell (2010), in writing about the paucity of information on Latino community college students states:

Most studies have focused on Latinas/os attending 4-year institutions, not community college. It is important to understand the experiences of Latina/o junior college students. This knowledge can help junior colleges to better meet these students' needs, particularly their transferring goals. (p. 168)

Nunez, Sparks, and Hernandez (2011) are even more explicit as they focus on the role of Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs) in their study. They state that “community colleges and HSIs serve as critical gateways to higher education for Latinos; therefore, understanding the influences on students' enrollment in these types of institutions is important” (p. 19).

One cannot look at the issue of Latino community college persistence without paying attention to a very subtle societal change, which may or may not be having an impact on college persistence. Traditional behaviors and expectations that were once associated with various chronological milestones in life have begun to disappear (Neugarten & Neugarten, 1987). For instance, women used to get married and become mothers by their late twenties. In another example, the authors have written about a blurring of what used to be easily identifiable chronological demarcations. Instead, there is fluidity in life roles as some youngsters are undertaking adult habits, like becoming teenage parents, while some adults are doing the reverse by delaying or avoiding becoming parents. Among the many descriptions that the writers have for “today's adults” (p. 31), this one is relevant to this study. “Overall, today's adults have . . .

fewer lasting commitments to work or community roles” (p. 32). Could this mean that adult students may not be committed to their studies and, therefore, not persist in college? Then again, how does one define an adult since adult roles are changing?

A focus on adult students is important because adult student enrollment in postsecondary education has been on the rise. The *Digest of Education Statistics 2011* reports that the enrollment of adult students aged 25 and over has surpassed the pace of the 18 to 24 cohort of students. Between 2000 and 2010, the increase in enrollment of the 25 and over cohort was 42% while the increase for the 18 to 24 cohort was 34% (Snyder & Dillow, 2012). According to the American Association of Community Colleges (2012a), 45% of the students are between 22 and 39 years, 39% are 21 and under, and 15% are 40 and above. What characteristics does each cohort exhibit? Are there significant differences between cohorts?

Decidedly, there exists a knowledge gap concerning Latino community college students and their reasons for attrition. This situation has underscored the timeliness for this study, which was conducted at College of Attainment Potential (CAP), a Hispanic-serving institution (HSI) in Florida. To protect the identities of all who are involved, I have used pseudonyms for the names of the college, its campuses, and an adjacent city. CAP is a 2-year multi-campus community college, which not only offers associate degrees and vocational certificates in a wide range of fields, but baccalaureate degrees in high demand areas, such as criminal justice, nursing, and science education (College of Attainment Potential, 2010a). CAP’s 2010 to 2011 college-wide annual enrollment data showed that more than 174,000 students attended classes, and 59% were female (College of Attainment Potential, n.d.). In the 2010 fall semester, 61,674 students were enrolled, and of that number, 42,742 were Hispanics (College of Attainment Potential, 2011). CAP has the largest Hispanic undergraduate student population for any college or university in

the United States (College of Attainment Potential, n.d.). Fifty-six percent of the students are first-generation; 33% are older than age twenty-five; 69% are employed while they are students; 20% are employed full time; 67% are of low socioeconomic status; 46% fall below the federal poverty level; Spanish is the native language for 42% percent of the students; and 74% take precollege courses in one or more subjects. The subjects are math, reading, writing, or English as a second language (College of Attainment Potential, n.d.).

Besides being an HSI, CAP also qualifies as an urban community college. According to Muller (1996), urban community colleges are usually located in metropolitan areas and have missions whose focus is to improve “the educational, social, and political fabric” (p. 57) of the surrounding community and its constituents. Hence, CAP in its mission statement affirms its “responsibility to serve as a . . . beacon” (College of Attainment Potential, 2010b) in the community. Another characteristic of urban community colleges is that the faculty and administration reflect minority representations that are similar in composition to the minority representation of the student population (Muller, 1996). The composition of CAP’s full-time faculty does reflect the ethnicity of the student population as 63% of the faculty are from ethnic minority groups (College of Attainment Potential, n.d.).

This study’s participants all attend the Enterprise Campus, which became a campus in 2004 (College of Attainment Potential, 2011). The fall 2011 student profile shows that 5,152 students were enrolled (College of Attainment Potential, 2012). Ninety-one percent or 4,661 students were Hispanic; 4% or 209 students were Black, and 3% or 167 students were non-Hispanic White. Fifty-five percent or 2,827 students were enrolled part-time. Sixty-four percent or 3,312 students were female; 36% were older than twenty-five years, 32% were younger than 20 years, and the remaining 32% were between 21 and 25 years. Seventy-seven percent worked

while attending college, and 31% of them worked full time; 68% were of low socioeconomic status, and 41% of that group were below the federal poverty line; 87% took precollege courses because they were academically unprepared; of that number, 51% took English as a second language, and the remaining 12% took developmental education courses in up to three areas: reading, writing, or math. Spanish was the native language for 67% or 3,432 students; English was the native language for 31% or 1,577 students, and the remaining students spoke other languages, including 38 students whose native language was French or Haitian Creole. Fifty-nine percent of the students were first generation. Sixty-nine of the students had declared that they would pursue their baccalaureate studies at CAP; 3,413 students had indicated that they were seeking an Associate in Arts (A.A.) degree, which meant that they were potential transfer students who would be continuing their undergraduate studies at a 4-year institution; 1,398 students had indicated that they were seeking an Associate in Science (A.S.) degree, which meant that upon graduation, they would have the necessary job skills to start working in their field; 34 students had indicated that they were pursuing certificate studies; and 238 students were undecided. The average credit load per student was 7.19 credit hours (College of Attainment Potential , 2012).

The Enterprise Campus is situated in the city of Steadfast, which is in the northwest quadrant of the county that CAP serves. According to the 2010 U.S. census, 94.7 % of Steadfast's residents are Hispanic, and 94.2% speak a language other than English at home (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Hispanic-owned firms account for 81.4% of the business in the city. The Enterprise Campus, therefore, serves as an English-speaking oasis in the city. However, those students, who are learning English, do have a challenge. The limited time that most of them spend on campus does not provide them with enough opportunities to improve their English.

When asked by faculty to practice speaking English outside of class, a common response is “I can’t. I live here, I work here, and everyone speaks Spanish.” Thus, for many of the students, their second language acquisition is akin to learning a second language in a foreign language context, that is no language learning takes place outside of the classroom, as opposed to learning the language in a language majority context, which means that their interactions with the society around them contribute to their learning the second language (Dixon et al., 2012). Researchers of second language acquisition also say that second language learners take three to seven years to become proficient in the new language (Dixon et al., 2012). Sadly, the level of confidence and competence that a student has in acquiring English could have an effect on the decisions she makes about persisting in college.

True to the research that has been discussed, many of the College of Attainment Potential students do not persist to graduation. Using data that was provided by the U.S. Department of Education for the reporting 2009-2010 period, Complete College America (2011) calculated CAP’s graduation rate of “first-time, full-time students completing [a] certificate or degree within 150 percent of normal program time” at 25% (p. 8). This statistic is similar to national graduation statistics for community colleges. A recent American Association for Community Colleges’ (2012) report states that “6 years after college entry, only 30% of low income community college students, 26% of Black students, and 26% of Hispanic students have completed either a degree or a certificate” (p. 14). Could there be some contributing factors that lead to this non-persistence phenomenon? Do the students’ precollege experiences have an impact on the students and the decisions they make to attend the college? What aspirations do the students have for their life? Is the Latin culture a dominant driver in their life? What factors would lead the students to persist or drop out of college?

Though CAP's student profile does not report retention challenges in terms of the ethnic grouping of the students, the Enterprise Campus report definitely reflects a majority Hispanic voice. The top five reasons students give for withdrawing from the college are: lacking finances 59%, transferring to a 4-year institution 55%, working full time 41.5%, caring for dependents 33.1%, and being academically unprepared 22.5% (College of Attainment Potential, 2012). An in-depth phenomenological study of the Latino students on the Enterprise Campus would not only reveal much more about their life experiences but would inform educators on how the students make sense of their lives and the world around them in addressing the phenomenon of persisting in college.

A phenomenological approach was desirable for this study because phenomenology focuses on extrapolating meaning from the participants' lived experiences. According to Creswell (1998), "researchers search for essentials, invariant structure (or essence) or the central underlying meaning of the experience and emphasize the intentionality of consciousness where experiences contain both the outward appearance and inward consciousness based on memory, image and meaning" (p. 52).

Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

Consequently, the purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand the meaning of the lived experiences of a small group of Latino students as they seek to earn a postsecondary degree at an urban campus of a two-year Hispanic-serving institution (HSI) in the southeastern United States. Two questions guided this research. They are:

1. What are the lived experiences of a small group of first-generation Latino students at a two-year Hispanic-serving institution in the southeastern United States?

2. How do these first-generation Latino community college students perceive their sense of self through their lived experiences and how does their perception influence their persistence in college?

Answers to these questions shed light on what Latino students face in their everyday lives and how they arrive at the decisions they make.

The research process that I used was modeled off Groenewald's (2004) experiences. Faculty recommended possible student participants to me. I contacted them, explained the purpose of the research, and invited them to participate in the study. I also found other students when I walked the hallways during class changes or when I attended campus events that were planned for students by the Student Life department. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and audio taped. Text from the interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed for themes. Further analysis was conducted to derive meaning from the participants' responses.

Conceptual Framework and Research Design

Moran (2002) defines phenomenology as “a way of *seeing* (emphasized in text) rather than a set of doctrines” (p. 1). This means that phenomenology falls under the interpretive research paradigm, which is interpreting or giving meaning to the realities of the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Consequently, a careful but profound analysis of the phenomenon, barring the interference of researcher bias, is necessary in order to discover meaning, which subsequently leads to the understanding of the phenomenon.

Regarding the usefulness of a conceptual framework, Smyth (2004) states that it is “a tool to scaffold research, and therefore, to assist a researcher to make meaning of subsequent findings” (para. 2). Because the purpose of this study is to make meaning of the lived

experiences of the participants, social and cultural capital and habitus as described by French sociologist and philosopher, Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002), forms one of the dimensions of the conceptual framework. Also, the social and cultural impact that today’s society has on young college students, aged 18 to 25 years, is explored through Jeffrey Arnett’s work on emerging adulthood. Lastly, the third dimension of the conceptual framework focuses on the experiences of adult students, those who are over 25 years. The work of Carol Kasworm concerning adult learners and their identity is employed. Consequently, the conceptual framework guided the framing of the questions that were used in a semi-structured interview with each participant. I was mindful, however, that because this is a qualitative research study, the conceptual framework could have changed as the research progressed. However, according to Miles and Huberman (1994), it is appropriate for a researcher to have some rudimentary idea of a conceptual framework at the beginning of the research.

Significance of the Study

Since this was a qualitative study involving a small number of participants, the results are not generalizable to the larger Latino community college student population. However, findings from this research might be transferable to similar HSI campuses in the southeastern United States where the Latino population is similar to the one in this study. Another sector that could benefit from the findings of this study is the emerging HSI. An emerging HSI is an institution that has between 15 and 24 percent Latino enrollment (Santiago & Andrade, 2010). Emerging HSIs are on the rise in the southeastern United States as well as elsewhere as more Latinos are pursuing postsecondary studies (Excelencia in Education, n.d.). Above all, from a local perspective, the knowledge gained from this research is expected to be valuable to faculty, student services personnel, and administrators at CAP. Faculty can understand how much

establishing interpersonal relationships in and out of the classroom has an impact on the students; student services personnel can discover what is important to student persistence and plan appropriate co-curricular activities and services; finally, administrators, will be better able to set policy, make recommendations, and design intervention strategies in an effort to improve the students' chances of success.

Definition of Terms

The following is a clarification of terms used in the study.

Hispanic/Latino

The U.S. government states that “a Hispanic or Latino [is] a member of an ethnic group that traces its roots to 20 Spanish-speaking nations from Latin America and Spain itself” (Passel & Taylor, 2009). Consequently, both terms are used interchangeably in this study.

Hispanic-serving institution

A Hispanic-serving institution (HSI) is a college or university whose enrollment of Hispanic students amounts to a minimum of 25 % of all students enrolled at the institution (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, 2009).

First-generation student

The National Center for Education Statistics defines first-generation students as “those whose parents' highest level of education is a high school diploma or less” (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998, p. 7). For the purposes of this study, I am also clarifying that this definition applies to both parents.

Summary and Organization of Dissertation

The issue that Hispanic students in large numbers continue to not earn a postsecondary degree or credential was introduced in this chapter. The matter is even more alarming at the community-college level, especially as Hispanic students have found community colleges appealing for their pursuance of a higher education. I then put forward the idea that a missing piece to solving the persistence problem could be found in my gaining an understanding of the lived experiences of the students. In chapter 2, a review of the literature that pertains to college student persistence and a proposed conceptual framework for the study are provided. Chapter 3 is a discussion of the research paradigm—Husserl’s phenomenological philosophy—that guided this study as well as the phenomenological methodology that was employed. Chapter 4 includes an analysis of the data, chapter 5 contains a discussion of the study’s findings, and chapter 6 presents reflections of the findings.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Current literature continues to reveal that achieving favorable rates of undergraduate student persistence still eludes many institutions in higher education today some forty years after student retention research began (ACT, 2004). It is necessary at this point to differentiate between retention and persistence. Retention is an institutional practice of maintaining student membership (Reason, 2009). It assumes quantitative properties as its goal is to ensure that a high number of students remains enrolled at an institution. Persistence is maintaining membership at the institution with the view of achieving a desired goal (Reason, 2009). Persistence assumes qualitative properties as the feelings and experiences of those who persist become the focus of study. This study concentrated on persistence, the latter phenomenon.

A close examination of the literature reveals that over the decades several theories and/or models have been proposed to explain retention and, by extension, persistence, but they have been unable to solve the mystery that encompasses the concept of persistence (Cabrera, Castaneda, Nora, & Hengstler, 1992b; Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Kinzie, 2009). These works, however, have been instrumental in demonstrating that the phenomenon of college persistence is both dynamic and multi-faceted. In this chapter, I examine the work of prominent theorists associated with persistence studies, profile the students for whom this study was conducted, examine two constructs that are associated with persistence, and establish a conceptual framework for the study.

The Work of Theorists

Vincent Tinto has become a notable stalwart in persistence studies ever since his interactionist theory was first published in 1975 (Braxton, 2000). Tinto's original theory and subsequent revised versions determined that student success was dependent on how well students integrated academically and socially at the institution. Academic integration was subdivided into two components: structural and normative integrations. Students who achieved academic integration succeeded in performing at an academic level that was congruent with the institution's guidelines—structural integration (Braxton, 2000). Intellectual achievement, on the other hand, was equivalent to normative integration. Social integration took into account the kinds of social relationships that students developed. Those relationships could be nonhierarchical—students with peers—or hierarchical—students with faculty and staff.

Tinto recognized that students did not enter college detached from their previous experiences (Braxton, 2000). Rather, students' precollege characteristics, such as prior academic accomplishments, family history, and socioeconomic status were essential in determining their likelihood to remain at the institution. In fact, Tinto (1993) posited that based on the students' characteristics upon entering the institution, they made two commitments. One was a personal goal commitment, and the other was a commitment to the institution. Over time, the students' personal commitment merged with their institutional commitment to consolidate an academic and social integration in the institution.

Having two commitments was only one aspect of Tinto's theory. Another aspect was that students' combined academic and social integration followed a certain path, which according to Tinto (1988), was reminiscent of anthropologist, Arnold Van Gennep's study, *The Rites of*

Passage. Van Gennepe identified three stages through which individuals aspiring to become members of tribal societies had to proceed. Those stages were named “the stages of separation, transition, and incorporation” (Tinto, 1988, p. 440). Tinto theorized that students who were seeking to become integrated into the college environment had experiences that paralleled Van Gennepe’s stages. He replaced Van Gennepe’s title, *The Rites of Passage*, with an institution-appropriate title, the Stages of Student Departure but retained Van Gennepe’s names for the stages.

Tinto (1988) argued that upon entering the institution, a student had to forsake the relationships she had had previously. The subjects of those relationships included family and friends. That relationship breaking phase was the stage of separation. Remnants of the separation stage were still evident as the student passed through the second phase, the transition stage. During that period of the student’s life, the student, in varying degrees, wavered between her past and current relationships as well as experienced a good deal of emotional upheaval. It was at that stage that the student decided whether to continue with the two commitments to herself and to the institution and persist toward educational attainment or to depart from the institution. If the student persisted, she then entered the incorporation stage to become an academically and socially integrated member of the college community.

Needless to say, not all theorists agreed with Tinto’s ideas and have been very vocal with their criticisms (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1977; Duquette, 2000; Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000; Torres, & Solberg, 2001). One major criticism has been that Tinto’s theory emerged at a time when the American undergraduate postsecondary education system was small and primarily uniform in character. For the most part, students were White, and they were from the financially stable middle and upper classes of the society (Dey & Hurtado, 2005). Students between the ages of 17 and 23 embarked full time on four-year baccalaureate degree programs at residential

colleges. Therefore, such a context made Tinto's explanation for student non-persistence a reasonable theory at that time.

However, other theorists, recognizing that Tinto's ideas did not include all students, proffered other theories of their own. Astin's (1999) theory of student involvement, for instance, embraced two principles: time and effort. According to Astin, an involved student was one who set aside time and exerted effort for the activity—academic, social, or co-curricular—in which the student engaged. Simply put, the more involved the student was in her activities of interest, the less likely it would be that the student would drop out of the institution. The assumption here, though, was that the onus of student involvement lay on the student herself and she was equipped with psychological tools like motivation, self-esteem, and locus of control to manage the events that occurred in her life (Astin, 1999). Though Astin's theory was much simpler than Tinto's, it could have overlooked some students, too. Those students who worked part time may have had neither the time nor the energy to be actively involved in college activities. Those students could also have been facing family and work challenges which took precedence over their campus activities. Clearly, those students' abilities to be involved in college activities would be greatly affected by circumstances outside their realm of control.

Another model that was used to explain student departure from college was the psychological model of college student development that was advanced by Bean and Eaton (2000). Whereas Tinto's theory was grounded in sociology, Bean and Eaton's model was grounded in psychology. Student behavior was central to the psychological model. Psychological processes involving attitudes, adjustment to environments, student perceptions regarding their self-efficacy, and their abilities to control life's circumstantial outcomes influenced the actions

students took. Their decision to persist and become fully integrated into the institution was a combination of their beliefs, past behavior, and psychological processes.

All the theories discussed so far have viewed student persistence from the perspective of students engaging in or disengaging from activities as a result of distinct academic, social, or psychological factors. Absent from these theories was the impact of the students' culture and social class on their decisions to persist or not. French sociologist and educator, Pierre Bourdieu, dealt with those elements in his theory of social reproduction (Berger, 2000). Bourdieu argued that members of a society had access to different kinds of resources or capitals. The most frequently identified capitals were: (a) economic capital, pertaining to finances; (b) cultural capital, pertaining to knowledge acquisition; and (c) social capital, pertaining to a network of social contacts and trust building. How individuals utilized their capitals in their daily lives determined the level of success that they were able to achieve in the society. Not surprisingly, it was usually the upper classes that had large reserves of capitals that they were able to wield and use as tender to further enhance their social standing. On the contrary, the members of the lower classes generally had capital deficits and, therefore, lacked the requisite skills to be able to navigate their way through society's jungle to improve their social status.

Financial terms were deliberately chosen in the aforementioned paragraph to assist in explaining Bourdieu's concept because, according to Bourdieu, "economic capital was at the root of all the other types of capital" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 54). Bourdieu used the analogy of economic capital, banking, and investments to demonstrate the value that capitals carry. In a profitable financial situation, the economic value of the investment would increase and would sustain or reproduce the investor's lifestyle within the society. Similarly, investments in cultural and social capitals were quite profitable as they could ensure socially upward mobility within the society, or

the maintenance of the society's hierarchical structure, hence the term social reproduction (Bourdieu, 1973).

Though economic capital has been used by a few researchers in persistence studies (Berger, 2000), some studies have shown that rather than treat financial needs and resources as a separate construct, there was a place for it in social reproduction theory when one considered that knowledge of access to financial assistance and the subsequent provision of aid factored in the students' decision to leave college (Cabrera, Nora, & Castaneda, 1993; St. John, Cabrera, Nora, & Asker, 2000). With economic capital having receded to the background, the focus then can be placed on cultural and social capitals.

Bourdieu (1986) identified three forms of cultural capital. They were the embodied, the objectified, and the institutionalized state. Embodied cultural capital was the information to which the individual had access, had retained, and had used. Information in the embodied state became a fundamental part of the individual. In the education context, a student who knew about the college application processes would have embodied cultural capital. Embodied capital transformed into objectified capital when the individual possessed a symbolic representation of cultural capital. A student's ownership of a book as supplementary resource material was an example of objectified capital. Thirdly, the institutionalized state was cultural capital at the highest level. That was where an institution recognized and rewarded the individual's cultural capital capacities. When a student earned her diploma, that student experienced the institutionalized state.

Cultural capital was not, however, a singular phenomenon; it worked in conjunction with the concept of habitus, an innate communicative sense that conditioned and directed one's thought processes. More precisely, Bourdieu (as cited in Di Maggio, 1979) defined habitus as:

A system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks, thanks to analogical transfers of schemes permitting the solution of similarly shaped problems. (p. 1464)

It is important to point out two considerations here. First, though habitus was a lasting system, it was not stagnant; it began in a person's childhood, but it continually changed as the person had new experiences with the external world (DiMaggio, 1979). Second, the *perceptions, appreciations and actions* of the above definition will appear later in this chapter as researchers make a connection between habitus and the student's aspirations and expectations in reference to psychosocial factors that impact a student's decision to persist in college.

Social capital, as envisioned by Bourdieu (1986), was closely annexed to cultural capital. The network of contacts that social capital provided an individual served two purposes. The individual's sphere of relationships was extended, and, as a result, her acquisition of cultural capital was augmented.

Bourdieu's conceptual framework of habitus alongside cultural capital and social capital was made complete with the inclusion of one more dimension: that of field. Field was the context in which the capitals operated (Dumais, 2002; McDonough & Nunez, 2007). A field was populated by groups of people, and it was far from being placid as one group struggled to dominate another (DiMaggio, 1979; Dumais, 2002; McDonough & Nunez, 2007). Of significance was that the capitals were not viable without a field (Dumais, 2002), and the functioning of habitus generated practice or action within the field.

Thus, drawing on Bourdieu's conceptual framework, it becomes possible to recreate a framework that is quite applicable to higher education. The institution is the field while the students who come from different social classes have varying levels of cultural and social capitals. Not only do struggles for dominance arise among the student groups, but between institutional leaders and students themselves. Students enriched with large reserves of habitus along with cultural and social capitals fare differently from those who have limited amounts of capitals. The students' ultimate decisions are indicative of the practices that have been shaped by their habitus.

From the outset, Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction appeared to be an antithetical approach to confronting the issue of college student persistence, but on closer examination, the tenets of Bourdieu's framework do have merit. The non-traditional student coming from a multicultural background with limited financial resources who had been overlooked in Tinto's model is accounted for in Bourdieu's. A student's perceptions about the college experience can be gained independently of any inconvenient constraints; that would avoid having the student experience the pressure of having to expend time and effort in order to measure the student's level of involvement as in Astin's model. Then there is the question of how much of a role the institution plays in the student's efforts to persist. In addition, Bean and Eaton's psychosocial characteristics can be further explored to see how they intersect with habitus within the domains of cultural and social capitals. What becomes evident in this theoretical review is that solutions to the challenges that obstruct college student persistence need to come from heretofore unexplored avenues. Pascarella and Terenzini (1998) supported this view by acknowledging that with such a diverse group of students as there is in higher education, "a broad repertoire of approaches to inquiry in research" is necessary (p. 155).

Student Profile

Data from the National Center for Education Statistics reveal that the postsecondary education landscape has become more diverse in the past thirty-five years (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010). The percentage of former high school students enrolling in postsecondary institutions immediately upon graduating from high school has reflected an increase across the board for the three ethnic groups that were examined (Table 1). However, Black and Hispanic enrollment has continued to trail White enrollment by a significantly large gap. The Hispanic enrollment trend for young high school graduates is alarming as Hispanics have become the majority minority race in the country. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2011b), 43% of the U.S. population is Hispanic. Yet, undergraduate Hispanic representation does not parallel the percentages that are seen in the wider society.

Table 1

College Enrollment of Recent High School Graduates

Year	White	Black	Hispanic
1980	49.8%	42.7%	52.0%
2008	71.7%	55.7%	63.9%
Total Gain	21.9%	13%	11.6%

One valid and often used explanation is that Hispanics are generally from the lower socioeconomic sector of the society and, as such, live in school districts where the quality of education is subpar in comparison to the type of education that is available in affluent school districts (Gandara, 2011). However, could there be other reasons why Hispanic students are not enrolling in greater numbers? What have the experiences of previous college enrollees been like?

What messages have previous Hispanic college students conveyed to potential successor students that could have discouraged them from enrolling in college? Do the structures within U.S. higher education repel prospective minority students instead of attract them? At the same time one cannot overlook those Hispanic students, who have, in fact, persisted and graduated. What lessons could they impart to those who seek answers? In what ways could the college experiences of those who persisted be replicated and used as a standard for persistence? With so many questions still unanswered, it is apt to say that on one hand, students can be identified because of their ethnicity, but on the other hand, much information about the students is still lacking.

Another important observation about undergraduate students in general is that those who attend a 4-year college or university are more likely to graduate with their baccalaureate degrees than students who begin their postsecondary journey at a community college with the intention of transferring to a 4-year institution (Long & Kurlaender, 2009). The authors discovered that in Ohio, community college students were 14.5% less likely to attain their baccalaureate degree after nine years. Other researchers have attested to similar findings (Radford, Berkner, Wheelless, & Shepherd, 2010).

However, in other studies where the performance of community college transfer students to baccalaureate institutions was examined, researchers, such as Carlan and Byxbe (2000) and Wang (2009) made some positive discoveries. For instance, Carlan and Byxbe (2000) found that in the long term, transfer students performed as well as native students, those students who started their studies at a 4-year institution. They found that community college transfer students encountered an academically rough first semester while adjusting to more intense coursework and demanding grading requirements at the new institution. Those students did initially have

lower grade point averages (GPA) and, as a result, were described as experiencing transfer shock (Thurmond, 2007). Nevertheless, the transfer students did rebound and by the time they graduated, their GPAs were on a par with the GPAs of native students (Carlan & Byxbe, 2000).

Using data from the 1998 National Education Longitudinal Study and the Postsecondary Education Transcript Study, Wang (2009) identified several factors that would indicate the likelihood of community college transfer students earning a baccalaureate degree. Those factors included gender—females were more likely than males—and the strength of the transferees' GPAs and goals and expectations. Concerning the latter factor—goals and expectations—those students who had decided, from their tenth grade year in high school, to take the community college then transfer to university route were more likely to succeed at the university level than those students who made the decision to transfer after they started at the community college.

Whereas the transferees in the Carlan and Byxbe (2000) and the Wang (2009) studies were not differentiated according to their ethnicity, other studies that focused on Hispanic transfer students have given mixed results as to baccalaureate degree attainment. Kurlaender (2006), for example, found that Hispanic transfer students did not perform well when they went to a 4-year institution. Gonzalez and Hilmer (2006), on the other hand, found that by diverting to a community college before transferring to a 4-year institution, Hispanic students improved their chances of attaining a baccalaureate degree. Other researchers have pointed out that there were discrepancies in how the data were collected, analyzed, and compared (Melguizo, Kienzl, & Alfonso, 2011). The example that the authors gave was that a student who had completed two years at a community college was not necessarily on the same level as a student who had completed two years at a 4-year institution.

Despite the inconsistencies in the study results done on Hispanic community college transfer students, what is clear is that community colleges are popular among Hispanic students. Forty-six percent of Hispanics aged 18 to 24 attend community colleges (Fry, 2011). Hispanic students find community colleges appealing for several reasons. They include the community colleges' open access admissions policy that accepts students who possess a high school diploma or an equivalent credential, the considerably lower tuition rates at community colleges than at 4-year institutions, the welcome given to academically low performing students, and the resources that are made available to help underachieving students overcome their deficiencies (Gonzalez & Hilmer, 2006).

Based on the discussion so far, one could mistakenly believe that community college students are traditional students. For the most part, they are not. Community colleges are by no means simple in terms of organizational structure (Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2003). On the contrary, they are complex systems with multiple missions designed to include the variety of programs that the colleges offer (McPhail & McPhail, 2006; Bailey & Averianova, 1999). Their student populations are equally diverse (Kane & Rouse, 1999). Though students can be as young as the upper teenage years, there is no limit as to how old students could be. Full-time and part-time descriptors apply to both the educational and employment statuses of the students. Flexible scheduling gives students the opportunity to attend classes throughout the day and night and on weekends while not neglecting their family responsibilities. Multicultural students whose primary language may or may not be English frequent community college campuses. First-generation students are regular attendees (Pascarella, Wolniak, Pierson, & Terenzini, 2003; Engle, 2007). Furthermore, community colleges willingly accept the academically challenged,

the underserved, and the economically disadvantaged (Solozano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005). In essence, community colleges reflect a unique blend of all that constitutes Americana.

Though this study is about Hispanic community college students, most of the research on Hispanic students has been conducted at 4-year institutions, such as the studies by Maestas, Vaquera and Munoz Zehr (2007) at the University of New Mexico, Museus and Quaye (2009) at “a large, rural, public, research university (p. 74), and Strayhorn (2008) at several 4-year institutions. In some cases, very relevant persistence research has been conducted on other than Hispanic students, and I opted to review those studies because the study participants shared some of the same attributes that the Hispanic community college students in this study have, and the findings from those studies have served to enrich this discussion. I have referred to those studies as I continued to develop the student profile on Hispanic students. In addition, I interspersed the literature on 4-year institutions with occasional references to research done at 2-year institutions.

In the same vein, most of the researchers employed the quantitative approach in their studies. Some of the quantitative studies that have been referred to are Desmond and Turley’s (2009) “The Role of Familism in Explaining the Hispanic-White College Application Gap,” Hausmann, Schofield, and Woods’ (2007) “Sense of Belonging as a Predictor of Intentions to Persist Among African American and White First-Year College Students,” Swenson, Nordstrom, and Hiester’s (2008) “The Role of Peer Relationships in Adjustment to College,” and Paul and Brier’s (2001) “Friendsickness in the Transition to College: Precollege Predictors and College Adjustment Correlates.” I briefly overviewed those studies as well as supplemented the discussion with details from qualitative studies, like Deil-Amen and Rosenbaum’s (2003) “The Social Prerequisites of Success: Can College Structure Reduce the Need for Social Know-How?,” Hand and Payne’s (2008) “First-Generation College Students: A Study of Appalachian

Student Success,” and Cejda and Rhodes’ (2004) “Through the Pipeline: The Role of Faculty in Promoting Associate Degree Completion among Hispanic Students.” Finally, the studies that were reviewed were selected on the basis of how well they provided information on the factors that contribute to the persistence of Hispanic college students. The discussion was based on two constructs that, in many cases, have emerged jointly from the literature. Those constructs are personal relationships and psychosocial factors.

Personal Relationships and Psychosocial Factors

The Family

There is resounding evidence in the literature to demonstrate that the Hispanic college student experience is impacted, positively and negatively, by different types of personal relationships. Desmond and Lopez Turley (2009) referred to the close-knit Hispanic family relationship between immediate and extended family members as familism. In honoring the principles that are enshrined in familism, an individual denies herself and turns her attention to supporting her community of relatives. According to the researchers, there were advantages and disadvantages to familism. On the one hand, strong family support provided encouragement to students to take full advantage of their educational opportunities. On the other hand, a family’s responsibilities could interfere with a college student’s educational plans.

Still, in another study, family support lost its detrimental impact once it was tempered with self-efficacy (Torres & Solberg, 2001). Bandura (1999) defined self-efficacy as “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to manage prospective situations” (p. 2). An example of a prospective situation is college persistence. Findings from the Torres and Solberg’s (2001) study revealed that those Hispanic students who expressed an

intention to persist had a combination of a high level of self-efficacy and family support. One drawback of the study was how self-efficacy was measured. Participants were given the College Self-Efficacy Inventory to complete. Each of the 20 items was rated on a 10-point scale with “0” meaning the survey taker had no confidence and “9” meaning the survey taker was very confident. A question that one has to consider is: can there be a uniform quantitative measurement for confidence? Though it is encouraging to know that positive self-efficacy leads to persistence in college, conducting further study in the qualitative arena would be helpful in explaining the conditions under which a participant’s self-efficacy increases or decreases and how the participant uses her self-efficacy to navigate familism’s cultural traditions.

Unfortunately, qualitative self-efficacy studies were very rare (Tsang, Hui, & Law, 2011). Zeldin and Pajares (2000) in calling for more qualitative studies in self-efficacy have said:

Quantitative efforts in the study of self-efficacy should be complemented by qualitative studies aimed at exploring how efficacy beliefs are developed, how students perceive that these beliefs influence their academic attainments and the academic paths they follow, and how the beliefs influence choices, effort, persistence, perseverance, and resiliency. (p. 221)

Although the Zeldin and Pajares’ qualitative study did not concern community college or Hispanic students, the study’s participants attributed their development of self-efficacy to the encouraging interactions that they had with their family, teachers, peers, and supervisors. The self-satisfaction and confidence that the participants gained as a result of their heightened self-efficacy led to their describing themselves as “persistent” and “resilient” (p. 233).

Viewed from the perspective of the dominant American culture, the parents of Hispanic middle school parents in a Texas community exhibited a lack of cultural capital concerning higher education for their children (McCallister, Evans, & Illich, 2010). Though the parents

highly valued a postsecondary education, they had no concept of how they were to prepare their children academically and themselves financially for it. The researchers pointed out a typical Latino behavior: in the home, the family was supreme; at school, the family relinquished its parental role to the school administrators and teachers. A report produced by the Pew Research Center on Latino educational attainment revealed a similar dichotomy in Hispanic thinking (Lopez, 2009). The parents of more than 75% of the youth who participated in the survey said that they “placed a great emphasis on the need to go to college” (p. 3), and 89% of the Hispanic youth who responded to the survey said that earning a college degree was important. However, in actuality, less than 50% of the survey participants planned to go to college. What could be causing this discrepancy? Are the roots of familism so deeply ingrained in the Hispanic cultural heritage that it becomes an escape device that shields individuals from making long-term commitments to pursuing and persisting in postsecondary education?

Or, is there another phenomenon emerging as some of the research seemed to suggest? Fuligni and Pedersen (2002) did a longitudinal study on a group of Latinos when they were in the twelfth grade and three years later. The data provided information on the perceptions of the participants when they were adolescents as well as when they were adults. Therefore, the data revealed how the adolescents transitioned into adulthood. The researchers discovered that the participants had conflicting lives. For instance, chronologically, they felt that they were adults and assumed the expectation—independence—of being adults, but that independence did not lead them away from their family, as in the traditional U.S. culture; instead, independence led the participants to foster a sense of obligation toward their family. Women and first-generation participants were strongly motivated to maintain that sense of obligation toward their family. The researchers noted that the parents were not surveyed to see if they had imposed a sense of

obligation on their offspring or if the offspring had found themselves entrapped in a transitioning life course of changing roles and expectations.

Another point arising from the Fuligni and Pedersen (2002) study is the correlation between a sense of obligation toward family and educational persistence. Those high school students who had low GPAs persisted in their studies because of their sense of obligation to please their family members and make them proud. Does the same thing happen at the postsecondary level? That is still to be discovered. In fact, Fuligni and Pedersen observed that in their findings there were high school graduates who, because of the sense of obligation to their family, sought employment after leaving high school. One year later, that group of participants continued to work, but, again, because of their sense of obligation to their family, chose to pursue postsecondary studies. The question that the researchers asked was if that specific group of participants would be able to fulfill both commitments or if they would abandon one sometime in the future.

In a study about attitudinal familism, where attitudinal familism means “attitudes toward the family” (Esparza & Sanchez, 2008, p. 194), the researchers discovered that a “high sense of familism was related to high academic grades for students whose mothers had less than a high school degree” (Esparza & Sanchez, 2008, p. 199). Granted that the subjects in the Esparza and Sanchez study were high school students, the findings again suggested that with regard to postsecondary education, the impact of the Latina mother in developing attitudinal familism and how that connects to the persistence of the college student was highly relevant.

Peers

The social relationships of friends acquired new meaning as friends played an important role for the students in the adjustment to college process (Swenson, Nordstrom, & Hiester, 2008). Adjustment to college was thought of as being one of the conditions that ultimately led to student persistence (Swenson et al., 2008). Adjustment was achieved through the satisfying of certain psychological needs, such as the desire for “academic, social, emotional/personal, and institutional attachment” (Swenson et al., 2008, p. 556). Swenson et al. studied the nature and the timing of the friendship. They discovered that old high school friends were a good carry over in the first few weeks of the first semester as they provided emotional/personal adjustment and institutional attachment to the new college students. However, by the second half of the semester, new college friendships should be surpassing the old high school friendships if academic and social adjustment was to occur.

Dennis, Phinney, and Chuateco (2005) conducted a study on first-generation ethnic minority students, the majority of whom were Hispanics, to see how motivation for attending college and parental and peer support contributed to their success in college. Two important insights were gained from that study. First, the participants favored their personal motivation to attend college over their family’s motivation for them to attend. Second, the majority of the students valued the support of their friends over family support. Such findings were in contrast with the expected familism relationship. One has to wonder, however, what personal emotional conflicts the students endured as they shifted between the traditional world of their family and the more contemporary world of their peers. Can a compromise be reached? Or, does persistence mean the loss of one branch of support?

The reality that a loss can occur and the implications that follow are the focus of Paul and Brier's (2001) study. The loss in question was the loss of precollege friends. Termed friendsickness, it is defined as "a pressing relational challenge for new college students that is induced by moving away from an established network of friends" (Paul & Brier, 2001, p. 77). According to the study, someone experiencing friendsickness went through a grieving process similar to what occurred at the time of the death of a loved one. The resulting feelings in the student were a lack of self-esteem and loneliness stemming from an inability to socially integrate with peers. These are definitely conditions that can get in the way of a student's college adjustment and can later affect her persistence.

Adult students. It is important to note that the friendship studies were all conducted on traditional-age students not older adult students who are typically found on a community college campus. However, Zwerling (1992) elucidated the plight of adult first-generation college students by reporting on Selma Rodriguez's (a pseudonym) experience. A Puerto Rican, Selma became a student at 42 years of age. Though her husband and her children encouraged her in her endeavors, Selma used expressions that were far from encouraging in describing her inner feelings. She said that her high school friends "were ambivalent about her success" (p. 52). Selma was caught up in an emotional struggle with one friend, in particular, who, Selma felt, did not want Selma to continue studying lest she lost her. Selma also noted that when she reflected on her past and her reluctance to pursue higher education, she had been submitting to the "outside forces" (p. 52) that were telling her that what with being a Hispanic and female she would not be successful in her endeavors.

Selma's experience surely gave a glimpse into the world of the adult learner. However, the literature on adult learners indicated that the adult learner segment in society is very broad,

aged 25 to 64 years, encompasses students who pursue postsecondary studies for a number of reasons, such as being in the workforce but wanting to improve their earning potential or requiring new skills as they seek to reenter the workforce, (Hagedorn, 2005; Sissel, Hansman, & Kasworm, 2001; Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2010). What the data revealed is that many of the adult learners do not persist until they graduate. In Florida, for example, 21.8% of adults aged 25 to 64 were tracked by the 2010 U.S. Census to be no longer enrolled in a postsecondary institution and not having earned a degree (Florida College Access Network, 2012). The Florida statistics is, in fact, indicative of a national trend (Florida College Access Network, 2012).

Yet, over the years different researchers have attempted to address the needs of adult learners. Most notably, there was andragogy, Knowles' theory of adult learning, which identified five principles that facilitated adult learning in the classroom (Chaves, 2006; Boulmetis, 1999). But the continued attrition of adult learners from higher education clearly indicated that adult learners had other needs to be met. Hagedorn (2005) suggested that institutional policies were behind the times and characterized adult students as square pegs that were trying to fit into the round holes of institutional practices that were designed for traditional-aged students.

In another study, some participants were stopout students. That is, they had been enrolled at an institution at some time in the past, stopped attending, and some years later reenrolled at the same or another institution to continue with their studies (Reason, 2009). What is important about this group of returning students is the reasons they gave for returning to college were the same reasons they gave for having left college (Hensley & Kinsler, 2001). They simply reoriented those reasons to fit their current life situation; “prior stressors—being older, divorced, having children, financial difficulties, negative academic experiences, lack of direction—were now viewed as motivating forces, urging students on toward continued

enrollment” (p. 98). The results of this study suggested that, especially for this group of learners, even though they were motivated, some additional support would need to be provided for them at the institution to lessen the chances of those students stopping out again, further delaying their attainment of their goals.

Still in another study involving a cohort of adult learners, Harris (2006) discovered that adult learners valued the “feeling of community” and “positive peer-group interactions” (p. 101) that the cohort-nature of the group provided them. It is understandable that returning adult learners would desire to be a part of a community and the findings in this study would seem to underscore the point that I had made about the previous study with adult learners being exposed to a different kind of experience their second time around to facilitate their persistence in college.

First-generation students. Being labeled a first-generation minority student immediately carries negative connotations in much of the research literature. For instance, the first characteristic that is usually discussed is the low socioeconomic status of the students, which is felt, incapacitates the students and prevents them from completing their studies when they do decide to enroll in higher education (Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996; Inman & Mayes, 1999; Choy, S. 2001).

However, Hand and Payne (2008), who studied first-generation students in the Appalachian region of the United States, discovered that blaming poverty for the failure of first-generation students to complete their studies was a misdiagnosis of the problem. Poverty was not so much a lack of financial resources as it was a “distinct culture” (p. 12). I acknowledge that the preceding definition of poverty has been criticized by a few writers (Bomer, Dworin, May, & Semingson, 2008; Sato & Lensmire, 2009) who asserted that Payne, one of the co-researchers,

had articulated a similar sentiment about poverty on other occasions. Payne's critics considered her stance to be that of a deficit-thinking-generated stereotypical view that is assigned to a vulnerable group of people. According to Bensimon (2005), deficit thinking is reflected in the way educational practitioners

are inclined to attribute differences in educational outcomes for black, Hispanic, and Native American students, such as lower rates of retention or degree completion, to cultural stereotypes, inadequate socialization, or lack of motivation and initiative on the part of the students. (p. 102)

Notwithstanding, Payne, who was cited in Hand and Payne (2008) because of a previous article that she had written, identified eight conditions that needed to be considered when tackling the problem of poverty. They were "financial, emotional, mental, spiritual, physical, support systems, relationships/role models, and knowledge of hidden rules" (p. 12). The majority of the preceding conditions do intersect with the identified constructs for this study all the more affirming that the phenomenon, minority student persistence, lies in approaching the research from a cultural and social perspective. Other researchers have come to a similar conclusion about first-generation students without taking the financial resources route (Dumais & Ward, 2010; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak & Terenzini, 2004; Martin Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005).

For Dumais and Ward (2010) cultural capital was a vital resource for beginning first-generation students, especially as their parents lacked the necessary knowledge to guide their children through the transition to college process. However, as first-generation students adjusted to their environment, their reliance on parental cultural capital diminished. One suggestion that Dumais and Ward offered was that first-generation students might have begun to take on new dimensions to their habitus, such as feeling "a sense of belonging" (p. 262).

Having shifts in habitus' properties is a real possibility because the sense of belonging literature does reveal that acquiring a sense of belonging is a developmental process which is closely associated with college adjustment (Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007). Other highlights of the research findings revealed that Hispanic students' sense of belonging increased and improved when Hispanic students developed a personal relationship with a diverse group of peers (Strayhorn, 2008). Hurtado and Carter (1997) provided a new interpretation for the sense of belonging acquisition, which coincidentally challenged Tinto's separation theory. Whereas Tinto's (1993) theory expected students to separate themselves from their family in pursuit of social integration on campus, Hurtado and Carter found that Hispanic students did achieve a sense of belonging without divorcing themselves from their families. Hurtado and Carter surmised that maybe, Hispanic students "were finding ways to become *interdependent* (emphasized in original) with their families during college, not completely independent" (p. 339) of their families, and they called for further research on the phenomenon. Such an observation led me to wonder if habitus has pacifying and mediating qualities that foster a feeling of achievement and wellbeing as one matures and carves out one's sense of self.

Based on their research findings, Pascarella, Pierson, et al. (2004) viewed social capital as an apparatus whose functionality increased over time as the first-generation students participated in extra-curricular activities. The added benefit from this outlook was that as a result of the enhanced social capital, first-generation students were able to improve their cultural capital. Findings in the Martin Lohfink and Paulsen (2005) study actually contradicted the findings of the Pascarella, Pierson, et al. study. First-generation student participation in academic activities, in other words enhancing cultural capital, was regarded as being more important than participating in social activities (Martin Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005). A question to consider is why

would there be such a discrepancy in results? Both were longitudinal studies conducted on students attending 4-year colleges. However, a major difference is the study period. Participant data in the Pascarella, Pierson, et al. study were collected from 1992 to 1995 while participant data from the Martin Lohfink and Paulsen study were collected from 1996 to 2001. Maybe, differences in institutional types where the data were collected or differences in the types of students surveyed or the number of students represented in the different subgroups or changes in the environment, like an increase in social networking, could account for the disparity.

The Faculty

Another important observation arising from the Martin Lohfink and Paulsen (2005) study is that faculty do play a positive role in the persistence of first-generation students. It is necessary to point out that students desired to meet socially with faculty outside of the classroom (Maestas, Vaquera, & Munoz Zehr, 2007; Cejda & Rhodes, 2004; Barnett, 2011; Schreiner, Noel, Anderson, & Cantwell, 2011). Maestas et al. conducted their study at a major research Hispanic-serving institution (HSI); Cejda and Rhodes conducted a case study at three HSI community colleges; Barnett's study was at an urban non-HSI community college; and the Schreiner et al. study occurred on nine colleges and universities. The institutions in the latter study represented different categories from the Carnegie Classifications for colleges and universities. All four studies had one common theme: the students desired validation from faculty. Rendon (as cited in Rendon, 2002) defined validation as "an enabling, confirming and supportive process initiated by in- and out-of-class agents that foster academic and interpersonal development" (p. 644). Faculty validation for Hispanic students is a natural progression within the social and cultural capitals framework. The more immersed the students become in the institution and the less dependent

they become on family and friends for support, the more they are going to need institutional representatives to provide them with relational and psychological support.

All the discussion about the students' attributes thus far has shown the relational nature of the students' experiences. In other words, students are likely to persist because their psychological wellbeing has been met through the types of personal relationships that they maintain. But, the decision of whether or not to persist is a personal one that can only be made by the student herself. What ultimately leads a student to make the decision she makes? What is her state of mind like? What is her sense of being like? How well has she been advancing through Chickering and Reisser's (Higbee, n.d.) seven vectors of development toward forming her identity?

Foubert, Nixon, Sisson, and Barnes (2005) did a longitudinal study on 18 to 22 year olds at a medium-sized public university to see how the students developed following Chickering and Reisser's vectors (Higbee, n.d.). The findings did not completely support what had been previously thought. There was no disagreement that the students in the study did advance through the seven vectors during their time in college. However, where it was felt that students would advance in the sequence that was determined by Chickering and Reisser, that was not always the case. One example that the researchers gave was that developing purpose is vector six, meaning that students would advance to that vector in their junior or senior years. The study data showed that students in all four year groups were experiencing that vector. Two other findings had to do with gender. The first one confirmed previous findings that women advanced sooner than men in the developing mature interpersonal relationships vector. The researchers classified the second finding as a possible emerging trend that was worth investigating further. It was found that women were more tolerant than men over the span of the four years and that the

women's propensity for tolerance was high from the first year of college. The researchers examined tolerance as a sub-variable of the developing mature interpersonal relationships vector.

What all the research on college students showed is that students are versatile beings; it is not possible to cast one mold that would fit all students. That is a reason why for a study of a group of people with so many attributes and differences, it was prudent to find out what their thoughts were about their life experiences. Their conversations could reveal the "*perceptions, appreciations and actions*" that were mentioned earlier in this chapter to define habitus. In the current literature the closest interpretation would be information pertaining to the students' aspirations and expectations. What follows are two different but equally relevant complementary approaches to the understanding of aspirations.

In the first, Bohon, Kirkpatrick Johnson, and Gorman (2006) made a distinction between aspirations and expectations. Aspirations are lofty ideals with a futuristic outlook that are abstract in quality. Expectations, on the other hand, are practical and more realistic than aspirations. The Bohon et al. study examined college aspirations and expectations of low-income Hispanic adolescents. The findings revealed that differences in aspirations and expectations appeared across ethnic Hispanic groups rather than among individuals. The differences were shaped by the cultural and historical experiences of the group. This revelation is a reminder to me that as the study progresses, I should consider each participant on the basis of her individual contribution to the body of knowledge on college persistence.

The second approach viewed aspirations as investments (Sherwood, 1989). Those who aspire "must allocate their resources between current consumption and future goals and then decide upon an investment strategy for pursuing their ends" (Sherwood, 1989, p. 62). In reality,

they are called on to commit “time, effort, and money” (p. 62) to their investments. This is a profound declaration of aspirants’ responsibilities. One wonders, though, how many students have achieved that level of maturity in their thinking in light of all the other challenges that they face as they attempt to pursue higher education.

The above statement, however, assumes that students are homogenous beings who would mature at the same rate. On the contrary, recent student identity studies have portrayed postsecondary students as being in two distinct life course cohorts rather than the singular traditional cohort of adulthood (Arnett, 2000, 2007). For most of the 20th century, the accepted definition of an adult was one who was no longer a teenager. Coupled with that line of thought is the industrialized society’s view of adulthood: it is a time for marriage, having responsibilities, such as raising a family, and becoming financially stable (Arnett, 2000; Cote, 2000). That stereotypical situation is no longer the case. Researchers, such as Arnett (2000) and Cote (2000), observed and have been studying a phenomenon that has been occurring in western countries, like the United States and Canada, for nearly three decades. Most individuals between 17 and 30 do not consider themselves to be adults. In a study conducted by Arnett on Americans in the aforementioned age group, the participants gave ambiguous answers when they were asked if they thought that they were adults. Their typical responses were “in some respects yes” or “in some respects no” (Arnett, 2000, p. 471). When they were pressed to clarify their responses, they rejoined that they felt that they were between adolescence and adulthood, but they lacked the terminology to fully explain who they were. The frequency of such responses from the participants made Arnett realize that Americans, who were within the 17 to 30 age group toward the end of the 20th century, have had different life experiences from their parents and consequently had a different worldview for themselves. In fact, that age group has delayed

assuming the traditional adult roles that were mentioned earlier. Arnett (2000) has classified the new group of individuals as emerging adults. The primary reason for the emerging adult terminology is not age, but the five characteristics that individuals within that cohort exhibit. The characteristics are: “(a) the age of identity explorations, (b) the age of instability, (c) the self-focused age, (d) the age of feeling in-between, and (e) the age of possibilities” (Arnett, 2007, p. 69). Arnett conceded that emerging adulthood is a life course stage that runs on a continuum between adolescence and adulthood with an overlap on either end of the continuum.

Not surprisingly, emerging adulthood does have an impact on the higher education arena. For example, a student who has changed majors several times might be experiencing the age of identity explorations defining feature of emerging adulthood. Other reflections on this developmental phase are that (a) “college education is often pursued in a nonlinear way, frequently combined with work, and punctuated by periods of nonattendance” (Arnett, 2000, p. 471); (b) emerging adults “are characterized by a high degree of demographic diversity and instability, reflecting the emphasis on change and exploration” (Arnett, 2000, p. 69); and (3) “there are certainly psychosocial differences among emerging adults related to socioeconomic status and ethnic group” (Arnett, 2007, p. 70).

Actually, in a longitudinal study, from 1992 to 2006, conducted on Asian and Latin American families by Fuligni (2007), Fuligni argued that whereas there was an increasing trend among Asian college students to disassociate themselves from maintaining the rigid family obligations that had been set by their parents and their predecessors, the Latin American students had not yet arrived at that spot in their life trajectory. A major difference between participants was that the parents of the Asian students were at a higher economic standing than the Latin American parents because the Asian parents had pursued higher education. In the study, there

were accounts of Asian students struggling with career choices; they felt somewhat obliged to please their parents' whose hard work to ensure a better life for them, their offspring, they appreciated, but at the same time, the Asian participants wanted to study fields that they thought would be more aesthetically fulfilling for them. For instance, May, whose parents were from Hong Kong, was interested in fashion designing and merchandising while her parents wanted her to attend a prestigious 4-year institution. Her parents won in the end (Fulgini, 2007). On the other hand, the Latin American parents did not have the same privileges as the Asian parents, and the study revealed that the family obligation, which is a cultural staple in Latin American families, has remained intact. Based on this study, one question to be considered is for how much longer can that traditional cultural structure of the Latin American family continue in the United States in the face of so many "attacks" from influences ranging from the media to peers? If and when Latin American families from the lower socioeconomic spectrum begin to embrace these cultural changes, how will the changes be reflected in the college students?

Findings in a study led by Arnett (2003) and conducted on emerging adults in three minority groups—African American, Latino, and Asian American—along with White Americans further clarified the concept of emerging adulthood. There was a minimum 70% consensus across all four groups concerning what constituted independence, which is an element in the construct of being an adult. Their responses included, "Accept responsibility for the consequences of your actions," "Decide on personal beliefs and values," "Financially independent from parents," and "Establish equal relationship with parents" (Arnett, 2003, p. 70). However, group differences for other elements indicated to what extent some of the groups have embraced the emerging adulthood trend.

With regard to questions on the Family Capacities scale, there was not a major difference between African Americans and Latinos in their support that both men and women “should ‘become capable of supporting a family financially’ in order to be considered an adult” (Arnett, 2003, p. 71). With both groups, more than 70% supported men while more than 60% supported women. The percentages for Asian Americans were 57% in support of men needing to support a family financially versus 49% in support of women. Among White Americans, 29% were in support of a man needing to support a family financially versus 30% in support of women. Arnett emphasized that the level of support by the minority groups appeared to be based on family obligation values rather than on gender. The theme of family obligations seemed to resonate especially among African Americans and Latinos because when they were asked if they felt that they had reached adulthood, among African Americans, 59% said “yes” as opposed to 34% that said “in some respects yes, in some respects, no” (Arnett, 2003, p. 73). Among Latinos, 48% said “yes” as opposed to 44% that said “in some respects yes, in some respects, no” (Arnett, 2003, p. 73). For White Americans, “the in some respects yes, in some respects, no” response was 60% whereas the response for Asian Americans for the same category was 54%. When the above figures were examined against the demographic backgrounds for the minority groups, the African Americans and Latinos were primarily from low socioeconomic backgrounds while that was not the case for White Americans and Asian Americans. Arnett’s conclusion was that family responsibilities which resulted from early parenthood among low socioeconomic groups had made it necessary for a greater number of African Americans and Latinos to assume adult roles earlier than their emerging adult counterparts in the other ethnic groups, who had not taken on such responsibilities even though they were within the emerging adult age range. I feel that with

the elapse of more time, future studies into this phenomenon will tell whether more Latinos will adapt their lifestyle patterns to become more like emerging adults.

As has been mentioned elsewhere in this study, the ages of community college students run the gamut from 17 to upwards of 70 years. Therefore, since an emerging adulthood phase has been identified, attention needs to be given to “adults” as well. First, for the purposes of this study, participants who were 18 to 25 were characterized as emerging adults. This grouping is still in keeping with Arnett’s model because for Arnett (2000) that is the age group that he focused on in his study, and one of his reasons for doing so was that that is the age range for a traditional student in the context of higher education. Arnett also reiterated that there is fluidity within the emerging adulthood life course, which is why he has made allowances for an overlap on either end of the continuum.

Through extensive study of adult learners, Carol Kasworm (2003, 2005, 2008) has created an arsenal of strategies that adult students need to master as they conquer the many complexities they face as they wend their way through mazes of course schedules, career path options, conflicting emotions, family and work decisions, and networks of people—be they advisors, faculty, and classmates—as they seek to earn academic credentials to improve their lives (Kasworm, 2008). Kasworm’s (2005) interviews with adult community college students revealed that the participants are guided and strengthened by two identity beliefs that they actively construct through their interactions with others.

First, there is the positional identity, which reflects the adult learner’s understanding of how her social position fits into the world in which she lives and works. Membership in that world requires her to interact with others and to take advantage of the resources that are available

to her. The participant discussions revealed three themes that are associated with positional identity: (a) adults judge themselves through beliefs of age-appropriate social norms; (b) adults judge their academic performance through age-related influences; and (c) adults judge themselves in relation to an ideal student image.

The other identity belief, relational identity, is what the adult learner constructs as she interacts with different groups of people and utilizes what she has gained from those experiences to develop a new persona, who can confidently and capably negotiate her way through the new contexts in which she finds herself. Themes associated with that identity are: (a) valued relationships with faculty; (b) relationships with younger students; and (c) relationships and experiences with other adult students. What follows is a perspective from one of the study participants:

We all have a lot in common. We all are reaching out, because we all want to feel good . . . and that we are not making a mistake and we are doing the right thing. . . . And, yes, we are going to remember each other and we are going to help each other, open doors for one another. (Adult student, as cited in Kasworm, 2005, p. 16)

The student's voice definitely demonstrated the kindred spirit that developed among a group of adult students. That spirit appeared to have become a nurturing relationship for all the group members.

In addition to being identity constructors, Kasworm (2008) characterized adult students as being driven or controlled by powerful internal emotional forces. Those forces cast doubt on the adult student's levels of self-confidence and competence and her abilities to achieve academically. Kasworm's antidote for calming the emotional turmoil is what she called "four acts of hope" (p. 33). Each act has a specific purpose. The first act is "seeking entry to college" (p. 28); the second is the adult student's "ongoing engagement in a collegiate environment" (p.

29); the third is for the adult student to focus on “engagement in learning new knowledge as well as new perspectives and potentially new beliefs” (p. 30); and the fourth is to “face challenges in gaining a place, a position, a voice, and a related sense of valued self in the cultural worlds of higher education” (p. 32). What Kasworm’s work demonstrates is that the world of adult students is a daunting one, and it will take an indomitable spirit and tenacity on the part of the adult learner if she intends to succeed.

Establishing a Conceptual Framework

Undoubtedly, the literature review has returned to some of the themes that were discussed at the beginning of the chapter. Somewhere and at some point within an individual’s life trajectory, actions that require prior cultural and social understanding are taken. Habitus could be that initial impetus that drives the individual’s decision to act. Then again, the individual’s behavior could be dictated by the individual’s position in her life course: emerging adult or adult. This synopsis, therefore, serves to affirm that the best way to approach the exploration of the phenomenon of Hispanic student persistence in college is through the lens of Bourdieu’s (1986) cultural capital and habitus, and social capital, Arnett’s (2000, 2007) concept of student identity and emerging adulthood, and Kasworm’s (2005, 2008) concept of adult student identity. A phenomenological approach allows participants the latitude to add their voices to persistence research, which has overwhelmingly been captured from a quantitative perspective. A study using the tenets of Bourdieu, Arnett, and Kasworm as a conceptual framework recognizes the value of paying attention to and addressing the idiosyncrasies of a small group as opposed to adopting a one-size-fits-all mentality, which inevitably runs the risk of overlooking certain subtleties.

Summary

In this chapter, I reviewed the work of prominent theorists in the field of student persistence and argued that even after decades of research, inquiry into the topic has not been exhausted. As the student ethnic composition of colleges and universities has changed, so have the issues relating to persistence been diversified. First-generation status, personal relationships, socio-psychological determinants, and student sense of self are some of the considerations that are applicable to this study. I have proposed that by employing a conceptual framework based on Bourdieu's cultural and social capitals and habitus, Arnett's notion of emerging adulthood, and Kasworm's construct on adult student identity, a phenomenological study be conducted to uncover the lived experiences of students for whom dealing with the matter of whether or not to persist with their studies is a compelling and personal problem.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The goal of this study is to describe and understand an unknown human experience: the meaning Hispanic community college students ascribe to persisting in college. The questions framing this research are:

1. What are the lived experiences of a small group of first-generation Latino students at a two-year Hispanic-serving institution in the southeastern United States?
2. How do these first-generation Latino community college students perceive their sense of self through their lived experiences and how does their perception influence their persistence in college?

As such, I am not seeking to test a theory. Neither am I seeking to establish a causal or a correlational relationship between variables or to arrive at a numerical understanding of the phenomenon under study. Therefore, I have chosen the qualitative rather than quantitative research approach for this study.

A general definition of qualitative research is that it is a type of inquiry that facilitates the social construction of meaning which is derived from a researcher-participant interaction taking place within the natural world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Merriam, 2002). Qualitative research is by no means a closed field of inquiry. In fact, in the second edition of his book *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, Creswell (2007) wrote about some of the changes that have occurred in qualitative research since he published the first edition. One such change was his inclusion of discussion of the interpretive qualitative research approach in the book. Creswell (2007) explained that interpretive qualitative research focuses

“on the self-reflective nature of how qualitative research is conducted, read, and advanced” (p.

3). This approach, he said, is being used with more frequency by qualitative researchers, such as ethnographers, grounded theorists, and phenomenologists.

Based on the discussion in the previous chapter, studies on college student persistence are not new. The researchers in most of those studies have utilized their data from a factual or face value perspective. I want to take the research to another level, a level that is more personal for the participants, and one that the participants may even be unaware of. Therefore, because I am seeking to delve into the human experiences of my participants to uncover what would normally not be accessible to an average observer, I have chosen phenomenology as the research inquiry for this study. Phenomenology is the study of individuals for the purpose of describing the essence of their lived experience as it relates to an identified phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Phenomenology is a unique research approach because the researcher and participants become partners or “co-researchers” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 103) as they work together in the context of semi-structured interviews to generate data that will eventually produce the keys to the phenomenon of persistence to graduation of Hispanic community college students. The assumption behind phenomenology is that there are multiple layers of meaning ascribed to text, and the meaning that is of most significance to the phenomenologist is the one that is the most concealed.

Needless to say, there are several phenomenological orientations. However, the one that I selected for this study is Edmund Husserl’s (1859–1938) transcendental phenomenology.

Transcendental phenomenology is guided by Husserl’s philosophy of which consciousness and acts of consciousness are important features (Moustakas, 1994). According to Husserl, knowledge, as revealed through phenomenology, is arrived at through a process that begins with

the researcher understanding the concepts involved in transcendental phenomenology then undergoing a preparation period before embarking on the research (Moustakas, 1994).

Husserl made a distinction between knowledge that was gained from what could be seen—factual or objective knowledge—and knowledge that was gained from the inner workings of an experience—subjective knowledge (Moustakas, 1994). However, an individual’s understanding of an object will depend on that individual combining her objective and subjective knowledge regarding that object. Ultimately, though, the same object can produce different understandings in different individuals because each individual will approach the object from different subjective perspectives. Hence, Husserl presented his concept of intentionality.

Intentionality involves the directedness of thought that occurs when the mind turns its attention toward an object. That object can be tangible or intangible, real or unreal. “Intentionality” explained Moustakas (1994, p. 28) “refers to consciousness, to the internal experience of being conscious of something; thus the act of consciousness and the object of consciousness are intentionally related.” The awakening of consciousness as a result of intentionality then leads to the awareness of noesis and noema. While noesis is the sensual realization—through “perceiving, feeling, thinking, remembering, or judging” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 69)—of an experience and its varying accompanying meanings, noema is the individual meaning that each sensation provokes. For instance, “the noema, in perception, is its perceptual meaning or the perceived as such; in recollection, the remembered as such; in judging, the judged as such” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 69). Undoubtedly, one noesis can be segmented into a range of several aspects of noema.

Another concept that is central to Husserlian transcendental phenomenology is intuition. Intuition means that the act of consciousness is given or presents itself. In other words, an act of consciousness has to be seen in order to be intuited; intuition does not reflect a past experience or a memory (Moustakas, 1994).

Three major stages characterize Husserl's methodology for transcendental phenomenology. They are the epoché, reduction, and imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994). The epoché is the reorientation of thought on the part of the researcher. This requires the researcher to take a new look at the phenomenon, a look that is free from biases and judgments. The researcher prepares for the epoché by undergoing a series of exercises. Those have been addressed later in the study. The reduction stage requires a thorough sensual annotation of each experience of the phenomenon through the epoché-ready lens of the researcher. The end product is "a textural description of the meanings and essences of the phenomenon [and] the constituents that comprise the experience in consciousness from the vantage point of an open self" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34). In the final stage, imaginative variation, the researcher closely examines the textural descriptions of the previous stage, decides on themes, eliminates replication of ideas, and composes the description that evokes the essence of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenological research has been used in a number of disciplines, including psychology, sociology, nursing, and education (Creswell, 2007). What makes phenomenology apt for these disciplines is its caring reflective focus (van Manen, 1984). According to van Manen, "phenomenological research is a research for what it means to be human" (p. 2). In the context of the current study, the question is what does it mean to be a Hispanic community college student?

In the previous chapter, I presented a conceptual framework through the lens of Bourdieu's cultural and social capitals and habitus, Arnett's emerging adulthood, and Kasworm's adult student identity. Literature on Hispanic college student persistence was reviewed, and it became evident that relational and psychosocial factors impacted the students' decision making process. In addition, Bourdieu, who was influenced by Husserl's philosophical teachings but at the same time did not adopt them entirely (Robbins, 2002), saw a connection between sociology and phenomenology. That connection is the reduction criterion of phenomenology (Robbins, 2002). Bourdieu's interest in reflection (Robbins, 2002), therefore, makes choosing phenomenological research appropriate for a study whose conceptual framework is partly based on Bourdieu's ideas.

Description of the Methodology

Several researchers have written about phenomenology as a research method and have identified three to five procedures associated with the method (Sanders, 1982; Giorgi, 1997; Hein & Austin, 2001). Since this study employed descriptive phenomenology, I chose to adopt those properties that have been present in all of the above-mentioned studies as the procedures for this study. They were epoché, reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis of meaning and essences (Moustakas, 1994).

Epoché

Before a researcher can begin collecting data in a phenomenological study, she needs to undergo extensive preparation, which is somewhat similar to a cleansing of the mind. The researcher is required to disregard all assumptions related to the phenomenon. That means all biases, judgments, interpretations, and feelings that the researcher has stored need to be exposed

and eliminated from the researcher's being. The researcher accomplishes that act of cleansing by fixedly focusing her attention on the phenomenon, by looking at it from different angles, and by engaging in reflective exercises. Then the researcher ends up in a presuppositionless (Zahavi, 2003) state where all previous experiences regarding the phenomenon have been suspended and the phenomenon is not seen in terms of what it appears to be but in terms of what constitutes its appearance. That is the essence of epoché.

Reduction

Moustakas (1994) explained that “reduction is not only a way of seeing but a way of listening with a consciousness and deliberate intention of opening ourselves to phenomena as phenomena, in their own right, with their own textures and meanings” (p. 92). Reduction begins with bracketing, which is eliminating all intrusive thoughts and focusing entirely on the object. Several researchers have questioned the fulfillment of bracketing because it is not possible for humans to be in a totally presuppositionless state (LeVasseur, 2003; Gearing, 2004). I took Moustakas' (1994) view that although bracketing may not be 100% attainable, one can achieve a maximum level of bracketing provided one submits oneself to rigorous self-scrutiny. I utilized the bracketing steps that Gearing set forth in his typology for descriptive or eidetic bracketing. Noting that this type of bracketing is not as strict as ideal bracketing, the one that truly reflects Husserlian philosophy, Gearing said that descriptive bracketing is still based on Husserl's principles, but it “represents the refinement and maturation of this ideal [bracketing] into a more practical application” (p. 1439). The following were the steps in the descriptive bracketing typology that I took:

1. set aside (bracketed) suppositions, attended phenomenon as it was experienced; started with suspension of most suppositions, allowing phenomenon to come directly into view without distortion; saw phenomenon naively and described it from its essences.
2. bracketed out suppositions and assumptions; set aside suppositions connected to external phenomenon and interviewee.
3. established and concluded bracketing around specific phenomenon.
4. reintegrated raw data acquired in bracketing after investigation of the phenomenon
(adapted from p. 1441).

Next, according to Moustakas (1994), the researcher with her presuppositionless mind looks at the object, describes, in terms of textural qualities, both the external and internal features that she sees, and writes the descriptions. She repeats the procedure several times as she focuses on perceiving the object from different angles. Personal reflection continues throughout this process. As the written descriptions with their different shades of the perceived object are compiled, the researcher enters the phase of horizontalizing where “every statement initially is treated as having equal value” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 97). After a rereading of the statements, the researcher removes those statements that duplicate ideas, identifies the horizons, which are “the textural meanings and invariant constituents of the phenomenon” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 97), arranges the horizons according to themes, and integrates the horizons and themes into a cohesive text.

Imaginative Variation

It is during the imaginative variation stage that a researcher captures all the possible meanings that are associated with the phenomenon. Hence, the researcher relies entirely on

imagination to accomplish the task of viewing the phenomenon from varying angles or perspectives. While practicing imaginative variation the researcher is gathering meanings, and themes begin to emerge on a recursive basis. After the researcher is satisfied that she has gathered all possible meanings, she has to decide which meanings will contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon and which will not. Giorgi (2007) suggested that,

if the imaginative elimination of an aspect causes the phenomenon to collapse, then that aspect is essential. If, on the other hand, the variation of an aspect of the given hardly changes what is presented, then that aspect is not essential. Once the essential features of the phenomenon have been determined, structural descriptions are made of them. (p. 64)

The resulting description should clearly demonstrate that the researcher had considered concepts, such as “time, space, bodily concerns, materiality, causality, relation to self, or relation to others” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 99) in regard to the phenomenon. At that point, the researcher has documented a description of the phenomenon in an invariant structure.

Synthesis of Meanings and Essences

In the final phase of the research, intuition, that which the act of consciousness gives, is brought to the fore as textural and structural descriptions are synthesized to reveal their essences. Moustakas (1994), who based his definition of essences on Husserlian thinking, said that an essence “means that which is common or universal, the condition or quality without which a thing would not be what it is” (p. 100). The goal of phenomenological research is to discover the essences behind the phenomenon.

Study Research Procedures

First, I complied with my university’s guidelines by applying to its Institutional Review Board for approval to conduct a research study involving human participants. I prepared to

engage in the epoché and reduction by participating in self-reflection exercises for several weeks prior to the start of data collection. Pezalla, Pettigrew, and Miller-Day (2012) wrote about the concept of the researcher-as-instrument in qualitative research. Depending on how that instrument is utilized, the outcome of the research could either be successful or in jeopardy.

Role of the Researcher

Given the various roles that the phenomenological researcher has, I kept a journal and wrote reflection pieces as guided by Janesick (2001), improved my interviewing skills, and learned how to avoid the occurrence of possible mishaps during an interview as suggested by Sorrell and Redmond (1995). One of the mishaps that Sorrell and Redmond (1995) point out is refraining from asking a question with “why;” “how” is a better question word for eliciting description from the participant. Another mishap is not asking “inside-out questions” (p. 1120), which are questions that end with “you,” as in *What does _____ mean to you?* When the question is framed inside-out, it is easier for the participant to be candid in her response and to move into the area of description.

In another article, Ojeda, Flores, Rosales Meza, and Morales (2011) wrote about researchers being culturally competent. The participants in this study were definitely at varying levels of acculturation into the U.S. society. As a researcher, one needs to be aware of the possible existence of certain attitudes—whether they are customary inhibitions or reactions to the usage of specific linguistic expressions—that might negatively impact study participants.

What I described above is action oriented, but it failed to reveal those thoughts and experiences that reside within me and color my worldview. I was reminded by Ponterotto (2005) that as a qualitative researcher, I needed to own my perspective, which included my giving an

account of my experience with the study's phenomenon. My interest in language and culture stems back to my childhood in high school. My undergraduate degree was in language and linguistics with a concentration in Spanish. My graduate degree is in English as a Second Language (ESL), and over the years, I have taught ESL to youngsters as well as adults. I have been teaching full time at a community college for eight years. The students have predominantly been Hispanic students. I understand the struggles they go through to learn the language. I can also identify with those students who have had to start life all over again because I, too, am an immigrant to the United States. Most importantly, I know that securing a college degree is the ultimate sacrifice, but I also know that without a degree, one's chances of making progress in society are slim. Therefore, it is within that context that I embarked on this study. I sense but cannot fully pinpoint, that there is a deeper reason why some students persist and others do not. It has been my intention to find an answer through an exploration of the lived experiences of the students, but to do so, I have had to lay bare my biases, as I have begun to do here, and be aware of their existence as I proceed with my research.

I am very aware that I am a novice researcher who on more than one occasion has asked: What have I got myself into? However, I have stood resolute as I have continued through with the data collection and analysis portion of the dissertation journey though I have had to admit that not knowing what to expect is daunting. In addition to finding communication with the members of my committee very rewarding, I have adopted two of Shank's (2006) seven *commandments* for qualitative research as my mottos to guide me as a researcher. The first is #4: Avoid "the sin of superficiality" (p. 207). Instead, I have strived for in-depth, illuminating research. The second is #7: Avoid "the sin of timidity" (p. 212). Instead, I have prepared for the rigors of doing the research by reading, reflecting, and casting aside my assumptions.

Selection of Research Participants

With respect to the selection of participants, I did purposeful sampling because that is the type of sampling that is done in a qualitative study when the object of the study is a specific target (Creswell, 2007). I used two purposeful sampling strategies. The first was criterion sampling. It occurs when participants are chosen on the basis of their having experienced the phenomenon which is to be studied as well as their meeting specific criteria that have been decided upon by the researcher (Creswell, 2007). Establishing criteria is a beneficial technique to use because it ensures that the participants are representative of the target group that is being studied (Creswell, 2007).

Based on the student profile for the Enterprise Campus students (chapter 1) and the student profile for first-generation, Hispanic, and community college students (chapter 2), I have created the following criteria for my participants. They are first-generation male and female, traditional age (18-25) and non-traditional age (over 25) students who are enrolled either part-time or full-time and who are employed—part-time or full-time—or are unemployed.

Though I found no information that gave a breakdown of the different Latino ethnic groups that live in Steadfast or that attend the Enterprise Campus, based on the U.S. Census Bureau's (2010) data on the concentration areas for Latino groups, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, and Guatemalans top the list of Latino origin groups residing in Florida. Therefore, I attempted to seek participants from the above-mentioned groups. The participants are either immigrants or native born U.S. citizens, who are offspring of immigrants.

With regard to the participants' academic history, I selected participants who had been in attendance for at least two semesters and had passed a minimum of four courses. I decided on

setting a minimum of four courses rather than a specific number of credits so as not to exclude those participants who are taking or had taken precollege courses since in the community college system, students do not earn credits toward graduation when they take precollege courses (Calcagno, Crosta, Bailey, & Jenkins, 2007). Therefore, for the purposes of this study, success in a minimum of four courses and continued enrollment in college indicate the participant's intention to persist. I consider four courses to be a milestone on the college completion trajectory. In other research, student acquisitions of 24, 36 and 48 credits were considered to be milestones in the traditional student's journey toward an associate degree completion (Adelman, 2005). I recognize that my participants would not always be traditional students, and, as a result, set the criterion of passing a minimum of four courses as a reasonably attainable milestone.

The participants did not need to have attended for two consecutive semesters; therefore, students who had stopped out and had returned were included. Because, of the 87% of the Enterprise Campus students who are academically underprepared (College of Attainment Potential, 2012), English is the course that is taken by most precollege students. Consequently, I anticipated that I would have precollege participants who had taken at least two semesters of English language courses in addition to participants who were taking college-level courses. For the initial identification of prospective participants, I solicited the help of faculty on my campus to recommend possible participants whom I then contacted by email, telephone, or in person. I was also successful in recruiting potential participants as I roamed the hallways.

The second sampling strategy that I attempted to use was snowballing. Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) explained that snowball sampling, otherwise called networking sampling, occurs during the data collection phase when study participants who have already done their interviews recommend and recruit other participants. I felt that selecting a few participants on the

recommendation of their peers would add to the richness of the participant pool because the recommenders could select peers who have a story to tell, but those peers might otherwise have been overlooked because of their life situation and how they choose to deal with it.

Consequently, one of the questions that I asked my participants at the end of the interview is if they could recommend someone to be interviewed. Four participants did think of someone else, but those leads never materialized.

Needless to say, I want to reiterate that I did not begin the process of participant selection until after I had received permission from both institutions with which I am associated. I first applied to the Institutional Review Board of the institution where I am a student. Once that application was approved, I was then able to apply to the Institutional Review Board of the community college where I work and where I planned to conduct my research.

Since I wanted to create a nonthreatening atmosphere between my prospective participants and me, when I met with each prospective participant for the first time, I did not record the discussion that took place. The purpose of that meeting was for me, in some cases, to introduce myself, and in other cases, to reacquaint myself with the prospective participant, to (a) find out whether the prospective participant fit the study's criteria, (b) discuss the purpose of the study, and (c) verbally inform the prospective participant of the confidentiality measures that I would be taking. Furthermore, I told each prospective participant that I would ensure that (a) all interview data would be kept confidential, (b) the participant's real names would not be used, and (c) the data would be stored in a locked file in my office for five years after the completion of the study, and after that time, the data would be destroyed. Then I presented to each prospective participant a study-participant packet that I had prepared. The packet contained a letter of invitation to participate in the study (Appendix A), pre-interview background questions

(Appendix B), the study's participant consent form (Appendix C), and a copy of the semi-structured interview questions that I would be asking (Appendix D). After hearing about the study and what each participant's role would be, I asked the prospective participant if he or she was still interested in participating. The answer was always in the affirmative. Then I set up an appointment for the interview. That pre-interview session with each prospective participant lasted for approximately 20 minutes.

Over a three-week period, I had pre-interview sessions with 14 potential participants. The first two of those participants served as the pilot for the study. Though I did audio tape those interviews, the contents of those interviews were not used in the study. However, the pilot experience was beneficial to me. I realized that the semi-structured questions on the interview protocol were easily understood. I gained skill and confidence in listening keenly to the participants and framing probing questions based on information that the participants uttered. I got an opportunity to comfortably slip into the role of researcher and to set my nervous participants at ease. Most importantly, I learned to make a conscious effort to remain focused on my participants and the data and to not allow assumptions and biases to creep into my thoughts. The pilot interviews averaged 40 minutes each.

I had anticipated that between twelve and fifteen participants would be interviewed. This estimate was close to Creswell's (2007) recommendation for "as many as 10 individuals" (p. 131) to be interviewed in a phenomenological study. Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) cautiously advised that for purposeful sampling to be done correctly to create a group of participants that is comparatively homogeneous and data quality that is good, then twelve participants would be an appropriate number. Notwithstanding, I was aware that data saturation would ultimately be the deciding factor concerning the number of interviews to be conducted.

Data saturation occurs when no more new themes and meanings can be extrapolated from the data (Morrow, 2005; Polkinghorne, 2005). I felt that I was approaching saturation point by my seventh interview, and my eighth interview served to confirm my feelings.

Making a decision on when a researcher should stop interviewing participants presupposes that the tapes would be transcribed and the text reviewed shortly after each interview occurs. Polkinghorne (2005) called the approach of selecting participants in stages an open process and recommended that it be done because the qualitative “research process is an iterative one, moving from collection of data to analysis and back until the description is comprehensive” (p. 140). One advantage of a researcher engaging in the iterative process is that she is able to keep track of the participants who have contributed to the data and make adjustments in terms of new participant selection based on the participant criteria that she had created (Polkinghorne 2005). I attempted to do the preceding activity when I made contact with one student who, at that time, was the mother of a 3-month-old baby and another student who was the married father of three children. Unfortunately, though they did express an interest in participating in the study, they did not keep their appointments.

Data Collection

All ten participants (including two pilot participants) were interviewed individually at a quiet location on the Campus. Only one interview session, lasting approximately 45 minutes, was held with each participant. The interview format was semi-structured, meaning that as the researcher, I was not limited to the questions that I had prepared in the protocol (Kvale, 1996). I listened closely to the participants’ answers and asked probing questions, which are questions that are seeking more information but not communicating any bias on my part to the participant

(Kvale, 1996). An example of a probing question was: Can you tell me more about what happened? I also decided if any of the participants' responses were ambiguous. If so, I rephrased the response to prompt clarification. In addition, I asked follow-up questions to responses that contained keywords, which according to Kvale, "may signify a whole complex of topics important to the subject" (p. 133). What resulted from the act of probing and asking follow-up questions was richly detailed text known as thick description (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

I prepared for the interviews by focusing on Kvale's (1996) "mode of understanding in the qualitative research interview" (p. 29). The mode of understanding consists of 12 aspects, which outline the purpose of the interview in qualitative research, the interviewer's role, and how the interview ought to be conducted. Kvale based the 12 aspects on descriptive phenomenology, and so, the names of some of the aspects are familiar in the literature on descriptive phenomenology. Those aspects are: life world, meaning, and deliberate naïveté. One aspect that resonated with me was change. I understood that the participant may change her view as the interview progresses. The significance of that is that "her descriptions and meanings about a theme" (p. 31) may change. I learned that such an occurrence is natural in the research interview process, and it signifies that the participant is reflecting about the meaning that she is constructing. In fact, I did see evidence of changing views in the interviews but was not perturbed by it because I had read about the phenomenon.

Concerning the types of questions asked in the protocol, Kvale (1996) said that they should have either a thematic or a dynamic dimension. The thematic questions were about the purpose of this research: the lived experiences of first-generation Hispanic community college students. The dynamic type questions were those questions that allowed the interview conversation to flow. Although the thematic questions closely adhere to a study's research

questions, Kvale explicated that the wording of the interview questions must be different from the wording of the research questions. The purpose of the interview questions is to elicit descriptions.

I pilot-tested the questions in the interview protocol in mock interview sessions with two interviewees whose responses were not included in the research data. The reason for conducting pilot tests was to make sure that the questions were not confusing. Creswell (2007) endorsed the recommendations of other researchers in pilot testing interview questions. The participants were familiar with the interview questions because they had received them in the study-participant packet that they were given at the time of their first meeting with me. My reason for giving the participants access to the interview questions was to prepare them for the interview experience and to make them feel comfortable. Being sensitive to the participants' needs aligned with another two of Kvale's (1996) aspects of the mode of understanding. They are interpersonal situation and positive experience. The interviews were audio taped after which they were transcribed verbatim by an outside source.

Data Analysis

Upon receipt of the transcribed data, I listened to the tapes while reading the transcribed text. The purpose of this was to make sure that the verbal data and the text were identical. I immediately made changes to the text as soon as I identified discrepancies in the transcription. Once I was satisfied that there were no mistakes with the transcribed data, I invited participants to member check their transcripts. That is, the participants read the text to check to see if their thoughts were accurately captured (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Participants were allowed to make changes if they felt that their transcribed thoughts were not completely what they had intended to

communicate. Although I contacted each of the participants and invited them to member check their transcripts, only three of them returned to do so. None of them made any changes.

Then I reread the text of each participant to familiarize myself with the content of the data. After that I followed the steps below as outlined by Creswell (2007) and based on the approach of Moustakas (1994):

1. Highlight *significant statements*, sentences, or quotes that provide an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon. This is known as *horizontalization*.
2. Develop *clusters of meaning* from the significant statements into themes.
3. Use significant statements and themes to write a description of the participants' experiences. This is known as *textural description*.
4. Similarly, use significant statements and themes to write a description of the context or setting that influenced how the participants experienced the phenomenon. This is known as *structural description* or called imaginative variation.
5. Write a composite description based on the structural and textural descriptions to present the essence of the phenomenon (adapted from pp. 61-62).

Ensuring Trustworthiness

Over the years, the expectation has been that in qualitative inquiry, researchers would demonstrate the validity of their argument and the reliability of their research procedures in order to measure up to the standards of quantitative research (Creswell, 2007; Rudestam & Newton, 2007). Many qualitative researchers did comply. However, phenomenological and other qualitative researchers have been rethinking the validity and reliability notion because it violates phenomenology's purpose, which is to describe an individual's lived experience. That lived

experience cannot be measured for reliability (Rose, Beeby, & Parker, 1995; Norlyk & Harder, 2010). Consequently, in addition to using member checking, which was discussed earlier in the chapter, I used triangulation and thick descriptions.

Triangulation is the use of different data sources to corroborate the data collected from the participants. The data sources were four other stakeholders who are associated with the campus. Two are current students who are male, under 25 years, and in their first year of attendance on the campus. The remaining two are female under 25 years, had graduated from the college within the past two years with their Associate in Arts degree, were currently continuing their studies toward a baccalaureate degree at another institution, and were working at their alma mater as tutors in one of the resource labs. All four briefly discussed their perception of persistence in college and confirmed my general findings about the participants' experiences with regard to persistence in college. I must point out, however, that the above four data sources did not represent the study's participant pool because although I searched, I was unable to find other adult-aged first-generation students to include in the source group.

My third method of ensuring trustworthiness was by using thick descriptions. They enhance the researcher's reporting of the data, draw the reader into the world of the participants "thus creating thick meaning for the reader" (Ponterotto, 2006, p. 546), and strengthen the credibility of the research. I have organized my analysis of the participant data in the following chapter as a presentation of the participants' thick descriptions.

Ethical Considerations

The matter of reflexivity and ethics also emerges in the literature in conjunction with trustworthiness in research. Rennie (2004) defined reflexivity as "self-awareness and agency

within that self-awareness” (p. 183). This definition encompasses a two-step process. Not only does the researcher think reflectively, but the researcher’s thought must be followed up by action. Reflexivity has different purposes and can be used at different stages of the research process (Gough, 2003). The authors also suggest that the research is enriched when more than one form of reflexivity is employed. Where this study is concerned, I utilized two forms. One was the personal form, relating my background and my interests for doing the research, which I described earlier in the Role of the Researcher section.

The second termed “functional reflexivity” (Gough, 2003, p. 23) aligns with my role as the interviewer in the research process. I work at a small campus, and it is quite likely that a few of the participants could have been former students of mine; in reality, four of them were. My task was to create an interviewer–participant atmosphere whereby the participant didn’t see me as an intimidating authority figure. Usher and Holmes (1997) described the relationship between the interviewer and participants in a phenomenological study as being extraordinary, for “the researcher is taken into the private, social, and experiential world of an individual with the intent of describing that person’s subjectivity or lived experience” (p. 54). I was ethically bound to establish trust with the participant and be (a) aware of my feelings and actions during the interview, (b) sensitive to the participant’s feelings, (c) flexible in my approach to the participant, (d) cognizant of the type of probing questions that I asked, and (e) with regard to the collected data, be respectful of any intimate information that might have been revealed and keep it confidential (Shank & Villeda, 2004; Usher & Holmes, 1997). I felt that I succeeded in accomplishing those goals. My five former students and I had a very congenial relationship as they were happy to talk about themselves and the progress they had made in their studies since I had last taught them. Altogether, all the participants exhibited a positive attitude toward me; they

were very eager to help me. They felt honored that they would be participating in a study. I sensed that some of them had thoughts of what their situation will be like when they, too, become doctoral students.

Limitations

First, the participant pool was not a complete representation of the student population on the campus. For instance, there were only two males, who were both emerging adults. Among the six female participants, half were emerging adults and half were from the upper spectrum—aged upper-forties and above—of adult learners. Consequently, the voices of adult males from both the upper and the lower spectrum—aged mid-twenties to mid-forties—as well as adult female participants from the lower spectrum are silent.

Then I was mindful of the issue of time, especially with respect to those participants who work. Therefore, although a longer interview time period or multiple interviews would have been ideal, I knew that I would have had difficulty getting participants to agree to an interview that is longer than one hour. Also, since the interview window only spanned a three-month period, it is very possible that potential participants who could have made a tremendous contribution to the study were not interviewed. Then I opted to focus my study on students who attended one campus in a multi-campus system and to concentrate on psychosocial factors rather than on academic or a combination of psychosocial and academic factors. I was aware that because of my decision, rather than viewing the students' persistence from a wide angle perspective, this study's findings will only present a snapshot of the phenomenon.

Delimitations

I did not consider the participants' academic progress and GPA in this study. I decided not to focus on that area of the participants' lives because I felt that (a) that is a subject that other researchers have investigated and (b) knowing about the participants' academic achievements is secondary to learning about their beliefs and their understandings of their lived experiences. I included in the study-participant packet (a) the pre-interview background questions so as not to have to devote any of the interview time to the answering of such questions and (b) the protocol with the interview semi-structured questions so as to give the participants an opportunity to reflect on their experiences.

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed why I selected phenomenology as the research paradigm for this study. I then outlined Edmund Husserl's philosophical perspective on which his transcendental phenomenology is based. I detailed the methodology that I followed before, during, and after data collection. Each methodological step was chosen to uphold Husserl's philosophical principles. Finally, I demonstrated how I ensured trustworthiness and maintained the integrity of the research.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF DATA

As far as the participants are concerned, this chapter is the chapter of their creation. This is the medium through which their thoughts, feelings, frustrations, and hopes are overtly communicated. For me, the researcher, this is my opportunity to retreat and allow the participants' words to depict what it means to them to be Latino community college students at this time in their life. However, prior to my revealing the individual accounts of each participant's life story, I have encapsulated biographical information that pertains to all members of the participant group.

A total of eight participants interviewed for the study. Six of them were females who were split into two distinctive age groups. Three were emerging adults; one was 20 years old, and the other two were 21 years old. The members of the other female group were 48, 53, and 67 years old. Both males were 20; therefore, they were considered to be emerging adults. In terms of country of birth, the participants were evenly split into two groups. The two countries were the United States and Cuba. Four participants had been in attendance at the college for two years. Of the remaining four, one had spent three years, two had spent four years, and one had spent five years. The three adult participants had spent three or more years. Both males had spent two years. Only two participants were currently taking precollege courses. Of the four participants who received financial aid in the form of a Pell grant, one was employed part-time and the rest were unemployed. Of the four who funded their education, one was employed full-time, another was employed part-time, and the remaining two were unemployed. Two of the participants were married, one was divorced, and the remaining five were unmarried. Four of the participants

planned to graduate in the year following the interview, one planned to graduate two years after the interview, and three did not know when they would be graduating. This last group of participants was comprised of the adult student who is in her fifth year of attendance and was taking a precollege course, another adult student who is in her fourth year of attendance, and the male student who after two years in attendance was still taking precollege courses. Table 1 contains demographic and educational information for the participants, whom I have given pseudonyms to protect their identities.

Table 2

Participants' Demographic Data

Name	Participant Data									
	Gender	Birthplace	Age	Years in College	Level of Courses Currently Taking	Student Status	Financial Aid Recipient	Employment Status	Marital Status	Projected Year of Graduation
Ernesto	Male	U.S.	20	2	Precollege	Part-time	Yes, Pell Grant	Unemployed	Single	Unknown
Anna	Female	Cuba	53	5	Precollege	Part-time	Yes, Pell Grant	Part-time	Married	Unknown
Clara	Female	U.S.	20	2	College	Full-time	No	Unemployed	Single	2014
Lourdes	Female	Cuba	21	4	College	Part-time	No	Part-time	Single	2014
Sandra	Female	U.S.	48	3	College	Part-time	No	Employed	Married	2014
Sophia	Female	U.S.	21	2	College	Part-time	Yes, Pell Grant	Unemployed	Single	2015
Vilma	Female	Cuba	67	4	College	Part-time	Yes, Pell Grant	Unemployed	Divorced	Unknown
Norman	Male	Cuba	20	2	College	Full-time	No	Unemployed	Single	2014

As I had mentioned previously in chapter three, a third instance in which I ensured trustworthiness of the data was to accurately capture a vivid representation of the participants' experiences so as to document thick descriptions that relate the meaning of the phenomenon. In the pages that follow, I have presented the thick descriptions for each of the participants. In

accordance with Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, each participant's thick descriptions have been divided into two areas: textural and structural descriptions. Textural descriptions tell what the participants' experience of persistence in college was (Creswell, 2007). Structural descriptions reveal how the participants experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). All descriptions are authentic except in those cases where I chose to protect the identities of the participants by changing certain names that are associated with the institution, College of Attainment Potential (CAP). I italicized the replacement names that were used in the participants' conversations. Finally, since the entire transcripts are not included in this document, there are some instances where I think further clarification is necessary for the reader's understanding; therefore, I have placed clarifying words in brackets.

Individual Participant Textural and Structural Descriptions

Ernesto

Twenty-year-old Ernesto was born in the United States, is single, and lives with his Cuban-born parents. He started attending classes on the Enterprise Campus in 2011, a year after he graduated from high school. Based on the alternative college placement test that CAP administers to all students who did not take or were not successful on the standardized ACT or SAT exams, Ernesto was required to do two levels each of reading, writing, and math in the developmental education program. In addition, he had to do an introductory-level study skills course, a requirement for all students at CAP who are in developmental education. Though Ernesto was successful with his reading, writing, and introductory study skills courses, he had to repeat his first level math course, and this semester, he is repeating his upper level math course. Since a consequence that a student faces for repeating developmental courses is being placed on

academic probation and doing an advanced level study skills course, Ernesto has had to take that course as well. Though Ernesto has enrolled in all the major semesters, which would be the fall and spring semesters, for the two years that he has been a student at CAP, he has not yet taken any college level courses. Ernesto is receiving financial aid, and he doesn't work. His goal is to get his Associate of Science degree in computer animation.

Textural Description

The experiences of Ernesto's immediate family have been fundamental in setting the stage for his desire to be in college. His parents arrived from Cuba when "they were old, in their 40's." As a result, in Ernesto's view, they were "unlucky." They both ended up working very hard driving school buses for public school children. Ernesto recalled the memories of his having to wake up at five o'clock on school mornings to prepare for grade school because he travelled with his parents. He also recounted the "nasty" behavior of the children on the bus, which prompted him to ask his parents, "Why do you work on the bus? Why do you continue doing this?"

On the other hand, the experience of Ernesto's older brother has been different. Ernesto noticed that his brother had an easier time adapting to the U.S. society than his parents did. He attributed his brother's good fortune to his being of a youthful age. He said, "My brother was lucky that he went to college and he learned English and so on and he actually is now an officer."

Ernesto described his time in college as challenging. He mentioned that because of his learning disabilities, he found meeting the college's academic expectations overwhelming for him. For instance he recalled,

I remember when they told me I had to do a report on my major, I was like, ‘Oh, ok that’ll be easy.’ I’m usually mostly doing one page. But when they said, ‘No, no, no, no, you have to do more than one page. You have to do up to maybe two or three or more.’ I was like, ‘I can’t write that much.’ I’m not the best at it.

He spoke of the “hours in the lab, class work, and then other stuff that require me to stay on campus for some time” leading to a “piling up” of work. At the end of such days, “When I come home, I am just frazzled, and I just want to go to bed.”

The tiredness that Ernesto referred to has caused him, on occasion, to consider dropping out of college.

Maybe, I should just give a break to college. Maybe, one semester—lay off fall or spring. But then I thought, lay it down. Then that will snowball into something bigger and maybe bigger financial problems. So I was like, ‘I’ll continue in college.’

Ernesto attributed his continued motivation to remain in college to his friends, “mostly the ones online.” Although he has real live friends who are in college, they do not attend classes on the campus where he attends classes. Therefore, his virtual friends, whom he has never met and with whom he communicates daily, give him support. He mentioned one virtual friend, in particular, who “motivated me to stay in school and to continue my studies . . . and listen to my parents.”

Heeding the advice of others and continuing to focus on his studies made Ernesto reflect on his college experience so far.

Here, I learned the hard way that you have to strive. You have to strive to be the best. You have to work hard. And of course, you have to get the best grade you can because you can’t pass with a medium grade. You just can’t with a B or C. You have to pass with the A. So I’m, so I, I try to work my best.

He is most proud of his first research paper. “I will never forget it. Some people will laugh at me saying, ‘Huh, three pages only,’ but that’s an achievement I’ll hold on my own until I write five or more. And then, I’ll brag about that, hopefully.”

Structural Description

The spoken word—be it external or internal—is how Ernesto has lived through his experience of persisting in college. He said that his parents told him, “study hard, work hard, so then after that you don’t have to deal with kids like this. You don’t have to work my job. You’ll see that it really will pay off.” Ernesto’s response was “and I took that to heart.”

Being a Latino college student is “something big” to Ernesto’s family. “They tell me to keep on going. When they see me in my room during school days, they’re like, ‘Do you have any homework? You’re in college. You should keep on pushing.’”

Ernesto’s strategy is to reflect. When he faces a challenge in his college life, he says, “Man this is difficult, but I have to move on. I have to . . . it’s for a better life.” He said that he tries to work as hard as he can, and

If something hard comes my way, I look at it first saying ‘Ah, this is too hard. I shouldn’t do it. I, I’m I’m not going to make it.’ Then, after that, I look at it more and more and go ‘let me try it. Uh, maybe I can do it.’

He has learned that he has had to “juggle college with life.” He remarked that “I learned the hard way that you have to strive to be the best. You have to work hard.”

Ernesto, however, does not focus all his time on his needs. He turns his attention to other people. He said, “I love to help out people. I haven’t done much besides talk to people.

Sometimes I help friends with tasks or life problems.”

Anna

Anna is a 53-year-old part-time student who started her studies in the English as a second language (ESL) program when she arrived from Cuba in 2006. While in that program, she studied English at the upper intermediate, lower advanced, and upper advanced levels. Each level consists of four courses—grammar, reading, writing, and speech. Since the ESL program is a precollege program, all graduates from the program need to take the alternative college placement test to see if they are ready for college-level courses. Anna took the test, discovered that she was not ready, and was required to take developmental courses in reading, writing, and math. This semester, she is taking developmental writing at the advanced level and a college-level lower division general education course as an elective. She has chosen to major in accounting since her prior studies and job in Cuba involved accounting. She currently works as a housekeeper.

Textural Description

Uppermost in Anna’s mind is the fact that she is an immigrant whose language is different from the official language of the host country. She said, “Every Latino should be a student. Every person who comes from some place in Latin America should study in this country.”

Therefore, Anna’s drive to be a college student is fed by two prioritized desires. She said, “First, I want to learn English because I know that in this country, I need English language.” Her second reason is, “I want to get my degree in accounting applications.”

When she combined her desires, Anna revealed her fundamental reasons for pursuing a college degree.

Today, immigrants must study to get a better job because when you have one language—only Spanish language—many, many difficult to find a good job. I want to get a degree, to get a good job, earn more money. I desire the degree first for myself. It's satisfaction to say to people that 'I get a degree in English in this country, but I know that I am immigrant.'

She spoke of the many challenges that she has faced as a student. Within her family of a mother and siblings, she is unique. "My family didn't study in this country and in my country, little. So, I am the first person in my family in this country that try to study." As a result, she has become the object of curiosity among her family members. She remarked, "It's difficult for my family to understand that at my age I want to continue to study."

Her husband, on the other hand, has been very supportive of Anna. She said, "I have one person that helped me in my college. It's my husband. My husband never studied. Always, he work in a factory." Unfortunately, after suffering from a heart attack, Anna's husband was unemployed for an extended period of time. During that time, Anna had to suspend her studies at CAP. She continued, "I had to work a lot because my husband heart attack and I support my husband by myself."

She spoke of the hardships of trying to get a job in her field in this country. She explained,

I try to apply for my accountantship in some place and I've been interviewed, but nothing happened. I don't know why. Maybe my background that I put in my resume don't look great, but I have twenty-five years of experience in accounting in my country, yes. And I do a lot of work in accounting field in my country, but in this country I never, never get a job in my field that I work in my country.

In addition, life as a college student along with being a homemaker, spouse, and income earner has not been easy for Anna. She reflected,

I think that combining work to study is a hard, is a hard thing. Because when you have to attend the house, you have to study at night, and work in the morning—for example, cleaning houses—you are tired. To study English, I spent a lot of hours in my house to do the assignments, look at the dictionary, the words.

I don't have computers in my house today, now. But I need to do the assignments in the school, but I need to do some work to earn some money, and need to do the stuff in my house—prepare food for my husband.

She finds that keeping up with her college assignments can be very stressful.

Sometimes I have a pressure with the time because sometimes I try to do the assignments with due dates. Some days I feel that I finish my things to do, but some days I feel frustrated. Because I think, 'I woke up early and I am not finished my assignments, my due date.' I'm pressured.

Structural Description

Anna thinks that all Latin American immigrants should become students, and she has taken steps to model that behavior. With regard to her family, she noted,

I think that I can be an example for my family because I have one sister to begin to study at *CAP* last year. When I got my first certificate, at *CAP*, she said, 'I want to begin to study at *CAP*, too.'

Anna spoke repeatedly of how much she has tried to succeed as a student and that she has seen some benefits. She recounted her story.

For example, in one class the other day, the professor gives a lot of assignments each week. We have to read, we have to make an essay. You know, and last week I needed more time. I sent an email to the professor and said, 'Professor, please I need more time to do my assignments' and he gave me more time, and I relax.

Then she very proudly spoke of her ability to communicate in this interview.

I never thought that I can get an interview in English like this. Now, I think that I can do it. Sometimes when I need to call by phone—to the bank, or to immigration, or to some other government office—I try to do the English line, and the people understand me.

Clara

The parents of 20-year-old Clara emigrated from Cuba to the United States a few months before she was born. Her parents remained together until they divorced when she was three years old. Each parent has since married someone else and although Clara is in touch with her father and her stepmother, her life revolves around her mother and stepfather, the family with whom she lives. Clara is a full-time student who is 12 credits shy of receiving her Associate in Arts degree in English. Her career goal is to become a college professor. While Clara did not take any developmental education English courses, she did take a developmental education math course.

Textural Description

Having spent her entire life within a “predominantly Hispanic” community, Clara said that being a Latina college student doesn’t mean a lot to her. She “sort of just feels like one in a crowd.” However, she is proud to be a Hispanic because she wants to “set a good example” for others within her ethnic group.

Clara explained that most Hispanic first-generation immigrant parents like hers are not seeking to improve their lives; instead, “they’re looking to better their children’s lives.” Consequently, Clara’s mother “always instilled” in her “that education was the key to everything.” Clara recalled hearing her mother constantly say to her as she was growing up, “Bringing you here isn’t enough. You’re going to need to get an education. You can have more, but you’re going to have to put in the effort.”

The views of Clara’s mother, however, did not represent the views of her entire family. Clara’s stepfather has been quietly supportive of his wife and as the sole breadwinner in his three-person household has paid for Clara’s college tuition and upkeep. Though Clara’s father

was proud that his daughter was in college, Clara observed that “he also thinks that when I get married, not if, and when I have children, I should slow down because good mothers are with their children, and if you’re not, you’re breeding a sociopath.” Of her extended family, the ones who are “less affluent” than she think that she should be working not studying, and those that are “more affluent” than she have told her “that’s nice that you’re going to community college. Your cousin, though, is going to . . .”

In describing her family situation, Clara said “I’m on that cutting margin between” the different family perspectives. She continued that

It [being on the margin] gives me a better perception of what hard work means and what you can aspire to. It really does give me a bigger scope of what it means to work at what you want, but still have the opportunity to get to where you want.

Clara had thought when she first enrolled in college that she wanted to become a graphic designer. She said that her motivation was “to get a better job.” But, as she explained,

I discovered that I actually wanted to teach. I found myself spending more time on my English courses than I did any graphic design. And that was out of my own volition. The more I was in those classes, and the more I spent time and I found out I enjoyed writing papers and just the discussion that I was having in class, I discovered that graphic design was a hobby, not my passion.

She vividly recalled the day when she became aware of the change that had been taking place within her.

We were talking about the iceberg about how when you write a story, you only show your reader the tip of the iceberg, but you have to have this whole narrative underneath it to really give the story weight. You need to know more than your reader does. And I remember sitting there, and I was just like, ‘I want her job.’ And that’s when I knew.

That change led her to conclude, “I see college as this introspective journey where I am learning more about my passion and I can hopefully give that to someone else.”

To explain how she felt about being a college student, Clara contrasted a student's life prior to entering college with a student's life in college. She said,

When you're in high school, middle school, elementary school, the teachers there really want to teach you, but everyone knows the public school system is strangled, stepped on. It's pretty much dead.

When I got to higher education, I realized, since it's much more free, it's professors teaching how they want to teach. It's, it's more individualized how the professor wants to get the material to you.

The impact that awareness had on Clara made her realize

That there's an art to it, and I think it's so beautiful. And I became so receptive and I, I took the information in. I sort of marinated in it. And I wanted to get my point across. I wanted to write an essay and let the professor know, this is what I think on this. I know that there is someone that will enjoy it as much as I did and if I can get to them, I would. It would bring me such fulfillment.

Clara's sojourn through college has not been without difficulty, however. She spoke of her parents not being aware until when she was in her teens about the concept of college and what preparing to attend college entailed.

When my mother and my father came to this country, no one in the family had gone to college either. And so, it wasn't until I grew older that the idea of going to college even passed through their minds. They didn't have a college fund for me. They didn't talk to me about college till I was in high school, which I know is very different in other cultures when you start a fund when you're five.

Financial issues have been a common problem in Clara's family, and though she had wanted to get a job to supplement her stepfather's income, her mother had always said no. Her mother would say, "You don't need a job. Don't worry about us." Her mother even remained adamant when Clara's stepfather became unemployed. Clara described the "internal battle" that she endured at that time, how she came close to dropping out of school, and how she eventually made the decision to continue with her studies.

I thought seriously about dropping out of college when my stepfather lost his job because he is the only breadwinner in the house. And like lots of Hispanic families, it's that mindset of the man goes out, and he works, the woman stays home, she cooks and she cleans, and I felt that if he was the only breadwinner, what are we supposed to do?

I am an adult. It's one of those things where I know I could be bringing in a paycheck and I should be bringing in a paycheck to ease the load, but I'm not. Instead, I—I—I'm not doing anything selfish, but it almost feels that way.

She recounted,

The person who has been my father and who has been supporting me told me this is your decision. What do you want to do? And I honestly didn't want to let go of my studies. And I really didn't. So, I made the decision to stay and so far, so good. It reached a point—sort of builds up and then comes back down, like the ebb and flow of waves.

In addition to the conflicts in her personal life, Clara has been affected by environmental conditions, which have caused her to doubt her chances of success. She said,

I know that my generation is screwed for the workforce right now. It's bad. It's just bad. And sometimes, I wonder, number one, am I in the right field although I love it, and I want to be in it so much. Is it a smart thing to do? And two, am I gonna get a job? So as I'm doing my studies, I'm second guessing my, my drive . . . Logically, I should get something that will help me provide the best that I can for myself and if I ever decide to have a family in the future . . . I get really, really stressed and I wonder should I even do this.

Finally, Clara described herself as being a product of the historical and cultural crossroads in which she and her peers live.

I think there's also this weird stratification when it comes to Hispanic culture in Florida. There is the older generation that was around when Fidel Castro came into power. They came here. They're the dissidents. They're constantly complaining . . . then there's my family—like my parents who came here—and they have a certain way of thinking. Then, there's me who is the Americanized version of that culture. Some negatives and some positive aspects leaked through that stratification and the American influence. Lots of opposing forces are trying to come together.

My generation and my group of students in *Enterprise Campus* who have a similar story, we're this weird conglomerate of ideals and expectations and so it's difficult to pinpoint what it is that you want when it's this way.

But despite all that Clara has experienced while being a college student, she remained resolute.

I've taken the need for education from the good ol' US of A, and I've taken from my mother that need for independence, that be better from her, and I think that's really what has created, this drive in me to better myself and to continue my education.

Structural Description

Clara's mother represents the older Hispanic culture that Clara had referred to earlier.

Realizing how debilitated she is by that culture, Clara's mother communicated to her daughter what she is not to do with her life. Clara described her mother thus.

My mother is a stay-at-home. She doesn't know how to drive. She is a nervous wreck at all times, and I blame the culture that she was raised in. 'Don't worry about it. A man will take care of it for you.'

And I think that's why my mother has driven into me, 'Be independent. Be educated so if a man ever screws you over, you won't have a worry. You are independent. You can pay your own bills. You can have a car. You can drive yourself. You won't have to worry about anything.'

Clara's response to that was "I'm gonna focus on my studies. I'm gonna become like the flagship of a female that is educated in Hispanic culture."

Clara discovered that through interacting with others she was able to gain understanding about choices that she needed to make while in college. She said,

I started like speaking to my professors. They have been mentors to me. They say how much potential I have and how much love I have for it, and they want to see me strive. They want to see me continue. They've really pushed me forward. It sort of came natural to me to ask them how they got to where they were. What was the coursework I was going to be seeing when I got to the upper levels? What branches of English could I go into if I wanted to?

And I got involved with the *Students' Periodical* [the *Periodical*]. We consider ourselves a little family. We are a group of five. I bonded with the group. And I found myself leaning more towards what we were doing editorially than what we were doing design wise.

As Clara became more involved with the magazine it became not only her symbol of refuge but her source of pride. She divulged,

The *Periodical* helps me cope. I almost call it my safe haven. Whenever I'm stressed out at home, and I'm just like, I can't touch this right now, if I'm stressed about school, I'll be, 'I'm gonna go edit some papers.' It really helped anchor me to this school because now I had some pride in something that I was doing that was contributing to the school.

Clara acknowledged another benefit from her involvement with the *Periodical*. "Thanks to the *Periodical*, the dean and uh a couple of the chairpersons know me personally." She was proud that they knew of her work and appreciated it.

The first year that I came on, we won best design—and I was the designer that year. We won best overall design. We won general excellence. We won first in the state, in the district. We won best editing. Just lots of awards. And it made me feel like, this is great. They know how much time I've put into the *Periodical*, and the *Periodical* is a reflection of the students, and if the *Periodical* does well, that means their students are doing well.

Lourdes

Twenty-one-year-old Lourdes came to the United States from Cuba with her parents when she was ten. Not having any siblings, she has lived a very sheltered life. She is the center of her parents' attention. She said, "They concentrate everything on me because they don't have nothing else to worry about. They worry a lot." Lourdes first enrolled at the Enterprise Campus in 2009 and did developmental reading, writing, and math courses. She has one more semester to do before completing her Associate in Arts in social work. Although Lourdes wants to transfer to a 4-year institution to get her bachelor's degree in social work, she has not decided as yet which of the local universities she will be applying to. Lourdes is employed part-time and receives no financial aid.

Textural Description

Lourdes has dual feelings about being Latino. Having lived in the United States for more than half of her life, she considers herself different from those immigrants whose age at the time of their arrival was older than when she arrived, yet she doesn't deny her heritage. She said, "I'm going to be 22. I came when I was a child, so it's different. It's different because I don't have a child. I don't have anything to worry about. I just have my parents."

Then she continued, "But, I'm still Latino. It [being a Latino student] means a lot to me because I get to represent the Latino people, especially my country, Cuba." Lourdes explained that by being a representative for the Latino people she is informing people in other ethnic groups that Latinos have the same capabilities as they. She said,

It's important because people is not used to seeing Latino people studying. They're used to seeing people working in factories. A lot of people come from the country when they are, like, twenty, twenty-five. It's really hard for them to continue the studying here, so they go to work to places where they don't need a professional career.

Lourdes' dream is to beat that stereotypical perception that others have of Latinos. For her, being a professional is "being in a place where I don't have to do manual work."

Lourdes revealed that remaining in college at her age, though, could end up being a lonely journey. She said, "Of all my friends, I think that I am the only one that's still in college. One of them has already a kid, so she stopped going to college. Another one is married, so she stopped, too." But, when Lourdes shifted from the Latino view of life to the American view, she made this observation about being a college student at this time in her life.

I see it as a normal thing; this is what a normal person should do at this age, coming to school, getting their degree. For me a normal person at this age should be having a part-time work and coming to college. At 22 they should be done with their studies or almost

done. We have a lot of Latinos here, especially in [the city of] *Steadfast*, but it's not the normal thing. The normal thing is people that were born here to be in college.

Lourdes description of her routine as a college student is an illustration of her perception of a normal college student. She said,

A lot of students have to worry about going back to home and cooking and cleaning. I only think about getting good grades. Sometimes I get out from work, like around seven at night and it's really hard to go back and study. So what I usually do, I come to work in the mornings. Then when I go home, I study. That's the only thing. I am privileged.

Structural Description

Though Lourdes is somewhat Americanized because of the length of time she has lived in the country, there is one important element about her that demonstrates her continued affinity with the Latino people and culture. That element is her name. She said, "I feel proud when they say my name, and they hear a Latin name. It's different. They know right away that I'm Latina when they hear that name."

Her parents keep her focused on her studies as well as on the goal she has set for herself. Lourdes noted that "They always tell me to finish studying so that I can become a professional." She, in turn, is proud to persist in her studies when she assesses the fruits of her efforts. She remarked,

One accomplishment that makes me feel proud is that every time that I finish a semester that I get an "A" that makes me want to continue studying and getting good grades. Also, an award that I got for academic excellence. Yeah, that makes me feel proud.

Sandra

Sandra who is 48 years old returned to formal studies at CAP on the Enterprise Campus this semester after a 25-year hiatus. Twenty-five years ago the campus that she is now attending

did not exist, but she, without any prompting, contrasted her experiences, which will be discussed later. Sandra dropped out of college when she was five courses shy of her Associate in Arts degree because she had received a job promotion. Her career continued to flourish as she moved from company to company and rose through the ranks. During those years, Sandra did remain connected with the postsecondary educational world as various employers regularly sent her to seminars. Today, she and her husband are successful co-owners of a healthcare business that employs a vast array of staff. Sandra's return to college does not stem from necessity but from an affective purpose. Sandra was born in the United States of parents from the Dominican Republic.

Textural Description

Being a Latina gives Sandra a strong bond with other students on campus. She said, "A lot of the students are Latino students, so I do not feel like a fish out of water. I actually feel that I know these people. They know me. Our cultures are very similar, and I enjoy it."

Sandra's knowledge of Spanish is what is important to her, for that is the medium that facilitates her getting to know her peers. She continued,

Spanish is a very big part of my heritage and who I am, so I feel a kinship with my fellow Latino peers. I feel close. I feel that we know the same things or . . . sometimes the expressions we use to explain things to each other allow me to know that this person knows or has experienced some of the things I've experienced.

Sandra was not a wife and mother when she first attended college, but now with two teenagers, one nineteen and the other fifteen, Sandra has found that her family has accepted her new role as a student. Her children have been more effusive than her husband, however. She

noted, “My children are proud. They encourage me. They’re already calling me “Doctor Mom.”

Her husband’s reaction has been different. She explained,

He understands and he’s also encouraging me. He just seems to think that he’s happy if I do it and, maybe, happier if I don’t. He felt a little threatened that I was going to be taken away from our business to be at college. ‘Well, you know, we have a *professional* here at our *business* and you make more money than she does, so why are you going back to school and taking time from what you’re doing here with us at the *business*?’

As a student returning after an extensive absence, Sandra admitted that she has faced some challenges. She revealed,

There’s just so much that I lost in these 25 years of being absent from college. I realize that technology has been the biggest obstacle. I’m taking a computer class. Now I’m realizing, I can click here, click there and kind of navigate, figure it out myself without the fear that I’m going to break something, which was my fear all the time.

Eight weeks into the first semester of her return, she found that staying on course with her studies has also been challenging. She continued,

It’s been very, very tough. The homework and just the things that I have to do. It’s not just coming to class, it’s also preparing for class, it’s also doing homework, it’s also reading. And I also have a husband at home, and I cook for him. That part’s been more challenging than anything that I thought.

However, Sandra displayed an upbeat spirit as she described her rewarding college experiences so far.

I’ve really enjoyed the quaintness of this campus. It doesn’t feel scary. Here, I’ve been an insider as a student and I’ve just really been able to enjoy my time here, realize that there’s lots of resources here available to you, and it’s convenient to my job, it’s convenient to where I live. I think it’s kind of like being in my backyard. I’ve felt very comfortable. Twenty-five years ago, I went to the *Perimeter Campus*. For some reason, it felt huge to me. I was scared. It was overwhelming. It’s almost like when you’re little, you think your dad’s really huge, and then when you grow up, you see that you are actually taller than your dad. I think that what I remember from *Perimeter Campus* twenty-five year ago. Was very different to what I have felt today.

In telling of her motivations for attending college, Sandra recalled,

Back then, I was doing it not because I had the desire to do it in the way I have today, but because I needed to accomplish certain things to get me into a job into making money, into my career. Today I'm back in school because I want to learn more. I want to achieve different things and not because I don't have a good job, but because I want to feel that I am in a different status.

Sandra's current college experience is shaped by her earlier college life. She reflected,

I can kind of see myself in them [today's students] twenty-five years ago, and sometimes, I just feel like maybe shaking them and saying, 'Hey, take advantage! Learn while you're here. Forget about everything that's outside and just drink everything up because everything you're going to learn here, sooner or later, is going to be good for you in whatever job you're at, whatever life experience.'

She recounted how her decision to drop out of college arose from her being misguided.

I dropped out because I thought I had acquired what you go to college for, which is to land a job with good benefits and that was enough. My dad just didn't see college as a necessity. He saw that I got a good job and that I was able to climb and get some raises at that job. And still going to *Perimeter Campus* at night, it was very difficult. I still lived at home. So he said, 'Why are you going to be a professional student?' You already have a good job.

However, Sandra revealed that over the years, she had a recurring experience that reminded her of her unfinished college student status.

I'll be honest with you, I always thought, 'Gosh, I wish I would have finished.' On my resume, I cannot put that I graduated because I didn't. And I've come a long way with what I've been able to do for myself: seminars that I've been able to go to on my own and employers that have sent me on different seminars that I've learned a lot from. But I've missed not being able to put a degree on my resume. I really have missed that. That is something that, yes, I've thought about. And I'm back. And it's more for accomplishing something, more than putting it on my resume today.

This time around, Sandra's words concerning her experiences as a returning college student reflect passion. She asserted,

I'm enjoying this experience. And I don't feel threatened. I really haven't felt awkward. I've felt, well, I'm here in this position and I'm required to give a little bit more. And maybe that's because I'm older and maybe it's because I see my kids in them, that I would want to maybe go a step above and try to see how I can contribute to their life.

I've been blessed in my life with different things that I've received, through hard work, through blessings. Just where I'm at today in my life, I feel that I'm grateful. And I want to be able to lend a helping hand or to pay it forward to others. And when I look at the young people around me, I want to help them. And it's been gratifying to be able to help.

And I know just in my heart that anything I give, I'm going to get it back tenfold. That's just the way I've realized in life that it happens and I'll go the extra step because I know that later on, somewhere or somehow, I'm going to get it back in another way.

Structural Description

Sandra experienced that feeling of kinship with her Latino peers while communicating with them and discovering a mutual understanding. She said,

I'm doing a project with another young lady from Cuba and sometimes she'll come up with sayings, Spanish sayings, that just make me realize that I am understanding where she's coming from. And it kind of just makes me feel like I know her better, she knows me better and we're from the same seed and it feels nice.

As a mother who has now become a student, Sandra has found that she is now living the kinds of expectations that she had set for her children. Because she feels that it is her duty to meet those expectations, she realizes that she is enduring some self-inflicted pressure. She recounted her feelings.

I've always told them that they need to get good grades and that they need to perform and achieve at a certain level, so now they're looking at me and I'm thinking, 'Well, I've gotta achieve at that same level' because I gotta prove to them that it's not hogwash. I'm applying pressure to myself to get As, which is what I expect them to get.

Sandra demonstrated how she put into practice her paying it forward belief by giving up some of her time to invest in the future of her fellow students. She said,

I have a networking group already established that I've networked with just as a professional and I want to share that with the younger students, and through some of the projects that we've done, I've been able to take some of the students to meet some of the people that know me as a professional and for me to say, 'Well, I'm mentoring this student, would you allow him to come in and watch me do this job or that job?' And for me to kind of bring them in and have them exposed to maybe someone that could eventually give them a job.

The immediate confidence that Sandra has gained in her technological skills has inspired her. She lamented,

I just wished that I wasn't as busy at work to where I could dedicate a little bit more time researching, I mean just being at the library and realizing all the technology and all the information that you have access to—besides books—has been wonderful.

But her proudest accomplishment is that for some computer-related activities, she has become independent of her staff. She declared,

I don't have to call my assistant when something's not working right on my computer. I can kind of brainstorm or just do a couple of things that I've learned in class that are helping me at work just to make my life easier. I'm not relying on others. I'm getting a lot more comfortable with technology. That's been the biggest thing for me.

Sophia

Sophia is a twenty-one year-old who was born in the United States of Cuban-born parents. She started at the Enterprise Campus in 2011 and has completed six semesters of study on a part-time basis. Sophia directly matriculated into a college-level program as she was not required to do any developmental education courses. Her goal is to pursue dual degrees, an Associate in Science in paralegal studies and an Associate in Arts in pre-law. She would like to become a lawyer, but while pursuing that dream, she wants to be able to earn a living by utilizing her degree in paralegal studies. Currently, she is unemployed, receives financial aid, and lives with her parents.

Textural Description

Sophia is very proud to be a Latina college student. She said that “it’s just an honor to be going to school and to be getting my education.” She is not pursuing postsecondary studies for herself alone but on behalf of other Latina students. She feels that she “represents” that set of “minority students.” And in doing so, she is setting “an example for others, who are not willing to get an education, to follow.”

Her strong feelings about Latin women and education stem from what she has observed within the Hispanic society. She spoke of Latin women as struggling within a society where men relegate women to a certain status. Consequently, Latin women are considered to be “stay-at-home moms or individuals who are not likely to succeed in life.” Sophia takes a different perspective and thinks that “it’s really powerful for a Latina” to embrace educational opportunities and “be successful in whatever she wants to do.”

The idea of being powerful resonated with Sophia as she considered her circumstances. Having recently turned twenty-one, she suddenly “realized what power I have as a woman, as a Latina.” She has begun to think about whom she would like to marry and whether or not she wants to have children.

Sophia disclosed an unforgettable episode in her past that continues to have a profound effect on her present life. When she was eight years old, she was diagnosed with a serious illness that caused her to be hospitalized for two months. During that time, she spent three weeks in intensive care. Sophia explained that “that was the moment that basically changed my understanding of how I am and how my body works. That moment defined me.” She recalled that “it was painful for a kid to suffer that way,” but she realized that there were other kids in the

hospital who were in a worse condition than she. She said, “So, I kind of appreciated the fact that yes, I survived. Yes, I made it. I had to grow up at that moment. I am mature because of that incident.” Although she thinks “that it is always going to be at the back of my mind that I’m kind of disabled,” she wants to “overcome.”

In addition to dealing with her health issues, Sophia faces emotional challenges in her life. She revealed that “Emotionally, I’ve always dealt with the fact that I know I’m overweight. Stuff which I think comes across every woman ... any race ... their self esteem.” She is not one to share her thoughts with others. She declared,

When it comes to my feelings, I keep them towards myself, but like if I have to tell somebody something, I will. Now, education wise and stress level wise, no. I tend to keep things towards myself. So, I think that has a cost to it.

In musing about whether or not she had considered dropping out of college, she said,

Due to my condition, I sometimes feel too overstressed and, recently, I actually ended up in the hospital because of that. When my stress levels get too high, I, I don’t know, for some reason, I just can’t deal with it. I know if I quit, I’m not gonna want to start again because I know myself. I ask myself, ‘Do I want a future or do I not want a future?’

Then she concluded with an additional revelation about Latin women and herself.

I think women should not, especially Hispanic women, doubt themselves because I think that’s the main reason why most of them tend not to get somewhere in life. I have experienced where I doubt myself because of the health problem that I have, because of my physical features, because I am Latina.

Structural Description

By being able to study toward her chosen career, that of becoming a lawyer, Sophia feels that “Women anywhere can make it. They could go to any limit they want to.” She spoke from a position of strength when she discussed her friends. The majority of them are Hispanic, but they

are not attending college. She added “I am stronger than most women who are not able to succeed or accomplish what they want because of other circumstances or obstacles that are occurring.”

She appreciated the support of her parents who “have taught that the first thing that should be on your mind is school. Your first job is school. School is the only thing that’s going to take you anywhere.” Sophia referred to her parents’ counsel as priorities. She continued to speak about her parents when she said, “one of the main priorities that they have always taught me and my younger sister is to never give up at anything, especially when it comes to school or education.”

Bolstered by such advice, Sophia said that she faced her transition from high school to college with an emotionless demeanor. She said,

I was nervous to actually start college ‘cause I wondered if they were going to judge me. But me being as friendly as I am, so far, that’s what my friends have told me, I mean, I’ve gotten by really, really good. I just took whatever attitude I had at the moment and just went with it in the sense that if they judge me, then that’s fine. If they don’t, then that’s fine too.

In a similar vein, she recognized her academic potential. She observed,

My classes, they’re not perfect, and I’m not going to say that I’m a perfect student, but I do, I try my best. I do have my weaknesses, but other than that, yes I’ve improved, personally, for me, I think I’ve improved.

Sophia explained that she was proud of having graduated from high school with honors despite her health difficulties. That accomplishment has given her the incentive to set high goals for herself. She reflected that there are

Certain goals I would like to accomplish ‘cause I know the benefits about having an education. You know, it’s an easy access to anything you want. Recently, I found out

that you could earn a President's award, but in order to do that, you need to do at least 100 hours of community service or more. They have different levels, and that's another priority that I want to do. I want to take whatever time I have free to participate and help the community or and possibly graduate with two degrees, plus the President's award.

As her interview drew to a close, Sophia declared that “whether you're rich, whether you're poor, whether you're middle class, I think that you have options. Options are the best thing that could come to you.” She further elaborated by saying that there are consequences to actions.

Whether you make a bad choice or you make a good choice, it all has a consequence. And then it all depends on how you react to the consequence. You could make a bad choice and then react in a good way.

Hence, Sophia concluded with “My motto is to not let anybody or anything stop me . . . especially from whatever I want to accomplish.”

Vilma

Sixty-seven year old Vilma is from Cuba. She came to the United States a little over a decade ago and took her first English classes at the Enterprise Campus in 2003. Since she had limited knowledge of English, Vilma's first two semesters were in the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program, which is offered through the Enterprise Campus' School of Continuing Education, the non-credit arm of the institution. Upon completion of the ESOL courses in 2004, Vilma did not pursue anymore studies because she had to work. Then in 2010, Vilma returned to the campus, this time to attend the credit-earning section of the institution. Again, she had to take English courses, but as these were preparing her for college-level study, they were called English for Academic Purposes (EAP). She took 12 courses in that program, but upon taking a placement test to see if she was ready for college-level courses, she ended up

having to do developmental courses in writing and math. Vilma has now completed her developmental courses and is taking college-level courses. She no longer works and is receiving financial aid.

Textural Description

First and foremost, Vilma sees herself as being indebted to the U.S. government because she is an immigrant who, at the same time, feels that it is necessary to set an example for other Latino immigrants. She said,

I have a duty because the government of the United States is giving me the opportunity to take my life to another level, and I am trying to show that I can do something for me and the country.

Also, I think that I have to pay it [the government] with my effort. And that's what I am trying to do so that all Latinos don't come here only to get the little bit of money the government gives to us. I have to show that it is an investment for them put this money in me.

We are minorities in this country, and the government and the country need our help. And I think that by increasing my, our education, we can contribute in a better way.

Vilma's family and friends, however, have differing opinions about Vilma as a student. Her mother is bewildered. According to Vilma, "My mother is 92 years old. She doesn't understand very well what I am doing here." Vilma's granddaughter, who is also Vilma's classmate, is proud of her but asks her not to tell people in the class that they are related. Vilma recounted, "She told me, 'Abba [*Grandma*], don't call me nieta [*granddaughter*] anymore in *Professor X's* classes.'" But, Vilma is enjoying the experience of being in class with her granddaughter, and she said, "And we spend very beautiful moments in our class. It is a great challenge for me because I have to study hard because I am peeved if I get a lower grade than she."

Vilma had this to say about her friends.

The fact that I am 67 years old is admirable to many of my friends. But others, when they see me they feel bad about my health problems. They say, 'Oh, if you don't leave these studies, we will be crazy. We will become crazy [with worry].' Then they say, 'I don't know.'

Vilma did admit that being a student at her age has been a matter of concern for her, too.

She reflected,

At my age, sometimes I think to myself, could I finish my studies and make something with the knowledge I'm studying here. Nobody can know what is coming in the future, and I am here, trying to do something more to keep my mind active.

But, when she thinks about her past and the present, the thoughts of the future diminish. She said,

I had my daughter at the age of 17. And I didn't have the opportunity to continue with my studies seriously because I began many things. I finished something, but I never finished my university career. This is my opportunity, and I have to take it.

She still finds it challenging to maneuver her way through her courses, but she has found her classmates to be very accommodating toward her. She explained,

My classmates help me in comprehension. Fundamentally in comprehension because I have to listen to different professors with different accents and sometimes, I'm not accustomed to think in English. I am accustomed to think in Spanish. And always a question, even in the classroom, surprises me because I am trying to translate in Spanish. I have received the help of my classmates. They tell me, 'Oh, I don't speak Spanish, but I'll explain you. I can, I try to explain you in English.'

Another area that bothers Vilma and makes her feel awkward is that sometimes she doesn't articulate as well as she wants to. She continued,

I am talking to you like a person that is in 3rd grade. And I feel bad because I have another idea that I cannot express in this language. I'm trying to go unto the end of the way because I always dreamed of speaking English fluently. I love English. It's not a very hard language. And I always say, 'Why I cannot do it?'

Structural Description

In choosing a career focus, Vilma has taken into consideration the strong desire she has to repay the U.S. government for what it has made available to her. She said, “This country has given me an opportunity to study, to serve. I want to be a social worker.”

She does not allow negative comments from others or internal thoughts to thwart her determination to continue her studies. She continued,

Sometimes, I smile because there are persons that don't have the adequate level and always they think that studying is bad for every person. But I think that it's not. Nevertheless, I am increasing my knowledge. And I feel very good. I know that my brain is not as active as the other persons who are young. But I try to not be depressed. I try to make an effort.

One way that Vilma makes an effort is to encourage others. She related how she does it.

I am always giving advice to them. Each time that one of them says, ‘Oh, I cannot do this,’ or ‘I have to go to my job,’ or ‘Oh, that is difficult to understand; that is hard to do,’ I always advise them, ‘Don't cry because this is your future and the future of your family and your children. Do not abandon the classes. Do not quit.’ I am the example for them that they are persistent in their ideas and their purpose.

Such an attitude also helps Vilma deal with her personal feelings. Therefore, she puts into practice what she preaches. She said,

My challenge is I don't want to abandon it. I want to persist, to continue, and to finish my career. The challenge is to make it over here in another language. It's double, double, double problems—the classes and the language for me. It's not easy, but I'm trying. I am fighting and I will win.

Norman

Norman is 20 years old, and he and his family moved to Florida from Cuba almost 18 years ago. He took his first course on the Enterprise Campus in January 2011 and is planning to

graduate with an Associate in Arts degree majoring in political science in April 2014. He is actively researching universities—private and public, within his state and outside of his state—because he wants to complete his applications to transfer to a university during the summer following the interview. His dream is to become a lawyer. He lives with his parents, and this semester he is a full-time student who is unemployed. He does not receive financial aid.

Textural Description

Norman told his story from two perspectives: first, as an individual with no strong attachments to his ethnic heritage and second, as an activist member of the Latino ethnic group. For the most part, these phases in Norman's life correspond with his experiences prior to attending college and since enrolling in college. He described the early years of his life in this way.

When I was a lot younger, I went through a time in my life when I really hated where I was from. I really hated it. It didn't even mean anything to me. I was born in Cuba, but I came when I was a year and a half. So basically, I'm American. I was raised in the culture. There was nothing in Cuba that I remember.

In high school, Norman excelled in English, the language of his adopted country. He said,

I was very successful, especially in English, very successful. I remember I wrote a research paper on WWII, which I still have to this day on my computer because I'm so proud of it. It's 15 pages. At that time, it was my greatest accomplishment.

College was the next step for Norman, and there again his focus was on a single mission.

When I first arrived in college, I had a very normal ambition. I just wanted to get my degree. When I did my first two semesters in college, I was not involved. I was just a student that did my classes, and then I went home.

Then his first college courses exposed him to an experience that he never thought that he would have had but, at the same time, made him aware of a situation that many other students faced.

When I got to college, I needed remedial classes. I needed college prep for mathematics and for writing. It felt frustrating to me knowing that all I did in high school basically didn't mean anything because I needed college prep. I didn't want to be there. I mean, I woke up with an attitude—okay, I have to do this. I don't want someone else to be discouraged because not everyone who's discouraged has the will to continue.

Norman's shift from the individual perspective to the collective perspective began when he was in high school. He recounted,

As I got older, I started noticing that I got offended when people talked about Latinos. I wouldn't speak, but I took offense to it. So I guess somewhere inside me, I did care. I just—I don't know what was going on. When I reached high school, 80% of the population there were newly arrived Cubans, so one way or another, I was gonna be involved in the culture. And it taught me that you have to embrace where you're from because it's—it's almost a part of who you are. I'm Cuban, and I'll say it now; I'm proud of it.

It was a college friend of Norman's who played a major role in solidifying his shift from the individual to the collective.

A friend of mine just said, 'Why don't you join *College Student for Action (CSA)*? I mean you seem motivated. You, you know you should do something.' 'Okay, fine. I'll join *CSA*.' And it was a rewarding experience because I started noticing the issues that have to be addressed in school and in colleges all around the United States. That we have to educate more people. That we have to focus on education the most because, in reality, education is the beginning of something. It's the future. If we don't prepare this generation, what are we showing to the next generation?

Since then, Norman has been actively involved in affairs that matter to Latinos.

As Latino, we, we try to make a difference. That's the main thing. We don't try to say that we come from another country just to be here, and take up space. We're here to make a difference, to stand out. I want to become somebody, not just an average person. I want to be someone, to make a difference in life. I could make a difference. And I'm trying to

make a difference. You know, raise awareness that you have to get educated. You can follow your dreams.

Along the way, different family members have had an impact on him. Whether those people have encouraged or discouraged him, the end result has been the same, to motivate him. Norman said, “My mother has a lot to do with it. I have a strong relationship with her. I want to make her proud.” His father, on the other hand, has a cautious tone.

My father is quite interesting because I always tell him about my dreams of becoming a senator but he says, ‘Maybe you should limit yourself to an attorney because you know, just with your last name or your background, you’re not going to get elected.’

Norman spoke of his uncle to whom he made a promise that he was going to get an education and be someone. He said, “My uncle, who I am very close to, tells me, ‘I want you to become the next president. Don’t stop at senator. Become the first Latino president.’”

Norman explained the contrasting points of view within his own family in this way.

My mother and father were raised in a communist country, and it had to be either have your education or you enroll in the military. I believe that from the system that they have, they’re only limited to certain things. You’re going to be limited to a certain career. You’re going to be limited to a certain amount of money that you can earn. It’s very limiting. So I think that they have the same mentality that maybe you should be limiting, too.

His uncle’s perspective is different because he only lived in Cuba for the first 18 years of his life. Norman has another ally in his grandmother. She lived in Cuba until she was 65; both she and his uncle disagree with Norman’s father. Norman added. “They believe that I should reach as high as I can and no matter what I dream, I can accomplish it.”

Norman was concerned about his father’s concept of limiting oneself. He asked,

Is that the mentality we're putting on the Latinos now? That we have to limit yourself? Why do we have to limit ourselves? Latinos constantly limit themselves. 'Why don't you aim?' Women are trying to break the glass ceiling. I believe we have our own ceiling we have to break. And I believe that it's something that we should address. It's something we have to move forward to.

He identified one local Latino politician whom he admires.

One person who really got my attention was Florida *Senator X*. Knowing that he—I had the same background as him. And I would have never expected that from someone of his stature because knowing the people from his stature, they're not from that—they don't come from where I come from. And it almost felt that okay, he did it, I can do it, too.

The primary source of the challenges that Norman faces is not having enough financial resources. He said,

The biggest challenges I face is money, to earn enough to pay for my classes, to pay for my books. I don't get financial aid, so my mother has to pay out of pocket. Last semester, she couldn't pay, so I got my job, and I paid. I went to college full time, and I had my job full time. I remember how I was constantly tired. You don't have a break. When you're not working, you're studying. When you're not studying, you're in class. I couldn't sleep. I barely had time to eat. I lost weight. Everything is thrown at you when you're a college student. But I believe, it just—it makes you strong. I believe it pays off in the end.

Structural Description

In speaking about the ceiling that limits the growth of Latinos. Norman voiced a desire to tamper with the ceiling.

I would like to send cracks on it. Something that could tell people I'm doing this, you know. Follow me. You don't have to limit yourself. Break the system. There is no system that says you have to limit yourself.

He then followed up by describing a program that he implemented at the college.

Recently, I founded a program, *Parents & Kids*, which gives young parents an opportunity to be studying in their classes while their young child is safe at a daycare center. I went to a competition, and I won a grant from *Company X* to sponsor my

program for them to continue their education and not only provide for themselves and for their child, but also show their child, ‘Look, I went to college. You have to go to college.’ Things like that make me proud. It’s just the fact that, you know, someone’s life was changed because of me. That’s something that I hold very close to me.

While in college, Norman has seen some of his dreams materialize. He credited his association with the student organization, *CSA*, for giving him access to opportunities.

One thing that college taught me is just to be able to dream big because you can get opportunities. *CSA* opened the doors for me. The professors I met opened the doors. They told me, ‘You know, you should do this.’ My American government professor told me, ‘There’s a political campaign. Why don’t you volunteer for the political campaign?’ I did. And I believe it just opened so many doors because now I have an ambition. Now I look forward toward the future. I don’t know what’s going to happen in the future—my law career, my political career, making a difference among Latinos, even creating new bars that I hope to set for everyone to reach.

Composite Textural-Structural Description

Based on the data analysis, the study of Latino students’ sense of being and persistence in college is similar to the scrutiny of a multi-faceted collage that is shaped by a combination of culture, history, and personal experience. As such, each participant’s story, though unique, contributed to the development of an intricate narrative. After identifying recurring themes across the conversations of the eight participants, I was able to group those themes which had a connection with a broader theme. As a result four broad themes were identified. Each theme was subdivided into concepts that represented the experiences of individual participants (Table 3). Not all participants contributed to each concept, but all participants did contribute, in varying degrees, to each theme. Hence, what follows is an integrated synthesis of the participants’ perception of being a Latino student who intends to graduate from college. A more detailed account containing the themes, concepts, and significant statements is in Appendix E.

Table 3

The Experience of Persisting in College: Themes and Concepts

Themes	Concepts
Being Latino	Kinship, Breaking away from the Latino stereotypical mold
Student Attitudes	Being proud, Being known, Satisfying accomplishments, Driven by zeal
Confronting Struggles	Influences of family and friends, Health issues, Financial worries
On a Scholastic Journey	Generating constructive feelings, Self-discovery, Seizing opportunity, Under pressure

The Experience of Persisting in College: Being Latino

Kinship. Essentially, all participants were proud of their Hispanic heritage. The bond they felt was so strong that it was almost familial. Sandra’s comments, like “I do not feel like a fish out of water;” “I feel that we know the same things,” and “We’re from the same seed” supported that idea. However, it is important to note that a few of the participants did deviate before they arrived at their current position. The length of time spent living in the United States and the subsequent Americanization of those participants did have an effect on their perception of their identification with their Hispanic heritage. Lourdes said, “I am different because I came when I was little. But, I am still Latino.” Clara identified three generations of Hispanics: the older ones by virtue of having lived in two different worlds, the pre-Castro regime and the Castro regime; her parents’ generation, whose experience of Cuban political life is limited to the Castro regime; and her generation, the Americanized generation, whose world is in stark contrast with Cuba. She proudly declares that she is “the Americanized version of that culture.” Norman’s experience was different. As a youngster who grew up in the United States, he was ashamed of

his Cuban birthplace and rejected any connection with it until he entered high school. There he found himself surrounded by so many newly arrived Cubans that he couldn't escape the lure of the Cuban culture. That realization prompted him to remark, "I guess somewhere inside me, I did care. You have to embrace where you're from."

Breaking away. All the participants who discussed Latino stereotypes toward women and their quest for educational progress had similar ideas. No doubt, the fact that they had made the choice to become a part of an institution of higher learning signifies their intention to shun Latino stereotypical entrapment. However, it is important to note that not all participants have expressed their intention to reject Latino stereotypes with the same amount of zeal. The reason for this could be that the participants themselves are in an evolutionary phase as they address the stereotype issue. The interviewees' comments ranged in tone from being general to being forceful. Vilma said, "I'm taking my life to another level. I am the example for them that are persistent in their ideas and their purpose." Lourdes added, "At 22 they [normal people] should be done with their studies or almost done." Norman stressed, "I believe that it's [breaking the glass ceiling] something we should address. It's something we have to move forward to." Clara remarked, "I'm gonna become like the flagship of a female that is educated in Hispanic culture."

The Experience of Persisting in College: Student Attitudes

Being proud. These attitudes were derived from the experiences that the interviewees had had on the Enterprise Campus. Although the interviewees were at different points on the road to graduation, they all had some positive results to share. The mere act of being in attendance in college and learning something new is what made some participants proud. Two of them, Vilma and Sophia, said, "I am increasing my knowledge, and I feel very good;" and "It's

just an honor to be going to school and to be getting my education.” Sandra shared how her exposure to new technologies has made her aware of how much she has improved the quality of her work. She said, “And the presentations, the way they are today, are just different from my posters and sticking or painting on them. I am happy to say that I’ve been able to really learn a lot of things that are helping me at work today.” Anna expressed her amazement at how far she had progressed with her acquisition of English. She remarked, “I never thought that I can get an interview in English like this.” Still, there were interviewees who felt proud because they were able to move beyond being solely concerned about their needs to being concerned about helping other people. Those interviewees, Norman and Sandra, respectively assessed their actions in this way: “Things like that [founding a program] make me proud. It’s just the fact that someone’s life was changed because of me;” and “I had some pride in something that I was doing that was contributing to the school.” Ernesto and Lourdes shared how their self-efficacy skills have developed because of their increased confidence in their abilities. “So now going to the lab is not that much of a big deal, but back then it was,” remarked Ernesto. Lourdes, observed, “I am more outgoing. I used to be really shy. And now, I stand in front of people and talk.”

Being known. The participants’ stories tell that while the interviewees were content to feel that they were “one in a crowd” in a Hispanic-serving institution, it was quite an honor for them when they were singled out of the crowd and were recognized by others for what they had done. The interviewees definitely identified college personnel as the ones who had focused on nurturing them and aiding them in their individual achievements. Clara said:

The dean and a couple of the chairpersons know me personally. They know how much time I’ve put into the *Periodical*. The professors have been mentors to me. They say how much potential I have and how much love I have for it, and they want to see me strive. They want to see me continue. They’ve really pushed me forward.

Norman's desire was to be known,

As Latino, not just an average person, I want to make a difference. My American government professor told me, "There's a political campaign. Why don't you volunteer for the political campaign?" I did. Now I look forward toward the future.

Satisfying accomplishments. The personal satisfaction that the interviewees received for their achievements is the driving force behind their persistence in college. In speaking about their accomplishments, the interviewees mentioned that aspect of their academic life that mattered to them the most. For Anna, the adult learner of English, it was "satisfaction to say to people 'I get a degree in English in this country.'" For Ernesto, the student who had struggled with writing a research paper which turned out to be three pages long, it was "an achievement I'll hold on my own." For Lourdes, the young student who felt privileged to be a student at her age because all her female peers were not attending college since they were busy attending to personal matters, it was "I get an 'A' that makes me want to continue studying and getting good grades. Also, I got an award for academic excellence."

Driven by zeal. Without a doubt, the interviewees were inspired to transcend their preoccupation with attending to their individual student needs to recognizing that it is possible to achieve more either for themselves or for others. To be successful in achieving the extraordinary requires action, a free will, and a determined spirit on the part of the interviewees. Clara spoke about distancing herself from a derogatory aspect of her culture so that she could pursue a higher education. She said,

Being a Hispanic female is a huge deal. It has lots of importance because the Hispanic culture is very machista [sexist]. It's very misogynistic, disgustingly so, especially toward women being educated. I can't even say I have pride in being Hispanic,—but I do. I have some pride in being Hispanic because I like to set a good example.

Sandra was eager to allow classmates to peek into her professional world so that they could be exposed to some potential benefits. She explained:

I took one youngster to my job for one of his projects to interview my staff, and he did such a good job. Then there was another student that I was able to send an email to introduce him to someone that I know is in a position of, maybe, giving him at least an internship.

The third example was Vilma voicing her reason for remaining motivated. She said “I have to show my children that whatever they want to do, they can do.” In whatever way the interviewees chose to communicate their message to others, they demonstrated a spirit of optimism not defeat.

The Experience of Persisting in College: Confronting Struggles

Influences. The gist of the participants’ conversations revealed that though many of the participants presented a composed outward demeanor, beneath that facade, they were dealing with difficult situations in their lives. To be precise, they were “fighting an internal battle while juggling college with life” The participants were not deterred, however, for they managed to prevail and stay the course. Several of the interviewees spoke of close family members who were their champions and who had supported them in their pursuance of their educational dreams. Still, there were other family members and friends who were not receptive to the idea of their loved ones attending college. The interviewees proffered a myriad of reasons for the resistance on the part of their family and friends.

In Vilma’s case, her age was the topic of concern for her family and friends. She said, “It’s difficult for my family to understand that at my age I want to continue to study.” With regard to her friends, she said, “When they see me, they feel bad about my health problems.”

Sandra's husband had a difficult time sharing his wife with her newfound interests. Sandra reported, "He felt a little threatened that I was going to be taken away from our business to be at college."

Fathers, in particular, approached their offspring's' study efforts with a measure of skepticism. Norman said,

My father is quite interesting because I always tell him about my dreams of becoming a senator but he says, "Maybe you should limit yourself to an attorney because you know, just with your last name or your background, you're not going to get elected."

Clara said of her father, "He also thinks that when I get married, not if, and when I have children, I should slow down because good mothers are with their children, and if you're not, you're breeding a sociopath." Sandra's father said "Why are you going to be a professional student? You already have a good job."

Health issues. Personal life circumstances also affected the participants and contributed to their struggles. Sophia's response showed the extent of her physical, mental, and emotional strain. She said,

Emotionally, I've always dealt with the fact that I know I'm overweight. I doubt myself because of the health problem that I have, because of my physical features, because I am Latina. I sometimes feel too overstressed. When my stress levels get too high, I don't know, for some reason, I just can't deal with it.

Ernesto lived with the constant reminder of his capabilities. He said, "It is always going to be at the back of my mind that I'm kind of disabled." Clara questioned her decision concerning her major and future career. She said, "I'm second guessing my drive. Sometimes, I wonder am I in the right field?" For Vilma, it was the ever so present and demanding struggle of learning a foreign language. Her words revealed the depth of her struggle when she said, "My challenge is I

don't want to abandon it. I want to persist, to continue, and to finish my career. The challenge is to make it over here in another language.”

Financial worries. Having to be concerned about how the day-to-day bills would be paid was a reality that collided with some of the participants' desires to attend college. Anna had to take a break from her studies while her husband was recuperating from his illness. She said, “Then when he began to work, little by little, I [became] more relaxed [and could consider continuing my studies].”

After her stepfather lost his job, Clara saw where more of her time was spent on dealing with financial issues even though her parents had tried to shield her from the harshness of the family's financial dilemma. She commented,

Before my stepfather lost his job, my home life was just tedious, like, ‘You need to go pick up your grandmother's medication before the place closes.’ After my stepfather lost his job, he's in this weird depression, and so, every issue, every paper that comes in the house has to go through my hands. So not only do I have to worry about, ‘Am I going to pass my math class? Do I have a test tomorrow? Did I study enough?’ [I have to worry about] this court paper that [indicates] we're in debt with this credit card company from 1997. Are we going to pay for it? Probably not. What are we gonna do?

For Norman, the issue surrounding finances is very much interwoven into his life. He said, “I face financial difficulties in my life constantly.” He spoke briefly about his plan to attend another institution after graduating from high school, but because he couldn't afford the tuition, he ended up at a community college, instead. Whereas his enrollment at the community college may have lowered his family's financial obligations toward his education, it has by no means eliminated Norman's “biggest challenge,” that of having sufficient funds.

The Experience of Persisting in College: On a Scholastic Journey

A critical strand of the multi-faceted collage that tells the interviewees' stories is the evolution of that person who allowed me to peek into his or her world. That individual took me on a scholastic journey that revealed how underlying factors in the individual's life contributed to that individual's growth as a student.

Generating feelings. The participants were not reticent in describing their experiences and the accompanying feelings about being a student. Those feelings ranged from recollections of shock, frustration, and exhaustion to a current state of joy and satisfaction. At the time of the interviews, it was evident that those participants who had experienced disturbing feelings earlier on in their college journey had either somehow found a way to overcome them or the happiness, because of achievements they have made, that they currently feel overshadows any lingering negative feelings that they may have. Norman spoke about his disappointing start in college and how his feelings gradually changed. He said,

It felt frustrating to me knowing that all I did in high school basically didn't mean anything because I needed college prep. I didn't want to be there. I mean, I woke up with an attitude—okay, I have to do this. Course, as I went along, I noticed that I needed it. It was necessary for my greater success in college. I believe that sometimes when students walk into college and they're just thrown into college prep, it's discouraging for them. I don't want someone else to be discouraged because not everyone who's discouraged has the will to continue.

Sandra felt that she belonged on the campus and said, "It doesn't feel scary. I've been an insider as a student. I've felt very comfortable." However, she was not satisfied to be only comfortable; she wanted to do something. As a result, she added, "I want to be able to lend a helping hand. I want to pay it forward to others." Vilma was so moved by the opportunity to be a

student that she said, “I feel that I’m grateful. I think that I have to pay it [the government] with my effort. And that’s what I am trying to do. It is an investment for them put this money in me.”

Self-discovery. Clara spoke of that defining moment when it dawned on her that she needed to change her major. She was in a creative writing class and her teacher had just taught her the symbolism behind the tip of the iceberg metaphor. The teacher explained that “When you write a story, you only show your reader the tip of the iceberg, but you have to have this whole narrative underneath it to really give the story weight.” From then on, Clara’s position has been, “I see college as this introspective journey where I am learning more about my passion.”

The other participants have had less dramatic though nonetheless defining moments in their lives as well. Norman, who earlier had expressed frustration when he first started college, discovered a potential that he didn’t even know he had. He said,

When I first arrived in college, I had a very normal ambition. I just wanted to get my degree. Then a friend of mine just said why don’t you join *College Student for Action (CSA)*? ‘Okay, fine. I’ll join *CSA*.’ And it was a rewarding experience. Now I have an ambition. Now I look forward toward the future. I don’t know what’s going to happen in the future—my law career, my political career.

Sandra’s self-discovery was triggered by memories of her experience as a young student. She said, “I can kind of see myself in them [today’s students] twenty-five years ago. I just feel like saying, ‘Hey, take advantage! Learn while you’re here.’” Ernesto encountered the reality of attending a degree-awarding postsecondary institution and concluded, “I learned the hard way that you have to strive. You have to strive to be the best. You have to work hard.” For Sophia, her self-discovery was an admission of triumph that she was able to overcome difficulties that could have impeded her progress in college. She said, “I am stronger than most women who are

not able to succeed or accomplish what they want because of other circumstances or obstacles that are occurring.”

Seizing opportunity. Engaging in active pursuits was a logical progression for the interviewees once they discovered what their role as a student was. Thus, the interviewees conveyed a sense of purpose as they discussed their realization that opportunities awaited them. Four interviewees stated their positions with conviction. Vilma said, “This is my opportunity, and I have to take it.” Norman uttered, “It almost felt that, like, he did it, I can do it, too.” Sophia added, “My motto is to not let anybody or anything stop me from whatever I want to accomplish.” Sandra said, “Today I’m back in school because I want to learn more. I want to achieve different things not because I don’t have a good job, but because I want to feel that I am in a different status.”

Under pressure. The interviewees eloquently expressed the dilemma they faced: they had made a commitment to pursue their studies and attain success, but what did such a commitment entail? The answer was enduring some kind of pressure, which was either self-inflicted or externally imposed. For most participants, the pressure was related to their academic work. Participants revealed their raw emotions as they described what it was like for them to be subject to pressure. Sophia said, ‘I was nervous to actually start college ‘cause I wondered if they were going to judge me.’ Anna commented, ‘I have a pressure with the time because sometimes I try to do the assignments with due dates.’ Vilma remarked, ‘It is a great challenge for me because I have to study hard because I am peeved if I get a lower grade than she.’ Sandra observed, ‘There’s just so much that I lost in these 25 years of being absent from college.’ Ernesto added, ‘I am just frazzled. Man this is difficult. Maybe, I should just give a break to college. But I have to move on. Let me try it. It’s for a better life.’

The Invariant Structure of Persisting in College

The invariant structure is the ultimate underlying meaning of an experience. It is also known as the essence of the experience (Creswell, 2007). When an experience is described at the level of the invariant structure, that experience is shared by all participants. Consequently, since not all participants experienced all the concepts in the identified themes of the textural and structural descriptions, I did some further refining of the themes to arrive at the invariant structure. To recapitulate, the themes that aligned with the textural and structural descriptions were the participants' experience of persisting in college (a) as Latinos, (b) with maturing student attitudes, (c) while confronting struggles, and (d) to complete a scholastic journey. The constituent experiences arising from the invariant structure were that the participants' experience of persisting in college signified (a) undergoing a transformation, (b) feeling valued and productive, (c) developing endurance, and (d) profiling the component structure of a Latino college student.

All participants identified with their Latin origins but recognized that changes were occurring at random spots within the fabric of the Latino culture. All participants appreciated the attention they received from others and expressed a desire to be proactive during their sojourn in college. All participants rose above the challenges that appeared in their lives. All participants came to an understanding that being a student is not monolithic; instead, it is multidimensional. No one constituent part functioned on its own. Thus, the essence of the lived experience of Latino community college students who are on a trajectory to complete their college education is a transformative one that incorporates the participants' sense of worth to themselves and to others, the developing of an enduring spirit, and the construction of a multidimensional student profile.

Summary

In this chapter, the interview data from each of the eight participants were analyzed, organized, and discussed according to their textural and structural descriptions. A subsequent arrangement of composite textural and structural descriptions revealed that four themes were associated with the experience of persisting in college. Each theme had at least two subcomponents. After the themes along with their subcomponents were discussed, the invariant structure, that is the essential meaning of the experiences of the eight participants who desire to persist in college, was attained.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The reason for conducting this study was to determine how the lived experiences of a small group of students on a Hispanic-serving community college campus in the southeastern United States explained their persistence in college. In chapter two, an extensive review of persistence literature was done. Major highlights from that chapter review were that among first-generation Hispanic college students, relationships with family, friends, and faculty aided by positive psychosocial factors, like self-efficacy, motivation, and a sense of belonging enhanced the students' decisions to complete their studies.

Since the study was being conducted on one ethnic group for whom the American system of higher education is foreign, I designed a conceptual framework that focused on cultural capital along with habitus, as well as social capital, and the student identities of emerging adults and adult learners to examine the phenomenon of persistence in college. In the first section of this chapter, I will discuss the findings from chapter four in light of the studies that were reviewed in chapter two. In the second section of this chapter, I will answer the two research questions that guided this study.

Discussion of Research Findings Based on Chapter Two Literature Review

The Family

Of the eight participants interviewed, three of them—Lourdes, Sophia, and Ernesto— had wholehearted support from all their family members concerning their desire to pursue a higher education. In all three cases, the parents took on the responsibility of caring for the students and

impressed on them that it was their duty to attend college. Lourdes described her relationship with her parents in this manner. She said, “My parents have helped me a lot because I don’t have to worry about going home to cook and clean.” Sophia expressed her parents’ sentiments toward her and her studies very clearly. She was told, “The first thing that should be on your mind is school. Your first job should be school.” Ernesto, upon reflecting on the question of how he managed his time at home, at the college, and at work, responded, “Thankfully, with no work, I don’t have to struggle that much.” On the other hand, the three participants—Sandra, Vilma, and Clara—that experienced resistance or criticism from their family members were reminded by their relatives of alternative activities that they could engage in. For instance, Sandra’s father asked her, “Why are you going to be a professional student? You already have a good job.” The above mixed reactions like those that were depicted here are similar to Desmond and Lopez Turley’s (2009) findings, which revealed that the close family loyalty that constitutes familism can have a positive result, as in the decisions made by Lourdes, Sophia, and Ernesto to remain in college, or a negative result, as in the case of Sandra’s decision to drop out of college.

Though the preceding Desmond and Lopez Turley (2009) study provided answers about what led the participants to make the decisions they made, it didn’t reveal why in some families some relatives encouraged the participants while others did not. Studies conducted by other researchers on the phenomenon of familism and acculturation do, however, explain the dichotomy that was evident in Clara and Norman’s families (Lugo Steidel & Contreras, 2003; Cortes, 1995; Sabogal, Marin, & Otero-Sabogal, 1987). Schwartz, Montgomery, and Briones (2006) explain acculturation as “the process of adaptation along two dimensions: (a) adoption of ideals, values, and behaviors of the receiving culture, and (b) retention of ideals, values, and beliefs from the immigrant person’s culture of origin” (p. 2). The preceding studies showed that

even when acculturation diminishes the belief that family members are obliged to be physically near each other, acculturation does not affect the responsibility that family members have to provide for those who are in need of support (Lugo Steidel & Contreras; Sabogal et al.). Also, an individual's allegiance to familism is affected by the individual's age, length of stay in the United States, and educational experiences (Cortes). While the study participants' conversations did not support the views of Lugo Steidel and Contreras and Sabogal et al. on acculturation, their conversations supported Cortes' perspective. In any event, one can conclude that acculturation does have an impact on the attitudes and behaviors of first-generation immigrants and the decisions they make in their lives.

In some of the interviews, the participants portrayed their mothers as having a dominant role in their lives and driving the participants' efforts to persist in college. Norman's feelings toward his mother signify how much she helped to keep him focused on his studies. He said, "My mother has been a big source of motivation. I have a strong relationship with her. I want to make her proud." Clara's mother never failed to impress on Clara how important it was for her to attend college. Clara reported, "My mother, specifically, just put such a big stamp on getting an education. She always told me, 'Strive to get into college. Do as much as you can to get into it.'" These findings are consistent with the Esparza and Sanchez's (2008) research on high school students who succeeded because of the influence of their mothers, who themselves had not completed their high school studies.

Those students, who in spite of family opposition, persisted with their studies demonstrated through their conversations that they were operating from a position of strength fed by hope and confidence. Norman described the change that came over him as he became active in a campus organization. He said, "After I began maturing as a college student, it became more

evident to me how important it [being a Latino student] was. Now I look forward toward the future even though I don't know what's going to happen." Clara gave a passionate rendering of her feelings. She said,

I think given the different forces that are pressing down on me, what I have taken out of it is that I should always go for education because education means advancement and it means knowledge and power, and there's nothing bad that can come from it. And knowledge also leads to independence which is something that I also strive for in my personal life.

The stand that these two participants took is consistent with the Torres and Solberg's (2009) findings, which revealed that those Hispanic students who were successful had high levels of self-efficacy.

Friends

Norman was the only participant who spoke about a new friendship that he had developed while at the Enterprise Campus. That friendship was very special to him because of financial challenges that his friend, Hilda, a pseudonym, faced. Hilda, until recently, was an international student, and as such was required to pay tuition at triple the rate that an in-state resident, like Norman, pays. Through his friendship with Hilda, Norman became aware of the differing categories in which students are placed because of their immigrant status. That knowledge inspired Norman to become politically active.

The other participants, with the exception of Ernesto, spoke of their continued relationship with friends that they had had prior to their attending the college. In Clara's case, she and her best friend from high school take classes together. She said, "It means camaraderie between us. We're taking these steps together." As a result, they understand what each person is experiencing, and they support each other.

Lourdes and Sophia's friends, also emerging adults, are supportive as well, but they are not college students. They are of the view that being college educated is good for Lourdes and Sophia, but that rule does not apply to them. Sophia explained.

My friends appreciate me for me. Some of my friends are not as, I won't say intelligent, but they are very laid back when it comes to getting an education. If, for one instance, I say, 'Oh, you know, I don't want to study for this test, or I don't wanna, you know.' They will be like, 'Eh, that's not you.' They'll encourage me.

Sandra's friends have demonstrated their support by respecting her decision to complete her education. She said, "Most of my friends are like myself, in my age category. And they are very, very proud. And they just say, 'Wow. I can't believe you are going back to school. Great for you! That's wonderful.'"

On the other hand, some of Vilma's friends perceive that her mature age should be a deterrent to her pursuing a degree. Her friends' attitudes clearly show how damaging and stifling to a society deep-rooted cultural beliefs about members' roles and behaviors can be. Vilma's response to the criticisms of those friends is, "I smile because they are persons that have not the adequate level and always they think that study is bad for every person. But I think that it's not."

All the above examples show that friends are an important part of the lives of the participants. Whether or not the friends agree with the participants' decision to study is not the issue. The affected participants seem to be quite comfortable with the dissent. They made no indication of any dissatisfaction with their longtime friends; consequently, the making of new friends did not seem to be a priority for the participants. Buote et al. (2007) observed that this behavior is typical of commuter students, students like the participants in this study. The researchers noted that, "New friendships appeared to play a more significant role in the adjustment of resident students than they did in the adjustment of commuter students" (p. 687).

One solution they offered was for institutions to provide opportunities for students, especially commuter students, to develop new friendships in their first year of college.

I have treated Ernesto's relationship with friends separately because his situation seems to be unique. He indicated that he had a few high school friends, but none of them attended the campus he attends. "They [friends] are in college just at a different campus," he explained. I asked him if he had made any friends on the campus he attends, and his answer was no. However, he did have a strategy that compensated for his not having friends on campus. His online friendship with one person, in particular, was what kept him motivated. Ernesto pointed out in his conversation that his online friend's advice took precedence over his parents' advice. He said, "She motivated me, and she told me to stay in school and all that and listen to your parents. . . . I listened to friends first and then listened to the parents." Although Ernesto's experience concurs with Dennis, Phinney, and Chuateco's (2005) research on students valuing their friends over their family, his behavior in light of his own admission that he has a learning disability would suggest that he was experiencing some amount of social incompetence.

Gresham (1998) defines social competence as "the degree to which children learn to establish, develop, and maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and adults" (p. 19), and a child who has been identified as being socially incompetent is taught social skills, defined as "socially acceptable learned behaviors enabling individuals to interact effectively with others" (p. 21) to remediate the lacking behaviors. Developing peer-relationship skills is a component of social skills training (Gresham, Sugai, & Horner, 2001). What is not known from this current study is how much, if any, remediation Ernesto received when he was in the kindergarten through high school system. What is also not known is what kind of a learning disability he was diagnosed with. However, this encounter with Ernesto signifies that the chances

are high that there are other socially incompetent students at the institution who may or may not be considering completing their studies. Moreover, as the student population continues to swell, it will become more diverse and students who previously, may not have considered enrolling in college because of some kind of a disabling condition will do so. Thus, having the capability to spot and diagnose subtle behaviors that are outside the usual realm of acceptable behaviors and provide intervention strategies for the affected students is a proactive way of dealing with an issue that could inevitably affect a student's desire to persist.

The Faculty

The impact of the faculty on the lives of the participants is very evident in the stories of the majority of the participants. Whether it was a simple compassionate act like giving an extension on an assignment, to awakening the joys of reading in a student, to inspiring a participant to have a career that is similar to her professor's, or to working in extracurricular settings like volunteering to assist with a political campaign, the faculty have been appreciated by the participants.

I sent an email to the professor and said, 'Professor, please I need more time to do my assignments,' and he give me more time and I relaxed. (Anna)

Some teachers can be very helpful, very funny, and very life changing. Some teachers really have changed my view on things like reading. Now, I am more interested in reading. (Ernesto)

Professor Y and *Professor Z* have been mentors to me, and I can't have imagined having that one-on-one, teacher-student relationship in another institution. They really took the time to explain, to teach. I remember sitting in *Professor Y's* class and we were talking about the iceberg about how when you write a story, you only show your reader the tip of the iceberg, but you have to have this whole narrative underneath it to really give the story weight, so you need to know more than your reader does. And I remember sitting there, and I was just like, I want her job. That was literally the word in my head. (Clara)

My American government professor told me, 'There's a political campaign. Why don't you volunteer for the political campaign?' Which I did. And I spent hours. The class

minimum was only 30 hours for a grade, and I did 200 hours because it was such an amazing experience for me. (Norman)

The above findings are supported by the research that was examined in this study concerning faculty validation and the persistence of Hispanic first-generation students. Martin Lohfink and Paulsen (2005) discovered that first-generation students preferred frequent interactions with faculty, and they suggested that faculty have great influence on first-generation students during their freshman and sophomore years. In the Maestas et al. (2007) study, students' sense of belonging to the institution they attended was credited to the interest the faculty took in them. The Cejda and Rhodes (2004) study was conducted at a Hispanic-serving community college to investigate how the faculty influenced the persistence decisions of the students. A majority of the student participants reported that they changed their minds from completing a certificate program to completing an associate degree because of the faculty. When the interviewers asked the faculty to describe some of the strategies that they used with the students, they reported that they mentored them and served as role models to them. Findings from Barnett's (2011) study also substantiate Cejda and Rhodes' findings. Barnett concluded that two factors strongly influenced students' persistence: students knowing that they are known and valued by faculty and students being in a mentoring relationship with faculty. It is quite clear not only from the participants' voices but also from the literature that faculty interaction and validation are essential in ensuring student well being and by extension, student persistence in college.

Adult Learners

With regard to two of the three adult learners in the study, one, Vilma, had become a student in the mature years of her life because she had spent her younger years raising a family.

She said, “I had my daughter at the age of 17, and I didn’t have the opportunity to continue studying seriously.” The other student, Sandra, who returned to college after a 25-year absence, had left originally because of a sense of commitment to her father. She said, “I didn’t finish when I started 25 years ago because my dad just didn’t see college as a necessity.” These selfless inclinations that both students exhibited concur with Fuligni and Pedersen’s (2002) findings about female first-generation students having a strong obligation to their family. Fuligni and Pedersen define family obligation as, “the extent to which family members feel a sense of duty to assist one another and to take into account the needs and wishes of the family when making decisions” (p. 856).

Though the notion of a family obligation is considered a component of familism (Fuligni & Pedersen, 2002), it is worth the while to look at that concept separately here. The two above-mentioned participants were young, under 25 years, when they made the family obligation decision to focus on the good of their family rather than on pursuing their educational desires. Their young age falls within Arnett’s age of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000). One participant was living in her native country of Cuba at the time, and the other was living in the United States. This strong family obligation fervor appears in other studies, such as one by Tseng (2004) who looked at the beliefs of four ethnic groups, one of which was Latino, and compared the responses of the U.S.-born participants with the responses of the foreign-born participants. The findings were that the foreign-born participants had a higher sense of family obligation than those born in the United States.

However, one has to wonder if that committed attachment to the family among emerging Latino adults who have been exposed to the Anglo lifestyle in the United States in the 21st century has been waning. The current emerging adult cohort in this study did not raise the issue

of family obligation in their conversations. In fact, many of the parents had told the participants that their “priority” in other words, obligation was to study. The parents’ behavior certainly shows a slight shift in thinking about family roles. This is a shift away from focusing on the needs of a collective family unit to focusing on an individual family member’s needs. This development, however, does not support Sy and Romero’s (2008) findings on Latina emerging young adults. Those researchers discovered that the Latina college students in their study felt as if they enjoyed some degree of independence, but being independent did not relinquish them from their responsibilities of providing financial support for their families. The researchers did not mention the socioeconomic status of the participants, but we know that the participants’ parents had to have attended at least some college. The participants all attended a small liberal arts college in California. It would appear that there are many differences between the participants in the Sy and Romero study and the participants in my study. However, since the study of Latino emerging adults is still relatively new, these conflicting findings suggest that the Latino emerging adult cohort is in flux and it is too soon for anyone to make a comprehensive conclusion on the effects of Latino emerging adulthood on college persistence.

A common thread that knitted all three adult learners together was their efforts to be actively involved in their learning environment. Each counseled others. They were not bothered by the youthful age of their classmates. Instead, they were driven by a desire to succeed, but they didn’t want to attain success at the expense of others; therefore, they unabashedly reached out to help and encourage their classmates or family members.

I want to help them. maybe that’s because I’m older and maybe it’s because I see my kids in them, that I would want to maybe go a step above and try to see how I can contribute to their life. (Sandra)

I have to show my children that whatever you want to do, you can do it. Not only my children. The classmates. Young classmates. To not abandon their classes. That they should think in the future of their children. They have to make an effort. (Vilma)

I have a sister much younger than me, but she never studied in the United States. But when I got my first certificate at *CAP*, she said to me, 'I want to begin studying at *CAP*, too.' She is now studying at *CAP*. (Anna)

In some ways their behavior is similar to the findings from the Harris (2006) research, in which Harris noted that “positive peer-group interactions” (p. 101) were important to adult learners. In other ways, all three women have exhibited signs of generativity in their outlook on life. Erik Erikson identified eight life stages through which all individuals pass as they mature from infancy to adulthood (Shin An & Cooney, 2006). Generativity, which is explained as “showing care and concern for the next generation” (Shin An & Cooney, 2006, p. 410) is Erikson’s seventh stage, which occurs in mid-adulthood, the period after age forty. Volunteering and mentoring are typical activities that are linked with generativity. All three women in this study are within the generativity age range and did engage in volunteering and/or mentoring. Furthermore, Shin An and Cooney discovered that generativity is positively related to wellbeing, one of the psychosocial factors associated with college persistence. This finding stresses the importance of educators not only recognizing the presence of generativity within adult learners but of giving the adult learners opportunities to encourage, not suppress, their generative inclinations.

Psychosocial Factors

The on-campus experiences of Clara and Norman resonated with Swenson, Nordstrom and Hiester’s (2008) research on student adjustment. Both participants entered college with a career goal in mind. However, after attending classes for about a semester, they were spotted for their passions in life and their talents by individuals on the campus and were encouraged by

those individuals to participate in specific campus activities. That encouragement led to the two participants discovering their true talents and to the changing of their majors and career paths.

The first semester, I had *Professor Z*, who told me that there was the *Periodical*. He'd seen a little bit of my writing in class and he just said you should take a look. I ignored him completely. Then the next semester, I happened to have him again, and they discovered that they didn't have a designer. And still being a design major, I said, 'Oh that's cool. I'll be your designer.' But I was bouncing back and forth wondering if I should do graphic designing. The market is very saturated. And the more I decided to take more English classes 'cause I always loved it, I took them as electives in the beginning, and the more I was in those classes, and the more I spent time and I found out I enjoyed writing papers and just the discussion that I was having in class, I discovered that graphic design was a hobby, not my passion. And I think that's when I realized that I actually wanted to teach. This is what I really like. (Clara)

At the ending of the second semester, the very last day of the semester, I was just sitting around because my friend stayed to do a final, and I promised him, 'Okay, I'm here to support you,' which I did. And then they just walked up to me and said, 'Why don't you join *CSA*?' And that's what I did. (Norman)

The researchers noted that the timing of when old high school friends are replaced by new friends is an important element in the academic and social adjustment of new college students.

The timing of when Clara and Norman moved away from their comfort zones and tried something new is significant.

The motivation that Sandra, the participant who had been a stopout for 25 years, offered for wanting to continue studying was not the typical motivation that adult learners have. Already successful as a businesswoman, improving her finances was not a consideration for her. She said,

Today I'm back in school because I want to learn more. I want to achieve different things and not because I don't have a good job, but because I want to feel that I am in a different status. You know, many times, when I was looking at resumes [of applicants to her business] and looking at people that had a degree, I'll be honest with you, I always thought, 'Gosh, I wish I would have finished.' You know on my resume, I can't put '*College of Attainment Potential*, business administration.' I cannot put that I graduated because I didn't.

And I'm thinking about retirement and the job I have today in the health center—I do all the marketing. I'm the one that brings in the business. I work very hard. I don't

want to do, when I'm older, a lot of pounding the pavement to bring in the business. I wanted something that was more relaxing but still prestigious. And that's why I wanted to get this degree.

The above conversation touches on two issues. First, Sandra, at 48 years, admits that she regrets not having completed her degree. According to Slay, Taylor, and Williamson (2004), Sandra's reflection concurs with a mid-life theory proposed by Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, and McKee in 1978. During midlife, 40-60 years of age, people evaluate their lives and their accomplishments as they consider making career changes to compensate for any unfulfilled desires that they may have. Second, Sandra raised the issue of retiring from her own business and maintaining a less demanding work schedule than she currently has. In fact, Sandra's preoccupation about a midlife career change is not unusual. Cahill, Giandrea, and Quinn (2005) prepared a working paper for the Bureau of Labor and Statistics about the changing trends in retirement. Starting in the last decade of the 20th century, an increasing number of retirees have returned to the workforce and have been involved in bridge jobs, a term that refers to the type of employment, usually part-time, that an older adult takes after she retires (Ruhm, 1990). Cahill et al. observed that at the writing of their paper in 2005, more men and women, both blue and white collar workers, in their fifties are employed in bridge jobs. Sandra anticipates that by the time she graduates with a degree in pharmacology, she will be in her fifties. Sandra's position is another image of the adult learner, an image that could very well increase in frequency as colleges begin to mirror what occurs in the wider society. This, therefore, is another area in which educators would want to become more familiar and start planning how students, with motivations that are similar to Sandra's, can be identified and provided with the right support that will satisfy their needs.

Sandra's case is unique, however, because she is also a stopout student, that is, she returned to the college after an absence of several years. Her reasons for continuing her education were similar to the motivators that other stopout students had in the Hensley and Kinsler (2001) study. Those motivators were being older, having children, and having a focused direction. The significance of the Hensley and Kinsler study is that stopout students have the ability to take the reasons that caused them not to persist—in Sandra's case, a youthful age, being free of any parental responsibilities, and not having a clearly defined path for the future—and change them into motivating factors for their return to the classroom. Sandra's contribution to this study reveals some of the causes of stopout behavior as well as possible adjustment problems that a returning stopout student could encounter. Nevertheless, Sandra and the stopouts in the Hensley and Kinsler study typify the second life that those students breathe into college classrooms and the potential wealth of knowledge they can contribute to their formalized learning because of the life experiences external to the institution that they have had.

Snippets of conversation from the younger participants revealed their major preoccupations at the time of the interviews. These conversations indicated that the participants were at different stages in their whole person development as a college student based on Chickering and Reisser's seven vectors (Higbee, n.d.). For instance, Sophia was very forthright in defining herself as Latina, admitting that having turned 21, she felt empowered and she had decided what she wanted to do with her life. She appeared to be at the defining purpose vector. Ernesto, on the other hand, had not matured as much as other participants and seemed to be hovering around the achieving competence and the managing emotions vectors. Lourdes, who was emerging from the overprotection of her parents, demonstrated that she was in the establishing identity stage. The three adult learners showed that while they were entrenched in

the upper vectors—establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity—they were also at the developing competence and managing emotions vectors.

When Chickering and Reisser developed the seven vectors, they expected that college students would progress through the vectors sequentially; therefore, their arrival in the upper vectors of establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity would coincide with the students' latter years in college (Foubert et al., 2005). All of the above participants had spent varying lengths of time in college with the shortest time being two years. However, some of those students, like Anna and Vilma, who had spent extended periods of time at the institution, five and four years respectively, were still experiencing the lower vectors. This situation suggests that another element beside length of time in college may contribute to the students' psychosocial development, which is characterized by their passage through the vectors. I suggest that life's circumstances, rather than age or time spent in college, are what shaped the psychosocial development of the participants. Hence, when one considers factors that influence the participants' intentions to persist, one cannot ignore the role life's circumstances have played in the participants' psychosocial development.

Other Participant Attributes

Seven of the eight participants were Cubans, and they all had similar expectations for themselves. They wanted a degree so that they could improve their lives as well as improve the lives of their families. The participants' dream concurs with the findings of Bohon, Kirkpatrick Johnson, and Gorman (2006), which had discovered that members of the same ethnic Hispanic group shared the same type of expectations. Sandra was the only participant from a different Hispanic ethnic group. However, her expectations were not different from the other participants.

She was focusing on satisfying her desires and helping another generation, her children. Of course, it could be that in this region of the United States where Cubans are the dominant ethnic Hispanic group, other ethnic Hispanic groups have assimilated somewhat with the dominant group and/or for the community of Hispanic students on the campus, their priority is on persisting to completion and subsequently reaping economic benefits.

Both Norman and Clara faced similar anxieties: the possibility of not having enough financial resources to continue with their education. Essentially, both participants relied on their parents for financial support, but based on their conversations, that support was not always available. Norman, for instance, had to work full time in the previous semester in order to pay his tuition because his mother did not have the funds to pay for it and he did not qualify for federal financial aid. He reported,

Last semester what I did was I went to college full time and I had my job full time. I remember how I was constantly tired. I couldn't sleep. I barely had time to eat. I lost weight. I couldn't participate as much as I would like to in class. But knowing when the semester ended and I received all As in my classes and I could pay for my classes, that satisfaction was incredible.

Clara, at the time of the interview, was experiencing great financial stress because her stepfather, the sole breadwinner in her family, had been unemployed for some time. That reality resulted in a divided Clara and a strained household. Clara felt that she should be doing her part in earning money for the family, yet she didn't want to discontinue her studies. Meanwhile, Clara's mother was determined that Clara not work, and Clara's stepfather avoided causing any conflict by leaving the decision to Clara. She explained,

And it gets very difficult to come to school and know that I could have been bringing a paycheck in to ease the load, but I'm not. And the problem with part-time jobs, especially here in Florida, is you're either waitressing or you're waitressing. The schedules are not flexible. And I know it would hamper my ability to continue my studies. And my

mother's like, 'You don't need a job. Don't worry about us.' But of course I'm going to worry. I'm an adult.

He [Clara's stepfather] told me that he would continue to pay for my studies. He would find a way and not to worry about it, but if I wanted to go out and get a job, that was okay too. It was whatever I wanted to do.

In spite of facing economic hardships, the participants and their families were by no means poor in their emotional and spiritual desires for the participants to persist. In fact, the participants and their supportive family members demonstrated a grit that indicated their determination to continue with their plans to remain in college, despite the emergence of hardships. Hence, these findings do not concur with Payne's view on poverty among first-generation students whereby she associated poverty with the activities of cultural groups (Hand & Payne, 2008). In actuality, Payne's deficit-thinking ideas, which are based on ascribing negative stereotypes to cultural minority groups (Bensimon, 2005), are not supported by the way Norman and Clara dealt with their financial crises.

Instead, Norman and Clara's situations coincide with Arana, Castaneda-Sound, Blanchard, and Aguilar's (2011) study on factors that contribute to the persistence of Hispanic undergraduates. The study's authors identified three domains that encouraged persistence. They were (a) the student context, which was comprised of family relations as well as being a first-generation student, (b) the college context, which was comprised of college-attending experiences, and (c) the blending of both the student and the college contexts. Norman and Clara's life stories did reveal the existence of all three domains, especially the third.

Two concepts emerged from the data that were not evident in the literature that I had reviewed in chapter two. One was the notion of the participants using other people's experiences as a frame of reference to plan their life of which completing college is a part. Ernesto's parents' difficult working conditions were enough to keep Ernesto focused on remaining in college.

Ernesto reflected, “I’m thinking of my parents. I see them dealing with nasty children who of course do many nasty things on the bus. My mom and dad, they weren’t lucky.”

Lourdes didn’t want to be like others who worked in menial jobs. She said,

I think that people are not used to seeing Latino people studying. They’re used to seeing people working in factories, and at the community college I get to do a career, like a professional career. So, that’s why it’s really important to me. They [my parents] always tell me to finish studying so that I can become a professional and work in a place where I don’t have to do manual work. Working in an office is something that is more recognized.

Clara was not going to be like her mother, who had no hope of escaping her life situation. She said, “My mother is a stay-at-home. She doesn’t know how to drive. She is a nervous wreck at all times, and I blame the culture that she was raised in.” With the experiences of their family members being a constant reminder to the participants as to what the alternative to not completing their college education is, the above three have one thing in common: intrinsic motivation. Ryan and Deci (2000) define intrinsic motivation as “the doing of an activity for its inherent satisfactions” (p. 56). Intrinsic motivation has also been associated with research done on academic resiliency (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004). Academic resiliency has been attributed to the educational achievement that has resulted in students despite the presence of at-risk factors, such as academic under-preparedness and low socioeconomic status among ethnic minority groups, such as African Americans, Mexican Americans, and Native Americans (Morales, 2008). Students attain academic resilience by relying on protective factors, which “work as buffers for the resilient students and are able to mitigate the effects of the risk factors” (Morales, 2000, p. 9). Intrinsic motivation is one of the protective factors (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004). Ernesto, Lourdes, and Clara have used intrinsic motivation as a protective factor as they overcome challenges that could have hindered their intentions to persist.

The second concept was the idea of the participants moving ahead but not traveling alone on that journey. Norman illustrated that when he spoke about doing something to end the cycle of constraints which he perceived to be preventing Cubans in his social class from taking full advantage of educational opportunities in the United States. He said vehemently,

The country I'm from is Cuba. If you're not related to someone famous or someone in the higher up in the diplomats, you're not going to have a career. You're going to be limited to a certain career. You're going to be limited to a certain amount of money that you can earn. It's very limiting. So I think that they [his parents] have the same mentality that maybe you should be limiting too. But I disagree with that. Why do we have to limit ourselves? Latinos constantly limit themselves. Why don't you aim? Women are trying to break the glass ceiling. I believe we have our own ceiling we have to break. And I believe that it's something that we should address. It's something we have to move forward to. I'm not saying that I'm the one to break it. I mean I would like to send cracks on it, something that could tell people I'm doing this, you know. Follow me. You don't have to limit yourself. Break the system. There is no system that says you have to limit yourself.

In a much subdued manner, Sandra had sentiments that revealed her concern for others and her desire for them to become aware of opportunities that are available to them to help them progress in the society. She spoke about "paying it forward," to assist others when she can. Both above scenarios show that these two participants and others, like Sophia and Vilma, have recognized that their persistence in college is bundled with a responsibility for them to reach out to others in an effort to help improve the lives of others. In other words, success for the participants would be achieved on two fronts, the participants themselves and the other students with whom they have associated and helped.

The caring attitude displayed by the above participants toward their peers bears some resemblance to peer-supportive relationships that two researchers, Gandara (1994) and Lopez (1995) have identified in the literature. Gandara (1994) studied a group of Mexican American (Chicano) students who defied the odds and succeeded in attaining postsecondary degrees at

various levels. The participants credited their success to many factors, two of which were the advice of older siblings and the mentoring relationships of peers. Lopez's (1995) study, which was also conducted on Mexican American students, examined the challenges the participants faced and the available resources they had to deal with their challenges. Challenges included financial burdens and academic difficulties. Faculty, financial aid advisors, and student peers are examples of resources that provided "emotional and instrumental support by encouraging students and assisting them in coursework" (Lopez, 1995, p. 500). The peer-as-a-resource approach is most assuredly a strategy that college personnel should encourage as they identify students who demonstrate that they have a propensity toward a supportive role.

Cultural Capital with Habitus and Social Capital

Norman and Clara were the most vocal in articulating how cultural (knowledge of the higher education system) and social (having a network of social contacts) capitals played a role in their decision to remain in college. At the beginning of the college journeys for both, cultural and social capitals seemed to be almost nonexistent. Prior to attending college, Norman had asked his high school teachers about college. Norman relayed the gist of his conversations with his teachers.

Before I got to college, I was constantly asking professors in high school, 'What's college going to be like? What's it going to be like?' A lot of professors always tell me, 'You'll be fine. You will be fine.' And it gave me a sense of 'Okay, I believe you. Okay, I mean, you've been through it. You should know.'

In hindsight, Norman would probably say that his preparation for college by his school teachers was inadequate. That was evident even as he went through the matriculation process in order to choose courses for his first semester. His high expectations were soon dashed when he realized

that he needed to take developmental education courses in English. According to Norman, “In high school, I was very successful, especially in English, very successful.”

A similar theme of a lack of understanding of what to expect in college appeared in Clara’s story. She reported that the decision for her to attend college was reached toward the end of high school. Although her parents had said repeatedly as she was growing up that they wanted her to attend college, they had given no thought as to how they would realize that dream.

When my mother and my father came to this country, no one in the family had gone to college either. And so, it wasn’t until I grew older that the idea of going to college even passed through their minds. They didn’t have a college fund for me.

However, as Norman and Clara discovered more about themselves and developed an attachment for Enterprise Campus, all through their association with others at the institution, their accumulation of cultural and social capitals increased. In fact, one could argue that Norman and Clara’s aggressive response to their financial hardship is a product of their maturing in cultural capital. Their conduct signified that they were making use of embodied cultural capital that is relying on information that they had access to in order to make a decision. These findings resonate with the literature on cultural capital and first-generation students developing a sense of belonging (Dumais & Ward, 2010; Strayhorn, 2008; Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007; Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Having arrived at the stage when they are comfortable within themselves and they feel that their collegiate lives coexist with Enterprise Campus’ curricular direction, both Norman and Clara signify that persistence in college is a natural progression for them.

Through Sophia and Ernesto’s conversations, it was apparent that they, too, had limited cultural and social capitals. Sophia worried about being accepted because of her size, and

although, she was often frustrated because of her illness, she had no one on campus to confide with. She said,

At certain times, due to my condition, I sometimes feel too overstressed. When my stress levels get too high, for some reason, I just can't deal with it. I've never gone to a therapist. I do tend to, for example, when it comes to my feelings, keep them toward myself.

Before attending college, Ernesto seemed to have been all alone as he pondered his next move after high school. Now as a college student, he observed, "In college you tend to talk with people." He still appeared to be alone as he navigated his way through college. He added,

During my one year break after graduation, I thought about why I should go to college. Why should I? I shouldn't. I should go to college because then I forgot I don't have to work on the bus, wake up at 5 in the morning, or do something hard like working in the McDonalds.

I learned when I came to college, that I'm a very late bird because I did all my assignments very late and I somehow managed to pass them. I know who I am at heart, but I don't try to fix it. I say, 'Oh, I'm too lazy. I should try to work harder.' But, I don't do it. I don't know why.

Yet, over time, Sophia's cultural and social capitals have improved. Thus, Sophia disclosed her plans.

Recently, I found out that you could earn a President's award, but in order to do that, you need to do, at least 100 hours of community service. That's what I want to do. So, I want to take whatever time I have free to participate and help the community and possibly graduate with two degrees, plus the President's award.

Anna and Vilma seemed to have developed their capitals as they sought to fulfill their dreams. Furthermore, habitus, that "system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks," (Bourdieu, as cited in Di Maggio, 1979, p. 1464) was most evident in these two participants.

Both women remained undaunted in their quest for a degree even though they faced many barriers, such as learning a new language at a later age and preparing for a career which necessitates a firm understanding of the language in which the career will be practiced, the likelihood of competing with younger job applicants who are more fluent in English, and dealing with health and financial problems. These women were only too grateful, that, finally, they had been awarded the opportunity to realize some lifelong dreams. All of the above examples support the findings of Dumais and Ward (2010) and Pascarella, Pierson, et al. (2004) on first-generation students that in comparison with other generations of students, they are at a disadvantage from the very outset of their quest for postsecondary education, and that disadvantage does not disappear while they pursue their studies. Therefore, for first-generation students, like Anna and Vilma, the key to persisting is to rely on the strengths they gained through their accrued cultural and social capitals and use those capitals as leverage to help them succeed in college.

One clarification is important to this discussion. In chapter two, I had envisioned that field, the context in which cultural and social capitals function, was limited to the higher education institution to which the participants attended. However, since reference to the preservation of the Latino cultural heritage and the disagreements that ensued with family members or friends when participants chose to behave differently were underlying threads in many of the participants' conversations, I have seen where it is necessary to expand the concept of field to include the community of friends, family, and the institution.

Student Identity of the Emerging Adult

My previously discussed findings about circumstances having a greater effect on the student's decision to persist than age also lend credence to Arnett's (2000) definition of

emerging adulthood. Age is not the defining characteristic of this life stage. In actuality, the vectors with which I associated Sophia, Ernesto, and Lourdes appear to correspond with three of Arnett's five characteristics of emerging adulthood. The vectors were defining purpose, achieving competence, managing emotions, and establishing identity. The three of Arnett's characteristics that were identified were the age of identity explorations, the age of instability, and the age of possibilities. These three characteristics also applied to the two other traditional-aged participants—Clara and Norman. The findings that not all characteristics applied to this cohort of Latino participants is not surprising as they substantiate claims from Arnett's (2003; 2007) subsequent research with three minority ethnic groups in comparison with White Americans. Latinos, one of the minority groups in the study, did not exhibit the same emerging adulthood trends as White Americans. Arnett (2007) attributed the difference to "psychosocial differences . . . related to socioeconomic status and ethnic group" (p. 70). The participants' references to their emotional, social, cultural, and financial struggles are evidence in support of Arnett's (2007) findings.

Student Identity of the Adult Learner

There is evidence from the conversations with Vilma, Anna, and Sandra, the nontraditional-aged participants, that these learners relate to the two adult learner constructed identities described by Kasworm (2005). With regard to positional identity, that is when the adult learner judges herself against preconceived ideas and other accepted norms, Vilma said, "I have to study hard because I am peeved if I get a lower grade than she [her granddaughter]." In a similar manner, Sandra spoke about the unofficial rivalry she had declared between herself and her children, "I'm applying pressure to myself to get As, which is what I expect them to get." Both examples illustrate Kasworm's viewpoint that adult learners have preconceived ideas on an

acceptable academic performance as well as ideal student characteristics for themselves. Adult learners use those preconceived ideas to rate themselves (2005).

Considering relational identity, that is when the adult learner establishes social relationships, Anna spoke about the community of adult learners that attended her church. She said, “Last year one of my sisters in faith graduated from *College of Attainment Potential*. In my church, a lot of people graduated from *College of Attainment Potential*.” Vilma demonstrated that she had a positive relationship with faculty. She said, “My professors say, ‘Oh, it’s good, that you, an old person, are making this sacrifice.’” Sandra took some of her younger classmates to meet some of the people with whom she networks. All these associations with other adult learners, faculty, and younger students are examples of relational identity, and, thus, they support Kasworm’s (2005) findings.

The final element in Kasworm’s framework is that adult learners are subject to strong internal feelings that lead them to doubt their abilities and to have diminished self-confidence (2008). Although all three participants did express some anxiety about the coursework that they had to do and their having to skillfully manage their student life along with their domestic life, their feelings on the subject were not as intense as in the Kasworm study. For that study, Kasworm proposed four “acts of hope,” which are similar to success strategies. Only one of the four appeared to be relevant to this study’s participants at the time of the interviews. That was “ongoing engagement in a collegiate environment” (p. 29), and it is probably pertinent to the participants since it embodies the idea of persistence.

A Return to the Research Questions

This study, which focused on the lives, experiences, and emotions of eight Latino students at an HSI in Florida, was driven by two research questions. They are:

1. What are the lived experiences of a small group of first-generation Latino students at a two-year Hispanic-serving institution in the southeastern United States?
2. How do these first-generation Latino community college students perceive their sense of self through their lived experiences and how does their perception influence their persistence in college?

Those questions will now be answered. However in keeping with the transcendental phenomenological method that this study undertook, the answers will reflect the understandings of the cohort of participants rather than individual participants.

Question 1

The participants were members of two families, the ethnic family of Latinos and their biological families. The Latino family links remained strong and endearing and the traditions of the Latino culture were the voice of the ethnic Latino family. Within the biological families, other voices could be heard and the message of those voices was at times contrary to the unified message of the Latino cultural voice. Hence, within families, some family members would give complete support to the students' efforts to attend college and persist while to other family members it was folly to make a commitment to persist. Their friends, who were also part of the ethnic Latino family, encouraged the study participants, but that encouragement did not necessarily transfer to the lives of the encouragers. Therefore, some participants found themselves on a lonely journey as they continued on the road to degree completion.

For the participants, the journey was replete with a combination of high points and low points. High points included (a) discovering who they really were and what their true calling was, (b) being in a mentoring relationship with faculty and staff, (c) donating time and energy to an extracurricular activity, and (d) enjoying learning and seeing the progress that they were making in their studies. The low points were the barriers that obstructed the students' path. Those barriers were (a) concerns about finances, (b) conflicts arising among family members about the participants' continued attendance in college, and (c) the resulting stress and weariness that the participants' felt. Therefore, the participants revealed that their lived experiences consisted of enduring a constant pull between the high and low points in their lives. However, because of their determination to succeed, the participants learned to create a balance between the two opposing forces.

Question 2

All the participants shared one common understanding about the value of getting an education, which, without being prompted, they articulated in different ways. On a global scale, to the participants, higher education is an imaginary line that divides two worlds: the traditional ancestral world, which does not guarantee economic stability and social mobility in the 21st century United States and the world of their making, which offers them an opportunity-rich outlook. The participants' stories vividly revealed what life is like presently for their family and friends who have not pursued a higher education: unemployment, underemployment, dead-end jobs, and anxiety. On a personal scale, the participants had an altruistic reason for getting a degree. They wanted to advance themselves so that they could concentrate on improving the lives of their families. Therefore, their strategy for fulfilling that desire to persist was to approach their stay in college as if they were on a mission. Within the participant cohort, there were two

distinct age groups. The younger age group, 18-25 years, exhibited characteristics that showed that even though they had heard of the difficult lives of their parents and they themselves had experienced generational challenges, their lives were still in an identity forming stage as they put into perspective past customs, present circumstances, and future dreams and tried to figure out how they would accomplish their ideals.

Those participants, who were older than 25 years, viewed themselves as being given a second lease on life. Unencumbered by the identity formation needs of the traditional-aged students, the adult learner participants focused their attention on achieving academic progress. Their strategy for doing so, however, included their involvement with traditional-aged students both in and out of the classroom. In short, the extent of the exposure to life's challenges determined how the participants in both age groups perceived their sense of self. However, in either case, both sets of participants developed strategies to assist them in their quest to persist in college.

Summary

In this chapter, the findings from the previous chapter were discussed in view of research that had been referenced in chapter two. Similarities were found in many of the instances; however, in a few cases, new areas of consideration presented themselves. The chapter ended with a review of the study's research questions followed by a discussion of their answers as intimated by the participants' conversations.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

On the one hand, indicators that the number of Hispanic students who are pursuing higher education has risen is good news for the country; on the other hand, past behavior of the majority of Hispanic college students failing to graduate from college has cast a shadow over the news. Why do so many Hispanic college students not graduate and what can be done to reverse the trends? Those questions have been the foci of many studies. The current study sought to add to the knowledge of Hispanic college student persistence by concentrating on a group of eight students who attend an HSI community college in the southeastern United States. The qualitative paradigm with Husserl's transcendental phenomenology as its mode of inquiry was employed.

The questions that framed this research were:

1. What are the lived experiences of a small group of first-generation Latino students at a two-year Hispanic-serving institution in the southeastern United States?
2. How do these first-generation Latino community college students perceive their sense of self through their lived experiences and how does their perception influence their persistence in college?

The study's findings indicated that the participants lived very complex lives and their decision to persist in college was based on a combination of several factors. Endearing relationships in the form of family, friends, and faculty coupled with the participants' having attained a personal level of comfort with their sense of identity, their self-efficacy, and their sense of belonging contributed to their desire to persist. At the same time, participants had to

wrestle with themselves and other pressing external factors in order to arrive at the desired level of comfort.

Implications for Practice

The data showed that Latino students at the study institution felt more comfortable as they became involved with extracurricular organizations or in informal small group settings. Sadly, those students who are not exposed to such associations could have a more difficult time developing social relationships with other students and, as a result, could easily fall through the cracks, become lost in the web of institutional academic structures, and eventually become college dropouts. There is, therefore, an urgent need for the provision of a strong multilayer transition-to-college support system that would be extended to all students. College personnel, especially those who are in student affairs where the focus on students' developmental and psychosocial needs is so critical, should be visibly and actively involved in this effort. Programs would be tailored according to students' interests, needs—relational, self-esteem, and self-actualization—based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943), learning styles—based on work contributed by Myers-Brigg and Kolb—(Montgomery & Groat, 1998), multiple intelligences—based on Howard Gardner's theory of the same name—(Northern Illinois University, n.d.), emotional intelligence—based on Daniel Goleman's research as well as the application of emotional intelligence to academic success—(Goleman, 2004; Van Der Zee, Thijs, & Schakel, 2002), and anchored by strengths-based psychology—based on Donald Clifton's StrengthsQuest, an assessment tool designed for high school or college students and adults—(Gallup, 2010). Figure 1 is my creation; I did not depend on any other model as I designed it. The figure depicts what the proposed support system would look like. In the student section of the diagram, the unshaded oval shapes represent the programs that would be available to the first-year students.

The arrows connecting the ovals indicate possible sequences and/or combinations of programs that the students could take. Students would not be expected to participate in all the programs. In the college personnel section, the arrows indicate the communication flow among faculty, staff, and administrators. The horizontal layout of the latter section is unintentional; its sole purpose is to illustrate the different interactions that occur among college personnel.

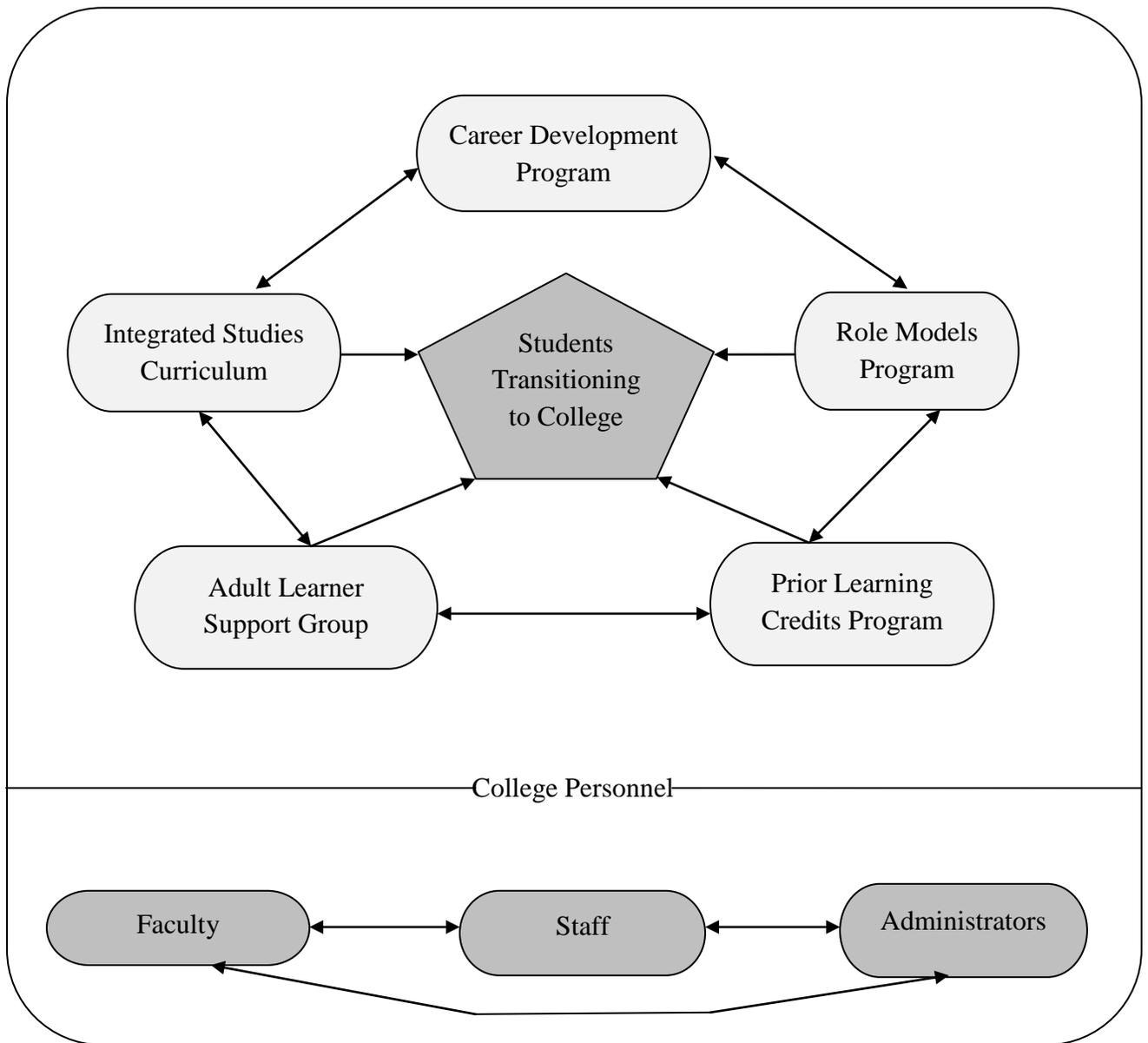


Figure 1 Conceptual model to illustrate proposed multilayer transition-to-college support system

First, a *Connection with Role Models* program should be established. “Making a difference” in the lives of others and “paying it forward” were recurring themes in the data. Alumni and other successful community members could do the same for current students and when students graduate, they would be recruited to join the program. The role model contributions could range from role models giving podcast talks on how they survived their college experiences, role models participating in an occasional guest speaker series, to role models providing mentorship, internship, career awareness, or apprenticeship opportunities for current students.

I learned from this study experience that an interview is a valuable tool for gathering data. The participants all voiced their different perspectives, yet each person’s contribution was critical to the holistic understanding of the phenomenon. The interview also captured the intensity of the participants’ raw emotion in a way that no quantitative research tool could grasp. Therefore, whenever possible, educators should seek to converse with students to get responses that are not desensitized by pencil and paper. The ideas that can be had through the interview medium should be useful to the administration, faculty, and staff as they create policies that impact students. For instance, by choosing to use the interview method to interact with students, it is highly possible that the voices of students who appear to be socially incompetent could be heard. Not only would campus leaders then be able to provide intervention strategies that would serve the specific needs of the individual students, they would also be able to engage in follow-up sessions with the students to assess how well the strategies are working and to make adjustments if necessary.

Another area that needs to be strengthened is the high school to college transition. The literature on student adjustment to college (Astin, 1999; Pascarella, Wolniak, et al., 2003) shows

that there are many factors that affect the choices high school students make with regard to pursuing postsecondary studies or not. There are demographic and parental factors. For instance, those high school students who attend affluent schools and have parents with degrees and professions experience the preparation for college much differently from those high school students who attend schools in low income neighborhoods and have parents who had no postsecondary education (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001).

According to Rowan-Kenyon, Perna, and Swan (2011), there is another set of factors. They pertain to school context. The researchers described three different types of school contexts: (a) a high-resource school, characterized by “above average student achievement and socioeconomic status,” (b) a middle-resource school, characterized by “average student achievement and socioeconomic status,” and (c) a low-resource school, characterized by “below average student achievement and socioeconomic status” (Rowan-Kenyon et al., p. 333). Some of the research findings were that certain occupations were more popular in specific school contexts. Among the high-resource schools, more students wanted to be artists and teachers. In the middle-resource schools, business and engineering careers were popular. In the low-resource schools, the popular career choices were medicine, law, and professional sports. Though one might wonder why these choices were not popular in the high-resource schools, their popularity in the low-resource schools could be indicative of the concept of aligned and misaligned ambition choices among teenagers (Hallinan, 2001). Students who have aligned ambitions begin their preparation while in high school for the rigors of college study by choosing an academic track that gives them the prerequisite courses that they will need in college. On the other hand, students with misaligned ambitions aspire for specific careers while in high school but do not map out a curricular path that will lead them to achieving their goals in college. Another notable

finding is that the students from the high- and middle-resource schools had a variety of sources—teachers, parents, and relatives—from whom they gained knowledge about careers. On the other hand, students from the low-resource schools had access to limited resources, such as career day activities at school and researching careers in classes.

In another study, Behnke, Piercy, and Diversi (2004) interviewed 10 rural Latino families—mother, father, and youngster—to find about their educational and occupational aspirations. The researchers discovered that (a) the youngsters had “surprisingly low educational aspirations and rather low or unrealistic occupational aspirations” (p. 29); (b) the parents’ educational attainment impacted their offspring’s educational and occupational aspirations; and (c) many of the parents had not discussed with their youngsters what they, the youngsters, intended to do post high school; therefore, those parents did not know if their youngsters had educational or occupational aspirations. All three of the preceding studies show that high school students need guidance in making choices about the occupations they aspire for and the type of academic preparation they need to pursue while in high school so that when they enter college, they do so with a purpose and they feel confident about their chances of progressing. Both of these conditions will eventually enhance the students’ prospects of persisting in college.

In some ways, the students in the above studies paralleled the younger participants in my study. My study’s participants were first-generation; that is, their parents had not been to college. The parents had no experience about college that they could pass on to the participants. Clara’s mother and stepfather wanted and expected her to go to college, yet they did not discuss college plans with her. As was disclosed in chapter one, the community in which the participants lived was a lower socioeconomic area. Some of the younger participants seemed to have decided on their occupational aspirations on a whim, without much thought. Ernesto’s response to a question

about his career intentions was “I didn’t know until the very end of high school when I was like, “you know what, I’ll be computer art animation.” Clara said that her aspiration was to become a graphic designer, but she found herself “bouncing back and forth” wondering if she should continue on that track or not. Norman changed his occupation aspiration after he became involved in college activities. These situations indicate that students need to participate in a structured career counseling program. The program’s activities should go beyond the traditional taking of a career interest survey to what Rowan-Kenyon and her colleagues (2011) describe as “career development programming that connects career decision making with educational planning” (p. 340). Highlights of the program should include teaching students to distinguish between expectations, aspirations, and goals, to set short- and long-term goals, and to reflect on their circumstances and engage in self assessment. Students would also need to attend post-self-assessment follow-up sessions with their advisors throughout their first two semesters on campus.

A second way in which the high school to college transition should be strengthened is by implementing an integrated academic and co-curricular program that addresses the adjustment of recent high school graduates into developmental education. Norman’s reaction to being placed in developmental classes was disbelief and shock that the time he had spent in high school, in essence, was not recognized by the college, and “didn’t mean anything.” At the beginning of his time in college, he said that he was emotionally affected by the delay in starting college-level courses and that he didn’t want others to have a similar experience, for they may not persist. This is a clear indication that yes, academically, taking developmental education courses may be a necessity for students who still need more time for remediation; however, the basic skills instruction of reading, writing, and math needs to be contextualized with another academic area

that is relevant to the students' educational growth. One such academic area is social justice. A brief definition of social justice is that it is the notion of extending equity and fairness to all people (Wilson & Meyer, 2011). In other words, the tenets of social justice are not foreign to developmental education students who are often considered underserved—low income—and underrepresented—ethnic minority and first generation—in the educational structure (Academic Pathways to Access and Student Success, 2006). Therefore, it would be beneficial for the developmental education students to become social justice advocates while they improved their deficiencies in the basic skills.

Two three-credit social justice courses, level one and level two, could be designed and offered as electives. The courses would target the basic skills areas of reading, writing, and/or math. Since not all students need to do all three basic skills areas, they would choose the basic skills that they would need to target and with the assistance of a faculty advisor, build a course around the basic skills competencies that the student is deficient in while incorporating social justice readings and discussions and other resources as well as a co-curricular activity, such as service-learning. Service-learning is defined as “a form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development. Reflection and reciprocity are key concepts of service-learning” (Jacoby, as cited in Schwartz, 2011, p. 11). The learning outcomes of the courses would include gaining competency in using the communication skills, thinking critically, demonstrating knowledge of social justice issues that exist in the local community, and devising a plan of action to ameliorate the condition. Since participation in a social justice course opens up so many opportunities for students to develop both academically and socially as well as to realize their potential as useful members of the

society who can make a difference in the lives of others, their experiences in the course should awaken in them a curiosity for further learning and, thus, encourage them to continue with their studies.

Nurturing the wellbeing of the adult learner should also be a priority. I definitely sensed a slight change in Sandra's attitude between her pre-interview session and the interview. At the time of her pre-interview session, which was four weeks after the semester started, Sandra was very excited about college and was delighted that a professor had recommended that she be a participant. However, her interview did not take place until a month later after she had had to reschedule the interview appointment on three different occasions. Although she was still excited about telling her story, she was anxious about the additional time that she needed to put into her schedule so that she could keep up with her classes. She shared her feelings in this way:

I thought this was going to be easy because I'm only taking two classes. I work full time. The homework and just the things that I have to do. It's not just coming to class. It's also preparing for class. It's also doing homework. It's also reading. And, I also have a husband at home, and I cook for him.

Moreover, because of an emergency she had to be the substitute for one of her staff members at two conferences that were going to be held a few weeks after the interview. Her participation in the conferences meant that she would be absent from college for two weeks. A program designed to help Sandra and other adult learners come together to talk about their experiences and support each other as well as to learn coping skills would be very appropriate. Another reason why such a program is necessary is that in classroom settings where adult learners are in the minority, if an adult learner is left to find and meet another or other adult learners by herself, she might not be successful. Therefore, a program that is orchestrated by college personnel and functions in a similar manner to a support group is recommended.

When I asked Sandra, the stopout participant in the study, if she had participated in any educational activities over the years, she said that she had attended employer-sponsored training seminars. In other words, although Sandra had not been formally enrolled in an institution collecting course credits, her learning had not ceased. She added that she rose up the ranks in her jobs, meaning that her experiential learning was an asset to her career development. Sandra's position is far from unique. She represents the subgroup of nontraditional adult students who attend college with a wealth of experience that they have accumulated over the years and utilized in their various work settings. Experience gathered in such a manner is called prior learning, and for decades, higher education institutions have been awarding credit to students for their prior learning in targeted areas, such as for military training (Travers, 2012). However, because of the dire shortage in the United States of qualified workers with postsecondary skills (OECD, 2012) and the aging of the student population on college campuses, an anticipated increase of students by 12% in the 18-24 age cohort, 28% in the 25-34 age cohort, and 22% in the 35 and above age cohort (Hussar & Bailey, 2011) the topic of awarding credit for prior learning in more areas is being discussed among higher education leaders. Awarding credit for prior learning through an assessment process, which is called prior learning assessment (PLA) is valuable to both the student and the institution she attends. A student who receives PLA credit (a) will reduce the time she spends in college, (b) will spend less money on college tuition (c) sees a connection between past experiences and new learning, (d) feels valued as a learner because the awarding institution recognizes her prior experiences and does not require her to duplicate the acquisitions of existing knowledge and skills, and (e) is more likely to persist in college (Klein-Collins, 2010; Benke, Davis, & Travers, 2012). The institution, on the other hand, benefits when more students graduate. Although incorporating PLA into an institution's curriculum does necessitate radical

philosophical and operational changes on the part of all the institution's constituents, serious consideration should be given by institutions to implementing a PLA program for their nontraditional learners who qualify.

Implications for Future Research

One of the drawbacks of this research is that the contributions of certain participant types were not included in these data. Therefore, I recommend that this study be replicated with some modifications. For instance, young parents, married or unmarried, with young children need to be heard. Other participants that could contribute valuable information would be students who are at different milestones in the community college system. Suggested milestones for a 60-credit associate degree could be at 15, 36, and 52 credits. A study with recent graduates from different programs would also be helpful. The study focus could also be expanded to explore how first-generation Latino community college persistence is impacted by academic and psychosocial factors. This study was conducted solely on Latino students at a Hispanic-serving institution; however, the issue of students failing to complete their college education is not limited to Latinos. Other ethnic minority groups, such as African Americans and Native Americans, have also been the subject of non-persistence studies (Cabrera et al., 1999; Hu & St. John, 2001; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998). Indeed, this study should be replicated for other minority groups. This study's major constructs of personal relationships and psychosocial factors are applicable to all students; however, there could be variations in the outcomes, therefore, necessitating the implementation of ethnic-specific policies and strategies to combat the problem of non-completion of college studies. Finally, future research should include all three research paradigms—quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods—with a variation in research concerns and questions. Additionally, institutions that are within the geographical area

where this study was conducted could conduct qualitative studies with their own students to learn more about the experiences of their students since the institutions, themselves, face similar non-persistence issues among their students and are tasked with developing strategies to combat the phenomenon.

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APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT LETTER OF INVITATION

Participant Letter of Invitation

Date _____

Dear _____,

My name is Joan Tulloch. I am a doctoral student specializing in higher education, and I am a faculty member here at College of Attainment Potential (CAP). I am currently doing a research study on Hispanic community college students. The purpose of the study is to find out what persistence in college means to the students. I will be interviewing students individually to hear what their thoughts are on the subject. The interview is expected to last approximately 50 minutes. It will take place here on the CAP campus, and I will audio tape the session. All the contents of the tape will be kept confidential, and the real names of the students will not be used.

You have received this invitation to become an interview participant because you fit the criteria that I am looking for. I am looking for Hispanic students whose parents did not attend college. The students should be currently attending classes on this campus.

Would you be interested in participating in the interview? By participating and sharing your ideas, you would be making a valuable contribution to the study. You would also be helping me to achieve my goal of encouraging student success at CAP.

Thank you so much for your time.

With warm regards,

Joan Tulloch

Participant Response

I accept the offer to be interviewed. I look forward to sharing my thoughts with you. Thank you!

Signature

Telephone #

Email Address

APPENDIX B

PRE-INTERVIEW BACKGROUND QUESTIONS

Pre-interview Background Questions

1. What is your name? _____
2. What is your age? _____
3. What is your gender? (a) male (b) female
4. In what country were you born? _____
5. Do you live with your parents? (a) yes (b) no
6. What is your current marital status? (a) single (b) married (c) divorced (d) widowed
7. Are you a parent? (a) yes (b) no

If you are a parent, how many children do you have and what are their ages?

_____ children aged ____ years, ____ years, ____ years, ____ years, ____ years

8. What is the highest level of education for (a) your mother and (b) your father?

(a) mother

(b) father

Below high school

Below high school

9th to 12th grade

9th to 12th grade

Some college

Some college

Associate degree or higher

Associate degree or higher

Bachelor's degree or higher

Bachelor's degree or higher

Other _____

Other _____

9. Are you receiving financial aid? (a) yes (b) no

If you are receiving financial aid, what kind of aid are you receiving?

10. Are you enrolled full time (4 or more courses) at CAP? (a) yes (b) no

11. When did you first start attending CAP? _____

12. Is CAP your first college or did you transfer from another institution?

(a) first college (b) transferred from another institution

13. How many semesters have you completed so far? _____

14. Did you take any EAP courses? (a) yes (b) no

If yes, how many EAP courses did you take? _____

Indicate which EAP courses you took and passed.

15. Did you take any College Prep courses? (a) yes (b) no

If yes, how many College Prep courses did you take? _____

Indicate which College Prep courses you took and passed. (a) reading (b) writing (c) math

16. How many college level courses have you taken? _____

Indicate which college level courses you took and passed.

17. Did you stop attending CAP at any time? (a) yes (b) no

If yes, when did you stop? From _____ to _____

18. What is your major? _____

19. What degree or certificate are you preparing for? _____

20. Do you work? (a) yes (b) no

If yes, do you work full time? (a) yes (b) no

APPENDIX C

STUDY PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Consent Form

Dear _____,

You have been invited to participate in a research study on Latino community college students. The purpose of the research is to find out what experiences students have while attending college and how those experiences contribute to students' decisions to complete their studies and graduate from the college. The study is being conducted by Joan Tulloch, a doctoral student in the Higher Education and Organizational Change department at Benedictine University in Illinois.

Should you decide to take part in the study, you will be asked to participate in an interview session that will last for approximately one hour. The questions will be about your experiences as a student. The interview will be audiotaped and later transcribed. All interview data will be kept confidential. Your real name will not be associated with the data. The data will be stored in a locked file in the researcher's office for five years after the completion of the study. After that time, the data will be destroyed. There are minimal risks associated with this research. Just be yourself.

If you decide to participate now but change your mind at a later time, you can withdraw from participation in the study without having to give any explanations.

If you have any questions concerning the study, you may contact me, Joan Tulloch, at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or Dr. Billy Jones, my research supervisor, at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or Dr. Alandra Weller-Clarke, Chair, Institutional Review Board, Benedictine University, at (630) 829-6240.

If you would like to participate in the study, please read and sign the consent agreement below.

Consent Agreement

I have had an opportunity to read and ask questions about the above information. I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I can withdraw at any time if I so desire. I agree to participate in this study. I have received a copy of this form to keep for my records.

Participant's Name (Print) Participant's Signature Date

Researcher's Name (Print) Researcher's Signature Date

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol

The participant interviews will consist of semi-structured questions. Probing and follow-up questions will be asked as needed.

Interview Questions:

1. What does being a Latino student in a community college mean to you?
2. What does being a Latino student in a community college mean to your family?
3. What does being a Latino student in a community college mean to your friends?
4. What have you discovered about yourself now that you are a college student?
5. What has motivated you to want to continue your studies here at CAP and have your motivations changed from when you first decided to go to college?
6. What is it like being a college student at this time in your life?
7. How did other people in your life help to shape your college expectations and academic success?
8. What challenges have you faced as a college student? How were you able to overcome them?
9. Have you ever dropped out of college and returned? If so, can you talk about those experiences?
10. Have you ever considered dropping out of college? If so, can you talk about how you made the decision to remain in college?
11. How does managing your life at home, at the college, and at work impact you as a college student?

12. As a college student, what experiences or accomplishments have you had that have made you feel very proud and have helped you to persist?
13. Is there anything else that you would like to add that would help me understand more what you have experienced as a Latino community college student?
14. Now that you have been interviewed, do you know of other Latino students enrolled at CAP that you would recommend I interview?

APPENDIX E

THEMES, CONCEPTS, AND SIGNIFICANT STATEMENTS

Being Latino

Kinship

- I'm still Latino. It means a lot to me because I get to represent the Latino people.
- I do not feel like a fish out of water. I actually feel that I know these people.
- Spanish is a very big part of my heritage and who I am, so I feel a kinship with my fellow Latino peers.
- I feel that we know the same things.
- We're from the same seed.
- I think there's also this weird stratification when it comes to Hispanic culture in Florida. There is the older generation that was around when Fidel Castro came into power. There's my family— like my parents who came here and they have a certain way of thinking. Then, there's me who is the Americanized version of that culture.
- When I was a lot younger, I went through a time in my life when I really hated where I was from. I really hated it. It didn't even mean anything to me. As I got older, I started noticing that I got offended when people talked about Latinos. I wouldn't speak, but I took offense to it. So I guess somewhere inside me, I did care. I just—I don't know what was going on. When I reached high school, 80% of the population there were newly arrived Cubans, so one way or another, I was gonna be involved in the culture. And it taught me that you have to embrace where you're from.

Breaking away from the Latino Stereotypical Mold

- I am the example for them that are persistent in their ideas and their purpose.
- I'm gonna become like the flagship of a female that is educated in Hispanic culture.
- I believe we have our own ceiling we have to break.
- I'm trying to make a difference.
- This is what a normal person should do at this age, coming to school, getting their degree.

Student Attitudes

Being Proud

- I don't have to call my assistant when something's not working right on my computer.
- I never thought that I can get an interview in English like this.
- Things like that [founding a program] make me proud. It's just the fact that someone's life was changed because of me.
- I had some pride in something that I was doing that was contributing to the school.
- It's just an honor to be going to school and to be getting my education.
- I am increasing my knowledge. And I feel very good.

Being Known

- They know how much time I've put into the *Periodical*.

- They [professors] have been mentors to me. They saw how much potential I have and how much love I have for it, and they want to see me strive. They want to see me continue. They've really pushed me forward.
- The dean and a couple of the chairpersons know me personally.
- As Latino, not just an average person. I want to make a difference.
- My American government professor told me, "There's a political campaign. Why don't you volunteer for the political campaign?" I did. Now I look forward toward the future.

Satisfying Accomplishments

- It's satisfaction to say to people "I get a degree in English in this country."
- That's an achievement I'll hold on my own.
- Also, I get an "A" that makes me want to continue studying and getting good grades. I got an award for academic excellence.

Driven by Zeal

- I've taken the need for education from the good ol' US of A, and I've taken from my mother that need for independence that be better from her and I think that's really what has created, this drive in me to better myself and to continue my education.
- I have a networking group already established that I've networked with just as a professional and I want to share that with the younger students, and through some of the projects that we've done.
- I am always giving advice to them. I always advise them don't cry because this is your future and the future of your family and your children. Do not abandon the classes. Do not quit.

Confronting Struggles

- juggle college with life
- an internal battle

Influences of Family and Friends

- It's difficult for my family to understand that at my age I want to continue to study.
- Lots of opposing forces are trying to come together.
- My mother has a lot to do with it. I have a strong relationship with her. I want to make her proud. My father is quite interesting because I always tell him about my dreams of becoming a senator but he says, "Maybe you should limit yourself to an attorney because you know, just with your last name or your background, you're not going to get elected."
- He felt a little threatened that I was going to be taken away from our business to be at college.
- The fact that I am 67 years old is admirable to many of my friends. But others, when they see me they feel bad about my health problems. They say, "I don't know."

- He also thinks that when I get married, not if, and when I have children, I should slow down because good mothers are with their children, and if you're not, you're breeding a sociopath.
- I still lived at home. So he said, "Why are you going to be a professional student? You already have a good job."

Health Issues

- It is always going to be at the back of my mind that I'm kind of disabled.
- Emotionally, I've always dealt with the fact that I know I'm overweight.
- I sometimes feel too overstressed. When my stress levels get too high, I don't know, for some reason, I just can't deal with it.
- I doubt myself because of the health problem that I have, because of my physical features, because I am Latina.
- I'm second guessing my drive. Sometimes, I wonder am I in the right field.
- My challenge is I don't want to abandon it. I want to persist, to continue, and to finish my career. The challenge is to make it over here in another language.

Financial Worries

- Then when he began to work, little by little, I more relaxed.
- So not only do I have to worry about, "Am I going to pass my math class? Do I have a test tomorrow? Did I study enough?" This court paper that we're in debt with this credit card company from 1997. Are we going to pay for it? Probably not. What are we gonna do?
- I face financial difficulties in my life constantly.

On a Scholastic Journey

Generating Constructive Feelings

- It doesn't feel scary. I've been an insider as a student. I've felt very comfortable.
- I want to be able to lend a helping hand. I want to pay it forward to others.
- I feel that I'm grateful. I think that I have to pay it [the government] with my effort. And that's what I am trying to do. It is an investment for them put this money in me.
- It felt frustrating to me knowing that all I did in high school basically didn't mean anything because I needed college prep. I didn't want to be there. I mean, I woke up with an attitude—okay, I have to do this. Course, as I went along, I noticed that I needed it. It was necessary for my greater success in college. I believe that sometimes when students walk into college and they're just thrown into college prep, it's discouraging for them. I don't want someone else to be discouraged because not everyone who's discouraged has the will to continue.

Self Discovery

- I see college as this introspective journey where I am learning more about my passion.
- I can kind of see myself in them [today's students] twenty-five years ago. I just feel like saying, "Hey, take advantage! Learn while you're here."
- I learned the hard way that you have to strive. You have to strive to be the best. You have to work hard.
- When I first arrived in college, I had a very normal ambition. I just wanted to get my degree. Then a friend of mine just said why don't you join *College Student for Action (CSA)*? "Okay, fine. I'll join *CSA*." And it was a rewarding experience. Now I have an ambition. Now I look forward toward the future. I don't know what's going to happen in the future—my law career, my political career.
- I am stronger than most women who are not able to succeed or accomplish what they want because of other circumstances or obstacles that are occurring.

Seizing Opportunity

- This is my opportunity, and I have to take it.
- I have a duty because the government of the United States is giving me the opportunity to take my life to another level.
- One thing that college taught me is just to dream big because you can get opportunities.
- I am here, trying to do something more to keep my mind active.
- Today I'm back in school because I want to learn more. I want to achieve different things not because I don't have a good job, but because I want to feel that I am in a different status.
- My motto is to not let anybody or anything stop me from whatever I want to accomplish.
- And it almost felt that like, he did it, I can do it, too.

Under Pressure but Coping

- I have a pressure with the time because sometimes I try to do the assignments with due dates.
- It is a great challenge for me because I have to study hard because I am peeved if I get a lower grade than she.
- I get really, really stressed.
- I am just frazzled.
- The *Periodical* helps me cope. I almost call it my safe haven.
- Man this is difficult. Maybe, I should just give a break to college. But I have to move on. Let me try it. It's for a better life.
- The biggest challenges I face is money, to earn enough to pay for my classes, to pay for my books. I don't get financial aid, so my mother has to pay out of pocket. Last semester, she couldn't pay, so I got my job, and I paid. I went to college full time, and I had my job full time. I remember how I was constantly tired. You don't have a break. When you're not working, you're studying. When you're not studying, you're in class.
- There's just so much that I lost in these 25 years of being absent from college.

VITA

I was born in St. Ann, Jamaica. I attended St. Andrew High School for Girls and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in language and literature from the University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica. I earned a Master of Science in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) from Nova Southeastern University, Davie, Florida. I am currently a candidate for the Doctor in Education degree in Higher Education and Organizational Change at Benedictine University, Lisle, Illinois, and hope to receive degree conferral in the summer of 2013. I have been a teacher for more than 20 years, and my career has spanned the elementary, secondary, and postsecondary levels.