

LATINO VOICES: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF FIRST GENERATION COLLEGE  
LATINO MALES

by

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## ABSTRACT

GERALD CHRISTOPHER BROWN. Latino voices: A qualitative study of first generation college Latino males  
(Under the direction of DR. EDWARD A. WIERZALIS.)

A qualitative study design was used to describe the perceptions and beliefs about higher education of seven first generation college Latino male students enrolled in higher education in the Southeastern part of the U.S. The purpose of this investigation was to explore the students' experiences regarding the various factors, which they perceive may have had an impact on their pursuit of higher education. Further, an examination of the academic motivation and aspirations of first generation college Latino males was an integral part of this study. The findings from this study may shed light on the implications for future research, practice, and policy which may impact the greater Latino population in both North Carolina and the United States. Findings may be discussed and presented to Latino students, Latino parents, and school and college counselors to stimulate awareness and potentially effect change with regard to first generation college Latino male educational decisions.

## DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to my parents, wife, and daughters. For my mother: Just as this research shows without you I don't know if I would have ever even considered college. You knew when to be strict and when to be tender and your undying support has helped me become the man I am today...For my father: I did this to make you proud and to finish this milestone for the both of us...For my wife: Thank you for your love, support, and encouragement throughout this journey. When I am with you I learn so much about myself and this makes me a better husband, father, friend, and human being...For my daughters: Lexie and Zoie you will always have a special place in my heart and soul. Both of you have kept me motivated to continue and not to quit even when that seemed like the better option. I love you both and I hope this experience inspires both of you to follow your dreams and never, ever, ever, give up.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The Latino population is increasing exponentially every year and is the fastest growing minority group in the United States (U.S) (Cavazos, Johnson, Fielding, Cavazos, Castro, & Vela, 2010). Census data for the year 2010 report that there were 50.5 million Latinos in the U.S (Pew Hispanic Center, 2011). Further evidence suggests that the Latino school population almost doubled between 1987 and 2007, and that by 2021 one in four students in the U.S. will be Latino (Gándara, 2010).

The changing cultural landscape in our nation's colleges and universities represents the increasing diversification of student populations, however many researchers have been concerned with the underrepresentation of Latinos in higher education as well as the low graduation rates for Latino college students (Cavazos et al, 2010; Gándara, 2010; Gloria, Castellanos, Scull, & Villegas, 2009). Latino adolescents, similar to other minorities, contend with various challenges throughout their educational careers (Gándara & Contreras Rivas-Drake, 2008). Latino males in particular encounter various social pressures and obstacles to educational progress such as being perceived as acting White or selling out their culture, working to help the family, and not having enough Latino male role models in their school or community (Saenz, & Ponjuan, 2009). If the gap in educational achievement among Latino males continues to grow, this country will develop a perpetual underclass of Latino males for generations to come

(Saenz, & Ponjuan, 2009). Further, as changes in the job market requires workers to possess higher levels of education, and as Latinos continue to become a larger segment of the national workforce, the low rate of degree completion for Latinos appears to be a significant concern for the future of the U.S. (Gándara, 2010; Gloria et al. 2009).

### Statement of the Problem

The existing research on first generation college Latino students largely fails to explain their individual perspectives and experiences regarding their own educational motivation (Olive, 2009) and aspirations. Aspirations reflect individuals' ideas of their "possible selves," what they would like to become, what they might become, and what they do not wish to become (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Latino students' motivation to pursue postsecondary education is rarely studied and there is virtually no research on this topic from students of diverse backgrounds and specifically first-generation college Latino males (FGCLM). This research sought to explore the academic motivation and aspirations of FGCLM, which helped fill in the gap in the literature (Olive, 2009; Phinney, Dennis, & Osorio, 2005; Sanchez, 2011). This research may spark more conversation of the relevance of the Latino male educational crisis and stimulate concrete interest in establishing a sustained network of Latino scholars and community leaders who are passionate and engaged in Latino male educational issues (Saenz, & Ponjuan, 2009). Exploring and understanding FGCLM academic motivation and aspirations may be an impetus for further research on this unexamined population which could lead to potential theories on how first generation college Latino males make their scholastic choices.

Phenomenology aims to access individuals' worlds of experience where consciousness exists and allow these same individuals to describe how they experience their world (Moustakas, 1994). An individual's ethnicity impacts how he or she experiences the world around them thus the importance of focusing on the educational experiences of diverse individuals such as Latino males. Considering a phenomenological approach permits the researcher to grasp the lived experiences of first generation college Latino male students. Lived experiences define us as humans and give us an understanding of what it means to exist in the world (Van Manen, 1990). Furthermore, this meaning making is intertwined with resilience and the various psychological, social, and cultural factors that impact individuals on a daily basis. Resilience is defined by thoughts and actions which cumulate into a general existence of overcoming formidable life challenges (Davis, & Pastor, 2000). The literature suggests that there are various forms of resilience such as instinctive environmental resilience, adaptive resilience, economic resilience, and academic resilience, which propel many of these students on their journeys toward higher education (Huber, & Cueva, 2012; Inzlicht, Aronson, Good, & McKay, 2006; Morales, 2008; Reynolds, & Baird, 2010). The investigator posited that resilience can be unpacked by the Psychosociocultural (PSC) theoretical framework devised by Gloria and Rodriguez (2000) which highlights the psychological, social, and cultural contributing factors leading to the motivation and persistence of first generation college Latino male students within a university setting.

This particular study examined first generation college Latino males at a university in the southeast U.S., which is an area of the country where Latino populations are dramatically increasing. FGCLM face a multitude of challenges as they navigate the

psychological, social, cultural, financial, and educational pathways towards college education (Fry, 2002; Phinney, Dennis, & Gutierrez, 2005). FGCLM must also contend with their parents' inexperience in the college application process and usually lower annual incomes than other cultural groups (Boden, 2011; Olive, 2009; Phinney et. al, 2005). Despite numerous challenges to academic achievement some FGCLM graduate from high school and pursue higher education; thus, further examination of the lived experiences of first-generation college Latino male students on their journey towards higher education was warranted. Focusing research efforts on states that have rapid Latino population growth with low Latino college enrollment may produce findings that underline specific factors of successful first generation college Latino male students. One such state is North Carolina, which has experienced a dramatic Latino population increase in recent years.

#### Latinos in North Carolina

North Carolina (NC) as a whole is becoming an increasingly ethnically diverse state and has one of the fastest growing Latino populations in the country. NC Latinos in 2007 numbered 636, 442 and in the 2010 census that number increased to 800,120 (Pew Hispanic Center, 2007; US Census, 2011). These data suggest that over 163,000 more Latinos have called NC home in a short three years (2007-2010). This population boom however, is not translating into increased college enrollment in the University of North Carolina (UNC) 16 campus system (<http://www.northcarolina.edu/about/facts.htm>). This absence of Latino student enrollment may be partly explained by the high numbers of Latino immigrants (many of which are undocumented) that provide much of the labor for the state's agricultural, construction, and service industry needs (Wainer, 2004).

In the fall of 2011 The UNC system enrolled a total of 7,718 Latinos or 4.4% of 174,805 students which was a minor boost compared to fall 2010 (4.2%). There were 583 Latinos or 2.7% of students enrolled at East Carolina University out of a total of 21,589 (2.7%). Interestingly, the percentage of East Carolina's Latino student population dipped to 2.7% whereas in the fall of 2010 East Carolina's Latino student population was at 2.9% and had been slowly rising in previous years. North Carolina State University matriculated 905 Latinos or 3.5% of 25,176 students. This represents a small surge as compared to fall 2010 data in which the total percentage was 3.3%. UNC Wilmington had 626 Latino students of 11,950 for a total of 5.2% as compared to 4.6% in fall 2010. UNC Charlotte had 1,306 Latinos or 6.4% of 20,283 for total students in contrast with fall 2010 numbers of 5.4%. UNC Chapel Hill had 1,688 Latinos or 9.1% out of 18,430 compared to the fall 2010 percentage of 6.7. Chapel Hill has experienced the largest increase in Latino student enrollment while East Carolina's percentage fell slightly.

Overall, the trend in Latino enrollment in the UNC system has remained low with the majority of institutions maintaining 5% or less total Latino student enrollment. During fall of 2011, the percentage of Latino student enrollment was 4.4% for all 16 institutions. Calculating the average fall enrollment rate for the past four years (2008-2011) brings the percentage to a paltry 3.6%. These numbers reinforce the importance of understanding how certain Latinos in NC are able to triumph over numerous obstacles to graduate from high school and persist in a university setting.

Some of the more relevant topics in the Latino education literature appear to be minorities in higher education (Palmer et. al, 2011; Teranishi, 2012), Latinos in higher education (Gándara, 2010; Rivas-Drake, 2008), gender differences between Latino

educational achievement (Gloria et. al, 2009), first generation college Latino male students (Olive, 2009; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009), motivation (Santos, 2004), and parenting style (familismo/parental support of Latino students (Cavazos, et al., 2010). The Latino education literature reveals a recent trend that Latinas are experiencing more success at the secondary and post-secondary educational level while Latino males are lagging behind (Cerna, Perez, & Saenz, 2009; Gloria et. al, 2009; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009; Santos, 2004; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). This concerning trend warrants attention to clarify some of the rationale behind this recent development.

There is very little written about first-generation college Latino males' lived experiences and their reasons to follow higher education aspirations (Olive, 2009; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009; Marrs, & Sigler, 2011). What factors motivate first generation college Latino males to pursue higher education? What are some of the aspirations that first generation college Latino males sustain in order to succeed academically? It is important to investigate the motivation and aspirations of FGCLM as essential characteristics toward academic achievement (Waxman, Huang, & Padron, 1997). How, when and where does this motivation develop for FGCLM? Does this motivation develop from parental factors or peer influence? At what age or developmental stage is the motivation first noticed? What kinds of physical and social environments were FGCLM exposed to as they journeyed towards college? These questions may help understand the essence of the motivation that spurred FGCLM to pursue higher education (Waxman, Huang, & Padron, 1997).

Latino students, particularly first generation college males may experience higher levels of altruism and stronger interests in pursuing careers that boost their passion for

“assisting their communities” (Bernal, 2002). Motivation and behavior is impacted by what a student values or what they perceive to be important for their present functioning and future aspirations (Marrs, & Sigler, 2011). Whatever the motivation may be for FGCLM, whether extrinsic or intrinsic, it is apparent that the need to investigate the various layers of this motivation is warranted.

Further, it is important to examine the concept of *familismo* and parental style and its influence on FGCLM is necessary to further understand how FGCLM may be supported *or not* to pursue higher education from their parents. The concept of *familismo* is central to Latino Culture and signifies the importance of family as the primary support system of Latinos’ existence. Parenting style surfaces in the review of the literature and so it is appropriate to inspect the literature further to learn how parents impact Latino students’ educational decisions (Pang, Hao, & Gardner, 2005; Gandara, 1995).

Other influences that have an impact on first generation college Latino males are following their peers’ educational paths, their faith, and choosing to enlist in the military (Boden, 2011; Campesino & Schwartz, 2009; Holland, 2011; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2011) . Understanding FGCLM experiences and beliefs around motivation, their perceptions of the parenting they received, and other influences may provide additional awareness into the varying ways they learn to navigate their personal, professional, and academic worlds (Rivas-Drake, 2008).

Research exploring high achieving students of color is limited (Bernal, 2002; Gándara, 1982; Morales, 2008; Olive, 2009) and research exploring successful FGCLM and their experiences is even rarer (Saenz, & Ponjuan, 2009). Rather than focus on the plethora of reasons why FGCLM *do not* attend college or obtain success through college

degree attainment this study focused on the few FGCLM who have made it to college and investigated experiences that may have helped them reach such a crucial and elusive milestone for many of their Latino peers.

#### Deficit Model

The literature on the ethnic minority educational achievement gap may be approached in a variety of ways however; the two primary emphases either center on student failure or student success (Morales, 2010). Historically, the trend that emerged in the Latino education literature during the 80s and 90s was the focus on Latino student deficits and weaknesses (Cerna et al., 2009). The abundance of deficit literature concentrated on the numerous reasons why Latino students do not pursue higher education due to school tracking, high rates of school failure, active discouragement by school officials, early pregnancy, poverty, gang involvement, and crime (Cavazos, 2009; Fernandez-Kelly, 1994; Kozol, 1991; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995; Zarate, & Burciaga, 2010). Deficit models do not reflect an understanding of successful Latino college students and how they may employ various forms of capital (e.g. social, cultural, economic, and human) (Cerna et al, 2009).

More recently the focus has shifted into examining the strengths that Latinos bring to their educational experiences (Cerna et. al, 2009; Morales, 2004; Olive, 2009). Instead of a focus on student deficiencies, school counselors, administrators, parents, community members, policymakers, and other stakeholders need to realize that Latino students need reassurance and encouragement. They may share with them that determination and hard work may be more important than ability or SAT scores (Cavazos, et al., 2010).

Many ethnic minorities develop instinctive environmental resilience, adaptive resilience, and academic resilience (Davis, & Pastor, 2000; Morales, 2008; Reynolds, & Baird, 2010). Instinctive environmental resilience refers to individuals' ability to overcome their environmental constraints and achieve success despite them. Adaptive resilience pertains to disadvantaged individuals who are transitioning to adulthood and are able to adapt to various life fluctuations, which are then internalized and processed as opportunities for growth as opposed to barriers and limitations. Morales (2008) identified academic resilience as one of the more important protective factors for ethnically diverse college students. Academic resilience has been defined as a specific characteristic that can be attributed to an individual who has the ability to surpass their academic expectations despite seemingly insurmountable obstacles (Morales, 2004). Attempting to obtain a more complete picture of academically successful Latino students underlies the belief that understanding how students have accomplished demanding academic milestones can be critical information for other Latino students; even if those students have not achieved (or will achieve) to the same degree (Morales, 2004). Additionally, the rationale for examining resilience rests on the fundamental assumption that comprehending how individuals overcome challenges to development and recover from hardship will reveal processes of adaptation that can influence intervention efforts with other underrepresented groups.

#### Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the essence of first generation college Latino males' pursuit of higher education. This study was based on first generation college Latino males' rich narratives of their past school, family, and

community experiences in order to examine critical forces and or factors that supported their pursuit of higher education.

### Research Questions

As a result of the “diminishing” population of Latino males in postsecondary institutions this study examined the academic, familial, and community experiences and contributing factors utilizing the narratives of up to 10 first generation college Latino males currently enrolled in a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in North Carolina.

The research questions guiding this study were:

- What are the common factors that influenced the pursuit of higher education among first generation college Latino males?
- What are the unique factors that influenced the pursuit of higher education in some first generation college Latino males?

### Definition of Terms

**Latino:** In this study, Latino denotes both males and females unless otherwise indicated. Latino also includes race and thus covers a variety of subgroups including Mexican American or Chicano, Cuban, Puerto Rican, Dominican, Central American, and South American including anyone that self-identifies as Hispanic or Latino (Valverde, 2008).

**Familismo:** The definition of *Familismo* is a strong orientation and commitment toward the family. There is high value placed on marriage, childbearing, and responsibility towards siblings. Family duties, loyalty, and interconnection to family members in both nuclear and extended families are also qualities that accompany the concept of *familismo* (Halguaseth, L. C., Ispa, J. M., & Rudy, D., 2006).

Phenomenology: Phenomenology is the study of lived experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Lived experience: Lived experience refers to the uniqueness of each individual's lived situations (Van Manen, 1990). Every person has their own reality and their reality is subjective.

#### Assumptions of Study

Participants were honest about their experiences and that they were first generation Latino males currently enrolled in a postsecondary institution. Participants were experts in their lives and establishing the "truth" of things was up to them (Moustakas, 1994).

#### Delimitations of Study

The scope of this study was limited to first generation college Latino male students who are currently enrolled in a university in North Carolina. The study and its results are not generalizable to other diverse first generation college students or other regions of the country. The focus was on FGCLM because the literature posits that Latino males' educational struggles are more pronounced than their Latina classmates (Cerna et. al, 2009; Gloria et. al, 2009; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009; Santos, 2004; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010).

#### Limitations of Study

There were some limitations to this particular study that need to be highlighted. It was difficult to detect or prevent researcher induced bias in qualitative research, however, through member checking and consultation with a peer reviewer the researcher could monitor for bias. Phenomenological research, which aims to describe the lived experience

as it is actually experienced by the person (Moustakas, 1994), does not produce generalizable data and so results from this study cannot be generalized to other FGCLM. However, the data collected from this particular sample of students can potentially be useful for educators, researchers, policy makers given its phenomenological and applied research approach addressing a societal concern within a university context. While participants in this study were all Latino, they are not representative of all members of this ethnic or cultural affiliation thus the results can only relate to the lived experiences of the participants in this specific study. Additionally, this study's small sample begs the question of whether experiences are typical for other FGCLM. Conversely, small samples permit the researcher to address the problem in depth and remain immersed in the research process. Finally, it is important to consider the possible difficulties of participants expressing themselves (e.g. age, foreign language, anxiety) (Van Manen, 1990) and these concerns can be alleviated through the researcher's empathy, patience, and explanation of the research process.

#### Significance of Study

A review of the research indicates that a link exists between the U.S.'s economic, social, political, and educational future and to the academic success of minority and Latino youths and especially FGCLM (Olive, 2009; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). Better educated ethnic minorities in our nation may produce more positive role models for future generations of ethnic minority students and a gradual erosion of the negative perceptions afforded many males of color (Hall, 2007). Research suggests that when young men of color have a strong sense of pride and awareness, they are able to construct healthy self-concepts that assist them in acts of engagement thus enabling them to combat

negative psychological and social forces (Hall, 2007). Ethnic minority males and FGCLM who are self-assured, encouraged to succeed, and overcome difficulty may contribute more social, psychological, cultural, economic, and educational capital into the future of our nation instead of extracting resources and being downgraded to less significant citizenry. It was my hope to add to the literature by revealing new insight into the perceptions and experiences of first generation college Latino males. The significance of the study is in its contribution to a body of knowledge that will help to clarify the various influences that inspire FGCLM to attend college.

#### Summary

The Latino population is growing at an incredible rate in the U.S., however, Latinos struggle on their journeys towards high education and many do not graduate from high school (American Council on Education, 2008). North Carolina is experiencing tremendous growth with the Latino population however; the upsurge of Latinos in the state is minimally impacting the enrollment of Latinos in higher education.

This study addressed what factors motivate seven FGCLM to pursue higher education by examining their lived experiences and then drawing out specific themes of those experiences. The scope of this study was limited to FGCLM enrolled in one institution in the southeastern portion of the U.S. This country's future will rely on minorities' and especially Latinos' current educational decisions as Latinos are the fastest growing minority population in the nation. Additionally, this study attempted to add to the dearth of literature on motivational and aspirational characteristics of FGCLM to pursue higher education (Phinney, Dennis, & Osorio, 2006; Olive, 2009).

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of the literature provides a framework for the problem that will be investigated (Creswell, 2007) and this chapter is a review of the literature regarding issues related to ethnic minorities in higher education. Resilience theory and the Psychosociocultural framework will be examined further as the overarching theoretical foundations for the rest of the chapter. The populations examined include ethnic minorities in higher education, Latinos in higher education, Latino males in higher education, and first generation college Latino males. This section will reveal some of the more visible themes in the ethnic minority and Latino student education literature. A summary of the literature reviewed will support the relevance of the study.

### Theoretical Framework

#### Resilience Theory.

“With no attempt there can be no failure; with no failure no humiliation (James, 1890, p.310)”

Scholarly interest in motivation, aspirations, and societal expectations traces back to more than 50 years ago to influential social psychological studies of human motivation and goal directed activities (Reynolds, & Baird, 2010). Mobility studies and status attainment research conducted in the 60s and 70s led to a more clear understanding that aspirations and motivation may be crucial parts of attainment-oriented behavior

(Reynolds, & Baird, 2010). Recently, there is still debate about whether or not there is a causal link between aspirations and subsequent motivation (Morgan, 2004; Reynolds, & Baird, 2010) especially for underrepresented groups who accomplish great things despite their personal and environmental circumstances. Resilience theory deals with individuals' propensity for coping positively under stressful and dangerous conditions and focuses on proven success despite acute and pervasive risk (Morales, 2008; Seery, 2011). Research implies that without adversity in the form of major life changes and commonplace events individuals would not be able to generate resilience (Seery, 2011). Many researchers suggest that resilience may be the most appropriate way to identify how many underrepresented individuals are able to overcome great odds and achieve personal, professional, and academic success (Davis, & Pastor, 2000; Huber, & Cueva, 2012; Morales, 2004; Morales, 2008; Obravic et. al, 2006; Seery, 2011). Resilience may be described as the quilt that contains the fabric of various resiliencies and psychological, social, and cultural elements that permit underrepresented individuals to forge ahead in their lives.

Instinctive Environmental Resilience. Everything can be taken away from a man but one thing...the last of the human freedoms-to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way (Frankl, 1959, p. 75). Studies of human developmental processes point to adaptive and maladaptive beliefs and behaviors, which are continuous and prone to change over time (Obradovic, Burt, & Masten, 2006). One element of resilience may be titled instinctive environmental resilience which insinuates that individuals triumph based on their measured choices despite environmental factors (McLeod, & Tanner, 2006). Humans understand feelings of sadness, regret, fear,

happiness, and peace among others. People experience a plethora of emotions each day as they navigate the constantly changing environments they live in. The environment individuals live in fuels their feelings and leads them to make decisions based on those feelings. Cultural background, gender, language, class, age, sexual orientation, spiritual orientation all influence how people react with their environment (McLeod, & Tanner, 2006). How individuals react to their emotional situations determines whether they accept or reject unhealthy life choices (Frankl, 1963; McLeod & Tanner, 2006).

Instinctive environmental resilience indicates that individuals understand that, despite negative environmental forces working around them, they have the right to refuse to quit or give up. These individuals allow their internal locus of control to become an empowering energy that brings the mind a sense of peace; this sense of peace cannot be taken away it must be given away. These individuals are able to live in the moment and not look back at the moment that just passed (McLeod, & Tanner, 2006). They are able to adapt to themselves and their environments and construct their own instinctive environmental resilience.

**Adaptive Resilience.** Adaptive resilience is a form of resiliency that is tied directly to the youth of this nation and is derived from social psychology, child development, and life-course research (Reynolds, & Baird, 2010). It also constitutes a young person's ability to successfully adapt to the unexpected, and to focus on the positive aspects of their transition to adulthood (Reynolds, & Baird, 2010) and higher education. Aspirations are instrumental in adaptive resilience because they connect self-reflection and feedback to educational and occupational attainment. There is argument then that the aspirations of underrepresented youth are even more critical compared to

their more advantaged peers because aspirations give minority youth hope and dreams to cling to thus serving as a symbolic safety net. The adaptive resilience of ethnic minorities includes four main components. The first component is successfully problem solving when encountering unforeseen situations (Reynolds, & Baird, 2010) such as parental divorce, violent crime, homelessness, etc. Secondly, in crises they learn to regulate their thoughts and emotions so the next time the impact will not be so dramatic. Adaptively resilient minorities tend to focus on the silver lining and can sift feedback from the environment to emphasize the positive aspects (Reynolds, & Baird, 2010). Finally, adaptively resilient ethnic minorities are able to balance the demands of their culture with the demands of the dominant culture. Many minority youth who make educational and career plans that are not realized are able to persist because they focus on what is possible and become their own emotional cheerleaders (Reynolds, & Baird, 2010). A fundamental aspect of adaptive resilience may be that ethnic minority youth mitigate their present circumstances by framing it as temporary roadblocks and that the future is still glowing with possibilities.

**Academic Resilience.** Academic resilience suggests that certain disadvantaged individuals are able to defy the odds in the academic pipeline and achieve educational milestones beyond that of their parents, peers, and community. Understanding the degree of academic resilience signifies comprehending the distance traveled by the individual towards his or her academic goals (Morales, 2008). Academic resilience has been examined by Gándara (1995) who studied low income Mexican Americans who completed doctoral degrees in academic disciplines, law, and medicine. Another more modest means of measuring academic resilience include a national sample of ethnic

minority students' persistence towards a four year degree (Reynolds, & Baird, 2010). Ethnic minorities' cultural experiences within traditional educational contexts compel them to display disproportionate amounts of consciousness, compromise, and conciliation (Morales, 2008). The various phases of education are at odds with the cultural beliefs and practices of ethnically diverse students, thus requiring them to be bicultural in order to equal or surpass their White peers (Morales, 2008). Ethnic minority students are not culturally deprived because of their cultural background and experiences; rather they have a rich amount of cultural capital (e.g. family, peers) but have to battle with the traditional academic milieu which often dismisses, devalues, and ignores their culture.

The Resilience Cycle. The resilience cycle is a promising construct that delineates the process of high academic achievement for statistically at risk students. The model purports that disadvantaged students go through five stages to reach optimal emotional achievement (Morales, 2008). Stage one of Morales' (2008) study signifies that the student realistically identifies his or her chief risk factors (e.g. first generation college student, drug abuse, etc.). Second, the student pursues protective factors (peer, parent, church, teacher, guidance counselor) to offset the negative effects of the risk factors. Next the student reconciles and directs his or her protective factors in a manageable manner to push them towards high academic success. Fourth, the student recognizes the helpfulness of his or her protective factors and continues to polish and implement them. Finally, the student reaches the stage of ongoing refinement and utilization of protective factors alongside the student's aspirations for his or her desired destination, which sustain the student's growth. Resilience indicates the propensity for individuals with deprived beginnings to prevail despite low statistical odds of

achievement. Instinctive environmental resilience, adaptive resilience, and academic resilience all play roles in how ethnic minorities overcome numerous obstacles on their journeys towards personal, professional, and academic success. Deconstructing resilient individuals may lead to new understanding of how they maintain a healthy psychological and social equilibrium (McLeod, & Tanner, 2006) while preserving cultural balance in their lives (Morales, 2008).

**Limitations and Strengths of Resilience Theory.** One limitation of resilience theory is that there is no one comprehensive theory in the literature (Morales, 2008). Additionally, much of the resilience research is limited to isolated variables within the resiliency framework (Davis, & Pastor, 2000; Morales, 2008; Reynolds, & Baird, 2010; Seery, 2011, Van Breda, 2001). Resilience theory has numerous strengths in that it can be applied to various contexts including educational, psychological, social, medical and cultural. There has been research conducted on resilience within topics such as cystic fibrosis, job performance, the ability to nurture, and successful aging (Van Breda, 2001). In the educational perspective, resilience theory is in line with the tide of recent minority education literature because of its emphasis on individuals' assets. Additionally, the interpretations of study results can be viewed from a strengths focus rather than a deficit focus.

#### **Psychosociocultural Model Origin**

The psychosociocultural (PSC) model initially employed a cultural competency framework in working with college-aged students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds and provided educators with a better understanding of awareness, knowledge, and skills when working with ethnic minorities (Pope, & Reynolds, 1991;

Sanchez, 2011). Therefore, Gloria and Rodriguez (2000) have borrowed from Pope and Reynolds's (1991) model and modified it with a PSC approach for university mental health counselors. The PSC approach was originally defined as the simultaneous interdependence of psychological, social, and cultural contributing factors that assist educators in understanding the academic experiences of Latina/o college students (Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000; Castellanos, & Gloria, 2007; Sanchez, 2011). Since then, the PSC model has advanced and been applied to include multiple groups of ethnic minority students in higher education (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Gloria & Castellanos, 2003; Gloria, Castellanos, Park, & Kim, 2008; Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000; Sanchez, 2011).

The Psychosociocultural (PSC) paradigm is a theoretical framework used to promote understanding of ethnic minority students to advance their academic success, persistence, and graduation (Castellanos, & Gloria, 2007; Gloria, & Rodriguez, 2000; Lira, 2010; Sanchez, 2011). The PSC approach is the combination of interdependent psychological (self-efficacy, attitudes, self-esteem, motivation); social (family, peers, role models, mentors, faculty/staff support); and cultural (ethnic identity, familismo, cultural values) dynamics in the higher education context which assists college personnel, such as counseling staff, advisors, faculty advisors and student affairs practitioners, in grasping the personal, social, cultural, and educational experiences of ethnic minorities (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Lira, 2010).

**Populations Studied.** Empirical studies using the PSC framework have been completed over the past 12 years and have concentrated on the educational experiences of ethnic minorities. While the PSC framework was originated in the work of understanding the Latina/o student experience (Gloria, 1997; Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000; Sanchez,

2011), the framework includes other ethnic minority students. Studies have also been conducted utilizing the PSC model in understanding the college experiences of African Americans (Gloria, & Castellanos, 2003), Asian Americans (Gloria, Castellanos, Park, & Kim, 2008), Native Americans (Gloria & Robinson-Kurpius, 2001), and other ethnic minority students attending Predominantly White Institutions (Jones, Castellanos, & Cole, 2002). Overall, research results have been constant in identifying culturally competent themes using the PSC model.

There appears to be a void in the literature regarding the application of a theoretical framework to first generation college Latino males and their lived experiences and descriptions of their desire to pursue higher education. Originally the PSC model examined three aspects (psychological, social, and cultural) of college success for students who visited a college counseling center (Gloria, & Rodriguez, 2000), the researcher believes that the model can be used to explore pre-college attributes along the same three domains as well. The PSC model suggests that in order to comprehend the current Latino student academic pathways there needs to be a reshifting of the current and traditional perspectives into a framework that includes the individual, environment, and culture (Castellanos, & Gloria, 2007). Utilizing the Psychosociocultural theory as a framework for understanding the crucial elements that may motivate the pursuit of higher education among FGCLM can be an excellent and culturally competent way to uncover the hidden meanings and cultural messages of FGCLM experiences (Castellanos, & Gloria, 2007).

Psychologically, the researcher focused on self-esteem, motivation and any other psychological elements that have helped FGCLM on their journey towards higher

education. Social aspects (e.g. mentors) appear to play a crucial role in FGCLM educational decisions, as noted in the review of the literature (Boden, 2011; Holland, 2011; Olive, 2009; Schofield, et. al, 2010; Sokatch, 2006; Strayhorn, 2008). Finally, cultural values and meanings (e.g. ethnic identity, *familismo*) (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007, Sanchez, 2011) may be significant for many FGCLM who have a desire to pursue a college education. These three domains will be further investigated and explicated in the remaining portions of the literature review as they pertain to ethnic minorities in higher education, Latinos in higher education, Latino males in higher education, and first generation college Latino males.

Limitations and Strengths of the Psychosociocultural Framework. The primary limitations of the PSC model stem from the results of empirical studies. Lack of age variance, self-reported answers, lack of generalizability, nonrandom sampling methods along with gender inequities were listed as shortcomings in the research (Gloria, 1997; Castellanos, & Gloria, 2007; Gloria, Castellanos, Park, & Kim, 2008; Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 2001). These studies investigated the minority experiences in primarily White institutions; conducting similar research in other institutions (e.g. historically Black colleges and universities) may offer new perspectives of this phenomenon. Research on the PSC model has confirmed its value in examining the experiences of diverse college student populations (Gloria, 1997; Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Gloria, Castellanos, Gloria, & Rodriguez, 2000; Park, & Kim, 2008; Gloria & Robinson-Kurpius, 2001). Findings from these studies suggest ways for education stakeholders (e.g. parents, teachers, professors, counselors, policymakers) to be committed to providing an

environment conducive to minority students' improvements in self-efficacy, self-esteem, social network building, and cultural balance.

### Ethnic Minorities in Higher Education

Ethnic minorities in the United States (U.S) are gradually becoming the majority; the total populations of Blacks, Latinos, Asian/Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans are projected to surpass the total population of Whites in the U.S. by 2050. This country is composed of a rich mixture of individuals from diverse races, ideals, cultures, and lifestyles, and the skills needed in today's workforce can only be developed through exposure to various cultures, ideas, and perspectives (Jones & Hancock, 2005). It is important as a nation to ask and reflect on how far it has come in achieving equity and balance in its schools, colleges, and universities (Jones & Hancock, 2005) Is a diverse student body a principal objective for educational institutions (Jones & Hancock, 2005)? Is equal educational opportunity and achievement for all simply a motto, a reality, or pieces of both? Much of the literature on minorities in higher education suggests that, as a nation, the United States has made some positive strides but there are many miles to go before it sleeps (Contreras, 2011; Delpit, 1995; Jones & Hancock, 2005; Nieto, 1996; Suarez-Orozco, 1995). To further examine the issue of minority representation and success in higher education, it seems appropriate to focus on the experiences of ethnic minority college students (ECMS) and their transition from high school to college and subsequent persistence in college.

The Achievement Gap. The transition from high school to college for students is a crucial step that creates the groundwork for students' educational attainment, career opportunities, preparation, and social mobility (Contreras, 2011). Unfortunately, too

many ethnic minority youth are underrepresented in the nation's postsecondary institutions, and this ongoing trend has been termed the achievement gap (Owens, & Lynch, 2012; Ward, 2006). Students' cultural ties have strong relation to the achievement gap that has been omnipresent in the nation's educational history (Ward, 2006). Many Latino, Black, and Native American youth have been left out of the higher education pipeline to success, and around half of these same students drop out of high school before obtaining a diploma (Contreras, 2011). Comprehending the causes of the low levels of academic achievement on the part of ethnic minorities remains a problem of national concern (Hu, 2011; Palmer et. al, 2011; Ward, 2006). That is to say that students of diverse ethnic backgrounds as a collective whole perform worse than their non-minority peers in their educational aspirations and achievements. As an example of this concern, the literature cites that the gaps in college graduation rates between Whites and Blacks and Whites and Latinos have broadened since 1971 (Ward, 2006). More specifically, Blacks lag behind their White peers by 16% in college graduation and Latinos by 24% (Ward, 2006). The college transition rates for ethnic minority students represent a huge breach in the educational pipeline, a disturbing development at a time when the greatest increase in the K12 population can be seen amid diverse student populations (Contreras, 2011).

Studying the strengths of ethnic minority college students (EMCS) may be an avenue of research that can elucidate the various determinants of success for EMCS. EMCS bring a collective set of unique experiences, and as students of color, they are holders and authors of knowledge and infuse the nation with a rich mixture of ideas, languages, cultures, and lifestyles (Bernal, 2002; Jones & Hancock, 2005). However,

their histories, experiences, cultures, ideas, and languages are often perceived as being devalued, misinterpreted, or dismissed from formal educational institutions (Bernal, 2002). This may be part of the reason why graduation and retention rates of EMCS continue to be a concern to colleges and universities (Jenkins, 2009). In an effort to focus on how some ethnic minorities are able to supersede the various roadblocks on their path to success, it is necessary to review the related literature on resilient minorities and their psychological attributes, as they progress through the education pipeline.

Self-Esteem. Resilient ethnic minority college students have to teach themselves that they can compete with their White peers in order to raise their levels of self-esteem (Morales, 2008). Self-esteem refers to the value placed on an individual's own strengths, weaknesses, outlooks, skills, and principles (Morales, 2008). The habits of mind that are cultivated and modified among underrepresented students can promote their higher self-esteem and psychological resilience to adverse life events (Zolli, & Healy, 2012). Research on Native American college students suggests that positive self-talk can be an integral part of EMCS passages into higher education and increase their self-esteem (Montgomery, Miville, Winterowd, Jeffries, & Baysden, 2000). This positive self-talk (e.g. I can do this, my time will come, you know who you are) serves as a reminder to stay on track and focus on present goals (Montgomery, et. al, 2000). The importance of positive self-talk and holding high self-esteem was passed down from tribal elders as part of the oral tradition in Native American culture (Montgomery, et al., 2000). The study concluded that internal self-talk and high self-esteem combined with personalized meaning allowed Native American college students to persist in their studies and value education as a life process with no destination (Montgomery, et. al, 2000). The Native

American students in this study were able to remain loyal to their heritage while continually cultivating their instinctive environmental resilience.

Morales' (2010) study of fifty Black and Latino students suggests that self-esteem is a fragile and vacillating aspect of the EMCS resilience, due to mixed findings that self-esteem was a protective factor (92% of the sample) but also a major psychological stressor for 54% of the study participants. Self-esteem is indeed an element of psychological resilience; however, many EMCS must learn to reconcile their positive inner and outer messages and thoughts with negative ones. Another element of resilience may be titled economic resilience, as there is a disproportionate amount of low-income status students in the nation's K12 schools and colleges who succeed academically despite inadequate financial resources.

**Economic Resilience.** The economic inequality inherent for many EMCS in the U.S. is an embarrassing and intractable challenge with profound social implications (Hu, 2011). In their study, Griffin and Walter (2006) cited data that more than fifty percent of students in high poverty school districts are Black and Latino, whereas only nine percent of students were Black and Latino in low-poverty school districts. Ethnic minority college students are more likely to work to support themselves and their families and struggle daily with limited community resources, violence, and racism (Griffin, & Walter, 2006). It is essential not to ignore the social-economic aspects of EMCS and instead connect those aspects to EMCS transition to postsecondary achievement (Morales, 2004). Despite the social-economic and other challenges that many EMCS face, they develop adaptive and economic resiliency as they transition from adolescents to young adults. Research suggests that low-income ethnic minority college students are

able to sustain multiple financial setbacks and difficulties and are able to reframe their experiences in a positive light (Griffin, & Walter, 2006). These financial barriers provide the opportunity for low-income EMCS to clarify their career goals and adopt new goals with their present circumstances (Griffin, & Walter, 2006).

In the next four decades, ethnic minorities may surpass the number of Whites in the U.S. Despite some improvements in racial and educational equality, EMCS still face various psychological and social-economic hindrances that impede progress towards their educational and professional goals. Focusing on the various resiliencies of ethnic minority college students may contribute to an increase in the percentage of Americans with postsecondary education, skills, and credentials (Teranishi, 2012). This aim can only be achieved through structural changes in how the educational participation of all Americans, including Latinos, which are the fastest growing segment of our nation's population, is understood and supported (Teranishi, 2012).

#### Latinos in higher education

Latinos and Latinas have the highest high school dropout rates (American Council on Education, 2008; Zalaquett, 2006), and only 23% of Latino college students receive a college degree within 10 years of high school graduation; the rest take longer to finish or drop out before completion (Strayhorn, 2008). Part of the explanation for this lack of educational success may be found in the disillusionment of many Latino youths, who are overrepresented in urban school districts with high rates of poverty, crime, and little to no resources (Rivas-Drake, 2008). For example, Gándara and Contreras (2009) state that in our nation's educational system one of the biggest stumbling blocks to a prosperous future is the lack of education among Latinos. Phinney, et. al (2006) stated that Latino

students' motivations to pursue higher education have been largely neglected. This may be partly explained by the nation's educational system, which as a whole is unreceptive and unengaging to its Latino students (Espinoza-Herold, 2007). Despite unfriendly and indifferent educational environments, some Latinos persevere each day towards a more thriving future for themselves and their families (Morales, 2008). These same students may be expressing their adaptive resilience and in particular the psychological dynamic of motivation.

Immigrant Status. The rising Latino population has dramatically impacted the overall demographic landscape of the U.S., especially the south. Data suggests that already in some counties in states like North Carolina one of every 5 individuals is Latino (Wainer, 2004). Latino immigrants have come to the US and states like North Carolina primarily for employment opportunities. The major economic endeavors for Latino immigrants are menial, unrewarding, and include many of the unpleasant aspects of the service industry such as meat and chicken processing, construction, and farm labor (Wainer, 2004). In spite of their success in these manual trades, the overwhelming majority of Latinos have yet to enter white-collar professions. Latino public education issues in emerging immigrant communities have been quite complex and disconcerting (Wortham, Murillo & Hamann, 2002). Although school systems have recovered somewhat from the initial immigration upsurge of the mid-1990s, Latino achievement scores and dropout rates are disturbing and educators and administrators continue to struggle to incorporate Latino immigrants and their unique needs and concerns (language barriers, legal status, cultural misunderstanding) successfully into public educational institutions (Wainer, 2004).

Motivation. Desire or motivation is the nexus to understanding what drives students' decisions to pursue higher education (Santos, 2004). Olive (2009) cited Thorndike's definition of desire as an emotion, involving thought and a supplementary emotional attitude that entitled each person to determine his or her own unique meaning of motivation. It is crucial to understand the essence of motivation, which promotes the formation of educational aspiration (Olive, 2009). There is also a variation within motivation that needs to be clarified. Intrinsic motivation is when a student wants to become successful and has an inner desire to do so. Extrinsic motivation is external support, encouragement, and positive or negative factors that encourage the student to pursue a specific goal (Cavazos, et al., 2010).

What motivates Latino students to pursue higher education? It is important to investigate motivation and student aspirations as crucial aspects of Latino student academic achievement (Waxman, et. al, 1997). Motivation and behavior are impacted by what a student values psychologically, socially, and culturally and what they perceive to be important for their present functioning and future educational aspirations and goals (Marrs & Sigler, 2011). Focusing on the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations of Latino students may lead to new understanding of the psychological factors that pertain to the academic achievement of Latino students. In addition to motivation, it appears that examining the parental style and its influence on Latino students is necessary to understand further how Latino students may be supported *or not* to pursue higher education from their parents.

Parenting Style. Parenting style is defined as the ethnically-derived parental attitudes that generate the emotional climate in which a child develops (Guilamo-Ramos,

Dittus, Jaccard, Johansson, Bouris, & Acosta, 2007). From her seminal work, Baumrind defined parenting style as parents viewing their child as a refractory savage, a small adult, or an angel sent from heaven (Baumrind, 1966). From Baumrind's (1966) early work appeared three distinct parenting styles of authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive. All three parenting styles have been examined widely in the literature (Baumrind, 1966; McGillicuddy-De Lisi, & De Lisi, 2007; Spera, 2005; Timpano, K. R, Keough, Mahaffey, Schmidt, & Abramowitz, 2010). Permissive parents act in a very accepting, non-punitive, and affirming style toward their child's impulses, wants, and behaviors (Baumrind, 1966). Authoritarian parents want to control, mold, and assess the behaviors and attitudes of their child in accordance with an established set of rules (Baumrind, 1966). Authoritarian parents enforce rules in a strict manner, demand total obedience, and discourage verbal give and take with their children (McGillicuddy-De Lisi, & De Lisi, 2007). Baumrind (1966) and Spera (2005) suggested that the authoritative parenting style consists of warmth, affection, established boundaries, and support for children's interests and curiosities.

Many authors argue that the authoritative approach is the most acceptable approach to take with children (Baumrind, 1966; Spera, 2005; McGillicuddy-De Lisi, & De Lisi, 2007; Timpano, Keough, Mahaffey, Schmidt, & Abramowitz, 2010). However, there is research that suggests that the authoritative approach has the *most* adaptive outcomes for children from European-American, middle class backgrounds and not necessarily other cultural backgrounds (Chaudhuri, Easterbrooks, & Davis, 2009, Domenech-Rodriguez, Donovanick, & Crowley, 2009; Garcia, & Gracia, 2009; Pong, Lao, & Gardner, 2005).

Parenting style is influenced by both personal experience and extensive contextual aspects, such as cultural heritage (Chaudhuri, Easterbrooks, & Davis, 2009). With respect to Latino culture in America, research has proposed that avoiding the labels of parenting styles and focusing on parenting *dimensions* may be more culturally appropriate (Domenech-Rodriguez, Donovanick, & Crowley, 2009). Traditional parenting categories may be inaccurate for Latino families; thus, the three dimensions of warmth, demandingness, and autonomy-granting are suggested as more appropriate to utilize with Latino families (Domenech-Rodriguez, Donovanick, & Crowley, 2009).

Latino families do not fit easily into categories of the majority culture, and therefore parenting dimensions may be more helpful as a frame of reference for understanding Latino families. The warmth dimension is similar in nature to the authoritative parenting style and includes the degree of responsiveness in the parents. The demandingness dimension is comparable to the authoritarian style in measure of strictness. Finally, autonomy granting is related to the permissive style that examines the extent of personal freedom given to children (Domenech-Rodriguez, Donovanick, & Crowley, 2009). In addition to parenting dimensions, the related research demonstrates that many Latino students benefit greatly from the support, encouragement, and information provided by their peer networks. Thus, examining the role of peer influence may uncover greater understanding of Latino students' decisions to pursue higher education.

**Peer Influence.** One of the primary themes in Latino education literature is how social relationships and connections impact individual outcomes (Riegle-Crumb, & Callahan, 2009). Owing to the various studies that point to Latino student disengagement

and lack of social capital (Oyserman, Brickman, Bybee, & Celious, 2006; Strayhorn, 2008; Zell, 2010), Latino students may depend on their peers' opinions, thoughts, and achievements as a compass to navigate the intricate world of applying to and achieving success in Primarily White Institutions (PWIs) (Boden, 2011; Olive, 2009).

Understanding the factors associated with Latino students' sense of belonging in K12 settings and in college may assist in reducing their levels of academic and social disengagement. Research suggests that diverse students such as Latinos that surround themselves with peers who have similar or greater educational goals will inspire them in higher goal setting and accomplishments in high school and college (Holland, 2011; Sokatch, 2006). In fact, Latino youths who befriend high achieving White students seem to have a distinct advantage, as they are able to test their academic knowledge, skills, and validate their performance in contrast with their White peers (Gándara, 1995; Morales, 2004). Latino males who maintain co-ethnic friendships are developing social capital and increasing their chances for academic success (Riegle-Crumb, & Callahan, 2009). Research suggests youths with interracial friends in middle and high schools will be open to interracial friendships at the college level, and thus create a sense of belonging for themselves (Schofield et al., 2010; Strayhorn, 2008). It can be argued that Latino males who retain friendships with White peers, co-ethnic peers, and ethnically diverse friends may have substantial social capital to withdraw from. This diverse cultural interaction permits many Latino students to live biculturally and develop adaptive and educational resilience as they maneuver between the home and academic worlds (Gándara, 1995, Morales, 2004).

Latino college students are the fastest growing college age demographic, however, many do not enroll in college and those that do end up dropping out or struggle to finish a degree. Latino college students utilize their motivation, both internal and external, as a protective factor to persisting in academic environments. Latino college students' motivation is part of their adaptive resilience as well as a crucial element of the psychological characteristics of the PSC framework. Parenting style (or dimensions) is another important factor to consider in Latino college students' decisions to pursue higher education (Chaudhuri, et. al 2009; Domenech-Rodriguez, Donovanick, & Crowley, 2009). Research suggests that authoritative and warmth dimension parenting styles are the most beneficial and culturally relevant for Latino students (Domenech-Rodriguez, Donovanick, & Crowley, 2009; Spera, 2005). Peer influence is significant in Latino students' educational decisions and how they navigate college application procedures. One interesting finding in the literature suggests that high achieving White peers of Latino students can promote bicultural growth and adaptive and educational resilience. The preceding portion of the literature review focused on Latino college students in general now attention is given to research on Latino males in higher education.

#### Latino Males in Higher Education

Gender Differences. Males and females have perceptions, outlooks, and societal positions that warrant their study as a distinct subgroup (Morales, 2008). From a historical lens there has been a supposition made about college being set up in favor of men (Saenz, & Ponjuan, 2009). However, much of the minority education literature points to females as equaling and surpassing their male counterparts both educationally and professionally (Morales, 2008; Perez, & McDonough, 2008; Saenz, & Ponjuan,

2009, 2011). When it comes to higher education Latina students are more likely than their male counterparts to pursue and finish college after high school or GED completion (Saenz, 2002, Gloria et al, 2009; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). For example, 2004 the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) data reveals that 28.4% of Latino males were high school dropouts in comparison with 18.4% of Latina females, 7.1% of White males, and 13.5% of Black males (Saenz & Ponjuan (2009). Today, females make up nearly 60% of all college graduates (Marrs, & Sigler, 2011) and the majority of Latino college students are female (Santos, 2004; Cerna et. al., 2009). The growing underrepresentation of Latino males, among all Latino college students, contributes the *most* to the college enrollment disparity between Latinos and White students (Zarate, & Burciaga, 2010).

However, there is research that found that in middle school there was no gender difference with respect to academic motivation and completion (Waxman et. al., 1997). This finding may suggest that there is some point between middle school and college that may negatively impact Latino male students' aspirations to pursue higher education. This finding may suggest that Latinas have higher or a different kind of adaptive resilience as they progress from high school to college. Gender, in addition to race, is indeed a crucial aspect mediating the college choice process for Latinos and deserves further investigation (Perez, & McDonough, 2008). In examining this gender disparity in educational achievement among Latino students there is argument that *the majority of* Latino males that pursue higher education are in some manner resilient. Resilient Latino males develop some of their resilience from their parents and specifically parental support.

Parental Support. Research suggests that parents are the number one influence on their children's college aspiration development (Cerna et. al, 2009). Parental support has been found to be the most significant foundation to uniquely predict overall, emotional, and academic adjustment among young Latinos (Sanchez, et. al, 2006) especially Latino males. Latino males who graduate from high school and pursue higher education appear to have ways of accessing specific social and cultural resources which drive them to persist in their educational goals. Parental support may be a specific form of social capital, which propels many Latino males to achieve academically. In his study Strayhorn (2010) found that parental support coincides with higher grade point average for Latino males. The findings include how having discussions about college with their parents was the most important aspect for Latino males' academic achievement (Strayhorn, 2010). Although many Latino males' parents have little education and knowledge about the higher education process they still offer verbal support and encouragement (Sanchez et. al, 2006). Parental support includes helping their sons with homework and maintaining contact with teachers and school personnel (despite some parents' limited English proficiency) (Sanchez, et. al, 2006). One important ingredient appears to be Latino males' awareness that no matter what their parents educational level or knowledge, they are involved and vested in their sons' scholastic futures. Many Latino males also regard the cultural value of *familismo*, or closeness of family and importance of family over individual, as a crucial element to their future academic success.

*Familismo*. Marschall (2006) points out that parents and educators seem to have different perceptions and expectations of each other's roles in the educational process.

Latino parents value nurturing, teaching values, and instilling good behavior and prefer to allow teachers to educate in specific course subjects (Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995). There is a *dicho*, or saying, that a great education begins in the home and many Latinos come from collectivistic orientations and believe in the importance of family (Sue & Sue, 2003).

Latino families customarily remain true to traditional gender roles (Sue & Sue, 2003). This normally translates to domestic duties for females and work roles for males (Yowell, 2000). *Familismo* is the Latino cultural value of maintaining close bonds with family members, which ironically translates into difficult decisions for Latino males as they make educational choices. Latino males experience family and parental pressure to pursue an early entrance into the work world due to poverty and limited economic opportunities (Romo, & Falbo, 1996; Yowell, 2000; Saenz, & Ponjuan, 2011). Additionally, Latino males interpret the cultural value of *familismo* as a duty to serve family values and wellbeing first (Guilamo-Ramos et. al, 2007), which may mean sacrificing leaving home for college to attend community college closer to home (Alvarado, & Lopez-Turley, 2012; Nunez, & Crisp, 2012). Other Latino males may decide to work full time for a year (or more) before enrolling in college or attend college part-time and work to contribute to the family. The key point is that the importance of the family unit (over oneself) is an overriding cultural factor in many Latino males' educational decisions. As such many Latino males may have the internal desire that could be termed, "*familismo achievement motivation*" which is a type of achievement motivation grounded in the desire to look after family and compensate "immigrant" parents or less educated parents for all of their sacrifice (Yowell, 2000). This *familismo*

*achievement motivation* may be ignited by Latino families' emphasis on hard work, collectivism, and not forgetting one's cultural roots. First generation college Latino males may be more inclined to develop a stronger sense of *familismo achievement motivation*. Despite facing a multitude of complex barriers and challenges on their journey towards higher education first generation college Latino males (Boden, 2011; Olive, 2009), are able to integrate their various resiliencies including their *familismo achievement motivation* and forge ahead in their educational pursuits.

Latino males are not represented in high numbers in the nation's postsecondary institutions, which is partly due to their dismal high school graduation numbers and the economically deprived environments they live in. Many of their female counterparts are surpassing Latino males in academic and professional achievements. The review of the literature finds that parental support is a significant social contributing factor to resilient Latino males' academic success. Educational discussions, parental involvement with teachers and school personnel, and encouragement despite lack of knowledge about higher education processes are important elements of parental support for Latino males. Parental support ties in to the cultural value of *familismo*, which is the value of the family over the individual. *Familismo achievement motivation* may explain a psychocultural phenomenon which pertains to Latino males' instinctive environmental, adaptive, and academic resilience in order to give back to their family and parents. If within the Latino male educational literature there is argument that *the majority* of Latino males that pursue higher education are in some manner resilient then the investigator argues that *all* first generation college Latino males are resilient based on the distinct struggles many (in this subpopulation) encounter on their academic journeys. The rationale for exploring first

generation college Latino male research is to comprehend their resilience; as well as their psychological, social, and cultural protective factors that contribute to their academic achievement and are representative of their experiences.

#### First Generation College Latino Males

First generation college Latino males who immigrated more recently with their families may have a more difficult acculturation and transition experiences and may be more motivated to meet their basic needs and those of their families. Higher education for such individuals may seem more of a distant dream and unattainable aspiration and is not a part of the family's narrative or tradition and thus not a point of emphasis (Wainer, 2004). Research suggests that many undocumented students are not welcome (e.g. due to political pressure on administration) in many school districts and if they graduate they have to pay exorbitant out of state tuition fees (Wainer, 2004). As such many of these Latinos are more likely to drop out of high school and become teenage parents (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009). Additionally, many recent immigrant Latino males contract with construction companies to earn adequate salaries and recognize that working is more beneficial than participating in discriminatory educational institutions (Wainer, 2004). Conversely, first generation college Latino males who were born in the U.S or have been in the states since their formative years may be *more* inclined to pursue higher education to break the cycle of poverty and provide a better future for their families.

More resilient immigrant Latinos may be able to acculturate and assimilate faster than others. In one study examining the acculturation of immigrant Latino youths, immigrant Latinos not only appeared to quickly embrace American behaviors, practices, beliefs, and peer groups within their first few years of residency but also maintained

strong orientation toward Latino cultural practices, values, attitudes, and behaviors (Martinez Jr., C. R., McClure, H. H., Eddy, J. M., & Molloy-Wilson, D. 2011). Latino youth who arrived in the U.S in their very early years and who had lived in the U.S for nearly a decade or more remained slightly more Latino than Anglo oriented (Martinez Jr., et. al, 2011). This result mirrors those of other studies that have found biculturalism and cultural balance to be the most frequently validated mode of acculturation among individuals from immigrant families (Schwartz & Zamboanga, 2008).

The road to higher education is paved with numerous challenges and barriers for first generation college Latino males as much of the statistics on Latino education reveal. For example, it is estimated that only 21 of 100 Latino adolescents will ever set foot on a college campus (Castellanos, & Gloria, 2007). Additionally, roughly 11% of Latino adults in the U.S. have college degrees (Phinney et. al, 2005) that comprise the lowest educational attainment rate for all ethnic groups (Nuñez, Sparks, & Hernandez, 2011). These statistics reveal a glum future for many college Latino students, and is especially dark for first generation college Latino males.

This study departs from the perfunctory approach of treating minority men as a monolithic entity (Strayhorn, 2010). In their national sample, Nuñez et al. (2011) found that Latinos were more likely to be first generation college students than any other ethnic group. These students may also be labeled as underprepared (Boden, 2011) or not motivated enough due to cultural misinterpretations such as *familismo* (family comes first attitude) acculturation challenges, economic needs of the family, and undocumented legal status. Latinos have more opportunities for a college education than ever before, however, over the past 20 years there has only been a 7% increase overall in enrollment

(mostly in community college) (Castellanos, & Gloria, 2007) despite the Latino population boom in the past 20 years. More research is needed to investigate how and to what extent do first generation college Latino males differ in terms of resiliencies, and psychological, social, and cultural factors that promote their academic achievement. In reviewing the related research, one of the cultural protective factors that leads to FGCLM adaptive and academic resilience is ethnic identity.

Ethnic Identity. Ethnic identity is a dynamic psychocultural construct that develops through various life processes that stimulate an individual's perceptions, cognitions, affect, and behaviors (Cano, Castillo, Davis, Lopez-Arenas, Vaquero, Thompson, & Saldivar, 2012). One obstacle that many first generation Latino students have to reconcile is the loyalty to culture and the opportunity that lies in autonomy (Sue & Sue, 2003) and educational mobility. Many first generation college Latino males find themselves at a cultural crossroads in which they have to decide whether to be the first one to go to college and make mom and dad proud or remain in the comfortable, yet somewhat constricted environment of family and friends and *still* make the family proud (London, 1989). Many FGCLM receive mixed messages from loved ones about their decision; one is to stay at home where they belong and two is to go out into the world and achieve (Auerbach, 2007; London, 1989). Research is also mixed with one study suggesting that the more acculturated (weaker ethnic identity) Latino student will experience higher academic achievement (Hurtado, & Gauvain, 1997) and another finding that biculturalism (balanced ethnic identity) predicts the best scholastic outcomes (Gándara, 1995). In their study Colon and Sanchez (2009) found that 69 first generation Latino males were more likely to retain cultural aspects of their country of origin and

share their parents' dreams and aspirations to flourish in the U.S. It appears that FGCLM may have a distinctive advantage in the cultural protective factor of having a stronger sense of ethnic identity which drives them to success. Having a stronger ethnic identity promotes conscientiousness which leads to higher educational aspirations and expectations among FGCLM (Cano, et. al, 2012). Another protective factor for FGCLM within the PSC framework is having mentors of color (e.g. teachers, counselors, administrators) that can empathize with many of their educational and life experiences (Irizarry, 2012).

Diverse Mentors. First generation college Latino males benefit from contact with Latino or other diverse teachers, counselors, coaches, and or administrators in their academic settings. Many FGCLM envision these mentors as their partners on a journey towards something more (Irizarry, 2012). Mentors can be critical especially for FGCLM who may experience feelings of isolation from their more academically privileged peers who know more about higher education procedures. In his study the participants (many of them FGCLM) declared that having Latino teachers leads to better cultural understanding and higher motivation to not let them down (Irizarry, 2012). FGCLM who seek out diverse mentors in their schools may find a person whom with they can share their unique concerns. They can analyze in a safe environment what it means to be a person of color to gain inspiration and support from those who have traveled along the same roads (Gándara, 2008). Diverse mentors represent *concrete* social encouragement for many first generation college Latino males. This means that teachers, counselors, and school administrators can serve as individuals who provide concrete materials and advice on college applications, applying for financial aid, college majors, and other college

related information. This stands in contrast to first generation college Latino males' parents and peers who may be *symbolic* social encouragers by ensuring FGCLM they can do it, do not give up, and to go for it (Martinez, & Cervera, 2012).

The investigator argues that first generation college Latino males have to integrate instinctive environmental, adaptive, and academic resilience to achieve academic success. One of the primary obstacles for FGCLM is finding ways to finance their college education. FGCLM who demonstrate economic resilience are more likely to achieve their educational aspirations and goals. FGCLM tend to come from low economic backgrounds that present overwhelming hurdles to climb when trying to resolve academic and professional goals with the reality of ever increasing-tuition costs (Boden, 2011). FGCLM, in general, cannot depend on their parents for financial assistance or knowledge such as filling out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and how to apply for scholarships (Auerbach, 2007). First generation college Latino males' knowledge of college financial assistance is limited due to minimal guidance, social inequality, lack of financial resources at home, and no checklist to follow in how to finance their college education. FGCLM may at times feel alone in the financial aid process but are still able to find enough economic resilience to push forward and this usually equates to working part time, full time, and balancing two or more jobs while attending college.

#### Other Influences.

In the literature there are various other influences both positive and negative that may lead FGCLM to choose alternative pathways to higher education. Examining some of these influences may help in understanding the unknown elements of first generation

college Latino males' educational decisions. One of the core cultural values among Latino subgroups is the importance of faith, although the expression of spiritual and faith experiences may contrast greatly among Latinos (Campesino, & Schwartz, 2009; Rodriguez, 2009). Research on a sample of Richmond, VA Latinos suggests that non-religious Latinos seem to experience better assimilation, faster aptitude of English, have higher occupation status, and are more likely to vote (Cavalcanti, & Schleef, 2005). Within the sample in their study, 64% of first generation Latinos remain true to their Catholic roots, whereas second generation Latinos tend to be open-minded about choosing another faith or no religion at all (Cavalcanti, & Schleef, 2005). This finding may promote the idea that first generation college Latino males may have certain linguistic and cultural disadvantages as they transition to higher education (e.g. less English proficiency, less assimilated). Traditional Latino values such as *familismo* and *personalismo* also influence faith experiences (Campesino, & Schwartz, 2009; Fischer, Harvey, & Driscoll, 2009). *Familismo* pertains to the fundamental role that the family relationships have in the everyday lives of Latinos and with their *compadrazgo* (extended family including godparents); *Personalismo* refers to warmth and closeness in relationships; including a relationship with God or higher being (Campesino, & Schwartz, 2009). In Latino culture everything is intertwined (Rodriguez, 2009), and an argument can be made that Latino faith coupled with many psychological, social, and cultural factors may have bearing on first generation college Latino males' decisions to pursue college. Furthermore, the education of a Latino child involves more than compulsory education. The education or "educación" of Latino children also includes

responsibility, morality or spiritual values, and interpersonal relations (Halguaseth, Ispa, & Rudy, 2006).

One sobering reason why many Latino males are not enrolling in higher education may be because of their overrepresentation in our nation's jails. In fact, in 2009 20% of the nation's 2.1 million prisoners were Latino (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2011). Another factor may be that many Latino males are deciding to enlist in the United States military (Saenz, & Ponjuan, 2011) most likely because of lack of funds for college. There is also argument that FGCLM may perceive excelling academically as "acting White" and so they may feel like sell-outs to their culture (Saenz, & Ponjuan, 2011). The literature posits various reasons and factors for Latino student academic success and failure; as such the ongoing study of first generation college Latino males may produce a common thesis among this understudied population.

First generation college Latino males have to overcome difficult barriers to successfully transition from high school to college. Ethnic identity may be one protective cultural factor that motivates FGCLM to become high achievers academically. The role of diverse mentors appears to be another alleviating social factor that helps FGCLM understand the actual requirements of applying and succeeding in higher education. The majority of FGCLM have to become economically resilient in order to progress academically, which means working long hours to pay for school as well as to support their families.

#### Subjectivity Statement

I am a Latino male and proud of my cultural background. I was born in San Jose, Costa Rica and I adopted when I was 8 years old by two loving American parents. My

story is full of heartbreak and triumphs and yet in an odd way without my experiences I would not be as satisfied with my life as I am today.

I personally have met and talked with many Latino males in high school and their Latino parents whom struggle with what to do about helping their son stay in school and encourage their sons to pursue a college education. Being a Latino male, I have witnessed in North Carolina community colleges and universities the Latino male seems to be an outlier in a sea of student demographic data. The awareness that there are few Latino males whom I can share my experiences with at the college level has been the impetus for conducting this research.

The phenomenological approach is mainly a way to begin to understand the experiences or essence of a person's lived experience or life world (Moustakas, 1994). I accommodated a phenomenological approach to this study because I attempted to understand the perceptions of FGCLM and also comprehend the "essences" of their experiences as well as any commonalities they shared amongst each other. I believe the essence of each voice was rich, fascinating, and fertile with inspiration.

#### Summary of Literature Review

Reviewing resilience theory and its various components as well as the PSC framework provides context from which to understand the various psychological, social, and cultural forces that assist ethnic minority and Latino students in their higher education journeys. Examining the literature on ethnic minority college students (EMCS) provides insight into some salient themes that impact the majority of minority college students. These themes include self-esteem (Morales, 2008; Zolli, & Healy, 2012), a

psychological protective factor and economic resilience (Griffin & Walter, 2006), which also relates to the success of first generation college Latino males.

Research on Latinos in higher education point to motivation, parenting style, and peer networks as important protective factors for Latino students (Holland, 2011; Marrs & Sigler, 2011; Sokatch, 2006; Spera, 2005). In utilizing high levels of motivation and accessing social capital such as peers, Latino students have learned to develop adaptive and academic resilience in order to succeed despite difficult circumstances and experiences prior to enrolling in college.

Focusing on Latino males in higher education literature is relevant because of the recent trends in the research that point to Latinas' ability to realize their secondary and postsecondary educational ambitions with more success than Latino males (Cerna et. al, 2009; Gloria et. al, 2009; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009; Santos, 2004; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). The literature suggests that between middle school and 12<sup>th</sup> grade the gap in academic success grows wider for Latinas and Latinos (Perez, & McDonough, 2008), thus a focus on Latino male issues in education literature is necessary. Findings from studies suggest that parental support, *familismo*, and specifically *familismo achievement motivation* contribute to the academic success of Latino males (Cerna et. al, 2009 Romo, & Falbo, 1996; Saenz, & Ponjuan, 2011; Yowell, 2000)

Reviewing the first generation college Latino male student literature confirms the need for further examination of this particular population of students due to the scarcity of studies that focus on this population of students; and the multiple obstructions that lay in front of their educational pathways (Boden, 2011; Olive, 2009; Sanchez, 2011). Some of the barriers highlighted in the literature are financial, cultural, familial, academic, and

personal in nature (Saunders & Serna, 2004). In a review of related research, ethnic identity and diverse mentors play significant roles in FGCLM educational goals. These protective factors push FCGLM to defy the odds and increase their confidence in supporting their families in the future (Irizarry, 2012; Cano, et. al, 2012). Other influences (both negative and positive) may impact the higher education attainment among first generation college Latino males such as juvenile detention and prison overrepresentation, zero tolerance discipline policies; and more positive aspects such as faith and military enlistment (Boden, 2011; Campesino, & Schwartz, 2009; Rodriguez, 2009 ; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2011).

First generation college Latino males' educational journeys are either ignored or misinterpreted and there is a need for more studies to clarify and give voice to their experiences and personal narratives (Bernal, 2002). Successful FGCLM are able to incorporate their instinctive environmental, adaptive, academic, and economic resilience into consistent intrapersonal and interpersonal reserves from which they can withdraw. The investigator argues that first generation college Latino males have to utilize *all* of the psychological (motivation, self-esteem, ethnic identity) social (peer networks, parenting style, parental support, diverse mentors) and cultural (*familismo*, ethnic identity) factors in distinct ways to rise above the cauldron of academic, financial, personal, and familial responsibilities once they transition to college (Saunders & Serna, 2004). Historically, the Latino education literature has resulted in unilateral attention to educational deficits and weaknesses; however the goal of this research is contribute to the emerging body of literature that relies on educational resilience and the strengths of FGCLM (Cerna et. al, 2009; Cano, et. al, 2012; Irizarry, 2012; Morales, 2004; Morales, 2008). This

underscores the need for additional focus on the experiences of FGCLM and their aspirations and motivation to pursue high education (Marrs, & Sigler, 2011).

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

As a result of the shrinking population of Latino males in postsecondary institutions this study examined the academic, familial, personal, and community experiences and contributing factors utilizing the narratives of seven first generation college Latino males currently enrolled in a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in North Carolina. The research questions that guided this study were:

- What are some of the factors that influence the pursuit of higher education among first generation college Latino males?
- What are the unique factors that influenced the pursuit of higher education in some first generation college Latino males?

### Theory of Qualitative Research

Phenomenology began as a movement in modern philosophical thought that was in essence created by Edmund Husserl (Churchill & Wertz, 1985). Husserl observed that human nature and culture could not be fully described through quantifiable means and causal discoveries (Churchill & Wertz, 1985). This is mainly because at the heart of phenomenology is the idea that humans are absorbed in a world of experience in which *the lived* is always greater than the known (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Sartre (1956) wrote that desire or motivation expresses a man's relation to one or several objects in the world, to appropriate a specific kind of life world (1956). Qualitative methods, specifically from a phenomenological lens, are excellent for achieving profound understanding of complex

processes and phenomena (Conklin, 2007) and in this case the essence of first generation college Latino males' desire to pursue higher education. However, important as it may appear, gaining a theoretical framework was not as critical as hearing their personal truths. By listening and focusing on one voice in the moment I was able to anticipate, understand, and clarify some of the needs of these Latino males in their lived experiences and their aspirations and motivations for their pursuit of a college education (Olive, 2009). This particular study transcended any theoretical limitation and phenomenon being examined (Olive, 2009; Moustakas, 1994; Giorgi, 1985). This study provided an opportunity to visualize and reflect on FGCLM from a new perspective and gain pure insight into the resilience they had each weaved into their life journeys.

A phenomenological approach using a modified combined version of the heuristic perspective and the Empirical Phenomenological Psychological Method (EPPM) which is a qualitative research design that looks for what an experience means for the person who has had the experience and can fully describe it (Moustakas, 1994) was utilized. Interviews were in semi-structured interview format which permitted the researcher flexibility to have a conversation around both pre-determined areas and unplanned open-ended questions to examine a topic further (Patton, 2002). A potential asset when utilizing semi-structured interviews is allowing the researcher, if attuned to immediacy, to recognize important themes in the moment as well as take advantage of opportunities to to examine further the participants' perceptions and beliefs (Perry, Thurston, & Green, 2004). From the participant general descriptions or universal meanings were excavated to convey the essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Some of the major characteristics of phenomenological research design are that it focuses on the human experience and human emotions (Moustakas, 1994). Participants were selected based on specific criteria which they needed to meet (in this case FGCLM) in order to have them return to their previous “lived experience” to obtain more comprehensive descriptions of their experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The goal of phenomenological research and specifically the interview process was to have a conversation and not necessarily a question and answer session.

### Research Design

The design is meant to describe the structures of experience based on reflective analysis and interpretation of each participant’s story (Moustakas, 1994). Gathering in depth data and knowledge about a small number of individuals is the crux of phenomenological data collection (Patton, 2002). For this particular study the use of the phenomenological research design was ideal because the investigator was attempting to understand the lived experience of the participants and to discover any patterns among the participants’ experiences after data were analyzed.

### Research Site

A southeastern urban university served as the research site for this particular study. The university is a large, public research predominantly White institution (PWI) that had a Fall 2011 undergraduate enrollment of 12,616 White students. The university maintained an undergraduate population of Black students totaling 3,412. The Latino student population was 1,306 with 618 of those students being Latino males (3%).

### Participants

Seven participants were recruited using a method of purposive sampling called snowball sampling which permitted the researcher to obtain information of potential participants from people who know others that meet the specific participant profile (Glesne, 2006). The researcher selected individuals for the study because they could purposely inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study (Creswell, 2007). The researcher contacted the office of multicultural resources at the institution to gather contact information on potential participants. Additionally, the researcher attended meetings of Latino student organizations to recruit participants. All participants were first generation college Latino males currently enrolled at the university. The FGCLM were the target population because of the potentially rich data and results that may foster the argument that motivation, aspirations, and other factors have played a role in their decision to pursue college studies.

#### Data Collection Procedures

**Participant Recruitment.** Upon IRB approval the plan was to elicit participation from members of Latin student organizations, and referrals through the director or associate director of the office of multicultural resources at the university. The researcher solicited interest in person or via an email asking them if they were willing to participate in an interview for an upcoming qualitative study (See Appendix A). When seven first generation college Latino male students demonstrated interest in participating in the study, we mutually agreed on an appointment for an interview and each participant reviewed and signed the informed consent form (see Appendix B) as well as the demographic information form (see Appendix C).

**Interview Site.** Six of the interviews were conducted in a secure room in the library of the university which was closer and more convenient for the participants and one was conducted in the participant's home to alleviate him of any traveling time and expense.

**Interview Process.** Once informed consent was read and signed and the demographic information form completed, the interview began. Through semi-structured interviews, the investigator used open-ended questions to elicit the essence of the participant's experience, the investigator did not ask close-ended or leading questions. Semi-structured interviews permitted the researcher flexibility to have a conversation around both pre-determined areas and unplanned open-ended questions to examine a topic further (Patton, 2002). The interview questions (see Appendix D) were mainly a guide for the FGCLM to consider and interviews lasted approximately an hour to an hour and a half. With respect to phenomenological inquiry the researcher only asked a few questions. The researcher clarified with FGCLM whether they were satisfied with their answers at the end of the interview.

**Confidentiality Issues.** Interviews were recorded with a digital recorder which was stored in a secure lock box along with any other pertinent and sensitive information in the researcher's residence. There was seven file folders created with pseudonyms that were stored in the lock box. The only person with access to the lock box was the researcher. Under no circumstances were the FGCLM forced to participate or coerced into participating. If they desired to quit at any time during the process then all their data and information would have been destroyed. All the recorded data was erased from the digital recorder. At the conclusion of the interviews, the participants had the opportunity

to comment or remark on any additional thoughts. Notes of any clarifications or comments were placed in each participant's files in the lock box.

Second Interview. Due to the richness and amount of data that each initial interview yielded there was no need for any secondary interviews with the participants. The researcher consulted with his committee members to ensure that additional interviews were not necessary. The researcher advised each participant that if they felt that one interview was not sufficient that they inform him after reading a copy of their respective transcription.

### Data Analysis

The combination of a heuristic and empirical phenomenological approach included the following steps as modified from Moustakas (1994); there was a reading of the entire description of each participant's narrative straight through and several times to obtain a sense of the whole. After several readings the researcher highlighted in color coding fashion various themes that stood out initially within the interview transcripts. Next, the investigator uploaded each narrative into Atlas ti software and read the descriptions more slowly with intent to further identify individual meaning units or themes. Subsequently, the investigator eliminated any redundant themes or subthemes and clarified each major theme as they relate to each other and the whole. The investigator reflected on each theme and drew out the essence of each theme. Through the utilization of concept mapping the investigator obtained a visual representation of the themes and subthemes that aided in completing the composite and individual descriptions of the participants. Then themes were organized into two composite descriptions one for each participant and one for the participants as a whole. The composite descriptions

remained close to the individual narratives of each participant. Finally, the researcher combined all the narratives of the participants into a culminating creative synthesis.

Once the initial interviews were transcribed, the investigator sent the initial transcripts to the participants for their review before conducting follow up interviews (if necessary) with each participant as a form of member checking. Member checking served to add to the interpretive and descriptive validity of the study (Maxwell, 1992). The follow up interviews were transcribed, analyzed, interpreted, and coded for themes following Moustakas' (1994) guidelines. These themes were transformed via psychological and distinct terminology (e.g. explaining aspects of familismo, resilience, motivation, etc.) and included integration of some themes into the resilience and PSC theoretical frameworks. The researcher created a table with all participants' demographic information (see Appendix E). The investigator synthesized and composed a final, unswerving account of the descriptions. Identifying the essence of the participants' descriptions and experiences through poetry was included.

There were several committee members (Drs. Wierzalis, Harris, and Lim) who specialize in qualitative research that oversaw the data analysis procedures and results for verification purposes. The purpose for the advisors was to increase trustworthiness and to monitor an excessive influence of the researcher's subjectivity with respect to the resulting themes and synthesis of the themes.

### Issues of Subjectivity

The investigator kept a written list of subjective opinions and thoughts apart from the transcripts themselves for self-reflection and awareness throughout the data collection and analysis to help limit subjective bias. When analyzing the transcript the investigator

bracketed his own reactions, feelings, or perceptions on notecards as indicated by Moustakas (1994) and demonstrated by Telles (2000). Additionally, the investigator maintained a weekly dissertation journal that allowed for ongoing reflection and analysis of the investigator's thoughts and feelings about the research process. The investigator met twice with members of his committee to ensure that the data analysis synthesis was objective and not impacted by personal bias. The themes of the participants were the overall focus of the data analysis and were included in the poetic narrative at the conclusion of the data analysis procedures per the heuristic tradition (Moustakas, 1994).

#### Ethical Considerations

The researcher was committed to open, honest and objective dissemination of the study results. Furthermore, the confidentiality of study and interview participants were held in strict confidence. The researcher was sensitive to incorporating research procedures that took into account cultural considerations. There did not appear to be significant risks associated with this study. Some of the questions were more difficult to answer than others but the researcher attempted to form questions that were not inappropriate or accusatory in nature. The study procedures did not invoke stress or unnecessary anxiety from the subjects. Nor were any of the procedures offensive, degrading, insulting, or vulgar in nature.

Data were securely stored and recorded in various ways (including audio recorders). Each participant was assigned a pseudonym and the pseudonym given to the subject was used for all data collection, analysis and reporting so as to maintain confidentiality of study participants. Participants were free to withdraw from the study at any time (Moustakas, 1994). Because interviews were open-ended, and conversational,

misconceptions were clarified as they occurred and open disclosures were accepted and supported (Moustakas, 1994). Information that was considered private, and possibly damaging, was removed or disguised to protect the identity of the research participant (Ezzy, 2002). At the conclusion of the study, reports were written with use of individual responses using the subject's identifying pseudonym when needed. At no time during the study was there any deception of human subjects involved.

#### Potential Risks

Risks that arose during the recruitment process include not obtaining a large enough sample. The initial recruitment process yielded five participants that met the criteria. The investigator obtained contact information for other potential participants from the first five participants. At times the participants experienced emotional discomfort and they were advised that they could stop and move to the next question or topic. The interviews did not last longer than an hour and a half so participants did not show and so breaks were not needed. Deductive disclosure was one potential risk to the confidentiality and privacy of the participants as the sample was specific to a small population of students at the institution, as such the investigator ensured to use pseudonyms and deleted any identifying information from the data collection, analysis, and dissemination procedures.

#### Potential Benefits

Participants in the study were a part of relevant and important research. The questions in the questionnaire aided participants in deeper self-reflection and self-understanding. The study itself contributed to a lacking body of research about motivation, resilience, parental support, mentor guidance, and other influences' roles in

FGCLM choosing to pursue higher education. The best outcome would be for the study to spark more serious interest in North Carolina and across the country in how FGCLM decide to pursue a college education. The results of the findings may be used to lead discussions with Latino males in middle school, high school, with Latino parents, in churches, school meetings, and even initiate support groups. It is an overarching goal of this research to arouse self-awareness, self-confidence, and pride in Latino males and their parents' hearts and minds about Latino males' future educational decisions.

### Summary

Utilizing purposive sampling the researcher obtained contact information of up to 10 FGCLM who were willing to participate in this particular study. The sample consisted of first generation college Latino male members of Latino student organizations and referrals from the director of multicultural resource center. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured fashion and lasted approximately an hour to an hour and a half. Participants had an opportunity to review transcripts to ensure interpretive and descriptive validity of their initial interviews. This also served member checking purposes and aided in finalizing the major themes of each participant's experiences. Follow up interviews were not a necessary part of the data collection process as the participants did not express a desire to clarify or include additional information about their experiences. The data analysis process involved a modified mix of heuristic and Empirical Phenomenological approaches (Moustakas, 1994) which detail specific steps in analyzing and finalizing the major themes of the participants. The potential benefits of the study outweighed the risks and this research contributed to a deeper understanding of

FGCLM journeys towards higher education and hopefully will ignite more time and resources to this underserved population in their K12 educational voyages.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The results of the thematic analysis derived from the procedures outlined in chapter three are presented in this chapter. The chapter is organized by first describing the eight common themes and then focusing on the unique individual experiences of each participant as they journeyed towards higher education. The eight common themes included 1. challenges, 2. psychological resilience, 3. academic resilience, 4. adaptive resilience, 5. economic resilience, 6. *ejemplo* (setting the example), 7. familial influences, and 8. others' influence. The first 8 themes answered the first research question and the section explaining the unique individual experiences answers the second research question.

The reasoning for including the challenges of this sample of seven first generation college Latino males was to provide context and present a realistic framework of their lived experiences. The investigator rendered brief biographic accounts of each individual participant prior to dissemination of individual findings. The investigator included a composite description of the common themes as well as an integrated poetic synthesis of all of the participants' experiences to conclude the chapter.

### Challenges

Within the common theme of challenges arose six distinct subthemes that encompass the participants' experiences including familial, physical, academic, psychological, cultural, and economic challenges. The rest of this section will emphasize

the specific experiences of the participants' alongside these six subthemes. One familial challenge was marital strife among participants' parents. For example Johnny described how his parent's unhappy marriage perplexed him as a child,

“Like my parents aren't, you know -- I didn't have a happy household in the sense that my parents didn't really get along. Like they're married but they're together because of me and, you know, I always -- I always told myself that that wasn't the kind of marriage that I was going to be in, and so I was going to be -- I always -- I always asked myself, well, if you guys didn't or don't get along this way and are this divided and this, like, different, then why did you guys get married in the first place? And they couldn't really give me an answer that seemed right at the time. And I always -- and that's a decision that they have to live with now for, you know, forever.” He added that they have just recently arrived at a place where they endure each other, “And I think they've gone to a place where they may not like each other but they can tolerate each other so, you know, the holidays and family dinners don't exactly happen.”

The familial challenge of domestic violence was something that Junior encountered at a very young age as he stated,

“Ah, let's see ....Whenever I was about 4 years old...I saw my dad beat my mom...like he was about to kill her....and she had my baby brother, so she was pregnant, and I was over there trying to tell my dad, no...don't do this...stop. Luckily for me...my mom keeps telling me...If it wasn't for you, I would've probably not been here right now.” Junior adds why he intervened in those violent moments, “He was threatening to kill her while she was carrying my little brother and I guess anyone would react that way and not....Well, uh...I can't speak for everyone. But I feel like the majority would....do something about it or.....cause no one wants to see their parent dead and you just stay quiet, so.”

Violence was another aspect of the familial subtheme that some participants' experienced. JD described his mother's experiences,

“But my mother did a lot to keep me and she suffered a lot....not necessarily at the hands of my biological father, but at the hands of his lifestyle, you know, she's had to flee the country before. My mom's been kidnapped by drug cartels, it's nothing new.”

Jesus depicted a rough childhood in which he lived in a very violent neighborhood and remembered holding a gun for the first time,

“I lived between Watts and Compton. The two most violent cities in Los Angeles. I was like how more crazy can it get?...I was around ten years old and I remember I get...I

think it was this best friend of my cousin who died. He was like, 'Here, hold this.' He gave me the gun. I remember the weight of the gun. It was really heavy. So I know it's loaded. My sister saw me and she just gave me this face. I just gave it back to him. I heard them asking for revenge. They were going to go look for the guys and go kill them."

Dealing with separation was another familial challenge for certain participants.

Junior discussed his parents' separation and how it impacted him as an eight year old,

"probably confused, cause at that time. I was...not really.....I mean, I knew what was going on with the whole separation....I just...didn't know how to be "The man of the house", since we already had my dad there. But...Yea, confusion. How am I going to like, help out around the house? How am I going to be a role-model? How am I going to help out my mom, when I'm only an 8 year old, with no job or anything?"

Some participants described having some physical challenges at early stages in their lives. Tony explained a time when he was extremely sick as a toddler,

"I think...I guess when I was two or three, I got really sick, I had I believe about 3-4 surgeries in less than 2 years. I wasn't expected to live long. And after that last surgery in that time span, I have never had to go back for any type of surgery."

Antonio discussed his weight issues in elementary and middle school,

"I was a little pudgy little guy, very overweight, in danger of getting diabetes or Pre-Diabetes...ah...It was like, it was growing up all the way from like 3rd to like 7th grade, I was getting called, "Fat", "Tubby".... Everybody there was very skinny. I was the like the fat one of the clique of the whole entire school. ...So, it was rough, I guess growing up being told that your fat, because then that made me feel very self-conscious of my own, of myself."

Psychological challenges such as self-doubt at times invaded certain participants' minds as Pedro stated,

"I think the thing that happened there was that I was really scared to go from high school to college, maybe because I didn't have the money and I wasn't sure if I'd be able to stay like - because I always knew I was good at school but I didn't know if I was off for college, you know what I'm saying? Like I didn't know if I had that in me, if I would be a good - just take college courses and pass them and do as good as I do."

Shame appeared to be another psychological challenge that Pedro still battles with respect to his mother,

“I don't know, my mom, right now she's not working because she's trying to learn English. She's been living in the United States for like what, 10, 15 years but she can't grasp English that well. All these cuss words she can say but she can't grasp English. My dad can, he did, he learned. My mom, she's having trouble. So, she is not working right now and she's trying to learn English. She's trying to get her citizenship because they're both residents here in this country but they're both trying to get their citizenships.”

Academic challenges were numerous for these FGCLM as Antonio discussed a time when he was misadvised,

“I talked to counselors, who said, ah, you should be fine, your grades are fine, your extra-curriculars are remarkable, you should have no problem getting into any college that you want to. I got denied by Duke, I got denied by Chapel Hill, got denied by NC State only got into ECU and because I was so far away.” I applied to this university, last minute, right before the deadline and then 2 weeks later I found out I got in and so I went here.”

JD discussed his academic suspension which prevented him from going to school,

“Because I remember it came to the point where I got suspended for an altercation I had. And I was upset that I couldn't go to school and that was the 1st time that ever happened to me, so that was the 1st time that I realized, Wow! I actually do enjoy going to school. To the point where this has me upset that I can't go to school.”

Having no college compass added to the confusion of the academic process and the transition from grade school to college. For example, Antonio described first learning about college entrance examinations,

“But that wasn't all, cause you look at college admissions and everything else, I had no idea about the SAT's until I was 16 or 17 years old. So I never knew I had to take it and neither did my mother, neither did my father. They didn't know about college applications cause in their country of origin in Peru, what they did over there was, if you did really well in school you'll get a letter of approval saying "That you have been, because of your good grades in your merits, you have been accepted into a University. Can you afford it?" Then "Yes, you can come.”

Johnny's experience was similar,

“I wasn't exactly sure where I wanted to go, if I still wanted to go at the end of high school because I never even applied anywhere. I saw all my friends just go off to college with acceptance letters and scholarships and I never even applied anywhere because I wasn't even really too confident in my own academic skills to get in a college because there was -- for me, it was just a place that like was like a mystery to me. My parents didn't -- couldn't really tell me how to get there, what it -- what it really entailed. All I

knew was I needed to go there to reach a goal but I didn't really know what kind of world it would be or what I needed to do to get there.”

Cultural challenges also pervaded the participants’ lives such as low cultural expectations that served to keep them from advancing in life as Pedro stated,

“a lot of people when I was in high school didn't think it was - like I felt like they - they were like, "Oh, what's the point? There's no point of even trying because it's just really hard." Most people, either they were immigrants or they just don't have the money from when I was growing up.”

Junior reflected on a similar observation he made ,

“To me, it means that....Well, first of all, seeing...growing up in a town, where there was like little Latino involvement, where you would see your friends, basically just going straight out of high school, or not even graduating high school. People being in gangs or just doing drugs and stuff like that.”

Prejudice was another cultural challenge that JD encountered personally,

“I can say that for Gastonia, NC there has always been this traditional, like "This is your role, you're going to play this role, I mean, I've grown up with, you know, racial slurs being thrown at me left and right” like, "this is your place wetback, this is your place you spic.” You know anytime I got in trouble at school it was because I was fighting over a racial issue and maybe that's just the south and we still haven't gotten out of that timeframe or we are still struggling to get rid of Jim Crow, I don't know. But all I know is that, at least for me growing up there has always been somebody there to tell me, or not even necessarily tell me, but to discriminate against me in some way to where it's like.... Well, I don't belong to this, so what do I belong to?

Cultural separation was another portion of the cultural challenges of this sample of

FGCLM. Jesus described feelings of loneliness as he took more advanced academic

classes which resulted in separation from his friends and what was comfortable for him,

“Well at first I just felt like I was isolated. I was separated from my own kind, if you can put it that way. ‘Cause I always had those friends where I would see them and maybe every other class or every class except for this one course which of course, a higher course. It’s like, ‘Okay. Where are my friends?’ You know. In a way, I actually -- the reason why I didn’t continue to take some honor’s courses and AP courses was because I wanted to get back to them, to my friends.”

Tony described how the demographics of his classes changed suddenly as a result of taking more advanced courses in high school,

“I set a challenge and I went up to honors the next couple of years. Though for the rest of my high school career it was honors and AP classes. I went from being in a majority of African-American and some Hispanic people in my classes to nothing but Caucasians people in my honors classes.”

Economic challenges were frequent for all of the participants in this study.

Antonio on his parents,

“My mom and dad worked 2 or 3 jobs to make sure that they were able to provide us with food on the table, clothes on our backs, roof over our head.”

JD recalled his living situation upon moving to North Carolina,

“when we first came down here from New York we actually moved in with her and my aunt moved down from New York about a year after us. It was 8 people living in a 3 bedroom apartment, I remember that.... That's one other thing in my life that I remember clearly to this day, is eight people living in a 3 bedroom apartment.” Johnny discussed his mother’s inability to secure a decent job for herself, “my mom, she had a really good job at a nursing home and she was making good money but something happened where she got fired from it and it has been really hard for her to get back on that horse. And she works two part-times now but she doesn't make nearly the amount -- the amount that she made before. And so...and so she's always in this position where she's either behind on a bill, has to wait for it, borrow from my dad to pay them back.”

The challenges of this sample of FGCLM varied from familial, physical, academic, psychological, cultural, and economic and many times they faced these challenges concurrently, however, through various protective factors the participants were able to illuminate and express *how* they were able to overcome so many challenges in order to advance in their lives. The rest of this chapter will emphasize the various protective factors of resilience, *ejemplo*, familial influence, and others’ influence in the lives of seven first generation college Latino males.

## Psychological Resilience

Psychological resilience was defined by avoiding failure, being optimistic, not conforming to a stereotype, having inner confidence, choosing success, and not settling for this sample of first generation college Latino males. Antonio developed his psychological resilience by choosing not to fail and he describes how important it was for him to not become a failure,

“The big "F" Failure. I don't like letting myself down. I don't like letting others down. I don't like letting something that I am part of down. Because, then that ultimately that means that I am a failure and that's not who I am.”

Junior expressed how he had always been optimistic and how that has made a positive impact on his life which allowed him to put life in perspective,

“I've always been optimistic, I guess I'm always been a positive person, people tell me that I smile too much. I've always looked on the positive side. My mom's alive, my brother's alive. We're living in the now.”

JD discovered that not conforming to the stereotype of Latinos helped him push forward despite similarities to others' experiences,

“the other guys have just kind of conformed with a minimum wage job. And that's where they are stuck, and that's where they are stuck and I don't ever see them getting out of that because they're still in that same place where they've got a job, whether it be at an AutoBell or whether it be cleaning apartments, houses. They just conform with that and they're just stuck there. I've been a janitor, I've worked at a grocery store, I've fixed cars, I've washed cars. I've done all kinds of low end jobs to get by since I've been old enough to pick up a broom and work.....I'm not unfamiliar to the struggle that they are going through and for that reason, it kind of upsets me because I'm like, I'm in the same boat that you guys are in.....and why am I the only one here that wants to go ahead and do something with myself.”

Jesus discussed his awareness of an inner confidence that kept him motivated and wanting to explore,

“We're born with the potential. We just have -- we just need to learn how to use that potential in order to strive... I think I'm just one of those people that I'm not enclosed in

my shell. It's like I just want to go out and explore the world. Like I've mentioned, 'Conquer the world.'

Tony explained that it is important to always have the right mindset as he goes through his life,

"I guess just having a different mindset, I guess I kinda mentioned that even though the two American and clashing between the two cultures you know having the mindset that we can grab the best of both worlds and seeing from the past what's the cycles of your family and having a good mindset and a good outlook on life that is a huge part of being different and wanting to better yourself. If the mindset isn't there then you can have some many good things going for you but if you don't know what to do with them, with your resources, then sometimes, you know nothing happens or bad things happen."

Pedro explained how his mindset was clear and that his dream of becoming a medical doctor had very specific requirements but that even if he did not finish, other opportunities would appear and he would have no regrets,

"You can't just say, 'Yeah, I want to go to medical school.' I'll go to college but I'll half-ass it. It won't do anything for you, so you do have to put that effort into it and you have to realize that and I guess I realized that very early on. Because that's what I had to do, because I have always wanted medicine and there's no other way around it, like that's what you got to do. I guess I thought if this doesn't work out, there's always other things I can do but there's no way to know something unless you actually go for it and try it. And that's what I did."

Johnny discussed how he depended on his own psychological resilience to pursue his higher education dreams and to not settle for an associate's degree,

"so to really look back and realize that I did all that research on my own, to realize that yeah, I went to a community college but I decided not to stay there because I wanted more and that I never really received any help in the sense of, you know, knowing what I needed to transfer, knowing what I needed to get here...Now, it's more I'm here for a reason. I got to make the most of it so, you know, every decision I make now is going to affect me in the future so why not make a good decision."

### Academic Resilience

Understanding the importance of school, creating an academic compass, adjusting to the college environment, being conscious of one's intellect, and the power of an

education are the various threads of academic resilience that have propelled these FGCLM to success academically. Antonio understood the importance of school early on in high school,

“So I chose not to skip classes and partake in these activities that would ultimately hurt my academics. Cause even though I did want to have fun, I knew that school does come first.”

Junior experienced roadblocks pursuing a university education yet still persevered and found his way,

“I applied to other schools but late and I got rejected to a bunch of schools, and just got accepted to private schools and well, I couldn't afford that. And then I kept going actually, I decided that alright I would just do a semester, finish off my credits, get my associate's degree and apply again and sure enough I got accepted here. Applied here and Appalachian. Got accepted at both, but decided to come here.”

JD acknowledged the difference between a high school and college environment and the different demands and expectations of college,

“That goes back to that notion that it was all fun and games until now... I can't pull that off in college anymore. You know, Thankfully, I have, thankfully I have the education level to where I can actually put in the work and still get the same result, but it's not like high school anymore, where I could literally do my research the day of and then be able to know enough... now in college, it's like you have to have a thesis, you have to have everything credited, you have to have sources and everything.”

Jesus recognized early on that he was very intelligent and he challenged himself with advanced courses,

“I actually think I always did. Ever since elementary school, I had the high grades. I went to Magnet School. I was put into classes for honors and AP classes. I knew I was smart.”

Pedro echoed a similar sentiment,

“I've always done good in school ever since, it was just a matter of putting more effort into it, because I would always be like be an above average student.”

Johnny's high school senior year was a pivotal year for his academic journey,

“It never really dawned on me the importance, like I said, the importance of an education and how far it could take me with -- I didn't really dawn on me until the opportunity was there, until it wasn't just like, you know, just like here, until it wasn't just handed to me; like, I had to really work to get it. And so that's why, you know, senior year, all of that started to hit me like whatever decisions I started to make now would affect me in the future.”

Tony had a more philosophical and altruistic view on education and understanding its power,

“just seeing thru history what things have happened with those that were very educated and you think how enlightening that you see that its true that the more education you get you can change yourself, your family, your community, which can help make a change for the better.”

### Adaptive Resilience

The main components of adaptive resilience from the interviews consisted of being adaptable, being prudent, being open to change, and avoiding life's pitfalls.

Antonio expressed his adaptability with respect to his work history and life in general,

“Yea, I mean, it's good, I guess its good cause, I'm the kind of guy...to like... No matter what gets thrown at me, or no matter whatever I get thrown into. I'm gonna choose to do well in it whether it's, I guess the best term for it is... adaptability. I'm a very adaptable individual. Even in my most recent job, whether it's, you know, one hour I'm serving 20 people in one table, or then next I'm upstairs hosting a reception for a wedding and the next hour, I'm cleaning the walls, to sweeping and mopping, emptying out trays just different things. You know, whatever anyone throws at me, I'm going to do it well. Whether it's my boss or life, they're going to see that in me no matter what, cause that's how I was raised to be and that's who I want to be and that's successful.”

Jesus shared how adaptive resilience helped him keep going and to lead him to almost completing his bachelor's degree,

“All these challenges. All these big rocks on the road in the way. You just have to push everything aside. Now you're on top of the mountain like, 'I'm done. I'm finished...So it's just the feeling of satisfaction that you've met your goals”

Johnny explained how he had to adapt and become prudent about intervening when his parents engaged in numerous fights,

“Like there was points that were -- they would be fighting and arguing downstairs and I would have friends over and I just tuned them out. Like they would look at me as if I should go down there or I should, you know, like everything was okay, that I would -- I would just look at them and be like, look, this happens like every day, like it's no -- it's not a thing for me, like let's just continue doing what we're doing and that's it. And so I guess in that sense, for a good while there, I just kind of gave up on them in that sense. I felt like no matter what I said, no matter what I did, they were just going to continue fighting and I didn't want to be part of it. And as long as it didn't have anything to do with me, and as long as I wasn't involved I didn't really care.”

Jesus alluded to his openness to something different, a real change for his life that involved constantly reflecting on his goals,

“I've always been since I started maturing, I've always been ambitious, I wanted to be different, I wanted to be better. Ambition in a good way, trying to better myself. So, I've seen the hardships that my family has gone through, like I think about or rethink about my goals.”

JD discussed how getting away from home helped him avoid some of the pitfalls that impacted some of his high school friends,

“I wanted to get away from that and part of that included getting away from home. I wanted to get away from home for a while because I was tired of the vicious cycle of drop-out of high school, get pregnant, do drugs and just kind of like....and that's not to say that that's..... And I'm not just blowing smoke out of my ass, you know....There are statistics that have been recorded that Gastonia has the highest teen pregnancy and drug overdose rate in the state or at least it is high ranked in the top 5. And I wanted to get away from that environment I didn't want to be around the negativity, so I left.”

### Economic Resilience

All of the participants found ways to become economically resilient despite their low social economic situations and environments. The FGCLM in this study sought out alternative strategies to finance college related costs, understood the reality of having financial limitations, and decided to begin breaking down the cycle of poverty that had entangled them all of their lives. Antonio discovered a way to pay for his SAT by doing some extra legwork,

“I took the SAT last minute because I didn't know about it, didn't know I had to pay for it, I couldn't afford it, my parents couldn't afford it either, so I finally after a couple months, I found out I could take it for free, because I was on free/reduced lunch.”

JD discussed how he was awarded a Pell grant through the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) but had a financial back up plan in case he could not pay for his college,

“And like I said, I wanted to go to school, but thankfully I got the "FAFSA award" and that's how I'm getting through my education, which granted, I'm still going to have a ton of loans to pay off, but it's worth it. But it's like I said, I told my parents if I cannot afford it and as much as it would kill my dreams, I'm just going to go to the military and call it a day, you know. And eventually with....and eventually they will pay for my school, but you know, thankfully I got a way out, you know. I got that FAFSA award....I always see that as my ticket out.”

Pedro received a \$3,000 scholarship to help him and he describes how the money provided a foundation for him to get started,

“I didn't pay anything when I was a freshman . That kind of covered my way through. I didn't take any loans out of my freshman year or anything and now I did, I do take out a lot of loans. I don't know, that kind of - knowing that I had that kind of gave me a foundation and just kind of let me know, yeah, you're going to have - like even if you don't have it all figured out the first year, you're always going to have that little bit of a safety net. \$3,000 is not that much money but it's something and you'll have that even if you're clueless because I knew I was clueless. That would help me at some point. So, I guess that's how I thought about that.”

All participants were raised by low wage earners which meant that they had to comprehend financial limits at an early age. Junior discussed how he understood throughout his childhood the financial limitations that came with being raised by one wage earner,

“And when we were little, we were always like....um...I don't know....I would always want something....but I would know that we wouldn't have enough money for that or... things like that. And sometimes, like... I see it with me and my brother, my little brother....he asks me for stuff...and I'm like...oh...I want to get you this....So, now I know how my mom would feel whenever we would ask her for stuff. And it is hard telling a little kid, no we can't have this.”

All participants alluded to breaking the cycle of poverty and Tony explained how despite being a first generation college student he was still going to take advantage of the opportunity,

“I think you know being first generation I saw that and I learned and I wanted to take that opportunity to try to break that cycle of because of, you know my, I’m the youngest in my family... so I kind of wanted to break that cycle.”

Johnny talked about his desire for his family to break the cycle of poverty,

“And I looked at that and I was like, if I get a college education and I make enough money, I could -- I could help them out. I can make it so, no, maybe they don't have exactly everything that they wanted but it's -- they don't have to feel like they've -- they have to work hard their entire lives, like there's no break for them.”

Part of being economically resilient seems to involve studying the job market and its educational requirements which Pedro did even at a young age,

“Pretty much I guess when you kind of just step back and look at things like there's no way you can actually make money. I guess I thought about that very early on, like a financial future starts with an education.”

### Ejemplo

Ejemplo in Spanish literally means “example.” For the purposes of this paper ejemplo signified a variety of interconnected pieces such as setting an example, being responsible, being the oldest son, maintaining internal pressure of being the first to attend college, receiving external pressure of being the first to attend college, feeling pride of becoming the first to attend college, changing the family’s narrative, and changing the cultural narrative. Jesus talked about how being a senior in college and president of an organization on campus has helped him set an example for other Latino kids and their families,

“I told the parents that the fact that they’re there celebrating their kid, taking time out of their life, their busy life...is just showing them love. We appreciate that you actually do care about their education. This helps them see that you care about them

succeeding. I told the students, ‘Appreciate this moment because you have the parents that love you unconditionally. Not every kid has a parent that will push and push and push you to get a higher education. But these parents that are there, they’re actually -- they’re helping you. So I think that was -- that’s a big thing from there. I remember giving a tour about three weeks ago to some church members from my friend’s church... Mostly a whole bunch of high school students and their parents. I told them the same thing. Just like that love that parents give you is like love that you will never ever get from someone else.’”

Many of the participants felt responsible for not only their success but the success of others as Pedro described his experience,

“I feel that I have a sense of responsibility for my brothers, because I have another brother, he wants to be an engineer, and then one of them I guess you would say he's not as good as the rest of us in school... and I try to show him that there's - like it's possible, you can do it. You just got to work for it, that's the thing, and a lot of people just don't want to work for it.” This sense of responsibility may be more pronounced for those participants that are the oldest sons in the family.

For example Antonio talked about his experience of being the oldest son,

“Hey, he's the 1st born son, hopefully he doesn't mess up.....becomes successful. That's what I try to do. Try to become a doctor, now I don't want to do that anymore, I feel like I was letting them down, but it's my life. I want to get into student affairs, I want to do this on my own. I want to be able to become a doctor of education or something along the lines, but, it's a lot of pressure. Especially when you have two... I have a younger brother, and a bunch of younger siblings, nieces and nephews that are looking up to you.”

Junior detailed his experience being the oldest son and becoming the man of the house,

“From being the oldest..... I actually have always been a little bit more mature than regular teenagers. I guess, thru life, just being a.... my mom, being a single mom, having to help her out, having...help her out with chores and basically,(laughs)...Her telling me, "You're the man of the house" and I feel that's where the responsibility comes out, comes from...”

That internal pressure of being the first is a consequence of being an ejemplo as JD describes,

“The other thing, and I feel like this always naturally gets put on every 1st generation regardless of race or anything.... I think there is always that pressure to succeed, because everyone is counting on you succeeding, you know. And there's a lot of pressure on our backs, and obviously we welcome it because, I mean, it is this sense of family that you

know we all take care of ourselves, like we are all in this together, that's just the way I was raised.”

External pressure of being the first spills over to being someone whom others can *always* count on as Johnny explained,

“I feel like -- I feel like for me, being someone that people can count on is very important. On a relationship basis, I feel like, you know, if someone doesn't have to doubt me and is okay with being able to trust me, I think that's important on a friendship level. You know, I feel like it's important for my friends to know that, you know, if there's anything going on in their life, if there's anything that they need a favor for, if there's anything that's within my power to do, that I'll do for them. And, you know, same goes with my parents or family, like I enjoy and pride myself on the fact that I could be counted on. And no, maybe I may not be able to fix everyone's problems and I realize that I can't; I'm still there for them in some way, shape, or form; like, I'm there to support them. Like, having that push and support, that cushion behind you knowing that if you were to fall, there was someone there to help you pick you up. I don't feel like I can just look at someone who's either upset or in need of something or in need of any kind of help that I can just turn my back. I feel like I have to be there for them because if that was me, I would want someone to come, find out what's wrong with me.”

A great feeling of pride and satisfaction is the end result for all of the participants in this study because as JD described pride and honor are really important,

“And I take pride in that because again its one of those things that regardless of color, honor is, honor is essential...you know. If you don't have honor, you don't have anything. If you don't have your word as a man, then you're not a man....you know what I mean. If you can't do something and be able hold your head up high after you've done it, then you didn't do something right. You know, if you ever do something and you have to keep your head down and you are ashamed of yourself, you can't even look at yourself, then you've failed as a man. I hate to say it but machismo is alive and well. And that's one thing that is really strong for all of us, a Latin man's sense of pride and honor, you know....At least it is for me anyway.”

Being an *ejemplo* includes changing the family's narrative and the Latino culture's narrative as Tony believed,

“You see thru your own or how far your family has done and lot more if you further your education, or just seeing thru history what things have happened with those that were very educated and you think how enlightening that you see that its true that the more education you get you can change yourself, your family, your community, which can help make a change for the better.”

Antonio had a similar view of how he can be an example not only for his family but for the world,

“It means the whole world is now....has their eyes on me, not just my family, the whole world. I'll either be that good statistic or that bad statistic... I want to be able to be part of that good statistic. And then eventually go out and help and make sure that that good statistic becomes better. That's ultimately what I want to do. I want to make sure that kids go to college....cause, and I don't want them to feel the same way I was, where when I was in high school, not knowing, "Hey, what should I apply, What/should I do this? Let's avoid all that.”

### Family Influences

*La familia* is an essential cultural protective factor of first generation college Latino males. This sample of FGCLM all voiced their maternal support as one of the most crucial ingredients to their success. The participants also discussed paternal influence, sibling influence, their maternal side of the family, and the concept of familismo achievement motivation. Each participant repeated the importance of their mother's support on their journey towards higher education for example Antonio stated,

“That would definitely be my mother, you know since kindergarten through all the way to high school she was the one who sat down me after getting off a 10-12 hour shift at work and she would make dinner and we would eat and the 1st thing she did was pop-out the homework books. She would make me do my homework over and over again until I did it right, with great penmanship. And she would not quit even though she had a rough day, she was the one who wanted me to succeed and if it wasn't for her pushing me to become better, I probably wouldn't ever seen college as an option.”

Junior discussed a similar feeling towards his mother,

“Well, first of all, my mom has always been the biggest influence in my life...but she mostly motivated me to school ...she sews and never had an education. And so, I always wanted to pursue a higher education to have a better life, provide a better life for my children and for myself.”

Johnny also expressed the importance of his mother's high expectations and how he would like to give back to her when he is able,

“And you know, when it comes to specifically my mother because she's such as annoying as she gets, you know, and as, you know, as hard as she is on me sometimes when it comes to, you know, the expectations she has on me, she's a truly wonderful person and she, you know, she deserves, you know, more than what she's had to go through in life and, you know, more than what she has now. And so that -- those kinds of images, you know, when it relates -- when it relates to my mother, it really -- it really pushed me to be better and to want to have a better life later on down the road for not only to be able to give back to her and, you know, give her stuff -- give her the things that she may not have had, you know, just supporting me but to be able to give my children I mean what I didn't have and to be able to tell them, like, look, I'm not going to tell you what to do but whatever you do, get a college education and you will have my full support when it comes to that.”

JD explained how important it was for him to have his mother in a symbolic sense, “You know the mother-figure never leaves, she will just sit there through it all with you and she will suffer there alongside with you...which is another part of the reason why I chose to do something with myself. Because my mother can suffer alongside with me or she can rejoice, you know, alongside with me if I get an education and that's the other reason why I did that.”

All of the participants witnessed their mothers' sacrifices and wanted to repay their mothers as Jesus stated,

“I just think it's the way my mother raised me. She always put into my head that you need to work hard for what you want. Nothing comes easy in this world. So she just pushed me and I saw how hard she worked and knowing that, once I get a good paying job it's like then I will be able to pay her back and be like, ‘Stop working. Take a break. I'll be the provider.’”

Tony explained how he always had his mother's support in his educational goals,

“She's always supported me no matter what. She's always given me the green light. If you believe you can do it, you can do it. I support you as long as I support you morally, I'll support you financially as long as I can and always the attitude of I believe in you, If nobody else does, I believe in you if you set your mind to do. So she's ever since I told her I want to go to college she's supported me 100%.”

Pedro talked about how he learned a lot of his values from his mother's direct approach,

“My mom was the one that has always given me the most advice, because my dad is like in the financial side of the family but my mom is the moral support. She's the one who has taught me all the values, all the - like the way I lived my life is because of my mom. My mom, she's really outspoken I guess. So, I don't know, it's just random things that I've heard her say that always stick in my - she used to always tell me, sometimes I think they're dumb but they're funny. It's something that sticks with it. I don't know why I was

thinking of it right now, she was like, "Never hit a woman, never ever." She would say things like that or, "Don't ever drink because your uncles, they're all a bunch of drunks. So, don't ever drink or you're going to end up like them." I don't know, just the way that she teaches... It's direct, she's straight up. I don't know. And the way she does it just sticks with you and I know it is for my good and that's why she says all these things and that's why she does what she does."

Paternal influence was a more complicated theme as certain participants were able to discuss how their father was supportive, others had problematic relationships with their fathers and others had no relationship with their fathers. Johnny's father taught him that if he did not want to struggle he would need to pursue an education,

"that was something that my dad always told me and said and, you know, would give me examples of like, look, if you don't want to do this, don't want to do what I'm doing, like, you have to get an education. He would support any decision I made but he wanted me to, you know, to be better than what he was, and I really took that to heart because, you know, like I said, I want to raise a family of my own and I wouldn't want them to go through the struggles that I did, you know. You know, even though I might not -- I might not have the worst upbringing, it's like it could always be better, you know, than what you leave -- you leave behind."

Pedro discussed how viewing his dad's backbreaking work schedule really pushed him to pursue higher education,

"He works two jobs, he does all this stuff and it makes me - sometimes when I think about it, it makes me feel bad because I'm like - he's working like what? He sleeps like five hours a day. He does all this. He works for two labor jobs. He works at a warehouse for Food Lion and at - like a factory for windows. So, he does those two things and they are tough jobs. He's just carrying windows all day. He does all this stuff. It makes me feel bad. That's part of the reason why I also push harder."

Tony had a more complex relationship with his father who believed that he should work and forget about school so he could provide more to the family,

"It's kind of hard, a little harsh, but I see it now as to him it is tradition. He is a tough guy, a typical macho Mexican. He doesn't show any emotions. He's like, "Stick to what you know", what is comfortable...of course, He is always working hard. We do this...don't try to be different. Don't step outside the boundaries, just do what we do. You know at first it hurt, and then you know you think about it when your own father doesn't believe in you. But now, I see that's how his parents raised him. His parents

were very harsh, poor people. His mom, my grandma, that's just his way of being. It wasn't that he didn't believe in me but his thoughts."

Although Tony received these messages from his father he decided not to comply,

"It made me really angry, I'm going to prove him wrong. Like that is one of the biggest things about why I'm here is to like you know prove him wrong, I can do it...I guess it made me mad and that's how I dealt with it."

Jesus' father was not even in the picture as he described, "So my dad was never in the picture. I have two step sisters and two step brothers. Those step sisters and brothers are from my dad's side. He was never in the picture. He always gave them everything they wanted and we lived a couple of blocks away and never paid attention to us."

Junior explained that he was fortunate not to have his father in his life because he probably would not have pursued a college education,

"Just...I'm usually, I'm more open-minded now, but he would have pushed the close-minded on us...who knows.... I can't predict what would have happened...but...I feel like he would have wanted us to not go to school. He didn't believe in going to school. He felt like it was a waste of time. I've never been actually the best at school, so I've never been driven....to get the straight "A's"....because....I've always been in the middle, and so....I guess I would have.... been like...Oh well, I guess he's right....I'm not the smartest person in the world. Might as well go and work."

Sibling influence was a mixed bag as some siblings were supportive and others were stubborn, and some less motivated academically. Jesus pointed out his sister's influence on him,

"My sister was a genius in the house. She would take honors courses and she would get, I guess, an end year certificates. She had basically beat the crap out of everyone and she would get all the certificates. So my sister helped me push myself to become something better."

In contrast to Jesus, Antonio described how his younger brother refused to listen to his advice and follow in his footsteps but that he would still be a success,

"It's like, I know, I know he will be able to be fine. Right now, he's at a time where he is struggling right now. And, I'm trying to help him out. But he's very "pushed-off-ish" he's like, don't get in my face...kind of, kind of...thing....And he has a very short temper. I can do whatever I want to make sure he is fine in life. But regardless, he's going to be fine. You can already tell. I'm trying to help him out now to kind of push how much

sooner he'll be fine...But he doesn't want that... right now. And that's fine, but, you know, I see it in him. He has that work ethic/potential. Maybe not where it needs to be, but he definitely has a work ethic. Where he's hustling other kids for shoes or money, not stealing, not cheating. But he's really good at making money. We'll say that.”

Pedro expressed his frustration regarding his younger brother’s attitude and lack of academic success,

“He's a little bit of a slacker and he doesn't try as hard, he's always failing classes and stuff. He's like the odd ball because my other youngest brother, he's an AP student also. So like we're all pretty smart and then him, he's the one that doesn't just do his stuff. He just doesn't - I guess he kind of has that mentality that's like, "What's the point?"

The maternal side of the family was more supportive of the participants in this study as Junior discussed his maternal uncle’s influence,

“Umm...There is actually a quote that my uncle has gave me a few times... It's "Express yourself, because those that matter, don't mind and those that mind, don't matter." And whenever I hear that quote, I just get this feeling that, "Do whatever you want to do", like he says, those that really care about you, they're not going to care what you do. Those that don't care about you, they really don't matter, they're just going to criticize, He’s probably given me that quote few, twice. He gave me that quote twice...and I guess I should have mentioned it before. He...ummm..every once in a while, he motivates, since he's the youngest of the uncles, so he relates more to us and he motivates us to do better. He's sometimes the police of all the little cousins. And yea, that quote has always stuck with me, to not worry about everybody else, to do what I want to do, and don't expect cause nobody else's going to do it for me.”

Jesus remembered his maternal aunt who was like a second mother to him,

“But every time I would get out of school and I’d walk back home, she was always there. Like, you want something to eat. I’ll give you something. So she was the second mother. I just had a huge amount of love for her and she had a huge amount of love for me. The way she raised her daughters is just with never ending love. Her daughters were her life for her.”

JD explained the respect he held for his maternal grandmother, “she was so instrumental because she had such an input on our lives, like she was there, she had....it wasn't like an every other month, we go see grandma, It was like a daily visitation, because you are living with her...she is still old enough to work...She is a very strong woman, she still takes care of herself and all of that.... but she's always had a daily input....You know, if something was going on, If I got into trouble for something or if my cousin got in trouble for something. We might be the oldest and we have a lot of pressure on our backs and we screw up a lot...I'm not going to lie....me and my cousin have done a lot of stupid things...you know. And anytime one of us has royally screwed

up, we get a phone call from grandmother...and she doesn't yell or scream, she actually talks to you, and tells you, you know....What are you doing?...Think about this, think about that...things that, in other situations you wouldn't have considered and she's always been there to give me a sense of the big picture. Aside from that she's always been a caregiver ....if we've struggled to find a job, Grandmother got us a job. Whenever one of us has been in the crapper financially that we can't take care of ourselves....Grandmother, out of nowhere just pulls out the money that you need, she's like here you go, just pay me back eventually. You know she has always been there.....I guess the best way I can describe my grandmother is like as the safety net...you know, she's always been there when all else fails”

JD also recalled his great grandmother and the importance she had on his life even though she passed when he was 10,

“I was like 10. That was rough, that was really rough. And it was a rough time and I didn't know what to do. Because she was another monumental figure, she was my grandmother’s mother and if my grandmother had the respect of the community, my great-grandmother had the respect and love and admiration. She was greatly admired. And I admire her, I mean, I loved her to death. She was always my caretaker. And since she was too old to work, you know whenever everybody else was out working or at school, she took care of us. And that's another memorable part of my life, is coming home every day and seeing great grandmother just chilling there and just sewing, just sewing. I'm not really sure what she was sewing, but she always just sewing something, she always had a different, this time it's blue, this time its red, this time it's green. She stayed busy. And you know she was your old school, hard-core, Latino grandmother, she was sweet but she could be like a thug if she needed to, man...like...I've been told stories that back in New York, man for her old age, she was still downing shots of *Aguardiente* like there was no tomorrow man, even in her old age. And she wasn't afraid to like, you know, to snap on me or my cousin, you know and if she had to, she would whip the belt out, if she needed to, but she was so loving, as long as you weren't doing anything stupid, you know. As long as you were doing the right thing, she was such a loving person.”

Jesus remembered his maternal aunt who was like a second mother to him,

“But every time I would get out of school and I’d walk back home, she was always there. Like, you want something to eat. I’ll give you something. So she was the second mother. I just had a huge amount of love for her and she had a huge amount of love for me. The way she raised her daughters is just with never ending love. Her daughters were her life for her.”

Familismo achievement motivation (FAM) drove all of the participants to achieve in order to provide a better future for themselves and their families. Antonio expressed his FAM with the following,

“Yea, I want to have a happy family. I want to make sure that I'm able to work full-time with a good salary, but at the same time, be there for my son or daughter. That's why I'm in college now, I want to do well. Cause if I can't graduate, that probably means I can't get a good job...no good job, fall back in the same place my father was 18 years ago. And I don't want to continue that cycle, I want to break it. To make sure that my kids aren't using video games to be happy when they are older, but to be there for their father and learn what it's like to grow up with a father. And that's why.”

Junior described how FAM kept him motivated,

“I guess the whole responsibility part and taking care of the family. Being there for my family...cause they've always been there for me and always wanted the best for me and I've always been there for them and they always motivate me to do better and I always motivate them to keep moving on and live a good lifestyle.”

JD explained how FAM is for the good of all and how he would love to succeed in order to help his family but especially his grandmother,

“You know, we are in this together, so whenever you make it, when one of us makes it, everybody makes it kind of thing. And that's another really big factor. One of my aspirations with my degree is to eventually be making enough of an income to be able to tell my grandmother, here's a ranch in Colombia, go leave this country and go retire and live out the rest of your years peacefully.”

Johnny discussed how important FAM was for him in order to continue the family name to a higher level,

“So that was...that was definitely the big thing for me to...and like on top of that, you know, my parents didn't go to college so I felt like it was only natural for me to, you know, just take that step. You know, I mean they sacrificed so much already and, you know, I'm their -- being an only child; that was another...that was like added pressure for me to be like no one else is here to carry on our family name to higher, higher feats than me. There's no one else that they can really count on and so I felt like, you know, it was up to me to strive forward for them.”

#### Others' Influence

The first generation college Latino males in this study were able to locate other

people in their academic and social environments that provided them much needed support including teachers, peers, guidance counselors, mentors, godparents, and a godbrother. Junior discussed how his high school history teacher made an impression on him,

“My freshman History teacher...she was really....she saw something in me that she knew I was going to go places. She always kept motivating me to try harder. "I know you are going somewhere, you're going to do great things". And so I guess hearing that from a teacher, I guess, motivated me to do good things and open up my mind a little bit more.”

Tony expressed how his high school math teacher went out of her way to be supportive, “

A math teacher, she helped in any way. If it was personal she tried to help. Of course, if it was educational, but she tried to help anybody out...I guess, she was more like she made a maternity side, more maternal side that she showed, as opposed to a lot of teachers they that you know they grade you and provide you constructive criticism, but I think some teachers don't take the time to actually know what the problem is or an issue is. Or try to make or understand better the material that they are giving you...At home, is there something I can help you with? Do you want to talk about it? You know, and she did that a lot, she tried to help.”

Peer influence was another significant resource for the study participants. For example Johnny described how his friends helped him cope with relationship issues and the realities of his parents' constant discord,

“And so there are times where I was really unsure of what I wanted to do in the sense of like there was a personal decision within a relationship that I didn't know how to handle or I was stressed about some other person feeling like I couldn't...I didn't know what to do about it or just issues with my parents where, you know, my strength of, just being to handle it just failed, that I would just kind of say, okay, I don't even know what to do right now. My friends would just know what to say and just know that, like hey, man, we have family drama, too. You're not the only one. Like, we're there for you. If you ever just need to get out of the house or, you know, just forget about whatever is going on over there, just hit me up...And, you know, I've taken them up...taken them up from that offer many times. And I feel like...for being friends as long as we have, you know, not only do I help them with similar situations like that but the friendship exceeds just me being there for them and just like if you want to hang out, I'm here to hang out and I'm cool.”

Antonio explained how his diverse friends helped him understand the higher education application process,

“They were Caucasian, maybe some South Eastern Asian, Middle-Eastern individuals as well. And I talked to them about it and I was like, Oh, then I should probably then take (SAT) that next year then, cause that's apparently that's vital to get into college. I just never knew how vital it really was. And then senior year came around and everyone was applying for colleges, and I was like, maybe I should do that too now. And I did.”

Antonio sought guidance from his high school counselor and stated how that helped despite his fears of the process,

“I didn't know where to start, and that's where I seeked the help of the guidance counselors, where I would go roughly twice a week for about 2-3 months just to check up on what I have to do next, How can I go to college, cause I was scared.”

Upon receiving a scholarship Pedro was assigned a mentor who assisted him and advised him not to give up on his dream of attending medical school,

“I just met him and he kind of asked me what my goals were and what I wanted to do. At first I was clueless, I didn't know anything and then he showed me that the things that I wanted were realistic. I guess I thought they were out of my reach at one point and he made it seem like they weren't. Yeah, I want to go to medical school. Because a lot of people told me, like when I would tell them that, they'd be like, "You know that's a lot of work. That's your whole life in school. And he didn't make it seem that way. He made it seem like something manageable, yeah, if you want it then go get it. Go do it. He made it seem that way.”

Jesus explained the importance of his godparents in his life especially in the violent area where he grew up,

“I used to live a block away from my school, elementary school and a block away from my godmother's house. Of course your godmother is really like your second mother. I remember her kids, my cousins, we were pretty much like brothers and sisters. I would actually...I remember calling my godfather my actual dad because I wanted him to be my dad, I never had a dad.”

He adds that his godbrother was like a big brother despite his gang involvement,

“It was just like he was I guess my brother to me. Just like the big brother I never had. I remember he loved his mother to death. The big problem of course was that gang activities for him.” Jesus recalled when his godbrother got shot and how ironic the situation was, “It's kind of ironic because the love of his mother killed him. He was on

the way to go get a cake for her and he got killed. Unlike all these stereotypes, I don't want to be part of that stereotype. I want to get rid of that stereotype.”

### Summary of Common Themes

In all there were eight themes that applied to all of the participants. Psychological resilience enabled many of the participants to avoid failure by not accepting failure as an option and by being optimistic despite violence, poverty, and having limited resources to success. All of the participants voiced their belief of the importance of not conforming to a stereotype that has been perpetuated by culture and society. Having inner confidence, choosing success, and not settling all combined to strengthen the psychological resilience of the FGCLM in this study. Each participant recognized the importance of school and that school was a means to a more prosperous future. They all developed their own unique academic compass which aided in their adjustment to their specific academic environments. All the participants were conscious of their intelligence and were not afraid to push their intellectual horizons as they realized that with an education one has power.

Adaptive resilience served all of the participants well as they each were able to adapt quickly to any setback or roadblock in their academic path. Being prudent helped the participants understand what they could and could not control and simultaneously being open to change so that they could reflect on their current goals and change them if needed. The participants were also able to identify environments or situations that were not healthy and decided to avoid them in order not to fall prey to various social and economic pitfalls. Economic resilience enabled the FGCLM to discover alternative strategies to finance college related costs. An important and difficult lesson was learned when the participants understood the reality of having financial limitations due to their

families' low socioeconomic statuses. Nevertheless, they all chose to challenge their economic background by pursuing college wanted to begin breaking down the cycle of poverty that had enmeshed their families for years.

All of these men were *ejemplos* in their families. All set the example for the future of their family by taking responsibility for their own future. Many of the participants were the oldest son which symbolized a greater feeling of responsibility to their families. All of the participants maintained an internal pressure of being the first to attend college because they felt it was an all or nothing proposition. They all received external pressure of being the first to attend college and becoming the model for their friends, siblings, future siblings, cousins, nephews, and nieces. Success did raise all of the participants' sense of pride of becoming the first to attend college which in turn would gradually transform the family's narrative and cultural narrative.

La *familia* was instrumental in supporting all of the FGCLM's academic efforts. Maternal support emboldened all of the participants to push the envelope academically. Paternal influence was a multilayered factor due to some participants' paternal support and others with no paternal presence in their lives. Sibling influence was motivating for some and disappointing for others. The maternal relatives were accepting and supportive as they provided distinctive resources and advice to the FGCLM in this study. The concept of familismo achievement motivation was another underlying theme that facilitated relentless striving towards a better future for their families and future families. Others' influence like teachers who went the extra mile, peers whom the participants could confide in, guidance counselors that revealed the college roadmap, mentors who

did not doubt, godparents, and a godbrother who represented a truer family were other integral pieces of this sample of first generation college Latino males' academic success.

#### Individual Themes

To answer the second research question the following are excerpts that paint a more complete picture of the unique experiences of each participant. Antonio was 21 years old and self identified as Latino. He was born in the United States but acknowledges his Peruvian ethnic and cultural roots. He was a college senior majoring in exercise science. His career ambition was to work with college students in a higher education leadership capacity. Antonio described some other experiences which were unique to his life journey including Catholic school influence and taking advantage of leadership opportunities. His first academic undertaking was in a stringent setting studying in a Catholic school,

“So in kindergarten we had to do all these homework assignments. We had to write the ABC's in alphabetical order 25 times each, so that I went to Catholic school which is why it was so strict. They made us do that all and even though I lacked the work ethic at that time, cause all I wanted to do was watch the TV shows, or play with my video games.” He recalled how he disappointed his mother was when he got a 30 on his exam in first grade, “I was in 1st grade and I got a 30 on my exam...It was seeing my mother cry about it, saying that "I can't believe this, you are better than this. We didn't raise you to be like that." And that was the last horrible test grade I've ever had since.”

Once he finished Catholic school he had become an exemplary student,

“You know I graduated at my Catholic school with like all these awards, with highest grade in math, highest grade in this, highest grade in that... I took home the whole...everything...the whole thing...that's when I ultimately realized that I did well and I am successful.”

Antonio took advantage of several extracurricular activities which exemplified his leadership skills,

“I had a 4.2 GPA, president of a medical organization and the National Spanish Honor Society and as many well as the Treasurer for the National Technical Honor Society and many other club membership organizations.”

Antonio’s leadership in high school was recognized by others and this led him to leadership in organizations at the university level,

“I became president of way too many clubs. That means that people chose me and people believed in me that I could do and will lead an organization to new heights. And same with college, you know, I won an "Organization of the Year" award. I know that I've sacrificed a lot of my time in order to make sure that, you know, we led these guys, that we tried so hard, but you know, deep in my mind it is a collaborative effort.”

Antonio’s top three protective factors were being an *ejemplo* which appeared 76 times in his transcript, maintaining psychological resilience (49), and maternal support (46). As the oldest son, Antonio took personal responsibility for setting the example for his family by challenging himself and not wanting to fail. His mother’s support was paramount and he longs to pay her back for all of her sacrifice.

Junior was 19 years old and self identified as Hispanic. He was born in the United States but recognized his Mexican ethnic and cultural roots. He was a college junior majoring in political science. His career goal currently was to work for the Department of Homeland Security with Border Patrol because,

“Border Patrol...A lot of people, get, they're like...How is that, you want to be border patrol, you are Hispanic, you are going to be betraying.....No, I am loyal to this country and I mean, I'm for immigration reform, but its necessary to protect the borders...I would be one of those officers that, I mean, wouldn't deport, like if I was put in the situation, but I wouldn't be one of those that attack Hispanics or treat them bad when they are already getting deported. It's just, I mean...lately, I've been hearing all these things, why do they hate the Mexicans, why are they deporting us...Well, I mean, getting into politics, I've learned that Border Patrol is important and it's important because of population growth, we can't fit that many people in here if we just let everybody come. Then everybody would be poor, there would be no jobs.”

Junior’s distinctive individual themes included his instinctive environmental resilience as well as the importance of his high school experience. Junior’s experiences with domestic

violence as a child reflected an instinctive manner of intervening during his father's violent attacks against his mother,

“Umm...mostly because it was my mom, I've always had a great love for my mom and just that he was threatening to kill her while she was carrying my little brother and I guess anyone would react that way and not...Well, uh..I can't speak for everyone. But I feel like the majority would....do something about it or.....cause no one wants to see their parent dead and you just stay quiet, so.”

He added that the instinct took over because of an inner sense of responsibility towards his family,

“I guess the whole responsibility part and taking care of the family. Being there for my family.”

Junior's elementary and middle school academic experiences were forgettable however, it was his high school experience that drove him to aspire for more education as he took certain classes at a local community college,

“Well, elementary and middle school, they really don't...At that time, I don't know about now, they really didn't push for higher education...They are just pass the grades, get a job or get to high school, basically. I notice now that my brother is in middle school, and he is in a program called AVID, which promotes higher education and going to college, but at my time there really wasn't really that many programs. So, elementary and middle school really wasn't any big influence. It was high school where that, where we would talk about organizing...looking at careers, looking at majors. I think there was one time where we had a session where we looked at basically we had a list and we had a budget. We would look online and find out how much stuff costs and that was kind of a wake-up call. Oh, I can't afford all this with a McDonald's salary. Or a minimum wage. Being in that college setting, in the beginning was pretty intimidating, even for a community college, cause you were straight out of a middle school, and then you had to have expectations of.....You were expected to write, talk and act like an 18 year old in college.”

Junior's three primary themes were psychological resilience which appeared 56 times in his interview, followed by being an *ejemplo* (53), and maternal support (26). Junior was also the oldest son in his family and saw his parent's separation when he was 8 years old as an opportunity to take care of his family as the surrogate man of the house. He

believed in himself enough that he could be responsible and set the example for his family and especially his younger brother by pursuing higher education. His mother was always behind his educational efforts even telling Junior not to work because she was afraid that would distract him too much from his studies,

“She doesn't want me to be worried....she just wants me to focus on school...and be more, well-actually focused... and cause if ....I feel like she thinks that if I...she asks for help...or like some parents ask their child to work to pay the bills or...at the house, then she thinks that I'll be stressed out all the time working for the house and she's just always wanted me to focus on school and get good grades.”

JD was 19 years old and self-identified as Latino. He was born in the United States but breathes his Colombian ethnic and cultural roots. He was a college sophomore majoring in business. His career goal currently was undefined as he thoughtfully stated,

“I used to sit on my window sill and just kind of like try to figure out where it is exactly that I'm going from here. Cause, like I said, this is all the beginning of my life's journey...I've got a long way to go from here and I just don't know which direction I'm going to go and but then again, I guess nobody really does where their life is going to take them...you know what I mean...”

His two unique individual themes included spirituality and maintaining bicultural balance. In this excerpt JD discussed how important spirituality has been in helping him achieve balance in life,

“It was the concept of doing the right thing, just kind of like kept me in the right state of mind, you know what I mean. Doing the right thing by God, made me want to do the right thing in every aspect of my life. It cleared my mind. And I'm not going to lie, you know, I'm still, you know, drink, and I'm a college student. Let's be real here, I drink every weekend but I'm not to that point that I was back then, to where I was doing stupid stuff all the time, you know. Like I have my priorities in line. And yea....Again I try to do the right thing by my faith, I'm not a pure 100%, you know, like saint...I acknowledge that. But I try to do the right thing on a daily basis and I think that that is fair...because I've put my heart into the right things that I try to do...The few times that I do the right thing, I put my heart into it and I have a good. I'm not doing it to gain anything, I just do it because it's what needs to be done and I feel like that has influenced my career goals and my motivation to strive in a lot of things. I feel like that has motivated all those factors. So, I would say the church has definitely been a big role in my life...you know... And like I said, it's a big role in the culture too...A lot of people still appeal to, you know,

you may only go to church once a year but that once a year that you go is because that's a great, that's an important sacred holiday. No one plays around, no one jokes around when it comes around to those sacred things. No one, no one makes a joke out of it...It is a very serious thing....you know.”

Recognizing the complexity of bicultural balance was and is still a crucial ingredient in JD’s academic success as he explained referring to a book he identified with

“It's a bunch of compilations of different stories that are really powerful and the opening quote is that quote about the “I do not belong in English, nor do I belong anywhere else.” And I feel like that's power and it's about identity and if I had to use one word to powerfully describe what it is to be a first generation Latino male, it would have to be "identity", cause you have to do a lot of identity searching when you are that, when you have that role, you know...You have to have a lot of identity searching cause it gets really confusing. It gets really confusing, at points you don't know who you are anymore...at points you feel like you don't know what's going on...”

JD’s three primary themes were academic resilience which turned up 35 times, followed by bicultural balance (25) and spirituality (23). His belief in God has been a reliable source of wisdom and spiritual comfort for him as he has journeyed through childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood. His academics excelled because he had an ability to continuously reflect on his identity. Here JD expressed how taking civics and economics in high school helped him appreciate learning and understand his identity,

“I started taking my civics and economics classes. I don't know, it was just something that clicked in me. I've never had anything just really click like that, that I've been able to say, "Wow, I get this and I enjoy getting it!" You know and civics, and that's really part of the reason why I went into business with civics and economics. A lot of people just hate that class, it just got me, it makes sense. I just have always liked to understand why things work the way they do and particularly in government, and in politics and business, that's always appealed to me. Specifically, why is it that things are the way they are....and I think the another reason that I was so appealed to Civics and economics was because of my social status, that the government puts on me, you know, I'm Latino, lower middle class. And, I've always wanted to know, I guess in a way, it kind of came as wanting to understand my identity.”

Jesus was a 21 year old who self-identified as Mexican-American. He was born in the United States but is proud of his Mexican heritage, particularly from a spiritual

sense. He was a college sophomore majoring in business. His career goal was to own a business or businesses because he has an enterprising spirit and an acute business insight. Jesus had two unique themes that served as protective factors for his resilient journey towards higher education. The first was spirituality which has cloaked Jesus all of his life and the second theme is a high school club that inspired Jesus to think more broadly about his future. Jesus remembered the first time he was taught a real life lesson from God,

“I remember one day we were going to -- I think it was a play of some sort that we're going to go watch at church. I don't want to go. I made this huge tantrum and we got to church in the parking lot. I was just mad at my mom and I closed the door, the car door, and my finger got stuck. I was screaming like hell. She didn't believe me. She thought I was having another tantrum. There is a car in front of us and like one of the lady's like, “Oh my God, oh my God. Your kid, your kid.” Of course my finger was stuck in the freaking door. I remember the way -- the whole trip going to the hospital and oh, the x-ray hurt like hell...I had to bend my finger. Oh, you can see the bone. I was like, ‘Ahh.’ But it's like, it was just a lesson from God. It's like, ‘Okay, I don't want to go to church so You punished me. I see how You are. So it's like -- so religion is just like a huge part of your culture. It's like -- although as a little kid it's like you don't want to believe. Once you're older it's just like you actually do believe, you know. Because you are raised with that, so now it's just part of you. So part of you wants to continue the tradition that your parents gave you as a little kid. Those traditions will never die. You want to teach those traditions to your kids as well.”

As a young adult Jesus felt God's presence as well as he described attending a Catholic convention and witnessing a kid playing football suddenly collapse and die,

“He has scored his touchdown. He was a running back. And I guess the middle, I don't know, and he just collapses like, ‘Oh crap.’ Maybe he just tripped or something. Next thing you know, all these -- the kids they're playing with -- they ran to him because he didn't just trip but he had fainted. So I ran up there and I noticed that he fainted. I told people to make room so he'd have some air. Next thing you know, they're calling the doctors to -- I guess emergency people in the location. I see this guy running like hell with -- I don't know what to call the heart thing...He's running like hell with that. I remember the ambulance coming and leaving with him. We all just felt like a heavy presence when we left that place and we're just walking in the other building and there's just this heavy -- heavy presence. Maybe thirty minutes later, the news comes on which says he passed away. So how can this kid that comes to a convention, Catholic convention, all of a sudden pass away. He was sixteen years old...we knew what

happened because we saw the group of kids wearing the same t-shirt he was. I guess they were from the same church. They were crying. The girls were crying. The guys are crying. I remember our church, I think it was eight of us, we all went outside and we sat on the grass. I remember my friend and she just started crying. At first I just let it go but then something weird happened. I don't know if it's -- I don't know how to say it but it's like you're seeing these trees and a breeze just hits me. You see these leaves going like in a circle. I guess like some scene in a movie it's like -- it was like -- and that breeze just any breezes just like I guess something had touched me, something had touched us. So I got up and I started to console her. I think that's one of the best things I ever felt as an actual adult. The breeze is not like any other breeze I've ever felt. The next day, I think it was the bishop that came. He gave mass and we all prayed together. It was just like this one huge family just come together. It's just a religious experience but it's crazy because a person died and because that person died, our religion bond grew even more."

Jesus joined a business club in high school which allowed him to reflect on how much was out there to see and do in the world,

"...The first time I came to Charlotte was because of the club. They took us to -- first they took us to the mall. That was just like, 'Whatever.' But the biggest thing was we went to the Bobcats arena and we talked to all these executives that was marketing of sports and everything. So, you know, and like they invited us to the Bobcats game. We went to the suite, we went -- we saw the whole arena. Of course being at the game and then like, 'Holy crap, that's Michael Jordan over there.' So you know, it was something special. We went to different trips. We went to conferences. So it was also an awesome experience for me. I just saw the world and it's like there's more out there. I just want to explore and enjoy everything."

Jesus' three primary themes were spirituality (34), being an ejemplo (32), and sustaining psychological resilience (29). Jesus had a strong faith in God and this faith carried him through poverty, gang violence, and not having a father to rely on. He learned not to take things for granted and was an excellent student in high school and in college and has been recognized for his leadership abilities at the college level by being voted president of a cultural organization at his university. His constant belief in God and in himself has led him to new heights as he prepared to graduate with a college degree in a few months.

Tony was 23 years old and self-identified as Hispanic. He was born in Mexico but migrated to the United States at age three. He was a college senior majoring in

mathematics. His career goal was to work in banking or the finance sector. Tony had two unique themes that involve spirituality the first one was spirituality and then as he got older he began questioning and reflecting more on his *complex* spirituality. Here Tony shared the importance of the necklace he always wears and the importance of Catholicism in Mexican culture,

“Being Mexican or Latino, most Latinos are Catholic especially Mexicans, so I’ve grown up Catholic you know all my life and baptized Catholic. Catholics use a lot of imagery and this actually my mom, she went to Mexico about maybe 8-10 years ago and she brought this back for me and I’ve had this on ever since. I carry it on as a sign of 1) My mom and 2) the faith that we believe that thru God all things are possible...I’m very religious in my own way I guess. I’ve been instilled. My parents have tried to a very Catholic family, church every Sunday and celebrate almost all of the Catholic religious holidays. The traditions...almost anything that you can think of my family does and it is tradition, so they try to pass it down.”

Tony later expressed his struggle with traditional Catholicism,

“As I’ve gotten older I’ve kinda drawn away from most of it. Just from studying religion what it’s done in the past with religion what it is doing now to some people. As far as the institution, I don’t believe in a lot of the things the Catholic institution believes in. I do believe in God, I do believe in all the saints that my family believes in and a lot of the values, but I believe I can have my own spiritual connection with God without believing everything that the Catholic Church believes in. That’s been my way the past 4-5 years. I’ve kind of not always seen eye to eye with the church, so but I do believe in God and a higher power. I do pray to Him. I have my own relationship with God as opposed to church... Yea, just you know when there’s hardships and I’m praying...That’s you know I’ve always, this the one thing that I’ve always taken from my family that you know when there some, when you are going through hardships to pray to that most things, if not everything to, that most, if not everything is possible through God and to thank Him for where we are at and to pray for the best, for the future.” Tony stated that his faith in God was one reason for being in college and not in gangs or drugs, “My life and just for you know being here in college, He’s helped me to get here. He’s my way, I’m not a criminal, I’m not I didn’t fall into drugs or gangs or like these other teens or other minorities fall into.”

Tony had three primary themes which included his psychological resilience (25), teacher support (18), and the love and support of his mother (18). In fact his mother’s support appeared to be critical in fostering his psychological resilience,

“And I believe my mom was a big help in, you know telling me when my dad was telling “No, you can’t”, my mom was telling me “Yea, I believe in you, You can do it” you know. “You can do it, whatever you want and set your mind to” So, that support system helped me a lot to be here.”

Tony described how his early educational experiences with his teachers boosted his psychological resilience,

“I think growing up since the early age, here in the United States, they teach you that you can do and be what you want to be...I did have teachers that pushed and they didn’t discriminate whether you were black/white or Asian. They pushed everybody and I grew up hearing that you can do it. Versus, a lot or at least what I heard from my culture you hear a lot of doubt or negativity. “Oh, you can’t do that? Why are you going to try?”

Pedro is 19 years old and self-identifies as Latino. He was born in the United States and is connected to his Mexican ancestry. He was a college junior majoring in biology. His career goal was to go to medical school after finishing his undergraduate work and becoming a doctor. Pedro identified two unique protective factors that helped him during his academic and life journey which were maintaining bicultural balance and being exposed to a lot of diversity. In this excerpt Pedro discussed how he just sees himself as a person and not necessarily a label,

“Like the Latino thing? It doesn't really - I don't really think about myself that way. I just think about myself as another student. I guess I realize it sometimes when people point it out that yeah you realize there's not...but I don't really think about it. I don't know, I don't think about myself. I don't label myself as a Latino student I just think about myself as another college student who's trying to do what he wants, trying to go for his goals. That's how I think about myself. I do realize it sometimes.”

Pedro explained how growing up in a diverse area close to Charlotte helped him appreciate diversity and that going off to a different university at first helped him realize that he wanted to be in a more urban area and campus,

“Diversity...because that's what I grew up around. You're accustomed to that and you just get pulled, kind of just thrown in to something that you're not used to. You can try to adjust and you can try to do what you need to do but I guess you never get completely climatized to it, that you never completely get used to not speaking Spanish

and being so far away from home too, like that kind of thing. For me, my family is a big part of me and I look like..it's 4 hours away from Lexington. It did kind of hit me a little bit. Just diversity in itself, I just like it just because there's a better - I feel like there's a better flow of ideas, culture and I just like that. If I do go into medicine I wouldn't want to go into a suburb, in a big like urban area like California or New York or something. In Charlotte, I would stay in Charlotte just because of all that diversity. I just like diversity.”

Pedro’s three primary protective factors were being an *ejemplo* (22), retaining psychological resilience (22), and being economically resilient (19). Pedro explained how being an *ejemplo* helped him realize that becoming a doctor might be in his future,

“Well, it was probably when I was around 11, 12 years old, because I would always help my parents whenever there was a doctor's appointment or anything, they would always make...they'll kind of force me to go with them and I would be the translator pretty much. I don't know, I just got used to doing that stuff and I started to like it, to be part of that process I guess. So, that's probably when I just had it.”

His belief in himself and his academic ability led him to win a \$3,000 scholarship and a mentor that helped push him towards his dreams of medical school.

Johnny was 20 years old and self-identified as Hispanic. He was born in the United States and is proud of his El Salvadorian heritage. He was a college sophomore who was undeclared in a major. His career goal was to find a major that fits his personality and skills. He stated that he had a strong affinity for technology and how things work. His two unique protective factors were his natural curiosity and his high school experience which helped drive him to higher education. Here Johnny discussed when he first recognized his natural curiosity and his love for technology,

“I think as a kid, just kind of browsing through channels and I would always end up in like National Geographic. I would always find myself watching documentaries about space or technology. They would just go off on random tangents and I would always...I would always just stay tuned just because I wanted to know how things worked. Especially anything like a planet or you know how things worked in space because for me all that was just like, you know, stuff that I learned on a textbook but it was not -- I never really knew for it to be in motion and for it -- to see it in a larger scope, it was -- it was -- I went sometimes like, wow, I want to know how this works... It just made me --

it made me feel like if someone didn't know, it just made me feel good to be like, well, this is why this is this way. And so that's why I've always been more science-inclined. But for me, like playing video games was not only a way to cope with stress but was also a way to...I learned a lot of my vocabulary from video games because it made me like I was reading constantly, I was listening to stories. That was my -- that was my medium for stories. That was like...that was the way that I entertained myself. And so to realize that all that came back from a box that, you know, was designed and programmed and had chips in it and, you know, I could, you know, I could immerse myself in this whole new world because of it, it made me feel...it made me want to know, okay, well, why...how can I view this on my television because of that. So that's why I went into wanting to know more about computers and chips and, you know, circuits and all that. And it just, it just kind of made sense.”

Johnny's high school experience was vital to his decision to pursue higher

education, “And so that's why, you know, senior year, all of that started to hit me like whatever decisions I started to make now would affect me in the future and... senior year was very pivotal for me in the sense that I was, you know, I was doing a lot of research, I was, you know, I was working hard to, you know, get the GPA that I wanted so the colleges would view me as someone that they wanted to go to their campus.”

Johnny's three chief protective factors were ejemplo (95), psychological resilience (58), and academic resilience (25). Johnny described how setting an example was important to him so he could do his part in breaking down stereotypes,

“I think for me it's, it's changing the status quo. It's feeling like I've broken a stereotype that we, you know, we as Latinos are like prone to look for manual labor or just jobs that no other person wants to have, that, you know, that we, you know, don't have the best English, that we don't really know, we're not as intelligent as, you know, other people. Like, I feel like that's a stereotype that I've seen on televisions. It's a stereotype that I've seen, you know, fellow students in high school live up to.”

Johnny talked about how his psychological resilience and focus on academics

strengthened because of positive Latino experiences in college despite the negative

environment he had grown up in, “I've learned that and appreciated it more coming here because the Latino presence on this campus is so...is so much stronger than it was for me in high school and so many...so many more examples of what if you choose to do it and you choose to apply yourself, that you can make it here. And I didn't really have that example in high school, and that's why I looked at embracing, you know, my Latino roots as not so much a negative thing but I didn't really view it as something that was positive either because all I saw -- all I saw around me were, you know, especially among, you know, Latino males were just, you know, guys who were...didn't really know what they

wanted, who were either prone to going to jail for gangbang or acting like it, or for just not going, just not being able to go to college because they were never...they were never in high school.”

This poetic narrative is a combination of all of the participants’ wisdom that they have learned on their journeys towards higher education:

Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to conquer the world. Education is the most powerful weapon. Whether you think of it or not, you can’t do anything without education. Where would you be without education?

The fact that I’m writing to you in English and I don’t belong anywhere else does not stop me from expressing myself and yourself, because those that matter, don’t mind and those that mind, don’t matter.

Success is choice. You can choose to be a good leader, you could choose to be a good son, you could choose to be a good student. No one’s going to do it for you, you gotta do it for yourself. You can get support all the way, of course you can....but...no one is going to do your homework. You gotta do right yourself. You know, everything, everything you do from here on out, from the day you are born, from the day you die, is you. You have support all the time, you can always have support, but no one should be doing things that you should be doing. Success is choice.

I made it a family thing, I mean I’m going to do it, you didn’t do it, I’ll do it. Don’t worry. I’ll finish it up because the only limits that you have are the ones that you set for yourself and you know everybody has problems but don’t ask why you are the way you are or why things are the way they are but to ask how you can change them.

Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world. If we don’t agree with a lot of things we want to change something we have to be educated about it. So, if we want to change our own lifestyles we have to educate ourselves to be better.

#### Summary

In this chapter, I presented my interpretations and findings of my exchanges with seven first generation college Latino males. At the beginning of the chapter I provided the challenges that the participants faced in their life journeys as well as the universal themes that served as protective factors for all of the participants and I summarized the universal themes. Next, I concentrated on detailing brief biographic accounts of each participant along with their unique individual themes as well as their top three protective factors based on data

analysis. I concluded the chapter with a poetic synthesis of each participant's unique experiences, life lessons, and beliefs as they journeyed towards higher education

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The intent of this study was to explore through qualitative inquiry, the lived experiences of seven first generation college Latino males in order to comprehend what factors have influenced their pursuit of higher education. This chapter presents a brief examination of the resilience framework and its implications for this study as well as the Psychosociocultural (PSC) model and its relevance to the findings in this study. This chapter includes an overview of the key findings and a discussion of the study's limitations. Next, implications for counselors and other stakeholders as well as suggestions for future research are considered.

### Resilience Theory

Latino academic pathways are clogged with various factors impacting Latino educational success (Camacho & Lord, 2011). Some of these factors are negative as much of the research points out (2007Auerbach; Castellanos, & Gloria, 2007; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009) and yet others are protective and growth inducing in nature (Alvarado, & López-Turley, 2012; Cerna et. al, 2009; Martinez, & Cervera, 2012). Despite many of the challenges that this sample of FGCLM faced (domestic violence, low cultural expectations, prejudice, self-doubt, major illness, low income household, etc.) the findings in this study strongly suggest that all of the participants in this sample were resilient in some manner.

Resilience theory deals with individuals' propensity for coping positively under harsh conditions and adversity (Morales, 2008; Seery, 2011). Individuals devoid of challenges and difficulty in the form of major life changes and commonplace events would not be able to generate resilience (Seery, 2011). Four specific areas of resilience were found in this population of first generation college Latino males including Psychological resilience (particularly not conforming to stereotype and self-confidence), academic resilience (mainly creating an academic compass, and understanding the importance of school), adaptive resilience (chiefly being adaptable and open to change), and economic resilience (primarily finding alternative strategies to finance education, and breaking the cycle of poverty). Altogether these strands of resilience combined to benefit all of the participants at certain points in their lives. What is important to understand from these findings is that all of the participants knew when and how to access each element of resilience at a given time and many times had to utilize multiple layers of resilience at once.

#### Psychosociocultural Framework

First generation college students encounter the apprehensions, dislocations, and challenges of many college students, however for Latino males this involves psychological, social, and cultural transitions (Terenzini, et., 1996). This study modified the model devised by Gloria and Rodriguez (2000) to highlight the psychological, social, and cultural contributing factors leading to the motivation and persistence of first generation college Latino male students within a university setting. Specific psychological contributing factors included the participants' psychological resilience, being intelligent, understanding the importance of education and its power, and being

naturally curious, being open to change, maintaining a strong sense of responsibility, and exhibiting a thirst for learning. Social factors included maternal support, paternal influence, sibling influence, peer influence, teacher support, mentors, and godparents. Cultural contributing factors involved familismo achievement motivation, bicultural balance, and changing the cultural narrative of Latinos. These findings add to the growing evidence suggesting that personal, social, and cultural resources advance the academic success of Latinos growing up in high risk environments (Morales, 2000; 2008; Perez et. al, 2009; Sanchez, & Singh, 2006; Spera, 2005; Santos, 2004)

#### Overview of Key Findings

Psychological resilience was a significant finding for the participants in this study. The FGCLM chose not to settle for less or the status quo, instead they chose success. All had inner confidence, and were optimistic about their future. Many also continuously reflected on their identities. These participants were able to bounce back mentally by engaging in mental practices similar to what Zolli (2012) described as a process molding the whole person via cultivating habits of mind that pervade what one chooses to believe, the mental practices that one nurtures, and how one mentally responds to any disruption in his or her life. Antonio realized at a young age that he would choose success which encouraged his initiative and risk taking by becoming a leader at home and in school. Even though Junior witnessed domestic violence as a child he always remained optimistic. JD emphasized how important it was for him to not conform or settle with respect to the Latino stereotype. Jesus discovered that everyone has potential and that potential is ignited with effort and hard work. He believed that it was more important to choose hard work over easy money and gang life. Tony chose to live life as

if it were his last day every day because he did not take anything for granted. Pedro made it a personal mission in his mind that he would become a medical doctor no matter the obstacles he would encounter. Johnny had the ability that enabled him to compromise, empathize, and reflect upon all sides of an issue before making a decision. This level of thinking enhanced his negotiating skills and his personal and professional relationships. The finding furthermore confirms the importance of psychological resilience in overcoming the deleterious effects of high risk exposure as suggested in the literature (Perez, et. al, 2009)

Having academic resilience indicated that all participants recognized the importance of school, although some much later than others. For example Antonio learned he did not want to fail in first grade, whereas Junior and Pedro did not perceive school's importance and its impact on higher education until high school. In Johnny's case he was in 12<sup>th</sup> grade when he suddenly realized the significance of moving on to higher education. All participants were able to voice the power of education and recognize how education impacted themselves, their families, and communities. Here JD succinctly described how he has always wanted and respected those with power, "I guess maybe I'm just attracted to power. But I've always have found a great deal of respect in people that have power. And I guess in a sense that is another factor that has pushed me to get my education, is I want to have that power."

All participants developed their own academic compass which enabled them to gain access to information and individuals whom they could rely on for specific college going information. The participants also understood that an undergraduate degree was just the beginning and that it could lead to further education like Jesus stated,

“So not only am I going to finish my diploma, not only am I going to get high grades and whatnot but why not pursue something higher. Go to the university, get a degree, and not stop there, get your masters, get your doctorates and try to do something with your life.”

All of these participants exhibited academic resilience by utilizing their thirst for learning and challenging themselves academically which revealed a high academic work ethic and self-discipline (Morales, 2008).

Another significant finding was the desire for the participants to set an example or be the example in their families (*ejemplo*). This finding was complicated by the positive and negative pressures that the participants put on themselves. Many of the participants developed a personal impetus (Boden, 2011) to succeed no matter what was put in their way. For example Pedro felt responsible for his brothers’ future educational choices,

“I feel it's my responsibility to show my brothers that it's possible, that it's not impossible to go to college and get good grades and do all that kind of stuff.”

The pressure of carrying on the family’s name, not letting their friends and family down, and simultaneously raising the hopes of the future Latino generation also indicated an external social and cultural pressure to not fail. Jesus discussed his vision for improving the perception of Latino culture, “I don’t want to be part of that stereotype. I want to get rid of that stereotype. Now I want to create a new culture where the stereotype is getting an education.”

Antonio similarly explained the pressure he felt not to become a statistic once he entered college, “It means the whole world has their eyes on me, not just my family, the whole world. I'll either be that good statistic or that bad statistic.”

Pressure and responsibility are a part of being an *ejemplo* as well as feeling satisfaction and gratitude as Junior expressed, “Being from a family that didn't have the opportunity, coming from a family that didn't have the opportunity to get higher education, makes me feel good that I get the opportunity to do something with my life and possibly help other people in the future.”

Maternal support was another important finding in this study as all of the participants described their mother's support as critical to their academic success. This finding is supported by several studies on the importance of parental support (Auerbach, 2007; Boden, 2011; Cerna et. al, 2009; Pong, et al., 2005; Spera, 2005). All of the participants echoed Jesus' sentiment about his mother,

“Of course my mom was always there. She has given us anything we needed for school. We barely have enough money to put food on the table at times, but if it was something we really needed for school, she'll provide it for us.”

JD expressed himself as a *momma's boy* and realized that his mother was there through all the toiling and pain, “My mom....well, people would describe me as a *momma's boy*. And I'm probably going to take that title because it was hard, man. It was hard growing up, because at one point it was literally me and her, just me and her like struggling to get by.”

Another interesting finding with respect to maternal support was the fact that only maternal relatives were supportive in the participants' educational journeys. For example some participants named their maternal uncle, maternal aunt, maternal cousin, maternal grandmother, and even maternal great grandmother as solid support systems for the participants. Paternal influence was complicated as some of the participants had positive and caring fathers in their lives while four of the seven participants had absent fathers or fathers that encouraged them to drop out of school and begin working. There was *no* mention of paternal relatives being supportive or playing significant roles in the lives of the FGCLM in this study. The psychocultural element of *familismo achievement motivation* was another important finding that united all of the participants to compensate family for everything they have provided as Johnny explained, “And I looked at that and I was like, if I get a college education and I make enough money, I could, I could help them out. I can make it so, no, maybe don't have exactly everything that they wanted but

it's...they don't have to feel like they've...they have to work hard their entire lives, like there's no break for them.”

Other important factors included teacher support, peer influence, and spirituality.

Teachers represented concrete social encouragement as opposed to parents and peers

symbolic social encouragement (Martinez, & Cervera, 2012). Teachers pushed the

FGCLM to challenge themselves and inspired them to go further in the education

pipeline. Junior was fortunate enough to have had a really positive experience with his

high school teachers, “I guess some of the teachers they just motivated me to keep going, doing better...all of them in general.”

Tony expressed how many of his high school teachers were more like mentors to him,

“I guess it was due to mentors in high school. I was lucky to have people that cared. People that, you know, think of it as an advantage, you speak two languages. I had people like that and I had people in high school that mentored me and cared.”

Peer influence served as symbolic social encouragement for many of the

participants. Johnny recognized that he would have to reach out beyond fellow Latino

students to make friends with individuals who had more ambition, “my friends growing up, you know, granted I had no, you know, no real, not a big, huge Latino crowd as far as my friend circle goes especially in high school because what I noticed a lot was, you know, a lot of Latinos in high school, especially in my end, they just -- they didn't really have -- academics wasn't a priority to them.”

Being surrounded by high achieving peers ignited Tony's desire to pursue higher

education, “I think one thing that influenced me was the surroundings that I had as far as my friends. In high school, I was just about the only Hispanic in the honor courses. So most of my fellow classmates you know from the freshman year in high school were looking, their pathway was to college and so I always had in my mind that oh, I am going to college because my friends are going to college. So that was one thing that kinda first ignited my dream, I guess of going.”

This finding endorses research that Latinos with high achieving peers in high school may

be more likely to begin the college application and subsequent enrollment process

(Alvarado, & Turley, 2012).

Spirituality was another important finding for some of the participants as they have learned to depend on God on their life journeys. For example JD linked his mother to the Catholic tradition and how important the two factors are in his life, “And my mother's gone through a lot for me and for my family and it's for that reason that I feel like a really close connection to her. You know, like I would do anything for my mother-figure. And not only that but the mother has always been a traditional role in our culture, that's always been sacred....going back to the Virgin Mary.”

Jesus discussed the vital role his religion played in his life, “It's like I..I mean our family was always involved in the whole catholic traditions like the Posadas...and all that kind of stuff. We would always do rosaries. I would have -- I want actually to be the leader of the rosary so I will say the whole rosary in a group of adults and like so religion has always played a role in my life.”

These findings suggest that faith can play a prominent role in the lives of some FGCLM as they triumph and struggle on their path towards higher education as some research has proposed (Campesino & Schwartz, 2009). Faith can also be complex and something that was continuously explored and reflected upon as Tony had done with his spiritual identity.

### Limitations

This study had limitations which must be detailed to better understand the results in context. The study included only first generation college Latino males from one institution in North Carolina which limited the number of participants. It may also have restricted a more diverse set of experiences among first generation college Latino males in other regions of the state and country. Another limitation to the study involves the results of the study only being applicable to this particular sample of first generation college Latino males as qualitative data is not necessarily generalizable. Researcher subjectivity is another limitation as I continuously examined my own beliefs and

experiences during the interviews, throughout transcription, and in the writing process. I maintained a dissertation journal throughout the process which enabled me to explore my frustrations, beliefs, attitudes, biases, and triumphs. Being a Latino male in higher education may have contributed positively in my research process, however, this may have decreased my ability to be completely objective in the process as well.

### Implications

The results of this study may be used to initiate discussion on this pertinent subject with elementary, middle school, and high school Latino males. Counselors may hold forums, conferences, and roundtable discussions with Latino males and their families about the importance of education. They may additionally highlight some of the findings in this study and other comparable studies. College and admissions counselors may incorporate these findings when visiting high schools with a large contingent of Latino students. College counselors may also be advised to host a Latino Student Day in which prospective Latino students and their families are invited to the campus to meet counselors in admissions, financial aid, orientation, and talk to other Latino students. The students and their families can participate in a campus tour and be provided lunch and to help establish a sense of community and comfort with the student as well as parents and relatives. Another idea for colleges to ponder is to designate office of Latino student services that specifically addresses the unique needs of many Latino students including FGCLM. Peer mentoring programs may be developed as a way to support young Latino males' educational decisions. Based on the results of this study it would be

extremely helpful for many young Latino males to have a *male* mentor presence in their lives.

The results have shed light on the importance of FGCLM and parental support specifically maternal support and the maternal side of the family. This finding implied that fathers and their side of the family may need more encouragement to play a more supportive role in FGCLM educational decisions. Parents and other relatives of FGCLM may additionally join together in churches, schools, community centers, or private homes to discuss further how they can be strong supporters of their FGCLM higher education pursuits. Teachers in high school were significant support systems for the participants in this study. The participants did not speak about either the importance of elementary or middle school teachers, counselors, or administrators on their academic decisions. This could imply that elementary and middle school teachers, counselors, and administrators may need to be more proactive in reaching out to young Latino males and create a more affirming environment for young Latino males. One suggestion for being proactive is to hire bilingual counselors, teachers, and administrators that could serve as point of contact for Latino families. Qualitative studies that examine the factors that propel FGCLM to pursue higher education may open windows to a new level of awareness and new dimensions in assisting these and other similar individuals. I believe that as more FGCLM apply and attend college new proactive programs can be developed to meet their unique psychological, social, and cultural needs. Many of these same students can begin to have a voice in how these programs are constructed and executed as well. A deeper and more comprehensive understanding may be the impetus for significant change in

elementary, middle, and high school advising and counseling as well as the kind of programming delivered in high school and in college (Olive, 2009).

#### Suggestions for Future Research

The findings from this inquiry may spur further research into this critical issue for FGCLM and their educational goals. I envision a larger qualitative study be performed with around 20 to 30 participants in various universities with multiple interviews or focus groups examining the factors that lead to educational motivation and aspirations could provide beneficial data. There is also room for a quantitative or mixed method research study to be conducted which may paint a more complete picture of how FGCLM decide to pursue higher education. Another study may focus on parents' perspectives of raising and supporting their FGCLM. This particular study can be divided by focusing on interviewing mothers of FGCLM and then interviewing the fathers of FGCLM. A follow up study can be conducted in 10 years to examine how this particular sample of FGCLM are doing post college and what their perspectives are at that time on the factors that motivated them to pursue higher education.

#### Personal Statement

This has been quite a time consuming task and also labor of love. I would not have put as much effort into this project if I really did not care about the topic. I can only hope that this dissertation actually depicts the lived experiences of the participants in a genuine and eloquent manner. At the beginning of the interview process I remember being excited and nervous. The interview process was enlightening and touching. I feel privileged to have been able to work with these resilient young men and to peer in to some very personal and delicate parts of their lives. With respect to

analyzing and interpreting I attempted to appropriately interpret the participants' stories. I am hopeful that I have accurately communicated their actual lived experiences.

Reading the transcripts gave me hope for the future of our country because I felt so blessed having the opportunity to listen to the participants proudly speak about their struggles and accomplishments. At times I tear up reflecting on the story behind each participant. I also tear up at the fact that I am only scratching the surface as to their collective lived experiences. It is amazing how much I can learn from someone else's lived experiences. The lesson I took away from this experience can be summed up by stating that resilience means there are no finish lines, silver bullets, or final destinations...it is always provisional, long-term, and many efforts to achieve it will fade as new psychological, social, and cultural forces are brought to bear on a person. Resilience must constantly be reinvigorated and recommitted to, every struggle at resilience buys us not certainty, but another day, another opportunity because every day is day one (Zolli, & Healy, 2012).

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## APPENDIX A: LETTER TO POTENTIAL STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Date

Dear Prospective Participant,

This email serves to inform you about an upcoming study entitled: Latino Voices:

A Qualitative Study of First Generation College Latino Males

I value the unique contribution that you can make to my study and hope you will accept my invitation to participate. If you agree to participate, we can make arrangements for a time and date to meet so we can go over informed consent (participant release form) and further discuss the nature of my study. I hope my research will clarify what motivates first generation college Latino males to pursue higher education I am seeking your insights as to any thoughts, feelings, and behaviors as well as situations, events, places, and people contributing to your experiences. I appreciate your possible participation and thank you for the commitment of time and effort it will involve. If you have any further questions before we meet you can reach me at 704-728-5180 or email [gbrown44@uncc.edu](mailto:gbrown44@uncc.edu).

Sincerely,

Gerald Brown  
Doctoral Student  
UNC Charlotte  
College of Education  
Department of Counseling

## APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT

## Project Title and Purpose

You are invited to participate in a research study titled *Latino Voices: A Qualitative Study of First Generation College Latino Males*

This study is designed to assess attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs of first generation Latino male college students with respect to their motivation and aspirations to pursue a college education.

## Investigator(s)

The study is being conducted by Gerald Brown, doctoral candidate in the Department of Counseling at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. I can be contacted at [gbrown44@uncc.edu](mailto:gbrown44@uncc.edu) and 704-728-5180. Responsible faculty are Drs. Harris and Wierzalis in the Department of Counseling ([hharris2@uncc.edu](mailto:hharris2@uncc.edu) 704-687-8971; [eawierza@uncc.edu](mailto:eawierza@uncc.edu) 704-687-8970).

## Eligibility

You are eligible to participate in this study as a first generation college Latino male, currently enrolled in a university program.

## Overall Description of Participation

As a subject in this study you will participate in an interview that will last approximately an hour to an hour and a half. Interviews will be audio recorded. After you have completed the interview you will be sent a copy of the interview transcript for your review to ensure authenticity and to give you an opportunity to make any additional edits

or changes as you see necessary. Next, if researcher deems it necessary you will be contacted via email for a follow up interview for member checking and clarification purposes. Additionally, the follow-up interview ensures authenticity and serves to clarify major themes of the initial interview. Transcripts will only contain subjects' pseudonyms and if any identifying information is given during interview, that information will be redacted from the transcript. Interview data will be kept in a lock file drawer until data analysis is complete at which point the transcripts and other data will be destroyed.

#### Length of Participation

Individuals demonstrating interest in participating in the study will make arrangements with me to schedule an appointment for an interview and to review and sign the Informed Consent form. Once the Informed Consent has been read and signed, the interview will begin. Participants will be asked several questions as part of the interview protocol and responses will be audio recorded. This interview will be unstructured so that a true understanding of the participant's experience will emerge. The interview will last approximately an hour to an hour and a half. At the conclusion of the interview, the participants will have the opportunity to comment or remark on any additional thoughts they may have

#### Risks and Benefits to Participation

There are no apparent risks associated with this study but a clear benefit is the opportunity to contribute to the understanding and provide insight into the essential characteristics that motivated first generation college Latino males to attend college.

### Volunteer Statement

You are a volunteer. The decision to participate in this study is completely up to you. If you decide not to be in the study, you may stop at any time. Your information that you had given up to that point would not be included in the final results and will be destroyed.

### Confidentiality Statement

Any information about your participation, including your identity, is completely confidential. During the interview participants will not be asked identifying information and should it emerge in the interview, the researcher will redact any specific identifying characteristics (e.g. name, birthdate, grade, location etc.). The investigator will assign a pseudonym to each interviewee. Any initial contact information [name, email, phone] will be kept in a secure file drawer.

### Statement of Fair Treatment and Respect

UNC Charlotte wants to make sure you are treated fairly and in a respectful fashion. Contact the UNC Charlotte's Research Compliance Office (704-687-3309); if you have questions about how you are treated as a study participant. If you have any questions about the actual study, please contact Gerald Brown (704-728-5180, [gbrown44@uncc.edu](mailto:gbrown44@uncc.edu))

### **Approval Date**

This form was approved for use on \_\_\_\_\_ for use for two years.

I have read the information in this consent form. I have had the chance to ask questions about this study, and those questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I am at least

18 years of age, and I agree to participate in this research project. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form after it has been signed by me and the principal investigator of this research study.

---

Participant Name (PRINT) Date

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Participant Signature

---

Investigator Signature

---

## APPENDIX C: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Pseudonym \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_

Ethnicity \_\_\_\_\_

Country of Origin \_\_\_\_\_

College Level (e.g. Freshman, Sophomore) \_\_\_\_\_

College Major \_\_\_\_\_

Born in the U.S (Yes or No) \_\_\_\_\_ circle one

If No, at what age did you immigrate? \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Identifying Pseudonym: \_\_\_\_\_

PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW:

**QUESTION 1:**

**Tell me about the factors that influenced your pursuit of higher education as a first generation college Latino male.**

QUESTION 2:

What or who do you think might have helped you be here today pursuing higher education?

QUESTION 3:

Tell me about your pre-college educational experience as a Latino male?

QUESTION 4:

Tell me about any significant events in your life?

QUESTION 5:

Tell me about any significant people in your life?

QUESTION 6:

What does it mean for you to be a Latino male college student?

QUESTION 7:

Tell me about your parents in terms of supporting your education?

QUESTION 8:

Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

## APPENDIX E: TABLE 1

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the Participants (Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant)

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Country of Origin</b>	<b>Class Level</b>	<b>Major</b>	<b>Born in USA</b>	<b>Age when Arrived to USA</b>
Antonio	21	Latino	Peru	Senior	Exercise Science	Yes	N/A
Junior	19	Hispanic	Mexico	Junior	Political Science	Yes	N/A
JD	19	Latino	Colombia	Sophomore	Business	Yes	N/A
Jesus	21	Mexican- American	Mexico	Senior	Finance and Spanish	Yes	N/A
Tony	23	Hispanic	Mexico	Senior	Mathematics	No	3
Pedro	19	Latino	Mexico	Junior	Biology	Yes	N/A
Johnny	20	Hispanic	El Salvador	Sophomore	Undeclared	Yes	N/A