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Social Capital and Low-Income, First-Generation Latino Male College Students

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Abstract

Low-income, first-generation students face numerous barriers to earn a college degree. Of these students, Latino male students have some of the lowest levels of college enrollment and persistence. This study used a phenomenological design to identify the perspectives of low-income, first-generation (LIFG) Latino male college students on how social capital affects their academic success. Previous research suggested that students are more likely to overcome some of the obstacles they face by establishing resourceful relationships on campus. Data were collected through in-person interviews and observations of ten LIFG Latino male college students. Personal interviews were conducted with study participants. In addition, observations between participants and mentors on campus were done.

Findings revealed that positive relationships, on and off campus, were instrumental in the overall success of the participants. Additionally, the results also revealed ways in which cultural capital - be it navigating the institution, understanding of services provided, and finding academic support on campus - influence LIFG Latino males as they advance through college. The participants successfully described their resourceful relationships with their university peers, their instructors and non-academic staff on campus, their respective mentors or advisors, and their family members. In addition, the data suggest it is important for students to take advantage of any form of social capital on campus. Implications for campus administrators, faculty, and support staff are discussed. Lastly, recommendations for future studies are explored.

Dedication

This study is dedicated to my amazing children, Imani and Thiago. You always asked, "when are you going to be done with your project?" Now I'm finally done! Without you in my life, there is nothing. *Só consegui saber o real significado do amor quando virei pai.* To Imani, *você é a linda do papai. Eu te amo muito, minha filha.* To Thiago, *você é o príncipe do papai. Procuro transmitir tudo que eu sei a você, pois um dia você será o chefe da nossa família.* To the both of you, *ser pai é ter consciência de que para os filhos ele é o maior super-herói e que nada pode vencê-lo nas batalhas dos dias. Obrigado por ter me deixado ser o seu Lanterna Verde*. To my wife Campbell, who has shared so much with me. Words cannot explain what you mean to me. Thank you for being my partner. Thank you for being my person. I would not have been able to accomplish this without you. Thanks for believing in me and for inspiring me. To my family in Brasil, *obrigado por tudo. Sinto tanta falta de todos vocês.* To my parents, thank you for being there when I needed you. And lastly, to my brothers. James Daniel and Marc Anthony, you have no idea how much you inspire me. I love you both dearly. And to my big brother Thiago, who has ALWAYS been there for me. I hope I made you proud… we did it! Tijuca Stand Up!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As the United States faces an ever-changing economy, one that prioritizes an

educated workforce, earning a college degree has become paramount. Mudge and

Higgins (2011) note that individuals who enroll in higher education, and successfully

graduate, are more likely to reap personal, social, and economic benefits. As the authors

state, with a reduced demand for relatively low-skilled workers, "postsecondary

education and training is of enormous and direct benefit to individuals seeking

employment" (p. 124). Furthermore, social cohesion, lower inequality, democratization,

civic participation, and political stability are benefits of a society that has a large number

of educated persons (Mudge & Higgins, 2011). Because of these benefits, Mudge and

Higgins suggest: a) Colleges and universities should place a premium on widening the

enrollment of students; b) Researchers should explore issues of equity and access to

education, as nations around the globe become aware of the value of tertiary education

within today's global and competitive economy; and c) Stakeholders should "make

policy recommendations intended to widen participation" (p. 123) amongst college-going

students.

Other scholars highlight how critical, and beneficial, a college education can be.

Garriott, Hudyma, Keene, and Santiago (2015), for instance, note the value of achieving a

bachelor's degree, and that "positive college experiences are associated with well-being

[for college students and college graduates]" (p. 253). For many, earning a college degree

is the key to a better, and more prosperous, life. Despite the general consensus that a

college degree is an important step for achieving the American dream of "success,"

according to Wallace, Abel, and Ropers-Huilman (2000), some students do not persist in

that dream because they lack role models, encouragement, guidance, support, and financial resources.

As Harackiewicz, Canning, Tibbetts, Giffen, Blair, Rouse, and Hyde (2013) state, a number of economic and social factors contribute to the social class achievement gap in college performance. These social factors include poverty (Reardon, 2011) and parenting practices (Guryan, Hurst, & Kearney, 2008; Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003; Lareau, 2003; Ramey & Ramey, 2010). Additional studies address the connection between quality of high school (Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996) and rigor of high school preparation (Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001) in relation to college performance. Quality of high school and rigor of preparation go hand in hand. Students who are underprepared to face the academic rigors of a university setting often fall behind academically and are at a higher risk of dropping out (Johnson & Castrellon, 2014; Thayer, 2000).

For many students – primarily those who come from low socioeconomic backgrounds, identify as students of color, or are themselves first-generation college students – a college degree is a foreign concept. Moreover, students from the groups mentioned above who do attend college often feel lost, confused, and overwhelmed on a college campus (Mamiseishvili, 2010). This confusion and overwhelming feelings, according to Bragg, Kim, and Garnett (2006), stem from: a) the inability of families to pay for college; b) the extent to which students (primarily those from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds) are able to overcome social disadvantages in college (e.g., understanding some of the unwritten rules in college); and c) the quality of secondary education – how students feel unprepared for college-level work. Achinstein,

Curry, and Ogawa (2015) touch on the three previous points made by Bragg et al. (2006), noting that providing college access to underrepresented student populations is a pressing issue in our culture. The same authors state that the push to "increase college attendance for students from underserved communities is a contemporary manifestation of this enduring struggle to equalize educational opportunity" (p. 312). The authors further claim that preparing students from underserved communities and backgrounds to succeed in college is an important step in providing this student population with an opportunity to succeed in life. This point coincides with what Garriot et al. (2015) stated regarding college being a key to a better life. Unfortunately, because underserved communities also often experience economic problems, Raymond (1998) explains that parents and family members may not have the financial means to send a student to college, or even support one for four years should the student be accepted. Parents often cannot afford steep tuition costs, nor additional academic expenses that come with multiple years of schooling.

Many students who identify as students of color, or come from underserved communities, are classified as low-income, first-generation (LIFG thereafter) students. These students struggle with issues of access to institutions of higher education. In addition, once they do enter colleges and universities, LIFG students must overcome two major inherent barriers to obtaining a college degree. The first barrier is to be able to understand the intrinsic rules and expectations of a first year college student (such as knowing how to navigate the campus, acquiring books and other resources, and understanding how a particular instructor grades assignments). The second barrier is not

having anyone at home who can provide them with the necessary resources as they make the transition to higher education (Miller, 2007).

Research conducted in the late 1990s and early 2000s showed that low-income, first-generation students were more likely to leave college right after their first year than their more advantaged peers (Mamiseishvili, 2010). Though most LIFG students enter higher education motivated and encouraged about their possibilities, many do not have the wherewithal to find their way through the complexities of a university setting.

Jehangir (2009) notes that many LIFG students also struggle with the expectations of being a university student, together with the changes in relationships they may experience at home. More specifically, Jehangir believes LIFGs are not free to immerse themselves in the college life, per se, as they still have close ties in the home and have a difficult time separating their lives at home and their new experiences at an institution of higher education. While discussing student engagement and learning on campus, Jehangir said the following:

> Despite all we know about engaging and involving students in
> learning, many first-generation students do not feel that they have
> the permission to engage in their learning authentically as their full
> selves. This divide between home and school worlds… perpetuates
> the isolation that first-generation, low-income students, many of
> whom are also students of color and immigrants, feel on campus.
> (p.34)

Within the LIFG student population, Latino students have drawn the attention of educators and researchers, due to their increasing numbers in institutions of higher

education (Achinstein et al., 2015; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Nuñez, 2009; Strayhorn, 2010). Trevino and DeFreitas (2014) address this issue by stating, "the academic achievement of Latino college students is becoming a more pressing issue in the United States due to their growing population and unique needs as a result of many being first-generation college students" (p. 293). The authors also contend that, given the growth of Latino enrollment, more research is necessary on this student population as it relates to their successes in higher education. Furthermore, the authors explain that, at present, most first-generation college students are Latino and often have little to no support from home when it comes to educating them on how to navigate the college system (Trevino & DeFreitas, 2014).

Target Population

Within the fast-growing LIFG Latino population, there are gender differences. Multiple studies suggest more female Latino LIFG students are enrolling in, and graduating from, colleges and universities than their male counterparts (González, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003; Klevan, Weinberg, & Middleton, 2015; Perez & McDonough, 2008; Tovar, 2015). According to Klevan et al. (2015), the number of female students is increasing in two major categories: matriculation and graduation. Therefore, the female dominance in higher education has become an important area of study due to its potentially expansive impact on various aspects of social and economic life post higher education (Klevan et al., 2015).

Even before attending college, Latina female students are more prepared to endure the academic rigors of a college education, in comparison to their male counterparts. Riegle-Crumb (2010) notes that, during high school, Latina female students

are "less likely to be placed in remedial courses and to drop out of school, earn higher grades across subjects, and take comparable or even larger numbers of college preparatory courses" (p. 575). The author contends that, even though the fact that female students often outperform males in school may not be a new concept, it appears that the gap between how much they outperform them in high school is increasing. This advantage has put female students, particularly Latinas, in a better position to enroll in post-secondary institutions. Finally, Riegle-Crumb states that Latina students, compared to Latinos, possess a better understanding of the preparation it takes to earn a college education. "Compared to their co-ethnic male peers, [Latinas] do exhibit higher levels of academic preparation in high school, and are also more likely than boys to articulate the importance of education as a way of getting ahead and voice higher educational aspirations" (p. 575). Riegle-Crumb note that, unlike Latinas, Latino male students are falling behind when it comes to overall academic preparedness and understanding how important a college education can be.

At the collegiate level, Latino males have not drawn as much attention from faculty and staff when it comes to retention and graduation. Male Latino students are falling behind academically compared to female Latina college students (Klevan et al., 2015; Perez & McDonough, 2008; Tovar, 2015). Among minority and Latino/a low-income college-going students, male students currently are 25 percent less likely than their female counterparts to enroll in institutions of higher education (Klevan et al., 2015). Overall, Latino male college students are among the largest underrepresented groups in higher education. Only 5.7% of these students are graduating from college (Ong, Phinney, & Dennis, 2006).

This male/female discrepancy has created possible directions for future studies, which include: possible explorations of a) the gap between male and female college graduates, and b) their overall access to higher education. For these reasons, this study focused on male Latino LIFG students.

Participants in the study presented here identified themselves as Latino students. They indicated that they grew up with Spanish spoken in the home, and were fluent in the language. In addition, they were all first-generation and low-income students.

Theoretical Framework

As previously stated, LIFG students face tremendous barriers in their pursuit of a college degree. As newcomers to a college or university, students must consider many factors, both academic and non-academic. Strick (2012) notes that some of the non-academic factors include how the level of parent education may affect a student's preparedness, how a student's ethnicity plays a role in college experience (e.g., many LIFG students tend to be students of color), and how a family's financial status may support, or hinder, students' ability to support themselves as college students. LIFG students, who are often also students from different ethnic backgrounds, often see these factors as problematic, and at times the source of barriers in college.

From a comparison standpoint, research shows that students who come from a high-income family are more than twice as likely to graduate from college in six years than a low-income (or income-qualified) student (Radford, et al., 2010, Strick, 2012). Similarly, continued-generation students (those whose parents earned a Bachelor's degree) are more than three times as likely to graduate compared to their first-generation counterparts (Radford, et al., 2010, Strick, 2012). Lastly, from a race

standpoint, White students are twice as likely to finish school in six years or less, when compared with Latino students (Radford, et al., 2010, Strick, 2012). These statistics clearly show some of the barriers LIFG Latino college students must overcome.

Challenges in higher education can often be mitigated by acquiring capital on campus. Social capital, for instance, is often cited as a reason why students are able to overcome some of the aforementioned challenges on campus. According to Bourdieu (1986), social capital is measured in the amount of resources that "are ranked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition, in other words, to membership in a group" (p. 248). Bourdieu views social capital as the support and trust networks among individuals within a group, which, in turn, benefit those individuals. A set of networks (or relationships) that will benefit a student is a powerful resource to have. These relationships may include: creating positive connections with mentors, gaining membership to student groups, and getting to know campus administrators.

Social capital, according to Delpit (1995) and Achinstein et al. (2015), is the tool that can be used to address the barriers, the institutional challenges, and the benefits of forming connections on campus. Furthermore, Delpit (1995) notes that schools must do a better job of making hidden codes (e.g., understanding how to behave in a college classroom environment and whom to communicate with when a problem arises) explicit to students. The author claims that, in order to enhance educational opportunities for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, access to cultural and social capital must be provided. Overall, increasing social capital

amongst LIFG students may increase their chances of earning a college degree –
especially when many of them may not be ready for the demands of college.

The benefit of social capital theory is its focus on a student's opportunity to learn
from those around them. Because of their socio-economic status, LIFG students are often
unprepared or ill equipped, to handle the rigors of higher education. In addition, this
student population may see themselves as victims of an unfair educational system.
Instead of individuals finding fault with their current social status, however, individuals
who form networks "share privileged information and resources in order to better the
lives of all members. Through the sharing of this knowledge, group members exchange
social capital" (Callahan et al., 2015, p. 99). In the case of LIFG students, this means
establishing relationships on campus with those who can provide resources to them.

Moschetti and Hudley (2015) also address some of the benefits of social
relationships for first-generation and ethnic minority students. For example, the previous
authors state that LIFG students of color enter into mentoring relationships on campus
because "they believe they would receive important academic knowledge and resources
during the mentoring process" (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015, p. 238). Additionally,
research on first-generation Latino college students – primarily done on the transitions
from high school into higher education – found that these students' experiences were
vastly influenced by their ability to create and sustain social networks once they arrived
on campus (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015; Saunders & Serna, 2004). The previous authors
show that social capital may benefit the early experiences of LIFG Latino male college
students.

Social capital can also play a role in how colleges and universities address issues of student retention. As Conley and Hamlin (2009) observe, higher education continues to wrestle with the challenge of engaging and retaining traditionally marginalized populations, particularly first-generation college students of color from low-income backgrounds. There are two perspectives to consider when addressing retention issues for LIFG students in higher education. On one hand, LIFG students try to overcome social, economic, and class barriers to persist in higher education. On the other, colleges and universities search for ways to remedy first-generation, low-income attrition while exploring ways to meet this population's needs. When addressing the aforementioned barriers in higher education, together with the challenges colleges and universities face, there must be an overall focus on the relationships and resources used by LIFG students. Social capital could provide one possible lens for this focus.

Research Purpose

The previous sections covered the importance of a college education for LIFG students. They also addressed how LIFG students, particularly Latino male students, face barriers in higher education, and the potential role of social capital in academics. There is a need to further explore if LIFG Latino male students tend to benefit from creating positive relationships on college campuses.

The purpose of this study was to identify low-income, first-generation Latino male students' views on resources and networks available to them at the collegiate level and whether they thought these resources had any effect on their overall academic performance. This qualitative study used a phenomenological design because its goal was to understand the individual experiences of the participants.

Significance

As Gonzalez (2015) notes, there are numerous barriers Latino students face in order to gain access to, and succeed in higher education. The author claims that "multiple perspectives in research [from researchers, faculty, and campus administrators] have created a broad and rich conversation around the common desire to improve rates of college access for Latino/a youth" (Gonzalez, 2015, p. 320). Though there is a desire to hold these conversations, what is missing is the perspective of the Latino students themselves (Cole & Espinoza, 2008; Hill & Torres, 2010). This study aims to identify the perspectives of low-income, first-generation Latino male college students on how social capital affects their academic success.

First, if university faculty and administrators recognized how LIFG Latino male students view social capital and its effect on their overall success in higher education, they could better appreciate the kinds of support these young men would need to succeed in higher numbers. Second, this study could help practitioners of student success and retention programs (e.g., university mentoring programs, federal support programs, campus multicultural centers, and state-funded retention and access programs) by specifically identifying the needs of the students with whom they work - be it academic needs, financial needs, or emotional support. From there, support program practitioners can cater the services they provide to students; maximizing their value to each student they serve.

Statement of Problem

Low-income, first-generation students who end up attending a four-year institution are twice as likely as students whose parents had a bachelor's degree to drop

out before their second year (Yeh, 2010). Of this population of LIFG students, Latino students comprise the largest segment. Latino students represent the fastest-growing subpopulation (e.g., race, socioeconomic status, etc.) enrolling in institutions of higher education (Klevan et al., 2015). Furthermore, within the LIFG student population, more females than males enroll in colleges and universities. The LIFG Latino male college student has one of the lowest enrollment and graduation rates of all underserved student populations. Though issues of retention and persistence of LIFG students continue to garner considerable attention from researchers and higher education administrators, the voice of the students themselves – particularly the voice of the male LIFG Latino student – is often absent in the conversation (Strayhorn, 2010; Wang, 2012). Also absent is their perspective on how different relationships, and resources around campus, affect their academic success.

Research Questions

The research questions this study are:

1. What are low-income, first-generation Latino male college students' perspectives on how forms of social capital used on college campuses affect their academic success?

    a. What are the resourceful relationships that LIFG Latino male students have with peers, faculty, mentors, and family?

    b. How do the above relationships relate to their academic success?

Definitions of Terms

• LIFG: low-income, first-generation student in higher education (Yeh, 2010)

• FGs: first-generation college students are defined as individuals whom neither parent has completed a college degree (Forbus, 2011)

• CG: continuing generation (Giancola, Munz, & Trares, 2008)

• Latino college students: undergraduate students who are raised in the United States by parents who migrated to the United States from Latin American countries (Camacho, 2014)

• Social Capital: a variety of positive and resourceful social networks (Coleman, 1988)

• Cultural Capital: a set of resources, knowledge, assets, or values that are considered important in a particular social context (Bourdieu, 1986).

• TRiO: the first three education opportunity programs that were created: Educational Talent Search, Upward Bound, and Student Support Services. Born out of President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty and the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, the primary goal of TRIO Programs is to provide equal educational opportunities for all U.S. citizens by increasing college readiness and developing higher education aspirations among students from low-income, first-generation college, and ethnic/racial minority backgrounds (Pitre & Pitre, 2009).

• SSS: Student Support Services (a federally-funded TRiO program through the U.S. Department of Education) which provides resources to students, including tutoring, peer mentoring, and academic advising (Jehangir, 2009).

Summary

Previous research shows that low-income, first-generation (LIFG) students face many obstacles which can threaten their goal of obtaining a college degree (Johnson & Castrellon, 2014; Owens, 2010; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). For LIFG Latino males, these

obstacles can be even more daunting. What role, if any, does social capital have on overcoming these obstacles and finding any sort of academic success? This phenomenological study focuses on participants who were low-income, first-generation Latino male students.

Chapter 2 presents the literature on the issues low-income, first-generation students face in higher education. There is a focus on Latino males through a social capital theory lens. This chapter focuses on the relationship between social capital theory and success in higher education – including, but not limited to, what researchers say about the relationships formed between LIFG Latino male students and those who work and/or attend institutions of higher learning.

Chapter 3 describes the research methodology. It includes the selection criteria of the participants, the method in which data was collected, and how this data was processed and analyzed. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study. Chapter 5 offers a discussion of the study, implications for practice, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify the perspectives of low-income, first-generation Latino male college students on how social capital affects their academic success. Specifically, this study looked at the relationships that LIFG Latino male students had with their peers, faculty, mentors, and family, and how these relationships related to their overall success. This review of literature is presented in six key sections. The first section presents an overview of the barriers the target population faces in gaining access, persisting, and finding success in higher education. The second section outlines the theoretical framework for this study, which is social capital theory. Because social capital finds its roots in cultural capital, connections between social capital and cultural capital are addressed. The third section addresses the influence of family, and how it affects LIFG students. The fourth section discusses the academic background of LIFG students. The fifth section focuses on the social barriers LIFG students face in higher education. Lastly, the sixth section explains the importance of building relationships on campus.

Barriers to a College Degree

Research studies have documented that low-income, first-generation students who successfully graduate from college are more likely to find success in life. Garriott, Hudyma, Keene, and Santiago (2015) conducted a comparison study of over 400 LIFG and non-LIFG students, testing Lent's social-cognitive model of normative well-being. In this study, the authors suggest that obtaining a college degree is very important to the

financial, career, and life satisfaction of a low-income, first-generation student. Additionally, they note that having a positive college experience is associated with overall happiness and well-being on the part of the student. For many LIFG students, gaining access to, and persevering through, a college education are ongoing challenges. Therefore, while a college degree is often considered a tool for realizing the dream of success in life, LIFG students typically do not pursue this dream because they often lack the help needed when navigating post-secondary institutions and the financial resources to persist in higher education (Wallace, Abel, & Ropers-Huilman, 2000).

Jehangir (2009) conducted research on how LIFG students feel isolated and marginalized on college campuses. She argues that implementing a learning community (designed with attention to multicultural curricula) can help address the challenges faced by LIFG students, bringing them together through this community. The author describes the journey to college LIFG students oftentimes face, and how being accepted to an institution of higher education can be a farfetched dream. She writes, **"**For many first-generation, low-income students, college is an unknown land at which they dream of arriving one distant day" (p. 33). Many LIFG students view institutions of higher education as a distant thought.

Being admitted to college, however, is not the only barrier LIFG students face. LIFG students who attend a four-year institution are twice as likely as students whose parents hold a bachelor's degree to drop out before their second year (Yeh, 2010). According to Prospero and Vohra-Gupta (2007) the number is even higher. The authors conducted a quantitative study of 197 students, investigating the motivation and integration dimensions that influence college academic achievement of first-generation

students compared to non-first-generation students. They wrote that "[first-generation students] are 71% more likely to drop out of college than [non first-generation students], even after controlling for race, gender, high school grade point average, and family income" (p. 964). This creates a significant gap between the students who are on their way to earning a degree and those who are not. According to Bragg, Kim, and Barnett (2006), this gap separates those students who benefit from a college education from those who do not complete their degree. The previous authors address this point by stating that students who do not enter nor remain in college do not experience the same benefits of a degree, such as increased annual earnings, as college graduates.

For those who are LIFG and Latino, the challenges of higher education are even greater. As Achinstein, Curry, and Ogawa (2015) point out, for low-income, Latino students, the idea of college is not seen as something natural. The authors point out that what is 'normal' for low-income, Latino students is to not graduate from secondary schools and not attend college. For those who do, many find themselves enrolling in community colleges or trade schools, in order to advance themselves professionally. Few end up enrolling in 4-year institutions directly out of high school. As Gonzalez (2013) notes, Latino students have many "internal and external forces that play a role in their college choice decision-making [and often] these students might not progress sequentially from one phase to the other" (p. 14). Students who are influenced by these forces often find themselves unprepared to make decisions about college, with little guidance from home.

Once enrolled, LIFG students face a number of obstacles in higher education. Two key obstacles these students face are academic barriers and an outlook towards

higher education that can be overwhelming (Wang, 2008; Wiggins, 2011). The primary goal for this student population is to find ways to bring down the many barriers standing in their way (Bergerson, 2009). LIFG students enter college with more potential obstacles than their non-LIFG counterparts (Housel & Harvey, 2011). Unfortunately, for Latino students who identify as first-generation and/or low-income students, these potential obstacles are more common than not. As Tovar (2015) states, not only do Latinos struggle in terms of access to college, they also face barriers in terms of inequities in access to resources, participation, preparation, transfer, and progression through higher education. Hill and Torres (2010) note, "the academic achievement of Latinos lags behind others in the United States" (p. 96). Furthermore, Perez and McDonough (2008) point out that Latino students are the least likely racial group (compared to other ethnic populations) to participate in a general college choice process and least likely to enroll in college following high school.

Those Latino students, who enroll in institutions of higher education, often find success when they adapt to the university and make connections with staff and students. According to Hurtado and Carter (1997), research on Latinos shows that they are more likely to succeed in higher education when they successfully make social, academic, and personal-emotional adjustments to the institution. Considering the barriers outlined earlier, it cannot be understated how important it is for this student population to make these adjustments and graduate from college.

Theoretical Framework

Social capital theory is rooted in the idea that membership in a particular group creates opportunities to acquire knowledge and resources from other group members

(Callahan, Libarkin, McCallum, & Atchison, 2015). For a LIFG Latino student, this knowledge and resources can translate into a better understanding of the unwritten rules within higher education. Stanton-Salazar (1997) defined social capital as building relationships with institutional agents, which in turn can be cashed out for resources and opportunities. According to Callahan et al. (2015) social capital explains how "individuals benefit from different types of social ties and networks in their professional lives" (p. 99).

Forbus, Newbold, and Mehta (2011) claim that LIFG students do not have the knowledge needed to succeed in higher education. The same authors state that, for those lacking educational behaviors, the "explicit teaching of the practical skills needed for college is recommended" (Forbus et al., 2011, p. 35). Educational behaviors and practical skills are usually not inherent in LIFG students. Since cultural capital speaks to the familiarity and ease with which one navigates the dominant culture of society (Cole & Espinoza, 2008), students who do not possess these behaviors and skills at the university level oftentimes do not find academic success.

Social capital could help explain how LIFG Latino students navigate different networks on campus. For instance, Gonzalez (2013) conducted a qualitative study on 43 high-achieving LIFG Latino students and the college choices that they make. She found that social capital is having network support and guidance toward educational attainment. According to the previous author, disproportionate amounts of Latino students enroll in community colleges and are less likely to graduate or transfer to four-year institutions. Networks of support can provide Latino students opportunities to make appropriate college choices. This is important because "first-generation Latino college students

heavily rely on school personnel and institutional agents, and defer their educational achievements to these adults" (Gonzalez, 2013, p. 7). These networks of support are an example of social capital. Likewise, the knowledge and resources needed to succeed are referred to as cultural capital. What follows is an exploration of cultural and social capital.

Cultural Capital

Both cultural capital and social capital play an important role in the academic success of college-going students. Cultural capital is a theory that originated from Bourdieu's work in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Much like his important work with the development of social capital as a framework for educational research and studies, Bourdieu is considered the originator of cultural capital. Bourdieu (1986) saw cultural capital existing in one of three forms.

> Cultural capital can exist in three forms: in the *embodied* state, i.e., in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the *objectified* state, in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.), which are the trace or realization of theories or critiques of these theories, problematics, etc.; and in the *institutionalized* state, a form of objectification which must be set apart because, as will be seen in the case of educational qualifications, it confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital which it is presumed to guarantee (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 243).

The three forms of cultural capital can be applied to all LIFG college students. First, the embodied state of cultural capital includes knowledge that has been acquired or inherited over a period of time. Of Bourdieu's three states of cultural capital, it can be argued that the embodied state may be the one that affects LIFG students the most. Sullivan (2001) notes that cultural capital "consists of familiarity with the dominant culture in a society, and especially the ability to understand and use 'educated' language" (p. 3). Using Bourdieu's work to study cultural capital and educational attainment, Sullivan notes that 'educated language' (i.e. language that evolves from linguistic and cultural competence on campus) derives from knowledge of the norms in higher education. Reflecting on the personal experiences of their participants as first-generation college students (and the struggles they faced), Housel & Harvey (2011) note that LIFG students must "often navigate the unwritten social rules of their peers, professors, and academic administrators, many of whom come from middle- and upper-class backgrounds" (p. 6). These unwritten social rules include, but are not limited to: understanding the norms and expectations of a college or university, and finding the right support while in school (Bragg et al., 2006). Bragg et al. (2006) echo the words of Housel & Harvey (2011), noting that the norms and expectations of an institution (such as understanding how to port oneself in a college classroom or knowing how to navigate some of the academic support services provided on campus) of higher learning can often be unwritten.

Second, the objectified state of cultural capital consists of tangible resources, or physical materials, owned by an individual. These cultural goods (e.g., books, scientific instruments, and computers) serve as the physical resources used by students in institutions of higher education. What makes these cultural goods so important, however,

is the knowledge of how to use them and the appreciation for them. As Claussen and Osborne (2013) explain, something of great value, like a "first edition of Darwin's Origin of the Species has less value to someone who lacks an understanding of why this is a seminal volume" (p. 62). Without proper understanding of these tangible resources, it becomes harder to acquire or use them (e.g., a college student waiting until the third week of the semester to purchase an online text for a particular class).

Lastly, the institutionalized state of cultural capital speaks to the academic credentials and qualification one earns. Prior to college, students earn credentials in high school in the form of Advanced Placement classes, International Baccalaureate classes, and honors high school diplomas. In the case of this study, the academic credential earned is a college degree. Because of the differences in the cultural capital they already possess, LIFG students are more "likely to be handicapped in accessing and understanding information and attitudes relevant to making beneficial decisions [in regards to being accepted into college]" (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004, p. 252). As the previous authors explain, oftentimes LIFG students lack the ideal academic preparation prior to enrolling in college.

Cultural capital typically is addressed as a precursor to social capital and its effect on academic success. Sullivan (2001) contends that "possession of cultural capital varies with social class, yet the education system assumes the possession of cultural capital" (p. 3) by most students. While there is an assumption that all students in higher education possess cultural capital (see Figure 1), depending on a student's social class, many possess little or none. As Early (2010) explains, academic success can be achieved by the use of cultural capital, rather than inherited abilities. While addressing how cultural

capital is gained, the same author notes that cultural capital "is the concept that academic achievement and ability are socially constructed rather than signs of innate intelligence or giftedness" (p. 279). Early further asserts that all individuals can gain cultural capital, though some struggle to access it more than others do.

Cole and Espinoza (2008) point out that since many Latino students have parents whose educational achievements are limited to a high school degree, these students' cultural capital is different from students whose parents attended, and graduated from, institutions of higher education (Cole & Espinoza, 2008). Because of this, the authors explain that students with "college-educated parents would have better access to cultural capital, which translates into a better understanding of the academic culture in college" (Cole & Espinoza, 2008, p. 289). Gonzalez et al. (2003) go even further in explaining the relationship between cultural capital and the target population of this study. In reviewing the work of McDonough and Bourdieu, Gonzalez et al. (2003) state that cultural capital is the "property that middle and upper class families transmit to their offspring, which substitutes for or supplements the transmission of economic capital as a means of maintaining class status and privilege across generations" (p. 148). The authors suggest that, specifically for college students, the most relevant property (as noted above) is understanding the value of a college education (2003).

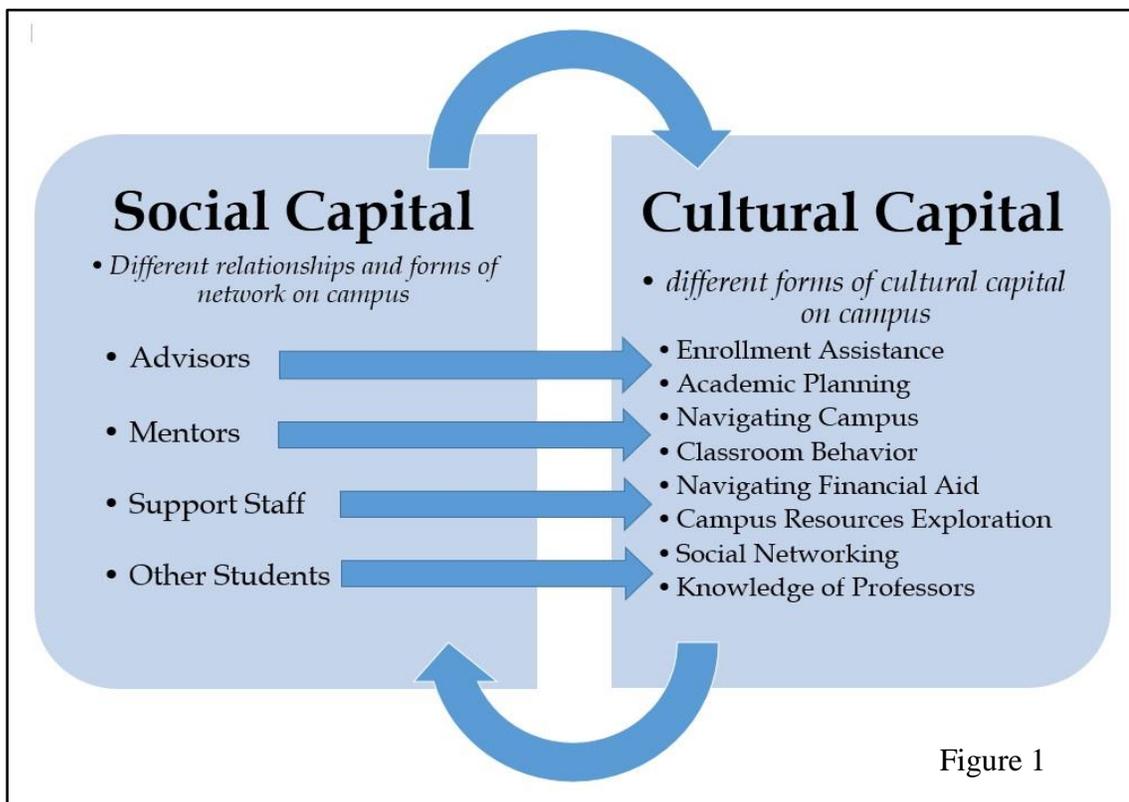Bourdieu's influence is also present in Sullivan's (2001) work. The author conducted a quantitative study of 465 British high school students, exploring the theory of cultural reproduction and cultural capital. Using quantitative data to measure pupils' and parents' cultural capital, Sullivan (2001) was "able to provide a better test of Bourdieu's theory" (p. 21). According to the author, the concept of cultural capital "has

often been assimilated to the data available to researchers" (p. 21). Her findings suggested that Bourdieu's theory provided some useful insights, and helped explain class differentials in educational attainment. Sullivan found that cultural capital is associated with social class, and is transmitted from parents to children.

Other researchers, influenced by Bourdieu, have expanded our understanding of cultural capital. Lareau and Horvat (1999) studied the "influence of race and social class in aspects of children's school experience" (p. 38). In this case study, the authors used cultural capital as the foundation of their theoretical framework. The researchers found that race, as well as social class, shaped school experiences. More specifically, the researchers noted that middle-class African-American families benefited from their class position in school settings, compared to their less-privileged counterparts, however they still faced an institutional setting that privileges European-American families. Through Bourdieu's theory, the study sought to highlight "the fluid nature of social interaction and the reproduction of inequality in society" (Lareau & Horvat, 1999, p. 50). The authors note that the way people use cultural capital influences how individual characteristics (e.g., race or class) will matter in social interactions.

Overall, Lareau and Horvat (1999) claim that in order for one to be considered of value in a specific field, cultural capital must be activated. They draw on Bourdieu's comparison of social and cultural capital to a card game. In this analogy, the card game is the field of interaction (e.g., the current environment, the workplace, the academic institution, etc.); the players are the individuals; and each player is dealt a set of cards (e.g., social and cultural capital). According to Bourdieu, the cards have different values, as does each hand. Additionally, the value of each hand changes according to the rules of

the game (e.g., the change of the environment, the number of individuals involved, etc.) that is being played (Bourdieu, 1976, Lareau & Hovart, 1999). For the purpose of this study, the game would be the college or university, the players include (but are not limited to) the individual students, family members, and other stakeholders, and the cards are the social and cultural capital possessed by each player. An example of this would be if a student and his family have very little knowledge of how to navigate college, then their cards will not be very strong and, most likely, they will not win the hand. Additionally, you may have a LIFG student who participated in a college preparatory program, has an older cousin who is already enrolled in the same institution and is familiar with the campus, and this student has previously made multiple visits to an advisor's office. In this example, the student has a much stronger hand and, with luck, may succeed in winning the game.

Social Capital
• *Different relationships and forms of network on campus*

• Advisors

• Mentors

• Support Staff

• Other Students

Cultural Capital
• *different forms of cultural capital on campus*
• Enrollment Assistance
• Academic Planning
• Navigating Campus
• Classroom Behavior
• Navigating Financial Aid
• Campus Resources Exploration
• Social Networking
• Knowledge of Professors

Figure 1

In addition to a card game, cultural capital invokes other analogies. For instance, the relationship between cultural capital and social capital form a sort of merry-go-round, where one form of capital supports the other in a circular motion. As seen in Figure 1 above, there is a relationship between social and cultural capital. Figure 1 shows the relationship between social and cultural capital in higher education. On the left, social capital is represented by the different forms of networks on campus. These include different groups of staff members and students. On the right, cultural capital is represented by a list of assets or resources one can acquire on campus. To gain cultural capital in higher education, one must draw on social capital. Both support each other, and in some ways, depend on each other.

Social Capital

The work of Bourdieu and Coleman on social capital theory in the late seventies and early eighties was the catalyst for the discussion of social capital in educational settings. According to Coleman (1988), social capital is not a single concept, but rather a "variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors - whether persons or corporate actors - within the structure" (p. 98). Coleman (1988) states that social capital, unlike other forms of capital, is deep-rooted in the structure of relationships amongst individuals of a particular group. These relationships may be formed between a student and an advisor or other students on campus (see figure 1). Bourdieu (1986) views social capital as a collection of resources within a certain network created by mutual relationships. He notes that "membership in a group provides each of its members with

the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 18).

Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988) emphasize resources, relationships, and networking as key components of this theory. Callahan et al. (2015) explain the importance of belonging to some sort of group – be it family, community, or within an academic setting (e.g., student group, organization, club, etc.). Moreover, individuals who belong to a certain group, benefit from these different types of social ties and networks in their professional lives. In her study of Latino adolescents and access to college, Gonzalez (2015) refers to the importance of networks, stating that "most social capital scholars are interested in the structure of a network, the opportunity individuals have to access it, and individuals' actual use of the network available to them" (p. 325).

Commonalities between both Coleman (1988) and Bourdieu (1986) are: 1) their emphasis on relationships, 2) memberships in a particular group, and 3) how the exchange of resources can benefit individuals within the group. Examples of these processes include a new student building a relationship with a mentor on campus, learning how to navigate the university, and understanding some of the nuances of accessing resources on campus.

Possessing social capital can mean improving one's own position in life. As Martin (2015) notes, Bourdieu contends that social capital can help define the inequalities within society, as the dominant (e.g., wealthy) class utilizes their vast resources and connections (e.g., implicit knowledge of campus life) available to them to further maintain and develop a strategic position in society. Thus knowledge serves as a form of commodity, exchanged and controlled by a select few. In an educational context, students

who lack social capital are less likely to succeed, while those who do possess it (whether inherited or not) are more likely to further themselves and use it for academic gains.

Additionally, social capital can be seen as a tangible resource, one that can be exchanged between those who possess it and those who do not. As Tovar (2015) states, social capital consists of "a supply of actual or potential resources associated with social networks and interpersonal relationships formed by individuals with others from whom support may be sought" (p. 50). Interpreting this idea from an academic viewpoint, students who have the social and cultural capital to succeed in higher education are more likely to take advantage of the resources already in place to succeed. These resources may include, but are not limited to: experiences of living on campus, relationships with faculty and staff, frequent interactions with a mentor or advisor, familiarity with the administrative faculty, etc. (see Figure 1). Each of these resources could help students in various ways by providing a form of networking or, as previously stated, social capital as a tangible resource.

Due to the focus on resources, the creation of networks, and the influence that groups have on individuals, social capital theory could provide a lens that helps explain how LIFG students navigate college. Gonzalez (2015) points to the effectiveness of social capital theory for studying LIFG students in higher education, since its focus is on the existing resources (e.g., relationships on campus, networks with peers and classmates, etc.) from which these students can benefit, not the previously noted disadvantages this student population may face (i.e. cultural and social barriers). The previous author believes social capital theory is an important lens due to the disadvantaged social positions occupied by low-income, first-generation students. She claims that using social

capital to address the barriers that LIFG Latino students face in college is useful because "it focuses on resources available in a given network rather than blaming a student or family for certain cultural characteristics" (p. 325).

While focusing on social capital as the theoretical framework within the literature, the relationships between LIFG students and their family members became an important aspect to consider. What follows is a look at how families influence LIFG students – including providing social capital and financial assistance, and their aspirations of their LIFG students.

The Influence of Family

Family plays a key role in the challenges first-generation, income-qualified students face in higher education. The support – or lack thereof – that a family can provide to a student (be it moral, financial, or academic) is extremely influential in the lives of LIFG students. Many researchers (Forbus, Newbold, & Mehta, 2011; Martinez, 2003; Miller, 2007; Unverferth, Talbert-Johnson, & Bogards, 2012; Yeh, 2010) have explored the influence that families have on this population in relation to their success in school. Unverferth et al. (2012) state that it is not uncommon for many LIFG students to "feel the tensions of entering new territory [when they enter college] and that their parents are unable to reassure or support them appropriately" (p. 240). These tensions can be detrimental to a college student.

Aside from the uncertainty of being able to count on parents, many LIFGs often face some form of cultural shock, leaving their own culture at home while trying to adapt to a new culture at school. Using a mixed methods approach, Miller (2007) investigated the association between family history knowledge, the persistence factors of resiliency,

and institutional engagement amongst 60 low-income, first-generation college students who were members of a retention program on a college campus. While addressing the cultural shock some students face, the author noted that a change in culture "is a problem encountered by first-generation students regarding the discomforts that arise upon leaving the social standing of one's family of orientation" (p. 31). This cultural change, as Miller explains, can often be confusing to LIFG students. It also underscores the important role that families of LIFG students play. What follows is a closer look at cultural capital and family members, and how finances affect students.

Cultural Capital and Family

Underserved student populations, especially those who are low income or first generation, have a harder time overcoming some of the obstacles to succeed in higher education – some of which is due to the student's family members (Forbus et al., 2011; Martinez, 2003; Yeh, 2010) . Yeh (2010), for example, discusses the influence families have on LIFG students. She states "students from low-income backgrounds whose parents never attended college are less likely to possess the kinds of cultural and social capital valued in higher education institutions, and thus will encounter greater barriers to academic achievement and success" (p. 52). Unfortunately, this is a result of a family history that is void of any sort of experiences in higher education. Forbus, Newbold, & Mehta (2011) outline this point in their study of first-generation students.

> This knowledge [cultural capital] - including familiarity with the
> college environment and campus standards, access to advising and
> financial resources, and familiarity with the normal functioning of a
> university setting - which is commonly conveyed by parents, may be

lacking among first-generation students as their parents did not attend

college, and this lack of knowledge may add to a sense of college

'culture shock' (Forbus et al., 2011, p. 15).

Other researchers (Harackiewicz et al., 2014) echo the points made by Yeh (2010) and

Forbus et al. (2011), stating there is a direct correlation between the experiences families

go through and those of their children. Harackiewicz et al. (2014) expand upon this,

suggesting that parental education is considered a proxy for social class or socioeconomic

status. The authors contend that the more educated the parents are, the higher the

socioeconomic status (Harackiewicz et al., 2014). According to the authors, the opposite

is also true. First-generation students often find themselves in a different social class from

their continued-education peers.

A family's knowledge and experience can be critical to the success of LIFG

students. Giancola, Munz and Trares (2008) wrote, "Although continuing-generation

students may already have some basic data regarding college, and thereby have a higher

comfort level, first-generation students are likely to require more information and

assurance" (p. 218). More specifically, how family members – with their academic

history and expertise – can help students as they transition to college is crucial for them.

Mudge and Higgins (2010) note the relationship between family knowledge and student

knowledge, stating, "parental levels of educational attainment are strongly associated

with student educational achievement, making social class backgrounds a barrier to parity

in college entrance" (p. 127). Mudge and Higgins further expand upon the influence of

family members on students' lives. They note that one of the reasons why a student,

under the guidance of his or her family, would not choose to invest in a college degree –

or any other educational opportunities beyond a secondary education – is that both the student and the family are not convinced of the economic benefits of a college education (Mudge & Higgins, 2010). The authors suggest that lack of family knowledge can hinder any sort of academic progress a first-generation, income-qualified student makes.

Conversely, there are students who have experiences with family members who think differently and understand the importance of a college education and the hope it can bring to a family. These students do understand that an education is the key to a better life. Latinos – and students from other cultural backgrounds – who persist in school have learned from personal experiences at home, where they have witnessed firsthand uneducated family members who work long shifts as laborers, custodial staff, and low-paid employees just to provide for their families. They understand that a college education is the key to breaking the cycle of low-paying jobs and graveyard shifts at work. As Dennis, Phinney, and Chuateco (2005) point out, these students want better lives for themselves than those of their parents. They found that, "Ethnic minority young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds often see education as the means to better their lives and avoid the difficult lives of their parents" (p. 224). Garriot et al. (2015) suggest that LIFG students who persist have higher educational aspirations, and set themselves as the foundation for future members of their families (oftentimes a younger sibling or a cousin) to attend school – serving as the example of someone who made it (Inman & Mayes, 1996). For those LIFG students who persist in school, they are more likely to graduate and provide an educational and financial foundation for future generations in their family.

Aside from seeing their children break the cycle and serve as an example to younger siblings, many parents also have their own educational aspirations for their children. In a study of academic achievement of students from Latino immigrant families, Carpenter (2008), citing previous research, found that parents' high expectations had a strong and lasting influences on students' educational and career development. In addition, the same author claimed that parents' educational expectations had significant effects on students' expectations. As Ong et al. (2006) note, among Latino college students, family interdependence is associated with "a strong desire to do well educationally, to repay parents for sacrifices made in immigrating to the U.S." (p. 963).

Family members who have high aspirations of their Latino students usually equate a good education with a prosperous life. Hill and Torres (2010) state that, in seeking a better life in the U.S., Latino immigrants hold strong beliefs about the role of education for upward mobility. The authors suggest that many families make great sacrifices, including working multiple low-wage jobs, so that students can obtain an education and enjoy a better life. Furthermore, parents have high expectations of their students because of the opportunities they have been given. The previous authors claim that parents have sacrificed for their children in order for them to be educated, therefore they do not want the opportunity to be squandered.

Looking at the relationship between students and family members, one issue the literature addresses is the emotional and physical transition LIFG students make – leaving their home to become college students. The LIFG student who can smoothly transition from their home environment to their new role as a college student has a better chance of persisting in school (Gonzalez, 2013). Going from a non-college going home

environment to a college campus where academic expectations are high can be a daunting task for LIFG students. First, students are faced with the reality of leaving their homes behind, both physically and emotionally. Second, students often must balance the dual lives they lead – being a college-going student while still connecting with a family where no one has attended school. Third, students must redefine their identity as it relates to their home culture.

Miller (2007) claims that LIFG students often have to shed parts of their home culture, as they become college students. This change can create frictions between the student and family members. For instance, family members frequently taunt the student who returns home with new ideas such as: tastes in music, clothing, and hairstyle, all of which are outward signals that change is taking place (Miller, 2007). Furthermore, this creates a sense of disorientation in the LIFG student, due to the increased estrangement from the comfort zone of the family of orientation (Miller, 2007). Wang and Castaneda-Sound (2008) suggest that first-generation college students often experience conflicting loyalties and values regarding home, peers, and family, and that this can become a burden to LIFG students, depending on where their allegiances lie.

Families and Finances

For all students, finding a way to pay for college remains a top priority. For first-generation, income-qualified students, this priority is further magnified. Conley and Hamlin (2009), citing relevant research, discuss the impact that finances have on LIFG families. They state that "family income appears to influence students' likelihood of entering and completing college, despite academic ability or achievement" (Conley & Hamlin, 2009, p. 47). This suggests LIFGs must consider the financial burden that a

college education can become, no matter how rewarding a degree is. Quite often, LIFG students work long hours while balancing a full academic schedule to support themselves (Mamiseishvili, 2010). Giancolla, Munz, and Trares (2008) claim that, unlike some traditional students (those who may live on campus, who oftentimes rely on family for financial assistance, and have the opportunity to concentrate on academics) "these students [LIFG] are more likely to be commuters and/or working full- or part-time" (p. 226). Because of these financial factors, LIFG students are more likely to leave college at the end of the first year, less likely to persist through college years, and less likely to earn a degree in a timely manner (Mamiseishvili, 2010). As Mamiseishvili suggests, financial preoccupations oftentimes take priority over persisting in school and completing a college degree. Unable to afford a post-secondary education on their own, and without the financial support of family members to help them, LIFG students must continue to find alternate ways to pay for college.

Though money is a source of preoccupation for LIFG students, it also serves as a motivator for them - a motivation to complete their studies and thereby become financially secure in life. Miller (2007) notes that an education is a way of ensuring upward mobility, and "upward mobility, with all its attendant financial and social benefits, is a desirable outcome of education" (p. 31). Blackwell and Pinder (2014) also discuss the social benefits of being educated, stating that "a more educated family will positively affect the citizens of the community, as well as the nation's workforce" (p. 46).

On one hand, the literature addresses the gap between those students who can depend on family members financially versus those who cannot. Those who cannot must balance academics and financial concerns. On the other, the research explains the

importance of completing a college education in order to become financially stable in life. LIFG students more often than not cannot count on their families from a financial standpoint, but they must continue to persist in school (without that financial backing) in order to graduate, get a job, and succeed in life and become financially stable (Trevino & DeFreitas, 2014; Dennis et al., 2005).

The role families play on higher education students is almost as influential as the academic preparedness they possess. This influence may include, but is not be limited to, the social capital a family possesses, how they can help students financially, the knowledge that they may possess regarding post-secondary experiences, and the stability they provide in the home – should the student continue to live at home through their college years. Family experiences, however, are not the only issue with which first-generation, income-qualified students must contend.

LIFG Academic Background

Not only do LIFG students have significant needs as they enroll into college, these needs are often interrelated and affect one another (Wang, 2012). These needs may include proper academic preparation and understanding, aside from academics, what it takes to be prepared as an incoming college students. A student's academic knowledge, both prior to being accepted and during their academic career, can greatly affect his or her success in higher education.

Students' Academic Past

Twenty years ago, the literature on first-generation, income-qualified students and their preparedness for college was scarce. Ting (1998) suggested relatively little had been written about the academic and personal characteristics of college students from first-

generation and low-income families and how these characteristics may affect their success in college. Since then, there has been an increase in work published in terms of academic barriers and students who are classified as LIFG. Currently, the literature touches on the academic preparedness of incoming college students, and how their academic history affects their successes in higher education (Heisserer & Parette, 2002; Owens et al, 2010; Ting, 1998; Wiggins, 2011). More specifically, the literature shows much more than the correlation between high grades and academic success. It shows a gap created between students who do not have the academic aptitude for college – those enrolled in remedial classes their first year of school – and those who enroll with a solid academic foundation. Furthermore, Owens et al. (2010) assert that the inadequate preparation of students who lack certain academic foundations stems from "attendance at elementary and secondary schools that were low performing, adults' and peers' lower expectations of their academic abilities, peer influence that encourages a disinterest in academic achievement, and financial barriers that limit their access to proper resources" (p. 294). Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are placed in less-challenging classes and attend high schools with low graduation rates, and that vary in academic rigor and quality of instruction (Hughes et al., 2007). Giancola et al. (2008) add that lack of academic preparedness can hinder access to colleges and universities. In their study, the same authors cite other researchers who claim that LIFG students "tend to be less academically and psychologically prepared for college and tend to have lower SAT scores and grade point averages; lower math, reading, and critical thinking skills; and lower self-images" (p. 216). This, in turn, becomes a problem at the post-secondary level. They are not prepared for the academic rigors and demands of higher education.

According to Hill and Torres (2010) Latino students are more likely to be placed on a vocational track than on a college preparatory track, regardless of their academic background. The authors also state that Latino students are underrepresented in Advanced Placement classes – an academic problem that precedes enrollment in institutions of higher education (Hill & Torres, 2010). Many Latino students attend schools that are poorly equipped to prepare these students, oftentimes housed in some of the most disadvantaged school districts (Peske & Haycock, 2006). Many times, these students are housed in classrooms with inadequate instructional materials, taking classes from teachers with very little experience (Conchas, 2001). In these conditions, schools do not promote the link between academic success and upward mobility to higher education (Ogbu, 1983). For these reasons, Latino students are seen as better fits for vocational programs, rather than college. These academic disadvantages which first-generation, income-qualified students face (particularly those who are Latino) make it more difficult for them to succeed in higher education.

Additionally, Pascarella and Tenerzini, as cited by Wiggins (2011), suggest that lower college performance and retention rates of LIFGs are just as likely to result from experiences during college as experiences students have in middle and high school. According to Wiggins, these experiences include: navigating the higher education system, a sense of inferiority compared to peers, and other emotional challenges LIFG students face as students in post-secondary institutions. In short, this student population is hindered just as much by their academic past as they are by their current struggles at the post-secondary level.

Much of the research suggests that a majority of LIFGs enter college at an academic disadvantage, compared to their continued-generation peers (Terenzini et al., 1996, Giancola et al., 2008). Researchers have found that first-generation students do not have the academic fortitude to maintain continued success in higher education (Byrd & MacDonald, 2005, Forbus, Newold, & Mehta, 2011). This includes things such as "attending class, being prepared, using course materials, and working in partnership with classmates" (Forbus et al., 2011, p. 35). Researchers also note that first-generation students are less prepared for a life in higher education because they lack critical thinking skills for college and enroll in colleges and universities with very poor academic training (Dennis, Phinney & Chuateco, 2005, Forbus, Newbold, & Mehta, 2011).

In summary, LIFGs, primarily those from low socioeconomic backgrounds, often face numerous academic challenges once they enroll in institutions of higher education (Achinstein et al., 2015; Martinez, 2003; Tovar, 2015; Wallace, Abel, & Ropers-Huilman, 2000, Giancola et al., 2008). These challenges include, but are not limited to, gaps in learning, academic preparedness, and resources available to LIFG students. The literature addresses these academic issues students face in preparation for, and during, their experience in colleges and universities. The next section will outline some of the social barriers LIFGs face in higher education.

Barriers in Higher Education

LIFG students face several social barriers in higher education. Colleges and universities are aware of these barriers and continuously look for ways to address them with this student population. Thayer (2000) states that, though colleges and universities have educational goals (graduation rates) and institutional goals (bringing in funds,

increasing research); they are also interested in increasing access to LIFG students. Conley and Hamlin (2009), in their study of efficacy with LIFG students, examined a semester-long, first-year seminar course that taught students about social justice and service learning. From this course, the researchers interviewed and observed three participants for their study – looking at both academics and service learning. In their conclusions, the researchers noted, "higher education continually attempts to identify effective means for engaging and retaining traditionally marginalized populations, particularly first-generation college students of color from low-income backgrounds" (p. 47).

Conversely, there are researchers who believe that colleges are not doing enough for this student population. Gray (2013) suggests that, though institutions of higher learning are seeing a demand from LIFGs, they struggle to connect with this student population and may not focus too much on their retention rates. The same author stated, "Universities attend to recruiting students from local high schools, often cultivating a demand from first generation, low-income students, and students of color — but often without investing much effort into insuring the success or graduation of students they admit" (p. 1245). In both cases, the literature suggests institutions of higher learning must continue to find ways of reaching LIFG students and making sure they do not feel vulnerable or as outsiders.

The growth of LIFG numbers on campus has also put an onus on faculty and staff to be more receptive to this student population. From an LIFG student's viewpoint, having faculty and staff members being "hands on" with them may not seem like a regular occurrence. In a 1996 study by Terenzini et al. (2004) which was based on data

collected from 23 two-and four-year institutions participating in the National Study of

Student Learning (NSSL) it was found that LIFGs were less likely to notice that faculty

on campus were concerned about students.

Garriott et al. (2015) conducted a quantitative study with a purpose of extending

the literature on the use of normative model of well being in predicting the academic and

life satisfaction of college students. They used Lent's model, which proposes that "global

life satisfaction is predicted by individual personality characteristics, social-cognitive

variables, as well as goal pursuit and progress in specific life domains" (p. 254). Survey

data from 414 college students was collected for this study. The researchers observed that

LIFG students oftentimes experience cultural mismatches (e.g., struggle with college

curricula, institutional policies, and teaching practices) with the established norms of

college environments, thus struggling with institutional policies (Garriott et al., 2015).

For these reasons, supporting this student population, and personally meeting their needs,

is crucial for their overall success. The previous authors state that support, both on and

off-campus, has been "identified as critical to first-generation college students' success

and overall well-being" (p. 254). Campus administrators and faculty members who

choose to engage, and spend time with this underserved student population notice how

building a relationship with them benefits all parties involved. "An understanding of first-

generation students will allow for more focused recruiting, program development,

retention, and graduation efforts" (Inman & Mayes, 1996, p. 3).

This section outlined some of the social barriers LIFGs experience in college and

what campus officials are trying to do to address them. One way of directly addressing

these social barriers is building relationships with significant members of the college

community (Heisserer & Parette, 2002). It is important to consider the role of the entire institution of higher education – from students to administrators to student groups – as it relates to building positive relationships with LIFG students.

Building Relationships

Getting involved on campus can have a determining impact on the academic success of a LIFG student. Yeh (2010) argues that students who are academically and socially integrated within their college campuses are more likely to persist. Woosley and Shepler (2011) share the same sentiments as Yeh. They stated, "students' expectations of being involved in campus life were found to be more predictive of student integration than standardized test scores" (p. 12). Being involved, and socially integrated within the campus, are signs of positive relationships in college. These aforementioned relationships could be with another student, a staff member, or within a student organization.

Peer Relationships

Establishing positive relationships with peers plays a role in how students perform academically. According to Stanton-Salazar (2005) peer relationships represent "a vital segment of an adolescent social support system" (p. 380). He notes that friendships with peers "embody the potential to nurture healthy development and academic achievement in ways that adults would find hard to duplicate" (p. 380). In a different study, Stanton-Salazar and Spina (2000) presented a critical assessment of existing characterizations of resiliency and help-seeking behavior amongst minority students. The authors note that in successful developmental transitions "opportunities exist for the development of social relationships with various agents – relations geared to the tailored provision of key forms of social and institutional support" (p. 241). Though in his studies Stanton-Salazar

focuses on high school and the transitions to higher education, similar inferences could be made about retention at the college level.

Other researchers emphasize the importance of building relationships with peers and the benefits it can bring, particularly in moments of transitions. In her study, which explored the social and academic factors behind the female postsecondary advantage among Hispanic and Caucasian-American students, Riegle-Crumb (2010) discusses the importance of relationships amongst peers. She states that positive relationships between peers have the potential to "increase college matriculation in a myriad of ways, including providing psychological encouragement, emotional support, academic assistance, and relevant information and guidance" (p. 576). The author also suggests that a focus on relationships with peers – as potential sources of social capital – increases a student's chance of enrolling in college, beyond that student's own individual choices and actions. In addition to Riegle-Crumb, Edman and Brazil (2009) also consider relationships with peers as a benefit to students. In their study on academic success among community college students, the authors claim that social support among peers can be associated with a sense of campus belonging and overall academic success, including student persistence and grades.

Finally, in a study of perceived stress and social support in undergraduate nursing students, Reeve, Shumaker, Yearwood, Crowell, and Riley (2013) also suggested that peer relationships contribute to a student's overall health. The authors claim that taking advantage of peer support has been shown to be effective in managing the effects of stress and promoting individual well-being. In short, as Yeh (2010) previously noted, developing peer relationships can have a positive impact on first-generation, income-

qualified students. These peer relationships, can be vital to the success of young adults transitioning from one environment to another (Stanton-Salazar, 2005).

Staff Relationships

As one of the fastest growing student populations on college campuses (Tinto, 2012), LIFGs have gained the attention of college faculty and administrators. Garriott et al (2015) highlight, "First-generation college students are becoming more visible on campuses and researchers have demonstrated a vested interest in understanding this unique student group given distinct challenges they may face" (p. 253). Furthermore, Strayhorn (2010) states, "A larger proportion of Hispanics enroll in college than 20 years ago" (p. 311). Strayhorn (2010) points out that this trend will continue to increase. By identifying and understanding this growing population comes the opportunity to form relationships that can prove invaluable to these students. Wallace, Abel, and Ropers-Huilman (2000) observed students' interpretations of their involvement with some of the formal mentoring programs that serve first-generation, low-income students. Through open-ended interviews with 20 participants, the researchers examined the relationship between students and mentors in federally-funded TRiO programs. They found that "informal relations [between first-generation, income-qualified students and campus faculty and staff] develop students' scholarly potential by teaching them 'the rules of the game' and by providing vital information, experiences, and networking opportunities" (Wallace, Abel, & Ropers-Huilman, 2000, p. 93).

Lastly, research shows students who participate in some sort of collaborative work with faculty on campus are more likely to succeed. In his study, Ishiyama (2002) suggests students who participate in collaborative research early in their educational

careers perform better academically. The author claims students who participated in research with academic faculty benefited overall from their experiences – gaining hands-on research experience, building invaluable relationships with faculty members, and breaking some of the barriers between students and faculty. The strengths which low-income, first-generation students bring to an institution of higher learning in terms of tenacity, resiliency, hard work, and a willingness to participate on campus, combined with the efforts of dedicated faculty and staff, have shown to be a successful marriage with beneficial outcomes.

Student Organizations and Support Programs

Many first-generation students are seeing the merits of getting involved on campus. A growing number of LIFG students are participating in extracurricular activities on campuses, which, as researchers show, can turn into a positive experience for students. These students gain personally and academically from these experiences. In 2004, Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, and Terenzini published a study on how first-generation students experienced college. The authors sought to identify the benefits of joining student groups and organizations. They conducted a comprehensive analysis of the National Study of Student Learning data that followed individuals through the second and third years of college (Pascarella et al., 2004). While reviewing the data, the authors found, amongst other things, that extracurricular involvement had "stronger positive effects on critical thinking, degree plans, sense of control over (and responsibility for) their own academic success, and preference for higher-order cognitive tasks for first-generation than for other students" (p. 278). It seems that LIFGs in their study saw the value in participating in extracurricular activities.

As the research above notes, creating and nurturing critical relationships on campus can be vital to the success of first-generation, income-qualified students, many of which are Latino students. Support programs on campus assist in increasing the retention and graduation rates of LIFG students. They target this student population because they are "already at a disadvantage when starting college, beginning their journey with less academic preparation, less financial and informational resources from parents, and lack of understanding of how to successfully navigate through college life" (Mamiseishvili, 2000, p. 66). Furthermore, Bergerson (2009) proposes that there are certain components – academic preparation, mentoring, nurturing aspirations, and financial assistance – that are part of an effective college program. As the previous author notes, those who can address the aforementioned components "will have the greatest impact on bringing down the many barriers standing in the way of postsecondary education for students of color and low socioeconomic status" (Bergerson, 2009, p. 97). Additionally, Wallace, Ropers-Huilman, and Abel (2004) note that since LIFG students face barriers which inhibit their ability to enter and succeed in a program of postsecondary education, intrusive advising and other student support programs are instrumental in the success of students from backgrounds that have not historically been well served by higher education.

Summary

This chapter reviewed the literature for the study. It addressed the barriers to a college education, the theoretical lens for the study, the influence of family in the lives of low-income, first-generation Latino students, the academic issues faced by the target student population, and the impact of the relationships formed on campus. Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology and how the study was planned. It includes the

qualifications of the participants, the way data was collected, and how this data was

processed and analyzed.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify the perspectives of low-income, first-generation Latino male college students on how social capital affects their academic success. Specifically, this study looked at the relationships that LIFG Latino male students had with their peers, faculty, mentors, and family, and how these relationships related to their overall success. This chapter focuses on the research methodology, which includes the researcher's background, participants and settings, data collection, and the data analysis.

Purpose of the Study

Several studies have focused on the struggles LIFG students face in higher education (Hill & Torres, 2010; Martinez, 2003; Nuñez, 2009; Saunders & Serna, 2004). In addition, issues related to access to higher education and the pre-college experience for LIFG students are well documented (Seidman, 2012). Few studies (Gonzalez, 2015; Strayhorn, 2010; Smith 2007), however, address the impact of social capital on the academic success of this target population. Fewer still look at the effect of social capital on LIFG Latino male students.

LIFG students continuously face struggles as they pursue a college degree. Less than 10 percent of students who are eligible for a Pell Grant – government funding geared towards students with a low expected family contribution towards higher education studies – graduate from a post-secondary institution within six years (Tinto, 2012). By comparison, those who do not identify as either low income or first generation, graduate at over 40 percent in the same period (Tinto, 2012). These statistics are alarming, and are

part of an overall retention and graduation trend for students from diverse populations: students of color, LIFG students, and non-traditional students.

For LIFG Latino male students – whose retention and graduation rates are among the lowest in the nation (Cole & Espinoza, 2008; Martinez, 2003; Saunders & Serna, 2004) – issues of retention, graduation, and overall academic success are especially concerning. For these reasons, this study explored if relationships on campus led to academic success for the target population.

Research Questions

Literature on LIFG students concentrates on the problems this student population faces (Achinstein et al., 2015; Jehangir, 2010; Wallace, Ropers-Huilman, & Abel, 2004). It also addresses how colleges and universities perceive this growing student population (Nuñez, 2009; Petty, 2014). As Gray (2013) notes, universities often do not invest "much effort into insuring the success or graduation of [LIFG] students they admit" (p. 1245). Often, lack of cultural and social capital can hinder the success of LIFG Latino students. Looking at these problems holistically, one would wonder what the effects may be of building networks and positive relationships on campus – especially if these relationships influence student graduation. The research questions, which the study addressed, were:

What are low-income, first-generation Latino male college students' perspectives on how forms of social capital used on college campuses affect their academic success? Sub-questions include:

a. What are the resourceful relationships that LIFG Latino male students have with peers, faculty, mentors, and family?

b. How do the above relationships relate to their academic success?

Research Methodology

This study utilized a qualitative research method. The origin of qualitative research stems from sociology, the humanities, anthropology, and evaluation. Piantanida and Garman (2009) argue that qualitative research is often defined as a way to differentiate linguistic data, accumulated through studies conducted within naturally occurring contexts, from numeric data. Using a qualitative approach in this present study, the aim was to gain the perspectives of LIFG Latino male college students regarding social capital, and record their experiences of how social capital affected them academically.

Using a qualitative method was considered appropriate because of the aims of this study and its focus on students' views. For instance, Rooney (2008) conducted a study addressing factors influencing the college choice process for LIFG Latino and African-American students. He notes that a qualitative method is an appropriate design for such exploration. A qualitative study can reveal unique factors that influence and motivate the decision-making process of college students (Rooney, 2008).

The qualitative study reported here used a phenomenological design due to its emphasis on understanding the individual experiences of each participant. In his descriptions of different qualitative designs, Creswell (2014) notes that phenomenological research "culminates in the essence of the experiences for several individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon" (p. 14). For this study, the individuals were low-income, first-generation Latino students and the phenomenon was academic success affected by social capital. The role of the researcher, as Creswell et al. (2007) state, is to interpret the meaning of the lived experiences by the participants.

Social capital theory was used as the theoretical lens for this qualitative study. This theory is rooted in the idea that membership in a group, and the development of positive relationships, creates opportunities to acquire valuable information and resources from other group members (Callahan et al., 2015). The primary focus of this theoretical lens was on the networks that were established between LIFG Latino males and members of the campus community, together with the resources these relationships provided.

Researcher Background

The researcher has experience with LIFG students. At the time of this study, he worked at a federally-funded TRiO program at a university in a western state. Part of his responsibility was to serve as a counselor and mentor for LIFG students. He was also responsible for all of the data regarding the students in a TRiO program. Counseling, meetings with students, and data analysis – which were all part of the researcher's daily tasks – all gave him first-hand experience with LIFG Latino students. Although he had his own professional views on the phenomena of the study, he tried to distance himself by examining, and re-examining, the literature. Likewise, though his interest in this study was founded in his work with LIFG students, he made an effort not to allow his professional views to affect the study by staying close to what the participants said, while not projecting his own professional views and thoughts. Additionally, the researcher took two major precautions to ensure that his professional role, and work with LIFG students, did not influence the interviews and overall study. First, none of the participants had any direct relationship (neither on nor off campus) with the researcher. Second, prior to the first interview he clearly defined his role as a researcher to the participants, versus his professional responsibilities and duties. These steps were taking to reduce researcher bias

throughout the data collection processes. During the data analysis, the emphasis was on the students' words.

Setting and Recruitment of Participants

The university where this study was conducted was a tier one institution in a western state. It boasted several programs, which supported students who were classified as either (or both) first generation or low income. This university contained three federally-funded TRiO programs: Upward Bound, Student Support Services (SSS), and Ronald E. McNair. Nationally, TRiO programs are outreach and student services programs designed to identify and provide services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. They serve and assist LIFG students to progress through the academic pipeline from high school to post baccalaureate programs. While the Upward Bound programs helped LIFG high school students prepare for college, they did employ several LIFG college students to serve as tutors and support staff members. Both the SSS and McNair programs worked directly with LIFG undergraduate students.

Additionally, the university included numerous other programs that aimed to support LIFG students academically and socially. First was a multicultural center, which provided programs and services that aimed to support the academic and social success of all students on campus. Second, was a retention program for incoming freshmen, designed to help first-generation freshmen students succeed in obtaining a college degree. There was also a center for student engagement (through the associated students of the university), which aimed to engage, educate, and empower undergraduate students to take action in the best interest of the entire student body. Lastly, a high school retention program (housed in one of the departments on campus) trained first-generation college

students to serve as mentors in target public schools. Their goal was to empower low-income, first-generation students to graduate high school and achieve higher education. In addition to these support programs, a new student achievement building had been recently completed, which housed academic and non-academic support programs for students (including, but not limited to, a tutoring center, a math center, a counseling center, and a disabilities resource center).

Participants for the study were recruited with the assistance of the directors and staff members of four support programs on campus: the multicultural center, the center for student engagement, the TRiO programs, and the high school retention program with LIFG college students serving as mentors (HSR program thereafter). An email was sent to these staff members with a recruitment flyer attached, asking them to advertise for the study. The researcher later contacted the staff members, as a way to follow up to the previously sent email. Staff members identified then contacted willing students who agreed participate in the study. All students willing to participate in the study were identified by the program staff members as low income. This was done based on their access to online financial aid records and their previous work with the student in completing financial aid documentation. In order to participate in this study, a student had to be: a) Latino, b) male, c) first-generation college student, d) low-income, and e) either junior or senior. Once recruited, direct contact between the researcher and the participants was limited to scheduling, and conducting, one-on-one interviews and observations. All meetings with participants (including observations) were conducted on the campus where the study took place.

Profiles of Participants

Participants for this study included ten upper-class male Latino students (N=10). Juniors and seniors were selected for this study for two reasons. First, unlike many underclassmen, they were familiar with the campus and had already gained certain knowledge of the university. Second, it was assumed that these students would have had more opportunities to develop relationships with peers, faculty, and mentors throughout their years on campus. These relationships would have been established before the study took place. Participants in this study identified themselves as Latino students. All participants in this study grew up with Spanish spoken in the home, and were fluent in the language. Students who agreed to be part of this study were both first-generation and low-income students.

A brief profile of each of the ten participants is presented in this section. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were used. All participants were associated with one of three retention and support programs (support programs thereafter) on campus: the multicultural center, the HSR program, or one of the two college TRiO programs. In addition, at some point during their interviews, all participants shared (through their own volition) that they were both first-generation and low-income students. Lastly, none of the participants in the study had any connection to neither the researcher nor the program in which he worked.

Abel was a junior engineering major. He had been an active member of a TRiO program for over a year. He also was a participant of a pre-college support program while in high school. Although he was born in the U.S., he spent most of his childhood living with his mother in a Latin American country. Abel's father was not present in his life. He

lived on his own in an apartment off campus. He was the first in his family to attend college.

Charlie was a senior science major. He was born in a Latin American country, though he moved to the U.S. at a young age. He spent most of his childhood and young adult life living in the U.S. while traveling back to Latin America and other U.S. states to visit family members. Charlie was a member of the HSR program throughout his college career. He lived at home with his parents and siblings. He was the first in his family to attend college. His younger sibling was also a college student.

Draco was a junior education major. He was born and raised in the same city in which this study took place. He maintained regular contact with his family in Latin America, and traveled there once a year during his academic breaks. Draco had been a member of the HSR program throughout his college career. Draco lived at home with his parents. Draco was the only one in his family to attend college.

Johnny was a senior social science major. He had aspirations of being accepted into graduate school at the time of the study. He was a member of the HSR program throughout his time in college. Johnny was born in a Latin American country, though spent most of his childhood in the U.S. He attended public schools in the same city in which this study took place. His father was not present in his life. Johnny and his older brother were raised by their single mother. He was the first in his family to attend college.

Nefty was a senior business major. An immigrant from a Latin American country, he spent most of his youth living in the same city as where the study took place. He was a member of the HSR program throughout his time in college, though at the time of the

study, he considered himself not active. Nefty lived at home with his parents. He was the first in his family to attend college.

Raymond was a junior performing arts major. He was born in the U.S., but had roots in Latin America. He occasionally met with the staff in the multicultural center, but was not active with the program. He transferred from an out-of-state junior college to the university where the study took place. While in college, his family still lived in his home state, which was not the one where the study took place. He considered himself a non-traditional student because of his previous years at his junior college. His older sister was a college graduate, but both his parents had no experience in higher education. Raymond lived off campus in an apartment.

Rene was a senior education major. He was born in the U.S. but had close ties to his family in Latin America. He was a member of the HSR program throughout his time in college, though at the time of the study, he was not active. Years earlier, he took time off from college to focus on working and supporting his family. Like Raymond, Rene considered himself a non-traditional student. He defined traditional as someone who began his college career as an incoming freshman and graduated within four or five years. Non-traditional students, however, were transfer students, students who took time off from school, or adults enrolling in college as newcomers, according to Rene. He was extremely close to his mother and immediate family. He was the first in his family to attend college.

Ricky was a junior engineering major. He was an active member of the multicultural center on campus. He was born in the U.S., though had roots in Latin America. He was an in-state transfer to the university where the study took place. Ricky,

like Raymond and Rene, was also a non-traditional student. He had very little contact

with his parents, who lived out of state. He lived in an apartment off campus on his own.

He was the only one in his family to attend college.

Rory was a junior education major. He was a member of the HSR program

throughout his time in college. He was born in a Latin American country, though spent

most of his childhood in the U.S. He had an older brother who had some community

college experience, but his brother did not earn a degree or certificate. He lived at home

with his parents. Rory was the only one in his family to attend a four-year university.

Xavier was a senior science major. He was born in the U.S., but his mother was

an immigrant of a Latin American country. He moved around the country as a child. He

had lived in the city where the study took place for less than seven years. Xavier's father

was not present in his life. He was raised by a single mother. He was a member of the

HSR program throughout his time in college, though at the time of the study, he

considered himself not active. Xavier was the only one in his family to attend college.

Table 1

Demographic information of participants

Name	Major	Grade level	Active in retention program
Abel	Engineering	Junior	Yes
Charlie	Science	Senior	Yes
Draco	Education	Junior	Yes
Johnny	Social Science	Senior	Yes
Nefty	Business	Senior	No
Raymond	Performing Arts	Junior	No
Rene	Education	Senior	No
Ricky	Engineering	Junior	Yes
Rory	Education	Junior	Yes
Xavier	Science	Senior	No

Data Collection

Data were collected using three different sources. The first wave of data was gathered through individual, semi-structured one-on-one interviews with the participants. These interviews were conducted in a private meeting room inside an academic building on the campus where the study took place. All participants were asked the same eleven questions (see below). Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. The researcher recorded each interview using an electronic audio recorder. Interview recordings were later transcribed verbatim by the researcher.

Questions asked during the first interview:

- Tell me about your current college experience thus far.

- How do you define academic success? How do you think your family defines academic success?

- Do you see yourself as a successful student? Explain.

- On a given week, who are the people that you interact with while on campus?

- When you need help with your schoolwork, whom do you go to for help? What about when you need help with other issues?

- What have been your experiences when you ask people for help? (potential follow up: are they available/willing to help?)

- Describe a memorable moment when someone provided the help that you needed.

- Has there been a time when you needed help and nobody was available? If so, what did you do?

- People say that sometimes "whom you know" is more important than "what you know." What do you think about this based on your experiences on campus?

- Imagine that there is a new Latino male student who comes to campus next semester. What advice would you give him?

- If you were going to give recommendations to campus officials about ways to support Latino students, what would those be?

The last question was an open-ended question, inviting the participants to share anything else that they would like about their connections on campus.

The second source of data consisted of observations, which took place at meetings that the participants had with their on-campus mentors or advisors. The researcher gained permission from both participants and their mentors to observe their sessions. During the meetings, the researcher sat in a nearby seat, taking field notes of the exchanges between both individuals. He examined the interactions between each participant and their respective mentors during these observations - this included taking notes of the topics discussed, writing certain statements that were made by the participant, and describing the body language of both during the meeting.

The final source of data was a second interview, which included follow-up questions and a verbal prompt. The follow up questions were asked first because they addressed some of the points discussed in the first interview. The researcher provided participants with a verbal prompt where they were asked to answer questions based on a fictional student scenario. The verbal prompt was based on previous research. This research showed that LIFG students who attend college often feel lost, confused, and

overwhelmed (Mamiseishvili, 2010). Those who establish resourceful relationships on campus, however, are more likely to succeed. Furthermore, LIFG students who have established relationships and share resources with others not only benefit themselves, they benefit others. As Callahan et al. (2015) explained, by sharing knowledge, group members exchange social capital with one another. The purpose of the verbal prompt was for the participants to address the student and his feelings of loss, confusion, and being overwhelmed. Also, as upper classmen, the researcher wanted to identify how participants would apply social capital in helping the student in the prompt. The verbal prompt used during the final interview was:

Theo recently completed his first semester at the university. He is the first in his family to attend college and he relies on financial aid and work to pay for school. Theo struggled to earn a 2.85 GPA last semester. Theo's parents are supportive, however they can't offer much support, since they work long hours. This semester, he is beginning to miss classes and has already missed two required online assignments.

You bump into Theo near the campus coffee shop. Theo then confesses: "I'm feeling totally overwhelmed by everything. My job is taking more time than I expected. I'm supposed to work 20 hours a week, but lately they want more hours from me, and now it's more like 30 hours a week. I really need the money to pay for school. I'm falling behind in some of my classes, and I have a math exam next week – and I just don't feel prepared. I really don't have anyone to talk to and I don't know where to turn. Overall, I don't feel like I have any support and don't know that many people can

understand what I'm going through. I just don't know where to start, or what to do next. Sometimes, I feel like dropping out of school."

What would you tell Theo? How can relationships affect Theo's current situation? What sort of relationships have "you" formed on campus that may benefit Theo? Describe how you would handle Theo's situation and steps he could take – focusing specifically on building relationships and asking for help.

The second interview session was conducted after the observations and followed the same format as the first interview. Participants met with the researcher in a private meeting room, and the session was audio recorded. In addition to the verbal prompt, participants were also asked follow-up questions based on what was observed during the meeting with advisors and some of the responses given during the first interview. Each participant was asked the same three follow-up questions. Two additional questions were developed specifically for each participant. Additionally, this last session gave the participants an opportunity to reflect on their previous answers and, possibly, add something that was not shared during the first interview.

Questions asked during the second interview:

- Do you think that relationships you have with your peers on campus lead to or assists you with academic success? If so, how so?

- Do you think that relationships you have with your family leads to or assists you with academic success? If so, how so?

- What is the most important relationship you have on campus? How do you think it affects your success?

As noted earlier, the researcher asked follow-up individual questions of the participants. These personalized questions were created based on the observations and the first interview responses. Sample questions included:

- During my observation, you and your mentor discussed overcoming some adversities this semester, and how you have been handling them. She seemed supportive of you. What does it mean to have someone like that support you in your life and academic career?

- During my observation, you and your mentor discussed opportunities for graduate school. How did she help you through this process? What does it mean to have mentors who have been through what you've been through?

During the first interview, participants shared their views on social capital, academic success, and their personal experiences on campus. During the observations, the researcher examined their interactions with mentors, and if these relationships seem to benefit the participants in any way. The prompt was incorporated into the study to gain a different perspective on a distant scenario. Their opinions revealed ways in which they would assist a fellow LIFG Latino male student. In order to cross-validate information and validate corroboration among sources (Oliver-Hoyo & Allen, 2006), all three sources of data were used to allow for triangulation in the study.

The data collection process occurred over a period of three months. Participants were recruited and contacted in late fall. The first set of interviews occurred at the end of the fall semester. At the beginning of the spring semester, the researcher conducted the observations. The final meeting, which included follow-up questions and the verbal

prompt, were scheduled in February, after observations took place. The data analysis took place following the observations, in mid spring.

Data Analysis

Once the interviews and observations were completed and data were collected, the researcher followed Creswell's (2014) six step process for data analysis. His steps are: 1) organizing and preparing the data; 2) reading through the data; 3) coding the data; 4) generating themes based on the coding; 5) identifying how the themes will be represented; and 6) pinpointing the lessons learned from the data. The data was analyzed inductively. According to Hastings, Griesen, Hoover, Creswell, and Dlugosh (2015) inductive analysis involves "examining specific data, finding patterns and interrelationships among those data points, then compiling those patterns and interrelationships into a meaningful whole" (p. 659). In trying to create a meaningful whole, Creswell's method of data analysis was the most appropriate for this study based on the data collected. According to Creswell, "phenomenological research uses the analysis of significant statements, the generation of meaning units, and the development of what Moustakas (1994) called an essence description" (Creswell, 2014, p. 196). Creswell goes on to state that, much like peeling an onion, the data must be taken apart and, once analyzed, put back together (2014). For these reasons, the six step process was used for this study.

The first two steps in the process involved preparing and organizing the data, followed by carefully studying the information gathered. Since the researcher recorded both the first and last sessions with the participants, he was then tasked with transcribing each occurrence. Additionally, field notes were written at the conclusion of the

interviews, as information was still fresh in the researcher's mind. While listening

through the audio, he also checked to make sure nothing was missed through the

transcribing process - this could have been an inflection in the participants' voices, a

pause, silence, or interruption. Field notes of each interview were carefully reviewed and

later compared to the transcriptions from the interview sessions. Once the transcribing

was complete, the transcripts were combined with the field notes taken from the

observations. Commonalities were identified between the information gathered during the

one-on-one meetings and the behaviors of the participants during the observation process.

The next steps of the data analysis process address coding and themes. Strauss

and Corbin (1990) state that, during the coding phase, researchers often summarize,

rather than conceptualize, data. As Creswell (2014) notes, "coding is the process of

organizing the data by bracketing chunks… and writing words representing a category"

(p. 197). Moreover, as explained by Strauss & Corbin (1990), the initial steps of coding

involve properly labeling the phenomena, then discovering categories, and finally

correctly naming these categories.

Transcripts and other documents were coded sentence by sentence, where an

initial phrase was written on the margin, then the researcher went back and conducted a

more detailed analysis on this phrase (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In this detailed analysis,

data were reviewed and compared to codes on the margins. Second, a set of spreadsheets

were created where each phrase was documented for each participant (columns for

participants, rows for phrases). One spreadsheet was created for the first interview and

observation, while another was created for the follow-up questions and the verbal prompt.

Using these spreadsheets, common phrases (e.g., having a mentor on campus, using

campus resources) were combined and common threads were identified. These common threads were later revisited and general themes (Creswell, 2014) were identified for the study.

The last two steps in the data analysis process involved an effort to take the data gathered (separated by themes) and find a way to represent them in the qualitative narrative (Creswell, 2014). In step five, themes were created to appropriately represent the data in the study. Themes were developed based on the responses provided by the participants, which were based on their personal experiences (for instance, nine of the ten participants discussed the important role that their family members played in their lives). In their study on generativity and the impact of mentoring, Hastings et al. (2015) outlined how they approached this penultimate step. "Statements were clustered into common themes and then translated into textural descriptions (what the participants experienced) and structural descriptions (contextual influences on how the participants experienced the phenomenon)" (Hastings et al., 2015, p. 659). This was accomplished by creating a detailed outline of specific themes, which are explained in the next chapter.

In the sixth, and final step, the researcher was responsible for taking these data and asking the question "What were the lessons learned?" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell, 2014). These lessons learned turned into the findings of this study, framed by the themes that were identified.

Limitations

There are two limitations to this study. First, not all participants were active members in a support program at the time of the study. Participants who were not active were still eligible (and able) to meet with advisors and mentors from these programs. Due

to their upper-classman status, however, some voluntarily made themselves inactive - choosing instead to meet with mentors on a need basis. The data reflected the views of six participants who had periodic contact with a mentor or support program, and four who did not. For this reason, the study lacks uniformity from students who were all active in a support program. Second, the responses given in the interviews did not reflect the opinions of all Latino male students who identify as low-income, first-generation students on campus. The opinions of ten students are not necessarily representative of the opinions of all other Latino male college students. Additionally, not all LIFG Latino male students on the campus where this study took place participated in some sort of support program.

Significance of Study

Research has shown a rise in the enrollment of Latino students in the last twenty years (V. Gonzalez, 2013). Unfortunately, graduation rates do not mirror these enrollment rates (Cole & Espinoza, 2008; Hill & Torres, 2010). While Latino students, many of which are LIFG, are enrolling in colleges and universities at a higher rate than before, many are not graduating nor persisting in school. Previous research addressed some of the obstacles preventing this student population from persisting and graduating. This study aimed to provide stakeholders (such as university faculty, staff, and administrators) with a deeper understanding of how building relationships on campus may affect academic success amongst the target population. With this information, these stakeholders could allocate appropriate resources that positively affect these LIFG Latino male students.

Summary

This chapter outlined the methodology for the study. It explained both the purpose and the significance of the study. It also addressed the setting for the study, and how the participants of the study were selected. Lastly, it described how the data was collected and analyzed. Chapter 4 explains the findings of the study and the data collected. It includes personal accounts of the participants and how they viewed relationships on campus, and if these relationships affected their academic success.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify the perspectives of low-income, first-generation (LIFG) Latino male college students on how social capital affects their academic success. Specifically, this study looked at the relationships that LIFG Latino male students may have with peers, faculty, mentors, and family, and how these relationships related to their overall success.

In order to better understand the effects of social capital on LIFG Latino male students, it is important to explore the viewpoints of this student population. As Gibbons and Woodside (2014) note, first-generation college students often struggle with college attendance and retention, usually come from lower income households, and are more likely to represent an ethnic minority than their peers. Though the participants in this study came from lower income households and identified as ethnic minorities, they persisted through college and were on track to graduate (at the time of this study). They credited personal relationships they established, at home and on campus, as the reason for their academic success.

This chapter presents the findings of the study. Students identified relationships as essential to their academic success. Participants noted the encouragement and personal support they received from family members as an integral reason why they persisted in college. Furthermore, they acknowledged their bond with a mentor on campus as a positive influence in their academic careers, and described strong relationships with their peers on campus, crediting these peers as a source of positive inspiration and support.

Additionally, they indicated the importance of establishing a connection with academic faculty and using resources on campus.

Themes

Within the four types of relationships identified, participants consistently acknowledged the importance of these individuals – including their interactions and what these individuals provided them in the form of capital or resources. Three themes were identified to represent the participants' responses about these relationships: 1) Early socialization experiences and their impact on students' college lives; 2) Learning how to Navigate college; 3) On-campus relationships. The first theme includes discussions about the influence of family - including "family expectations" and "measurable family support," as well as "growing up as a LIFG student." In the second theme, social and cultural capital help frame the discussion of navigating a college campus. Lastly, the third theme provides participants' explanations about mentors, including discussions of "comfort level with on-campus mentors" and "resources mentors provide;" about peers, such as "peer motivation and support systems" and "tangible support from peers;" as well as about faculty and staff, such as "importance of reaching out to faculty" and "navigating through campus resources."

Early Socialization Experiences and Their Impact on Students' College Lives

The first theme addresses the influence family members had on individual participants, as well as lessons learned early in life. This theme focuses mostly on off-campus experiences and relationships, and what impact, if any, they had on the on-campus experiences of the participants.

Influence of Family on Participants

Because family members had little to no college experiences, participants shared that their relationships with family, particularly regarding issues they faced as college students, were very different than relationships they had on campus. The following sections look at how participants viewed their connections to family members and the quantifiable resources provided by their parents.

Family expectations. Although none of the participants' family members had any familiarity with higher education, most of them understood the importance of earning a college degree. Family members equated a college education with starting a career, earning money, and securing a stable future - one which they themselves could not enjoy due to their lack of education. For these reasons, according to the participants, most of the parents saw the overall value of a college education. Consequently, there was motivation from parents for their students to do well academically. This success was defined differently by some of the parents. Some parents saw grades as the most important factor, so they expected their students to earn good grades. Some saw academic progress as the most important factor, so they encouraged their students to progress as students and keep learning. Lastly, some parents felt that earning a good living after college was the most important factor, so they pushed their students to graduate and start their professional lives.

Charlie's family members never earned a college degree. Though he noted that they were proud of him for finishing school, they were unfamiliar with his day-to-day progress and what he was learning in classes. For Charlie's family, the only way to define success was through his grades. Their expectation of him was to do well academically. In

his first interview, when asked about how his parents would define academic success, he shared the following:

> I think my family would define it [academic success] as… just the grades…
> Since they've never gone to college or anything, they don't really see our
> [academic] improvements. They just base it off: "ok, what's your grade in
> this class?" If it's a good grade, it's a success, if it's not, then it's not. I don't
> really see it that way. I see it more as, if you've improved from the past,
> that's academic success. They're just like, if you got an "A" you succeeded,
> if you didn't then you didn't succeed.

Charlie's parents were unfamiliar with the progress he made as a student, which was not reflected in his academic transcript. Later in the interview, Charlie continued to discuss the gap between him and his parents. Though he understood their motivation for him to excel in the classroom, he was more proud of the overall academic growth he had made since his freshman year.

Xavier's mother initially felt the same way as Charlie's parents. Though Xavier lived on his own, his mother was still a big influence in his life. With his father not present in his life, Xavier was raised by his mother and was motivated by her hard work as a single mother and provider. Her goals were for him to be successful academically. According to Xavier, his mother's views on academic success, at first, related directly to grades. "My first two years she definitely defined it [academic success] by letter grades. That was success to her, in her eyes was 'did you get an A? Did you get a B? Why'd you get a B--you coulda got an A', you know that kind of stuff." To her, Xavier needed to do well in the classroom to be successful. Once his mother realized how hard he had been

working, and that his class load was getting harder, she began to realize that grades were not the only way to gauge success.

> She's understanding that these classes that I'm taking as I'm a senior are harder, so you know getting that A isn't as easy… She doesn't necessarily define it that much anymore as a letter grade… [Now she views success as] making sure you learned, you took all those skills that they teach you in that class and you've learned how to apply them in the future.

This shift in her mindset was a credit to her understanding of what Xavier was going through in college and how he grew as a student. Her expectations of him changed from earning good grades to learning something and applying it to lessons in life.

Like Xavier's mother, some of the other participants' parents viewed academic success as simply making progress. Due to their lack of formal education, these family members wanted the participants to do better than they had done, so they encouraged them to complete their degree and be successful Latino men. Abel, Nefty, and Johnny shared similar experiences with their family members.

When asked about motivation, family, and academic success, Abel shared in the second interview that his mother supported him in his academic endeavors, though expected him to not waste the opportunity he was given to earn his degree.

> I have my mom who she also didn't go to college, but she knows the benefit of education and she has always pushed me to do great and although she lives in a different country she always pushes me to do good in school. She tells me, "It's your job, and I want you to do the best you can because I

sacrificed part of my life for you to be successful. You need to pay me back"

in that respect.

Abel understood the expectations his mother had for him and knew how supportive she was of him. During his meeting with his mentor, it was observed that Abel shared a close bond with his mother. He communicated with her constantly over the phone. Abel mentioned that she served as a source of motivation to him and she was very proud of his accomplishment.

Nefty's parents, like Abel's mother, were also not aware of his overall academic progress. They understood he was a college student. They also understood he was working hard in school. They did not understand much else. Their primary expectation was for him to graduate. He stated, "To my family, academic success is graduating... To them, it means, 'Oh, okay, you've made,' it's like milestones." They saw his success in college as reaching another goal. "You've graduated from high school, you're successful in your academics in school, you'll be graduating from college, oh great!" Unfortunately, because of their lack of knowledge of higher education, they were not aware of the obstacles Nefty had to overcome. "They're a bit confused with my success in my academics because of how long it's been taking me, they just assume that I come to school and that it's just like high school over again and that's not the case." Nefty admitted that he was completing his fifth year in college, so while his parents continued to encourage him, they were unsure what took him so long to finish. Like Abel's mother, Nefty's parents were unfamiliar with college life and academic expectations, yet they knew the value of earning a college degree.

Johnny's mother's expectations were lower than those of Abel's and Nefty's parents. Because of her lack of education (he explained that she had a sixth grade education) her expectations of him were to finish high school. Anything else was an additional benefit for him. "She defines [academic success] as just graduating high school. That's her expectation she had for my [older] brother and I. Graduate high school and then after high school we can do whatever we want. We decide, we're adults, she'll support us for whatever." What stood out in his response was how she viewed his college career. "She says she tried to help me in college, but unfortunately due to financial and personal reasons, she was never able to. Just more like moral support." Johnny knew that his mother could not pay for college, she could not tutor him, and because of her education, she could only offer moral support. And yet, Johnny saw her as an inspiration and source of motivation, knowing that he needed to achieve more than she had in his life. Johnny's older brother was more direct with how he felt about his achievements. According to Johnny, his brother saw his accomplishments and was pleased with what he had done. "My older brother, he tells me you know 'I'm proud of you for going to college, I'm proud of you for sticking to it, you definitely did something I couldn't do.'" Though Johnny had exceeded his mother's expectations, he worked hard to continue his education and make her proud.

Unlike some of the other relationships between participants and family members, Rene's relationship with his family was unique. His motivation did not come from earning good grades or even progressing in college. His motivation stemmed from the fact that, once he graduated, he would be able to help his family financially. Rene shared in the first interview that his mother believed academic success meant earning a good

living after college. "My mom she's not from this country. And so, I think with her, academic success is first off having a job that pays well… [She] has that mindset that maybe with this education, you can help me out. You can help me get out of my financial troubles, and I think that's where a lot of my family sees the academic success." Rene, a non-traditional student who was married and had recently purchased his own home, was expected to be able to provide for his extended family. He was motivated to complete his degree so he could help those close to him. "It was good [nearing the end of his degree and] to be able to share with them, you know, my success and include them into my plans." Rene was proud of assisting his family members and saw his academic success as a triumph for the entire family.

Measurable family support. Participants in the study recognized that their family members had different expectations of them. Family members also provided them with support - both emotional and financial. Some of the participants, for instance, counted on their parents to keep them grounded or to be a sounding board, when necessary. Others depended on their financial contributions - living in their parents' homes, relying on them to provide food and shelter while they completed their college education.

Though Abel excelled in the classroom, he did have personal moments where he struggled and needed support. He often found this support by reaching out to his family, primarily his mother. During his first interview, when discussing whom he spoke to when he needed non-academic help, he shared that his mother was always supportive. He said, "there were tough times where, like when I was [studying abroad], it was a really tough time and I needed to find, you know, ways to keep myself in check, so I would call my

family." Abel echoed these same sentiments when he met with his mentor. He stated that he contacted his mother periodically and these conversations "grounded him." He claimed that when he was stressed and felt overwhelmed, his mother would remind him of how much he had already overcome in life, and how successful he already was. This made him realize that, one day, his efforts would pay off.

Raymond also had special connections with his family. Like Abel, his family lived far away, so it was important for him to reach out to them as much as possible to maintain a connection with them.

> I check in with my mom or dad, whoever picks up the phone on any given day and just kind of like run them through my day plan or what's happened that day, good or bad… It's kind of showing them that I am growing up, essentially… I think checking in with them has been very good in finding out what's going on at home and how are they doing, and I think keeping that solid [foundation] has also been a really positive impact [for me].

According to Raymond, checking-in with his family periodically provided him with the sort of emotional support he may not had received from some of his peers. He wanted to show his family that he was overcoming some of the obstacles he faced in college.

Much like Abel and Raymond, Nefty found that his family members provided emotional support when he needed it. Unlike his classmates and friends on campus, Nefty noted that it was nice to speak to someone outside his circle who could provide guidance and support.

> [My] family is usually always there… knowing they're supporting you and that you have someone who will catch you if you fall… it's good to have a

good support system, and also talk to [parents]… With my family, I usually talk to them about non-academic stuff, so it's usually my personal life, personal situations, who I'm dating, you know stuff like that. It's good to also decompress and have a different opinion from those who are not in the same bubble.

In his meeting with his mentor, Nefty also discussed his close relationship with his family, especially his parents. His mother played a large role in his personal life. While Abel and Raymond's parents did not live in the same state as their respective sons, Nefty's parents lived nearby. He appreciated being geographically close to his family and the emotional support they provided.

Rory's family provided more than just emotional support. They also provided a place for him to live while he attended school. While Rory was going to college, he did not have to worry about paying rent and supporting himself. "They [his family] only want me to focus on school even though I'm working, but even if I were to stop working I know I'd still have support from them financially and mentally too… if I'm ever feeling down and wanted to talk to someone, they're always going to be there. So it's just that support system that really helps out." Having this support system, both emotionally and financially, allowed Rory to focus on his studies - which was a tremendous resource for him as a college student.

Charlie and Draco also lived at home while attending college. Both relied on their respective families to support them financially (e.g., housing, food, clothing, bills) during school. When addressing his family with his mentor, Charlie spoke about living at home and depending on their support while he earned his degree. Also, when he was

considering graduate programs, he mentioned to his mentor that staying local was an important factor for him, as he wanted to continue to live at home and rely on the support system he received from his family.

Draco appreciated the resources that his family provided him, stating that living at home allowed him to focus on school, rather than on supporting himself. "I don't have to work because I live with my parents, so I don't have to worry about paying bills, you know rent, things like that. I help around the house, but it's not like if I don't do it I'm gonna be living in the streets or something like that. So in that regard they help me because… I can focus more on school, instead of on living, you know?" This statement was made during Draco's second interview, while addressing the relationship he had with his family. Overall, he understood he was lucky to rely on his family for financial support. According to him, living at home positively affected his overall academic success, as he was able to concentrate on school.

Growing up as a LIFG student. Though many participants praised the role of mentors and programs on campus, and how these resources were paramount to their success, some participants noted that some of the lessons they learned through family members also influenced them as college students. More importantly, these lessons shaped who they were as LIFG Latino male students, and helped instill certain values (e.g., self-sufficiency, trust).

In both his interviews, Ricky discussed with the researcher how he viewed help-seeking on campus. He claimed that, because of his background and the way he was raised, he did not like asking for help. Moreover, he noted that he was raised to be apprehensive of people in positions of power.

I was taught to be afraid of authority figures…I don't have any relationships with faculty outside of [mentors helping with his student group]. I don't have that sort of background of going to teachers or professors for help, you know? So I don't feel comfortable with it. I don't feel comfortable going to a professor's office hours for anything. If you didn't grow up in an environment that taught you that, to network and to reach out to people to become mentors and things like that, you don't know how to do that. I don't know how to reach out to one of my engineering professors and tell them, you know, "Hey I need help or mentorship," like, I don't know how to do that.

Ricky's feelings about dealing with academic faculty pervaded the entire first interview session. It was also present during his meeting with his advisor. Ricky asked few questions and never discussed any personal matters with his advisor. His answers were brief and his advisor kept the conversation short, focusing specifically on future coursework.

Ricky was aware that he must change who he was in order to help himself and build relationships that could benefit him academically. He later stated, "I'm realizing now that because of the way I feel about faculty and the reasons that I'm not building those relationships or networking, so to speak, I am at a disadvantage, even though I succeed academically." For Ricky, this disadvantage was his inability to secure an internship off campus. He realized that his classmates were gaining valuable experience at local engineering firms based on the recommendations from faculty on campus. Ricky

knew no matter how successful he was in the classroom, he would need the help of others to truly succeed as a college student.

Like Ricky, Raymond was never taught to ask for help from others. He spoke about the impact his family had on him concerning asking for help on campus. In his first interview, when discussing the topic of asking for academic help, Raymond shared that his parents had a lot to do with the student he became. "I never learned how to ask for help… I don't know if it's a weakness, but I think the self-sufficiency that my parents kind of taught [me], they hated asking for help, whether it was financial or helping them [perform some sort of task that would require assistance from others]." This self-sufficiency directly affected Raymond's academics, as he initially felt he could not turn to anyone for assistance, either in class or on campus.

During his second interview, Raymond was asked about his self-sufficiency. Similar to Ricky, he was able to see the importance of asking for help. In addition, he shared that he had made changes to find the right balance between figuring things out on his own and seeking help. He shared,

> [Initially my self-sufficiency] made me want to just kind of go off and, you
> know, 'I've gotta do this, I've gotta really do this on my own, and if I can't
> do this on my own then I'm no good.'… I think there's a balance in asking
> for help but also being self-sufficient… I have found that in changing [my
> ways], I am much more [comfortable with this balance]."

Raymond's newfound ability to ask for help was a welcome and positive change in his academic life. He claimed that his study habits had changed and his grades were improving.

Xavier grew up without a male figure in the home. In his first interview, addressing a question regarding whom he asks for help, he spoke about the impact of not having a male role model at home and how he learned to figure things out on his own. He said,

> My family mostly consisted of my mom and my little sister, and being a male, there are different aspects of being a man, being the guy… and just learning what it takes to be a "guy." I kinda had to learn that on my own… in that sense, I never had somebody to teach me those kinds of things, you know like change the oil, fix little things in the house… To this day I'm still just trying to learn [to grow as a student and as a man] by myself. I want to be a father someday, and I want to show my kid these things. I just want to make sure I'm capable of doing [things in life without asking for help].

The idea of not asking for help, and figuring things out on his own, was something that came up throughout Xavier's interviews. Outside of his professors, he did not really ask for any sort of academic help from his peers. As far as personal issues, Xavier kept things to himself and tried to sort those issues internally.

Help seeking was not the only trait participants said was influenced by the way they were raised. Impostor syndrome was the other. According to Dancy and Brown (2011) impostor syndrome is "the belief that one does not deserve his or her success or professional position and that somehow others have been deceived into thinking otherwise" (p. 615). Because the participants were low-income, first-generation Latino male college students, some struggled with the idea of being successful college students and being assured that they truly belonged on a college campus. As previous literature

showed, LIFG students often have to overcome cultural, social, and academic barriers to be accepted into college (Bragg, Kim, & Garnett, 2006; Mamiseishvili, 2010). Once they became university students, some of the participants were not sure if they deserved to be there and earn a college degree.

Nefty was a student who was lost early in his academic career. Because of his business major, and the lack of Latino males in his courses, Nefty often wondered what he was doing in the classroom. He explained in his first interview that, initially, he did not feel as if he was a part of the university. This even affected the way he approached using services on campus and communicating with his professors.

> I didn't see [resources available to me on campus] I guess because I didn't see myself as a student, I think they were available for me, I felt like they were available for everyone else but not for myself. The moment that I realized that I'm a student just like everyone else, and I deserve to be here just like everyone else, I started to be like "Oh wait, my professor did say that her door is always open." … before that would just go in one ear, out the other… I [later] realized I'm not here to prove to anyone that I belong here, because I do belong here.

Though he initially had these social struggles in school, Nefty realized that he did not have to succumb to the impostor syndrome. It took Nefty over two years to realize he did belong on campus and that he was just like all other students, worthy of the resources on campus, worthy of earning good grades, and worthy of being considered a college student.

Ricky attributed his impostor syndrome to early life experiences. In his first interview, he constantly discussed his upbringing and past as the reason for being the sort of college student he was (early in his academic career). It was not until he established relationships with his peers that he began to see changes in his personality.

It [his reclusiveness] was affecting me. It was affecting the way I went to school, my grades suffered for it…I just personally was suffering from, I think they call "impostor syndrome" - not feeling like I was supposed to be here at all. So, finally one day, like someone I knew came up to me and they noticed that, even though I seem like someone who was open, they could see that I was guarded all the time.

Ricky was involved with gangs as a teen. He said that he would often hang out with the wrong crowd and make questionable decisions as a youth. This lead to some of his trust issues and reclusiveness. When he arrived on campus (from a junior college) he carried these experiences with him and, as stated earlier, they affected his relationship with staff on campus.

Though not asking for help and the impostor syndrome may possibly be seen as negative qualities, the aforementioned participants saw them as an opportunity to change them into positive learning experience. Each participant vowed to change his own narrative and overcome some of their inherent barriers to obtaining a college degree (Miller, 2007).

The previous theme discussed family member's expectations of grades, the importance of progressing as college students, how a college education equals success, and measurable family support provided to participants. It also addressed certain life

lessons and how they impacted participants' college lives. In the following theme, the effects of cultural and social capital on certain campus experiences, and how these effects directly influenced participants, are explored.

Learning How to Navigate College

As Bourdieu (1986) noted, cultural capital is defined as a set of resources, knowledge, assets, or values that are considered important in a particular social context. Earlier in the study, the researcher identified different forms of cultural capital on campus (figure 1). These included: classroom behavior, campus resources exploration, and academic planning. Previous research also suggested that the embodied state of cultural capital includes knowledge that has been acquired or inherited over a period of time (Bourdieu, 1986). As upper classmen, some participants acquired certain knowledge of classroom behavior, campus resources, and overall planning, due to their time spent on campus.

Participants shared that they knew exactly what needed to be done in college to get the results that they needed (e.g., focus on this assignment more than that one). Others knew how to "play the game" (as Draco put it) to their advantage. In the research, Wallace et al. (2000) also referenced college as a game – one which consists of unwritten rules students must learn in order to succeed academically. Of the participants in this study, some saw their experiences at the university as a game of give and take - giving just enough so they could take what they needed. This theme explores these different forms of social and cultural capital, and how some participants viewed their overall college experiences.

During his first interview, while answering a question about his academic success, Draco discussed his academic priorities and what was more important to him. He shared a story of how he viewed some of the classes in which he was enrolled.

I'm taking a theater class right now that has nothing to do with my major or any interest that I have, so you know I'm doing good on the tests and the homework and everything. I will skip a few classes in the [early] morning, or I won't put in the same effort on some of the assignments, versus, you know, some classes [that affect my major]… I'm [an education major] with an emphasis in [foreign languages]. So, for example, my [foreign language] classes, I love that kind of stuff. So, you know, I try harder in those classes, and as a result I get better grades. I'm more successful in those classes. That's what pushes me to do better in those classes. I care about them. I enjoy being there.

When asked about his other classes, those that did not directly apply to his major, Draco stated the bulk of his studying and focus were directed towards the classes within his field of study.

Xavier also was selective of his overall effort in class. He explained that some things (academically) were out of his control and he just had to "play" along. "There were some classes that you know every student has to take which have nothing to do with your major." Like Draco, Xavier stated he did just enough to pass those courses. While he may not have been thrilled about spending time in those classrooms, he knew it was part of the process - the sooner he completed those courses, the sooner he could focus exclusively on his field of study.

Abel was clear about his academic priorities and what was important to him. Abel's approach was to view college as an investment, "college is expensive so you've gotta make the investment pay you back." He made it his priority to get as much out of the opportunities provided to him on campus. He took advantage of research opportunities, internships available, and studying abroad. If college was a game, Abel wanted to play it to his advantage.

Johnny and Rory saw their experiences on campus as a game of give and take. For Johnny, he was motivated by not losing his financial aid. In his first interview, he shared that his academic success was driven by doing whatever it took not to lose his funding. "I don't have the option to fail. I don't have the option to be a student who can just get D's or C's. I aim for A's and B's. A's and B's, that's the GPA I want, that's the grades I want." He said he did what needed to be done so that he could keep his aid. As long as he kept his grades up, he would not lose his scholarships. At times during the interview, it seemed as if being a successful student was secondary to being funded.

Rory had a more holistic view of his campus experiences. He was not driven by earning good grades, but rather by finishing school so he could move on to the next chapter of his life. "I think I see it [navigating through college] more as getting from A to B, then to C, because that's how the real world works. You got to go to school to get a good job. I'm experiencing many things [on campus], I'm meeting new people, I'm doing new things that I never thought I'd do, but [in the end] I need to go to school to be successful. So yeah I think of college as a way to get from A to B, then to C." The give and take for Rory was doing what he needed to do to earn his degree and move on with

his life. While there were good times in his college career, Rory saw his college experience as a means to an end.

The previous section addressed the second theme of this study. Cultural and social capital, together with campus experiences, were discussed. The study now shifts to the third theme, where participants provide explanations about specific connections with individuals on campus.

On-Campus Relationships

The final theme of this study explores the on-campus relationships between participants and mentors, peers, and faculty on campus. Of the three themes, much of the data focused on these relationships. Participants shared the importance of these relationships and what they gained from them.

Relationships Between Participants and Mentors on Campus

The next two sections examine the relationships with mentors on campus. During the data collection stage, this was the most discussed topic. All participants, some way or another, had a relationship with a mentor or support program on campus. Six were active members in some sort of support program on campus, while two more had strong ties to their program, but did not consider themselves active. Lastly, many credited their relationship with their mentors as the main reason they persisted on campus.

First, the comfort level with mentors is addressed. This included the individual bond between participants and their mentors, as well as the social benefits of participating in a retention program on campus. Next, the ways in which mentors (and programs) provided resources to participants on campus, including specific services that directly benefited the participants are discussed.

Quality of relationship with on-campus mentor. More than any other relationship (peers, faculty, family members), participants in this study identified their mentors on campus as the biggest influence on their persistence and overall academic success. Mentors (and the programs they represent) were credited with helping students personally and academically throughout their academic careers.

Charlie had a very close bond with his mentor. He had been a member of his support program since the 9th grade. Because he had participated in his program for nearly eight years, he was very familiar with his mentor. He stated in his first interview that he felt comfortable going to his mentor for anything. "The closest relationship I have on campus [is with his mentor]. When I ask her for help, she is there. She doesn't hesitate in saying yes. They always offer to help. They offer their time, their free time, we can meet up anywhere. They make it comfortable to meet up with them." Charlie explained to the researcher how important it was for him to be able to have a strong relationship with a mentor on campus. Later in the interview, Charlie was asked about a memorable moment when someone provided some sort of assistance to him. He recalled a time when he was struggling with a personal issue (of which he did not want to share details). His mentor was there to assist him. "A mentor in the program [was there to help me], just because we had similar experiences, and she went through the same things I did, or had to go through, so she was someone I looked up to… she went through it [the experience] first, so she was guiding me through the process." According to Charlie, his personal connection to his mentor was second only to his relationship with his family members.

Rory also had a very close relationship with his mentor. Like Charlie, Rory claimed that his mentor had always been there for him. According to him, she would always make time for him and support him, regardless of what he was going through.

> [She makes time] even though she has [other] college students that she has
> to talk to. But I don't know it's just our relationship, she's always there. If I
> need to talk to her right now, even if she's busy, she'll drop everything to
> talk to me. Like if I'm struggling with my school and I need to vent or
> something, she'll always be there to listen, she always has resources for me
> if I need help on something, and I think she's great. She's really helpful.

Even as a graduating senior, Rory was thankful for the fact that his mentor made herself available to him, was always an active listener, and helped him through any situation (personal or academic).

While Charlie and Rory referenced the close bond they had with their mentor, Raymond focused on the motivation his mentor provided him. "[His mentor] just seemed very passionate about what he was doing and what he wanted to do with me, so I think that's been the strongest relationship that I've built here [on campus]." According to Raymond, his mentor pushed him to become a better student and a better person. "I think if I hadn't found him, I would still have been kind of skating by… most people would probably just kind of shrug off any shortcomings that I might have in areas of my life, but he [his mentor] turns around and he says, 'No, I know you can do better. I've seen you do better. I know you're capable of it.'" Having someone that pushed him was a new experience for Raymond. He had never come across a teacher, counselor, professor, or advisor (neither in high school nor in college) who had treated him in such a way. "He

can break me down, he makes me confront my weaknesses, and that's something I've never had." Raymond said he fed off his mentor's passion, and it forced him to improve himself personally and academically.

Though Raymond was very specific about some of his interactions with his mentor, Rene had a holistic way of describing his relationship with his mentor. His mentor did so much for him: personally, academically, and financially. His mentor provided him sound academic and personal advice, pointed him towards the right resources on campus, and was sensitive to his status as a non-traditional student and how he should proceed with decisions about his future.

> The most important relationship that I have on campus [is with my mentor]. She helps out in many different ways. I mean, with advice as to my academics and which path to follow, how to make it easier, where to go for resources… when you need financing or finances, working full-time and going to school is hard, and so being able to talk to her and knowing that she is trying to make arrangements or make provisions to help me out. I mean that's so helpful. [My mentor] has helped me to keep going to say "Hey I'm struggling with this. What do you think? What should I do?" Especially when I'm almost done. You just need little things to push you over the hump.

Rene was appreciative of the support his mentor had provided him throughout the years. During his meeting with his mentor, Rene took time to thank her for everything she had done for him and the encouragement she had given him. He stated that, since he had been around for so many year, he had seen the program grow and was appreciative of the work

she had done to move the program forward and, specifically, to the help she provided him – helping him find scholarships, applying for internships, and finding a way back to campus (after taking some personal time off).

While many participants praised their personal relationships with their mentors, others spoke of the overall social benefits of participating in a retention program on campus. Aside from the measurable resources these programs provide (e.g., scholarships, academic advising, and contacts on campus) participants mentioned the social bonds they formed as members of the program.

In his second interview, Nefty brought up the friendships he created with the individuals in his program. He also mentioned that, as he became an upper classman, his role changed from being a young mentee to being somewhat of a role model for the younger members of the program. "I've been part of that program for… years, and I think it's great when you're on the other side [being an older student in the program] too because you know what an impact you have on [younger] individuals." His longevity with the program had allowed him to build strong relationships with program participants and staff members. Nefty earlier had shared that he was very selective with the people with whom he interacted, so to have these close bonds meant something to him. He credited his program mentor, the rest of the staff, and other program participants for being supportive of him and his academic goals.

Much like Nefty, Johnny had been an active participant of his specific program for multiple years. In his second interview, he praised the program participants and its staff for helping him through his college career. He saw the program, and its participants, as more than just friends and classmates.

I always say that they are my second family… [my] family away from home. You grew up with these people. You grew up with all these students, you grew up with the faculty, you grew up with these mentors, peers, and they learn to love you for who you are. They all supported me emotionally or socially or just been pushing me along. They've assisted me not just financially with college, but other personal issues I've had in my life, and they've always watched out for me. They continue to watch out for me.

When he was asked to identify the most important relationship he had on campus, Johnny said the entire program had played an important role in his life - he could not pinpoint one person.

The support program in which Draco participated was instrumental to his success as a college student. Not only did he receive guidance and found a second home on campus, he relied on other program participants to keep him focused on his goals of earning a college degree. "My friends in this program that I [participate] in, the mentors that I have through this program, you know they've grounded me. This program, has been a [personal and academic] cushion for me. And you know whether I like to admit it or not, they are a really big force in how far I've come in school. They're really big. They're a big reason why I'm still here, you know?" Draco would not have been where he was had it not been for the bonds he established through this program.

Measurable resources mentors provide. Mentors, and retention programs on campus, did more than provide participants with personal bonds and relationships on campus. They also provided quantifiable resources to the participants. As the participants explained, because their mentors had numerous experiences on campus, they possessed

certain capital that would benefit them as students. Some participants counted on their mentors, and their programs, for more than just a personal relationship. These resources may have included academic assistance, help with campus documentation, or even assistance with finding a job.

Abel and Charlie shared in their second interviews that staff and students in support programs could help students find tutoring, should they struggle with a class. When Abel addressed Theo's situation in the verbal prompt, he reminded the researcher that "there are programs on campus that help students who come from first-generation [backgrounds]. These programs offer support… a lot of programs that support academic success, with tutors." An active member of his support program, Abel knew he was afforded the opportunity to receive tutoring whenever necessary. Charlie spoke from personal experience when he discussed finding academic support through his program. His close relationship with program participants have helped him "with studying, mentoring, tutoring, everything." He explained that his program - by helping him whenever he had any sort of academic or non-academic problem - led him to become successful, both academically and personally. Much like Abel, Charlie knew he could go directly to his program and ask for academic support, whether on a large project or a simple homework assignment.

Draco and Xavier both disclosed how their relationship with their respective mentors helped them apply for financial aid on campus, something they were unfamiliar with before they started working with their mentors. During his first interview, Draco mentioned his mentor assisted him when it came to applying for student aid. "Coming into college, I didn't know what FAFSA was, I didn't know where to apply... Thankfully,

I had a good mentor through this program and they were able to point me in the direction, point me to the resources I needed to get here." Later, when Draco became familiar with the process of applying for financial aid, he began helping others in his program, just like his mentor had helped him.

As a graduating senior with few remaining academic and social needs, Xavier admitted he did not have much frequent contact with program participants and its staff. He did, however, check in with his mentor from time to time and asked for help, when necessary. One example was when he needed assistance completing his federal forms. "[His mentor] still supports me regardless… I ask them here and there for FAFSA help." Many students on this college campus did not have direct access to a program which could personally help them with financial aid forms. Xavier understood this fact and was thankful for the opportunity to still be able to count on his mentor to help him when necessary.

In addition to providing academic and financial aid assistance, participants stated that their mentors helped them gain jobs and acceptance into graduate programs on campus. Rory explained in his first interview that, by being a part of his program, he was aware of job opportunities that others on campus were not.

> In my program, we have a lot of connections with other people [on campus], so it makes it easier for us to find jobs. Most of the time, [my mentor and other program staff] emails us, and says, "hey, there's this position open, is anyone interested?" and she puts in a good word for us. We just gotta, like, to go through the process: the application, the resume, you know. I just feel

like those people that don't have connections… There's some people who

aren't in the program and they're struggling.

Rory was cognizant of the benefits he received from his program and his mentor. He

further explained that his mentor could have served as a reference for him, had he

pursued one of those campus jobs.

Like Rory, Johnny took advantage of a benefit his mentor provided him. He used

his relationship with his mentor to assist him with applications for graduate school. At the

time of the study, Johnny was applying to a graduate program at the same university

where the study was conducted. Since he wanted to stay in town, Johnny reached out to

his mentor and asked her to assist him with the application process. During Johnny's

meeting with his mentor, the researcher observed both participant and mentor go through

the required paperwork necessary to apply for the graduate program. Later, during the

second interview, Johnny was asked about this experience and how much he relied on his

mentor for assistance.

> It helps a lot... because of the fact that for her, she's in her second master's
>
> program. So, she already knows what the first one needed, she already
>
> knows what the program I'm looking into needed, because she got accepted
>
> into it and she's already working in it. So it definitely gives me a head start
>
> and a better edge on the competition, on other students because she knows
>
> "Hey you need this to get accepted, you need to make sure your letter looks
>
> like this, you make sure your references are like this, your resume... If you
>
> get accepted and they want to interview you, make sure you do this." So,
>
> she already went through it, so she's giving me that assistance.

Johnny relied on her experience to provide him with the resources he needed in order to submit a successful application to the graduate program. His goal was to pursue a graduate degree. He knew his mentor was able to help him, just as she had helped him throughout his undergraduate career. He credited this resourceful relationship with his mentor for his ability to succeed academically as a college student.

The previous two sections discussed the relationships between participants and mentors on campus. In these sections, the bond with mentors, the social benefits of participating in a support program on campus, and the multiple resources mentors provided were addressed.

Relationships Between Participants and Peers on Campus

Participants in the study shared that, second only to their relationships with mentors on campus, their relationships with peers was one of the driving forces behind their academic success. In the following sections, participants' perspectives about peers, such as "peer motivation and support systems" and "tangible support from peers," are provided.

Motivation and support system from peers. Everyone in the study shared a story or examples of how their peers helped them succeed academically. Some pointed to relationships they developed on campus as a source of motivation and inspiration. In other cases, many of the participants noted how their peers – based on the nature of the relationships they formed – became a second family to them. Additionally, they said these close friends supported them throughout college. This section focuses on all three of these points.

Johnny, a graduating senior and education major, was involved in a retention program throughout his college career. In this program, he formed various relationships with other education majors and LIFG students like himself. In his second interview, he discussed his relationship with his peers (both in the program and in his education courses), his inspiration to keep persisting, and the motivation he received from them on campus.

> If you have a peer who is well-driven, knows what they want, definitely working on their degree, super dedicated, it's all about school first and then whatever happens afterwards, it motivates you - pushes you to keep going because you see them… so you're like, 'Well if this person can do it, my friend can do it, it means I can do it too.'

The first one in his family to attend college, Johnny was motivated by his close on-campus friends. He recognized that they pushed him academically.

Abel, a junior studying engineering, echoed the same sentiments as Johnny. During his second interview, he was asked about his peer relationships on campus and if these relationships affected his academic success. Abel gave a personal example of someone to whom he had grown close. Similar to Abel, this other student grew up in another country.

> I met [name of male peer], who is [a South American] student. He was top engineering student, Honors Program…When you see people from other race[s] or background succeeding, you don't really identify with them, but me and [male peer] really got to know each other. We spoke the same first

language, he grew up in a different country, we were both students here and

seeing him succeed so much I was like, "If he can do it, I can do it too."

Abel spoke highly of his peer from South America. Additionally, he associated one's

personal success with the connections they make with successful people. That is how he

saw his relationship with his South American engineering friend – two Latino males

serving as motivation to one another.

Nefty also saw his peers as a source of motivation. During both his interviews, he

shared how demanding his field of study was and how important it was for him to succeed.

He also addressed the competitiveness of his classmates and how they served as a source

of inspiration to him.

The majority of [business] students, they tend to be very driven and over-

achievers so the majority of them, to be able to succeed in my field, you

have to put in the work. I think that by me spending time with them and

surrounding myself with them all the time just kind of influences me to do

the same. If I didn't have that, if I wasn't around those people I think

definitely would not succeed in my career path or really in anything that I

do.

Nefty acknowledged that his field of study was challenging, and he was driven by his

peers to be successful as a business major. During his meeting with his mentor, Nefty

also discussed the pressure he felt from his peers and how this forced him to do well

academically. When his mentor asked him how his classes were going, he said everyone

in his cohort of business students were working extremely hard and, during the upcoming

month leading to graduation, were focusing on their academics in order to earn the

highest marks possible. This drove him to push himself and, as he stated, "keep working hard these last few months."

Raymond was somewhat new to the university - having transferred within the same year that this study was conducted. During his first interview, he mentioned how important it was for him to establish new relationships on campus, especially those in his department, and use these as a source of motivation.

> I've been finding that if I hang out with these [academically-driven peers]certain people, it keeps me motivated and I also get to engage in the social aspect of my life, which in turn I think it allows me to kind of decompress for a bit so that when I do jump back into the water and start hitting the books again, I don't feel so tensed up and I think that's what's been super helpful in getting myself to be successful academically and motivated to pursue it [his degree].

Raymond's major was in the arts. Because his field of study was specific to his artistic skills, he had been more proactive about engaging with certain people in his department whom he believed to be the type of people who, according to him, "are trying to head in the same direction I am academically." Similar to Nefty, Raymond said he understood how peers in his department could serve as a source of motivation and inspiration. According to both participants, their respective peers drove them to be better students and excel on campus.

Xavier, a senior psychology major, moved to the city in which the study took place from the Midwest less than ten years prior to the study. He brought up in both interviews the importance of surrounding oneself with positive people, who will motivate

each other. In his life, this meant surrounding himself with those who would positively influence him, both personally and academically.

> I definitely do think that who you're friends with, who you hang out frequently and what not, will lead to academic success if they are striving to get the same goals… With my background of just growing up and moving from place to place I was able to make various connections, various friendships… I am a high believer in who you hang out with is whether or not you're going to be successful, and I try and apply that to myself… Psychology tells us who you hang out with usually dictates whether you're successful or not.

Xavier noted that his family moved frequently as a child, which made it difficult at times to establish roots in one particular location. Even so, he credited his ability to develop positive relationships with peers – and these relationships serving as encouragement & motivation to him – as the reason for his academic success.

Rene, a senior education major and one of the non-traditional students in the study, highlighted the importance of surrounding oneself with positive influence - In a manner similar to the one that Xavier discussed. During his second interview, Rene was asked about the influence of his peers on his academic success. He mentioned that he was motivated by them, and used the analogy of a race, where his peers were pushing him to the finish line.

> It [relationships with peers] encourages me in many ways… I think it's kind of, like, you're running a race. But a lot of times if you're by yourself, it's hard to gauge if you're going fast or slow. Usually you can use your peers

as pace-makers in a way… it's about surrounding yourself with the right

type of peers.

Though years older than many students in his circle, Rene was inspired by the academic

drive of his younger peers, which motivated him to persist in school and complete his

degree.

Participants like Xavier and Rene realized the significance of establishing the

right relationships on campus – relationships that could help one reach goals of obtaining

a college degree. Both participants used terms such as "various connections,"

"surrounding yourself," "striving for the same goals," and "the right types of peers." To

both of them, these peer relationships served as a source of motivation and inspiration.

Aside from being a source of inspiration and motivation, the participants also

noted how their peers acted as a support system, becoming, as some of the participants

said, "like a second family on campus" to them. Many of these peer relationships were

formed in various classes on campus. Others were formed throughout their college

careers as members of support programs on campus. Several of the participants

constantly referenced these friendships (developed through their on-campus programs) as

their "go to" people for social problems.

Charlie spoke of the importance of building strong bonds with peers. "You get

that close relationship with someone on campus. You're always around them. If you need

any [personal] help, I see that as a person of contact. It's kind of like having a family with

you, on campus, or every place you go." Some of Charlie's peers have known him since

middle school, which aided the strong bond they shared.

Rory also had been on campus since arriving as a freshman. He was a senior studying education. Raised in the city where the study took place, Rory had known some of his peers since high school. Rory subscribed to, as he said, the "whole group" mentality, where everyone kept in touch and helped one another.

> The relationships I have with my peers assist me because I grew up with them, so they're around the same age as me… They're always there to help me if I have a question. It's always nice getting feedback from them [in regards to a personal issue or concern]. I think that's really helpful because not a lot of people have that. I always go to my friends … to let out some steam. Like I said, they have the same passion as me.

Both Charlie and Rory fostered some of the same relationships for years. During their interviews, both participants consistently referenced their peers as their surrogate family on campus – always trusting them when needed.

Ricky was a non-traditional student studying engineering. He was a transfer student from a small college in a western state. The lack of initial support he had when he first arrived on campus almost drove him to drop out of school. He attributed the fact that he remained on campus to one of his peers, who in turn became a confidant and a friend.

> My best friend [name of male student] has been the most important [relationship on campus]. Because it started out as someone who I would like study with, but that's turned into more of a personal relationship and then becoming people we can both rely on, do each other favors, and you know just help each other out. And so having a sort of like solid rock there, has been incredibly helpful.

In a candid moment, Ricky said his friend saved him from quitting school. Aside from his best friend, he had also been involved on campus through student groups and organizations. He developed relationships with other students through these groups. According to him, these relationships were also a source of support on campus.

> People I've met through organizing on campus with the groups that I'm involved in… it's a focus for us to all maintain real, solid relationships with each other, so it's become less like a clique here and there, and it becomes like the whole group… So we all keep in touch, we all go out, and, you know, build relationships.

Ricky credited his relationships on campus – both with his very close friend and with the other friends he made through his involvement with student groups – as playing an important role in his retention on campus. When he arrived on campus, he felt lost. His peers helped him get involved, and made him feel as if he was a part of the group.

> Draco was a senior studying education. Draco was never fond of asking for help from others. During his interviews, he mentioned how he tried to overcome obstacles on campus on his own. He did, however, acknowledge the importance of the peers he had at the university and the support system they had been to him.

> I've never really asked for help or anything, but a lot of times like just morality-wise, just to know that there's certain things that I can [rely on] like if I need [some sort of personal] support, it's there… So yeah, I think that's what helps me.

Draco knew his peers provided encouragement, offered encouragement, and served as his support system on campus. This was somewhat of a contrast for Draco, as he saw himself

as a self-sufficient person who tried to solve personal issues on his own. Both Ricky and Draco came across as incredibly independent students, but appreciated the social role their peers played in their lives.

Tangible support from peers. Participants in this study recognized the importance of developing productive relationships with peers on campus. Four of the participants stated that, even if it meant stepping outside of one's comfort zone, developing these relationships on campus (either with peers in class, or via clubs and student groups) could be extremely beneficial - whether it be finding appropriate resources on campus, or using student groups and organizations to help develop a sense of ownership because, as Abel put it, "I wanted my university to be mine." Throughout their interviews, observations, and verbal prompt responses, participants shared examples of these benefits.

During their second interviews, all participants were given a verbal prompt, asking them to comment on a fictional situation regarding Theo, a freshman LIFG Latino male student who was struggling both academically and at work. In his response to the scenario, Rory explained that Theo should have made an effort to meet individuals in his classes, and used these relationships to his advantage.

> It's all about knowing people obviously because if you don't know anyone,
> you can't go to anyone for help. So if I was Theo and I struggled to earn a
> 2.85 last semester, I'd try to tell myself that next semester I'm going to talk
> to more people in my class, so we can have study sessions. That way, with
> those study sessions, they'll more than likely improve my score and that

> grade because we're going to study together. And if I need help, there's
>
> going to be other people that could help me.

Rory wanted to make sure that Theo used as many resources on campus as possible. He knew, from experience, that forming study sessions with classmates could help his overall grade. He echoed these same sentiments while discussing his own experience on campus.

> This semester I'm taking two [history] classes… I've got a few friends who
>
> already took [history] classes, so if I'm ever stuck somewhere [he can say]
>
> "Hey, I don't get this article. I know you read it before, help me out. Help
>
> me understand it a little more." It just makes it easier to get help from
>
> people.

Rory - who admitted to be somewhat of an introvert during his interviews - realized the value in talking to others in his classes and using them as resources for studying or asking for academic help. He was one of the participants who encouraged students to step outside their comfort zone. In his meeting with his mentor, Rory also shared these opinions. His mentor asked about his classes. He spoke of the history classes in which he was enrolled. He told her he was somewhat worried about the readings for the class. He expressed his appreciation for having peers in the same class who could help him academically and serve as study partners.

Draco, like Rory, believed in using his classmates as a resource when it came to academic support. While answering the verbal prompt about Theo, Draco gave a personal example of what he did with his classmates.

With classmates, a lot of times, if I'm lost in the class or if I'm not doing too

good in the class, I like to get perspective, especially from people who are

doing well in that class. I like to talk to them… When I go to class, the first

thing I do is "Hey let me get your number, let me get your number. That

way if I have questions I can call you guys, or if I miss a class I can ask you

what you guys did or anything" and you know I'll get their numbers… A lot

of times I'll ask them "Hey dude, what did you get on this assignment? Or

what'd you get on this?"… [Similarly] I'll see if there's something I can offer

them, and I'll offer help too… That's one relationship that may benefit Theo

is classmates.

It was important for Draco to develop those relationships with peers and use them to his

advantage. He wanted to put himself in the best position to pass his courses, and he knew

that, through those relationships he had formed in class, he would put himself in an

advantageous position. His comments were consistent with what Rory shared. Both

participants believed that developing peer relationships on campus for academic reasons

may lead to academic success.

Other than receiving support from peers, according to the participants, there were

additional benefits of forming relationships with peers. Gaining a sense of belonging and

developing an identity on campus were also important factors to consider. The sense of

belonging could be found by participating in student groups or clubs. Abel, for example,

talked about making the university a place where he would be comfortable. Because he

was far from his family, he wanted to create an environment that felt like home – a

welcoming place for him to learn and socialize with others. To do this, he decided to

create his own clubs on campus. He noted during his first interview that he "started the [music] club because I'm really into [music] and [the university] didn't have it. I'm also into [martial arts], and I made a club just because the university didn't have it. So I wanted to do things and I just find the way to try to feel myself at home." The music club had multiple members and they performed on campus and in the community. The martial arts club met periodically and had, according to Abel, provided an avenue for students to come together and be with other students who understood each other.

Ricky also recognized the importance of students being surrounded by peers who understood each other. Much like Abel, he believed students could feel welcome on campus by participating in clubs and other student groups. When responding to the verbal prompt about Theo, Ricky talked about the advocacy club in which he participated. He said that members supported each other and provided guidance to each other, as well as other student groups on campus. He claimed that, "in terms of relationships and how they can affect Theo, I think it would be good to include him in groups of people I know who can and do understand his situation. Because a lot of the work I do on campus [through the club] I know a lot of people who are struggling with this… I think if he [Theo] had someone who he can talk to and also see how they balance it all or what advices they can [give him], that would be incredibly beneficial for him." Ricky championed the idea of establishing relationships on campus through clubs and student groups. Once feeling isolated and without any support, Ricky was able to find a sense of belonging through his participation on campus.

While both Able and Ricky credited their clubs with helping them develop a sense of belonging on campus, Xavier spoke of a particular student group which helped him develop his identity: his fraternity.

> So coming here, it was like, I'm the only one. I have to figure it out. Luckily an old friend of mine that had moved away early on in high school was coming as well, and through him I met all of his friends, and then through him ended up joining a fraternity. And then through the fraternity I kept meeting more people. So it's definitely once you put yourself out there it's just like a cascade, it's just like a domino effect. You just run into more and more people and it just becomes a source of utilities for you to use whenever you're feeling like you need help. And it makes things so much easier.

Xavier spoke highly of his fraternity during both his interviews, and when the researcher observed him during his meeting with his mentor. In his first interview, he noted that most of the extracurricular activities in which he participated involved his fraternity brothers. During his meeting with his mentor, he said he was living with one of his fraternity brothers, and they would help each other whenever necessary. He recognized the important role his peers in the fraternity played in his academic career. As noted above, they helped him establish a network of connections at the university. During his meeting with his mentor, he also spoke about the support he received, not just at the time, but throughout the years from the members of his fraternity. In his first interview, Xavier indicated that his fraternity brothers helped him feel as if he belonged at the university. Overall, like Abel and Ricky, Xavier appreciated what his student organization has meant

to him as a student and, how through clubs and organizations, establishing peer relationships can be beneficial to students.

The previous two sections discussed the relationships between participants and their peers on campus. This was addressed through the following: a) motivation and support system from peers, and b) tangible support from peers. The initial section explained how the participants viewed their peers as a source of motivation, as well as how their saw their peers as a second family on campus. The subsequent section showed how some in the study established relationships on campus for academic gain, while others personally benefited from participating in clubs and student organizations.

Relationships with Faculty, and Utilizing Services on Campus

The final on-campus relationship in this study provides participants' views about faculty and staff, as well as the importance they placed on using services on campus. First, participants provide specific examples of their connections to academic faculty on campus. Later, participants address how campus resources (such as academic centers and student services departments) can be beneficial to students.

Importance of reaching out to faculty. Throughout the data collection process, many of the participants referenced their relationships with academic faculty on campus. They viewed this relationship as an important part of their overall academic success. This section describes some of the experiences the participants had with academic faculty and the importance they placed on communicating with them.

Nefty, during his first interview, spoke about his relationship with his professors. More specifically, he mentioned that he knew how important it was to reach out to his instructors when he needed help. He noted that, because of the rigors of his business

major, there were high expectations of students. "There's a lot they [the department professors] expect for you to know, but not everything is on a book or not everything was mentioned in class, so some things they just expect for you to either come to them for help… in this case, I [see] my professors… their doors are always open and they're easy to reach via email, cell phone." Nefty made it clear during his interviews that his professors were open to seeing students and working with them when needed.

Abel echoed Nefty's points when it came to the availability of academic faculty on campus. While Nefty indicated he would see his professor as a tertiary source of help, Abel used them as his primary source.

> When it comes to school, first people to go to, professor. Sit down and say, 'I am struggling in class, I don't understand anything… let's find a time to sit down and talk about it'… [Professors] are available as long as you [make yourself available]… they have office hours, so if you respect that, they will help you, they are in their office they will help you… It seems like they are really available most of the time.

Both Nefty and Abel praised the fact that their professors were available when needed. Because of their academic status, and the rigors of their fields of study (business and engineering, respectively) both participants used their professors as resources, when necessary.

Two of the participants indicated that their professors were some of the people they interacted with the most on campus. According to them, they did so out of necessity. Xavier and Charlie both worked to put themselves through school. They worked long hours and rarely had time to do much more on campus. Both participants indicated that

they prioritized work and school over other opportunities on campus (e.g., social gatherings, sporting events). While Xavier still had connections with his fraternity, both he and Charlie placed more significance on academics, particularly since both were schedule to graduate in the upcoming spring semester.

Due to his busy schedule, Xavier mentioned in his first interview that when he needed academic help, he went directly to his instructors. "I don't really go to anyone for academic help other than maybe my professors." Xavier was sincere about his relationship with his professors. He explained that, due to his science major, he was not afraid of asking his instructors for help when he could not figure something out on his own. He said that others in his social circle were not familiar with the content of the subject he was learning so, in the interest of time, it was more beneficial for him to reach out directly to his instructors when he had any concerns.

Charlie, like Xavier, was a science major with a demanding academic schedule. During his first interview, he mentioned that he saw his professors first when he had an academic question. He mentioned "on a given week, I most likely [interact with] faculty, professors… I don't have time to interact with anyone else. It's mostly [peers in his program]…and professors of my classes." Due to work responsibilities off campus and family commitments at home, Charlie put an emphasis on school, his program, and work, rarely making time for much more on campus. He knew that communicating with his professors throughout the week was an important step for him to grasp the material being taught.

Unlike Xavier and Charlie, Raymond had recently begun to communicate with his instructors. In his second interview, he shared that he began to change the way he

approached his instructors. "I am much more at ease when I get to classes, because now I'm not so afraid to ask [for assistance from my professors], 'You know I didn't really get that? Can you reiterate that in another way or can you show me another example?' Instead of just like, Oh, I'll try and figure this out later on my own, I guess." Knowing the benefits of establishing a relationship with faculty on campus, Raymond pointed to his improved scores in his classes as a reason for reaching out to his professors. This was also evident during his meeting with his mentor. When asked by his mentor about a particular class, he said he took some time earlier in the week to meet with the instructor to get clarification on a specific project. He then disclosed that he was trying to do a better job of reaching out to his instructors. His mentor praised this action.

While Raymond made a conscientious effort to begin reaching out to academic faculty, Johnny wished he had done so sooner in his academic career. A graduating senior, Johnny regretted not making an effort to develop relationships with his professors. When asked about something he would have changed in his college career, he pointed to his lack of communication with his instructors.

I need [to do a better job of] branching out more, creating more bridges and trying to get closer to instructors. I definitely realized that when I was applying to graduate school when I was looking for recommendation letters. I couldn't think of any faculty members within my degree that I connected with until one actually popped up and told me, "Hey, you're an amazing writer, you should apply for grad school." And that's when I reached and told her, "Hey, thank you for the compliment. Can I use you as a recommendation? Can I get a letter of recommendation from you?" And

they definitely agreed. They were like "No problem. Just send me an email, and I'll write one for you."

Johnny viewed his relationship with academic faculty as somewhat incomplete, understanding that his actions may have jeopardized his ability to go to graduate school. Though frustrated he did not do more to communicate with faculty, Johnny was extremely grateful for the one connection he made, which resulted in a letter of recommendation.

Navigating through campus resources. While most of the participants agreed that establishing a relationship with faculty on campus is important, all agreed that using the resources and services on campus could help students be successful. During both interviews, participants discussed the value of using academic support centers (e.g., tutoring center, writing center) and student services resources (e.g., office of financial aid, admissions and records office, and counseling office) to their advantage.

Draco was one of the participants who used the academic support centers on campus. During his first interview, he shared that he worked at the campus writing center as an intern, and he recommended it to students as a source of academic help. In his second interview, while addressing the prompt and providing advice to Theo, Draco also spoke highly of the academic centers on campus. He suggested that Theo – and all students who were in need of academic assistance – should have made their way to these campus resources. "I'd probably suggest [to Theo] 'Hey man, do you need help with math? There's a math center.'…You know the writing center in [the new academic center] building, like I'd direct him to those, to that kind of help." Draco noted that the

new academic center building on campus could be a resource for students who were struggling academically.

Rory and Charlie also identified the campus academic support centers as valuable tools to students who were struggling. Both participants spoke about the significance of using the resources that were provided to students. During his first interview, Rory said, "Use your resources, like the math center and the writing center. Use the resources that are available to them [college students]." Coming from a family that could not help him academically, Rory recognized how valuable these campus resources were.

Like Rory, Charlie saw the value of the academic support centers on campus. He also agreed that if the resources were out there, students should use them. When addressing Theo's academic struggles, he stated, "If you need tutoring, attend tutoring. So yeah, I think it really comes down to… knowing what resources are out there, and using them, if you need them."

While he recommended that students use these centers, Rene also admitted to using them himself when he needed help with his classwork. During his first interview, while discussing his experiences asking people for help on campus, Rene shared that he relied on academic centers for support. "When it comes to education or academic courses that I'm taking that I'm struggling with, usually that's me going to ask these centers for help." Earlier in the interview, he mentioned that he previously experienced a miscommunication with a tutor from one of the academic centers, which resulted in a negative experience. Still, he understood the importance of these centers and, as he put it, held no grudges. Moreover, he believed in these centers being an important support

system for students on campus and he would have hesitated to use them again, if necessary.

In addition to academic support centers, the participants discussed other services on campus which positively affected their overall success: student services resources. These services include financial aid, admissions, and counseling. These non-academic departments on campus were viewed as extremely resourceful services by the participants. The advantage of these departments was appreciated by the participants, as they shared personal stories of how these services helped them on campus.

Rene was a non-traditional student. He took some time from school to focus on work and supporting his family. Because of this, he relied on services on campus to help him return as a full-time student. During his first interview, he described a memorable moment when the personnel at the office of financial aid assisted him tremendously.

> In the financial aid office… you know, really helped me. I don't know how she [staff member working in financial aid] did it, but she found money somewhere to where it helped me pay for my classes, buy books, and it even allowed me to save some of that money for the next semester, and so I wasn't behind. And I mean it was great just because I thought I was [at] a dead end. I mean everything was coming crashing down. My credit score was gone, I had to go to court…you know, stuck paying fifteen thousand dollar bill [for a car loan he helped co-sign], you know and I was like, you know I'm just starting out [his adult life], I'm just, I'm trying to get my degree. But luckily, the person in financial aid, I mean, helped me out tremendously.

This was an important moment for Rene, considering the financial struggles he was going through at the time.

Draco, Charlie, and Abel addressed the importance of financial aid for LIFG students and establishing a connection with the financial aid office, as well. In his first interview, Draco quipped that, when he first began as a freshman, he did not know where the office was – even though he relied heavily on student aid. Once he learned its location, he made it a point to go and ask the right questions. Charlie also relied on financial aid as a student – he made his college choice based on the financial package he received. In his verbal prompt, Charlie suggested Theo, who also relied on aid, should take advantage of the resources on campus and possibly speak to someone in the office of financial aid. Abel also made his college decision to attend the university where the study took place based on the aid package he received. Like Charlie, Abel also suggested that Theo (the student on the fictitious scenario) find a way to reduce his workload and get in touch with someone in the office of financial aid. All three aforementioned participants saw the value in establishing some sort of connection with the financial aid department, and how the benefits provided by this department were an essential resource on campus.

Much like the office of financial aid, the participants also pointed to the office of admissions and records as another resource on campus that could benefit LIFG students. Addressing Theo's situation of finding a way to pay for school, both Nefty and Johnny – speaking from personal experience – suggested Theo found a way to communicate with admissions and records, speak to someone in person, and ask to be given a reprieve from making all of his payments at once. Nefty said, "[the next] step [Theo should take] would probably be go straight to the Admissions/Records and talk to the ladies and say 'can you

hold off for like a month or so until I can get paid? or 'til I have enough money to pay for it?'" Nefty shared that he had done the same thing for himself. He also shared that, had he not gone and spoken to someone directly – establishing some sort of relationship with someone who could understand his predicament – he may not have been successful.

Johnny also encouraged Theo to speak directly to someone at admissions and records. He spoke specifically about breaking up the payments so that Theo could afford his tuition. Like Nefty, Johnny spoke from experience.

Tell him to talk to Admission/Records and the good people over there. Tell him "Hey, can we do like a payment plan?" I've been down there multiple times because they do a payment plan… if you go down there and talk to them about your situation, they'll make it into a four-month payment plan. So it definitely gives you like a little edge, a little help.

Johnny grasped the importance of making a connection with someone in the admissions and records office, as well as the importance of using this resource on campus to his advantage.

Ricky suggested another way of using the office of admissions and records. He directed Theo to contact them regarding his overall credits and class load.

If I can't find anything like that [another job that would pay him enough to afford his tuition], I'd probably see about finding exemptions 15-to-finish[1] credit, and see about lowering my credits [with the admissions office] as to how many I need to take each semester [while still making satisfactory

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[1] 15-to-Finish was a campus initiative that encouraged undergraduate students to take 15 credits per semester (rather than 12). This would increase the student's chances of graduating in four years, rather than five.

academic progress]. It will slow down the classes, like you probably won't

graduate in 4 years, but I think the point is that you want to graduate.

Ricky knew that Theo would probably have to take a step back academically. That said,

Ricky wanted to make sure Theo graduated, whether it be in four, five, or even six years.

More importantly, Ricky realized how significant it was to use campus resources and, in

this specific situation, work with those in admissions and records to benefit Theo.

While other participants benefited from the financial aid and admissions and

records offices, Raymond found another non-academic resource on campus (unique to

him in this study) that he credited with helping him be more successful. When asked

whom he goes to for help with non-academic issues on campus, he was very open with

his response. Raymond confessed, "I have started going to the counseling center… I felt

like, you know maybe I want to work a little bit on myself… see somebody, [a counselor]

here on campus." Raymond was honest about wanting to work on himself, and was

grateful that the university provided resources, of which students can take advantage,

such as the counseling center.

Summary

This chapter explored the findings for the study. It addressed the three major

themes identified in the study through the data collection process. It also presented a first-

person perspective on how the study participants viewed their relationships on and off

campus. Chapter 5 presents the discussion regarding this study and its overall

conclusions. It includes a summary of the study, discussion of findings, implications for

practice, and recommendations for future studies.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify the perspectives of low-income, first-generation Latino male college students on how social capital affects their academic success. Specifically, this study looked at the relationships that LIFG Latino male students had with their peers, faculty, mentors, and family, and how these relationships related to their academic success. This chapter is divided into five sections. The first section presents an overall summary of the study, including a brief review of the methodology used. The second section discusses the findings of the study, which includes an explanation of the themes identified in chapter 4. The third and fourth sections address the implications for practice and recommendations for future research, respectively. Finally, a conclusion is presented.

Summary of the Study

This study aimed to examine the relationship between social capital and the academic success of low-income, first-generation Latino male college students. The research question which guided this study was:

What are low-income, first-generation Latino male college students'

perspectives on how forms of social capital used on college campuses

affect their academic success? Sub-questions include:

a. What are the resourceful relationships that LIFG Latino male students

have with peers, faculty, mentors, and family?

b. How do the above relationships relate to their academic success?

In an effort to answer the research question, and corresponding sub-questions, the researcher utilized a phenomenological research design for this study, with social capital theory as its lens. Three sources of data were collected. The first source was a semi-structured, in-person interview with participants. The second source came in the form of observations of meetings between participants and a mentor or advisor on campus. The last source was a verbal prompt given to all participants where they were asked to answer questions based on a fictional student scenario. This verbal prompt was presented during a second in-person interview, which also included follow-up questions based on the observations and first interviews. The interviews, together with the observations and verbal prompt, allowed for triangulation in the study.

Data were collected from ten participants. All were LIFG Latino male college students attending a four-year university in the West. Five were juniors and five were seniors. Two of the seniors indicated they may return for another semester, extending their graduation date another six months. Three participants were education majors, two were engineering majors, two were science majors, and the last three were business, social sciences, and performing arts majors, respectively.

Discussion of Findings

The participants provided valuable insight on how forms of social capital, used both on and off campus, affected their academic success. This insight directly addressed the research questions. In the course of their responses, they spoke of the relationships they had with peers, faculty, mentors, and family members. The general findings – from the analysis of the data – revealed that relationships participants had with the aforementioned groups positively affected their academic success. Through the data

collection process, three themes emerged. All four groups are reflected in the themes. Within these groups, the findings suggested two different characteristics of the relationships: the personal side of the relationships (the "who" in the relationship); and the capital side of the relationships (the "what" in the relationship). For instance, a participant would speak to the close bond he had with a mentor on campus, as well as the measurable resources this mentor could provide him.
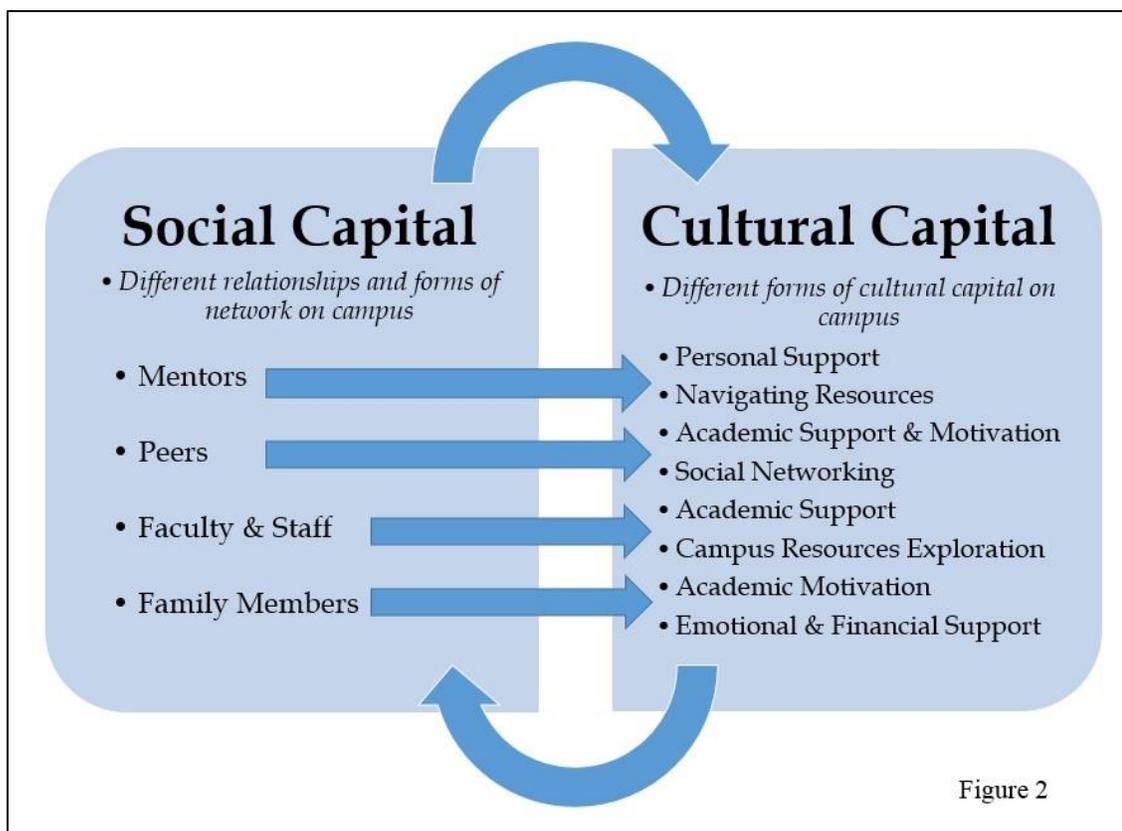
Social and Cultural Capital

In the review of literature, the relationship between on campus social capital and cultural capital was addressed. It was suggested that social capital and cultural capital support one another in a circular patter (Figure 1). The findings of this study, however, suggest that, while the circular patter remains the same, the social capital relationships, along with the forms of cultural capital, are different than the ones depicted in the first figure.

As seen in figure 2, the forms of cultural capital have changed. Originally, family members and peers were not a part of social capital, however the information shared by the participants suggested otherwise. In addition, many of the forms of cultural capital changed, including: enrollment assistance, classroom behavior, and knowledge of professors.

Figure 2 reflects the three themes previously discussed, as well as the discussion about the different forms of relationships addressed in chapter 4. Contrary to figure 1, where social capital consisted of advisors, mentors, support staff, and other students, in figure 2, according to the findings, family members and faculty play an important role in how participants gain cultural capital. In addition, the participants saw mentors and

advisors as one in the same. Finally, in Figure 1, support staff were seen as members of

academic support programs, while the findings suggested that participants viewed these

staff members as their primary academic advisors, a role usually assumed by academic

department advisors.

Figure 2

The connection between social and cultural capital was also present in the themes.

In the literature, Sullivan (2001) stated that, while cultural capital varies with each

student's social class, colleges and universities assume that all students possess cultural

capital. This assumption, however, was not reflected in the study. All participants stated

that cultural capital was not something they originally possessed when they first arrived

on campus. It was, however, gained through their experiences with the four groups

mentioned above. As seen in Figure 2, As students developed relationships on campus,

their social capital gave them access to the necessary cultural capital they credited with as part of their success in college.

Influence of Family

Participants acknowledged the influence and support they received from family. The findings addressed the academic expectations families had, as well as some of the tangible support family members provided. Findings from this study generally supported Dennis et al. (2005) and Miller's (2007) point that a college education provides a better life for LIFG students, in the eyes of the parents. Rory indicated that his mother wanted him to graduate and earn a good job, so that he would not be required to do manual labor. According to him, his parents did not want him to live the same life as they did, cleaning houses to support the family. Rene, meanwhile, was earning his college degree to, in part, be able to help provide for his immediate family. Their financial status was tied to his academic success.

Findings also addressed Conley and Hamlin's (2009) point that family income influences the chances of LIFG students earning a college degree. Draco, Rory, and Charlie lived at home and claimed they benefited from not having to pay rent, bills, or groceries while focusing on their academics, internships, and work. While previous research (Mamiseishvili, 2010; Giancolla et al., 2008; Unverferth et al., 2012) suggest parents are oftentimes unable to support LIFG students appropriately, participants who lived at home did not have to pay for certain expenses. Though many parents could not afford tuition payments, by financially supporting their student, their family income indirectly influenced the participants' ability to focus on school and earn a college degree.

Somewhat absent from the literature on social capital and LIFG students, however, was the positive role parents played in the lives of these students' lives. Data collected suggested that participants often counted on their family members as one of their support systems – helping them overcome personal obstacles and motivating them when necessary. Though researchers (Forbus, Newbold, & Mehta, 2011; Martinez, 2003; Miller, 2007; Unverferth, Talbert-Johnson, & Bogards, 2012; Yeh, 2010) have discussed the impact of families on LIFG students, not much literature was found which directly addressed the close bonds LIFG students (particularly males) have with their families – a point which was present in the findings of this study.

Growing Up as a LIFG Student

This second part of the first theme described how previous life experiences helped form participants' sense of values and early identity. Two key points surfaced from this discussion. First, some participants shared that they had never learned how to ask for help. Raymond, for example, discussed how he learned to be self-sufficient from his parents. He admitted he was taught never to ask for assistance thus, throughout life, he chose to find solutions to problems on his own. Xavier, who grew up without a father, claimed that he had to learn to do things on his own and be "the man of the house," as he put it. This independent mindset carried through into his college career. Previous research on LIFG students indicates that lessons learned from family members directly affect the values with which they come to college. Different authors (Miller, 2007; Giancola, Munz, & Trares, 2008; Yeh, 2010) addressed the direct correlation between the experiences families go through and those of their children. In their studies, the authors suggest that LIFG students often are ill-equipped to handle the rigors of being a college student.

Students are then forced to draw on their personal background to navigate through college. In the findings, however, participants admitted that, once they broke from these learned norms, and made an effort to reach out for help, their relationships on campus improved, as did their grades.

The second point showed that some participants felt, due to their race and socioeconomic background, they did not belong on a college campus. Ricky and Nefty spoke about succumbing to the impostor syndrome. Being a LIFG Latino male student, it was difficult for them to accept that they were truly college students. These feelings of insecurity were not misguided, as previous research suggests that attending college is a foreign concept to this student population. Mamiseishvili (2010) explained that LIFG students (from diverse cultural backgrounds) often feel lost and overwhelmed in college. Jehangir (2009) noted that college, for LIFG students, is often seen as a distant dream. Ricky and Nefty had to find ways to overcome the impostor syndrome, and assure themselves that they indeed belong on a college campus.

Learning How to Navigate College

The second theme explored the effects of social and cultural capital on different campus experiences, and how these experiences affected the participants. Similar to the discussion on growing up LIFG, this theme provided a better understanding of certain values or knowledge participants acquired over a period of time (Bourdieu, 1986). Draco, Xavier, and Abel realized that being a college student meant using the cultural capital they had gained as upper classmen to their advantage (e.g., prioritizing their time when it came to classes or individual assignments, taking advantage of certain campus benefits). Previous research (Housel & Harvey, 2011; Bragg et al., 2006) suggested colleges and

universities often have norms and expectations which can often be unwritten. (Forbus et al., 2011) noted that LIFG students often are unaware of these norms and expectations, and thus lack the ability to succeed in higher education, due to lack of preparedness and critical thinking skills. The findings, however, indicated that students who did possess certain cultural capital, and were familiar with the unwritten rules on campus, used these to their advantage, finding ways to succeed academically.

Relationships with Mentors on Campus

The third theme of this study begins with a discussion of the role of campus mentors. The comfort level participants had with on-campus mentors and the resources these mentors provide, respectively, are addressed. Findings showed that, of all the on-campus relationships, this was the most impactful. Participants spoke highly of their interactions with their campus mentors, crediting this relationship for both their persistence and overall academic success. For instance, Raymond confessed that his mentor pushed him like no one had before, helping him grow in ways he never thought possible. He noted that he experienced dramatic academic and personal growth as a result of his interactions with his mentor. Likewise, Johnny appreciated how his mentor guided him in completing a successful graduate school application. He stated that his mentor's experience applying for a similar program was invaluable in his own application process. Previous research indicated that support (in the form of mentors or support programs) for this student population is critical. Garriot et al. (2015) explained that, due to unfamiliarity with the established norms of college life, LIFG students must be supported on campus. Furthermore, in her study which assessed social capital through academic mentoring, Smith (2007) noted that mentoring has an "indirect positive influence on the academic

achievement of students" (p. 33). Findings from this study support Smith's ideas, as participants indicated that their relationships with mentors and support programs were an important factor in their overall academic success.

Relationships with Peers on Campus

From the third type of relationships identified in this study, relationships with peers, participants discussed the following: 1) Motivation and support system from peers, and 2) measurable value of peer relationships. Findings suggested that participants greatly benefited from positive interactions with peers. Rory shared that he trusted his on-campus peers more than his instructors or administrators on campus. His peers were the first ones he reached out to when he needed help studying for an exam or overcoming a personal matter. This sentiment was validated by others in the study. Similarly, Draco explained how he reached out to one of his peers regarding an upcoming class in which he was enrolled. His friend was able to tell him about the course, the professor's teaching style, and even volunteered to assist him with his assignments. Overall, participants appreciated how peers provided them with an outlet, or a system of support for both academic, and non-academic, issues. Previous research supports this idea. As Stanton-Salazar (2005) noted, relationships amongst peers represent the potential to foster healthy development [within an individual] and overall academic achievement. These connections benefited the participants academically (e.g., tutoring, studying) and socially (e.g., student groups, organizations). To them, this form of social capital was crucial to their overall success in college. Contrary to these findings, with the exception of Stanton-Salazar (2005), little research was found on the positive impact peers had on this specific population. Much of the literature addressed the gap between LIFG and CG students

(Owens, 2010; Wiggins, 2011) and the importance of students getting involved on campus (Yeh 2010; Woosley & Shepler, 2011).

Relationships with Faculty and Using Campus Resources

Finally, this study explored the relationships between participants and staff on campus, while also looking at the use of campus resources. Participants shared that having a productive relationship with academic faculty had a positive effect on their academics. The findings support Heisserer and Parette's (2002) claim that social and academic barriers on campus can be conquered by building relationships with significant members of the college community. Nefty and Abel shared that they both took advantage of meeting with their professors during office hours. Both noted that their professors were the only ones knowledgeable enough to help them academically. As Abel mentioned, the professor's job is to help students, so students should take advantage of this opportunity.

While some participants viewed their relationships with faculty as important, some acknowledged that taking advantage of resources on campus was even more significant. While addressing Theo's situation in the prompt, Charlie and Draco suggested he should take advantage of the academic support centers (e.g., math, tutoring, writing) on campus. Others suggested Theo contact staff members who work in non-academic departments on campus (e.g., financial aid, admissions and records). Rene shared that a staff member in financial aid was responsible for him receiving the funds necessary for him to return to school. Previous research showed that LIFG students often struggled in college because of disproportionate access to, or understanding of, campus resources (Tovar, 2015; Wiggins, 2011). Findings from this study, however, show that,

through social capital on campus, participants were aware of campus resources available to them and understood the importance of using these resources.

Addressing the Research Question

This study sought to present answers to its research question and corresponding sub-questions. The primary question was *What are low-income, first-generation Latino male college students' perspectives on how forms of social capital used on college campuses affect their academic success?* As stated in chapter 2, social capital is defined as a variety of positive and resourceful social networks (Coleman, 1988). Evidence was shown through all three data collection methods (personal interviews, observations, verbal prompt) that the participants in this study valued social capital on their college campus, and viewed the positive social networks they formed as instrumental to their academic success. Participants believed that: 1) without these positive relationships established on campus, they would not have been successful college students; and 2) it is important for <u>all</u> students to take advantage of any form of social capital on campus.

The corresponding sub-question asked the following: a) *what are the resourceful relationships that LIFG Latino male students have with peers, faculty, mentors, and family?*; and b) *how do the above relationships relate to their academic success?* The participants successfully described their resourceful relationships with their university peers, their instructors and non-academic staff on campus, their respective mentors or advisors, and their family members. They explained the importance of establishing these relationships and how each of these four types of relationships directly affected their academic success in a positive way.

The research on LIFG students show the importance of students building relationships on campus (Yeh, 2010; Wallace, Abel, & Ropers-Huilman, 2000; Woosley & Shepler, 2011). The findings of this study suggest that interactions between LIFG Latino male students and mentors are most effective when students are free to build trusting relationships with these mentors. While participants in the study had their own major-specific academic advisors, and other staff members who were available to them for support, their first point of contact - should they need assistance with anything on campus - were usually their mentors. Even those who were not active in their programs still would reach out to their mentors from time to time. This point speaks to the trusting relationships participants had with their mentors. Likewise, the data also showed how important peer relationships were to the participants. These peers, most of whom were also members of a support program, often had similar experiences as the participants, and could relate to their college experiences. Finally, the findings show how interconnected social capital and cultural capital were to the participants (see Figure 2). Students benefited from their relationship on campus and gained the necessary cultural capital to assist in their overall success.

Though this study yielded somewhat similar findings as previous studies, it provides a "fresh theoretical contribution" (Smith, 2007, p. 43) in exploring the relationships between social capital and academic success for LIFG Latino male college students. While the research on LIFG Latino male students show the gaps in enrollment, retention, and graduation between them and other student populations (Kevan et al., 2015, Tovar, 2015, González, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003), the fundamental connection between social and cultural capital on campus has helped lessen these gaps. This study

found that social capital does have a positive effect on LIFG Latino male college students. As noted earlier, participants in this study provided valuable insight on how forms of social capital, used both on and off campus, affected their academic success. Through their responses, they spoke of the relationships they had with peers, faculty, mentors, and family members. In most cases, peers, mentors, and family members provided them with a non-academic support system. Faculty and mentors provided them with certain tangible resources on campus. Faculty and peers often provided them with academic support. Overall, the general findings suggest that the aforementioned issues surrounding retention, and graduation of LIFG Latino male students can be mitigated through the positive effect of social capital.

Implications for Practice

This study addressed the impact that social capital had on a group of LIFG Latino male college students. Participants shared how resourceful relationships they had, both on and off campus, positively affect their academic success. Findings from this study encourage U.S. higher education leaders to be mindful of the demands of being a low-income, first-generation Latino male college students, and provide this student population with more support on campus. Research has shown that universities often do not invest much effort into insuring the success or graduation of LIFG students of color (Gray, 2013). It is not enough for universities to recruit and admit these student populations. University leaders must engage these students and invest in their overall persistence in college. It is also suggested that these leaders identify ways to reach this student population at the beginning of their university careers (either as incoming freshmen or recent transfer students).

Findings from this study also highly recommend the development of mentoring programs for incoming LIFG Latino male students, or the improvement of current support programs on college campuses. These mentorships could come from expanding current support programs (which are often underfunded and can only serve a small percentage of this student population) or faculty and staff members willing to serve as a staff mentor to these students throughout their years in college. Though it would not be required for mentors and mentees to share the same cultural and socioeconomic background, the findings show that this student population identified more with those who had similar experiences as they did. Previous research suggested that LIFG students typically do not pursue a college education because they often lack help navigating post-secondary institutions and the financial resources to persist in higher education (D. Wallace, Abel, & Ropers-Huilman, 2000). By establishing new mentoring programs, or expanding current programs, LIFG Latino male students would be provided with the necessary help needed to navigate college.

Recommendations for Further Research

The purpose of this study was to identify the perspectives of low-income, first-generation Latino male college students on how social capital affects their academic success. While significant findings emerged, there are two areas of research which deserve further consideration.

The first recommendation is to expand on this study with a longitudinal mixed-method approach with an extended group of participants. To accomplish this, the following would be suggested: 1) a two-year study which tracks participants as they begin their junior years of college through their graduation; 2) incorporate into this new

study quantitative data in the form of grades, total credits taken and earned, and possibly a semester satisfaction survey; and 3) a larger sample of low-income, first-generation Latino male students. All three of these suggestions would provide richer data for this proposed expanded study. This recommended longitudinal study could also be a comparative study - comparing the target population with students who are not first generation nor considered low-income students.

The second recommendation is a comprehensive study on current mentoring, retention, or support programs (support programs thereafter) on college campuses. The findings from this study suggested that LIFG Latino male students benefited tremendously from their work with an on-campus mentor. Additionally, those who were active participants of their support programs found them to be extremely beneficial. While it is significant to hear the experiences of LIFG students on college campuses, it is just as significant to explore the efforts of support programs, and how they work with different student populations, particularly those who come from similar backgrounds as the participants in this study.

<div align="center">**Conclusion**</div>

The findings of this study expand research related to social capital and low-income, first-generation Latino male college students. Previous research showed that LIFG college students often struggle with issues of persistence and graduation in college. There was limited data showing how LIFG Latino male college students - a population which had extremely low rates of persistence and graduation in higher education - perceived forms of social capital on college campuses, and how formed relationships affected their academic success.

This study's findings indicated that LIFG Latino male college students established resourceful relationships with four different groups: their on-campus peers, faculty and staff members on campus, mentors and advisors who worked in different support programs on campus, and their respective family members, while attending a four-year university in a western state. These relationships positively affected the participants' academic success. Additionally, the findings suggested that the participants in this study were influenced by certain norms learned through family members or personal experiences on campus.

Finally, LIFG Latino male students often must overcome numerous barriers as college students. This research supports the idea that, in order to overcome these barriers, this student population benefits from having meaningful relationships on campus that positively affected their academic success. This research also supports the need for U.S. colleges and universities to adopt strategies to improve ways in which social capital can benefit LIFG Latino male college students, as well as investing in more support programs on college campuses, thus better assisting this student population and ensuring that they will persist and graduate with a college degree.

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