

Boys in Peril: Examining Latino boys' educational pathways and motivation towards postsecondary education

A Qualitative study of Latino boys in Florida and Texas education systems

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QUALITATIVE STUDIES EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Latino male college students are effectively vanishing from our postsecondary institutions (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009), and recent attention from institutional leaders and policymakers (College Board, 2010) finally mirror years of concern from educational leaders about this persistent and growing gender gap in educational attainment. In 2010, three out of every five degrees (i.e., associates or bachelors) earned by Latinos were earned by females, and the degree completion gaps are growing across all critical junctures along the education pipeline.

Since 2000, colleges and universities in Texas have been focused on bridging gaps at these critical junctures by reaching prescribed targets for higher education participation and success outlined in the State's Closing the Gaps benchmarks. In the latest revision to this plan in summer 2010 (THECB, 2010), the State explicitly highlighted the importance of improving participation and success rates for Latino males across the educational spectrum. Institutions across Florida have also begun to respond to the growing gender gap in educational attainment through campus-based initiatives and community town halls and conferences.

This TG-sponsored mixed-method research study responds directly to this growing national imperative. Our research efforts spanned across two states, across 9 institutions, and reached more than 160 students, administrators, and educators. Our study yielded significant findings related to the complex experiences of Latino male student navigating their postsecondary education pathways. Below are some highlights of our key qualitative findings across both studies:

- Complex role of masculinity, peers, and family on Latino male success,
- Lack of consistent institutional awareness across key stakeholder groups about the depth and severity of the challenges facing Latino males in education, and
- Perceived challenges to institutionalizing male-focused programs and services.
- Lack of awareness of educational obstacles for Latino males by educators,
- Role of Latino families in Latino males' educational experiences,
- Impact of peers and mentoring on Latino males,
- Role of program outreach and partnerships focused on Latino males.

The last section of this report highlights key implications for practice that we have distilled from our collective research findings. These implications are written with an eye towards existing efforts already in place within some of the institutions included in this study, and our aim is to continue to inform the strong commitment that has already been demonstrated to the issue of Latino male student success. Our suggestions are organized as follows:

- High Stakes Engagement practices
- First Year Programs with "Men in Mind"
- Role Models Matter
- Step-by-Step: Academic Advising and Career Planning
- Messaging to Latino Males and their Families
- Family Influence: Fathers, Mothers, Siblings, Others

DESCRIPTION OF STUDY, RATIONALE, AND PURPOSE

In 2010, Dr. Luis Ponjuan (University of Florida), Dr. MaryAnn Clark (University of Florida) and Dr. Victor Saenz (The University of Texas at Austin) collaborated on a TG-funded research endeavor to investigate the emerging crisis facing Latino male students in higher education. This collaborative research effort aimed to respond to the growing national imperative surrounding the Latino gender gap in educational attainment, and it was also a significant next step in the important research work that had already been put forth by two of the Co-PIs (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). The overarching purpose of this mixed-method research study was threefold:

1. to investigate Latino males' higher education experiences in Gainesville, FL and Austin, TX, including to understand how they navigate their postsecondary pathways;
2. to determine the level of overall awareness and engagement among key institutional stakeholders regarding Latino male educational success;
3. to understand the challenges in institutionalizing Latino male programs/services at educational institutions within the local community and beyond.

Initially this was to be a one-year research study utilizing both qualitative and quantitative methods, but we were granted an additional year of funding from TG to expand our scope even further while retaining our original research purpose. The end result of this funding support produced two years' worth of rigorous, mixed-method research activity, the results of which are extensively highlighted and synthesized throughout this final report.

First Year of Study (Fall 2010-Spring 2011) – Gainesville & Austin

The project was initially conceived as a mixed-method research design to qualitatively examine the experiences of Latino male students enrolled at multiple institutions within each community (i.e., Gainesville, FL and Austin, TX), and quantitatively inquire about the college aspirations of a national sample of Latino male high school students using 2009 High School Longitudinal Study (HSLs) data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (*please refer to the TG Quantitative report*). The restricted 2009 HSLs data was not released by NCES until late fall of 2011, so conducting our quantitative analysis using these data was postponed until the second year of the study.

During the first year, project teams in Florida and Texas conducted student focus groups with Latino male students and canvassed the perspectives of key student affairs, academic affairs, and executive-level administrators on the growing crisis facing Latino males within each local community. Specific details related to size of sample and recruitment methods will be described in the methods section of this report.

Second Year of Study (Fall 2011-Spring 2012) – HSLs, San Antonio, and Tarrant County

In the spring of 2011, we requested and successfully received supplemental funding from TG to extend the time needed to complete our quantitative analysis. Further, due to the increased attention focused on the growing Latino gender gap in educational attainment around the state of Texas, we received approval from TG to expand our **qualitative** research footprint to include **two** additional research sites in Texas: San Antonio and Tarrant County (Fort Worth, TX).

In San Antonio, we targeted:

- **Two community colleges (San Antonio College and Palo Alto College)**
- **The University of Texas at San Antonio (four-year institution)**

In Tarrant County (Fort Worth) we targeted:

- **Tarrant County College, Trinity River Campus (two-year institution)**

Expanding our qualitative study to these two additional sites in Texas significantly extended the scope of our work and provided for a rich array of perspectives and insights. San Antonio and Fort Worth represent two of the largest and fastest growing population centers for the Latino community in Texas, and each of these regions are vital to the economic prosperity of the state. More importantly, each of these population centers exhibit vastly different social and economic contexts which provided a compelling backdrop for the qualitative study of Latino male college student experiences, especially in community colleges within each community.

Our ultimate goal for this expanded scope of work was to be able to synthesize our qualitative research findings from our two original sites (in Gainesville, FL and Central Texas) with the emergent findings from two new proposed sites funded by TG (San Antonio, TX and Fort Worth, TX). In addition to this data collection, we merged findings from two additional sites (in McAllen, TX and the Houston area) that our research team has already completed independent of TG’s grant support (see Table 1). In this way, we forged an even greater understanding—drawn from the perspectives of students, staff and administrators across six different research sites in Texas and one in Florida—about the challenges facing Latino males as they navigate their higher education pathways across institutions within each state.

Table 1.

	First Year TG Grant (2010-11): <i>“Boys in Peril”</i>	Second Year TG Supplemental (2011-12) <i>“Boys in Peril”</i>	Project MALES Study (2011; Dr. V. Saenz): <i>(not funded by TG)</i>
Research Sites	Gainesville, FL & Central Texas (Austin)	San Antonio, TX & Fort Worth, TX	McAllen, TX & Houston, TX
<i>Institutions</i>	<i>Univ. of Florida; Santa Fe College; Alachua County School District</i>	<i>UT San Antonio; Alamo Community Colleges (Palo Alto College & San Antonio College)</i>	<i>South Texas College; PSJA ISD; McAllen, ISD</i>
	<i>Univ. of Texas, Austin Community College, AISD</i>	<i>Tarrant County College (Trinity River Campus)</i>	<i>Lone Star College System (North Harris campus & Cy-Fair campus)</i>

As described above, TG’s supplemental grant support allowed us to expand our original qualitative study from two sites to four. Findings from these four sites were then merged with our work from two additional sites that our research team has already completed through a research study called Project MALES. Project MALES (Mentoring to Achieve Latino

Educational Success) is led by Dr. Victor B. Saenz and it is supported by UT-Austin’s Division of Diversity and Community Engagement (DDCE), South Texas College in McAllen, TX, and Lone Star College System in Houston, TX. Project MALES utilized the same research protocol as the TG-supported “Boys in Peril”, so merging the qualitative findings from both studies was appropriate. A copy of the protocol questions has been included in Appendix A (Focus Group Questions) and Appendix B (Interview Questions).

UT-AUSTIN AND FLORIDA QUALITATIVE STUDY METHODOLOGY

As stated, our study employed both qualitative and quantitative approaches in addressing our primary research purpose: to better understand the postsecondary education pathways and experiences of Latino males students in Florida and Texas.

This study embraced a qualitative, interpretive approach, which recognizes the socially constructed nature of reality and the validity of situated knowledge claims (Willis, 2007). We also acknowledge that understanding a particular environment requires understanding individuals’ subjective perceptions of their environment. Meaning also arises through social relationships as people negotiate and create shared understandings of the world (Willis, 2007). The qualitative components of our overall study, therefore, focused on how students, faculty, and staff at various institutions perceived and made sense of their experiences.

Year 1. The first year of our research study (fall 2010-spring 2011) employed qualitative methods and involved the collection of focus group and individual interview data from three segments of education in the Gainesville and Austin communities. Project teams at each site conducted one-on-one interviews with key administrators and also conducted student focus groups with Latino males in college. This multi-pronged approach aided in triangulating our data, giving us a more complete picture of student perception, institutional awareness, and programmatic impact.

Location	First Year TG Grant (2010-11): “Boys in Peril”	Focus Groups	Number of Students Contacted	Interviews
Gainesville, FL	Univ. of Florida	2	4	3
	Santa Fe College	0	4	6
	Alachua County School District	0	5	5
Austin, TX	University of Texas	1	4	4
	Austin Community College	1	7	4
	Austin Independent School District	0	0	3

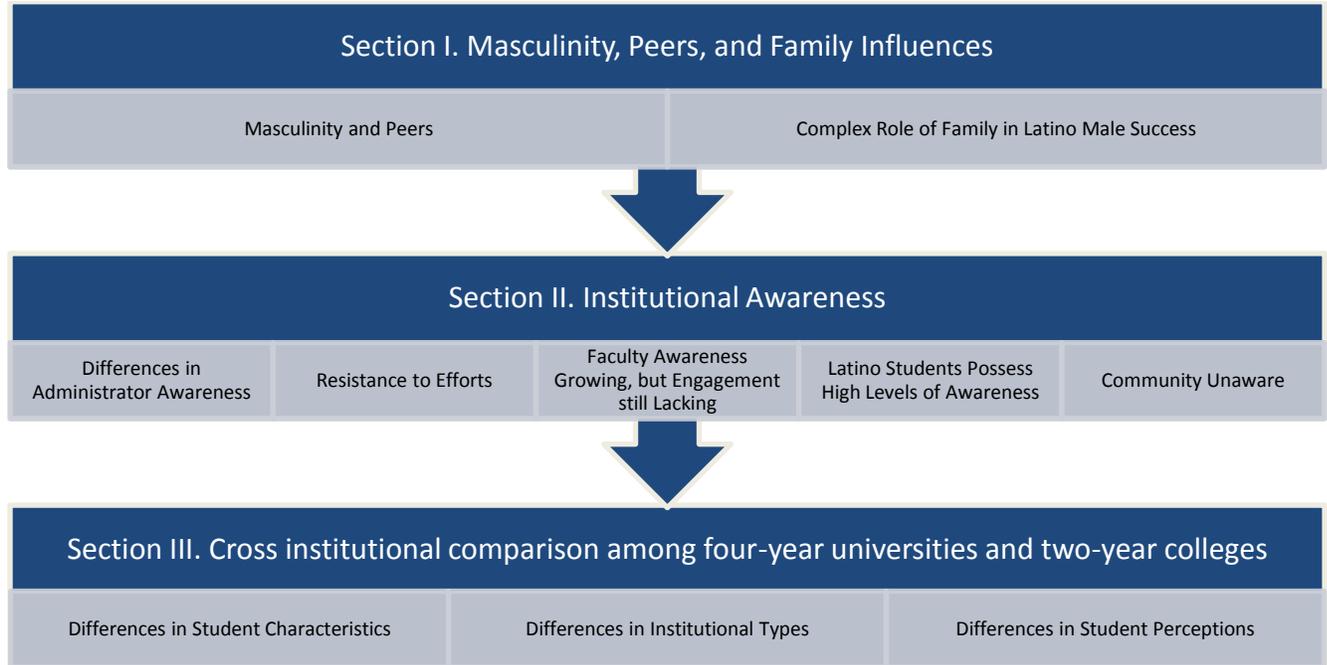
Year 2. The second year of our research study (fall 2011-spring 2012) employed the same qualitative protocol as in year one as we expanded to two additional sites (San Antonio, TX and Fort Worth, TX).

Location	First Year TG Grant (2010-11): <i>“Boys in Peril”</i>	Focus Groups	Number of Students Contacted	Interviews
<i>Austin, TX</i>	University of Texas at San Antonio	6	25	4
	Alamo Community Colleges (Palo Alto College & San Antonio College)	15	37	8
	Tarrant County College (Trinity River Campus)	4	21	7

UT-AUSTIN QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

The results section highlights the final research findings of our study. These results are the culmination of two years of data collection across multiple research sites throughout the State of Texas. The results are divided into three sections which respond to our research questions: (1) masculinity, peers, and family influences (2) institutional awareness, and (3) Cross institutional comparison among four-year universities and two-year colleges.

From here, results are further explored into ten themes found across the research.



Section I. Masculinity, Peers, and Family Influences

Theme 1. Masculinity and Peers

A major theme from our findings revolves around masculinity, or what it means to be a man for Latino males. There was a definite dichotomy between traditional notions of masculinity (i.e., qualities traditionally associated with men such as strength, aggression, and a reluctance to display emotions) including the cultural concept “machismo” and its impact on Latino males’ experiences in an educational setting. Oftentimes, machismo served as a source of empowerment and resilience. Unfortunately, machismo also served as a barrier to certain help-seeking behaviors (e.g., utilizing advising, tutoring, peer support services, etc.). This theme closely related to how students discussed the dual-edged influence of their peers. Peers—male friends and mentors in particular—were recognized as either supportive, encouraging influences or as forces pulling men away from their studies and educational goals.

1.1 Complex Influence of Pride

Traditional views of masculinity stress the importance of remaining tough, or “strong and silent,” in the face of challenges and avoiding displays of emotion. Displaying emotion is often perceived as a weakness or as a feminine (or “sissy”) response. For male college students, fear of being perceived as weak can translate into refusing to ask for help, even in the face of imminent failure. Students often labeled their resistance to help seeking as “pride” and/or “machismo.”

The very notion of “machismo” is a paradox. On one hand, men’s pride, or machismo, is a source of strength, propelling them to achieve more and work harder for their goals. In fact, for some men in our study, the very thought of Latina female success surpassing Latino male success triggered their competitive nature and prompted them to try harder in school; a positive response from feelings of pride/“machismo.”

Male pride is at the root of the statement:

“It's us being smart enough to build in opportunities so that you can keep your sense of self and pride and then get the support that you're paying for. Your fees and everything - you're paying for this stuff. You need to get down there and get it done.”

-Student, 2-year institution

“I mean that shows that you are taking care of your responsibilities, and being a man, just like we were taught. Um, going back to that pride issue, I mean, you are... We all have a sense of pride, man, and I mean, we all need to learn when to, uh, be smart and not let it get in the way.”

-Student, 2-year institution

Based upon these responses, it is easy to see how pride helps ground students in their accomplishments. In fact, pride becomes an essential component to their college-going behavior as their accomplishments help students develop a stronger sense of belonging to their academic institution and the college-going culture.

On the other hand, pride/machismo has negative consequences, of which men were cognizant. Men directly articulated that “machismo” was a barrier to their academic success as it often retrained Latino males from standing up for themselves and seeking help when it is most critically needed. Classic examples of this are evident in the following statements:

Facilitator: Do you think Latinos in general feel comfortable asking other Latinos for help, or is that—

St #1: I don’t think so. I think there’s some sort of pride in our culture that keeps us from asking for help in general.

St #2: Yeah, I think it’s basically that some of us are on our own and we’re by ourselves already so there’s not really—we’re already here doing this by ourselves, why do we need else to—

St #3: I heard a word that relates to that and they call it *machismo*.

St #4: Yeah, exactly.

Group: [Laughs]

St #3: Yeah, trying to go out there and do it by yourself and not asking for help; that's one of the terms that I hear.

St #1: That's true.

St #5: And like what you were saying the machismo, when I would here stories about my dad, he would tell me about how he raised us and that he didn't need help from anybody. So when I'm in school I'm thinking I have to do everything by myself because I have something to prove, and asking for help I guess kind of weakens the cause of what I'm doing. So there is some sense of machismo in that.

—Students, 2 year institution

Statements such as this show the thought processes associated from years of acculturation to certain behaviors for many Latino males.

“Machismo” or male pride often has negative connotations when used to describe Latino men both culturally and societally. Many young Latino men have fallen into a self-fulfilling prophecy; they internalize societal expectations in negative ways, staying tough even when it is to their detriment educationally. This phenomenon was evident when Latino males were asked why they do not seek help and/or why they do not admit lack of comprehension of material. Rather than answering the question directly, many young men placed blame on “machismo,” and responded that they are just “too proud,” “too stubborn,” or “too dismissive” to access resources. In several interviews, young men connected those behaviors back to pride:

“It also comes from a sense of pride. You know, you're always taught to be a man, and you're proud and if you fall, if you stumble, then that's your own fault. You don't bring anybody down with you. You don't ask for help because it's your doing. You shouldn't have to ask anybody for help, and so it's just that sense of pride that carries over - that in the end, makes you fail...because with that, if you're failing, you don't come back up because you don't want anybody to help, and sometimes you can't come back up without help. So it's that sense of pride that just holds...that brings you down.”

—Student, 2-year institution

This young man articulates how pride, and a reluctance to seek out help, can ultimately doom Latino males to college failure. Because these young men internalize their obstacles, rather than seeking resources or a support system, they are at times overwhelmed and unable to handle the obstacles that they face.

1.2 Fear and Pride Inhibit Help Seeking Behaviors

The notion of pride was often articulated in conjunction with feelings of fear. Men indicated that, despite their overt pride and confidence, they were often afraid of failing. This fear revealed itself as anxiety and, when faced with challenges, men were more likely to quit, opting to take pride in meeting familial obligations than pride in persisting in school. It is important to note that part of what makes it “easy” for male students to drop out for work is a perception that help is not readily available. It is almost a fight or flight response; by choosing to drop out, males could run away from the source of their fear of failure—education—but simultaneously run towards a source of confidence and strength—a job.

St #1: I think a big portion of students, who are enrolled here, especially male Hispanics, they're not that serious about school. They enroll in a few classes, and they're in school and that's it. They're not really taking it seriously as they should be.

St #2: Or they'll fail a class and then they'll just be like, 'Uh, I'm not doing it; I'm not going to try it again, I'll just drop it.'

St #3: Or they think that they're not smart enough to be here.

St #4: Yeah, they do badly in one class and then all of a sudden college is impossible because of that one class.

St #5: Because they don't want to get help because of machismo.

Group: [Laughs]

St #6: And unfortunately it's just when you don't know the ropes and there's nobody there to teach you. Most of us are first year generation college students and we don't know what to do. And I think a lot of that has a lot to do with it, so when they finally hit that breaking point, they just quit.

St #7: Yeah. They're probably just looking for the first thing that gets in their way to step out, whether it's their family and they're like, 'Oh I have to get out of school then because I have to do this for my family,' or, 'Hey I'm not really getting the support that I need here on campus,' or, 'I'm not doing so hot in this class.' Then that's the first thing that comes to their mind and they're going to drop. They don't have their long-term plan set up for them and that's basically what it is. They're looking for the first excuse to get out of college.

– *Student, 2-year institution*

Several students also articulated that they perceived high school and college very differently. As the quote below indicates, high school is seen as easier, and some men felt they could use their male privilege to “charm” their teachers, cheat in order to pass, or leverage their sports prowess to pass:

St #1: I can tell you this: when you're in sports in high school, and the coaches like you, you're going to make it through high school, there's no doubt about that. So that's why you see a lot of sports players and they don't take high school seriously. They're like, 'My coach---it ain't nothing.' Which that's the way I used to go to school. I used to go to school and in all the history and science classes I had coaches. So they would [say], 'Okay, we'll pass you along like everybody else.' [Group laughs] So, I think that's one of the reasons why I got through high school, but...

Facilitator: So you liked it at the moment, but now you're kind of...

St #2: And now I'm kind of dreading it, like, 'Okay, I wish I would have actually paid attention and had a good teacher.'

– *Student, 2-year institution*

Unfortunately, teachers and other students can also reinforce unhealthy behavior such as putting forth little effort/misdirected effort in academic performance. Young men are often underprepared for the realities of what it takes to succeed in education; this often sets them up for failure since many have not acquired the skills needed for success (Kimmel, 2008). Consequently, men often do not feel prepared for college-level work. They are also less likely to ask for help because they do not want to appear weak or compromise their appearance of confidence:

“I think that's one of the things that freshman have that they're scared to ask when they first get here. I know when I was first here I sat in the back and I would never ask questions, I would never raise my hand. But second semester I started learning; I sat in the front, I started asking questions and things just changed dramatically for me. I realized, 'Well this is really going to change my grades,' and it did. It affected my grades so I think the teachers help out a lot and it's just something that, I guess, the machismo thing, too, you know, 'I don't want to ask; I don't want to look dumb.' That's one of the main things so yeah, I think it helps a lot to ask and they do help.”

– *Student, 2-year institution*

The issue, therefore, is not necessarily that resources were unavailable, or that students were uninformed of the resources or how to access them; the primary factor that held them back from seeking help was fear of appearing lazy or confused and/or pride in fulfilling their and their family's expectations:

“...a lot of Hispanic parents don't really have a clue about education overall and when you by yourself, first generation, come to college, you're really hit hard because you have no idea what the expectation is and overall how to succeed in college. And you have to go out there and get it on your own.”

– *Student, 2-year institution*

The concern at hand, therefore, is not one of just pride, but a mixture of both pride and fear, which has proven to be a dangerous combination impeding many young Latino men from

excelling academically. When men internalize traditional masculinity ideals, it ignites their hidden fears and inhibits their help-seeking behaviors. This finding is helpful to higher education administrators as it can inform institutional initiatives to reach out to men more effectively.

1.3 Help Seeking is Different for Latinos and Latinas

Our research has also found that many men are afraid to ask questions, particularly in comparison to their more vocal and independent female peers. Students articulated that there exists a prominent difference between Latino males and Latina females:

“I think generally women are more ambitious than men. But also the Latino community, or perspective, I think that there are more single households run by women than run by men. And I think with the Latino community it’s even greater in numbers. And I think that Latino females are more ambitious and now with the way that this country is not working out. Women are being more independent, being the household head, and bringing income into the house; more income than the male. I think they look at that and they want to be a part of that, and kind of make a mark and show that they can leave or go by without the male figure.”

– *Student, 2-year institution*

Furthermore, many men expressed discomfort in approaching authority figures, especially faculty members. This fear of feeling vulnerable and emasculated limits the amount of help Latino males seek, if they sought help at all. Whereas females are more likely to actively seek help, males are more likely to remain silent when confused or in need of help. When seeking help, some Latino men shared that they felt more vulnerable with male figures and were more comfortable seeking help from maternal figures:

St #1: I would say we reach out better to females because a male would probably be like, ‘Come on dude, don’t talk to me about that.’

St #2: Yeah they’ll probably be like, ‘Stop being a punk,’ or something, ‘Suck it up.’
Yes, it would be easier to have a female mentor.

St #3: Yeah and if it was with a female, you’re kind of more emotional, I guess, and you just connect faster.

– *Students, 2-year institution*

This difference between male and female help-seeking behaviors has deep implications for student affairs professionals and faculty, who are in daily contact with men and must actively engage men in getting the assistance they need.

1.4 Peer Influence is Dual-Edged

Traditional notions of what it means to be a man also influenced peer interactions both positively and negatively. Peers can have profound effects on how Latino male students' attitudes and habits regarding college are developed. For example, students consistently mentioned they were hesitant to ask for help from their peers, staff, and faculty members. Furthermore, when men were aware of resources, their pride discouraged them from seeking assistance because they did not want to appear weak to their friends:

“I think it's harder for males because – I'm first generation Latino here in the United States. So what we were instilled, and like, our father was like, ‘Men are men and we don't ask for help, we don't need help, we can do it on our own.’ So we're less likely to ask for help...”

– *Student, 2-year institution*

Latino males further expressed a dual-edged influence of peers, both men and women. On the positive side, peers encouraged and provided needed support, even driving them on a postsecondary pathway:

“I think it's also your influences from friends. If your friends go to college, you're more likely to go to college. If your friends don't go to college, you're more likely not to go to college. So that's basically part [of it]; who you hang around with, how your friends act. What they're doing, it affects everything, especially around our age group, the younger group of Latinos.”

– *Student, 2-year institution*

“I was intimidated and I couldn't do it at first, but my girlfriend told me, ‘No, you can do it; it's not something you can't do.’ She believed in me so it made me want to come. And it was just getting that foot in the door, really. That's all it is and people are just afraid and some of them are just lazy.”

– *Student, 2-year institution*

Peers pulled men away from their studies, encouraging non-academically oriented or even academically detrimental activities. Often, these activities were more aligned with traditional notions of masculinity, which stressed physical labor and strength instead of intellect. Regarding male peers specifically, students were more likely to indicate a negative rather than positive influence. Therefore, men needed to form positive associations and institutions needed to encourage the creation of peer groups that encourage engagement rather than disengagement.

Administrators agreed that the influence of peers significantly impacts the success of Latino males in higher education. Most felt that peers connected students to the institution and provided a less intimidating way for them to gain access to information and additional support for their studies:

“I think that peers also have a very important role to play, and I don't think we've examined that phenomenon as well, but I think often times, young men and

women will go to their peers for advice more than they will go to, say, an adult figure. Basically because they feel more comfortable with their peers, and they don't feel as intimidated...they're afraid to ask the questions because of the fear of that invalidating experience they will have, and I think with peers, they will feel more comfortable.”

-Administrator, 4-year institution

As the administrator acknowledges, Latino males (similar to other students) will often go to their peers for assistance because they feel more comfortable with others who are going through similar circumstances and pose less of a threat of resulting in a negative experience. Asking for help is already difficult enough without adding more intimidation from a person who might not provide the supportive environment that the student was hoping for. Other administrators echoed this support for peer interaction by illuminating the positive peer mentor role that can emerge:

“I think peers play a greater impact that we realize. I think positive peer role models where you have a student that has been here a year, has made that connection and has engaged the influence they can have over a friend a brother, a sister can be huge. Much more than I would ever have.”

-Administrator, 2-year institution

This administrator discussed the crucial role that peer mentors can play in the lives of Latino male students. Administrators can make an impact in terms of strategic planning, mentorship, and programming. However, this administrator highlights how peer-to-peer interactions may have a much deeper impact than anything that administrators might be able to orchestrate on their own.

Students are influenced by their peers in many ways. Peers provided support and encouragement for educational success in some instances, while in others they provided distractions or misinformation. In addition, men more likely to be influenced in ways that would allow them to appear confident and/or capable to their friends rather than appearing weak by asking for help. Relationships with male peers, in particular, are a significant influence on college men, but not always beneficially. Practitioners need to understand the influence of male peers and importance of students' building supportive networks with a culture of giving un-asked-for assistance.

1.5 Sacrificing Education for Financial Success

Another interrelated effect of peers and masculinity is the role of finances. Many Latino men equate money with social status. This means that opportunities for making “quick/easy” money are a constant temptation, especially when many Latino male students have a family to support:

“Money, family; you have two or three kids. The wife doesn't work, you have a mortgage, you have a car payment, and just college is not in the picture right now.”

– Student, 2-year institution

Students also expressed that they felt pressure from their community, peers, and others to enter the workforce immediately after high school because employment is a cultural marker of manhood. The sooner they can attain employment status and demonstrate an economic gain they have essentially demonstrated their “manhood.” Education, therefore, is seen by some as taking “too long” while work provides more immediate status and self-worth. Men, therefore, expressed a dualistic conception of school and making money:

“Yeah, with mine it is because like my mom, right after I got out of high school, she was like, ‘When are you going to get a job?’ And [I said], ‘Well I kind of want to go to college first and try it out; if it’s not for me then I’ll get a job. But she constantly keeps reminding me, ‘When are you going to get a job? You have to help us with the income, and stuff.’ And then my mind’s like, I’m taking all of these classes and I have a full course load and everything so I can’t do it. It’s not like easy classes, they’re pretty difficult classes so ... I mean I’ve gotten to understand it but she always used to always remind me, ‘When are you getting a job? When are you going to help out?’” –

– *Student, 2-year institution*

Male students sometimes find it difficult to forego markers of masculinity such as gainful employment. Many male students also felt there was a noticeable disconnect between education and economic success. Sometimes, students felt that education and economic success were juxtaposed instead of as interrelated. In working with men, therefore, practitioners must be aware of the importance of students’ ability to earn money and must help students see the connection between education and future prosperity.

Summary of Theme 1. Masculinity and Peers

Traditional notions of masculinity revere the appearance of strength and capability. Staying silent in the face of adversity, remaining emotionless, and projecting confidence in one’s ability to succeed are perceived as normal for Latino males. These traditional ideas of what it means to be a man can positively influence young men to work hard, achieve more, and take pride in what they are accomplishing for themselves and their families. Masculinity impacts men negatively. Often, it manifests itself in a reluctance to seeking help, fearing failure, remaining silent when confused, and not accessing resources even though they are needed. To put it simply, “men” do not express fear, do not ask for help, and maintain a façade of confidence even when they are deeply fearful of the consequences of their actions. Peers often impact notions of what it means to be a man by encouraging seeking employment over studying, Peers can also help men funnel their energy back into educational endeavors. Practitioners can work more effectively with men if they are aware of the way ideas of masculinity influences Latino male behaviors. Administrator awareness is essential in developing varied approaches needed to ensure Latino male success in higher education.

Theme 2. Complex Role of Family in Latino Male Success

The interview and focus group data emphasized the critical role family members play in Latino male success. Students provided in-depth descriptions of how family members communicated academic expectations and demonstrated the value they placed on education. These interactions shaped Latino male students' college-going aspirations and influenced their higher education experiences. College and university administrators also observed these family dynamics and highlighted their influence on Latino males. Data analysis revealed five key themes regarding the relationship between family members and Latino male student success. They included: family influence on the college going attitudes and behaviors, female figures, the complicated role of fathers, family expectations to work, and administrators' views of Latino families.

2.1 Family Influence on College Going Attitudes and Behaviors

Parents, siblings, and extended family networks are instrumental to the postsecondary pursuits of Latino males. Students shared the encouragement and support they received from their relatives. They also reflected on their family's struggles and expressed a desire to "do better." In addition, Latino males learned about college-going behaviors from family members who were unsuccessful in pursuing a college degree; students learned from their family's mistakes and re-strategized to achieve success. This section addresses the specific roles of parents, siblings, and extended family in the college-going attitudes and behaviors of Latino male students.

Parents

Parents were key to establishing a college-going mindset among Latino males. Students portrayed supportive parents who talked about college in the home and stressed the importance of earning a college degree. Parents provided emotional and financial support and served as role models. Latino males in this study also underscored their parents' role in setting academic expectations.

Family conversations about enrolling in college emphasized the value of a college degree and the relationship between going to college and future success. These family discussions began at an early age and inculcated the importance of a higher education:

"So at a very young age it was always instilled in me, my brother, and my sister that we were going to go to college because we wanted to be more than what our parents were and what our grandparents were."

– *Student, 2-year institution*

Parents of Latino male students described a postsecondary degree as the gateway to a future, successful life. A college degree provided an opportunity to "do better" than previous generations and also promoted economic stability. Despite their personal struggles, parents continued to encourage their children to enroll in college and complete their degree.

“Well, my parents and my stepmom are supportive because they want me to have a better life because they work in labor and they want me to have a better life to not settle, to get a better life, to have a better paying job because I see them as always very tired and they’re very supportive and they want me to finish.”

– *Student, 2-year institution*

Understanding the value of a college degree, parents also established non-negotiable expectations for students. They set the educational norms and standards for the family. In some cases, students were not provided with another postsecondary option; college was the only option. For example, one Latino male student said,

“To me, my parents, this is what I had to do. There was no question. They don’t show encouragement; this is what I’m supposed to do and there’s no question about it, that’s it. I’m supposed to go to college, get a degree that is going to make money and live a successful life.”

– *Student, 2-year institution*

Parents were instrumental in communicating the significance of a college degree. Their encouragement and expectations affected the college-going attitudes of Latino males. Students were also motivated to pursue college because they observed their parents financial struggles.

For example, one student recalled extreme the economic hardships he encountered within his family. As he endured hard labor and earned minimum wage, he realized college provided an avenue to a better paying job. These challenges, coupled with a desire for future financial security, propelled his enrollment in college:

“The biggest thing that pushed me to come to school was growing up, you know, young, and working in the fields, my family, we were like dead-broke in that time so, you know, I look back now, and it’s just like, you know, working in the fields and everything was a pain, and now working minimum wage is just something I can’t do to provide for my family, so. You know, I really want to get out of the minimum wage and not go back to working in the fields. To get something better.”

– *Student, 2-year institution*

Having seen and experienced the stark reality of life without a college degree, Latino male students’ sought postsecondary education. Thus, their attitudes towards college and long-term goals are informed by their first-hand experiences, observations, and parental influences.

Siblings

Older and younger siblings also affected Latino males’ perceptions of college. Their influences were unique to the siblings’ personal and educational experiences. While older siblings offered mentorship, students also revealed their intent to influence their younger siblings’ educational

aspirations. Latino male students specifically described how older siblings motivated them to pursue a college degree by expressing academic expectations, providing mentorship and advice, and serving as role models.

Similarly to parents, older siblings set academic benchmarks and held Latino male students accountable. For example, one Latino male student said,

“I have two younger brothers. But my older brothers and sisters, they’ve all gone to universities and gotten master’s and bachelor’s and they told he I have to follow in that footsteps. So I decided to come to college and start off here at [my institution.]”

– *Student, 2-year institution*

Older siblings communicated the value of a higher education through their example, and they expected their younger counterparts to pursue the same path. Latino males also described how their older siblings challenged them to be goal-oriented and use their time wisely:

“I was just enjoying the time off and my sister called me and said, ‘What are you doing? You’re just at the house.’ She said, ‘Why don’t you start going to school and do something?’ And that’s what happened.”

– *Student, 2-year institution*

This example highlights the role of older siblings in encouraging Latino male students to be productive. In addition to setting higher education expectations, older siblings promoted the idea of college as “cool” and emphasized the need to enroll at an early age:

“My brother's always like, I remember since I was a kid, he's like, you know, you gotta go to college. College is, like, cool, or whatever and this and that.”

– *Student, 4-year institution*

Older siblings also influenced Latino male students’ collegiate experiences by offering advice based on their own challenges. Siblings shared some of obstacles they overcame with Latino male students. They offered mentorship and encouraged Latino males to persevere:

“I actually have an older brother that goes here so all the mistakes that he’s made, all the stuff that he’s done wrong, he actually guides me and tells me what to do, how to use this, how to do that, my math, macro, all that stuff.”

– *Student, 2-year institution*

This Latino male student benefitted from his sibling's guidance and avoided future pitfalls. Instead of learning the "how to's" of college through trial and error, he was able to rely on his brother's prior experiences and insight. In addition to providing counsel, older siblings inspired Latino male students to overcome personal challenges and pursue their degree:

"One major factor had to be my older brother. Um, I saw him go through a lot of struggles in life. He went, he came to college here at UTSA. He suffered a lot, um, with medical condition that he had, and he still finished college. Now he's going back for his Master's, and that was really a big influence like to, uh, achieve my goal to become a Mechanical Engineer."

– *Student, 4-year institution*

Students observed their older siblings overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles, and, in turn, they are encouraged to persist towards their degree. Older siblings can serve as role models as they continue with their collegiate career.

Latino male students also explained the influence of younger siblings on their college-going attitudes and behaviors. Students realized their younger siblings were looking up to them, and they sought to encourage their younger sibling's enrollment in college:

"And also what influences me is that I have a younger brother and I want him to go to school and do good, so I have to be a role model for him."

– *Student, 2-year institution*

Latino male students realized their instrumental role in supporting their younger sibling's educational path. As college students, they also understood the importance of a higher education and attempted to guide younger siblings towards obtaining a college degree. For example, one student said,

"I have my younger brother. I want to be, you know, a role model for him. Um, you know, he tells me sometimes that he's not sure if he wants to attend college. He's thinking about opening up a business and starting his own shop like my stepdad. And I tell him that's cool, you know. But I tell he can always get an education, too. And if he ever has any questions about, you know, education, um, post-high school, he can always come ask me. So I just want to like open up a new trail for his eyes to see. I try to help him that."

– *Student, 4-year institution*

Even if their younger sibling was interested in pursuing a different postsecondary path (e.g., work), Latino male students encouraged their siblings to enroll in college and remained available to answer college-going questions.

Siblings challenged students to accomplish more than they thought capable and created a support system throughout the college-going experience. Older siblings offered practical advice and provided valuable insight into the college experience. Relationships with younger siblings provided an opportunity to share lessons learned and offer encouragement. Consequently, siblings heavily influenced Latino males' perspectives on the college-going process.

Extended Family

The influence of extended family members manifested through relationships with cousins, aunts, uncles, and grandparents. These relatives offer encouragement and moral support, and they are the foundation upon which Latino males stand. Latino males attribute their college enrollment and success to the support they received from extended family members:

I had quite a bit of support. It's never been an option for me not to come to college, you know. It's something that they kind of raised me with it, so, they're the reason that I'm here.

– *Student, 2-year institution*

My cousin she's a CPA and she tells me what she does and the benefits of it so, that's why I'm studying in college because I want to make something of myself. Family is what backs me up.

– *Student, 2-year institution*

Family support encouraged Latino males to excel and continue with their collegiate career. Family members also instilled the value of a higher education, and they encouraged Latino males to maximize their learning experiences as college students:

They've been very supportive, my grandmother, my aunts, my cousins, my brothers and sisters, I mean, they keep telling me to go for it, get what you can out of it, get what you can out of it. They keep telling me they're proud of me. I mean, they're all behind me and that's a good thing. It feels good. It feels good.

– *Student, 2-year institution*

Latino males described a sense of satisfaction in knowing their family members were proud of their postsecondary enrollment. Extended family networks fostered confidence in their ability to learn and to contribute to the institution.

Family members also influenced Latino male student success by challenging them to achieve more than prior generation and serving as role models and mentors. For example, one student described the advice he received from his grandfather and how this conversation motivated his enrollment in college:

I remember my grandpa used to tell me 'cause neither of them went to college, and he would tell me, 'You see those?' 'Cause there'd be people taking the trash, I guess, to the garbage truck. He said, 'You see those people outside. Those are our people, and they have to work out like out in the sun all day 'cause they didn't go to college. They work for pennies.' And he was just exaggerating, obviously, but he said they get paid pennies to do that job. And he said, 'You deserve, you deserve better than that. We did that so that you don't have to do that.' So that's, so that really motivated me to want to go to college.

– *Student, 4-year institution*

This student's grandfather encouraged him to pursue an advanced degree by illustrating the life one lives without college and by reminding him that he deserves better. He ought to pursue a higher education because his family and grandparents sacrificed to provide this educational opportunity. Extended family members encouraged students continue with their education and offered mentorship.

Mentors within extended family networks provided insight into the roles and responsibilities of certain professional careers. They also clarified the process for navigating the college-going process or a particular academic program. Extended family members answered questions about course requirements and course selection. For example, one Latino male student said,

It was, basically, my sister-in-law that said, 'Hey, you should go to UTSA.' She's about to graduate with an Accounting degree, and she basically became my mentor, and sat me down and said, 'This is what you need to do.' She'd gone through and learned all of it the hard way, and she basically sat me down and said, 'You need to get into this. You need to get to know this professor, this professor, this professor.'

– *Student, 4-year institution*

This student's experience demonstrates the important role of family members in the college choice and major selection processes. His sister-in-law served as an informal academic advisor by providing helpful information about the department's structure, processes, and faculty members.

2.2 Family Expectations to Work

Family role expectations refer to family expectations outside of college life. Students described a range of expectations related to their role in the family and their work responsibilities. For example, some students felt pressured to work and provide for their immediate family or their own family. In other cases, Latino male students were encouraged to not work and only pursue their college degree.

Latino male students described the challenges they sometimes encountered in pursuing a higher education. Parents expected Latino males to work and be the “breadwinner,” thereby reinforcing the traditional role of men as the provider: Parents also struggled to understand the new role Latino males assumed as college students:

So even though my mom told me, “Go get your education,” I think a lot of parents come from that background and just stay in that state of mind. They don’t see education as a means to... move up in life, because it’s always hard work. Hard work and make money; be a breadwinner.

– *Student, 2-year institution*

Parents were unfamiliar with the work required to be a successful college student. While parents value their child’s education, they are still ingrained with a more traditional perspective of Latino males. One student described how he negotiated his cultural identity and academic identity through conversations with his father:

“My father he works everyday and everyday he sees me going to college he wants me to finish college but at the same time he wants me to work. He wants me to do both. And sometimes I have discussions with him because of that.”

– *Student, 2-year institution*

Latino male students are confronted by their parents’ work expectations, and they manage these perspectives while pursuing their postsecondary degree. Latino males also discussed how their parents encouraged them to delay full-time employment and to focus on their education:

“My dad always said, it doesn’t matter if, as much as a job sounds tempting right out of high school, he said, of course it’s good to have a part-time if you want to have money to buy stuff that you want, but school is more important in the long run.”

– *Student, 2-year institution*

Parents encouraged students to postpone immediate gratification and to focus on the long-term rewards and earning potential with a college degree.

Students also revealed how their parents re-framed their position concerning Latino males and work. Instead of urging Latino males to find a job immediately after high school or while

enrolled in college, some students illustrated their parent's realization that they can better provide for their family with a college degree:

“She didn't put the pressure on me to where I had to like work as soon as I got out of high school. Like, you know, she used to always say, you know, "The male does, it is supposed to be, you know, the provider in the family." But you know, she's like, she always told me that you don't have to, you can become the bread provider through your own way, like you can go to school. Get your education. Become a doctor, you know, do it that way. You don't have to like own the shop like your step-dad does.”

– *Student, 4-year institution*

This student's experience demonstrates the shift from a more conventional understanding the role of Latino males within the family. This new perspective presented Latino males with an opportunity to be the “breadwinner” or “provider” as a college graduate.

2.3 Female Figures

The primary female supporter of Latino male success was their mother, and students specifically addressed the role their mothers played in their enrollment in college. Students wanted to pursue a college degree to honor their mother's hard work and sacrifices. Once enrolled, they wanted to succeed in college to make their mothers proud. Mothers encouraged students' college-going aspiration and inspired them to persist towards their degree.

Mothers contributed to the college-going process because they emphasized the importance of a college degree. Regardless of their personal educational experiences, mothers promoted college enrollment and encouraged Latino males to earn an advanced degree:

Well I know in my household, even though my mother doesn't have a high school diploma or college education, education was always stressed. Or not stressed, but she always put it on me like, ‘Get your education; that will get you where you want to be in life.’

– *Student, 2-year institution*

In addition to highlighting the importance of a college education, mothers motivated students to complete their degree. They set academic expectations and goals for Latino males, and students aspire to achieve those goals and to succeed in college:

“The one person I do everything for is my mom. I mean, I can say when I first started college, I didn't stop because I didn't want to be looked upon as a failure towards my mom, and so I know of the...one person that I can do it for the most is my mom, just so, ‘Hey, I accomplished it. You're proud of me. And I did what I had to do.’”

– *Student, 2-year institution*

“And so, my mom always says, "Yes, I want those bragging rights." But it's also because she wants those positive bragging rights. She, she doesn't want to just say, ‘We went to college.’ She wants to say, ‘They went to college. They got a degree. Now they have this job at some major corporation or they've started their own business.’ And, she wants us to be able to make our, a name for ourselves.”

– *Student, 4-year institution*

Mothers motivated Latino males to do well in college and beyond. Students wanted to accomplish their goals in order to make their mothers proud and to demonstrate their appreciation for their mother's support. Students also recognized they would not be in college without their mother's support, and they remained in college and committed to their degree out of respect for their mothers.

2.4 Complicated Role of Fathers

Latino male students portrayed a range of support from their fathers. Students described their fathers to be indifferent, supportive, or involved. Fathers served as role models and encouraged Latino males to consider future career possibilities. The cultural values instilled by fathers to students informed their experiences upon matriculation in college.

For example, fatherly influences framed Latino males' understanding of help seeking in college. Fathers who discouraged asking questions or help also informed their students' behaviors on-campus:

“I think it's harder for males because-I'm first generation Latino here in the United States. So what we were instilled, and like, our father was like, ‘Men are men and we don't ask for help, we don't need help, we can do it on our own.’ So we're less likely to ask for help like, ‘How do you go about doing this? What should I do to get these classes? How would I go about getting my degree? Or, how do I transfer?’ and stuff like that.”

– *Student, 2-year institution*

This cultural perspective on asking for assistance presented new challenges for Latino males. As first-generation college students, Latino males entered the college with limited understanding into the workings of the institution. Perceptions on help seeking only further confounded their ability to navigate the college's practices and procedures.

Fathers also encouraged Latino males to continue with their education to avoid economic struggles. Students recalled conversations where their fathers promoted a higher education as a way to secure a better career and secure livelihood:

“My father he didn't, he didn't graduate high school, and he's working construction. And, um, we're..we're struggling financially. And he's always told me to graduate, and go to college and be somebody so you can have better than what he did. “

– *Student, 2-year institution*

‘Don’t struggle like I struggle,’ is what my dad told me before he passed away. And he wouldn’t tell me that but in bits and pieces, ‘You see me working 3 jobs to maintain you.’ He’d put it like, ‘I didn’t like that so you shouldn’t do that; I didn’t like that so you don’t do that.’

– *Student, 2-year institution*

Fathers wanted Latino males to strive for greater achievements. They did not want students to struggle in the same way they struggled, and they wanted students to find satisfying careers. To assist in students in determining their long-term career goals, Latino males received encouragement to explore their options:

My dad was like, “You can do whatever you want in life. You can be a cop or a surgeon or an astronaut; whatever that might be just try to be the best and do whatever makes you happy.” And they are the ones that support me; I’m very grateful for that. I think it comes to role models.

– *Student, 2-year institution*

And I always remember like my mom, no my dad, telling me, "Oh, you're going to be a doctor or an engineer, or something, like, try to do something different, or whatever." 'Cause like, even though my father didn't understand how, what, what it is to be a student, or how, you know. how it feels like, or the, and the struggles, like, he still wants something better for me.

– *Student, 4-year institution*

Students described varying levels of support from fathers, and in some cases, students needed to communicate the value of a college degree to their fathers. In other cases, fathers overtly supported students’ college aspirations and encouraged them to maximize their potential. Fathers often influenced Latino male success by sharing their personal struggles. These encouraging words prompted students to pursue a college education to avoid similar hardships.

Summary of Theme 2. Complex Role of Family in Latino Male Success

Latino male students receive support from a broad spectrum of family members. These family members include their immediate family, their own family, as well as extended family networks. Throughout the college-going process, family members offered words of encouragement and supported students’ college dreams. They inspired and motivated Latino male students to persevere and overcome obstacles. Students referred to their family members as their “foundation” and “backbone,” and their support is key in promoting Latino male student success.

Section II. Institutional Awareness

Levels of stakeholder awareness varied across our interviews with high school and higher education administrators, staff, and faculty members. Their diverse perspectives influenced their levels of engagement in Latino male initiatives. Most administrators acknowledged a need to change their recruitment and outreach efforts, while others recognized a need to modify teaching practices to help Latino males succeed. School officials faced a constant struggle balancing what is best for a specific subgroup as opposed to what is fair for the entire student population, and they were forced to make poignant decisions that limited attention and resources to those needing it most.

Theme 3. Differences in Administrator Awareness

One overarching theme that emerged from this study was the difference in administrator awareness of the educational experiences of Latino males. Some administrators admitted they were unaware of the issue until they were introduced to the data. Others candidly admitted that it was “off their radar” while others actively engaged in creating support programs targeting Latino males to ensure their success. Administrators also revealed a broad approach that focused on helping all enrolled students, regardless of gender:

“There are many difference factors and variables, but typically the females seem to have the resources, the fortitude to get that support, to get help, and to reach out, and the expectations are also difference culturally. So, I believe the females seem to do better than the males, but ...I could cut that and segment that because there are so many variables involved in that. So, I'm thinking about like circumstances, like situations, like pressures...not generally speaking.”

-Administrator, 4-year institution

Unfortunately, this administrator’s narrative demonstrates a lack of awareness regarding the unique educational needs of Latino males students. This administrator also failed to notice the significant gender gap in graduation and persistence rates and missed critical distinctions between the needs and experiences of specific subgroups. While interviews with high school administrators revealed a lack of awareness regarding the unique experiences of Latino males and Latinas, higher education administrators demonstrated varying levels of awareness regarding Latino males’ educational experiences.

Administrators in a college setting unveiled a variety of perspectives. For example, some administrators failed to acknowledge there is a problem and denied any distinction between the success of Latino males and that of their peers. Other administrators realized Latino males confront specific academic obstacles, but they struggled to implement support programs for specific ethnic groups:

“I don't see particular, like, steps just for the Latino male population. I think just for our younger graduating students we take some steps, but I don't think there's some specific steps they take just for Latino males”

– *Administrator, 2-year institution*

“[At our institution, the data] really doesn't look too bad. So, it's really not been on our radar screen. I guess I should say, it's not been on my radar screen.

– *Administrator, 2-year institution*

This lack of administrator awareness on the Latino male issue continued to emerge as administrators were intent on addressing common challenges for all students (e.g., academic preparedness). One administrator frankly stated he was unaware of any issue specific to Latino males and found no distinction between Latino males and non-Latino students because his staff was focused on addressing college-readiness issues among enrolled students:

“We're dealing with a lot of the underprepared students. ...I don't necessarily see a difference between the, the Latino and the non-Latino. It's underprepared it's underprepared.”

– *Administrator, 2-year institution*

The administrator asserted retention and graduation rates were an area of concern for all enrolled students, not only Latinos (Administrator, 2-year institution). However, other administrators reflected on their observations of Latino male students. They highlighted the importance of reassuring Latino males and encouraging them to seek out answers to their questions:

“I think the, the Latino male is a unique breed. We've got a lot of work to do in understanding what, what the Latino male that actually arrives on a college campus, on a college or university campus, and how to let them, let them know that it's, not expected to be here and have all the answers already. ...”

– *Administrator, 2-year institution*

On the other hand, some higher education administrators showed an increased awareness of the issue but felt it had not yet reached a critical mass. They understood that the Latino male issue was an important educational issue, especially given the community demographics and felt it was their duty to inform faculty, staff, and community members about the educational attainment gap of Latino male students. More specifically, two administrators interviewed emphasized the responsibility that executive leadership and the university have to intentionally serve Latino male students, regardless of institutional resistance to the issue.

In terms of current services, the administrators of certain institutions acknowledged that Latino initiatives were in place but that more focused efforts should be initiated in order to meet the

specific needs of Latino males. Finally, one administrator suggested that when promoting awareness, their committee, as well as other advocates, must be cognizant of the way in which this message of the Latino male achievement gap is delivered in order for it to be recognized and not stigmatized:

“When I meet with my co-chairs and stuff like that for this committee, we are very strategic about how we want this message delivered without, because the last thing I want - right, wrong, or indifferent - is for this message to come out of one person because then that person gets labeled, and doesn't really get heard.”

– *Administrator, 2-year institution*

In sum, administrators expressed diverse perspectives on the educational challenges confronting Latino male students. Some administrators were unaware of the consistent achievement gaps Latino males face, while others recognized these challenges, but were unsure how to respond. Administrators avoided ethnic-specific interventions or support services because they focused on the academic challenges experienced by a majority of enrolled students or because they were astutely aware of institutional resistance. Despite their diverse perspectives and approaches to the issue, administrators agreed on the need to help students succeed.

Theme 4. Resistance to Efforts

Administrators admitted there was and will continue to be some resistance in seeing Latino male-focused efforts translated into institutional initiatives. These administrators suggested an overpowering fear of political backlash when focusing too much on any specific sub-group, resulting in resistance to these issues. Additionally, one administrator related that he has found a staunch resistance to focusing on subgroups, like Latino males, even though an issue with this subgroup has been identified. Two administrators mentioned battling the ideology of serving “all” students, citing that for many, especially more traditional faculty members, the idea of targeting Latino males can be perceived as a “turn-off” and is often accompanied by racial undertones and unfair treatment of “all” students. Despite all of this, both administrators maintained that this issue needs to be addressed by the institution and that changes will be made, regardless of the resistance.

“I think where we're [going to] get some resistance is, is again with some of our more traditional faculty, that have been here 20, 30, 40 years... was one of the discussions we had at our meeting was, you know, we're here for all students. ‘We, we shouldn't be saying that we're here for the minority male, or the His-, or the Latino male,’ you know? They, that's a turnoff for them.”

– *Administrator, 2-year institution*

“...there may be some resistance, just in the part of why should we focus on males, or why should we just focus on Hispanic males when we've got all these other students, and my answer to that, is, you know, you identify, we've identified that there's a problem here.”

– *Administrator, 2-year institution*

Concerns such as these may build resentment in other subcultures that do not understand the reason behind the enhanced efforts to focus specifically on Latino males. Institutions are concerned that by focusing on a specific subculture, they might offend or shun other subcultures or attract legal action. Navigating through these treacherous waters is risky; most institutions prefer to focus on the success of all students, or “minorities” in general instead of one or two specific subgroups.

Most administrators recognized their responsibility to help Latino males succeed, but could not deny an institutional fear of developing programs that specifically targeted Latino students. This fear is more pronounced when discussing resources aimed at Latino males, specifically. Some administrators feared that by targeting specific groups (i.e. Latinos or Latino males), the remaining student body will suffer.

When asked whether or not his campus is dedicating resources to Latino male success:

“...I think we're afraid to do that. I've been in meetings where they're afraid to say, ‘This is a Latino male program.’ Unless they can be more general, I don't think we do that. I don't think we target, we'll target that.”

– *Administrator, 2-year institution*

Another valid point related to change in general. Change is often accompanied by resentment. One administrator stated:

“There are some that are, that are not going to embrace any kind of change. And, I don't think it means that they're, they're racist or anti-Hispanic, I think it means some of 'em are just anti-change. Whatever it is. And those people you just have to go without them. I mean you can't wait around and please everyone, and so, you just have to make the decisions and go.”

– *Administrator, 2-year institution*

To battle this “reluctance” and “fear of backlash,” administrators undertook a broader approach to helping underrepresented students succeed in an academic setting. One administrator admitted that the only way he could reasonably meet the needs of Latino male students was to have a university-wide mandate. This specific request suggests the need for institutional buy-in to meet the needs of Latino males and close the gender gap.

Theme 5. Faculty Awareness Growing, but Engagement still Lacking

Faculty members were increasingly aware of the issues facing Latino male students, yet they expressed limited engagement in addressing this issue. Faculty awareness of the Latino male issue is vital to pedagogy and to creating a positive learning environment for students. One faculty member acknowledges the need for action:

“I think faculty members need to understand at the college level the importance of who we have going to school here, that if we don’t help them, encourage... that they’re going to be on our tax roles later. So, if we can get [students] through some kind of program, whether technical or academic, then in the long run we’re going to be better off as a society because there’s only so many blue collar jobs in the market. So, we’re going to need something beyond that. And if we can get the Hispanic males in here and encourage them, I think it will be a lot safer for us in the future.”

-Faculty, 2-year institution

On the other hand, one professor admitted:

“I’m not one of those people that buys into the ‘Oh, it needs [to be] a Hispanic male role model.’ It’s anybody they can identify with... I would think that anybody that you respect could provide that mentoring role model for you, and they need that.”

– Faculty, 2-year institution

Changing current teaching practices could help ensure Latino male success. Limited faculty and administrator awareness and buy-in translated to no significant changes have been made. Gaining institutional support to support efforts directly targeting Latino males is challenging. Successful initiatives require a buy-in from multiple stake holders. Admittedly:

A lot of changes, though, a lot of changes going on are impacting how we...how we do our work. You know, I guess, the verdict is out over there whether it’s for the better or not. I mean, there’s this whole trying about...holding educational systems accountable. I don’t know how far that’s gone. I think it helps, but then sometimes it takes away from trying to, you know, help students holistically. When you narrow down things to learning outcomes and just, you know, if you’re not careful you can kind of strap the hands of the faculty members. So, I think we’re doing a lot here for the Latino.

-Faculty, 2-year institution

Without strong faculty support and engagement, it will be difficult to impact change and raise levels of attainment in Latino male students. Positive role models have been recognized as a key

component for Latino male success, and faculty members recognized the limited number of role models, especially male role models, available on-campus:

[The male faculty are] role models. "If he can do, I can do it." I mean, they identify with Latino males."

Faculty, 2-year institution

Campus role models provide mentorship and academic or career advice. Role models offer an example to which Latino males may aspire or an example to emulate. Fewer campus role models limit opportunities for Latino males to identify with campus individuals or connect to the university.

Another way increase the level of faculty-student engagement relates to teaching style. Some teaching methods are not always conducive to the learning styles of Latino men. Whether for cultural or generational reasons, faculty needs to create enriching classroom environments that promote student success. One faculty member noted:

"We need to do a better job overall with the way that we work with students in the classroom. I think we have a traditional, often patronizing, model of competition, of pitting students against one another, of, you know, only telling students that they're done well 'til the very end, and I think our students need a teaching and learning environment where they feel cared about, not only as a student but as a person."

-Faculty, 2-year institution

Creating positive learning environments where students feel validated is essential for persistence and retention. Additionally:

"There are individual instructors out here working their tails off to try and connect to these kids. And, you know, whether or not you have institutional support, sometimes it doesn't matter. We do what we have to do to keep them in the classroom, to help them where we can. The institution itself is an entity that's, it's, it's some the sum of its parts. And I think in some cases, the parts don't do necessarily all that they could. That's the best way for me to put it, I mean."

-Faculty, 2-year institution

Reflecting upon the administrator and faculty comments throughout our interviews, the varied levels of institutional awareness on the Latino male issue is obvious. Few faculty and administrators recognize that a problem exists. Many campuses fear backlash and feel they must hide their efforts to reach out to Latino males by inviting all students. Integrating color-blind initiatives has provided some students opportunities to get involved at their respective schools.

Even faculty and administrators who recognize that the Latino male issue is real often fail to launch programs to help more Latino males succeed.

Theme 6. Latino Students Possess High Levels of Awareness

Regardless of gender, all Latino students acknowledged the growing gap in achievement for Latino males. Although men and women approached the issue differently, both groups asserted that Latino males seemed to be facing issues with persisting through each stage of the educational pipeline. In addition, Latino male students were overwhelmingly aware of the Latino male achievement gap present within their community. Not only did they notice their male peers were underperforming, they were also aware that they were being outperformed by their Latina female counterparts. Latino male students cited several barriers—including family and social expectations, financial concerns, and support networks—as overarching explanations of why Latino male students had difficulty persisting in college. Many Latino male students perceived the decision inherent in deciding between joining the workforce and staying in college:

“Rather than coming here to education, we’re just like, yeah, whatever, that ain’t for me. I’ll let you go ahead and do it; I’ll stay here and work instead of going to class.”

– *Student, 2-year institution*

Although all of the students we interviewed have obviously made the choice to stay in college, they still acknowledged that many of their Latino male peers are failing to make the same choice. One student suggested that for many Latino males, college just “ain’t for me” and that other male students would rather work than attend classes. Latino male students were also very aware of the overwhelming barriers and frequent opportunity costs that existed for them in choosing to attend college. Furthermore, students acknowledged that Latino males were often the villains in their own downfall, refusing to seek out help, surrounding themselves with negative peer influences, and choosing to enter the workplace rather than investing in a college degree. Latino male students seemed to be fully aware of the issues that surround the Latino male achievement gap and are eager to embrace initiatives and more resources dedicated to the issue.

Similarly, Latina females were keenly aware of the issues facing Latino males in college. They acknowledged seeing fewer Latino males as classmates and more as workers in the general community. They also seemed to be aware of several of the barriers regarding finances and work-family responsibilities. However, Latina females were completely unforgiving of the slipping success of their Latino male counterparts. In many cases, they blamed a lack of Latino male success on males’ lack of ambition and drive, much like in this Latina female’s comment reveals:

Facilitator: Why do you think you’re more focused than the guys?

Student: Well, because we care more.

– *Student, 2-year institution*

Latina females do not believe that the barriers facing Latino males are insurmountable; rather, they believe Latino males have the same ability for success that they possess, it is a matter of “caring more” about education. Both Latino males and females pinpointed that Latinas seem to have an internal drive that sustains their success. It is also apparent through this statement that Latinas put greater effort or “care” into their success and, as a result, have experienced higher levels of success. In addition, within their focus group, Latinas rejected ideas that institutions should have additional programming and academic initiatives focused solely on Latino males. Despite the desire of Latino males to see efforts from the college to reach out to their subgroup and potentially improve success, Latinas were decidedly against it. Instead, they felt (as some administrators did) that efforts or interventions should be focused on all students.

As a whole, Latino students, both male and female, were very aware of the issues facing the achievement of Latino males. Students seemed to have a firm grasp on the barriers and challenges affecting Latino male students as well as many of the institutional efforts seeking to improve the success of the general student body. However, limited discussion occurred regarding Latino-male-only efforts within higher education institutions, most likely because many of these efforts are still in development.

Helping Latino males develop a new perspective on help seeking, may lead to greater academic engagement and success. Guiding students through this process and turning their attention to the reality that they are, in a sense, paying for these services may help Latino males rethink their lack of using their resources to one where they are paying for services they are not using, but which could benefit them in the long run. Helping students navigate through college involves helping students access the resources available. Changing their mindset may help them redirect and seek help when needed thereby raising their level of awareness and, in turn, their persistence. Indeed, the “machismo” mentality has to be redirected to purposefully seek help when needed and find ways to engage Latino males in their own educational pursuits in a positive way.

Theme 7. Community Unaware

To gauge the context in which the Latino male achievement gap issue resides, we asked administrators to describe the level of awareness they perceived the community had on this issue. In all instances, administrators suggested that the Latino community and the surrounding community were simply unaware. Community stakeholders were more aware of issues around general Latina/o academic success, but they are not as aware of the more nuanced issue of Latino male academic success:

“None. They’re [the community is] aware of the general problems we have with Latino success, but Latino male ... Not broken down to the gender level. Definitely aware of ‘We need more college graduates’ and that kind of thing, but I’ve never heard any political leader down here say ‘Hey, we’ve got to worry about the Latino males in our community’ ... I’ve never seen that.”

– *Faculty, 2-year institution*

Two, I think there's a severe lack of cultural competency when it comes to Latino males, or the Latino community. I think there's still way too many educators out there in our system, both on that level and higher ed, that don't have high enough

expectations for Latinos in general. Um, and, unfortunately, we don't have enough mentors and role models to fight.

– *Administrator, 4-year institution*

Communities are aware of the need to improve the number of students staying in the educational pipeline; however, there is virtually no community focus on challenges uniquely facing Latino male academic achievement. As the faculty member asserted above, no group of community leaders have addressed the issue. This begs the question of how higher education institutions can be the locus of advocacy to promote this issue among community members.

Because the community is such a valuable stakeholder in promoting the achievement of its students, it is imperative that colleges and universities engage the community in efforts to further the success of Latino male students. At present, the issue is not a topic of discussion among the Latino or general community. Without community awareness of gaps in Latino male educational success, it will be difficult to garner community support; therefore, raising awareness should be a priority.

Summary Stakeholder Awareness

Within this study, we sought to gauge the level of awareness administrators, faculty members, students, and the community had regarding the Latino male achievement gap and available resources for this issue. We found that there were varying levels of awareness among these four key stakeholder groups. Administrators seem to be having quality conversations regarding the Latino gender gap; however, awareness and resources are still limited. For faculty, there is minimal but growing awareness of the issue, suggesting that faculty may be an untapped resource for promoting the issue and encouraging initiatives for Latino male success. Latino students, both male and female, seemed keenly aware of the low performance of Latino male students and reinforced many of the other findings regarding barriers that Latino male students face. Finally, according to those interviewed, the greater community does not seem to have awareness of the Latino male achievement issue. It is a non-issue within the community; however, with the support and advocacy of institutions, the Latino male achievement gap could become a rallying-point for communities around the states of Texas and Florida.

Section III. Cross Institutional Comparison Among Four-Year Universities and Two-Year Colleges

In particular, we acknowledge the need to consider men as gendered beings whose experiences and needs differ based upon their enrollment in community colleges or four-year institutions. Latino male students enrolled in four-year and two-year institutions differed in their academic profile, pre-college experiences, and socioeconomic status. The specific institutional type also influenced the strategies employed to support Latino male students. Four-year and two-year institutions also distinguished Latino males' perceptions of the campus community and campus climate.

Theme 8. Differences in Student Characteristics

Latino males at community colleges generally attend college part-time, are from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and have more family and financial responsibilities. Additionally, they are more likely to live at home, be first-generation college students, and be non-traditionally aged with varied levels of life experience. These students were not necessarily expected to go to college by parents and others, but chose to do so based on the advice or counsel of a school counselor, teacher or other mentor/role model.

On the other hand, Latino males at four-year institutions generally attend college full-time, are from higher socio-economic backgrounds, and have fewer direct family and financial responsibilities. These students are more likely to live on-campus, have parents that attended college, and be traditionally aged with little life experience. Many Latino men enrolled in four-year institutions were expected to go to college by parents and others.

Theme 9. Differences in Institutional Types

Not surprising, there were significant differences in the overall mission, programming and outlook between community colleges and four-year institutions on Latino male issues. Community colleges tend to “meet men where they are” in terms of addressing identity, masculinity, and sense of belonging; they are more likely to be proactive and innovative concerning strategies to engage students. The overall mission of community colleges allows them to focus on learning for *all* students – they have the ability to address individual needs in order to enhance the academic experiences of major subgroups.

Four-year universities are more likely to be trepidatious in implementing programs and initiatives that focus solely on men. Politics surrounding equity of men and women at the university and beyond make all-men programs difficult to “sell” to administrators, faculty, and staff to be weary. Fear of back-lash in four-year institutions, in turn, exacerbates the problem by failing to make necessary changes in their programming and student support services to help Latino males succeed. The solution to this fear of backlash is a reluctance to focus on sub-populations of students. According to one administrator in our study, Latino male issues get wrapped up into a bigger pool of “underrepresented students” or “minorities.” Sadly, even after looking at the data, many administrators are unwilling to address educational gaps and fail to

acknowledge that there is a problem with the university system or the academic capability of its students.

Theme 10. Differences in Student Perceptions

Significant differences were identified between students perceptions of institutional support between community college students and those enrolled in four-year institutions. Latino males enrolled in community colleges, shared experiences of a welcoming staff and faculty, access to resources and a sense of belonging.

Four-year institution Latino male students, however, Latino males expressed their fear and culture shock when they first arrived on campus. Many Latino males were accustomed to being surrounded by other Latinos, and when they arrived at the university, they were surprised by the lack of Latinos in their courses. Several confessed they were intimidated by faculty and did not feel comfortable approaching faculty with questions. Students were not disapproving of more “proper” faculty at larger institutions, but were intimidated and feared appearing ignorant to their faculty and peers.

Summary of Comparison

Significant findings in our study provide a better understanding of Latino males across different institutional types and contribute to the literature on Latino males in higher education. Additionally, our study provides a better understanding of males across different institutional types, which could lead to more nuanced and appropriate interventions. We challenge higher education institutions to take action and engage in difficult conversations to raise awareness on the Latino male issue. Further analysis on these cross-institutional comparisons will be detailed in an upcoming conference paper in 2013.

UF QUALITATIVE STUDY METHODOLOGY

Location and participants

We conducted the study in a southeastern state with a growing Latino population and a county that had a full complement of educational institutions- six high schools, a local state/community college, and a flagship research extensive university. The county encompasses suburban and rural areas and the percentage of students on free and reduced lunch is over 50 percent, higher than the national average. We found the following in our study:

1. Latino males have lower high school graduation rates and lower college entrance and retention rates than do other subpopulations in this district, as is true nationally.
2. The local college enrolls 11% Latino students, while the university enrolls 15% Latinos. Both postsecondary institutions articulate higher numbers of Latino females than males.
3. We relied on several “gatekeepers” at the high school and university levels to develop a list of potential participants. We developed a purposeful sample, consisting of counselors and administrators that worked at each institutional type and sent potential participants an e-mail describing the study and requesting their participation.
4. We identified fourteen individuals from two high schools, the county school district, the state/community college, and the four-year university, and all of them accepted the invitation to participate in the study.

The study participants included:

1. Two high school principals, two high school counselors, a director of school guidance services, three college administrators who work with multicultural issues, and six university administrators who represented multicultural and diversity perspectives, financial aid, outreach programs, student support services, and student organizations.
2. Nine of the participants were male, of whom three were Latino, two were Black, and four were White. Five of the participants were female, four White, and one Latina.

We used this purposeful sample (1) to address the research questions, (2) to create a rich participant pool that matches the researchers’ focus of study, and (3) to capture a precise participant pool identified within secondary and postsecondary education (Marshall, 1996).

Data collection procedures

We obtained Institutional Review Board and School Board approval for the research protocols used in this study. All participants signed an informed consent form prior to the interview session. We created interview question protocols for high school counselors and principals,

community college administrators, and university administrators who work with diversity issues on their respective campuses. The same protocol of questions was used for each interview in order to compare across institutional types and administrative position. To address our research questions, we used a semi-structured interview format to understand educators' perceptions of experiences and unique needs of Latino males with regard to their educational pathways and postsecondary enrollment and persistence.

We conducted the interviews for approximately 45 minutes each during the late fall 2010 and early spring 2011 semesters. The principal investigator, with the assistance of doctoral students, interviewed the educational practitioners in their respective offices. The principal investigator conducted each interview and one doctoral student served as the recorder and note taker for each session. The research team stored the completed digital recordings in a secure office location.

Qualitative method

Guided by phenomenology, we used inductive analysis to examine Latino boys' educational pathways and motivation towards postsecondary education. We selected phenomenology because it guides the research process investigating the essence or composition of an experience or phenomenon. Phenomenology in social sciences is the study of participants' life experiences and consequent meanings. Researchers suggest that this method attempts to understand and interpret these meanings with depth and richness (Van Manen, 1990). Phenomenology focuses on revealing meaning versus defending an argument or creating a theory (Flood, 2010). The process begins with a description of a situation that is experienced by the participant in daily life (Flood, 2010). This approach requires researchers to obtain descriptions from the participants about the phenomena, and remain mindful to separate their own judgments and bias from the actual data. Finally, the researcher analyzes the experiences of the participants and groups them into an agreed consciousness, in order to interpret the meaning of the phenomena as experienced by the participants (Crotty, 1998; Flood, 2010; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Data Analysis

Inductive analysis was the basis for the data analysis for this study (Hatch, 2002). Understanding the specific elements of each transcription from the collected data generates meaning units, defined as individual statements that stand-alone and provides meaning (Hatch). The researcher works to make connections of these meaning units among the transcriptions as a whole. Inductive analysis searches for patterns of meaning to provide general statements about phenomena under investigation (Hatch). By looking at the patterns across the data, the researcher establishes a status of general explanatory statements (Hatch).

Under the supervision of the principal investigators, the graduate students transcribed and analyzed the transcriptions. The data analysis process included reading the individual

transcriptions, breaking the text into meaning units, and then assigning the units into a unique domain. Domains are groupings retrieved from the meaning units that provide semantic relationships to inform the researcher (Hatch, 2002). We coded and grouped the more salient domains to identify which themes carried stronger meaning as observed across various interviews. The research team examined the domains within individual interviews and across interviews to determine the most frequent and salient domains.

As part of the qualitative vetting process, the research team re-read the data and domains to ensure that their initial findings were correct. We adjusted and refined the assigned domains after multiple readings of the transcription and meaning units to ensure we had a strong match between the research team's findings and the participants' responses. Finally, we generated a master outline that expressed relationships within and among domains (Hatch, 2002). We used this outline to make general exploratory statements about the phenomena.

Trustworthiness

We developed trustworthiness in this qualitative study with a focus on the data credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Guba, 1981). First, we developed credibility in the data analysis with weekly research meetings to discuss the preliminary meaning units and subsequent themes (Shenton, 2004). Additionally, we shared preliminary findings with study participants to have additional feedback and provide critical member checking.

We were able to establish transferability of our study to understand how we could generalize our findings in relation to the current research literature. That is, our sampling for this study selected a sample that could provide useful responses to our research questions. We established dependability using an established method of data analysis (Hatch, 2002; Shenton, 2004).

Finally, we recognize that a researcher's potential bias may influence the development of themes. We compared data analysis notes throughout the process to ensure that confirmability of the study is attributable to the findings and less by researcher bias (Shenton, 2004). Nonetheless, we acknowledge that the research team's members are interested in the educational achievement and persistence of males of color, which may influence their perceptions of this issue and the study's results.

UF qualitative results

The high school counselors and school district leaders, and postsecondary administrators provided extensive insights about their understanding of the issues Latino males face from their respective institutions. Moreover, the qualitative findings provided new insights about the daily interactions of these professionals with Latino males and their families. From the interview data, we identified four primary themes:

1. Lack of awareness of educational obstacles for Latino males by educators,
2. Role of Latino families in Latino males' educational experiences,
3. Impact of peers and mentoring on Latino males,
4. Role of program outreach and partnerships focused on Latino males.

Lack of Awareness of Latino Male Obstacles

Most of the counselors and administrators at the three levels mentioned there are no specific support programs offered solely to Latino males. However, they did indicate that there are programs geared towards underrepresented students for which Latino males could qualify. Some suggested that schools and postsecondary institutions should develop additional outreach and recruitment programs, specifically focused on Latino males. For example, a high school counselor expressed concerns about programming for Latinos and said, "They could do more specific activities that are tailored to Latinos." These concerns highlight a general lack of awareness of Latino male educational issues among high school teachers and administrators. A high school principal recognized that the school's teachers have little awareness of the problems faced by many Latino males. He noted, "Perhaps some training of faculty on..., I think when people understand the issue, when they see it's a major issue. They have a tendency to group together and come up with some solutions."

All four of the high school counselors and administrators agreed that communication regarding the specific issues Latino males encounter is important towards the awareness and support of these students. One principal also added that he had gone out in the hallways prior to the research interview to talk with Latino male students to better understand their concerns, and as a result, felt better informed and wanted to make some changes in his school. Unless there were specific issues related to Latino males specifically brought to their attention, these participants believed many faculty were unaware that Latino males faced these academic challenges.

Likewise, each of the college and university administrators also stated that there was general support for programmatic initiatives for underrepresented populations but there was a need to better inform and attract Latino male students to participate in these initiatives. Additionally, they expressed that getting Latino students to the college/university level was one issue, and retaining them was another. They also commented that faculty members need greater awareness of the challenging educational issues these young men face.

The role of family influence

Another prevalent theme that emerged from these interviews is the role of Latino families in their children's educational aspirations. Even though many Hispanic parents value higher education, many still exert pressure on their sons to contribute financially to their families. A university administrator expressed this ongoing tension, "Some of them (Latino males) I know send money home to help support their families, younger siblings...and so I think that sometimes can get in the way of them being academically successful." Both high school principals mentioned that early entry into the job market to assist with family support as a reason for some not to go on to postsecondary education.

Coupled with these financial expectations, Latino families' socioeconomic status was another critical factor regarding family influences on their child's educational experience. As one university administrator put it, "A lot of them worked at 14 or 15, and contributed to the household...they're still getting income through financial aid...so the expectation is that they're still paying the light bill at home even though they are not living there." Similar at the high school level, school counselors shared that a migrant farm families' poverty level is one of the biggest barriers in students' school attendance.

All of the high school counselors and administrators pointed out that parental involvement is essential towards students' success and outreach. Unfortunately, they have found that Latino parents' English language deficiencies can hinder family involvement in their child's educational experiences. For instance, a high school principal (a Latino male) said, "language is a barrier because I know that we have a few here and they (the parents) only talk to me because I can speak Spanish, but they will never go to the school counselors." The director of guidance services for the school district noted that, "The biggest barrier is that we are not always sending home letters that are in English and Spanish, so that can be a barrier for some kids."

Despite many Latino parents' lack of English proficiency, their high expectations still remain, as a school district administrator commented: "My experience with Hispanic families is that they have very high values for education...probably a little bit of a slant toward the male children in the family being achievers-getting that college degree, you know."

Impact of Peers and Mentoring

Many high school counselors and college/university administrators also talked about the impact peers often have on Latino males' decision to attend college. Most agreed that if a Latino male has peer support to attend college, he is more likely to aspire to attend college. For instance, one college administrator said, "the ones who are getting into college, there is a very strong support from each other (Latino males)". Conversely, if his peers do not have similar aspirations, it can negatively affect them from attending college. One school counselor shared a Latino male experience with having to choose between his peer group and school. The counselor remarked, "I've got one (student) that actually went on to dual enrollment; I think he may have almost felt like he had to leave the peer group to get ahead."

However, peer influences do not only pertain to high school students. Many college students continue to make their decisions based on what their friends are doing. For example, a college administrator discussed how peers could be both positive and negative influences on one another. The administrator said, "Peer influences can be positive in that 'I want to be more than a drug dealer like my friend' but negative in that 'I almost owed something to them or I want to

help them so I'm still involved in their life". Another university administrator goes on to say, "Now, if these are first generation college goers and you haven't navigated this whole system how can you not be influenced by your peers that are doing something else, because that's the only thing that you see."

The high school counselors and administrators at all levels stated that mentoring programs are pivotal in providing ongoing encouragement, support, and resources for Latino males. For instance a school counselor argued in support of mentoring programs by commenting, "We need to get a better mentoring program going...I would like to see every Hispanic male with a mentor." A university administrator also talked about the importance for Latino males to have role models or mentors. "I mean, that's some of the strength of a mentoring program, if nothing else. To be able to go and connect with young people that look like them and talk like them and, you know, for them to help along the way, and it's certainly a powerful program."

The value of outreach programs for Latino males

The final theme that emerged from many of the participant interviews was the need of outreach programs in creating a welcoming environment for Latino males in educational settings. Many of the participants viewed these types of programs as essential for Latino males' educational success. As one higher education administrator suggested,

Many of the Latino males join those organizations because of the camaraderie that they have with other Latino males. The good thing about Latino students is that when they identify somebody who cares about them they will latch on, and most importantly, they will tell others this is a person that will be here to support you.

Even at the high school levels, administrators have concerns about understanding what types of programs Latino males need. One school district administrator stated, "Using the data to provide the right level of support that a student needs to benefit from an instructional program or a counseling program or both (is needed)." Educators at each level commented that specific group opportunities for Latino males could be a helpful source of support (i.e. school clubs or university groups specifically for Latinos male).

UF Qualitative Study Conclusion

National demographic data tell us that Latino males have the lowest high school, college, and university graduation rates in the country. It is of utmost importance to understand these statistics, the unique characteristics of this population, and to use these findings to take next steps to promote school, college, and university success for Latino males.

This study offers significant insights from educators at three levels in the pipeline, high school, college, and university, about issues and influences surrounding Latino males and their educational attitudes, choices and persistence. Being able to examine how these professionals address the unique needs of this subgroup is a major first step in providing necessary services, such as counseling, connecting with caring adults, mentoring, family and cultural support as well

as communication among these three levels of education to promote postsecondary access, opportunities and persistence. Our theoretical framework suggests that administrators and counselors need to develop programs focused on a social justice advocacy model and strengths-based perspective of Latino males. Thus, program development should focus on creating positive educational environments to include family and community involvement, mentoring and role modeling, and support services and programs that encourage Latino males to formulate and carry out their educational goals. Counselor educators, school counselors and practitioners working in community settings can utilize the results of this study in their work as they continue to advocate and serve as brokers of resources with underserved student populations and their families. The themes of this study support the principles of social justice and advocacy that we strive to meet in our work with clients in schools, colleges and universities, as well as in a multitude of agencies and institutions.

The issue of underachieving males in many cultures has implications for the stability of families, local communities, and the greater society. Any group that is “disenfranchised” can have a negative effect on the culture in which it exists. Although we are examining the achievement gaps of Latino males at the public school, college and university levels in this study, the future implications can affect not only higher education, but career development, marriage, and family life as well. Data from studies can contribute to more knowledge about the issue as well as educate other stakeholders involved; families, counselors, educators, and policy makers.

Section IV. Practical Implications for Institutions

The last section of this report highlights key implications for practice that we have distilled from our collective research findings. These implications are written with an eye towards existing efforts already in place within some of the institutions included in this study, and our aim is to continue to inform the strong commitment that has already been demonstrated to the issue of Latino male student success. Our suggestions are organized as follows:

- High Stakes Engagement practices
- First Year Programs with “Men in Mind”
- Role Models Matter
- Step-by-Step: Academic Advising and Career Planning
- Messaging to Latino Males and their Families
- Family Influence: Fathers, Mothers, Siblings, Others

In addition, we have included a “blueprint for action” that can continue to guide the work on Latino male students for all of the institutions represented in this report as well as their peer institutions.

High Stakes Engagement

“High stakes” engagement refers to the critical period when a student first interacts with the institution and the institution responds to that interaction. The outcome of that encounter can determine whether the institution has lost its first and only chance to make a true connection. Latino male students, like most college students who believe an institution is not engaging them or providing useful support services, will tend to not want to return for additional support services or to the institution. Therefore staff, faculty, and administrators at IHEs (institutions of higher education) must be prepared to successfully engage and be responsive to Latino male students. When Latino males reach out for help, IHEs needs to be immediately responsive or chance losing the opportunity to connect. Furthermore, staff, faculty, and administrators must make themselves available to young Latino men *early* and *often*.

Since men are less likely to ask for help, advisors should assume lack of knowledge in the face of silence. At worst, students will receive redundant information, and, at best, students will become more engaged with their coursework and gain vital information they need to succeed.

Recommendations for Practice:

- Male-oriented spaces – provide a space where Latino male students can feel comfortable asking questions;
- Strategic advising –help Latino male students see the connection between current academic work and future economic stability and independence;
- Faculty/Staff training on Latino male issues –provide faculty/staff information about the challenges facing Latino males in higher education;
- Special Latino male session during New Student Orientation –provide Latino males students the opportunity to learn about the issues they may face and let them know they are not alone in working to overcome them;
- Summer bridge program –engage Latino male student before their first fall semester of college and in small cohorts;
- First-Year Interest Groups (small cohorts) – provide Latino males the opportunity to take courses in a small group in order to establish strong networking and study skills.

First Year Programs with “Men in Mind”

The ability of a first-year Latino male college student to successfully navigate the complex college environment can be critical to their success through graduation. First year programs with “men in mind” represents an immediate positive mechanism to assist Latino males in being successful not only in college but also after college. Programming with “men in mind” can provide meaningful opportunities for Latino males to socialize with other Latino males in college and to develop purposeful relationships with male faculty and staff.

First year programs with “men in mind” are important because male students tend to not want to seek assistance, tend to believe they can figure things out on their own, and can even be inadvertently stigmatized by “special” programs. Latino-male-based programs during the first year can provide institutions with the appropriate “safe spaces” for Latino males to learn about what is important to being successful in college as well as provide the necessary support services with their specific needs in mind.

Another important aspect of providing male-based programming is that it provides a different kind of messaging to the Latino male student, and messaging counts. If you want students to respond to the programming you are providing, it has to be relatable to them and they must be able to see themselves utilizing these services. The institution needs to make a direct connection with the Latino male students being served.

Recommendations for Practice:

- Program incentives – provide scholarships, stipends, fellowships, paid internships or work-study opportunities to offset the cost of attending college while providing a positive connection to the institution;

- Establish a positive message – create an ethos that inclines male students to believe the institution cares about their academic needs and their aspirations to be successful;
- Relatable services – help students to understand the realities of college (i.e., cost of college, need for stronger academic skills, and accepting help/guidance when needed);
- Identity development – help Latino male students to learn more about themselves as individuals and men and within their culture.

Role Models Matter

Time and time again, Latino male students indicated they do not see enough Latino male role models on campus. Role modeling matters because students get the opportunity to see someone like them who is successful. Role models can play a pivotal role in the success of Latino male students as they increase student social networking knowledge and skills; connect students to mentors (male alumni, faculty, or staff); offer real world experiences through a caring, trusting, and safe environment; and provide pathways for positive reinforcement for successful decisions as well as constructive feedback for correcting poor decisions. Role modeling also allows successful Latino male adults to connect with college Latino male students and give back to their communities in meaningful ways. Adult males need to connect with younger males who are looking for guidance and direction. Although anyone can be a role model, for Latino male students it is important that successful males talk to male students. Latino male students should be provided the opportunity to understand how to be successful and to see themselves being successful.

Recommendations for Practice:

- Recruit successful second year students to be peer mentors – establish a peer mentoring program to help first year students navigate the college;
- Recruit faculty/staff to be mentors – pair students with positive role models on campus to help students increase their level of college knowledge and establish a connection to the campus;
- Recruit and retain quality Latino male faculty and staff – Latino male students need to see more people like them and learn from their success stories;
- Recruit and openly encourage Latino males students to be classroom and community leaders – this will help Latino male students be role models and ensure they are invested in giving back to the next generation.

Step-by-Step: Academic Advising and Career Planning

Step-by-step academic advising and career planning takes a student through the process of understanding which courses to take each semester and linking those courses to their career goals. This is critical because strategic academic advising and career planning is important to the success and retention of Latino male college students. By providing strategic academic advising and career planning, advisors can work individually with each Latino male student to understand their academic strengths and weaknesses. This process will allow advisors to engage young men in critical thinking about their futures, be less prescriptive when developing individualized course schedules with Latino males, and help Latino male students connect academic goals to career goals.

Academic advising needs to be more than advisors telling Latino male students what courses to take next. Strategic academic advising leads to concrete career planning. Understanding that academic advising and career counseling are separate services (and offices); university staff need to work with their students to combine the two to increase student success. The two services may remain separate due to institutional structure, but Latino male students need to perceive the two as seamless.

Recommendations for Practice:

- Provide strategic one-on-one advising – Latino male students need to understand their academic strengths and weaknesses as well as link their academic goals with their career aspirations;
- Develop Individual Educational Plans – require all Latino male students to set academic goals each semester and explore their career interests as part of the first-year academic advising process;
- Career Interest Assessment – require and monitor all Latino males to utilize the assessment tools (“Steps to Exploring Careers”) provided by the Career Services within the first year of college;
- Professional development – host a campus-wide professional development opportunity for all academic advisors, faculty, and staff to ensure all university colleges and departments have the opportunity to provide up-dates as well as answer questions about curriculum or course changes.

Messaging to Latino Males and their Families

The message Latino males, and their families, receive about attending college and completing a college degree needs to be more realistic (i.e., college is not easy, it requires time and energy, and it is challenging). We need to “flip the switch” about what it really means to go to college and be honest about the sacrifices that need to be made in order to be successful in college. Being honest informs families that the benefits of college are not immediate, but that college completion will offer a path to better financial opportunities when complete. The drive to get more students to attend college typically comes with the message that anyone can go to college or you have the potential to earn a college degree; however, unless that message comes with a firm understanding of what it really takes to complete a college degree, the message may be lost on male students and their families or lead to disenchantment with college and dropout.

Most male students tend to be competitive. As educators looking for solutions to increase the number of Latino male graduates, we need to tap into the male competitive spirit. Latino male students need to be told that there are no short cuts to earning a college degree and what they are doing is difficult. Latino male students need to understand that most of them will have to work while earning a college degree and that is just their reality. This form of messaging helps male students to increase their time management skills between work and college and lets them know it is okay to work and contribute to family income and still go to college—it’s doable and worth

it. By leveraging the competitive spirit of a student to the realities of earning a college degree, you are igniting their internal drive to want to be successful. Of course, tapping into a competitive drive also requires an explicit discussion of how to cope with failure. Since Latino males are disinclined to ask for help or admit imminent failure, previously mentioned strategies such as creating safe spaces for discussion and strategic advising must equip men with the skills and mindset to respond to failure constructively.

In branding the message of college completion to Latino males, they also need to be informed of the reality of their existence (as a population) in college. Latino males need to know their population tends to not be successful in college and their success in college is the mechanism for changing that reality as well as paving the path for future Latino males. Latino males need to be informed how their success can be an inspiration for other Latino males to be successful.

Recommendations for Practice:

- Latino Male Youth Summit – continue to host as this opportunity allows Latino male students to hear from other successful males;
- Develop positive support networks – utilize the Latino Male Youth Summit as mechanism for eliminating negative peers and providing a positive environment for networking;
- Develop positive support networks – establish regular (e.g., monthly) events for Latino male students to get together to discuss Latino male issues and learn more about the importance of completing a college degree;
- Parent orientation – use new student orientation as an opportunity to speak with parents about the positive ways they can support their students during the transition from high school to college as well as throughout the students college career;
- New Student Orientation – Set the tone early; create a presentation or bring in guests to speak directly to Latino male students about Latino male issues.

Family Influence: Fathers, Mothers, Siblings, Others

Throughout this report we often highlighted the complex role of family influence on Latino male college student success. Female figures in the lives of these young men are especially positive influences, while fathers or other male figures can sometimes steer young men away from their college pathways. This finding is critical not because of its deficit framing, but because institutions need to be especially sensitive to the economic circumstance that can exacerbate these forces for Latino males.

Educational institutions (P-16) need to develop policies that encourage families to become actively involved in their Latino males educational experience. Schools need to be especially sensitive to the economic drivers that constantly tantalize young Latino males to join the workforce, especially if they come from low-income or working-class backgrounds. One strategy for institutions is to acknowledge this reality and impress upon students the importance of persisting and finishing the college degree. Another key strategy is to educate families—especially father figures—about the potential for increased economic returns that can come from a son’s sacrifice of delaying entry into the full-time workforce until after the degree is earned.

Section V. Blueprint for Action

Many of the practical implications in this report provide invaluable information about how communities and educational leaders can improve the educational success of Latino males. However, we believe that in order to scale-up efforts focused on increasing access and completion for Latino male students, a detailed blueprint could help guide communities and educational institutions in developing programs for Latino males.

This blueprint summarizes critical elements that can assist educational and community leaders, as well as other key stakeholders (e.g. private foundations) in developing focused strategies to increase Latino male success. The blueprint highlights three main stages for consideration: (1) Planning and Development, (2) Resource Development and Sustainability, (3) Outcomes and Communication.

Planning and Development Stage

This stage is critical for the initial development of any program specifically designed for Latino males. The programs highlighted in this brief worked to *create awareness* about the critical educational issues related to Latino males. Next, these successful programs *developed a connected network* that relied on Latino families, Latino community leaders, schools, postsecondary institutions to address the plight of Latino males. All of these programs *created a mission statement and/or theory of change* directly related to Latino male educational success. These programs focused on addressing the unique needs of these students inside and outside of the classroom. Finally, these programs *identified short- and long-term activities* focused on helping Latino males throughout their educational pathways.

Resource Development and Sustainability Stage

The ongoing successes of these programs rely on the ability of these programs to create a strong financial base and sustainable resources to continue their work. Many of these programs worked extensively with their connected network of community leaders, private foundations, and private companies to *garner resources* for their programmatic activities. In addition, these programs developed a financial and human resources plan to *create financial and non-financial sustainability* for their organizations. These two key elements ensure that the programs have a long-term viable solution for program stability and efficiency.

Outcomes and Communication Stage

Finally, these highlighted programs also emphasize the importance of accentuating the success stories of the Latino males in their programs. These programs *developed key benchmarks* to identify how they measured success and to examine how their students compare to other students. In addition, these program leaders also demonstrated that they worked hard to *inform stakeholders* of their successes. These valuable programs highlight the importance of educating the community about programmatic efforts to reverse the educational trends of Latino males.

The “blueprint for action” does not imply that these elements will guarantee programmatic success for any program; however, this blueprint does highlight the importance of developing programs with thoughtful and careful planning. These programs also emphasize the importance of having purposeful and intentional programs for Latino males.

Blueprint for Creating an Action Plan for Latino Male Success

PURPOSE		ACTION	FIRST CRITICAL STEPS
Planning and Development	Create Awareness	Utilize (and/or collect new) education and workforce data to explore the current educational and employment trends of Latino males	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utilizing these data, develop research reports, policy briefs, and/or practice guides on Latino education trends, with an emphasis on gender differences in educational access, degree attainment and employment patterns Conduct a policy and practices gap analysis at the national, state, and local levels to highlight discrepancies between educational policy and practice focused on Latino males
	Develop a connected network	Identify key educational and community leaders, business champions, and public and private organizations committed to promoting the success of Latino males	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> With the support, guidance, and expertise of these individuals and identified leaders, develop a national, state, and/or regional, highly visible network able to actively advocate and mobilize constituents in support of Latino male educational and career opportunity and success
	Create a mission statement and/or theory of change	Continuously guide network and other stakeholders and supporters with a clearly outlined plan for success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a clear and aspirational mission and vision statement for innovative policy development and pioneering practices that promote the success of Latino males Develop a simple theory of change that outlines well-defined inputs, influencers, assumptions, and outcomes for Latino male success
	Identify short- and long-term activities	With your theory of change as a guide, develop initiatives that speak to each desired outcome for Latino male success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utilize network leadership while also making the process of activity development inclusive of the broader network

PURPOSE		ACTION	FIRST CRITICAL STEPS
Resource Development and Sustainability	Garner resources	Secure financial resources and critical infrastructure for program implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Generate a financial base through various revenue streams, including individuals, local foundations, state grants, and public and private organizations ■ Procure physical space and infrastructure to launch and sustain planned initiatives
	Create Financial and non-financial sustainability	Ensure the long-term viability of developed initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Prioritize the development of a sustained, stable financial future by cultivating long-term relationships with your network ■ Cultivate relationships with groups not directly supporting your network or initiatives, but indirectly benefiting from your efforts
Outcomes and Communications	Develop key Benchmarks	With essential outcomes in mind, construct metrics that measure Latino male educational and employment patterns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Develop an evaluation plan that measures and reports on intermediary and ultimate outcomes of your initiatives ■ Let the data that comes out of such evaluation drive future efforts so as to build a sustained model for change
	Inform stakeholders	Communicate policy and practice recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Make known the findings of your evaluation, particularly to key and potential funders and influencers ■ Create a diverse, broad and strategic dissemination plan that may include social media, print, internet, and television or radio outlets

Source: Latino Males IHEP Policy Brief (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2011)

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Appendix A: Latino Male Focus Group Questions

1. Precollege experiences
 - a. What factors influenced you to attend (the institution)?
 - b. Why are some Latino male students not attending (the institution)?
 - c. What are some challenges or barriers do Latino males have to enroll at (the institution)?
 - d. Why are some Latina females attending college (the institution)?
 - e. What role do your family members played in attending (the institution)?

2. College experiences
 - a. What was your first day like on campus?
 - b. How do Latino males connect with other males on (the institution)?
 - c. How do you feel about talking with professors or instructors?
 - d. What does it take to be academically successful here?
 - e. How are some of your male peers helping you academically succeed?
 - f. How has (the institution) helped you academically succeed?
 - g. Why are some Latino Males not finishing at (the institution)?
 - h. What are some other things that you do on (the institution) out of the classroom?
 - i. What is (the institution) doing to encourage you to stay in college?

3. Post college experiences
 - a. What will you do after your time here at (the institution)?
 - b. How many think they will graduate from (the institution)?

Appendix B: Administrator Interview Questions

1. What is your institution doing to encourage:
 - a. HIGH SCHOOL: access to postsecondary enrollment for Latino students? (any specific approaches for males?)
 - b. COLLEGE: retention for Latino students? (any specific approaches for males?)
2. What are your perceptions of Latino males' academic performance?
 - a. How is it different from Latina females?
 - b. Other male subgroups?
3. What do you see as the barriers/obstacles for Latino males (as different than females) for:
 - a. High school completion?
 - b. Postsecondary enrollment?
 - c. College completion?
4. What steps does your institution take to assist in overcoming these barriers and/or in encouraging Latino male students to succeed?
5. What resources (financial, programmatic, personnel) do you have to work with this population?
 - a. FOLLOW-UP: What resources do you need (that you currently don't have)?
6. What are your perceptions of the role of family in promoting the success of Latino males in:
 - a. postsecondary enrollment
 - b. college completion?
7. What are your perceptions of the role of peers in promoting the success of Latino males in:
 - a. postsecondary enrollment
 - b. college completion?
8. What level of awareness does the local community have with regards to Latino males' postsecondary success?
9. Within (the institution), what level of awareness do the Faculty, Academic affairs, and Student Affairs have with regards to Latino males' postsecondary success?
 - i. YES: What has been the role of (the institution) in this discussion?
 - ii. NO: What role should (the institution) have in this discussion?
10. In a time of scarce resources how can (the institution) ESTABLISH/maintain a commitment to Latino male success?

ALTERNATE QUESTIONS

11. What could high schools do to promote the academic success of Latino males in high school and beyond? (BOTH)
12. What could colleges/universities do to promote the academic success of Latino males in college and beyond? (BOTH)