HISPANIC STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF SUCCESS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE IMPACT ON K-12 ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

by

Rodney Martin Stephens

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the impact of Hispanic learners' perceptions of success on their completion of secondary/post-secondary studies. The following served as a guiding research question: How do the perceptions of success among male and female Hispanic high school completers/non-completers ages 18-29 impact their educational pursuits? This qualitative study examined the lived experiences of Hispanic participants through social/cultural contexts framed around Bronfenbrenner's (1974) ecological systems theory, Vygotsky's (1978) social learning theory, Rotter's (1954) social learning, and Bandura's (2002) social cognitive theory. Participants included 22 Hispanic high school completers/non-completers ages 18-29 who were clients or students in one of three settings: a Hispanic advocacy center, an adult education center, or a moderate-size university, all near Atlanta, Georgia. A phenomenological approach was chosen because phenomenology considers constructs through the consciousness of persons who live unique experiences. Following Moustakas' (1994) methodology, this study sought to organize data in such a way to elicit textural and structural descriptions as well as structural meanings related to the phenomenon. Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and observations. Analysis was conducted via coding, memoing, and bracketing. By examining participants' perspectives, as well as their experiences in United States K-12 settings, the researcher determined that their definition of success centered on family. A future phenomenological study to examine language as an acculturative construct, as well as a case study to frame Hispanic students' perspectives in educational and familial milieus were proposed.

Keywords: achievement, graduation, Hispanic high school students, Latino, success

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my father, the late Sanford Stephens. While he did not graduate high school and only later in life completed his high school equivalency diploma, he was extremely proud of me for pursuing higher education. He once told me that he will forever have "bragging rights" on whatever I accomplish, regardless of my age. He went to be with God during my completion of this dissertation, but I know that he has eternally retained those bragging rights as he smiles on me from above.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my wife, Ronnice, and my two daughters, Ana Grace and Jenna Kate for their love and encouragement during this study. They selflessly endured many days in which I worked behind closed doors and were very forgiving of the time spent away from them. This study was a family effort, and I could not have completed it without their support.

I am similarly grateful to my work family, the school in which I have been called to lead. Like my physical family, they have encouraged and supported me along this journey, and on the days in which I grew weary, they provided the extra boast to persevere.

I am forever indebted to the 22 participants who served as the heart and soul for this study. The time that I spent with them was invaluable, and I am grateful to them for allowing me to delve into their lives and to glance into their worlds.

I would like to say a special thank you to my committee. Dr. James Zabloski, dissertation chair, provided a wealth of knowledge to me along the way and was, at times, the motivation I needed to reach the finish line. Dr. Floralba Arbelo-Marrero shared invaluable guidance and insights into the perspectives of Hispanic learners that proved to be the lifeline for this study. Dr. Cathy Moore was a constant source of encouragement, and having served as lead professor for my educational specialist degree, she was both a link to my past and a forerunner to my future.

Above all, I say thank you to my God. He has plans for me (Jeremiah 29:11), and I am honored to serve as His steward. The completion of this degree is a testimony to His providence and sovereign guidance.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The academic achievement of Hispanic learners has been a substantial topic of debate among educators across the nation for the past two decades. With the historical passage of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001, teachers have voiced concerns in recent years regarding how to promote parity among all learners with attention given especially to diverse, minority subgroups. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) required schools to reach proficiency by the 2013-2014 school year, demonstrate adequate yearly progress along the way, and coupled with rapidly changing demographics among Southeastern United States regions, it sparked anxieties among educators with concerns for academic achievement of ethnically diverse students, many of whom were non-English-speaking (Hill & Torres, 2010; Ross, Rouse, & Bratton, 2010).

In Georgia, the presence of Hispanic populations has more than doubled in many districts since 2000, and the passage of NCLB required Georgia schools and districts to show adequate yearly progress with students who often present cultures, experiences, backgrounds, and learning needs that differ widely against those of other cultures (Frey, Mandlawitz, & Alvarez, 2012; Groen, 2012; Rush & Scherff, 2012; Wortham, Clonan-Roy, Link, & Martinez, 2013). With the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015, schools and districts across the nation are hard-pressed to provide all student ethnic subgroups with rigorous coursework centered on comprehensive college and career readiness skills with emphasis beginning at the Pre-K level (Kerr, 2015; Layton, 2015).

Since the inception of NCLB, quantitative research has concentrated heavily on the efficacy of pedagogical strategies for English language learners, commonly examining correlations between program implementation and student achievement. Similarly, quantitative

studies have examined the effectiveness of language acquisition models, reading fluency programs, and English language learner frameworks with emphases on longitudinal student growth data, achievement, and high school graduation rates (Lopez, 2011; Lopez & McEneaney, 2012; McEneaney, López, & Nieswandt, 2014; Zoda, Slate, & Combs, 2011). Yet, literature is lacking studies that ponder the extent to which achievement goals of United States academic cultures mesh with those of Hispanic learners. Moreover, while the American education system commonly measures success by standardized test scores, graduation rates, and enrollment into post-secondary studies, little is known about the extent to which these ideals correlate with Hispanic learners' own perceptions of success (Frey, Mandlawitz, & Alvarez, 2012; Groen, 2012; Kerr, 2015; Rivera-Mills, 2009; Rush & Scherff, 2012).

Qualitative studies generally seek to delve deep into the world of its participants to understand not only the events or circumstances ascribed to them, but more importantly, their interpretation. The overall purpose of a phenomenological study is to explore distinctive events of individuals and their thoughts, feelings, and common meanings attributed to those events. The ultimate goal of phenomenology is to establish themes and structural descriptions relative to unique experiences, seeking to understand how individuals ascribe meaning and make sense of their world (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002; Schwandt, 2007). The use of multiple data sources to achieve saturation is promoted by both Creswell (2013) and Patton (2002) and requires the researcher to triangulate data, looking at phenomena from multiple perspectives.

Following the traditions of qualitative inquiry, this research strives to articulate the perceptions of Hispanic learners' views of success and the extent to which their ideologies have influenced their overarching academic and vocational goals. Using a variety of data sources (interviews, focus groups, and observations), the researcher underscores Hispanic learners' lived

experiences, amplifying the voices of those who have participated in K-12 studies in the United States, along with their own familial and cultural ideologies of success that might have impacted their past educative efforts. The purpose of this chapter is to provide background information related to the study as well as articulate the manner in which the situation relates to self. The problem statement and overall purpose are posited, and the significance of the study is identified in light of extant literature. The research questions and subquestions are presented, and key terms are defined. This chapter concludes with a brief summary for this phenomenological inquiry.

Background

According to the most recent United States Census survey (2010), Hispanic populations are the fastest growing ethnic subgroup in the United States with over 50 million current residents and representing 16.3% of our nation's total population. The U.S. Census Bureau (2011) reports that over half of the population growth among U.S. regions from 2001 through 2010 occurred because of increases among Hispanic subgroups. Over two-thirds of Hispanic residents are of Mexican descent, and 25% of Mexican residents live below the nation's poverty level. While schools across the Southeastern United States have seen remarkable increases in Hispanic populations in recent years, these subgroups demonstrate the lowest academic achievement of any ethnic subgroup in American school systems (Parker, Edelmira, & Tap, 2016).

Studies conducted by the Pew Research Center (2009) indicate that almost half of Hispanics across the nation between the ages of 16 and 24 do not enroll in secondary or postsecondary studies, and 23.7% of Hispanics enrolled in college are halftime, compared to 14.7% of White students. Further, almost 33% of foreign-born Hispanics drop out of high

school. And, while White and Black subgroups experienced notable academic successes in closing achievement gaps in recent years, the National Assessment for Educational Progress (2009) notes that the achievement gains for Hispanic populations remain relatively unchanged across many United States regions. High school graduation and college admission rates for Hispanics are lower than any other ethnic subgroup. Hispanics consistently lag behind their peers, including other immigrant subgroups, in their overall reading achievement, high school graduation, and entrance into advanced curricular science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) programs (Carpi, Darcy, Falconer, Boyd, & Lents, 2013; Hill & Torres, 2010; Lesaux & Rangel, 2013). While educators agree that quality programs, parity, and effective strategies are nonnegotiable for students of diversity, the manner over how to accomplish these ideals remains widely contested.

Several theoretical frameworks are appropriate in examining the wide-ranging perspectives of Hispanic populations. Bronfenbrenner's (1974) ecological systems theory is especially fitting as it reflects the complex, interwoven nature of family and society, along with their overlay among varying traditions, social identity, and familial behaviors. Bronfenbrenner (1974) maintained that individuals progress through overlapping subsystems that work to develop social identities. Each subsystem serves to regulate acceptable behaviors of subcultures and its members. Paat (2013) stressed ecological systems and noted that diverse learners are marginalized in situations in which the culture of family does not mesh with that of schools. Thus, from an ecological mindset, the very presence of Hispanic students challenges educators to carefully reexamine curricular strategies, while implementing often needed remediation firmly embedded in multiculturalism; from this angle, the juxtaposition of nationalism, multilingualism,

and politics should overlap with curricular strategies (Casellas & Ibarra, 2012; Rolstad, Mahoney, & Glass, 2005).

Social learning theories are equally appropriate in framing studies involving Hispanic students in American school contexts (Rotter, 1954; Vygotsky, 1978). Social learning theories are incumbent among educators who concern themselves with providing quality curriculum and learning tasks that are rooted not only in sound pedagogical principles, but also diverse learners' own cultural and linguistic needs. A social learning mindset requires educators to establish practices to better bridge cultural divides that exist between schools and diverse populations with holistic approaches that merge familial backgrounds, parental supports, and socio-economic variables with self-efficacy and life expectations of unique learners (Mihyeon, 2014). Proponents of social learning assert that parity will only occur in diverse classrooms when school administrators and personnel first take more deliberate steps to understand diverse students, their backgrounds, and myriad of challenges (Orosco, 2010; Plata-Potter & de Guzman, 2012).

Social cognitive perspectives are similarly fitting in considering the achievement of Hispanic subgroups (Bandura, 1989). Approaches rooted in social cognition maintain that self-efficacy is determined by both motivation and the extent to which individuals succeed in the face of obstacles; behavior is then shaped by outcomes that directly determine the likelihood of their recurrence. Theorists immersed in a social cognitive approach would assert that the disenfranchisement of Hispanic subgroups occurs when the social strata of school settings contrasts starkly against those of ethnic subgroups. As the individual and collective efforts of diverse subgroups are met with negative outcomes in classroom settings, the motivation and frequency of such behaviors are diminished (Artiles, 2011; Behnke, Gonzalez, & Cox, 2010).

The immigration of ethnically diverse students into American school systems has become

a political hot-topic, and while legislators continue to grapple with its legal implications, the responsibility to educate students of all ethnicities remains irrefutable; it is the charge of educators to provide quality instruction to any child regardless of his or her ethnicity or legal status. The call for equity is a common theme in the educational world and is well-grounded in several theoretical paradigms. However, questions persist on how to best promote academic parity for diverse learners, Hispanics especially (Artiles, 2011; Hill & Torres, 2010).

Situation to Self

As a middle grades principal and former classroom teacher in a school and district with rapid demographic changes among Hispanic learners in recent years, I have experienced the perplexity of promoting academic achievement among Hispanic subgroups, while balancing their needs for rigor and effective curricular programs. I currently work in a school that has experienced rapid demographic changes firsthand, with a student population that was 88% White in 1998, and that is 60% Hispanic today. Further, I have experienced the heartbreak associated with Hispanic youth who, for reasons unknown, choose to leave their academic studies prematurely.

Through this research, I desired to understand how Hispanics might describe and give meaning to the construct, success, and the optimal level of education they might perceive necessary in order to achieve it. It was my goal to understand why many Hispanics do not pursue secondary/postsecondary studies and the extent to which their culture impacted their pursuits. I hoped to give a voice to the lived experiences of Hispanic youth who abandoned their educational efforts as a result of their social/cultural models of optimal success in an effort to empower them.

My own experiences greatly underpinned both the assumptions and paradigms for this study. I grew up in a small, rural Southern mill-town in Northwest Georgia, and my elementary and high school teachers instilled the importance of education within me from an early age. For individuals in my hometown who chose not to attend college, working in the mill was largely the only option. I equated education with success at an early age, and I held to the belief that a college education yields a fulfilled and prosperous life. Education was important to me because significant people in my life hailed it as such; my teachers taught me that it was nonnegotiable in order to escape a hard life of poverty. Now, as a school administrator and educator, I promote education to my students as a prerequisite for their successes.

It is my philosophical assumption that our circumstances and social contexts serve to shape our perceptions; our perceptions then essentially become what we know: our reality. Hence, ontological assumptions have framed my current worldview, and a constructivist paradigm guided my research design (Creswell, 2013; Raina, 2011). Creswell (2013) asserted that ontology requires the researcher to investigate numerous realities and to embrace these through contextual evidence that comes through unique individuals' varying perspectives. Similarly, Guba and Lincoln (as quoted by Denzin and Lincoln, 2000) maintained that "realities are apprehendable in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature. . . " (p. 110). It is my belief that participants in subcultures construct their reality through collective and individual experiences. Researchers must attempt to understand the complex world of participants and the journey that leads them to what they know (Bandura, 2002; Gredler, 2012; Orosco & O'Connor, 2014; Schwandt, 2007). Ultimately, I hoped to discover how Hispanic learners' have constructed reality, both individual

and shared, regarding success, and the role that secondary/postsecondary education played in shaping their definition of it.

Problem Statement

Numerous studies published in the past two decades underscore the gravity of lagging academic achievement among Hispanic youth with resulting emphases placed on curricular strategies rooted in cultural awareness and language acquisition principles (Artiles, 2011; Carpi et al., 2013; Darcy, Falconer, Boyd, & Lents, 2013; Leidy, Guerra, & Toro, 2012; Martinez, 2013; Rusch & Horsford, 2008; Schulz & Rubel, 2011; Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco, & Sattin-Bajai, 2010). Few studies, however, capture the perspectives of Hispanics who participate in American education programs, who experience disparity in academic contexts, and the inherent value they place on education as a prerequisite for success. Therefore, the problem underlying this study is that the notion of success ascribed to in American education systems has not, perhaps, aligned to the inherent values upheld in Hispanic cultures. While educational leaders measure success by the effectiveness of pedagogical practices, graduation rates, and enrollment/completion of students in postsecondary studies, little is known about the extent to which such constructs align with the broad goals of ethnic subgroups, notably, Hispanics (Howell & Timberlake, 2014; Rothstein, 2010; Schochet & Chiang, 2012).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand the impact of Hispanic learners' perceptions of success on their completion of high school. Following the theoretical perspectives of a phenomenological inquiry (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002), this study explored the lived experiences of Hispanics ages 18-29 at three distinctive sites: A Latino advocacy center, a college/moderate-sized university, and an adult learning education center. All

three sites were located in a Southeastern metropolitan area near Atlanta, Georgia. Participants included Hispanics who were seeking education/career guidance and who did not complete secondary studies. It also considered the perspectives of Hispanic learners who did successfully complete high school, and the societal, cultural, and academic challenges that each group experienced along the way. Hill and Torres (2010) defined success as the optimal level and "role of education (needed) for upward mobility" (p. 95), and this definition defined the construct, success, for this inquiry.

Through rich descriptive texts, this study sought to provide an experiential voice of Hispanics who do not complete high school as a result of their perceptions of success. This study sought the perceptions of students who did successfully complete their secondary studies, and the cultural, familial, and school-based challenges they experienced. In essence, this phenomenological study strove to underscore the level of education Hispanics deem necessary to accomplish their ideals of success and the extent to which such ideologies may have influenced their pursuits of advanced vocational or secondary studies (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). This research was fashioned around the theoretical frameworks related to Bronfenbrenner's (1974) ecological systems theory and the interconnectedness of familial and educational perspectives. Further, this study was centered on social learning/cognitive theories. Vygotsky's (1978) and Rotter's (1954) social learning theories and Bandura's (1989) social cognitive theory was underscored regarding the norms, behaviors, reactions, and cultural milieus that have impacted Hispanics and their pursuits of broad educational goals.

Significance of the Study

Significant increases among Hispanic populations in recent years exemplify, perhaps, a changing United States cultural landscape. Hispanic populations are increasing exceedingly fast

in many metropolitan Southeastern cities, and as accountability becomes more prevalent in the educational arena, educators are hard-pressed to demonstrate achievement gains with new student subgroups. The ability of schools and systems to keep up with population changes through traditional college, career, and readiness programs proves problematic to educators faced with rapidly changing demographics. Current research often emphasizes the disparities of Hispanic learners in great abundance, noting that they demonstrate the lowest academic gains of any subgroup. Still, achievement gains are minimal and widely gauge the academic successes of our nation's public schools (Artiles, 2011; Casellas & Ibarra, 2012; Elfers & Stritikus, 2014; Hayes, Blake, Darensbourg, & Castillo, 2015; Lesaux & Rangel, 2013; Pew Hispanic Center, 2009; Zoda, Slate, & Combs, 2011).

Much of the available research regarding Hispanic learners features the efficacy of curricular programming and the correlations between pedagogical strategies and achievement. Few studies, however, have sought to understand the unique learner and why many Hispanics discontinue their secondary/post-secondary academic pursuits. Moreover, little is known about the interplay among their culture, familial dynamics, and high school completion and the inherent value Hispanics place on secondary/post-secondary studies (Artiles, 2011; Behnke, Gonzalez, & Cox, 2010; Carpi et. al, 2013; Hayes et. al, 2015; Rolstad, Mahoney, & Glass, 2005). Hence, this study was critical because it sought to embrace our educational system through their (Hispanics') eyes; it investigated the mindsets of some of our nation's newest learners, Hispanics, and the extent to which education has served as a perquisite for their perceptions of success.

From a personal perspective, this study bore practical significance. As an educator who has witnessed rapid demographic changes over the course of a decade in a Southeastern

metropolitan school district, I have felt the struggle associated in juggling achievement, rigor, and remediation simultaneously among diverse subgroups. Further, from a constructivist perspective, I believe that individuals shape their own realities, and I often draw parallels between Hispanics' positions within the strata of our educational system and my own experiences as a child who sought education to escape from the hardships of a small, Southern mill-town (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Orosco & O'Connor, 2014). I have faced frustrations as I have attempted to ascribe my perceptions of success onto diverse learners as a remedy for struggling student subgroups with the notion that education yields a fulfilled and prosperous life.

In this way, this study sought to determine whether societal construction of success as defined by Hill and Torres (2010) correlates with the perceptions of Hispanic learners: "role of education (needed) for upward mobility" (p. 95). This study bore credence in determining whether or not my instructional efforts, based upon my own constructed perceptions, and the efforts of educators much like me, align with those of Hispanics; it sought to determine the extent to which achievement relates to social constructions versus pedagogy or curricular models (Gredler, 2012; Moises, Russell, & Vohra-Gupta, 2012).

Rotter (1954) and Bandura (2001) maintained that our interactions within various milieus of society converge to shape our unique personalities. Vygotsky (1978) similarly asserted that individuals use various societal contexts to construct their knowledge of the world, and Bronfenbrenner (1974) believed that individuals are impacted by a series of interactive systems, beginning with the family, that ultimately shape personal identity. Social theoretical frameworks are particularly intriguing when considering Hispanic cultures, especially in light of familismo (Leidy, Guerra, & Toro, 2012; Martinez, 2013; Smith-Morris, Morales-Campos, Alvarez, & Turner, 2012). Woolley (2009) described familismo as a powerful social entity among Hispanic

populations that underscores family as “the key source of strength and support while expecting individual family members to place the family's needs above their own” (p. 10). While the family system in Hispanic cultures is highly regarded through ecological perspectives (Bronfenbrenner, 1974), the full extent to which familismo impacts educational success remains undetermined.

Phenomenological studies purposefully describe, articulate, and accentuate the perceptions of participants with respect to a given phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). Ultimately, the significance of this inquiry was rooted in the need to provide a voice to Hispanic students by articulating their ideals of success and the influence that those viewpoints may have had on their attainment of academic goals:

1. It examined the impact that the phenomenon, success, has had on their (Hispanics) completion of high school.
2. It sought to bridge literature regarding the educational disparities of Hispanic students with their own perspectives of success.
3. It gave a voice to what Hispanics perceive to be optimal educational attainment needed to achieve upward mobility.
4. It provided insights to educators regarding the perceptions of Hispanic students who drop out of high school so that interventions to prevent attrition might be enacted.

Research Questions

The examination of lived experiences of Hispanics who chose to leave high school and the extent to which familial and cultural values influenced that decision was foundational to this phenomenological design. Further, understanding the perceptions of Hispanics who successfully completed secondary studies was central to this study. Emphasizing the interrelation of familial

and societal factors that influence the decision-making of Hispanic students led to the very essence of the phenomenon. The use of a single, guiding research question that intricately focuses inquiries is well-supported in literature (Creswell, 2013; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2010; Patton, 2002; Schwandt, 2007). The development of a single guiding question central to the inquiry that considered the essence of Bronfenbrenner's (1974) ecological systems theory, Vygotsky's (1978) social learning theory, Rotter's (1954) social learning theory and Bandura's (2001) social cognitive theory was appropriate in investigating the external responses, motivations, and consequences experienced through social lenses that shape human behavior. Hence, the guiding research question for this study was, "How do the perceptions of success among male and female Hispanic high school completers/non-completers ages 18-29 impact their educational pursuits?" This question represented an ecological systems theory, the social learning/cognitive theoretical frameworks, and the gap in existing literature (Creswell, 2013; Moises, Russell, & Vohra-Gupta, 2012; Paat, 2013; Patton, 2002).

Additionally, the use of carefully framed subquestions is advocated in literature (Creswell, 2013). This practice involves the posing of a single guiding research question and related subquestions that seek to capture the essence of the study and to pinpoint significant experiences regarding their specific interplay with the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Thus, the following subquestions were framed for this inquiry.

1. What resources did male and female Hispanic high school completers/non-completers ages 18-29 perceive to be necessary to achieve success?

Existing research highlights the need for structured pedagogical strategies at all levels of the K-12 setting to assist Hispanic learners struggling to meet academic proficiency. However, literature is devoid of studies related to the influence of culture on such ideologies and its

delicate intersection with pedagogical strategies that promote the successes of minorities, most notably, Hispanics (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014; Mihyeon, 2014; Plata-Potter & de Guzman, 2012). Further, this question was integral because it deliberated the self-efficacy of Hispanic students and the tools needed for them to experience success in secondary and post-secondary settings. Rotter (1954) purported that behavior is rooted firmly within various systems, and the primary responsibility of educators should be to establish environments "in which the child learns to live cooperatively with others, to accept responsibility, and to find gratification in constructivist individual and group activities" (Rotter, 1954, p. 434). This question was embedded in social learning/cognitive theory; outcomes serve as either motivations or consequences and directly sway both the likelihood and frequency of recurrence.

2. What did male and female Hispanic high school completers/non-completers ages 18-29 perceive to be obstacles that hinder achieving success?

Current studies denote disparities among Hispanic populations in educational milieus with attention on content initiatives aimed at improved high school retention. Yet, a large percentage of Hispanics drop out of high school even with these strategies in place (Behnke, Gonzalez, & Cox, 2010). This question was developed with the data collection methodologies in mind and aimed to give voice to Hispanics regarding success and the tools they need to accomplish success. Furthermore, it elicited insights from multiple perspectives by having both completers and non-completers identify perceived obstacles.

3. How did male and female Hispanic high school completers/non-completers ages 18-29 describe the cultural and familial backgrounds that impact their perceptions of success?

Bronfenbrenner (1974) examined the effect of varying subsystems on human behavior. This question specifically reflected the interplay of those subsystems on the decisions of Hispanics to pursue secondary/post-secondary studies. Further, this question bore relevance to social learning/cognitive theories as it specifically reflects the extents to which norms, values, and familial systems directly control the decision-making processes of Hispanics. This question considered the overlapping structures of culture and family and the impact these structures have on participants' ideologies of success. Finally, this question allowed the researcher to examine contrasting viewpoints of Hispanic completers and non-completers, and the varying impact that these viewpoints may have had on their educational pursuits.

Definitions

- *Culture* – a group of people with shared values/beliefs (Bandura, 2002).
- *English language programs* – programs designed to meet the linguistic and instructional needs of populations with limited English proficiency (Won & Sharnez, 2014).
- *Parity* – the sense of quality in education shared among populations and subgroups (Artiles, 2011).
- *Social cognitive theory* - Communal constructs and norms; extends to and beyond collective groups; expectations that govern behavior within cultures (Bandura, 2002).
- *Social learning theory* - The expectancy of the occurrence of reinforcement following a behavior (Rotter, 1954).
- *Subculture* – smaller groups that are established with an existing culture (Bandura, 2002).

- *Success* – The optimal level of education perceived as necessary in order to achieve upward mobility (Hill & Torres, 2010).

Summary

Research underscores achievement concerns among Hispanic subgroups in United States classrooms over the past two decades. While literature emphasis has been given to curricular strategies in recent years, cultural awareness, and appropriate language acquisition models, few studies have been conducted to understand the perspectives of Hispanics who experience educational disparity, and the value that they place on education as a requirement for success (Artiles, 2011; Carpi et al., 2013; Rusch & Horsford, 2008; Schulz & Rubel, 2011; Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco, & Sattin-Bajai, 2010). This study examined the level of education Hispanics deem necessary to accomplish their academic and vocational goals and the extent to which their perceptions influenced their completion of secondary studies. Participants included 22 high school completers and non-completers between the ages 18-29 who were students/clients of a Hispanic advocacy center, a college/moderate sized university, or an adult education center; all three sites are located near Atlanta, Georgia. Multiple sources were examined to investigate the phenomenon of interest; data was gathered through interviews, focus groups, and observations. This inquiry was important because it deliberately examined the impact that the phenomenon, success, has had on Hispanics' completion of high school and provided insights into their past varying degrees of academic persistence.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The experiences of Hispanic learners in the American school context is multifaceted with layers entrenched deeply in their own acculturation processes and unique familial subsystems. These experiences are impacted greatly by many factors, and to fully understand which academic or curricular strategies might prove successful with them, one must first strive to understand the delicate intersection of family, generational heritage, and culture of Hispanic subgroups. This review of literature delves deeply into such perspectives while providing synthesis from extant research regarding achievement and classroom experiences of Hispanics.

This review begins by highlighting the theoretical frameworks that guided this research inquiry. Bronfenbrenner's (1974) ecological systems theory is examined in light of the environmental, communal, and societal structures that facilitate human development. Theoretical frameworks entrenched in social learning are also featured with emphases on Vygotsky's (1978) and Rotter's (1954) social learning theories and Bandura's (1989) social cognitive theory. Following theoretical frameworks, discussions center on educational parity and curricular access for students of Hispanic descent. Finally, literature regarding the retention of Hispanic learners in post-secondary studies is carefully pondered, and importance is placed on the current curricular trends and efforts in place at both state and federal levels to promote parity among minority subgroups, particularly, Hispanics in public classrooms.

Theoretical Frameworks

To fully underscore the experiences of Hispanic learners and their educational experiences in United States schools, it is important to first consider those experiences through distinctive theoretical frameworks. Bronfenbrenner's (1974) ecological systems theory is

especially appropriate in examining the environmental, communal, and societal structures that facilitate human development among diverse subgroups. Likewise, theoretical frameworks entrenched in social learning with emphases on Vygotsky's (1978) and Rotter's (1954) social learning theories and Bandura's (1989) social cognitive theory bear relevance in framing familial and cultural milieus of Hispanic subgroups.

Bronfenbrenner

Bronfenbrenner (1974) promoted the ecological systems theory and a combination of subsystems that he asserted work together to develop unique members within social structures. These structures involved five systems: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem, and each exemplifies the ecological transitions that individuals experience throughout their life span along with the myriad of challenges that ultimately converge to shape human behavior (Bronfenbrenner, 1974). Bronfenbrenner (1979) purported that deliberate processes taking place within and between these distinctive substructures must be viewed interdependently and analyzed in relation to the entire system. He suggested that it is within these systems that children develop their sense of efficacy and personal identity. Each system contains an "enduring environment" denoted by the physical space and materials of the context and the people, roles, relationships, and meanings established during idiosyncratic interactions (Bronfenbrenner, 1974, p. 2). Each subsystem is intricately interrelated, and each is embedded within higher systems.

The microsystem refers to the immediate institutions that primarily mold the development of individuals, beginning in early childhood. This system involves family members, academic settings, church associations, communities, and peer groups. Bronfenbrenner (1979) maintained that such processes begin early and extend throughout the

lifetime and that various sections of our lives (home, school, community) are not compartmentalized. In this way, the interactive nature of social nurture yields "proximal processes" and the "primary engines of development" (Bronfenbrenner, 2000, p. 130). Proximal processes include:

> Feeding or comforting an infant, playing with a young child, child-child activities, group or solitary play, reading, problem solving, caring for others, acquiring new knowledge and know-how, or planning or engaging in other intellectual, physical, social, or artistic activities that become increasingly complex over time (Bronfenbrenner, 2000, p. 130).

The microsystem represents the basis from which individuals learn to interact with and interpret the world.

Next, the mesosystem is intricately connected to the microsystem and includes extended family members and teachers, along with new and broader friendship groups. Microsystems are said to be nestled within mesosystems (Watling & Neal, 2013, p. 725). Watling and Neal (2013) defined the mesosystem as a "social interaction between participants in different settings that both include the focal individual settings" (p. 725). Children learn more about their identity as significant members of the mesosystem converge. For instance, when the parents of a young child conference with teachers for the first time, the primary system merges with a new context in which the child has developed almost independently of his or her parents. In a sense, this is a convergence of the child's primary learning contexts (the microsystem) where primary behaviors have been extended (in the mesosystem) and applied (Bronfenbrenner, 2000; Watling & Neal, 2013).

The exosystem characterizes the influence of an individual with other outside forces that extend beyond his or her direct engagement. The exosystem is thought to be nestled within the

mesosystem with a large degree of connectedness. Experiences within the exosystem are indirect and might be even determined, for instance, by the interactions a parent has outside of the home. Other examples may include "the nature and requirements of the parents' work, characteristics of the neighborhood, health and welfare services, government agencies, the relationship between school and community, (and) informal social networks" (Bronfenbrenner, 1974, p. 16). Exosystems may also include educational policies, rules, and laws that ultimately govern the person in his or her interactive processes within educational settings although he or she has no direct contact with those who enact these guiding principles. These outside influences reinforce other subsystems, the parent/child relationships at the microsystem level, for instance, and establish a dynamic interactive construct central to human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1974; Watling & Neal, 2013).

The macrosystem involves broader contexts that frame human relationships. These include the socioeconomic variables, ethnicity, heritage, and values that mitigate the development of unique members. Ethnic and heritage values are cultivated in family systems through unifying cultural themes; these themes then serve as commonalities among subcultures in larger-scale social settings. The exosystem is thought to be embedded within the macrosystem. This sphere represents the complex tenets and societal factors that ultimately shape its members through "broad cultural influences that have long-ranging consequences for the focal individual" (Watling & Neal, 2013, p. 726).

Finally, the chronosystem refers to the events and/or significant transitions that occur in a person's life. Such are deemed socio-historical and include distinctive events like the divorce of parents. From the ecological systems theorist's perspective, events are not bounded by a single place and time; rather, they are imprinted into individuals' history and continually influence their

unique worldviews (Watling & Neal, 2013). Thus, this system reflects the interpersonal exchanges that occur within each subsystem and reflects the scope of events holistically. Two types of transitions occur within chronosystems. The first is normative and involves natural transitions that occur over time like school attendance, puberty, marriage, and retirement. The second is non-normative and refers to death, illness, divorce, and other significant life-changing events. Regarding the chronosystems, Bronfenbrenner (1986) asserted that "such transitions occur throughout the life span and often serve as a direct impetus for developmental change. Their relevance for the present review, however, lies in the fact that they can also influence development indirectly by affecting family processes" (para. 7).

Theorists subscribing to the ecological theory systems would purport that the family is likely the first dimension for which children learn appropriate interactions. Further, from an educational perspective, theorists would maintain that interpersonal development is an integrated, highly interrelated process. Practices within the home (microsystems) determine behaviors in larger contexts (mesosystems). In this way, Bronfenbrenner (1986) articulated the familial influences on education:

> Children from homes or classrooms affording greater opportunities for communication and decision-making not only exhibited greater initiative and independence after entering high school, but also received higher grades. Family processes were considerably more powerful in producing change that classroom procedures. School influences were nevertheless effective, especially for pupils from families who had not emphasized intergenerational communication in the home of the child's participation in decision-making. The effects of family and school processes were greater than those attributed to socioeconomic status or race (para. 32).

Child development is a complex process and involves family dynamics, societal frameworks, and the expansive range of traditions, perspectives, and related behaviors. Through a theoretical lens entrenched in Bronfenbrenner's perspective, educative efforts, then, should be multifaceted, reaching across the stratums of existing subsystems.

Vygotsky

Vygotsky (1978) was a proponent of social learning theory. This learning theory maintains the development of school-aged children progresses in a continuum, and this development is the direct result of their engagement within their learning environment. Vygotsky (1978) asserted that three broad constructs are essential to social learning: social interaction, interactions with role models (more knowledgeable other), and the acquiring of skills through the zone of proximal development. The development of human action occurs alongside environmental constructs and language development; learning is a communal construct, and learners demonstrate proficiency in their exchanges with others (Ferrari, Robinson, & Yasnitsky, 2010; Sannino & Sutter, 2011; Vygotsky, 2011).

From Vygotsky's (1978) perspective, children learn under the direction of adults through a zone of proximal distance to acquire new behaviors. Learning is not restricted to mere classroom dynamics; rather, it can be accomplished in any setting in which the learner is willing to cognitively engage. The ability to develop an extended zone of proximal development is not necessarily characteristic of very young children; it is a process that evolves over time as learners develop readiness (Gredler, 2012). Proponents of Vygotsky's (1978) theory would assert that students need opportunities to interact with adults to learn ideal forms of behavior, and these processes are essential to the social and cognitive development of the learner. Language and

social frameworks yield significant effects on the development of young children (Ferrari, Robinson, & Yasnitsky, 2010; Gredler, 2012).

Vygotsky (1978) maintained that "psychology still did not have the methods objectively to investigate consciousness as revealed in the phenomena of human behavior and new methods were urgently needed" (Ferrari, Robinson, & Yasnitsky, 2010, p.106). From this perspective, cognition develops in proximity to significant others; young students develop skills with the support of parents or teachers, and as they become autonomous, the need for support is decreased. The success of the individual is ultimately determined by how successful he or she can be without the support systems of role models, and thus, Vygotsky promoted several phenomena: normal development, pathological regression, supernormal development, and the pathological expressions of the gifted learner (Ferrari, Robinson, & Yasnitsky, 2010; Sannino & Sutter, 2011; Vygotsky, 2011).

According to Eun (2008), inherent in Vygotsky's theory are the "social origin and cultural mechanisms of development" (p. 135), along with four interrelated constructs. First, mental functions develop with "specific social interactions and retain a social nature even in the most private spheres of human consciousness" (Eun, 2008, p. 135). Second, the "insistence on the social nature of psychological development" in which behavior and consciousness become unified is also central to Vygotsky's theory (Eun, 2008, p. 135). Third, attention is placed on mediation, the "specific mechanisms involved in the transition between social interaction and individual mental functioning" (Eun, 2008, p. 136). Finally, this theory stresses the development of psychological systems (Eun, 2008).

Vygotsky (1978) asserted that individuals develop a shared societal lens by which they actively construct knowledge. The development of language is a precursor for intellectual and

social development, and the use of language is central to his learning theory; language evolves during these experiences (Zavershneva, 2010). In this manner, Vygotsky (as quoted by Zavershneva, 2010) stated that language is "the relation between the speaker and the listener, the relation between people directed toward an object; it is an interpsychic reaction that establishes the unity of two organisms in the same orientation toward an object" (p. 25). Gredler (2012) concluded that Vygotsky's theory promotes "higher mental functions of voluntary attention, categorical perception, conceptual thinking, and logical memory as the outcomes of cognitive development" (p. 120).

Rotter

Rotter (1954) maintained that psychoanalytic theories fail to capture the essence of behavior that occurs as an extension of reinforcement, and his social learning theory evolved as a result. Rotter (1954) argued that behavior choices were not embedded within psychological needs and the gratification of those needs, and "this social learning approach rejects the theory that psychological goals must be explained in terms of their leading to the satisfaction or neutralization of a physiologically described drive and resulting in reduction of that drive" (Rotter, 1954, p. 116). Rotter (1954) maintained that societal members are both producers and products of communal systems, and behaviors are shaped as a result of three modes of agency: direct personal agency, proxy agency, and collective agency. These three modes of agency denote one's alternating frames of reference, from self-reflective behaviors (inward) to self-reactive (response to environmental stimuli). Individuals consistently monitor and change their behavior through triadic "self-regulation," balanced by cognitive, behavioral, and environmental stimuli (Rotter, Liverant, & Crowne, 1961).

Direct personal agency develops from interaction with others. By experiencing varying

degrees of acceptance in correlation to their actions, individuals are then able to gauge their own well-being through interactions and promote their own sense of agency. Proxy agency occurs among individuals who seek guidance from others who have the resources and power to exert certain amounts of control over them to enact change. This mode of control is demonstrated through parent/child, employer/employee, and legislator/citizen relationships. Collective agency results when individuals actively coordinate their actions for the good of the larger group (Rotter, 1954).

Several premises are central to Rotter's (1954) theory: "potential, expectancy, and reinforcement value," and the following formula guides learning: "the potential for behavior *x* to occur in situation 1 in relation to reinforcement *a* is a function of the expectancy of the occurrence of reinforcement *a* following behavior *x* in situation 1 and the value of reinforcement *a*" (p. 108). Behavior occurs as a response to a stimulus, and the potentiality of a certain action is the direct result of it occurring in relation to reinforcements; as certain behaviors are rewarded, their expectancy increases (Rotter, Liverant, & Crowne, 1961). From the social learning perspective, reinforcement of behaviors becomes two-fold. First, it is evaluated internally (reinforcement); second and perhaps simultaneously, it is mitigated by outside influences, extrinsic motivations (extrinsic reinforcements) that shape actions within a behavior construct. Regarding the development of human interactions, Rotter (1959) asserted that individuals learn through conflicts that provide stimuli for interpersonal growth.

Behavior reinforcement and extinction are integral components of social learning. A person is likely to continue a learned skill if it is perceived to be an extension of their newly acquired behavior (reinforcement). Behaviors are controlled by the environment in which they occur; the outcome of a given behavior can either effectively reinforce or suppress its recurrence

(extinction). Those who demonstrate behaviors that correspond to their setting are deemed successful, while those who fail to adapt to societal standards are not. Regarding the power of human engagement, Rotter, Liverant, and Crowne (1961) concluded:

> Whether or not humans see success in a task as being determined or controlled by chance, random or other factors beyond their control, or see the reinforcement in the situation as an outcome of their own characteristics or skills, appears to have systematic effects on changes in their expectations for future reinforcement (p. 161).

Bandura

Social cognitive theory shares commonalities with the social learning theory promoted by Rotter (1954). Bandura (1989) asserted that basic/traditional behavior theories overlook the importance of dynamic interchanges. By examining the outcomes of the shared constructs and behaviors on individuals, Bandura (1989) extended Rotter's (1954) "social learning theory," and much like Rotter, the emergent person as an interactive agent is stressed by social cognitive theorists. Bandura (1989) stated that "people's self-efficacy beliefs determine their level of motivation, as reflected in how much effort they will exert in an endeavor and how long they will persevere in the face of obstacles" (p. 1176).

From the social cognitive standpoint, outcomes serve as either motivations or consequences and directly determine both the likelihood and frequency of recurrence. Individuals are shaped by extrinsic constructs, most often not overtly articulated, that determine the decisions, goals, and traditional processes that gauge their actions (Bandura, 1989). Individuals develop their sense of agency through interactive processes: The self as agent and the self as object. The self as agent evolves during introspection, and from it, the development of self-efficacy occurs. Contrarily, a failure to conform to societal expectations creates contentious

theoretical dualism. This happens when an individual is in conflict with others because he or she fails to consistently demonstrate those behaviors considered acceptable by the larger system (Bandura, 1991). From this perspective, agency refers to the unique person who emerges from the process of interactive discourse. The "self as agent" (Bandura, 1989, p. 1181) emerges from reflective, introspective societal interchanges. The "self as object" (Bandura, 1989, p. 1182) refers to the personality and behavior dynamics that evolve as a result of a person's relation to others. The "emergent interactive agent" develops as a result of social/cognitive interactions, and ultimately, "self-efficacy" (Bandura, 1989, p. 1176) evolves, the manner in which a person sees him or herself.

Through the expectations exerted in familial and social frameworks, individuals begin the process of "diagnostic self-monitoring," which refers to one's ability to observe personal thought patterns, emotional reactions, behaviors, and conditions under which these behaviors occur (Bandura, 2001, p. 250). Unacceptable behaviors are reduced through sanctions, and as individuals reflect inwardly on their personal engagements with significant others, they then develop a sense of personal efficacy and pursue a course of action that produces for them positive "self-reactions" (Bandura, 2001, p. 256). Social learning/cognitive theorists argue that personal identity develops during a variety of interactions. Each unique person is intricately molded by the impeding circumstances of his or her environment. Most commonly, they are shaped by family and classroom dynamics (Bandura, 1989).

Application of Theories

Human behavior is a complicated construct that stems from innumerable milestones and interrelated processes. Proponents of Bronfenbrenner's (1974) ecological systems theory would purport that children must be considered holistically; their experiences within microsystems

greatly impact their behaviors in mesosystems. Likewise, the behaviors of mesosystems dynamically enable human functions within exosystems, and the behaviors of the exosystem control those within macrosystems, while distinctive events continually shape us (within chronosystems). Bronfenbrenner (1974) asserted that a failure to recognize the distinctions among subsystems results in alienation; educators must understand the complex, interrelated structures that mitigate students' behaviors in classrooms. Bronfenbrenner (1974) noted, "As a result of these converging trends, the school has become, over the past two decades, one of the most potent breeding grounds of alienation in American society" (p. 4).

Similarly, social learning/cognitive theories are widely applied to educational milieus. Vygotsky's (1978) theory is underscored in arenas in which learners are encouraged to construct their own knowledge independently of teachers. Educators who implement Vygotsky's approach would establish classrooms in which learners make sense of knowledge and behavioral constructs. Classroom opportunities rooted in Vygotsky's theory would allow for both social and spatial interaction and the deliberate development of language and speech patterns (Gredler, 2012).

The premise of effective classroom management has been immersed into social learning/cognitive frameworks along with the promotion and extinction of target behaviors. Students are given classroom rules that govern their behavior; those who comply are rewarded with reinforcement, while those who do not abide by expectations are redirected to more acceptable behaviors. Further, students are given the opportunities to create their own knowledge within varied proximity of their teachers. Formal teaching strategies are steeped with ideologies of constructivism, shared learning, justice, and interpersonal development through ongoing classroom management and behavior modification training with general applications to

traditional, flipped, and/or virtual settings (Jones, Bailey, & Jacob, 2014).

Theorists would generally purport that the primary responsibility of educators should be to establish learning environments "in which the child learns to live cooperatively with others, to accept responsibility, and to find gratification in constructivist individual and group activities" (Rotter, 1954, p. 434). From group contexts, each members develops personal efficacy that promotes their academic accomplishments as well as their interpersonal growth and self-efficacy; "students with stronger academic self-efficacy tend to have higher outcome expectations, which lead them to set higher goals and expectations for their careers" (Mihyeon, 2014, p. 404). Through their interactions within social constructs, individuals develop their sense of agency. Direct personal agency develops through interaction with others. They are guided by proxy agency from educators who exercise control over them to enact positive behavioral change. Ultimately, collective agency results when each person is able to coordinate their actions for the good of the larger group. When this occurs, they are perceived as successful (Bandura, 1989; Rotter, Liverant, & Crowne, 1961; Rotter, 1954).

From a social learning/cognition perspective, those who perform well in academic settings are shaped by positive responses; they develop acceptable behaviors that are shaped and reinforced by both teachers and fellow classmates. Theorists suggest that such students develop self-efficacy; they are committed to doing well; they report positive relationships with peers and teachers; they have parents who support their educational efforts; they are future oriented in their discussions. Those who do not develop appropriate interactions may develop disenfranchisement with formal education processes (Pereira & Gentry, 2013).

Related Literature

For this inquiry, perceptions of success were examined from an ecological systems theory perspective and through a social learning/construction lens that analyzes norms/reactions, cultural parameters, and the impact on Hispanics and their pursuits of educational endeavors. By having Hispanic participants describe familial backgrounds that have shaped their ideals of success, external responses, motivations, consequences, and the influence of these constructs on educational attainment among Hispanic learners, meaning was ascribed to their perceptions. Further, by having Hispanics articulate the dynamics of their varying subsystems, the researcher gave emphasis to the intersection of family constructs, cultures, and values promoted in academic structures. Therefore, the examination of experiences of Hispanics who chose to leave secondary studies and the extent to which their familial and cultural values swayed that decision was foundational to this treatise.

Understanding both the importance of ecological systems and social learning/cognition within Hispanic family systems and the desire of Hispanics to develop or conform to their societal expectations regarding educative and vocational decisions proved fundamental for this study, as this phenomenology centered upon the theoretical frameworks of Bronfenbrenner's (1974) ecological systems theory, Vygotsky's (1978) social learning theory, Rotter's (1954) social learning theory, and Bandura's (2001) social cognitive theory. Insight provided from literature that articulates the appropriateness of these theories and ecological systems, social learning/cognitive theories is highlighted next in relation to Hispanic learners in public education settings.

Theoretical Frameworks and Hispanics

Interactions and perceptions of minorities may vary widely, and the integration of Hispanics in United States often necessitates them to adopt distinctive identities. Many Hispanics maintain a cultural perspective that idealizes their familial values; yet simultaneously, a school culture identity is also established. In order to promote higher education and post-secondary successes among Hispanics, Nunez, Sparks, and Hernandez (2011) urged that diverse students must retain their cultural perspective and that diverse pedagogies are needed to support learners in their educational pursuits. Therefore, in areas with large populations of Hispanics, the role of the family as a pervasive social construct should be upheld. Nunez, Sparks, and Hernandez (2011) asserted, "Our analysis indicates that Hispanics are more likely than other community college students in general to rank personal and family reasons and academic programs coursework as important criteria in their reason for choosing a college" (p. 28).

Hebert (2001) pondered the loss of identity of diverse populations within larger United States school environments. As a result of their daily interactions, minority groups demonstrate two theoretical identities that are strongly related to communal frameworks: The modern identity and the citizenship/national identity. Through the modern identity, minorities are educated by distinctive programs: English language learner services, special education services, economic variables, and pedagogical principles. Within the citizenship/national identity, diverse students adapt to the interpretations of rules that govern interactive processes; these are the learned behaviors that are manifested through interactions. Rather than developing a cohesive identity with a combination of familial and educative frameworks, Hispanics often develop polarized identities: One that represents the academic experience, and one that represents a national identity (Hebert, 2001; Oppong, 2014).

Abdi (2011) emphasized social frameworks and subsystems of diverse students and articulated common disenfranchisement of Hispanic learners in public classrooms. The interactions that many Hispanics experience within United States classrooms often repress dynamic social principles. When classrooms contrast against the broad dynamic of familial structures, Hispanics may find themselves in conflict with educators. Because of limited interactions, or altogether negative relationships, Abdi (2011) noted that many diverse students simply "remain silent," passive in the educative process (p. 180). Abdi (2011) noted that the lack of engagement in public education structures lead to Hispanics' disengagement, "the kinds of issues, positioning, and interaction dynamics present" (p. 186).

The ecological systems and social parameters that diverse learners balance are complex; these parameters are comprised of educators' behavioral expectations, language barriers, and rules and procedures that may not correlate to their backgrounds. Abdi (2011) noted that such dichotomies leave Hispanics with "perceptions of ineptness," and without "Consejos," available counsel (p. 161). Similarly, Plata-Potter and de Guzman (2012) noted that expectations and perceptions of Hispanic parents differ significantly from other ethnicities, and that parents of Hispanics often recognize "their own limitations in guiding their children through this new territory but continued to provide assistance. . . in the form of emotional support, advice, and encouragement" (p. 102).

When the structures of home contrast against those of prevailing cultures, minorities often experience subsystem dichotomies (Shim, 2013). Shim (2013) maintained that relationship dynamics include "teachers' judgments toward ELL students and their parents; ELL parents' frustration about their inability to influence a teacher's decision making; and ELL parents' fear of repercussions for speaking up" (p. 23). Shim (2013) concluded that the ELL teacher-parent

dynamic is characterized by positions of ELL parents and teachers that do not depict equal power levels. Hispanics are often marginalized through their experiences in societal and public school settings (Shim, 2013).

Hispanics, Schools, and Social Processes

The academic achievement of students, regardless of ethnicity, is complicated and is dependent upon several factors. The classroom dynamic is a distinctive interactive construct, and to participate in formal educative programs requires students to draw from their unique backgrounds. The role of the family, both immediate and extended, plays a critical role in this process. To fully understand the experiences of Hispanics, it is imperative to first understand their interconnectedness to family members, as well as their early experiences within the home. Bronfenbrenner (1974) would likely identify these early interactions as central to Hispanics microsystems. It is important to understand that the lens from which diverse learners approach the educational experiences is fashioned by their pre-literacy skills, familial perspectives, and the challenges associated with the acculturation processes (Fuller & Coll, 2010; Perez, Araujo-Dawson, & Suárez-Orozco, 2011; Wessels & Trainin, 2014).

Acculturation is the process of relinquishing one's familial, cultural, and societal values and adopting the values of a (new) distinctive society (South, Crowder, & Chavez, 2005). Hispanics experience varying degrees of the acculturation processes when they enter into United States schools. They are expected to adopt the language and customs of educational structures; yet, in their homes, many must also maintain their native language and traditions. Three modes of acculturation are generally recognized: assimilation, integration, and separation (South, Crowder, & Chavez, 2005; Wessels & Trainin, 2014).

Persons who assimilate to a given culture adopt certain practices and customs that resemble their own. To integrate means that one must learn new behaviors; they must combine the practices and traditions of new cultures with their own. To experience separation, individuals completely abandon their culture for the traditions and practices of a newly acquired one. From an ecological systems theory perspective, the interaction between Hispanics' microsystems and mesosystems may create conflict. The extent to which Hispanics acculturate and/or learn the practices of United States school settings may correlate with their levels of acceptance or alienation (Boone, 2011; Bronfenbrenner, 1974; South, Crowder, & Chavez, 2005; Torres & Rollock, 2007; Tsai, 2012).

Alienating substructures that interfere with the formal learning process are significantly interrelated; students who abandon their own heritage often have the sense that what they did or said do not matter and convey feeling powerless (Schulz & Rubel, 2011). Schulz and Rubel (2011) upheld these general thematic structures related to acculturation as they examined the perspectives of secondary students. From their research, common themes emerged regarding multiple school transitions, peer relationships, relationships with significant school adults, failure to sustain academic progress, home instability, and notions of personal accountability. Schulz and Rubel (2011) concluded that each student shared commonalities (inadequate feelings of belonging, trust, and self-worth) related to disenfranchisement which, in many cases, led to their withdrawal from the formal academic setting.

Woolley (2009) discussed the importance of family and adult relationships among Hispanic cultures and the impact that these interactions have on Hispanic students' performance in school settings. Woolley (2009) referred to the family as "social capita," and noted that "a youth's relationships with adults are the most influential factors in promoting a school success

trajectory" (p. 10). Hence, in order to empower students of Hispanic origin, Wooley (2009) maintained that educators must first understand the power of "familismo": "the centrality of strong family ties within the family, simultaneously positioning family as the key source of strength and support while expecting individual family members to place the family's needs above their own" (p. 10). Similarly, Martinez (2013) asserted that the interconnectedness among Hispanics to their extended family members may ultimately shape Hispanics' long-term goals, including their choice of college attendance. The beliefs regarding advanced education and its inherent value are rooted in family dynamics, and the extent to which to pursue academic and vocational goals are mitigated by these factors. Many Hispanic youth will only pursue educational or vocational paths if such are encouraged by family members; likewise, Hispanics will potentially abandon educative efforts if they are not directly supported by their social support systems (Martinez, 2013). The choice of pursuing post-secondary education studies for each participant may be determined by "sense of loyalty to family, particularly when parents indicated that these were their wishes for the student, or a sense of reciprocity and responsibility, as in the case of students that felt they needed to financially contribute to their family income" (Martinez, 2013, p. 29).

The interactions of children in the home with significant adults may serve as frame of reference for them as they interact with other adults in new social settings (Bandura, 1989). This socialization process is bounded by culture, family values, traditions, and community practices. The ease at which children transition into unfamiliar settings depends upon how well their prior experiences correlate to those new surroundings. Regarding Hispanics, Fuller and Coll (2010) noted "they must learn to efficaciously adapt to situated norms and cognitive demands, whether those demands are pressed inside preschools, encountered when integrating with peers, or

confronted in civic and economic settings" (p. 561). The home serves as a training ground for the school contexts, and when the values and traditions of the home contrast against the prominent culture, disengagement often results (Wessels & Trainin, 2014).

The role of the home and its correlation to development is paramount in understanding students' varying levels of engagement. Recent studies that examine communal constructs of diverse student groups "have illuminated how children learn to become competent in colorfully different ways, mobilizing distinct sets of tools, symbols, language, and forms of participation" (Fuller & Coll, 2010, p. 560). Thus, the pre-literacy backgrounds of Hispanic children contrast against those of other ethnicities. While White parents commonly place emphases on reading books and counting objects in the home, parents of Hispanic youth may focus on interactions. And, while predominantly White cultures often create protective settings for younger children, Hispanic families generally promote self-efficacy and exploration for preschool-age children (Fuller & Coll, 2010).

Further, the extended family is widely cherished in Hispanic homes, and as Hispanic youth mature, emphasis is placed on caring for loved ones above other articulated goals. "Learning is motivated in part by the child's desire to feel competent in particular family or organizational settings, normatively structured around set social roles, tacitly learning what is required to become an efficacious member" (Fuller & Coll, 2010, p. 563). Hispanic youth are likely to make vocational and scholastic decisions based upon needs and stated preferences of family. The role of the family is generally much more salient in Hispanic cultures than the role of education: "Within Latino culture, 'familismo' means placing the family before one's own personal needs" (Leidy, Guerra, & Toro, 2012, p. 4)

To a large extent, readiness is determined by the values and expectations of one's familial

support: the norms, language, and cultural heritage expressed in the home. From an ecological systems theory standpoint, the home serves as a primary basis for broad goals and interactions within other settings. If the characteristics of home contrast against those of pervasive ethnicities, students may struggle at an early age to adapt to the social nuances of academic settings (Fuller & Coll, 2010; Leidy, Guerra, & Toro, 2012). Children's pre-literacy experiences determine their behaviors in classroom environments. While parents of Hispanic children may find it important to provide interaction, social responsibility, and belonging to their children in the home, if those skills are not highly regarded by the predominant cultures, such children may be labeled unprepared for academia (Fuller & Coll, 2010).

Unique challenges pervade Hispanics. Often, as they develop English skills, the interaction between them and their parents diminish. Further, to migrate to the United States sometimes requires immigrants to separate from their extended family members. This greatly diminishes primary ecological systems as Hispanics adapt to new social and educational practices (Bronfenbrenner, 1974; Leidy, Guerra, & Toro, 2012).

Disparities of Hispanics in School Contexts

Evolving societal structures of United States schools have been widely noted in literature in recent years with widespread demographic changes in many states**.** Since 1995, districts across the nation have experienced tremendous growth among Hispanics, particularly in Southern cities. Hispanics now represent the fastest growing non-white population across the country with half of the overall increases among young adults between the ages of 18-24 being Hispanic. Hispanic populations in the United States increased by 15 million in the past decade and now make up just over 16% of the total population. Many Southern states experienced a 100% increase in Hispanic populations between 2000 and 2009, and Hispanics will soon

comprise the majority of students in California public educational systems. The population of Hispanics in the United States is expected to triple by 2050. Although the presence of Hispanic learners has increased exponentially, the achievement gap, compared to other ethnicities, notably White peers, remains relatively stagnant (Carpi et al., 2013; Casellas & Ibarra, 2012; Hill & Torres, 2010). The inclusion rates of Hispanic males in programs embedded in the sciences, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM programs) remains lower than other that of other ethnicities. Furthermore, the high school completion rate for Hispanics is at approximately 65% nationwide, and despite educative and legislative efforts developed to bolster academic advancement, Hispanic populations demonstrate only marginal growth (Artiles, 2011; Carpi et al., 2013; Rusch & Horsford, 2008).

Not only do educational efforts with Hispanic youth warrant careful deliberation, but the wide range of psychological variables of diverse learners must also be examined from complex perspectives, along with their correlation to behavior and academic challenges. Many advocates of Hispanics assert that the majority of intervention strategies in public classrooms today do not adequately address complex factors related to immigrants' educational experiences. Thus, they called for "culturally responsive-evidence-based interventions" that nurture students' "cultural identities and adaptation while providing expansive learning opportunities for developing key academic and social skills in a safe, welcoming, and inclusive school climate" (Bal & Perzigian, 2013, p. 25).

Disparities of Hispanics are widely noted. They are more likely than White students to enter kindergarten unprepared; they are more likely to repeat a grade in elementary school than their White peers; they are also more likely to be suspended or expelled for behavioral problems; and they are more likely to drop out than White students (Casellas & Isbarra, 2012). McGlynn

(2015) found that while 53% of White secondary students are deemed prepared for the rigors of traditional college studies, only 30% of Hispanics show similar readiness skills. The mix of English Language Learner strategies, remediation, diversity, and professional development require a delicate pedagogical balance.

The enrollment of Hispanics in post-secondary studies is of concern compared to other ethnicities; 16% of current enrollees in two-year college programs are Hispanic, and only 7-9% of enrollees into four-year college studies are of Hispanic ethnicity (Espinoza, 2013; Madrid, 2011; Nunez, Sparks, & Hernandez, 2011). Educators continue to be pressed by state and federal initiatives that mandate and monitor student achievement, and with the addition of various ethnicities come new student "subgroups" that must demonstrate proficiency and academic growth in broad areas of standardized tests (Behnke, Gonzalez, & Cox, 2010). Even with the recent passage of the "Every Child Succeeds Act," Layton (2015) asserted that individual "states will still be required to test students annually in math and reading in grades three through eight and once in high school and to publicly report the scores according to race, income, ethnicity, disability and whether students are English-language learners" (para. 11). Rolstad, Mahoney, and Glass (2005) fully articulated the complexity of Hispanics disparities by stating, "because the education of students who are immigrants is closely tied to issues of nationalism, immigration, and the politics of multilingualism, the debate over how best to serve ELL students has often been clouded by politics" (p. 574).

First Generation Hispanics

Much of the research regarding the achievement of Hispanics has centered on first generation learners. Hill and Torres (2010) asserted that Hispanics families often come to the United States seeking educational and career opportunities, but many are met with poverty,

learning gaps, and language barriers that impede their educational achievements. The difficulties facing first-generation Hispanics are multifaceted, and even though many migrate to the United States to pursue curricular and vocational opportunities, they sometimes lack the social perspectives needed to navigate academic settings (Berrios-Allison, 2011; Borrero. 2011; Hill & Torres, 2010). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), degree completion rate for college students between the ages of 25 and 29 years in 2014 was 40% for White students, 20% for Black students, and 16% for Hispanic students (2014).

Research broadly correlates college success to parents' levels of education, and since the parents of first generation Hispanics frequently possess limited educational experiences, they sometimes lack familial support systems. Many are compelled to succeed academically, but the expectations that impact their levels of success in traditional classrooms may be in opposition to their cultural and/or family expectations (Espinoza, 2013; Hill & Torres, 2010). Thus, research supports the deliberate implementation of mentoring and leadership programs implemented early among diverse learners to guide their educational journeys at the elementary, middle, secondary, and post-secondary levels (Boden, 2010; Rodriguez & Oseguera, 2015).

Literature also suggests that the successes of first-generation Hispanics are directly tied to social frameworks more than any other factor. In order to perform well in secondary and postsecondary environments, they must carefully navigate societal nuances that sometimes contrast against their own. The complexity of education institutions is shaped by internal subsystems that reinforce generally acceptable behaviors, those behaviors that reflect the inward values of the culture itself (Berrios-Allison, 2011; Wheeler, 2014). Rodriguez and Oseguera (2015) refer to these notions as "institutional cultures": the "values, beliefs, and processes that

characterize institutional life" and "the social climate within the institution" regarding "who deserves success" (p. 132).

Understanding the institutional culture of academic settings is complicated, but it is central to promoting the accomplishments of Hispanics in secondary and postsecondary endeavors (Pino, Martinez-Ramos, & Smith, 2012; Rodriguez & Oseguera, 2015). Rodriguez & Oseguera (2015) stated, "When examining retention or student success rates, particularly among Latinas/os, researchers can examine the ways in which spaces (i.e., classrooms) in institutions help promote student engagement" (p. 145). The culture of educational institutions is multifaceted, and if the values of it do not align with those of diverse learners, the completion of coursework may be inherently thwarted. This can be especially daunting for the first-generation Hispanic learner who must navigate both curricular differences and societal intricacies (Rusch & Horsford, 2008). Schueths and Carranza (2012) succinctly articulated this complexity: "Opportunities for Latino/a educational equity and upward mobility are directly intertwined with the fate of the United States and its place within the larger global landscape" (p. 566).

Curricular/Pedagogical Strategies

The successes of English language learners (ELL's) in the classroom are generally related to the extent in which teachers implement culturally responsive strategies tailored to their linguistic needs. Curricular efforts should be embedded in culturally relevant instruction, high levels of teacher collaboration, and teaching principles steeped in multicultural philosophies. Teaching practices should be anchored by pedagogies that merge the application of academic skills with effective classroom models. These models vary and may include co-taught ELL services, resource ELL classrooms, and/or monitored/supportive frameworks (Abdi, 2011; Good, Masewicz, & Vogel, 2010; Orosco & O'Connor, 2014). In order to understand the educational

successes of Hispanic learners, it is important to explore the various contemporary approaches commonly implemented for them. Although ELL strategies have application to multiple ethnicities, this review of literature will center specifically upon those implemented among Hispanic English language learners (ELLs).

Carefully selected reading strategies are integral for English language learners. The use of context clues in ELL classrooms supports language acquisition by allowing learners to frame unfamiliar words in sentences to discover meanings. Likewise, strategies rooted in word cognates that stress synonyms, antonyms, and appositives in language development and are highly regarded. These approaches provide ELLs with scaffolds that increase their reading abilities while simultaneously developing language fluency, and the use of cognates or context clues may be extended to multiple grade levels and content areas. Likewise, the frequent use of letter-sound phonological strategies that stress letter-sound expression and letter-sound fluency are advocated in ELL classes, especially for early childhood students (Montelongo, Hernandez, Herter, & Cuello, 2011; Rahn, Wilson, Brandes, Kunkel, Peterson, & McComas, 2015).

Programs to build vocabulary development, used in conjunction with read-aloud computer programs, are also widely supported. The use of books (literature) to support word usage and definitions for unfamiliar terms in students' home language provides scaffolds that draw from their prior knowledge. Vocabulary previewing strategies for unfamiliar texts, along with repeated exposure to newly acquired skills, encourages fluid English development. Researchers note that these strategies should be merged with both expressive and receptive language tools. Strategies to build vocabulary should be systemic in programs serving ELLs (Leacox & Jackson, 2014).

Predictive reading assessments implemented early in the educative process of Hispanic

learners are similarly noteworthy. Petersen and Gillam (2015) found that 75% of learners who demonstrate reading difficulties in first grade will demonstrate these difficulties in adulthood. Thus, effective ELL instruction should include bilingual assessments of diverse students early in their educative settings. This is necessary to discern language acquisition from learning difficulties and to determine the appropriate class and program placements for struggling learners (Petersen & Gillam, 2015).

Bilingualism, an approach in which language is fluid and flexible, is also generally touted (Ofelia, Woodley, Flores, & Chu, 2012). While language immersion programs (rooted in English-only philosophies) may be effective in certain arenas, instruction delivered through bilingual modes is holistically most effective in promoting thinking, speaking, and listening skills of ELLs. "Bilingualism should be used flexibly in order to help learners 'make sense' of 'teaching and learning" and to communicate 'appropriate subject knowledge, and academic language practices'" (Ofelia et al., 2012, p. 806). High-level cognition occurs best in situations in which English language learners relate new knowledge to their own experiences, while content-linking in one's own language correlates to faster language development (Roemer, 2011).

Moreover, literature supports frameworks that cultivate the cultures of diverse students. The use of reflective strategies in which learners are able to make meaningful connections between newly acquired skills and their own cultures is essential to ELL programs. Ofelia et al. (2012) referred to this approach as "culturally transforming pedagogies" (p. 806) and stressed that this practice allows teachers to make a "new space where cultures coexist and are transformed" (p. 813). Rather than expecting diverse students to adopt American frameworks, this approach fosters appreciation for the reference points of the Hispanics learner (Burke, 2013).

Finally, the use of quality mentoring programs for Hispanics in pre-kindergarten through post-secondary settings is widely promoted. Coller and Kuo (2014) upheld the use of mentorship programs among Hispanics stating that "high-quality mentoring relationships have stimulated child health through improvements in academic performance, positive feelings of self-worth, perceived acceptance, relationships with others, and decreases in high-risk behaviors like alcohol/tobacco use and violence" (p. 316). Schueths and Carranza (2012) similarly stressed the importance of "same ethnic group mentors" that extend to entire families (p. 580). Formal mentorships among middle grades Hispanics who are in the midst of transitioning to secondary programs have been found helpful in maintaining student retention (Sanchez, Esparaza, & Berardi, 2011).

Multiculturalism

Multicultural instruction is an approach that considers not only what is taught, but how instruction is deliberately delivered. The use of multicultural principles is supported among Hispanic learners because curricular practices must be embedded into the life experiences and perspectives of learners in order for them to establish authentic cognitive and schematic structures. Learners must be able to make real-life connections to course materials and broad learning goals in order to achieve proficiency, and teachers of diverse populations must be deliberate in this process. It is important, then, for educators to embrace students' home and community in order to establish learning spaces for dynamic cognitive engagement (Lafferty & Pang, 2014; Orosco & O'Connor, 2014; Rameriz, 2012).

Instruction that is rooted in diversity reflects diverse students' societal and linguistic frameworks and is embedded in a social constructivist framework that attempts to not only transfer knowledge but to also foster critical-thinking. Hispanics demonstrate a need for

pedagogical strategies that carefully infuse distinctive learning needs (like phonics-based instruction) while simultaneously embracing their unique cultural frameworks. Proponents of multicultural instruction maintain that it may directly support diverse students' experiences, disengage racial discrimination, and promote varying ethnic identities within interactive structures while intricately supporting student achievement (Brown & Chu, 2012; Orosco & O'Connor, 2014). Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco, and Sattin-Bajai (2010) stressed the need for culturally-responsive education noting that "the academic trajectories and performances of immigrant-origin students are determined by an alchemy of family background variables, neighborhood factors, and the character and quality of schools they encounter, second language acquisition challenges, student engagement, and relational supports" (p. 540)

Hence, teachers must be adequately trained to provide sound pedagogy for diverse learners. Gomez and Diarrassouba (2014) supported this assertion noting that educators need professional learning to support their classroom efforts and that teachers who are "unprepared to teach linguistically different students can be related to the United States national educational environment" and that "many states do not require their educational practitioners to be trained in English language development or bilingual education teaching methodologies" (p. 98). Multicultural learning opportunities for preservice teachers must be systemic, and training for current teachers must be ongoing.

Professional learning for educators immersed in diversity and entrenched by effective pedagogical practices is integral in educating Hispanic learners. Good, Masewicz, and Vogel (2010) stressed that educators must actively identify multiculturalism tenets appropriate for their diverse learners and carefully monitor program efficacy. Educators must be deliberate in analyzing strategies that boast parental involvement, student engagement, and the extent to

which cultural norms of ELLs support student achievement (Good, Masewicz, & Vogel, 2010). Moises, Russell, and Vohra-Gupta (2012) concluded that today's educators possess a "wealth of knowledge that can help explain the relationship between motivation and academic achievement in FGS (First Generational Spanish) and have firsthand knowledge of the barriers faced by their clientele" (p. 119).

Further, quality instruction that is entrenched in cultural awareness, district and school-level leadership initiatives, and data driven instruction are paramount in promoting parity. Elfers and Stritkus (2014) asserted that "leadership at both school and district levels plays a crucial role in creating and sustaining systems of support for classroom teachers working with EL students" (p. 318). They also asserted that "school and district leadership is crucial in creating and sustaining systems of support for classroom teachers to work effectively with EL students" (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014, p. 338).

Summary

The disparities of Hispanic learners in educational settings warrant careful deliberation. Hispanics demonstrate the lowest proficiency gains on state and federally achievement measures, and the 2001 implementation of No Child Left Behind has left many systems struggling to sustain academic growth among Hispanic subgroups. While research considers the range of classroom and curricular strategies embedded in multicultural perspectives across the nation, Hispanic learners continually demonstrate the lowest high school retention rates and most stagnant academic achievement of any ethnic population (Behnke, Gonzalez, & Cox, 2010; Berrios-Allison, 2011). While the recent passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act provides states with deliberate control of educative accountability, schools and districts across the nation still must examine the performance of various student subgroups, particularly, the achievement

gains of minorities and their strides towards enrollment and completion of postsecondary studies (Kerr, 2015; Layton, 2015).

Current literature has concentrated immensely on instructional models and language acquisition frameworks along with remediation principles. Similarly, research has stressed the importance of quality curriculum, and the need for advanced curricular access for diverse populations. Even with deliberate foci on achievement and secondary/post-secondary completion, the results of Hispanic-based strategies have yielded few substantive gains (Carpi et al., 2013; Casellas & Ibarra, 2012; Hill & Torres, 2010). Few inquiries have squarely examined the perspectives of the Hispanics, their familial, cultural, and societal values, and the intersection of these perspectives with their broad educational goals. Hence, this inquiry bridged the gap in extant literature by examining the unique perspectives of Hispanic learners and the extent to which these viewpoints influence their decisions to complete secondary/post-secondary studies.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

This qualitative research seeks to understand the impact of Hispanics' perceptions of success on their completion of secondary and post-secondary studies by underscoring their lived experiences and the manner in which familial perspectives have influenced their pursuit of educational goals. This study strives to determine what male and female Hispanic high school completers/non-completers ages 18-29 perceive to be the optimal level of education needed to achieve success and bridges existing literature regarding the educational disparities of Hispanics with their perspectives of success, and the extent to which their own ideologies shaped their completion of secondary/post-secondary studies. This chapter outlines the methods for data collection and the rationale behind the choice of those methods along with the setting, sampling, and steps used to carefully select participants for this inquiry. Furthermore, this chapter articulates the role of the researcher, data collection methods, and analysis procedures. Finally, discussions center on trustworthiness and the ethical considerations important to this qualitative design.

Design

The development of qualitative theory was a rejection of positivism, the notion that research can empirically quantify human thought and action. Qualitative theorists generally believe that positivism fails to capture the essence of the human behavior; our experiences extend beyond objectivity, and the essence of our perceptions is pivotal to our understanding of both human thought and action. Schutz (1967) maintained that little is learned simply by watching human behavior; one's observations must be carefully framed through subjective lenses. Science alone cannot explain the complexities of the mind and the dynamic interactions

among persons (Schutz, 1967). Qualitative studies seek to understand the perspectives of unique persons and the manner in which these are shaped by dynamic interactions (Creswell, 2013; Schutz, 1967).

Stake (1995) asserted that "two realities exist simultaneously and separately within every human activity. One is the reality of personal experience, and one is the reality of group and societal relationships. The two realities connect, they overlap, they merge, but they are recognizably different" (p. 18). Qualitative studies seek to feature the realities of its participants, the themes and rich structural descriptions relative to lived experiences, with an emphasis on the voice of the persons who experience them (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). Phenomenology explores "how humans make sense of experience into consciousness, both individually and as shared meaning" (Hurrserl, 1994, p. 76).

The human experience is integral to phenomenological designs, and phenomenological theorists believe that our interpersonal development occurs within a spatial dimension of other experiences. No one specific event occurs in isolation of others. Rather, our lived experiences generate a unified awareness from the essence of many layered events over time, and our interactions with our world allow us to ascribe meaning. It is the role of the researcher to simply describe those experiences and the interaction of participants with them (Creswell, 2013; Husserl, 1991; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002; Schutz, 1967; Stake, 2010). In this manner, Husserl (1991) asserted that phenomenology "lies in a wholly new dimension . . . entirely new point of departure and an entirely new method distinguishing it in principle from any natural science" (p. 24).

The ultimate goal of this qualitative inquiry was to understand the lived experiences of individuals regarding an event, circumstance, or phenomenon of interest. Phenomenology was

an appropriate research design in articulating Hispanic learners' views of success and the extent to which these perceptions shape their broad educational goals. Since it was the desire of this researcher to intently describe and articulate the perceptions of participants in respect to a given construct, success, a hermeneutic phenomenological approach for this inquiry was most fitting (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). This approach was appropriate in giving Hispanic participants a voice to articulate their ideals of success and to describe its intersection with academic and vocational goals. It was the goal of this researcher to capture the voice of Hispanic learners who have chosen to complete their secondary studies as well as understand why others have chosen to end their high school studies and/or post-secondary endeavors.

This research followed methodological frameworks promoted by Moustakas (1994). An overarching research question and three subquestions rooted in social constructs of Hispanics and their perceptions of success were carefully constructed. The review of literature framed the inquiry, with attention to ecological systems theory, social learning theory, and social cognitive theory. Ethical principles of research were stringently upheld as this research was conducted. Individual interviews and focus groups provided foundational perspectives yielding thick textural descriptions. Bracketing was implemented during the research process to engage the researcher's own ideologies and to continually build upon those of the participants. Finally, data was analyzed, textural descriptions were highlighted and then combined with participants' perceptions to ultimately underscore the phenomenon.

Research Questions

A single research question that seeks to examine the perceptions, values, experiences, and social constructs of Hispanic learners in academic contexts guided this study: "How do the perceptions of success among male and female Hispanic high school completers and non-

completers ages 18-29 impact their educational pursuits?" Further, to fully answer this question, three subquestions framed this inquiry.

1. What resources do male and female Hispanic high school completers/non-completers ages 18-29 perceive to be necessary to achieve success?
2. What do male and female Hispanic high school completers/non-completers ages 18-29 perceive to be obstacles that hinder achieving success?
3. How do male and female Hispanic high school completers/non-completers ages 18-29 describe the cultural and familial backgrounds that impact their perceptions of success?

Setting

The researcher conducted the study at three different sites. The first was a Hispanic advocacy center in a Southern metropolitan city. This organization works specifically with Hispanics of all ages to provide educational, vocational, and language assistance in a metropolitan Southeastern United States region. The advocacy centers employs a fulltime director and several teachers, counselors, and mentors, and a board of directors oversees the center's financial expenditures and program offerings. This organization was an appropriate choice because of its role in assisting Hispanics in the development of professional and vocational skills. For clients who are unemployed, the organization assists in finding quality jobs along with training to promote members' tenure in those jobs. For those who are not high-school graduates, the organization provides General Educational Development (GED) tutorials and assists those members in registering for GED test administrations. The organization also provides assistance to Hispanics in completing Deferred Action of Childhood Arrivals (DACA) paperwork.

This organization is located in a moderate-sized town about 45 miles from Atlanta, Georgia. According to United States Census data (2010), 5.2% of residents of the community are Hispanic; 38.4% are White; 54% are Black/African American; 3.1% are Asian, and 2% are of two or more races. Approximately 10% of residents speak a language other than English; 88% of residents are high school graduates; 46.7% are college graduates. The percentage of residents living at or below the poverty level is 25%. The organization currently serves about 70 clients of Hispanic descent; 70% are male; 30% are female; 65% are non-high school completers; 90% are under the age of 25. Approximately 65% are of Mexican descent, with the remainder coming from Honduras, Guatemala, Peru, and Nicaragua.

The second site was an adult learning center in a Southern metropolitan area. A local technical college has oversight of the adult education center and its offerings. This site employs several teachers, one who serves as the lead teacher and site manager. This organization works specifically with individuals between the ages of 18 and 29 who are seeking support in order to obtain their GED. This organization was an appropriate choice because of its role in assisting Hispanics who have previously discontinued their high school studies.

This organization is located in a moderate sized town about 45 miles from Atlanta, Georgia. According to United States Census data (2010), 27.7% of residents of the community are Hispanic; 61.5% are White; 8.2% are Black/African American; 2.1% are Asian, and 1.5% are of two or more races. Approximately 27.4% of residents speak a language other than English; 78% of residents are high school graduates; 22% are college graduates. The percentage of residents living at or below the poverty level is 16.9%. The organization currently serves about 135 clients of Hispanic descent; 50% are male; 50% are female; all are non-high school completers. Approximately 64% of the learning center's students are Hispanic; 21% are Black;

11% are White; 2% are of mixed races.

The third site included a moderate-sized public university in a Southern metropolitan area. The university has oversight provided through a president and governing board; autonomy is given to various departments and department heads at each of the university's various campuses. Leadership at the local level is provided by subject-area deans and professors. This organization currently serves students of varying ethnicities who are seeking baccalaureate or graduate degrees. This organization was an appropriate choice because many of the students who attend there are Hispanics who have recently graduated high school.

This organization is located in a moderate-sized town about 45 miles from Atlanta, Georgia. According to United States Census data (2010), 27.7% of residents of the community are Hispanic; 61.5% are White; 8.2% are Black/African American; 2.1% are Asian, and 1.5% are of two or more races. Approximately 27.4% of residents speak a language other than English; 78% of residents are high school graduates; 22% are college graduates. The percentage of residents living at or below the poverty level is 16.9%. The university currently serves over 18,000 students; 44% are male; 56% are female. Approximately 76% are White; 11% of the students are Hispanic; 4.6% are Black; 3.4% are Asian; 3% are of mixed races.

Participants

Patton (2002) underscores the need to choose sample size based upon "the purpose of the inquiry, what is at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources" (p. 244). While Patton (2002) does not specify ideal sample sizes, Creswell (2013) suggests including 15 participants for phenomenology, noting that a small sample might yield richer data, while a larger sample size might provide less detailed

descriptions. Hence, the researcher initially sought 15 individuals through the process of purposeful and criterion sampling (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002).

The practice of purposeful sampling refers to choosing specific persons whose experiences and characteristics enable detailed descriptions related to a phenomenon of interest (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). Schwandt (2007) defines purposeful sampling as the deliberate choice of participants because of their "relevance to the research question, analytical framework, and explanation or account being developed in the research" (p. 269). Participants in this inquiry were chosen because they share homogenous characteristics in that they represent the cultures of Hispanic learners and their similar experiences within academic environments and the interplay of their perceptions of success (Moustakas, 1994). The purposeful selection of Hispanics between the ages of 18 and 29 who are seeking assistance with job and/or vocational placement allowed the researcher to determine the extent to which the viewpoints of success among Hispanic learners may have influenced their completion of secondary studies.

The researcher sought referrals from the director of the advocacy center, the lead teacher from the adult education center, and a professor from the university for participants who fully met the stated delimitations. A sequential survey (see Appendix A) was given by the director, lead teacher, and professor to Hispanic students/clients between the ages of 18 and 29 who are seeking assistance with GED completion, or completing a four-year college degree. This step identified potential participants who attended school in the United States for at least five years. The use of sequential surveys also helped to identify potential participants who are bilingual, speaking both English and Spanish.

The use of criterion sampling involves choosing participants because they meet a certain set of criteria essential to the central research questions (Patton, 2002). Hence, the researcher

gave written invitations to participate, along with informed consent, to 50 participants who met the stated criteria (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). The choice of 22 participants, 11 high school completers, and 11 non-completers of high school ensured detailed descriptions and ultimately, data saturation: Rich data that occurs when participants' descriptions optimally articulate their experiences with a phenomenon. The researcher concluded the gathering of data when data saturation was achieved (Creswell, 2013).

Procedures

The first step in this research process was approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Liberty University. This important step ensured the safe and ethical treatment of all persons during the course of the study. See Appendix B for IRB approval. Second, verbal and written permission was gained from the director of the Hispanic advocacy center, the adult learning center, and the university where the study was conducted. Once permission was granted from the IRB at Liberty University and from the research sites, written invitations to participate were presented to key faculty members at each location, along with a verbal and written explanation regarding the scope of the inquiry. They, in turn, gave invitations potential participants who met the stated parameters (see Appendix C). Those who completed the initial questionnaire and were considered qualified received an invitation to participate, along with informed consent (see Appendix D).

The participants were between the ages of 18 and 29 years of age and met the previously stated delimitations set forth earlier in this inquiry to be deemed qualified. The researcher conducted the interviews individually. The researcher also established two separate focus groups based upon whether or not the participants were high school completers or non-completers. The two focus groups contained a total of seven to nine participants each, and each focus group

discussion lasted between 60-90 minutes about topics related to the phenomenon of interest (see Appendix E). Throughout the research process, it was integral for the researcher to understand his role as the human instrument; this perspective is discussed next.

The Researcher's Role

Because I work extensively, however, in a diverse setting with a relatively large percentage of Hispanic students, it was important to understand the extent to which these previous interactions have shaped my own perceptions. Hence, my personal viewpoints were appropriately framed as the "human research instrument" as success was examined from the reference of participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 41). Bracketing and journaling were helpful to ensure that personal biases did not pervade the process. I had no prior relationship or connection to the sites at which the study was conducted.

It was important to maintain a neutral position in the eyes of the participants. Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen (1993) emphasized the need for researchers to establish partnerships with stakeholders during interviews to facilitate the free-flow of communication. Because several of the students were actively seeking DACA status, it was imperative to build trust, for them to know that I am an educator seeking to support Hispanic populations, and that I have no ties to any other governmental agencies.

Data Collection

The goal of this research design was to describe, articulate, and frame the perceptions of Hispanic learners' views of success and the extent to which these notions have impacted their overarching academic and vocational goals. Using a variety of data sources, the researcher underscored participants' lived experiences, and the extent to which they were influenced by familial and cultural ideologies of success to discontinue/continue their educative efforts. Data

collection occurred through a variety of methods chosen to elicit responses and underscore perceptions regarding the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002; Schwandt, 2007). These methods included interviews, focus groups, and observations.

The use of triangulation in qualitative research is important as a means for observing data in multiple ways (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). This encourages thorough descriptions of experiences, and it also promotes a richer understanding of the varying perspectives (Patton, 2002). The use of triangulation provided complementary perspectives of the phenomenon, success, as perceived by Hispanic learners. Data was triangulated through focus groups, interviews, and observations (Merriam, 2009).

Interviews

Using the delimitation previously discussed, interviews were conducted individually to encourage dialogue and the open sharing of experiences. The individual interviews promoted genuine interaction with participants. These interviews elicited personal as well as familial/societal perspectives that impacted each participant regarding secondary/post-secondary education decisions (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). Data collection included semi-structured interviews that elicited conversation from participants regarding their perceptions of success and the interplay this construct has had in their educational choices. A listing of interview questions has been listed in the appendix (see Appendix F). Patton (2002) underscored the use of interviews as a process of entering into another person's "world or perspective" (p. 341). Interview questions centered on participants' attitudes regarding their educational experiences in general, reflections/feelings regarding familial behaviors that fashioned both their perceptions of success and their choices surrounding high school completion.

Specifically, the use of a semi-structured interview allows researchers to develop a series of questions central to the research phenomenon that encourage dialogue regarding feelings, insights, and interactions. While the semi-structured interview promotes organized discussions that relate to the research inquiry, they also allow participants the freedom to discuss components of the phenomenon that are especially important to them (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002; Schwandt, 2007). Merriam (2009) supports the use of semi-structured interviews noting that this process is "guided by a set of questions and issues to be explored, but neither the exact wording or the order of questions is predetermined" (p. 114).

Interviews were conducted at a Hispanic advocacy and at an adult learning center; both are located near Atlanta. Each interview session included participants who are bilingual, Spanish-speaking/English-speaking. This interview session was conducted within a 60-minute timeframe. The researcher digitally recorded the interview process using a GearPro digital audio recorder. Schwandt (2007) emphasizes the need to ensure that participants are not swayed by overarching theoretical premises of the researcher and suggests observations to accomplish this goal. Therefore, recordings of the interviews were used by the researcher to analyze conversations in a noninvasive manner. This allowed the researcher to analyze not only the words spoken, but also the non-verbal messages assigned to the conversation.

The following served as semi-structured interview questions:

1. How many years of high school did you complete?
2. Describe the relationships you had with your teachers during your last semester of school.
3. What are your thoughts about going to school today? (Vocational, college, and/or trade)?

4. Describe the career are you most interested in.
5. How much education to you need for your "dream job"?
6. How many years did your mother to go high school? (Your father?)
7. Please describe your mother and father's views of your education. Describe how their views of education have impacted your views. How were their views similar or different from those of your other extended family members (grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc.)?
8. (For those who dropped out): What did your parents think about you dropping out of school? Extended family members (aunts, uncles, grandparents, brothers, sisters, etc.)?
9. (For high school completers): What would your parents have said if you had chosen to drop out of school? Extended family members (aunts, uncles, grandparents, brothers, sisters, etc.)?
10. Describe how your culture has affected your education.
11. How would your parents feel about you going back to school today (GED or post-secondary)?
12. If you decided to go back to school today, what would your extended family members think or say (aunts, uncles, grandparents, brothers, sisters, etc.)?
13. Describe how your family impacted you to drop out of school (non-completers)/stay in school (high school graduates).
14. Describe a person whom you think is "successful" and tell what makes him/her successful.

15. To be successful, do you think it is more important to have a family or a career? Why?
16. Describe the types of support you need in order to achieve success.
17. Describe the things that have gotten in the way of success for you.
18. Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about your experiences in school and your views of success?

The interview questions were piloted prior to the data collection process. The use of piloting is an integral tenet of qualitative research as it determines the extent to which the instruments provide trustworthy and data-rich information. Further, piloting interview questions promotes face and content validity, the degree to which related data is reasonable, believable, and the extent to which it truly "connects to how people see the world" (Patton, 2002, p. 561).

The piloting process for interview questions involved two phases. First, the use of a bilingual language expert in the pilot process was vital in determining the extent to which interview questions succinctly address the constructs they were intended, and whether or not language and/or culture might impede them. Second, the piloting process included two Hispanic bilingual volunteers (acquaintances). These volunteers were central in providing feedback regarding the comprehensibility of the actual interview questions. Both piloting phases of the interview process were recorded using GearPro digital audio recorder, along with an Apple voice memo recording application and lasted about 25-30 minutes each. The recording of the piloting phase was important in determining the quality of interview questions. It was imperative to determine whether or not particular words, phrases, pronunciations, or interviewer voice inflections seemed confusing to interviewees as the semi-structured interview protocol was finalized.

The use of interviews was integral in answering the guiding research question for this study: How do the perceptions of success among male and female Hispanic high school completers/non-completers ages 18-29 impact their educational pursuits? Interview questions were framed in a way in which participants could describe notions of success as well as their related decisions to pursue secondary/post-secondary studies. Further, the use of interviews addressed each of the subquestions by allowing participants to articulate success and its bearing on high school and/or post-secondary studies (Borrero, 2011; Good, Masewicz, & Vogel, 2010; Hayes et al., 2015; Hill & Torres, 2010; Leidy, Guerra, & Toro, 2012; Martinez, 2013; Mihyeon, 2014; Paat, 2013; Oppong, 2014; Plata-Potter & de Guzman, 2012; Wessels & Trainin, 2014).

The use of interviews addressed the first subquestion by having participants describe the tools and strategies needed and obstacles related to academic goals. Furthermore, they were encouraged to ponder and discuss the ways in which extended family members influenced their decisions regarding completion of secondary/post-secondary studies. Interview questions three and four were directly related to the second subquestion: What do male and female Hispanic high school completers/non-completers ages 18-29 perceive to be obstacles that hinder achieving success? This subquestion examined the perceptions of Hispanics regarding success and the obstacles they perceive (Boone, 2011; Elfers & Stritikus, 2014; Schulz & Rubel, 2011). Interview questions two, eight, and nine related specifically to the third subquestion: How do male and female Hispanic high school completers/non-completers ages 18-29 describe the cultural and familial backgrounds that impact their perspectives of success? These interview questions allowed participants to identify the societal/familial influences that they have experienced regarding education and long-range goals (Borrero, 2011; Good, Masewicz, & Vogel, 2010; Hayes et al., 2015; Hill, & Torres, 2010; Leidy, Guerra, & Toro, 2012; Martinez,

2013; Mihyeon, 2014; Paat, 2013; Oppong, 2014; Plata-Potter & de Guzman, 2012; Wessels & Trainin, 2014).

Similarly, interview questions 11 and 12 addressed subquestion three: How do male and female Hispanic high school completers/non-completers ages 18-29 describe the familial backgrounds that impact their ideals of success? Interview questions five, six, seven, and ten also related specifically to subquestion three. These questions examined the familial perspectives and the intersection of familial values on education. Interview questions 14, 15, 16, 17, and 18 correlate to the first subquestion; this question examined the perceived obstacles and resources needed by Hispanics to complete secondary/post-secondary studies. Further, these questions helped the researcher determine the active manner in which participants define success, the central construct of this inquiry (Abdi, 2011; Borrero, 2011; Burke, 2013; Espinoza, 2013; Lesaux & Rangel, 2013).

Focus Groups

Using the delimitations previously discussed, focus groups encouraged dialogue and open sharing. The establishment of focus groups is a data collection method characterized by an informal structure in which its members are encouraged to interact with each other and a facilitator (Creswell, 2013; Morgan, 1997; Patton, 2002). Morgan (1997) notes that focus groups are typically homogeneous, involve high levels of facilitator engagement, and include six to 10 participants each. Patton (2002) recommends focus groups as an effort to gather data in a group dynamic noting that such conversations elicit thoughts and feelings regarding constructs of interest among other group members. Through free and open discourse, Patton (2002) purports this exchange results in high quality data "where people can consider their own views in context with the views of others" (p. 396). Similarly, the establishment of focus groups has been

advocated by Creswell (2013) as an effective technique to promote engagement and discussions of group members who share similar experiences with a phenomenon. Therefore, the use of a focus group allowed the researcher to establish two homogenous groups representing the cultures of Hispanic learners and their similar experiences. Recordings from the interviews were transcribed by the researcher.

Like individual interviews, participants received a written invitation to participate in appropriate focus groups. The focus groups consisted of individuals who were also interviewed individually in hopes that group discussions will elicit richer, deeper descriptions. The first focus group contained nine high school graduates; the second contained six non-completers. Both focus groups lasted between one and two hours. The use of ice-breaker questions were implemented in the focus group before moving into content-specific questions relative to the design. The use of two focus groups was important in eliciting viewpoints regarding the familial, societal, and cultural perspectives that influenced each participant regarding secondary/post-secondary studies.

The two focus groups were conducted separately. One was conducted at an adult learning center near Atlanta, Georgia; the second was conducted in a classroom at a university, also located near Atlanta, Georgia. Each session included participants who are bilingual, Spanish-speaking/English-speaking. A listing of focus group questions may be found in the appendix (see Appendix E). The process was digitally recorded using a primary device, a GearPro digital audio recorder. Furthermore, discussions were electronically videoed using a small cam-recording device. Recordings from discussion groups were transcribed by the researcher. The discussions that occurred during the focus groups were extensions of themes/ideas that also emerged during interviews. Creswell (2013) promotes a flexible role for

the researcher during the focus group process, with dialogue evolving naturally from the constructs generated by participants. Although distinctive group questions were formulated in advance, they served merely as a guide with attention given to the themes that emerged during the actual group discussions.

The following served as semi-structured focus group questions:

1. Tell us a little about yourself. (Your name, age, where you attended school, etc.)

2. How would you describe your high school experience?

3. What was the hardest part about attending school in the U.S.?

4. What was the best part about attending school?

5. (For those who dropped out of school): What was the biggest reason you decided to drop out of school? (For high school completers): What was the biggest reason you decided to stay in school?

6. If you decided to go back to school today to continue your education (GED, college, vocational, Master's degree), what would your extended family members think or say (aunts, uncles, grandparents, brothers, sisters, etc.)?

7. How did your family impact you to drop out of school (non-completers)/stay in school (high school graduates)?

8. In your own words, define success? Each group (completers/non-completers) will be asked to respond.

9. To be successful, is it more important for you to have a family or education? Why?

10. How much education do you think is necessary for you to be successful?

11. What kind of support do you think Hispanics need in order to achieve success?

12. Describe the things that have gotten in the way of success for you.

13. What else would you like to say about your experiences with educational success?

Like the interview questions, the focus group protocols/discussion guides were piloted prior to data collection process to ensure trustworthiness along with face and content validity (Patton, 2002). The piloting of focus group discussion guides was conducted directly after interview questions were piloted within the same timeframe and setting. This process for piloting focus group discussion guides (discussed below) mirrored the piloting of interview questions.

Piloting included a (White) foreign language expert/teacher (and colleague) who can analyze the wording and structure of the statements to ensure their coherency for Hispanic participants. This ensured that the discussion guides succinctly addressed the constructs they were intended. The piloting process also involved two Hispanic bilingual volunteers who "tested" the questions by going through an exchange with the researcher prior to the actual focus group process. These volunteers were central in providing feedback regarding the comprehensibility of the actual interview questions. The piloting phase of the interview process was recorded using GearPro digital audio recorder, along with an Apple voice memo recording application. This allowed for analysis regarding the quality of interview questions as the discussion guides were finalized.

Much like the interviews, the use of focus groups was critical in addressing the guiding research question: How do the perceptions of success among male and female Hispanic high school completers/non-completers ages 18-29 impact their educational pursuits? By having participants define the construct of success and also describe their perspectives in educational settings, the researcher strove to elicit rich, descriptive data to underscore the phenomenon of interest. Further, the use focus group questions addressed each of the subquestions by allowing

participants to articulate their experiences and their own perceptions of success. Focus group questions two, three, and four related specifically to the first subquestion: What additional resources do male and female Hispanic high school completers/non-completers ages 18-29 perceive to be necessary to achieve success? Focus group questions five, six, and seven addressed subquestion three: How do male and female Hispanic high school completers/non-completers ages 18-29 describe the cultural and familial backgrounds that impact their perceptions of success? Focus group questions five, six, and seven examined the familial perspectives along with the values and attitudes ascribed to education.

Observations

The use of participant observations serves as an effective data collection strategy for qualitative inquiries because it highlights not only on the words they use to describe their experiences, but it also considers the non-verbal components of their descriptions. In this way, observation requires the researcher to reflect not only upon what participants say regarding the interactions with the phenomenon, but also, how they say it (Moutakas, 1994; Patton, 2002). Gall, Gall, and Borg (2010) promote the use of observations in the data gathering process while confirming or disconfirming discrepancies among emerging themes.

The impact of ecological systems and social learning/cognition along with societal expectations regarding educative and vocational decisions were central to this inquiry. To participate in various educative arenas requires diverse learners to learn new behaviors, combining the practices and traditions of new cultures with their own (Fuller & Coll, 2010; Perez, Araujo-Dawson, & Suárez-Orozco, 2011). Thus, the observation of Hispanic participants in a Hispanic advocacy and the adult learning center and their engagement with their instructors who provide GED tutorials yielded thick descriptive data related to the phenomenon of interest.

Observations allowed the researcher to note the facial expressions, body language, and other non-verbal constructs that develop through participants' interactions with instructors. The researcher kept field-notes during this process as themes were observed (Creswell, 2013).

The use of reflective notes has been supported by Creswell (2013) to record processes, reflections, summaries, and conclusions to be used to support theme development. Patton (2002) asserted that "reflection and introspection are important parts of field research. The impressions and feelings of the observer become part of the data to be used in attempting to understand a setting and the people who inhabit it" (p. 264). Hence, this process was important in eliciting and noting descriptive words and phrases that might underscore the phenomenon. A blank field-notes template has been listed in the appendix (see Appendix G).

Data Analysis

Deliberate data analysis is important in establishing themes and patterns that emerge during the inquiry process that might give perspectives related to the phenomenon of interest. Schwandt (2007) notes that "analysis begins with the process of organizing, reducing, and describing the data and continues through the activity of drawing conclusions or interpretations" (p. 6). A variety of techniques were used to determine themes surrounding Hispanics and the phenomenon of success. It was important for the researcher to understand the impact of personal experiences with Hispanic learners. In this way, the use of bracketing to establish epoche is underscored by Moutakas (1994) as an essential component of the research process as the researcher sets aside personal beliefs regarding the phenomenon of interest.

Data analysis began with reading through the transcripts multiple times to begin classifying and interpreting data while writing notes in the margins. This progressed to the actual coding phase by considering the various categories inherent in the data and classifying by

themes. This process, horizontalization, is promoted distinctively by Creswell (2013) for distinguishing significant statements that underscore participants' interaction with the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2010; Patton, 2002; Schwandt, 2007). As the researcher pondered the ideologies of Hispanics and their experiences with the phenomenon, attention was placed on both the textural and structural descriptions. In essence, emphasis was placed on both what participants experienced as well as how they experienced it (Creswell, 2013). The researcher coded themes within each transcript using Atlas.ti software and classified the various codes using axial and in vivo coding.

Memoing

The use of memoing is endorsed by Creswell (2013) as a means to establish credibility. It is the practice of listing key words, phrases, observations, notes, and/or recurring themes that are elicited throughout the inquiry. This practice is important in establishing emergent themes, and it ultimately helps to elicit rich descriptions that underscore phenomena (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). The researcher added additional reflective statements during data analysis while reading transcripts in their entirety from interviews multiple times, adding reflections in margins that related to words and meanings ascribed by participants as they discussed experiences with school, family, and the construct, success. This encouraged elaboration on data along with commentary to accentuate meanings, values, and family perspectives that related to coded categories (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002; Schwandt, 2007).

Coding

Coding is the active process of creating classifications or schemes to establish patterns in emergent data. Miles and Huberman (1984) assert that "coding schemes, developed inductively or driven by research questions, are critical data-reduction tool" (p. 25). This process was

important as the researcher interpreted and made sense of interview notes, field notes, and observations (Creswell, 2013). Patton (2002) stressed this practice involves "analyzing core content of interviews and observations to determine what is significant" (p. 463). Through coding, key concepts were identified, grouped into similar concepts, and ultimately into categories. As themes were identified related to family, cultural, and individual meanings of success, for instance, like or similar responses were grouped categorically. Words, phrases, and statements were grouped according to themes or meanings that participants ascribed to them (Creswell, 2013). This allowed the researcher to consider the conditions and dynamic interactions of participants and the extent to which these constructs related to the phenomenon while examining commonalities (Creswell, 2013; Strauss & Corbin, 2015).

In vivo coding is the practice of recording key words or phrases used by participants during data collection; in vivo codes are essential when researchers desire to denote the exact words, phrases, and/or terminology surrounding participants' experiences and proves particularly useful when the researcher desires to capture the exact wording (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). Hence, conversations, key words, and clusters of meaning were coded as emerging themes occur. Because this inquiry specifically examines themes related to diverse cultures, the use of in vivo codes was important to underscore cultural paradigms. The use of exact words related to success or education proved essential in establishing commonalities that underscore the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

Emerging themes were ultimately arranged through axial coding. Creswell (2013) promotes the use of axial coding in refining categories, subcategories, and their interconnectedness in establishing core phenomenon, by considering causal relationships and related consequences. This step allowed the researcher to establish potential patterns regarding

the value of education and its relationship to success. This practice was particularly important in understanding how participants interpret their own environments and values ascribed therein. Emphasis was placed on shared essences in familial and cultural milieus related to education and the construct of success (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 2015).

Bracketing

Finally, the researcher implemented bracketing throughout the research process to examine personal philosophical and theoretical frameworks and their interplay on those of the participants (see Appendix H). In this way, Lincoln and Guba (1985) promoted the researcher as "the human instrument" who uses "him or herself as well as other humans as the primary data-gathering instruments" (p. 41). Hence, the use of bracketing was implemented at the onset to understand and suspend personal existing assumptions about the population of interest. This will allow the researcher to intently focus on the participants, their worldviews, and the manner in which they experience the phenomenon of interest.

The use of bracketing was used to holistically facilitate conversations with participants that promote their perspectives and that synthesize the researcher's understanding of the phenomenon with theirs. To successfully embrace the spoken words and the perspectives in which spoken words are framed, Schutz (1967) noted the researcher "draws upon his whole personal knowledge of the speaker, especially the latter's ways and habits of expressing himself. Such personal knowledge continues to build itself up in the course of a conversation" (p. 38). Bracketing was used to "decide how and in what ways…personal understandings will be introduced into the study" (Creswell, 2013, p. 83). Personal reflections were integral in recording both what the participants experienced and how they experienced it. Bracketing

occurred often during and after data collection (interviews and focus groups) and data analysis (Creswell, 2013; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2010).

Trustworthiness

Schwandt (2007) notes that researchers should ensure the trustworthiness of a qualitative study through adherence to established criteria and the study's generalizability. Patton (2002) similarly notes that the verification and validation procedures used by the researcher to generate a quality design promote its trustworthiness. Creswell (2013) advocates the use of deliberate steps to ensure the integrity of research. Hence, the following processes were deliberately implemented to ensure credibility, dependability/confirmability, and transferability of this research.

Credibility

First, Patton (2002) underscores the need to triangulate data to ensure the credibility of the inquiry. Triangulation is achieved as researchers look at data through a variety of perspectives (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). This study achieved triangulation by examining the perspectives of participants from multiple sources: Interviews, focus groups, and observations. This promoted the consideration of the phenomenon, success, from multiple perspectives while ascribing meaning to it from the lens of participants. Furthermore, the use of member checks ensured that conclusions were supported by both theory and sound judgment (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2010).

Dependability and Confirmability

The idea of dependability refers to the extent to which the research is conducted in a consistent manner, and the likelihood of it being repeated. Confirmability refers to the extent to which the results are not shaped by the personal biases or perspectives of the researcher

(Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). The use of an external audit as well as member checks allowed the researcher to maintain the dependability and confirmability throughout the inquiry. The use of an external audit requires researchers to present data to an outside professional to determine whether or not the manner in which it was gathered and analyzed is acceptable (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2010). Member checks involve having participants analyze the data and confirm that the conclusions drawn from it match those of the participants, themselves. Creswell (2013) promotes the use of both methods to avoid "distortions introduced by the researcher" and to ensure that the conclusions reached are sound (p. 253). A blank member checks template has been listed in the appendix (see Appendix I). Both member checks and external audits were used during this inquiry. These steps ensured the intellectual rigor of the inquiry (Patton, 2002).

Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which the results of an inquiry may be generalized to other settings. This tenet of research is most often accomplished by thoroughness in qualitative studies (Creswell, 2013; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2010). Creswell (2013) promotes the process of transferability through rich descriptive notes and texts that give layered insight into unique perspectives. Therefore, transferability was maintained through thick descriptive data and a commitment to recording everything (meanings, utterances, words, thoughts) through the data collection processes. Transferability was accomplished through dedication to fully articulate the data collection/analysis processes.

Ethical Considerations

Several ethical considerations are inherent to this qualitative inquiry. Research did not commence until full approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Liberty University was received. This ensured the ethical treatment of all persons during the course of the study.

Second, written permission was gained from the director of the Hispanic advocacy center, the adult learning center, and the university where the study was conducted. Further, only after participants received an informed written consent were they included in this inquiry.

Participation in this inquiry was strictly voluntary; no participant under the age of 18 was be included. Furthermore, participants were made aware of the voluntary nature of this inquiry and their right to withdraw consent at any time. Measures were taken to assure the anonymity of each participant, and a pseudonym was assigned to each as well as to the setting. Finally, field-notes were carefully maintained electronically on a password protected computer device and the access to all data, including field-notes, was safeguarded.

Summary

This phenomenological qualitative study sought to capture the voices of Hispanic learners while examining their perceptions of a phenomenon, success. This research was conducted at a Hispanic advocacy center, an adult learning center, and a moderate-size university, all located near Atlanta Georgia. Both Hispanic high school completers and non-completers were included. Interviews, focus groups, and observations were carefully utilized while seeking to understand the lived experiences of Hispanics, and the relationship of familial and cultural constructs on their perceived optimal level of education needed to achieve their broad goals. Analysis was conducted through memoing, coding, and bracketing, and measures to assure trustworthiness included triangulation of data, member checks, peer review, audits, and the development of thick descriptions. This research was conducted using the methodological frameworks articulated by Moustakas (1994). This phenomenological inquiry was important because it provided insights into Hispanics' varying degrees of persistence in academic settings.

Further, it bridged a gap in extant literature by seeking to understand why Hispanics often fail to complete their secondary/post-secondary studies.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

This qualitative phenomenological study seeks to understand and describe the perceptions of Hispanic learners' views of success and the extent to which their ideologies have influenced their academic and vocational goals. Three data gathering techniques have been implemented: Interviews, focus groups, and observations, as researcher seeks to consider Hispanic participants' personal experiences in United States' public schools, along with the familial and cultural ideologies that have impacted their past educative efforts. By giving credence to their stories, the researcher desires to understand the manner in which Hispanics (ages 18-29) define the construct, success, and the role they feel education should be ascribed to it.

The following research question has been posed: "How do the perceptions of success among male and female Hispanic high school completers/non-completers ages 18-29 impact their educational pursuits?" In addition, three related subquestions have also been created to understand varying perspectives:

1. What resources do male and female Hispanic high school completers/non-completers ages 18-29 perceive to be necessary to achieve success?
2. What do male and female Hispanic high school completers/non-completers ages 18-29 perceive to be obstacles that hinder achieving success?
3. How do male and female Hispanic high school completers/non-completers ages 18-29 describe the cultural and familial backgrounds that impact their perceptions of success?

Through thick descriptions, this chapter introduces the participants and presents the research themes that were identified through bracketing, memoing, and coding. The guiding research

question is also answered, along with each related subquestion, and this chapter concludes by providing a summary of research findings.

The Research Lens

Essentially becoming a research instrument is paramount in helping participants tell their stories through interview and focus group discussions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher gives a voice to already existing stories by interacting with those whose lives have generated them (Creswell, 2013; Husserl, 1991; Patton, 2002). Lincoln and Guba (1985) referred to the researcher as the "human research instrument" (p. 41) and Moustakas (1994) asserted the researcher brings human experiences into consciousness, understanding individual meanings within group and societal settings, and establishes a refined lens to consider participants' perspectives. Ultimately, in conducting phenomenological inquiries, Van Manen (1997) stated "human science aims at explicating the meaning of human phenomena" (p. 4).

Bruner (2004) reminded "one important way of characterizing a culture is by the narrative models it makes available for describing the course of a life" (p. 694). Thus, using the methodological research framework promoted by Moustakas (1994), the goal of the researcher was merely to describe the unique experiences of Hispanics with the phenomenon, success, through thoughtful, meaningful interactions with them. The researcher strove to give voice to Hispanic high school completers and non-completers, their unique perspectives, and the manner in which they have been shaped by cultural, familial, and educational contexts (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1995; Patton, 2002; Stake, 1995).

Participants

There were twenty-two participants in this inquiry, and all of them resided in a suburban/metropolitan Southeastern demographic (see Table 1). The following rich descriptions

employ pseudonyms for each and any school-related identifiers to ensure their anonymity. All were given the opportunity to evaluate their interview/focus group transcripts, which provided the content for descriptions and theme development. Through the member-check survey, each was able to designate their level of agreement with research themes.

Table 1

Participant Overview

Pseudonym	Age	Education Level	Site	Interview or Focus Group
Kim	23	Non-high school completer	Adult Education	Both
Pablo	28	Non-high school completer	Adult Education	Both
Steven	21	Non-high school completer	Adult Education	Focus Group
Joel	25	Non-high school completer	Adult Education	Focus Group
Rebecca	18	Non-high school completer	Adult Education	Focus Group
Brenda	18	Non-high school completer	Adult Education	Focus Group
Katarina	27	Non-high school completer	Adult Education	Focus Group
Miguel	29	Non-high school completer	Hispanic Advocacy	Interview
Barbara	29	Non-high school completer	Hispanic Advocacy	Interview
Daniel	29	Non-high school completer	Hispanic Advocacy	Interview
Emilio	26	Non-high school completer	Hispanic Advocacy	Interview
Meredith	22	High school Completer	Southeastern University	Interview
Leo	22	High school Completer	Southeastern University	Interview
Bonita	19	High school Completer	Southeastern University	Both
Marco	22	High school Completer	Southeastern University	Focus Group
Mariela	20	High school Completer	Southeastern University	Focus Group
Christian	19	High school Completer	Southeastern University	Focus Group
Belinda	21	High school Completer	Southeastern University	Focus Group
Eduardo	24	High school Completer	Southeastern University	Focus Group
Elaina	24	High school Completer	Southeastern University	Focus Group

Angela	23	High school Completer	Southeastern University	Both
Yesenia	20	High school Completer	Southeastern University	Both

Non-Completers of High School: Adult Education

The participants who are presented first are non- completers of high school who participated in a focus group discussion at an adult education center located near Atlanta, Georgia. Two participants were also individually interviewed. Furthermore, the researcher conducted a one-hour observation at the adult education center, which allowed him to see the participants in an educative context. The participants at the adult education center ranged in age from 18 to 27.

The participants sat in a circle with the researcher facilitating discussions using a semi-structured approach. Discussions began with simple "get to know you" statements and questions: Tell us your name, age, what school you attended, etc. The focus group discussion questions (see Appendix E) guided the conversation, but the researcher strove to capitalize on salient, rich themes that germinated naturally within individual responses. The focus group conversation was 90 minutes in duration, and although it took place as a group, the researcher desired to carefully frame the stories of participants individually, featuring them uniquely as individuals shaped by circumstances, their families, and cultures. Hence, the researcher analyzed transcripts from group discussions (and interviews if applicable), along with observation field-notes, to draft seven distinctive participant profiles.

Kim. Sitting next to the researcher was Kim, a 23-year-old female from El Salvador who is seeking General Equivalency Diploma ("GED") assistance. She is a thin young lady with short brunette hair that has red highlights. She wore rugged jeans, black boots, along with a shirt

that completely exposed her stomach and mid-drift. She was soft-spoken and polite and presented herself confidently during both the interview and focus group conversation.

She moved to the United States with her parents 10 years ago, and she has lived in both New York and Georgia. Spanish is her first language, and she learned English upon enrolling in public schools. She self-described as "an A+ student" whom "teachers loved" when she first arrived in the United States. Before moving to New York, Kim described her former self as "innocent," but she began attending clubs, experimenting with drugs and alcohol, and hanging out with the wrong crowd while her family resided in Long Island. Newfound friends told her, "You're Latino, you can't go to college," so she reasoned, "Why bother finishing high school if I can't do that?" In describing New York, Kim painted a picture of place that had what she called "over-hype," a new world with brand new experiences that appealed to a naive, adolescent girl. Her life hurled quickly out of control, and she dropped out of high school and ran away from home at age 17.

Kim moved to Georgia only three months ago; she has a two-year-old son, and she is married. She currently works for a major fast food establishment, and when asked to describe her job, she responded flatly, "I hate it. . . .I don't want to be there forever, or having jobs like that." She never experienced racism in New York, but upon moving to Georgia, countless times she has encountered individuals who will say to her, "Go back to Mexico," to which she added with a slight chuckle, "I'm not even from Mexico."

Pablo. Pablo sat next to Kim during the focus group, and he also agreed to an individual interview. He seemed a bit nervous at first during the focus group, but he quickly relaxed and shared accounts of his time at a local high school. He is a 28-year-old Hispanic male living in a suburban area outside of Atlanta, and has a large build, wears glasses, has numerous tattoos, a bit

of an unkempt demeanor, wearing what appeared to be older jeans and a rugged t-shirt. He is not a legal citizen of the United States and is currently completing his paperwork for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA).

Pablo dropped out of high school his senior year, and he noted that he was only a "couple of credits short" from graduating and that he "failed the Social Studies part." As he spoke about high school, he recalled peers who were distractions, friends who drank and did drugs. He stated that he was into the partying scene as a teenager and young adult, and so, Pablo has not given much thought to his long-term goals up until now. When asked about his motivation for getting his GED, he answered, "Getting a better job. I don't want to be at the warehouse. . . . it's just a dead-end job.. . .you are just an employee." Spanish is his primary language, and he did not learn English until he began public school.

His parents were displeased with his decision to drop out of high school, and when asked to describe the moment he told his dad, he shared, "Yeah – he looked upset. But he was like, you're an adult now, so you can face the consequences pretty much." Pablo plans to study computer science at a local technical college upon completion of his GED. He also dreams of being a business owner one day, but he seemed reluctant, embarrassed perhaps, as he softly shared that notion: "Sounds crazy, but I want to be an entrepreneur."

Steven. Steven sat next to Pablo, and from the start, he seemed relaxed and personable. He is a 21-year-old Hispanic male and has dark hair, an average build, and a slight mustache. He speaks with no distinguishable accent, and English is his first and primary language. Steven is of Mexican decent, but he has lived in the United States his entire life. He dropped out of high school when he was 17-years-old, and he recounted a very limited relationship with his parents. He was friends with individuals who sold drugs on the streets, and after seeing the amount of

money that an acquaintance was making from doing this, Steven, too, began selling drugs. He has an older brother, whom he described as a "bad influence," who dropped out of high school, and soon thereafter, Steven followed in his footsteps.

He recalled living with his grandmother, and when she passed away a few years ago, her death had a profound impact on him. He moved to the Atlanta area with his brother seeking to start over. At that point, he began working at a fast-food restaurant where he eventually served as shift manager. It was there that he met his current girlfriend whom he described as a positive influence. His girlfriend's father owns a construction business, and Steven now serves as a project manager with that company. He noted that his girlfriend's father saw something in him that he had never seen in himself and pushed him to succeed. With the influence of his girlfriend and her family, Steven made the decision to pursue his GED. He would like to eventually attend college and pursue a career in the construction and building industry.

Joel. Joel is a large framed young man who presented confidently and sat to Steven's left. He is a 25-year-old Hispanic male living in a suburban area near Atlanta and is married and has three children. He is from Mexico, and his parents brought him to the United States when he was about 13-years-old seeking work and a better life. He is not a legal citizen of the United States, but has completed DACA status. Spanish is his first language, and he currently works for an apartment leasing company providing maintenance service for its tenants. He smiled readily and immediately extended his hand upon our introduction. Joel was insightful during the focus group discussions with comments that were often seasoned with both humor and mild profanity, referring to his former high school self as "bad" with the use of an expletive.

Neither of his parents graduated high school, and they desired an education for their children. However, Joel noted that his family's primary motivation for moving to the United

States was simply to make money. He recalled spending time with high school friends who liked to drink and throw wild parties on the weekends. He was admittedly a behavior problem in the classroom context, and his girlfriend became pregnant when he was just 16-years-old. He recalled, "I mean, my dad, he was begging me, almost begging me to stay in school, and I was just being stupid."

The ability to earn money was greatly appealing to Joel as a teen, and that, coupled with the fact that he would soon become a young father, lured him to drop out of high school. Hence, Joel feels that the enticement of part-time jobs is one of the biggest obstacles placed before Hispanic youth because they often see such jobs as what he called, "shortcuts to success" or "shortcuts to the American Dream." He greatly regrets dropping out of high school, and if he could redo his high school days, he stated that he would be focused on his school work, and at certain points during our conversation, tears welled within his eyes, and he seemed emotional as he shared his insights. Success for Joel is being able to better provide for his family financially while also supporting his parents.

Rebecca. Rebecca sat next to Joel during the focus group. She is an 18-year-old female who is currently seeking her GED. Her parents are from Mexico, but Rebecca was born in the United States and is a citizen. She attended at a moderate-sized high school in a suburban area of Atlanta, but she did not graduate. She experienced interpersonal conflicts with both students and staff at her school, and she was eventually enrolled in an alternate learning center, a program that is geared towards students who have long-term suspensions in the public school setting.

Rebecca bears the countenance of a young girl. She had long, wavy brunette hair and glasses. She wore blue jeans and a lightweight jacket in which she kept her hands inserted into the pockets for most of our discussion. As group members were introducing themselves,

Rebecca appeared to be nervous about speaking to the rest of the group often darting her eyes around the room and back at the researcher. Upon introducing herself, she stated, "I really don't have anything to say." However, she went on to share incremental facts about her life and appeared to be interested in other group members' statements.

In ten years, she hopes to have a better lifestyle and to support her parents and self financially. When asked what her ideal career would be, Rebecca stated that she would like to become a nurse, but she seemed reluctant to share that fact. Even though she stated that her parents have little to say about her desire to complete her GED, she noted that they are supportive of her decision.

Brenda. Brenda sat next to Rebecca, and she, too, appeared to be somewhat nervous, especially at the beginning of the conversation. She is an 18-year-old Hispanic female who is currently seeking to complete her GED. She is of Mexican and Salvadoran decent, and she is a United States citizen. She wore an oversized sweatshirt, blue jeans, and glasses. She had long hair that she had pulled back on her head. Upon our introductions, Brenda stated that she would prefer to speak primarily in private. However, as discussions continued, she relaxed and began participating in the group's conversation. Her voice inflection was elevated, full of emotion, and a bit gravelly, and she had the countenance of an individual who has experienced a difficult life. She attended a moderate-sized high school in a suburb north of Atlanta and described her time in high school as problematic, with conflicts with teachers and fellow students. She turned to a life of drugs and alcohol as a young teenager, and she chose to associate with peers who were into the partying scene. It was then that she dropped out of high school.

When asked to describe how dropping out of school impacted her relationship with her parents, she stated, "They basically wanted me to go to school, but when they saw that I had

dropped out, they had gave up on me." They did not try to dissuade her from dropping out of high school, and this is a source of emotional pain for her. Brenda described her family as being indifferent to her, and she recalled telling them of her desire to return to school to which they seemed only minimally enthused. From her perspective, her parents are only concerned with her working and helping to support them.

She hopes to complete her GED so that she can pursue college studies. She is expecting her first child, but she has not shared that news yet with her parents. Brenda hopes to provide a financially stable environment for her unborn child in the future, and even though her relationship with her parents is strained, she would like to provide for them financially in the future as well.

Katarina. Katarina sat next to Brenda, and she completed the group's circle, sitting to the right of the researcher. She is a 27-year-old female who works as a receptionist and payroll clerk at a local business. She is an attractive young lady with distinguishable facial features, neatly dressed wearing square-framed glasses and a gray sweater. She attended a school in a suburban area north of Atlanta for five years. Spanish is her first language, and upon being enrolled in the public school, she was immediately placed in ESOL classes where she began learning English. She failed to see the benefit of a high school education, however, and similarly, her parents demonstrated little concern for her coursework. Upon our introductions, Katarina did not speak publicly at first, and as group members introduced themselves, Katarina asked if she could please talk in private. However, she did eventually make comments to the rest of the group as conversations ensued.

Moving to the United States to work was not appealing to Katarina when she was younger. Instead, she dreamed of marrying, having children, and working to support her family

in Mexico. However, her parents had different dreams; they wanted to move to the United States so that they could seek better paying jobs and brought her when she was a young teen. She began working immediately, but because she is not a United States citizen, she worked undocumented for a number of years before eventually applying for and receiving DACA status. She recalled feelings of hopelessness prior to receiving her work permit, working many hours at lower-paying jobs just to help support her mother and father.

Even though she feels that they are not supportive of her, Katarina would like to be able to care for her parents financially. In fact, she shared that her parents often seem indifferent, and she dabbed tears from her eyes and she described their lack of emotional involvement in her life: "When I drop out of high school, nobody push me, nobody told me you have to go." She does not have a specific career in mind as she looks to the future: "Whatever is more money, I will go for it." Like other members of the focus group, Katarina believes that the allurement of jobs is often an obstacle for Hispanic youth.

Observations: Adult Education Center

The 60-minute observation at the adult education center took place during the evening hours while multiple classes were in session. The adult education center is located on the campus of a local high school and is housed inside a large, modular building. Classes consisted of approximately eight to 12 students each. Classes seemed to be an even mix of White and Hispanic students with a very small percentage of Black students. Six teachers were present; two were males and four were females; all of them were White.

Instruction seemed rather informal with students sitting clustered together in desks or in semi-circles. Classroom doors were left open, and teachers seemed casual in their approach, conversing with students and providing one-on-one support to them as needed. In math class,

Pablo sat within a semi-circle of other students as the teacher stood at a white board modeling steps for solving math equations. In an English class, Brenda, Kim, and Rebecca sat clustered together in desks; the teacher sat before them, also in a student desk as they discussed a literature passage.

Students seemed to arrive at varying times. Although the class session began at 6:00 in the evening, students were observed coming in 15 to 20 minutes late. Students appeared to enter and exit classrooms casually and seemed to vary in their choice of attire. Some wore jeans; others wore wind-suits and exercise pants; some wore clothing that exposed their mid-drifts.

Non-Completers of High School: Hispanic Advocacy

Miguel, Barbara, Daniel, and Emilio are presented next. They are Hispanic non-completers of high school, and they are clients at a Hispanic advocacy center located near Atlanta. They were each interviewed, and they were also observed in a classroom context at the Hispanic advocacy center. Observations and interviews were used to create their individual profiles.

Miguel. Miguel is a 29-year-old, single client seeking GED support so that he might apply for DACA status. Discussions with Miguel took place in a small classroom inside the Hispanic advocacy center. He entered the room with confidence and immediately introduced himself. He wore thick glasses, and sat in a metal chair across from the researcher with his body turned at an angle. He had been the victim of a car crash ten years ago, and that accident left him with slurred speech, restricted use of his left arm, and a slight limp. Prior to his accident, Miguel reported that he was an "A student" who made all "As and 100s" in his high school classes who had planned to go to college, but because of his accident, he did not graduate high school.

At the time of his accident, he was enrolled in honors classes in high school, and he worked fulltime at a factory simultaneously. He began working in the factory as a line leader when he was 16 years old to help support his mother, a fact in which he seemed to relish. He made $350 per week at the age of 16 and smiled proudly as he shared that fact. His mother also worked in the same factory, and Miguel stated proudly that "everyone knew her." He moved to the United States from Mexico when he was 13 years old, and he stated that his family came to the country seeking to have a better life. When asked what that better life entails, Miguel responded, "It's hard to make a house in Mexico." Several times during the course of the interview, he stated that he desires to "be somebody in life. . . .to do something big, like be an attorney."

When asked about the people in his high school classes, Miguel stated that most of his classmates were White, and when asked to describe them, he whispered, "They was smart." He recalled positive relationships with Blacks and fellow Hispanics, but he reported that White students often seemed to distance themselves from him. When asked to describe the relationship with White students, after a long pause, he replied, "They treated us as if we were nothing," but he described this notion more of an attitude rather than overt actions. He spoke of mainly positive experiences with his teachers describing them as highly effective, noting that they were the most significant supports for him in school. He recalled an ESOL teacher from Puerto Rico who helped him learn to speak English and a football coach who once told him, "You're going to be somebody in life, son."

However, while he experienced many positive relationships, he also recalled teachers who seemed suspicious of him and other Hispanics. He told of dancing in the hallways with his friends on one occasion, and that his teachers panicked and summoned school security. Further,

teachers and fellow students alike often expressed disdain when he and other Hispanics would speak in Spanish rather than English, and fellow (non-Hispanic) students would say such things as "You're in America," or "Go back to Mexico."

Miguel prides himself in his work ethic. When asked to define success, he stated, "I'll be, I'll be happy. I'll be working, working, working, working to help my mom. I want a house." When asked which is more important in having success, education or family, he answered, "Education *and* family."

Barbara. Barbara is a 29-year-old Hispanic female who came to the United States when she was approximately 12-years-old. She attended school in the United States for about five years before dropping out. She is a tall, slender female with shoulder-length, brunette hair, and she spoke softly with confidence. She agreed to participate in a one-on-one interview, but she seemed apprehensive at first and she asked numerous questions (in Spanish) of her instructor.

She came to the United States with her parents, somewhat against her will. When asked about her life in Mexico, Barbara shared, "I had dreams. I dreamed of becoming a ballerina." She stated it was her desire to stay in Mexico and go to school there. However, her parents had different plans and wanted to come to the United States for the purpose of working and making money. She noted work was her family's primary focus and the family's decision was always about working and money, not school.

Upon her arrival in the United States, Barbara was responsible for caring for her younger sister and ensuring that she was able to successfully complete her homework in the evenings while her parents worked. She recalled that her younger sister complained every day because she had no friends at school, and she stated that classes did not help her sister. Her younger sister's struggles in school meant increased responsibility for Barbara. When she was 16, her

mother began to say to her, "You have to go to work," so Barbara dropped out of high school when she was 17-years-old, a decision she did not wish to make but did so to please her parents. She noted that the most important supports that can be given to Hispanics are language supports and ESOL classes.

Her family is not supportive of her efforts to obtain her GED, and they often say such things as "At your age? Why do you want to do that?" Barbara now has a young daughter of her own who is six years old, however, and she believes that completing her GED is especially important in setting an example for her. When asked which is more important in attaining success, education or family, Barbara quietly responded, "la familia." She noted, "At the time, when I was planning my life and what I want to do. I wanted my education. Once that was achieved, I would be able to raise children well. That's the way I saw it."

Daniel. Daniel is a 29-year-old client at the Hispanic advocacy center who moved to the United States when he was 12 years old. He attended high school in a moderate-sized school district near Atlanta and dropped out when he was 17. He is married, has two children, and he is not a legal citizen of the United States. He is completing his GED so that he may apply for DACA status. He has dark hair, is of an average build, and he has a full mustache, and he currently works fulltime in the construction industry.

Spanish is Daniel's primary language, and he frequently alternated between English and Spanish in his statements. He shared his personal observations about Americans in the classroom context using a sports analogy: "They keep going. The mentality for Mexicans is more like 'Aaaaaa' (eh), we can lose, we lose, but if we cannot not do it, es (it's) okay." He noted his mindset in school was that as long as he made a 70 on an assignment, he was satisfied,

but many of his White counterparts strove for more. He asserted, "Americans have to be persistant in the goals."

The desire to earn money originally lured his family to the United States, and Daniel admits that education was never part of their long-range plans. He does not plan to stay in the United States longterm, and he went on to share that many Hispanics have that mentality and live in subpar housing, not because they have to, but because they choose to in order to save their money. Daniel, for instance, has a home in Mexico to which he eventually plans to go back, and if he chose to go back to Mexico at this point, he could live very comfortably there because he has saved. If he were to continue his education formally beyond a GED, he shared his extended family would not be supportive and "would want to know why." When asked whether education or family is most important in obtaining success, he answered, "family."

Emilio. Emilio is a 26-year-old male from Guatemala who came to the United States 13 years ago. He is completing his GED in order to qualify for "DACA." He is smaller in stature, standing at about five feet, five inches, and weighing approximately 135 pounds. He appeared to be wearing construction clothing with a shirt stained with paint and shoes that appeared to have steel toes. He stated that his family first came to the United States when he was just eight years old. His mother became quite sick at that time, and his family moved to the United States to seek medical care and a better life.

However, Emilio did not wish to move to the United States, and he was allowed to stay in Guatemala with his father and attended school there through sixth grade. When he was 13, Emilio began having relationship problems with his father, who drank heavily, and he called his mother and asked to come to the United States. She allowed him to do so, and he began

attending seventh grade in the United States, attending school for a total of five years in both Alabama and Georgia.

While he has always relied on his physical strength in the construction industry for job-related success, Emilio began to carefully think about his occupational future about four years ago. He recalled a personal epiphany that he had: "And how am I going to live with a hammer and all that? Right now, I have power. . . What happens when I am 50?"

When asked, "What does it mean to be successful?" Emilio responded, "To have more things." He noted that poverty is often generational among Hispanics and that some feel powerless regarding their socioeconomic status: "If you are a carpenter, you going to be a carpenter. . . .if their family is poor, they going be poor too. That's the way they see it."

Observation: Hispanic Advocacy Center

The two-hour observation conducted at the Hispanic advocacy center allowed the researcher to analyze how adult Hispanic participants engage in a classroom setting comprised (only) of other Hispanics and in their own language. While many adult learning centers cater to learners of all ethnicities, this particular site serves only Hispanics.

The classroom appeared to be a former office space in the back portion of the building. The room was quite narrow and had nine desks arranged in a circle. In the corner sat a larger desk with numerous papers and textbooks stacked on top of it. It was there that the teacher, Ms. Alma, a Hispanic female, sat during the instruction.

Ms. Alma had a loud, commanding voice and lectured for most of the class time from behind her desk. She would frequently ask open-ended questions, pausing long enough for a student to interject with the correct answer. Although the class consisted of adult learners, it was

obvious that Ms. Alma commanded the space; at one point, she asked the researcher/observer to please gather his things and move to a place in the room that would be less obtrusive.

A large white board was mounted to a side wall and only occasionally served a purpose. Three vocabulary terms were printed on the board: "Native Americans, colonies, and settlers," and from time to time, Ms. Alma would call on students to articulate those terms. The instruction appeared to be traditional, with each participant sitting in a student desk with a workbook opened to a specified page and listening attentively to Ms. Alma.

During discussions, Ms. Alma showed video clips that portrayed the early settlements of America along with scenes of warfare. John Smith and Pocahontas were featured and served as a source of discussion. At one point, as the group discussed a film clip featuring the removal of Native Americans, with dramatizations of challengers being burned at the stake, one student (Daniel) turned to the researcher/observer and stated, "It's a good thing immigrants don't treat the Natives that way today, huh?"

After a period of instruction, Ms. Alma then referenced questions that appeared at the end of a section in the workbook. Ms. Alma made an assertion to Barbara, at which Barbara smiled and sheepishly glanced downward at her booklet. Ms. Alma then turned to the researcher/observer, and in English stated, "They may take the practice GED test online, free of charge, but I can't get anyone to take it." She went on to say that the students were "extremely sensitive to test-taking" and will not complete any activity that will result in a "passing or failing grade" because "they fear tests, and they fear failure."

High School Completers: Interviews

The following profiles are the narratives of eleven high-school completers who are students at Southeastern University. Five of the eleven were also interviewed individually.

Meredith and Leo are presented first, as both were interviewed, but they declined participating in the focus group discussion.

Meredith. Meredith is a 22-year-old-female from Mexico who is completing her bachelor's degree at a university near Atlanta, Georgia. She has lived in the United States essentially all of her life, except for a short span of time in which she resided in Mexico for one year. She is an outgoing, bubbly young lady with long, light-brown hair. She has been in college for three years, and she hopes to become a professional counselor. Although she was ultimately willing to speak about her experiences, she began our conversation rather reluctantly. When asked, for instance, what sort of work she did, she answered hesitantly, "I work at a – uh – a – store," and laughed nervously.

Spanish is her first language, and she recalled learning English in school with the help of a classmate. Although she took ESOL classes, she believes that having an English-speaking companion helped her acquire the language faster than any curricular approach. She asserted Hispanics need support with course content in order to be successful in school, including after-school programs in which to successfully complete homework assignments, projects, and study for tests. She experienced a small amount of conflict while in high school simply because she sometimes conversed with others in Spanish. White students, particularly, would take offense to her and her friends speaking in Spanish, and a fellow, non-Spanish-speaking classmate once became upset with her because she felt that Meredith was speaking disparagingly about her.

She spoke warmly of her mother referring to her as her "biggest supporter," and although her mother is willing to help her financially, Meredith feels that working is a personal responsibility. Hence, she currently works approximately 30 hours per week and attends college part-time. When asked if she ever gives money to her mother, she laughed slightly and said,

"No. Like I barely make enough. Well, I do make enough but I mean, I have to pay my car, and my phone, and shopping."

Leo. Leo is a 22-year-old male living in a suburb outside of Atlanta. He is approximately six feet tall, of slender build, and has shoulder-length hair that was pulled back from his face. He was confident, yet friendly, and he readily extended his hand and introduced himself. He is a senior at a large university and is majoring in business and has attended both private and public schools in Florida and Georgia. He graduated from a large high school in the Atlanta area and currently resides with his parents. He described his middle and high school interactions as "good" and "average." When asked if he was ever treated differently in school because he is Hispanic, he answered "yes"; however, he had difficulty pinpointing concrete examples.

Leo has a four-year-old daughter who was born during his senior year of high school. He stated that his parents were shocked to learn that his high school girlfriend was pregnant, but that they were supportive. When asked to describe their mindset during his girlfriend's pregnancy, he responded, "Stressed. . . worried for me. For my plans to go to college, whether or not they had changed." While he is no longer romantically involved with the mother of his child, nonetheless, he remains involved in his daughter's life. He volunteers at local agencies teaching GED preparatory classes, but Leo does not formally work, and his parents have supported him financially during his college studies. They also provide financial support for his child.

Leo dreams of opening his own business someday, and he hopes to work in international sales. He asserted that Hispanics need language and academic supports to be successful. When asked to define success, he responded, "Success for right now is just graduating." He went on to

explain that in a few years, he hopes to support his mother financially, as well as his daughter and the mother of his child.

High School Completers: Focus Group/Interviews

The focus group for high-school completers took place at a Southeastern university in a suburb of Atlanta. Nine participants were chosen to participate based upon their fit for the study. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 24; six were females, three were males. The discussion was 90 minutes in duration. One participant was a first-generation Hispanic. All other participants were born in the United States. Three of the participants (Bonita, Angela, and Yesenia) were interviewed individually in addition to their participation in the focus group. The researcher facilitated the group conversation (and individual interviews as applicable) in a way that allowed for individual portraits of each participant to reflect their diverse backgrounds and experiences.

All participants sat together in a semi-circle with the researcher in the middle. The researcher began with ice-breaker questions to encourage dialogue. Although the previously drafted focus group questions (see Appendix E) were utilized, effort was given in to encourage free-flow of thoughts on the part of the participants. Below are their stories.

Bonita. Bonita was the first to introduce herself to the group. She is a 19-year-old biology major who plans to eventually go to medical school. Her parents are from Mexico and moved to the United States prior to her birth, and Bonita is the oldest among two siblings. As the first in her extended family to go to college, her aunts, uncles, and cousins are not supportive of her college enrollment: "I guess it is just like family drama - they don't like seeing other people doing better than them. I think that is how it is for a lot of Hispanic families." She described her high school experience as "average," and although English is her first language,

she was enrolled in ESOL classes up until she was in seventh grade, a fact that seemed to puzzle her: "That's what I didn't understand. Why I was in ESOL when I could read, and write, and speak English really good, fluently."

She became a certified nursing assistant when she was 15-years-old, and she worked part-time in a local nursing home. This was part of a career/work-based study program in her high school. She stated the work was extremely taxing, however, and that she quickly decided to seek a career in a different position after just a few short months. Bonita feels the most important support that can be given to Hispanics is "information" because Hispanics often do not know what types of higher education and/or scholarship programs are available to them. She shared that she missed a year of school simply because she did not have the information she needed in order to register for classes.

Marco. Marco introduced himself next and sat to the right of Belinda. He presented very confidently and was outspoken during the focus group. He graduated from a large high school in the Atlanta area, and he is a 22-year-old college sophomore who is majoring in business. He remembered his high school experiences as "mainly positive." He had an average to stocky build and although he is just a few years older than his classmates, he seemed to have a sense of maturity that set him apart from them, particularly among his male classmates.

His parents champion his completion of college, and Marco noted that they would be devastated if he decided to drop out. He still lives with his parents, and he described their financial support of him to be "about half," stating that he pays for the things he wants. Spanish was the first language spoken in his home, and he learned English upon beginning elementary school: "My parents had no idea what English was, and I was at such a young age, that I had to teach myself, but at the same time, strive to teach them."

He recalled conflict at times while in high school, classmates and teachers expressing a desire for him to speak English in school contexts, and who seemed suspicious when his friends and he spoke Spanish. He underscored the need for Hispanics to be equipped with information as they complete middle school and high school to promote their long-term academic success.

Mariela. Mariela sat next to Marco during the focus group. She was outspoken during the discussions with many insights to add regarding the educational experiences of Hispanics. She was eccentric, wearing a baseball cap that was turned sideways and an oversized baseball shirt. She spoke loudly and with deliberate enunciation. She is a 20-year-old female who graduated high school two years ago. Her mother is of Mexican descent, and her father is from El Salvador. She has lived in the United States her entire life and is a United States citizen.

Her school experience spanned both New York and Georgia, but Mariela spent most of her middle school and high school years in Georgia public schools. For middle school, she was enrolled in a "school of choice," a program within a public district that accepts students by application only, and that provides an advanced, project-based curricular environment for high-level learners. She graduated high school as an honors student with an International Baccalaureate diploma seal, a recognition that distinguishes her as an honors student capable of completing rigorous coursework. She is currently seeking a bachelor's degree in graphic design.

In her own words, her high school experience "started off poor," but she shared that "it got better." She recalled not having teachers with whom she could relate, that most of them were "white males." She did not have Hispanic friends in school and the closest she came to that was a girl who "was like half-White and Jewish . . . and was like a 16th Cuban." She asserted that she was sometimes treated differently in high school because she is Hispanic.

Teachers often assumed that Mariela was proficient in Spanish, and that, in and of itself, served as a source of conflict for her. Mariela believes Hispanics need teachers and counselors with whom they can relate. Because she struggled in the general public school context, she stated that she applied to a "school of choice" to escape one particular teacher, especially, whom she described as "degrading." She considered dropping out of school on occasion, but her mother and aunt were the biggest factors in continuing her studies.

Christian. Christian sat next to Mariela. He was very soft-spoken and seemed to lack in confidence. He presented as a teenager and was somewhat reserved during the discussions. He is a 19-year-old nursing major, and his parents are from Mexico. He is a United States citizen, and he attended a moderate-sized high school and graduated two years ago. Christian described his high school experience as "average," and he stated that he was not treated differently because he is Hispanic. Spanish is his first language, and he learned to speak English only after enrolling in the public school system.

His parents are the biggest motivating factor for him in seeking a college degree, and they want him to attend college because (in his words) they are "embarrassed by their low-paying jobs" and "want something more" for him. Christian is mainly dependent on his parents for financial support, and he feels that his parents would be disappointed if he made the decision to discontinue his college studies. He feels that Hispanics need the encouragement of teachers and high school counselors to promote optimal success, and when asked to define success, he laughingly asserted, "I just want job."

Belinda. Belinda was next to Christian, and at times, it was difficult to gauge her emotions as group members spoke about their experiences in school. She is self-described as "someone who doesn't look Hispanic," and she added insights regarding the need for

multicultural awareness. She is a 21-year-old sophomore majoring in political science, and she ultimately hopes to become an attorney.

Her parents have often worked in factories, and seeing their struggle firsthand has served as an impetus for her to attend college. Belinda was born in Georgia and attended a high school with a student population that is 50% Hispanic and 50% Caucasian. She described her experiences in middle and high school as "average," and regarding stereotypes and interpersonal conflict, she recalled that students in her school most commonly referred to all Hispanics as "Mexicans," regardless of their (or their families') country of origin.

Like others in her discussion group, providing for her parents financially is her primary goal and a potential indicator of her future success. She is seeking a stable career that will support her financially. She believes Hispanic students need teachers and counselors at school who understand their diverse backgrounds.

Eduardo. Eduardo introduced himself next, and he sat next to Belinda. A 20-year-old engineering major who attended a moderate-sized high school in a suburban area, he bore the countenance of a teenager, with short, dark hair and a slight mustache. He stands at approximately six feet tall and has a slender build. He seemed nervous at first but added comments and insights frequently to the group discussions.

His parents are from Mexico and moved to the United States prior to Eduardo's birth. Spanish is his first language, and he did not learn to speak English until his was five years-old, at which time his parents enrolled him in a public pre-kindergarten (pre-k) program. His high school was comprised of a population that was about 50% Hispanic. He described his middle and high school experiences as "average" and stated that he never faced negative treatment from others based solely upon his race. When discussing success, Eduardo emphasized his desire to

take care of his parents financially. He believes that Hispanics need to be made fully aware of scholarships available to them as they complete high school.

Elaina. Elaina sat next to Eduardo. At age 24, she was the oldest group member and is expecting her first child. She is a nursing major and is a United States citizen whose parents are from Mexico. She grew up in metropolitan area of Georgia and attended a small high school with a large percentage of Hispanic students. She described her experiences there as "really great." She typically did not speak unless a question was asked specifically of her. Even then, her statements were rather concise.

Spanish is her first language, and she did not begin speaking English until she was about five years-old. Elaina stated that in high school, she was not treated differently because she is Hispanic. She described success as "living comfortably – to be able to say I accomplished more than my parents did, because I know they want it for me." Within ten years, she hopes to be able to financially care for her unborn son as well as for her parents. Regarding supports for Hispanics, she noted that students need to be equipped with vocational and educational information, "advice from school" as they plan for their futures. When asked which is more important in achieving long-range goals, education or family, Elaina answered simply, "If I had to choose, I would say family."

Angela. Angela was next to introduce herself and sat beside Elaina. She presented as strong and confident and freely added insights from her former high school days as well as details about her family. She is a sophisticated young lady with a warm smile, who spoke with a commanding voice. Aside from participating in the focus group, Angela also agreed to be individually interviewed. She is very involved in her college coursework and during the individual interview, she shared that she had "pulled an all-nighter studying for a test. "

She is a 23-year-old nursing major, and she works 30 hours per week at a local supermarket where she is a shift manager. She prides herself on her work ethic, and she noted that she often forgoes social activities with friends so that she can work extra shifts in order to have money for college and emergencies. Her friends are not always supportive of her in her college-coursework, though, and sometimes question why she is going to school when she has already achieved manager status at the supermarket. However, she asserted, "It's not enough." While her parents are supportive of her choice to attend college, extended family members are not. She is the first person among extended family to attend college, and her cousins will sometimes ridicule her.

As she recalled a friend ("Lee") from first and second grade who was instrumental in teaching her English, she shared that having a personal bilingual friend to serve as a language mentor was her greatest support while in school. She also stated the primary support that should be made available to Hispanics is simply communication and feels that parents and Hispanic students alike need to be made aware of their options when planning their futures. Not only does Angela work and go to college, but she also serves as a volunteer at a local hospital, and she stated that this is something she has done since graduating high school. When asked about her plans for the future, Angela answered that she "wants to be somebody" and do everything that her parents taught her "by making a difference."

Yesenia. Yesenia was the last participant to introduce herself to the group. She sat on the far end of the group, and she shared readily about her experiences in school. In addition to participating in the focus group, Yesenia also participated in an individual interview. She is a 20-year-old female college student who currently resides in a metropolitan area near Atlanta. She is as a stylish, confident young lady with long, auburn-brown hair. Even though she has

only been speaking English for about six years, she has little to no accent and has a strong command of the language with a rich vocabulary. She came to the United States in 2010, and she completed grades eight through 12 in a public school system. She is from Peru and is a sophomore studying early childhood education.

Yesenia described her experiences in the public school system as "average," and she never felt she was treated negatively because she is Hispanic. She was enrolled in ESOL classes upon her arrival to the United States, and she remained in an ESOL program for two years. She described the ESOL instruction as helpful and attributed her quick mastery of English to both ESOL and the efforts she placed in learning the language while at home.

She spent her formative years in Peru and described her family as middle class while living there. Her father was an engineer in Peru, and her mother was a teacher there. Her father made the decision to come to the United States when Yesenia was about seven, and she did not see him for six years as a result. Similarly, her mother came to the United States when she was about 10 years old, and she was not able to see her mom for about three years. During that time, she lived in Peru with her grandmother and younger brother, while her older sister and parents lived in the United States. She recalled missing her parents tremendously.

Her parents came to the United States "seeking a better life," and she does not resent her parents for leaving her in Peru to be raised by her grandmother. She feels that a college degree is essential for success and believes Hispanics need language supports and after-school programs to promote academic success. Now that she is living in the United States with her parents, she described their relationship as a strong one: "My dad is very involved and like caring . . . we're like a really close family. In the beginning, it was hard, but once we got here, we just did everything together."

Results

The researcher desired to know the manner in which the Hispanics (ages 18-29) define the construct, success, and the role they feel education should be ascribed to it. Interviews, focus groups, and observations were implemented to consider Hispanic participants' personal experiences in United States' public schools, and the extent to which family and culture impacted them. Using participants' descriptions, the researcher strove to tell their stories and to underscore themes while answering the guiding research question and three related subquestions.

The researcher bracketed his own experiences regarding education and his perspectives of success at various times throughout the research process. Groenewald (2004) stated that researchers do not completely suspend their own assumptions for the sake of inquiry through "overanalysis, removal from the lived contexts of the phenomena…reducing the phenomena to cause and effect" (p.18). Rather, the researcher must embrace his or her own assumptions and then seek to fully embrace those that belong uniquely to the participants.

The researcher analyzed field-notes from the observations of non-completers of high school. This step provided a unique inward look at Hispanics while in a learning capacity. A total of three hours was spent observing adult students at the Hispanic advocacy center and an adult education center, and the field-notes from these observations allowed the researcher to add rich descriptions of participants' classroom behaviors to support textural and structural descriptions, particularly paying attention to the contextual differences evidenced between each location (Creswell, 2013; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2010).

The researcher then transcribed individual interviews and discussion group conversations, noting the exact wording of participants as they described their experiences and defined success (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). The researcher read through each transcript

multiple times noting words and phrases used by the participants as they told their stories and articulated their perceptions. Similarly, the researcher listened to the audio recordings multiple times to note not only participants' words, but their voice inflections, pauses, and para-verbal communication (Groenewald, 2004). Transcripts, memos, and field-notes supported the writing of each participant's story (Creswell, 2013; Groenewald, 2004).

Table 2

Themes/Subthemes

Primary Themes and Related Subthemes	**Initial Subthemes Identified**
1. **Familismo** a. Commitment to Parents b. Commitment to Family Goals c. Commitment to Community	Perceptions of Education Family/Extended Familial Goals Motivation Parents Success Defined Supports for Families Perceptions of Working Altruism
2. Language a. Conflict b. Language of Self Talk	Identity Language Preference Metacognitive Language Conflict Prejudice School Interactions Supports for Language Acculturation

Themes

Using Atlas.ti software, the researcher coded themes within each transcript, and ultimately classified the various codes using axial and in vivo coding; similar responses were grouped categorically (Groenewald, 2004; Moustakas, 1994). The use of coding schemes allowed the researcher to organize data inductively in reference to the guiding research question and subquestions (Creswell, 2013; Groenewald, 2004). The analysis of data yielded themes that

emerged as the researcher sought not only to understand the interactions of participants within public schools, but more so, the manner in which their life experiences, culture, and familial relationships converged. Initially, 209 codes were identified from transcripts. Classifying them ultimately led to 17 themes. Additional refinement led to two primary themes: family (familismo) and language (see Table 2).

Familismo

The centrality of familismo was a significant theme that emerged among both completers and non-completers of high school as they articulated their school experiences and ideologies of success. This notion is entrenched in extant research emphasizing the general familial nature of the Hispanic culture (Niemeyer, Wong, & Westerhaus, 2009; Leidy, Guerra, & Toro, 2012). Familismo is a powerful construct that supersedes the manner in which other ethnic subgroups typically characterize their devotion to family; it is way of life in most instances among Hispanic cultures and embodies not only their allegiance to loved ones, but moreover, their unwavering desire to uphold the collective needs of family (Leidy, Guerra, & Toro, 2012; Smith-Morris et al., 2012). Martinez (2013) stressed that family plays a powerful role in the lives of Hispanics as they make lifelong choices, including career or college pathways, and may often sway or dissuade Hispanics regarding education altogether. In this way, three related subthemes were noted regarding the saliency of familismo and emerged as a three-tiered commitment for the participants: a commitment to parents, family goals, and communities.

Commitment to parents. The provision of parental care was expressed almost unanimously among participants as they defined success and discussed the importance of family. Specifically, high school completers and non-completers alike discussed their desire to care for their mothers financially as they defined success. Some asserted they would like to purchase

their mothers a home, while others stated they would prefer to support their mothers financially so they might stop working. While Emilio referred to success as "having more things," the other 21 participants referenced their desire to take care of their parents as a long-range goal. During the focus group discussion for high school non-completers at the adult education center, all seven group members there affirmed that caring for family, parents particularly, is a primary goal.

During the focus group discussion for high school completers, all stated that caring for their parents was a long-term goal and an indicator for personal success, though they may not currently be doing it. The desire to take care of older family members, mothers especially, is a deeply embedded, well-documented theme within Hispanic cultures (Abdi, 2011; Calzada, Tamis-LeMonda, & Yoshihawa; 2012; Good, Masewicz, Vogel, 2010; Hayes et al., 2015; Martinez, 2013; Leidy, Guerra, & Toro, 2012; Suizzo, 2013). Yesenia spoke directly to this principle:

> "I think they (Hispanics) are just thankful to their parents because they came to a new country where they didn't know the language, or because they found a better place to live. . . cause they're thankful for that, and now . . . they can give it back to their parents."

However, while most all of the participants converged in their need to care for parents financially, they varied in their perspectives of when this financial support should occur. Generally, those who were non-high school completers felt that this was an immediate need to the extent that they would forgo their own ambitions for the sake of family.

- Miguel began working fulltime at a factory at age 16 while still in high school in order to provide support to his mother.
- Barbara was urged by her parents to drop out of high school at age 17 so that she might provide them with financial support.

- Katarina began working at age 14 to provide financial support to her family, and she eventually dropped out of high school to work fulltime.

Yet, when asked, none of the high-school completers indicated an immediate desire or need to provide this type of support; none indicated that they had ever considered dropping out of school/college to support their families. In fact, when Meredith was asked if she currently uses her own money to support her mother, she laughed and stated, "No. Like I barely make enough." Furthermore,

- Angela works as a manager at a local supermarket, and she primarily uses her money to pay for college and has not provided support to her family.
- Eduardo and Christian are completely dependent upon their parents for financial support while attending college.
- Leo, Eduardo, and Christian have never worked and are dependent upon their parents.
- While Leo expressed a desire to care for his mother in the future, he envisions his college studies as a method to bring that plan into fruition as a long-range goal. Regarding working, Leo stated, "Knowing what I know . . . the work I could be doing now, just in terms of compensation, pales in comparison to the compensation I could be getting when I graduate. . ."

Commitment to family goals. An allegiance to familial goals versus individual ones was also pervasive among participants. Many spoke of personal sacrifices related to their parents' goals, and both occupational choices and future goals were commonly framed around those of parents. The overarching goals of their families in most instances determined whether or not the participants in this inquiry completed high school studies or abandoned education to seek employment. Martinez (2013) emphasized this collective nature of Hispanics and asserted

family members are often more likely to make deep personal sacrifices for the sake of familial goals, a stark contrast against individualistic mindsets of other United States cultural subgroups.

Barbara dreamed of becoming a ballerina, but she was forced to forgo her dream for the sake of family. Katarina desired to remain in Mexico to work and raise a family there; however, she was forced to move to the United States to support her parents' goals. Daniel spoke of his extended family's desire to come to the United States to work and to save money and indicated that his family likely would not support his decision if he chose to go back to school. Further, he seemed baffled by his former classmates' individual persistence towards educational plans by asserting, "Americans have to be persistant in the goals."

Pablo spoke to this notion and offered insights regarding the role of family in education, along with the influence of familial plans over individual ones:

> "See, I think the reason why is because of our parents. They just have the mentality of working, not seeing the bigger picture. I think because their parents showed them a 'work at it life'. . . . I think their mentality is more like "Mexico life," even if they've been here 10 or 15 years, they just want you to work, work, and work. You reach a certain age, and most of them just want you to work. You know. . . .money is an issue with them and everything. So, that's why they came over here – to have a better life. . . .they'll push you to a certain level, but then after that, they're just like, 'Okay, if you want to go to work, go to work.' That's the way my parents did."

Calzada, Tamis-LeMonda, and Yoshihawa (2012) underscored the influence of familismo, and affirmed the role of family in Hispanic cultures greatly impacts Hispanic students' persistence. Hispanic students will often excel in school if education is hailed as an important by family, and poverty, stressors, and family obligations may lead to high school

attrition among Hispanic youth. Joel acknowledged his commitment to his family's collective goals:

> "When you come from Mexico, you come with this mentality that what you came here for is to work. Not to go to the school. . . .We came over here to work. We came over here to make money. We didn't came over here to waste time. Being in school, you know, wasting time."

Moreover, because family members often commit themselves as a unit to addressing financial hardships, generational poverty is prevalent among Hispanic cultures (Martinez, 2013; Niemeyer, Wong, & Westerhaus, 2009). Emilio echoed this notion: "If their family is poor, they going be poor too. That's the way they see it."

However, collective familial goals were not indicative of non-high school completers alone; this premise was likewise evidenced among high school completers. For instance, when Leo's high school girlfriend became pregnant, he stated his parents were "stressed . . . worried for me. For my plans to go to college, whether or not they had changed," and when describing his innate desire to obtain a college degree, he shared his motivation to attend college was ingrained in him as an extension of his parents' goals. He noted,

> "I don't know about you, but as far as I go, before I knew what it meant to go to college, I had it like spoken about. And I guess seeing the way my mom, like, spoke about seeing me graduate. . . . made me want to accomplish that."

Yesenia was left by her parents in Peru for a number of years to be raised by a grandmother so that her parents could come to the United States to work; yet, she supported their decision and does not resent her parents for fulfilling their goal:

> "They were just like, I think it's gonna be better. It was hard. But I remember every night crying. I be like, why can't I see my dad?"

Furthermore, during the focus group conversation with high school completers conducted at Southeastern University, each group member was asked to identify their primary motivation for seeking a college degree. Elaina was the only participant who shared her primary motivation included securing a better-paying job to care for her unborn child, but still, pleasing her parents was embedded within her goals: ". . . to be able to say I accomplished more than my parents did, because I know they want it for me." The other participants indicated their primary motivation for attending college was steeped within their parents' desires; their individual desires for completing college are extensions of familial goals.

Commitment to communities. The establishment of family as a primary theme among Hispanic participants emerged in their commitment to communal, altruistic goals. Woolley (2009) suggests the supportive nature of Hispanic's home environment leads them to create similar dynamics within their communities. Clearly, the notion of familismo refers to the closeness of family within Hispanic cultures (Martinez, 2013), but Smith, Morales, Alvarez, and Turner (2012) suggest that this term may be short-sided in describing the altruistic nature of Hispanics. While their desires to support others may originate within their own families, their commitment to communal goals extends beyond familial settings. Smith et al. (2012) argue that when "familismo is used in generalizing ways, it neglects the broader significance of nostalgia or of a larger social (extra-familial) connectedness" (p. 37).

Hispanic participants commonly articulated altruistic desires as they defined success. This was first expressed by Emilio who cited societal/spiritual benefits as his primary motivation for completing his GED:

> "When I come back here, to try to get my GED, cause I was thinking something, cause I see all my people, all the people from where I go to the church. They from Guatemala. And, I see them. And, nobody want to - nobody want education. And, I see around me. And, I think, if I had to take the gospel to the people, how I gonna do it?"

Rebecca stated that her motivation for seeking educational/GED support is to "become a better person." Meredith hopes to become a counselor. Yesenia hopes to return to Peru to serve as an educator:

> "It's just going to be worth it at the end. If you really love something – like for example, for me, being a teacher is my goal. . . . Like, I want to travel back to Peru and do this community service thing. So, I want to go there for like two years and teach kids. I mean, they don't pay you a lot, but it's like basically community service."

Angela currently works fulltime at a supermarket while attending college, and while her friends have often questioned her desire to continue her college studies because she has a managerial position, she affirmed, "I want more." Further, when defining success, she responded, "Being somebody in life and doing everything my parents taught me – you know – making a difference."

Out of the eleven participants who are high school completers currently pursuing college degrees, six are completing programs related to helping professions: Careers related to assisting others, including the medical field, teaching profession, mental health industry, in which the professional is "motivated by the helping subject's interest in another person's needs. . ." (Milcak & Zascodna, 2008, p. 202). Meredith desires to be a counselor. Bonita hopes to become a doctor and provide help to children in Syria. Yesenia wishes to be a teacher. Angela, Christian, and Elaina aspire to be nurses.

The interplay between family dynamics and career choice is supported in literature and theoretical frameworks for this inquiry, namely, ecological systems theory of interpersonal development (Watling & Neal, 2013). Watling and Neal (2013) maintain that the behaviors learned within subsets of ecological systems impact individuals' behaviors in broader social contexts, and they assert that behaviors cultivated within familial settings (exosystems) extend to larger-scale social settings (macrosystems). Hence, the tendency to value the extended family within Hispanic cultures may lead Hispanic youth to seek occupations and career where relationships are similarly cultivated as evidenced in this inquiry (Martinez, 2013).

While research is limited regarding the relationship between familismo, Hispanics, and their career choices, namely, their occupational choices in helping professions, Turcios-Cotto and Milan (2012) noted that Hispanics are more likely to enter careers with social benefits over those that might otherwise foster independence or individualization. Flores and Hondagneu-Sotelo (2014) similarly noted that Hispanics are more likely to enter socially-integrated fields like teaching than other minority subgroups, notably Blacks and Asian-Americans.

The theme, familismo, is significant in this study because this construct directly impacted the manner in which the participants defined success, as well as the way in which they approached school contexts. For participants who are non-completers, their desire to provide care for family members immediately superseded their desire to complete high school. For them, providing this level of care, in and of itself, is success and much more salient than education. Future plans for high school completers have, likewise, been framed within those of family. To present education to them as a means simply for securing employment and/or financial gain outside of their family may be misguided.

Language

Language emerged as a second major theme in this inquiry as Hispanic participants described their experiences in United States school settings. Two subthemes specifically emerged regarding language: social/interpersonal conflict and the language of self-talk. While all of the participants included in this study were English-speakers (see Table 4), they each varied in their levels of proficiency, and each participant described interactions with classmates and teachers that were often dynamically shaped by their levels of English proficiency and/or English use.

This theme is resonated in literature with emphasis on acculturation, the extent to which minority individuals ascribe to and blend with a predominant ethnic group (Kim, Newhill, & Lopez, 2013). Abdi (2011) underscored the importance of language as a cultural and identity construct, noting that language usage often determines the social experiences of minority students in settings in which English is expected of them. Brown and Chu (2012) similarly affirmed that Hispanic students who speak limited Spanish may experience interpersonal conflict in schools. Language is generally perceived as an indicator of acculturation, and students who fail to adopt the practices of the dominant culture may experience isolation (Kim, Newhill, & Lopez, 2013).

Social and interpersonal conflict. Social conflict was described by participants, especially when referencing the time in which they were initially enrolled in United States schools. This conflict was demonstrated in one of three ways: a. pervasive feelings of isolation due to a limited English proficiency, b. participants establishing friendships with fellow Hispanic peers who did not value secondary education, and c. interpersonal conflicts while speaking Spanish in school.

Eduardo recalled feeling isolated, that he "hated preschool" as a non-English speaking student. Angela similarly shared that she "hated school" when she was in first grade because she didn't understand anything, and she only felt safe when she was placed in language support classes with other non-English speakers. Barbara discussed the difficulty of helping a younger sister who struggled to learn English, and recalled that her sister's school performance increased once she learned English. Emilio told of his first moments in public school:

> "I didn't know what to do. They give you the schedule and just send you to a classroom. . . .eh, you don't know how to read. I didn't know how to read in English. . . . I go to a classroom and I stay there. Watching them. What they doing? When the teacher teaching you, you don't understand what she saying. She lets you go home and with homework and you go to do homework. I tried to do my homework every time a teacher send it home, and I – I just see what the …the question is. And, I go in the book, and I find the page, and I just copy."

Non-high school completers often spoke of associating with peers, "the wrong crowd," to escape isolation as they settled into the United States school environment for the first time while learning English. Pablo was into the partying scene with other Hispanics. Kim spoke of friends who lured her into drugs and alcohol. Joel referred to his former-self as "bad" as he discussed the types of friends with whom he associated. Katarina spoke of connecting only with other Hispanic females whom she referred to as "gangster-type girls."

Further, most of the participants (eight out of 11) in the focus group for high school completers stated they experienced at least one episode of conflict with a peer or teacher because they chose to speak in Spanish rather than English. On such occasions, stereotypes were often assigned to them as a result of them choosing to speak Spanish, with classmates referring to them

as “Mexicans,” regardless of their (or their relatives’) country of origin. Belinda recalled, “You would hear them comment like, ‘Oh, Mexicans!’”

Miguel spoke of a time in which his friends and he were dancing in the hallways, speaking in Spanish, and his teachers summoned security. He recalled that White classmates asserted, “You’re in America. . . Go back to Mexico.” Marco described negative interactions with high school peers and teachers when he chose to speak in Spanish, and when asked how often this occurred, he responded, “All the time.” Yesenia recalled her biggest motivations for learning English: “My teachers, they were White, so they didn’t want us to speak Spanish at all.”

Meredith recalled a disagreement she once had with a White classmate during her school lunch-time. While a friend and she were conversing in Spanish, an English-speaking peer became angry because she felt that Meredith and her friend were talking disparagingly about her to which Meredith concluded, “We were talking about a TV show. . . .We weren’t even talking about her.”

Bonita spoke of mainly positive social experiences in high school, but she, also, shared that speaking in Spanish was a source of conflict:

> “Because there was not really a high majority of Hispanics, so when we were together, we were like speaking Spanish, or we would be talking in Spanish in class. And some teachers be like, ‘Don’t speak Spanish because we don’t know what you are saying.’ Or some students would be like, ‘This is America, so speak English.’

Mariela also experienced conflict regarding language use, but the conflict she experienced was dissimilar to that of other participants. Conflict arose when her teachers assumed that her preferred language was Spanish and would communicate with her accordingly:

> "I don't – I don't look the part of an advanced kid. And most people didn't really know me, so they – they like - I don't want to say it was because of my skin color or the way I looked. I want say that . . . influenced what they thought of me based on what they needed on default. So, I was just some angry, spicy Latino lady."

While language usage was often a source of interpersonal conflict for participants, such conflicts were more frequently reported by high school completers than non-completers. Miguel was the only non-completer, in fact, who reported interpersonal conflict with teachers and/or fellow students as a result of language usage. However, it is important to note that he is the only non-completer who was enrolled in honors classes and who took college preparatory classes.

Two plausible explanations from literature support the sharing of interpersonal conflicts by high school completers. First, Bruner (2004) contended the details participants omit as they tell their stories are as equally important as the details they share, and "these are just as demanding, even if they are not subject to verification" (p. 693). Thus, it is possible that the conflicts were equally prevalent in both groups, but only the high school completers chose to expound upon this theme merely because the conflict bore significance to them and them alone.

Abdi (2011) contended that language is a multidimensional construct with implications on "social positionings" for English-language learners and their teachers and fellow classmates (p. 178). Similarly, Kim, Newhill, and Lopez (2013) stressed that students of Mexican descent often possess "two social selves": The first has the English-speaking identity that he or she possesses within the mainstream American culture; the second is the Spanish-speaking Mexican identity in which he or she feels most comfortable (p. 39). Ultimately, for those students who have not ascribed fully to the United States school context, their "identity as a Mexican is positioned higher than his (or her) identity as an American" (Kim, Newhill, & Lopez, 2013, p.

39). Hence, if the participants did not feel that is was necessary to appease their teachers or classmates, to acculturate, such instances (interpersonal conflict related to language) may not have been considered noteworthy by them as they talked about their high school experiences.

Also, because high school completers were generally enrolled in advanced content coursework, it is also possible that high school completers were placed in settings that were predominantly filled with English speakers. Brown and Chu (2012) asserted that minorities often become invisible with less recognition or appreciation for diversity. This premise, invisibility, was evidenced in observations conducted at the adult education center. While the researcher observed a class conducted entirely in Spanish at the Hispanic advocacy center, with participants speaking to another and to the teacher in Spanish, the use of Spanish was not evidenced at the adult education center. Classes were a mix of White and Hispanic students, but no behaviors were evidenced that might have distinguished Hispanics from other ethnicities.

This ideology was also seemingly upheld by Yesenia, Bonita, and Angela who shared during their individual interviews they had never noticed the number of fellow Hispanic classmates in their Southeastern University college class until the researcher identified individuals to potentially participate in focus group discussions. In other words, even though a third of their college class was Hispanic, the ethnic make-up of that class was not readily noticed by the Hispanic participants themselves. The use of Spanish would readily draw attention, perhaps for the first time, to such diversity.

Language and self-talk. A second language subtheme emerged and related to language of thought. Language of thought refers to the internal voice individuals access during metacognitive processes. Such is often referred to as a mental code or frame and primarily

relates to the cultural models of which the individual most closely associates (Lopez & Morant, 2013; Luna, Ringberg, & Peracchio, 2008; Machery, 2005).

During initial conversations, it was noted that Barbara, Miguel, Emilio, and Daniel commonly began their statements in Spanish and quickly transitioned back to English. In some instances, the mix of languages was subtle: the use of the words "este" and "pero" for example. During a follow-up conversation, Daniel provided the simplest explanation: "I forgot to speak English," and noted that he failed to switch the language of his internal thoughts as he described his experiences. Hence, as other participants and he began articulating their experiences, they commonly did so in harmony with their language of thought. As Barbara discussed the dynamics of her family and the role that her parents played in her education, the researcher asked, "Which is more important, education or family?" She responded, "La familia."

Hence, as interviews and focus groups continued during the research process, the researcher then began asking participants to describe their internal, metacognitive language. While research is extremely limited regarding assessing the language of one's self-talk, the researcher believed participants' description of their inner metacognition may be indicative of their primary language of self-talk. Table 3 shows the responses by participants.

Table 3

Language of Thought

Pseudonym	Education Level	Language of Thought	Bilingual?
Kim	Non-completer of high school	Spanish	Yes
Pablo	Non-completer of high school	Mixed – Mostly Spanish	Yes
Steven	Non-completer of high school	English	No
Joel	Non-completer of high school	Spanish	Yes
Rebecca	Non-completer of high school	Mixed – Mostly Spanish	Yes
Brenda	Non-completer of high school	Mixed – Mostly Spanish	Yes
Katarina	Non-completer of high school	Spanish	Yes
Miguel	Non-completer of high school	Spanish	Yes
Barbara	Non-completer of high school	Spanish	Yes
Daniel	Non-completer of high school	Spanish	Yes
Emilio	Non-completer of high school	Spanish	Yes

Meredith	High school Completer	English	Yes
Leo	High school Completer	English	Yes
Bonita	High school Completer	Mixed – Mostly English	Yes
Marco	High school Completer	English	Yes
Mariela	High school Completer	English	Yes
Christian	High school Completer	English	Yes
Belinda	High school Completer	Spanish	Yes
Eduardo	High school Completer	English	Yes
Elaina	High school Completer	English	Yes
Angela	High school Completer	English	Yes
Yesenia	High school Completer	Mixed – Mostly Spanish	Yes

In most instances, non-high school completers answered, "Spanish" or "Mostly Spanish." Most high school completers answered "English" (see Table 3). While there are multiple theories that could potentially provide insights into this subtheme, Quintana and Nichols (2016) asserted,

> One of the most significant signs of acculturation is language. When it comes to acculturation among Hispanics, language preference falls in four categories: Spanish only (isolated), predominantly Spanish (low acculturated), predominantly English (high acculturated), and English only (assimilated) (p. 226).

Thus, the extent to which participants are willing to learn and actively apply the language of mainstream American school cultures may be indicative of familial motivations, backgrounds, and values that ultimately frame Hispanics' perceptions of success, as well as the role that they feel education should play in fostering it. From a social cognitive perspective, a failure to learn the predominant language, to demonstrate behaviors considered acceptable by the larger system, may lead to conflict (Bandura, 1991).

Hence, language is a significant theme in this study because it impacted the manner in which the participants experienced school settings. Language often served as a source of conflict among participants, who were sometimes marginalized for speaking Spanish. Participants often described feelings of isolation because they were unable to communicate with teachers and

peers. Moreover, the use of language may be indicative of participants' levels of acculturation in United States school contexts (Lopez & Morant, 2013; Quintana & Nichols, 2016). Quintana and Nichols (2016) maintain that the extent to which individuals become a part of a culture is indicated by their behaviors within that culture; such behaviors include their use of language.

Research Question

The guiding research question was integral to this study: "How do the perceptions of success among male and female Hispanic high school completers/non-completers ages 18-29 impact their educational pursuits?" The researcher posed several questions to participants during interviews and focus groups to understand their perspectives: a. In your own words, define success. b. To be successful, is it more important for you to have a family or education? c. Describe a person whom you think is successful and tell what makes him/her successful. d. To be successful, do you think it is more important to have a family or a career?

While Hill and Torres (2010) emphasized upward mobility in achieving success, with emphasis on employment and education, participants in this study underscored the ability to provide care for family as a dimension of success. Being able to support their mothers, particularly, served as a hallmark of success:

- Meredith stated, "I need to think about my future. My mom's future. My family, but to support my mom. . . .I want to give her her house. . . .my mom – she - she just deserves it."
- Marco shared, "I'm a big sports fan and you always hear about athletes buying houses for their mom. . . and I don't necessarily want to be able to do that. But I at least want to say, 'here mom. Here's half my paycheck. Go do - go do what you want to do with that.'"
- Miguel asserted, "I'll be happy. I'll be working, . . . working to help my mom."

Even among participants whose relationships with their parents were strained, they still expressed a desire to care for their parents. Katarina dabbed tears from her eyes as she described the lack of involvement of her parents in her life. Similarly, Brenda shared that her parents often seem indifferent to her. Yet, both Katarina and Brenda also shared that caring for their parents financially is a personal goal for them.

Participants further defined success through altruistic desires that have extended, perhaps, from their family systems to broader communities (Martinez, 2013). Many hope to enter into helping professions in the future, and others placed emphases on obtaining education for community benefits. Participants stated that their future success will be rooted in such efforts as spreading the gospel, supporting refugee children in Syria, teaching in impoverished communities of Peru, or serving as a nurse or in some other helping profession.

When describing a person whom they considered successful, most referenced individuals who not only have financial stability, but also who have successfully cared for their family. Yesenia referenced her parents who made sacrifices to support familial goals. Miguel described his mother who has supported her family while achieving distinction at her job. Kim described her father who has experienced career success while providing for his family:

> "He's got his own company. He's got his life solved. He's got his house. He makes good money. He takes care of his kids. . . . he has a good life. Like my brothers and sisters, my youngest brother is like six years old, and he's going to do right."

Finally, when describing success, most participants placed emphasis on family when asked, "Do you think it is more important to have a family or a career?" In fact, all non-high school completers answered "family" (see Table 4).

Subquestion 1

In addition to giving credence to the manner in which participants defined success, the researcher also posed related subquestions. The first referenced supports and/or resources: "What resources do male and female Hispanic high school completers/non-completers ages 18-29 perceive to be necessary to achieve success?" Participants stressed three distinctive perspectives.

Table 4

Importance – Education or Family

Pseudonym	Education Level	Education or Family?
Kim	Non-completer of high school	Family
Pablo	Non-completer of high school	Family
Steven	Non-completer of high school	Family
Joel	Non-completer of high school	Family
Rebecca	Non-completer of high school	Family
Brenda	Non-completer of high school	Family
Katarina	Non-completer of high school	Family
Miguel	Non-completer of high school	Both
Barbara	Non-completer of high school	Family
Daniel	Non-completer of high school	Family
Emilio	Non-completer of high school	Family
Meredith	High school Completer	Family
Leo	High school Completer	Family
Bonita	High school Completer	Family
Marco	High school Completer	Education
Mariela	High school Completer	Education
Christian	High school Completer	Education

Belinda	High school Completer	Both
Eduardo	High school Completer	Both
Elaina	High school Completer	Family
Angela	High school Completer	Family
Yesenia	High school Completer	Family

High school completers and non-completers alike emphasized the role of language supports. Several remembered feeling isolated without such supports. Angela shared that she felt safe while she was in sheltered language classes. Meredith and Angela advocated pairing non-English speakers with an English-speaking mentor. Barbara concluded, "My sister, once she was able to understand English, her grades went up. . . so, the teacher makes a difference."

Participants also highlighted the need for academic supports. Many shared that parents of Hispanic students are often unable help to their children with school-work because of language barriers. Thus, they proposed after-school programs to assist Hispanic students as they complete assignments, projects, and study for tests. Mariela emphasized the need for Hispanic teachers who might provide academic support:

> "I also want like some Hispanic teacher, counselor somewhere, because. . . I've never had a Hispanic teacher I can relate to or just like, someone to talk to, someone that I can go to who would know where I am coming from and know my background and stuff. That would just make me relax a little more and probably be more likely to go out and get help."

Participants likewise stressed the need for futures-based guidance. High school completers discussed the need for counselors to lend help to Hispanic students in filling out

college and scholarship applications. Bonita shared that she missed a year of college because she lacked guidance: "I could've been here last year, but I didn't know." Marco asserted,

> "At my school, McDonald's had more advertisement for Hispanics, you know, and that's not how it should be. You should really know what's out there for you to grab or not. If you don't want to, that's your choice as well, but for me, I really didn't have that big of an opportunity. . . .I probably would've looked a little bit more for it if I didn't have to do it all myself, because that's what you hope for in a teacher."

Pablo stated Hispanics need supportive relationships in general with school personnel: "Just be more interactive. You know, get to know them. Like – talk to them."

Subquestion 2

Additionally, the researcher posed a second subquestion: What do male and female Hispanic high school completers/non-completers ages 18-29 perceive to be obstacles that hinder achieving success? This subquestion was worded during focus groups and interviews as, "Describe the things that have gotten in the way of success for you."

Participants frequently referenced associating with "the wrong crowd" as they shared their experiences. Kim talked about what she called "over-hype," a new world with distractors, drugs and alcohol, that eventually got in the way of her graduating. Joel, Pablo, and Brenda likewise discussed associating with friends who drank and did drugs. Katarina recalled hanging out with "ganger-type girls" who did not value education: "I was hanging out with the wrong people in high school. I wanted to be like them, you know, gangster-type girls, which I regret so much." Steven shared that it was his brother who was a bad influence, whose acquaintances lured him into selling drugs on the streets.

Non-high school participants also overwhelmingly identified the allure of jobs as distractions. Joel introduced this notion explaining that jobs are often seen as, "shortcuts to the American Dream." He was enticed to work after seeing his older brother purchase a new truck:

> "I thought making money at that time was more important than being in school, you know? I thought that getting a truck, getting material stuff was more important. . . . I look back now, and I have a pretty stable job. But I don't think it's the way it's supposed to be. I have three kids, and I don't want them to do the same thing. I mean, I don't want them to drop out just to make money."

Katarina began working at young age, and when she had to make a choice, she chose her job:

> "I started working for $7.25 an hour. And I thought my check was big because I had never work before. And I was like, 'Oh My Gosh! – this is all for me? $200.00!' I was like 14 years old. . . .I used to work from 5:00 to midnight. . . . and so, it was so hard, and by that time, the company at which I was working, they gave me two options. They were like, either you start working fulltime, or you just drop off. So, I decided to drop-out of school and start working fulltime on second shift."

Steven, similarly, was distracted by the charm of making money as he reflected upon his younger days. He shared, "I was seeing a lot of money around me, so I was like, . . .What else do I need?" While it is interesting to note that non-high school completers were often distracted by jobs, high school completers often did not work at all, or if they worked, they often worked in a limited capacity.

Subquestion 3

A third and final subquestion was posed: "How do male and female Hispanic high school completers/non-completers ages 18-29 describe the cultural and familial backgrounds that impact

their perceptions of success?" Discussions centered on parents and extended family members. Non-high school completers were asked to speculate how parents and extended family might react if they chose to pursue higher education; high school completers were asked to speculate how parents and extended family might react if they discontinued their education.

The importance of family emerged repeatedly as both high school completers and non-completers articulated their school experiences and ideologies of success. Participants overwhelmingly demonstrated an unwavering devotion to their family as they discussed past experiences and future plans. The goals of the family in many instances determined whether or not participants in this study completed high school and/or pursued college.

Barbara shared that her family currently questions her desire to complete her GED, asserting, "At your age? Why do you want to do that?" Daniel stated that if he were to pursue higher education, his family "would want to know why." Brenda noted that her parents seem indifferent, and Katarina recalled, "When I drop out of high school, nobody push me, nobody told me you have to go."

High school completers, however, noted that their parents would be disappointed and devastated if they discontinued their studies. Mariela recalled wanting to drop out of school, but her mother and aunt pushed her to continue. High school completers also commonly identified their parents as their biggest motivation for completing their studies. Meredith referred to her mother as her biggest supporter.

Regarding extended family (aunts, uncles, and grandparents), high school completers shared that extended family was either not supportive or that they were indifferent to their educational goals. Angela's extended family has ridiculed her for attending college:

> "Sometimes, they make fun of us. Like they'll make little side comments or they will say oh, they don't have time for anything. We shouldn't even invite them. They won't even go, and stuff like that. And sometimes I feel like it's hurtful."

Bonita stated her extended family members "don't like seeing other people doing better than them." Others, like Eduardo and Marco, felt that extended family would be indifferent to their goals. Regarding his extended family, Marco shared,

> "If were to ask them, they would probably be like, well that's good for you, but down there is like a completely different lifestyle than up here. Down there, there's really no college. It's more working on a farm or trying to sustain life as it is. You know, it's like, live for today, and if tomorrow comes, tomorrow comes. So, I need to do this for me as well as for my parents."

Finally, participants commonly expressed an allegiance to familial goals. Education was upheld as a worthy goal if the entire family deemed it as worthy. Leo, for instance, shared his completion of college was an extension of a familial goal:

> "I don't know about you, but as far as I go, before I knew what it meant to go to college, I had it like spoken about. And I guess seeing the way my mom, like, spoke about seeing me graduate, seeing me attend college, becoming something important — the way she spoke about it, it made me want to accomplish that."

Likewise, participants left school if their families articulated goals with emphasis elsewhere. Daniel dropped out of high school at 17 and shared that education was never part of the plan for his family when they moved to the United States. Barbara and Katarina relinquished their dreams for the sake of family and dropped out of school to appease and/or support their parents. Joel stated his family's goal was to earn money, not "being in school. . .wasting time."

Research Questions: Summary

The guiding research question and three related subquestions were articulated to provide emphasis regarding the experiences and perceptions of Hispanics within public school contexts, and the supports, obstacles, and cultural constructs that have impacted those experiences. Bruner (2004), asserted unique cultures may be understood as they describe their "course of life" (p. 694). Hence, using the words of the participants, the researcher sought to answer the guiding research question and subquestions to not only understand their diverse perspectives and the cultural and familial backgrounds that have shaped them, but furthermore, to empower them.

Summary

This inquiry considered the perspectives of 22 Hispanic participants between the ages of 18 and 29. Data was analyzed using both axial coding techniques and in vivo coding, and the analysis of data initially revealed 17 potential subthemes that were central to the study: Acculturation, personal identity, perceptions of education, family, goals, language use, metacognitive language, conflict, motivation, parents, prejudice, school interactions, success, supports for families, supports for language, work, and altruism. Through classification, those 17 themes were narrowed to two primary themes: Familismo and language.

The influence of family was pervasive among the participants, a mitigating factor behind decisions to either continue or discontinue high school. For those participants who did not complete high school, they frequently cited collective goals of family as a primary reason, noting their family came to the United States for the purpose of working, and education was not ultimately part of their plan. For those who graduated high school, they, too, demonstrated allegiance to family goals, but their choice of completing high school and attending college was typically an extension of their parents' desires, as well. Further, because the participants came

from strong families who typically placed emphasis on commitment to one another, many of them showed interest in pursuing careers that served as an outgrowth of their family systems, with altruistic motives and careers focused on helping others.

Language emerged among participants as an indicator of their cultural identity. Language is generally hailed as a gauge for acculturation, and as such, this construct might be indicative of the extent to which the participants in the study have experienced acculturation in United States school contexts (Kim, Newhill, & Lopez, 2013). High school completers frequently recalled interpersonal conflict with school staff and students simply because they chose to speak in Spanish rather than English, and this conflict commonly arose in situations in which high school participants were in school settings where diversity was not readily embraced. Further, high school completers typically identified their internal dialogue (voice of thought) as occurring mostly in English while non-completers described it as occurring in Spanish. This, too, may be indicative of their levels of acculturation.

The construct, familismo, was integral to participants as they defined success. As participants shared their experiences, familismo most often emerged as a more than devotion to loved ones; moreover, it served as their frame of reference as they embarked upon academic and career pathways. Success was generally rooted in their ability to provide care for parents, mothers especially. Non-completers of high school commonly envisioned this as an immediate goal, while completers often perceived it as something that should occur in the future.

Ultimately, this study sought to understand the manner in which Hispanic participants, ages 18-29, define success, and extent to which this definition has impacted their experiences and pursuits for higher education. Regardless of whether the participants were non-graduates of high school or high school graduates, success for them was ultimately framed around their

families. Education for each of the 22 participants bore relevance to them to the extent that it was upheld as a noteworthy goal by their families, their parents especially.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

This qualitative phenomenological study seeks to understand the perceptions of Hispanic learners' views of success and the manner in which these perceptions have influenced their past academic and vocational efforts. The underlying problem is that Hispanics are the fastest growing ethnic subgroup in United States schools, but despite initiatives to promote educational parity, their achievement has been lagging, especially across Southeastern districts (Frey, Mandlawitz, & Alvarez, 2012; Groen, 2012; Rush & Scherff, 2012; Wortham et al., 2013). Further, while districts and states have enacted large-scale education initiatives to promote academic achievement of Hispanic learners, the problem lies in the notion that educators know little about the extent to which Hispanics value education as a condition for success.

The following question guides this inquiry: "How do the perceptions of success among male and female Hispanic high school completers/non-completers ages 18-29 impact their educational pursuits?" Understanding the extent to which Hispanics perceive education as requisite for success is central to this inquiry. Additionally, three related subquestions were developed to elicit an understanding of the types of obstacles that often impede Hispanic student success as well as the types of supports needed by Hispanics.

Data gathering techniques included interviews, focus groups, and observations to examine Hispanic participants' experiences in school, along with the familial and cultural constructs that have shaped their past educative efforts. This chapter provides an overview of the findings with implications outlined within relevant literature and theoretical frameworks. Empirical and theoretical research are also highlighted, along with delimitations, limitations, and recommendations for future studies.

Summary of Findings

The researcher strove to understand the mindsets of participants by having them define the notion of success in their own words while also discussing the importance of education and family. Additionally, the researcher observed non-completers of high school in an academic adult learning setting. Field-notes and transcribed data ultimately led to portraits for the 22 Hispanic participants. Table 5 provides comparisons of key data.

Table 5

Data Related to Theme Development

	High School Completers	**Non-Completers of High School**
Family came to U.S. primarily for work (including child/children):	9%	91%
Family came to U.S. primarily for (child/children's) education	91%	9%
Long-range plans include providing for parents	100%	82%
Began working while in high school.	18%	73%
Reported conflict for speaking Spanish in school	64%	9%
Metacognitive language of thought - English (or mostly English)	91%	9%
Metacognitive language of thought - Spanish (or mostly Spanish)	18%	82%

As Hill and Torres (2010) discussed the role of education in reference to success, they emphasized "upward mobility," a notion that ultimately expressed career opportunities afforded from higher education (p. 95). However, participants in this inquiry placed a three-tiered emphasis on their families when defining success. This emphasis included an allegiance to long-term parental care, familial goals, and communities.

Allegiance to Parental Care

Primarily, they equated success with the ability to care for parents financially. When participants articulated their long-range plans, most always, their primary goal included the ability to provide financial support to their parents, with the need to care for mothers, particularly, serving as a hallmark of success. Some stated they would like to purchase their mothers a home, while others stated they would like to help their mothers to discontinue working. High school completers described caring for their parents financially as a long-term goal, something that they are not currently doing, but would like to do in the future. Many non-completers of high school expressed this as an immediate need, to the extent that they previously discontinued high school to pursue it.

Allegiance to Familial Goals

Participants further presented perceptions of success through allegiance to collective familial goals; they upheld education as noteworthy only if their extended family embraced it as such. First generation participants frequently described their motives for coming to the United States as a joint, family decision and expressly stated, in some instances, their family came to the United States to work and not to seek education. Completers of high school shared their parents would be disappointed if they discontinued their college studies and described their college attendance as an extension of familial goals. Non-completers of high school affirmed parents and/or extended family members would question them if they decided to pursue curricular studies, as such would fall outside the realm of familial plans.

Allegiance to Communities

Both non-completers of high school and high school completers also defined success through desires to support their communities. Altruism was an important subtheme that emerged as an outgrowth, perhaps, of participants' collective familial commitment. One participant cited a desire to spread the gospel, for example, as a motive for completing his GED, while another stated she was seeking GED assistance because she would like to become a better person. Most high school completers in this inquiry expressed interests in helping professions like education or the medical industry.

The guiding research question for this inquiry, which sought to highlight the manner in which Hispanic participants define success, led to the establishment of a primary theme, familismo. While a devotion to one's family certainly involves a commitment to care for its members among most cultures, the notion of familismo is much more salient in Hispanic cultures than a mere allegiance to family (Martinez, 2013; Quintana & Nichols, 2016). Familismo has served as a way of life for Hispanic participants in this inquiry and has provided a foundation from which their perceptions of success have been both articulated and posited. In other words, success is entrenched within each participant's unique familial perspectives, collective goals, long-range plans, and aspirations.

In addition to the guiding research question, the researcher also posed three related subquestions. The first asked, "What resources do male and female Hispanic high school completers/non-completers ages 18-29 perceive to be necessary to achieve success?" This question served as a discussion point during focus groups and interviews.

Language supports were highly emphasized. Participants recalled feeling isolated due to their lack of English proficiency in school and recalled feeling safe only when they were in

English as a Second Language ("ESOL") classes. Thus, they underscored the importance of quality ESOL teachers and programming, as well as transitional supports for students who enter public schools for the first time. Others remembered having language mentors, bilingual classmates who supported English language development and hailed this as a highly effective language acquisition strategy. Some shared personal experiences of parents who were unable to provide academic support at home because of language barriers and stressed the need for after-school programs to provide extra support.

Participants recalled navigating middle and high school without knowledge of elective coursework, high school completion plans, and college preparatory programs. High school completers recounted minimal guidance as they made post-secondary decisions and desired school personnel to assist them with college and scholarship applications. Non-completers recalled the need for similar guidance, the need for intervention in high school to curtail attrition. The term "information" was used by participants more frequently than any other term as they verbalized the need for school supports.

Along with understanding needed resources, the researcher desired to highlight potential barriers that might impede Hispanics' successes. The second subquestion asked, "What do male and female Hispanic high school completers/non-completers ages 18-29 perceive to be obstacles that hinder achieving success?" Discussions centered on two areas.

Non-completers of high school openly discussed associating with individuals whom they described as the wrong crowd while in high school, peers who did not demonstrate value in education. They sometimes forged friendships with such individuals to avoid feelings of isolation that resulted from a lack of English proficiency. In some instances, participants

recalled associating with gang members or classmates who introduced them to drugs and/or alcohol. Such friendships commonly derailed their high school plans.

Participants also identified employment a school distractor. To provide financially for their parents, several participants shared they began working in factories while in high school and eventually chose their jobs over education. Non-completers described their initial perceptions of such jobs as "shortcuts to the American Dream," explaining they came to the United States for the purpose of working and saving money, and they envisioned jobs, even the lower paying ones, as a tool for quickly achieving those dreams. Others shared jobs are a necessity because first-generation Hispanics may work to send money to relatives living abroad. Hence, participants cited the allure of jobs as the most prevalent reason Hispanics discontinue high school studies.

The third and final subquestion sought to understand the interplay between family, culture, and participants' viewpoints of education. This question asked, "How do male and female Hispanic high school completers/non-completers ages 18-29 describe the cultural and familial backgrounds that impact their perceptions of success?" Participants underscored two themes.

Once again, participants articulated the centrality of familismo. Most often, the desire to attend college was an outgrowth of a familial desire, and similarly, family plans negated participants' desires to pursue high school studies. Both high school completers and non-completers referenced their goals as collective, shared by parents, siblings, and grandparents. Further, high school completers reported conflict with extended family when pursuing college studies when family members did not equally embrace college studies as important.

Language emerged as a cultural construct and a second, primary theme for this inquiry. Most all high school completers spoke of episodes of conflict with fellow classmates for speaking Spanish rather than English in school. While non-completers also spoke Spanish in school, they did not share examples of conflict. The tendency to appease predominant cultures, to acculturate, seemingly produced conflict primarily for participants pursuing high school graduation and college studies.

Furthermore, during initial interviews, the researcher found non-completers of high school often alternated between English and Spanish as they elaborated on their former high school experiences. Follow-up conversations revealed Spanish served as an extension of their internal thoughts, and speaking in Spanish occurred simply because participants began to relax during the course of discussions and forgot to speak in English. Hence, the researcher began asking participants to describe their internal language of thought during subsequent discussions. This led to an important subtheme: Non-high school completers commonly reported Spanish metacognitive self-talk (or mostly Spanish) while high school completers reported English (or mostly English) self-talk.

This subtheme, the language of thought, is compelling because those students who experienced success in United States schools described metacognitive processes consistent with other United States (English-speaking) students; those who did not graduate high school generally experienced metacognitive processes indicative of their own (non-English speaking) ethnicities. When this notion is considered in light of social conflict, one might conclude high school completers internally subscribed to the internal, acculturative practices of predominant, mainstream school cultures. Moreover, one might conclude high school completers demonstrated higher levels of acculturation in general during their high school experiences (Kim,

Newhill, & Lopez, 2013; Lopez & Morant, 2013; Luna, Ringberg, & Peracchio, 2008; Machery, 2005).

Discussion

This qualitative phenomenological inquiry strove to underscore Hispanic participants' views on education and the extent to which they perceive high school completion as important in obtaining success. This study investigated familial, social, and cultural backgrounds of participants, and the extent to which these constructs have determined their completion of secondary/postsecondary studies. Through interviews, focus groups, and observations, the researcher was able to consider the lived experiences of Hispanic participants, ages 18-29. The findings have strong ties to both theoretical and empirical studies.

Theoretical Literature

The findings of this inquiry have important implications within its theoretical frameworks. Rotter's (1954) social learning theory and Bandura's (2002) social cognitive theory both stress the importance of relationships, and Vygotsky (1978) maintained the home serves as a foundation from which individuals make sense of their world. Interactions within the home provide a reference point for individuals as they relate to others in new social contexts, and the process of socialization is rooted deeply in culture, familial values, traditions, and communal expectations (Bandura, 2002; Rotter, 1954; Vygotsky, 1978). The ease at which individuals transition into new settings depends upon how well their prior experiences mesh with the new (Bandura, 2002; Rotter, 1954).

The salient nature of Hispanic families particularly parallels ecological systems purported by Bronfenbrenner (1974). The manner in which participants defined success through familismo gives origin to social behaviors extending outward from the family to schools and other levels of

social strata (Woolley, 2009). Because social development is an interrelated process, the values established within Hispanic families (microsystems) greatly determine similar behaviors for school settings (mesosystems) (Bronfenbrenner, 1974). Bronfenbrenner (1978) asserted that individuals are essentially defined through cognitive, behavioral, and environmental stimuli, but the individual who emerges is ultimately embedded in and reflective of his background, the family of origin.

Empirical Literature

Themes emphasized in this study uphold the potency of familismo as a pervasive way of life that gives way to ambitions among Hispanics (Woolley, 2009). Full and Coll (2010) stressed "Learning is motivated in part by the child's desire to feel competent in particular family or organizational settings, normatively structured around set social roles, tacitly learning what is required to become an efficacious member" (p. 563). Hence, acculturation is not an individualized construct, and Hispanics will demonstrate acculturation in varying degrees (Leidy, Guerra, & Toro, 2012; Woolley, 2009). Yet, as they do so, their social behaviors will be empowered primarily through family systems: the family system will determine to what extent, how, and when Hispanic students acculturate (Martinez, 2013; Quintana & Nichols, 2016).

Research underscores the importance of social interactions of Hispanic youth to support not only acculturation, but also, their acquisition of the English language (Kim, Newhill, & Lopez, 2013; Leidy, Guerra, & Toro, 2012; Smith-Morris et al., 2012). A lack of acculturation, or behaviors indicative of non-acculturation like speaking Spanish rather than English, produced conflict for those participants in this study who were placed in learning environments with White students, and who aspired to graduate high school and attend college.

The stories of the 22 participants echo the assertions of Abdi (2011) who contended that language is a social construct and reflective of "social positionings" (p. 178). Participant profiles are also congruent with the findings of Kim, Newhill, and Lopez (2013) who similarly asserted Hispanic students maintain two identities: one that is reflective of their culture, and one that fits their current circumstances. For Hispanic high school students to demonstrate behaviors (for example, the use of language) socially that are reflective of their heritage indicates they position their cultural identity higher than their identity as an American student (Abdi, 2011; Kim, Newhill, & Lopez, 2013).

The premises of this research vary from that of extant literature, however, in two ways. First, to address parity in the classrooms, research primarily promotes curricular strategies tailored to meet the linguistic needs of Hispanic students with teaching practices embedded in culturally relevant instruction (Abdi, 2011; Fuller & Coll, 2010; Good, Masewicz, & Vogel, 2010; Orosco & O'Connor, 2014). Emphases are also placed on pedagogical practices to merge academic skills with effective instructional methods for English Language Learners (Montelongo et al., 2011; Rahn et al., 2015). Other emphases include reading instruction and developing literacy schema (Gillam, 2015; Leacox & Jackson, 2014). Undoubtedly, curricular approaches are paramount to the successes of Hispanics.

Yet, the overarching perspective of family is, perhaps, the greatest determinant of Hispanic students' success in schools, and the family should be intricately involved in educational planning before instruction even occurs (Martinez, 2013; Quintana & Nichols, 2016). Educational efforts poised in the absence of the familismo may be short-lived, and efforts to bolster academic achievement of Hispanic populations will have minimal results if cast in the absence of familial goals. To understand the goals of individual Hispanic learners, educators

should first apprehend the collective goals of their families (Calzada, Tamis-LeMonda, & Yoshihawa, 2012).

Further, this inquiry subtly diverges from research regarding notions of acculturation and Hispanic learners. While current literature suggests a lack of acculturation for Hispanics is causal, that it may lead to high school attrition, (Abdi, 2011; Fuller & Coll, 2010; Kim, Newhill, & Lopez, 2013; Quintana & Nichols, 2016), this researcher would argue acculturation, particularly the adoption of English over Spanish, is reflective and indicative of students' familial and educational viewpoints. In this light, if a Hispanic family does not uphold education as a necessity for success, students from that family system may not demonstrate acculturation, as evidenced through their use of preferred language. In other words, a lack of acculturation may be indicative of a (familial) decision to not graduate.

Implications

Rotter (1954) and Bandura (2001) both maintained that individuals pass through a myriad of social interchanges that shape their sense of self. Vygotsky (1978) asserted it is through interactive environments that individuals construct knowledge. Bronfenbrenner (1974) similarly affirmed societal members emerge from a series of embedded, overlapping subsystems that work together to produce identity. Notably, the family system is the core from which individuals emerge and serves as the commonality for all four theories (Bandura, 2001; Brofenbrenner, 1974; Rotter, 1954; Vygotsky, 1978).

Social theoretical frameworks are particularly compelling for Hispanic populations when considering the power of familismo. The extended family is highly revered in Hispanic communities, and Hispanic youth learn to place primacy on the care of loved ones as a long-range goal (Fuller & Coll, 2010; Leidy, Guerra, & Toro, 2012). Acculturation is a multifaceted

construct with its roots in family systems; the extent to which individuals acculturate is dependent upon the family from which they emerge (Martinez, 2013; Woolley, 2009). Thus, when considering Hispanics and the manner in which they hail education as important for their future successes, one would be hard-pressed to identify a mitigating factor in empirical data more prominent than familismo (Leidy, Guerra, & Toro, 2012; Martinez, 2013; Quintana & Nichols, 2016; Woolley, 2009).

Extant literature emphasizes the challenges of Hispanics who must carefully navigate societal settings that may contrast against their familial backgrounds (Fuller & Coll, 2010; Perez, Araujo-Dawson, & Suárez-Orozco, 2011; South, Crowder, & Chavez, 2005; Wessels & Trainin, 2014). It is within these settings that Hispanic students must learn social behaviors, and exchanges in school either strengthen or diminish their social behaviors (Berrios-Allison, 2011; Wheeler, 2014). The Hispanic student ultimately emerges as a distinctive individual who mirrors not only the context in which he or she now participates, but also, the family system from which he or she has come (Rodriguez & Oseguera, 2015). It is here that theoretical frameworks merge with empirical frameworks, for it is within the family system that Hispanics not only shape their worldview, but moreover, frame their hopes, dreams, and ambitions.

Implications: School Administrators

School administrators should understand family systems from which Hispanic students emerge. Efforts at the school level should involve the entire family in long-range education plans. Students in this inquiry overwhelmingly expressed a need for information to navigate American schools. In this way, completion of high school will result from buy-in from the family, as graduation becomes a shared familial goal. Long-range plans for students, including

high school graduation, should not compete against familial goals; rather, schools should work to empower Hispanic families with information so they may make informed decisions.

Further, administrators should give special efforts to forming relationships with Hispanic students. Hispanic participants reported feeling isolated when entering public schools for the first time, craving guidance from school leaders. To use the words of Pablo, one of the (non-completer) participants, administrators should, "Just be more interactive. . . . get to know them. . . . talk to them."

Implications: School Counselors

School counselors should educate parents and students about the various pitfalls that impede success. While many Hispanic youth often work to support familial needs, working while in high school, especially fulltime, is a distractor of graduation. Similarly, since non-completers in this study emphasized the downfalls of associating with friends who introduced them to gang activity, drugs, and/or alcohol, counselors should work with students and parents to warn against such dangers.

Hispanic students, especially, need graduation plans with clear expectations regarding course completion and college preparatory programs. They also need deliberate guidance early in their high school experience to curtail attrition. Counselors should offer workshops in which they provide one-on-one support for Hispanics in completing college and scholarship applications.

Implications: Teachers

Understanding the familial backgrounds of Hispanic students who enter United States classrooms will be paramount in promoting their successes in classrooms. Teachers of Hispanics should make efforts to bridge school and home by providing parents with opportunities to learn

about curriculum, student expectations, and learning environments. Embracing familial goals and framing academic achievement within those goals will be vital for Hispanic students.

Students who are newcomers to United States schools need extensive supports to navigate school settings. Educators might pair non-speakers of English with bilingual language mentors, classmates who encourage English acquisition. Afterschool supports for Hispanic students as they complete homework, projects, and/or study for tests are also important. Language use should be viewed as an indicator of acculturation among Hispanic students, and great efforts must be taken within classrooms to foster appreciation and tolerance for diversity. Finally, educators should facilitate open communication with the family/parents of Hispanic students to ensure buy-in from all stakeholders. Mariela, a (high school completer) participant concluded, "I also want like some Hispanic teacher, counselor somewhere . . . someone to talk to, someone that I can go to who would know where I am coming from and know my background. . ."

Delimitations and Limitations

The researcher implemented several delimitations to guide the scope of the inquiry. The study included Hispanics between the ages of 18 and 29 years of age. This age group represents determinative years for Hispanic learners, the point at which many make decisions regarding academia, family, and/or careers (Woolley, 2009). Participants attended school in the United States for at least five years and included both high school completers and non- completers seeking occupational/futures-based guidance and/or a college degree. Finally, participants were bilingual, speaking both English and Spanish.

Husserl (1991) stressed the significance of time on the essence of phenomenology; "the consciousness of the now . . . is continuously transmuted into a consciousness of the past while

simultaneously an ever new consciousness of the now is built up" (p. 64). Therefore, the inclusion of Hispanics who attended school in the United States for five years was an important delimitation because it precluded those whose attrition possibly relates to other factors outside the scope of this research. This delimitation promotes the inclusion of individuals who can freely recall their memories specifically related to the phenomenon.

Other delimitations were equally important. The inclusion of high school completers was an important delimitation because the participants can discuss both obstacles and the supports needed for diverse learners to complete secondary studies. Likewise, the inclusion of non-completers was essential in exploring the dynamic perspectives of Hispanics who did not complete secondary studies. Finally, the choice to include bilingual participants (who speak both English and Spanish) supported the analysis of dialogue for both verbal and nonverbal meanings.

There were several limitations inherent in the study. The researcher conducted the investigation in an Atlanta area, and the participants may be dissimilar to Hispanics living in other regions of the United States. Metropolitan areas near Atlanta attract large numbers of Hispanics to work in factories, and this may appeal to those whose primary motives are work rather than education.

In addition, because the researcher is a White male, a cultural dichotomy was present. Even though the researcher took great effort to ensure interview and focus group questions, for instance, were appropriate for Hispanic participants, it is not possible to account for all cultural differences like word choices or para-verbal communication.

Finally, although bilingual participants were included in the study, language differences may have diminished the free-flow of ideas. Participants presented a wide-range of English

proficiency, and a lack of English knowledge may have precluded their sharing of key memories and/or perceptions.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future phenomenological studies should examine the extent to which language serves as an indicator of acculturation for Hispanic students, not as a causal construct, but as a reflective one. In this way, studies should determine whether Spanish-speaking students fail to acculturate because they do not develop English proficiency, or if (conversely) students do not develop English proficiency because they do not intend to acculturate. This concept is important because language may serve as indicator of Hispanic families' long-range education plans and may allow educators to intervene early with Hispanic students to merge familial goals with high school graduation plans.

In addition, case studies should to examine the impact of familismo on individual Hispanic students' high school graduation rates. Case studies should examine distinctive families in light of their long-range plans and the extent to which familial plans affect high school completion. Case studies would allow researchers to assess familismo individually through participants' stories, examining their unique commitment to parents, familial goals, and communities, and the way in these commitments have influenced their completion of high school.

Summary

Hispanic populations are the fastest growing ethnic subgroup in United States, and extant literature has described Hispanic students' achievement as lagging, particularly in many Southeastern school districts (Artiles, 2011; Casellas & Ibarra, 2012; Elfers & Stritikus, 2014; Hayes et al., 2015; Lesaux & Rangel, 2013; Pew Hispanic Center, 2009; Zoda, Slate, & Combs,

2011). Further, schools and districts across the nation commonly place prominence on standardized achievement tests, high school graduation, and/or college enrollment to measure schools' efficacy. However, educators know little about whether or not Hispanics revere education or uphold it as an indicator of personal success (Artiles, 2011; Behnke, Gonzalez, & Cox, 2010; Hayes et al., 2015; Rolstad, Mahoney, & Glass, 2005).

This inquiry strove to capture the perspectives of Hispanic learners regarding success and the extent to which their perspectives have shaped their completion of high school. Chapter one of this investigation described success as the amount of education needed for "upward mobility" with emphasis on a better life and employment (Hill & Torres, 2010, p. 95). This definition served as a frame of reference for this study as participants defined success in their own words. The researcher, then, framed collective viewpoints of the 22 Hispanic participants, along with their experiences in United States public schools, and the cultural and familial constructs that have shaped their mindsets. While Hill and Torres (2010) accentuated education as a primary component for success, this study concluded that the 22 Hispanic participants placed emphasis elsewhere.

Participants defined success through a single word: family. Their lives have essentially revolved around a commitment to parents with an overwhelming allegiance to familial goals. Caring for their mothers, especially, has served as the ultimate benchmark of accomplishment as they cast their visions, and so positing education outside of familial goals may do little in bolstering their academic achievement. Yet, to frame education within familismo may produce substantive changes inside every diversity-filled classroom across the nation. Perhaps, then, *their* success and *our* success will simply become *success*.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Sequential Survey

Study Title: Hispanic Students' Perceptions of Success: A Phenomenological Study on the Impact of K-12 Academic Achievement.

Dear ___,
My name is Rodney Stephens, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Education Department at the Liberty University. I am conducting a study as part of the requirements of my educational doctorate degree in teaching and learning, and I would like to invite you to participate in a survey. This survey is an important step because it helps me in finding the right people to participate in a study. Your answers will not be used for any other purpose outside of this study. Your completion of this survey is completely voluntary.

If you are willing, please answer the following 9 questions, and return this survey to _____ at XXXXXXXXXXX. Thank you for your time.

1. What is your full name?

2. What is your current age?

   ___18 ___19 ___20 ___21 ___ 22 ___ 23

3. Are you male or female? _____

4. Which best describes you?

   ___ Hispanic ___ White ___Black ___Asian Other: _____

5. How many years did you attend middle school and/or high school in the United States?

   ___ 1 year ___ 2 years ___ 3 years ___4 years ___ 5 years

6. What years did you participate in middle or high school?

   ___ Before 2009 ___Sometime after 2009

(Questions continue on the next page)

7. Have you been enrolled in either middle school or high school between 2009 and the present?

   ___ Yes – my enrollment began in (check one):

   ___2009, ___ 2010, ___ 2011, ___ 2012, ___2013, ___2014, ___ 2015

   ___ No – my enrollment began before 2009.

8. Did you finish high school? Circle One: YES NO
9. Are you currently seeking career help from the Athens Latino Center for Education and Services? Circle One: YES NO
10. Do you speak ***both*** English and Spanish? Circle One: YES NO

Appendix B

IRB Approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

September 28, 2016

Rodney M. Stephens
IRB Approval 2524.092816: Hispanic Students' Perceptions of Success: A Phenomenological Study on the Impact on K-12 Academic Achievement

Dear Rodney M. Stephens,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

[redacted], MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
The Graduate School

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Appendix C

Invitation to Participate in Study

Study Title: Hispanic Students' Perceptions of Success: A Phenomenological Study on the Impact of K-12 Academic Achievement.

Dear ___,
My name is Rodney Stephens, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Education Department at the Liberty University. I am conducting a study as part of the requirements of my educational doctorate degree in teaching and learning, and I would like to invite you to participate in my study.

I am studying the ways in which your ideas of success may be determined by your family and culture. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to take part in an interview with me, as well as in group discussions to discuss your experiences in school. Specifically, you will be asked questions about the ways in which your family's views of education and success impact your own views.

The interviews and conversations will take place at XXXXXXXXX, and should last a total of 3 hours. These meetings will be audio recorded so that I can accurately remember what is discussed. The recordings will only be heard by me and the individuals who may transcribe them for me.

If, for any reason, you feel uncomfortable answering any of my questions during our conversations, you may choose to not answer them. Although you probably won't benefit directly from this study, we hope that others in the community will benefit by helping us understand the amount of education you, your family, and others in your life think is necessary in order to be successful.

Participation is confidential, and all information from the study will be kept in a secure location. The results of the study may be published or presented at meetings, but your identity will not be revealed to others. Your participation is anonymous, which means that no one will know what your answers are. Others members in the group will hear what you say, and it is possible that they will tell someone else. Because we will be talking as a group, we cannot promise that what you say will remain completely private, but we will ask that you and all other group members respect the privacy of others.

Taking part in the study is completely your decision. You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to be. You may also quit at any time or decide not to answer any question you are not comfortable answering.

I will be happy to answer any questions you may have about this study. You may contact me at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or at XXXX@liberty.edu.

Thank you for your consideration. If you would like to participate, sign the attached form and return it to _____.

With kind regards,

Rodney Stephens
(XXX) XXX-XXXX
XXXXXXXX@liberty.edu

Appendix D

Informed Consent

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from 9/28/2016 to 9/27/2017 Protocol # 2524.092816

CONSENT FORM

Hispanic Students' Perceptions of Success: A Phenomenological Study on the Impact on K-12 Academic Achievement

Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study that seeks to identify Hispanic individuals' ideas of success and the ways in which family and culture determine their ideas of success. Specifically, from talking with you, I would like to determine whether or not your family and culture group may have influenced you and your decisions to complete high school. Further, I would like to know whether or not your family and culture influenced you to continue your education after high school.

You were selected as a possible participant because you are a Hispanic member of [redacted] and because you are between the ages of 18-29. Further, you were chosen for this study because you have attended school in the United States, and you have at least five years of experience in a US school.

I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study. This study is being conducted by Principal Investigator, Rodney M. Stephens, a doctoral student at Liberty University, School of Education.

Background Information:

The purpose of this qualitative research is to identify recurring themes regarding Hispanic students, education, and the level of education Hispanic students think is necessary to accomplish success. This will provide insight to both the perspectives of educators who work with Hispanic students so that support can be given to Hispanic learners as they strive for success.

Through our discussions and my observations, I hope to answer the following questions: How do the perceptions of success among male and female Hispanic high school completers/non-completers ages 18-29 impact their educational pursuits? What resources do male and female Hispanic high school completers/non-completers ages 18-29 perceive to be necessary to achieve success? What do male and female Hispanic high school completers/non-completers ages 18-29 perceive to be obstacles that hinder achieving success? How do male and female Hispanic high school completers/non-completers ages 18-29 describe the cultural and familial backgrounds that impact their perceptions of success?

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

1. Each participant will be interviewed individually and asked to talk about their experiences in school, as well as the perceptions of success communicated to them through close family members. Time Estimate: Each interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes. For this interview, you will be talking one/one with the principal researcher, Rodney Stephens. Interviews will be digitally recorded, as well as video-recorded so that the researcher can have a record to refer back to later. No one else will

see or hear these recordings except for people whom the researcher might pay to transcribe the discussions: to make a printed copy of the spoken words.

2. You may be invited to participate in a focus group. Time Estimate: This focus group conversation will include 6-10 participants total and will last between one and two hours. Like you, the members of this focus group will be [redacted]. No one else will see or hear these recordings except for people whom the researcher might pay to transcribe the discussions: to make a printed copy of the spoken words.
3. After the interviews and focus groups, the researcher will then ask you to complete a "member check" questionnaire. This means that I will give you a form to complete that asks if the statements I made and the conclusions I reach based upon our conversations match your true feelings. Time Estimate: This activity will take about 15 minutes for you to complete.
4. Finally, the researcher may then observe you in the setting ([redacted]) as you interact with instructors and fellow classmates. This will not require that you talk to the researcher. The researcher may write down key words and phrases and behaviors that occur as you interact with leaders in the [redacted]. Time Estimate: Observations will likely last between 90 and 120 minutes.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:
No more than the risk typically associated with every day activities at the [redacted] is associated with this study.

There are no direct benefits to the participants beyond the satisfaction of having contributed their perspectives to current research in the field. The possible benefits to society include the sharing of perspectives and ideas about Hispanic students and educational issues with future educational leaders.

Compensation:
You will not receive payment for taking part in this study.

Confidentiality:
The records from this study will be kept completely private. In any report that I may write or publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible for others to identify who participated in this study. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to them.

- Participants [redacted] will be known to each other.
- Pseudonyms (fake names) will be applied to the transcribed face-to-face interviews and focus groups.
- Recorded discussions will be erased after transcriptions (printed copies) are produced.
- Transcriptions with non-identifying data/pseudonyms may be retained indefinitely.
- The data may be used for future research, but no identifying data will be used in any publication, product, or future research that may come from this particular study.

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from 9/28/2016 to 9/27/2017 Protocol # 2524.092816

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or with other members or with the staff members at [redacted] If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study:
If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Contacts and Questions:
The researcher conducting this study is Mr. Rodney Stephens. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you may contact Rodney Stephens as follows:** PHONE: [redacted] or E-MAIL: [redacted]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty advisor, Dr. James Zabloski, at [redacted] or [redacted].

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Green Hall Suite 1887, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record/video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Signature Date

Signature of Investigator Date

Appendix E

Focus Group Discussion Guide

1. Tell us a little about yourself. (Your name, age, where you attended school, etc.)

2. How would you describe your high school experience?

3. What was the hardest part about attending school in the U.S.?

4. What was the best part about attending school?

5. (For those who dropped out of school): What was the biggest reason you decided to drop out of school? (For high school completers): What was the biggest reason you decided to stay in school?

6. If you decided to go back to school today to continue your education (GED, college, vocational, Master's degree), what would your extended family members think or say (aunts, uncles, grandparents, brothers, sisters, etc.)?

7. How did your family impact you to drop out of school (non-completers)/stay in school (high school graduates)?

8. In your own words, define success? Each group (completers/non-completers) will be asked to respond.

9. To be successful, is it more important for you to have a family or education? Why?

10. How much education do you think is necessary for you to be successful?

11. What kind of support do you think Hispanics need in order to achieve success?

12. Describe the things that have gotten in the way of success for you.

13. What else would you like to say about your experiences with educational success?

Appendix F

Interview Questions

1. How many years of high school did you complete?
2. Describe the relationships you had with your teachers during your last semester of school.
3. What are your thoughts about going to school today? (Vocational, college, and/or trade)?
4. Describe the career are you most interested in.
5. How much education to you need for your "dream job"?
6. How many years did your mother to go high school? (Your father?)
7. Please describe your mother and father's views of your education. Describe how their views of education have impacted your views. How were their views similar or different from those of your other extended family members (grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc.)?
8. (For those who dropped out): What did your parents think about you dropping out of school? Extended family members (aunts, uncles, grandparents, brothers, sisters, etc.)?
9. (For high school completers): What would your parents have said if you had chosen to drop out of school? Extended family members (aunts, uncles, grandparents, brothers, sisters, etc.)?
10. Describe how your culture has affected your education.
11. How would your parents feel about you going back to school today (GED or post-secondary)?

12. If you decided to go back to school today, what would your extended family members think or say (aunts, uncles, grandparents, brothers, sisters, etc.)?
13. Describe how your family impacted you to drop out of school (non-completers)/stay in school (high school graduates).
14. Describe a person whom you think is "successful" and tell what makes him/her successful.
15. To be successful, do you think it is more important to have a family or a career? Why?
16. Describe the types of support you need in order to achieve success.
17. Describe the things that have gotten in the way of success for you.
18. Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about your experiences in school and your views of success?

Appendix G

Field Notes

Title of Study: _____Researcher's Name: ____

Observation Date: _____ Start Time: _____ Stop Time: _____

Interpretive Lens: _____

Site Diagram

Memoing	Thick Description
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Appendix H

Bracketing Example

10/22/2016 Location: XXXXXXXXXX

I met with clients at XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX. It is important for me to remember that the experiences of the clients there may not mirror mine.

Participants:
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

I did see similarities that I discussed with XXXXXXX, the teacher, afterwards. Although she feels that my experiences would've been very different, I can't help but see comparisons. I did leave home years ago seeking a better life when I was young. It didn't seem that many people in my life understood the need for education, and to an extent, I had to go against the grain.
She reminded me that -
Poverty in Mexico is different from poverty in the US
The concept of rural is different in Mexico than in the US

XXXXX talked about leaving Mexico for a better life. Also, some of the challenges she discussed when she told her family she was going back to school resonated with me. I admire her dedication even though she doesn't have support.

Key points to remember:
Education does not mean financial gain for everyone.
Education is not the answer for everyone.
Even for those who choose education, their version of it may be different than my own.
There is no right or wrong where education and decisions to pursue it (or not) are concerned.
Education does not make sense to everyone.
Education is not always the best option – considering the person's circumstances.

Layers in education - apparent. Things that I should consider:
Every step is a milestone for participants.
A GED is an accomplishment just like any other ed milestone.
The focus is not always financial.

Things that stood out:
1. Participants spoke English and Spanish both while talking to me
2. There is a participant who is 29 who would be a good fit for the study.
3. I felt like an outsider a bit today. The classroom setting!
4. Education is just a small piece of the puzzle for them

Appendix I

Member Check Template

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The transcription (copy) of your interview was correct.					
I correctly interpreted your experiences from our discussions.					