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## **Critical Bicultural Masculinities: Reframing Community College Success Among Latino Immigrant Male Students**

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LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

Critical Bicultural Masculinities:  
Reframing Community College Success  
Among Latino Immigrant Male Students

by

René Lozano Esquivel

A dissertation presented to the Faculty of the School of Education,

Loyola Marymount University,

in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education

2019

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Reframing Community College Success  
Among Latino Immigrant Male Students  
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by

René Lozano Esquivel

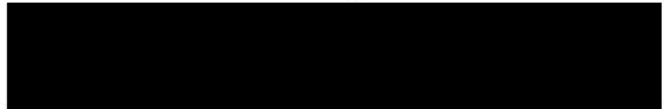
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8-23-19

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## **DEDICATION (DEDICACION)**

*Quiero dedicar este trabajo académico a mi papa Rafael Lozano y mama Lourdes Lozano Esquivel—apa, no te regale un nieto al cual le pueda dar tu apellido, pero espero haber inmortalizado el nombre Lozano en el mundo académico—ama, gracias por el valor que demostraste cuando me trajiste a los Estados Unidos y ofrecerme una nueva vida llena de oportunidades y brindarnos a mi y a mis hermana@s una niñez llena de apoyo y amor materno. Los quiero mucho a los dos y no seria nadie en este mundo sin su apoyo y amor incondicional. Abue, la amo y me duele tanto haberla perdido durante mi trayectoria en este programa.*

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b> .....	<b>iii</b>
<b>DEDICATION</b> .....	<b>vi</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b> .....	<b>ix</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES...</b> .....	<b>x</b>
<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	<b>xi</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
Statement of the Problem .....	5
The Community College System.....	8
Context of Deficit Thinking .....	11
Purpose and Significance of the Study.....	17
Research Questions .....	18
Conceptual Framework .....	18
Critical Biculturalism .....	19
Latino Masculinity Theory.....	20
Methodology.....	21
Positionality.....	22
Link to Social Justice.....	23
Limitations and Delimitations .....	24
Definitions and Key Terms .....	25
Organization of Study.....	27
<b>CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW</b> .....	<b>29</b>
The Community College System.....	31
Meritocratic Measures of Success .....	33
Challenging the Banking Model.....	36
Latino Male Students in Community College .....	38
Critical Biculturalism .....	43
Latino Masculinities .....	48
Minority Masculinity Theory .....	48
Toward a Critical Latino Bicultural Masculinity .....	50
<b>CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY</b> .....	<b>52</b>
Research Questions .....	52
Methodological Framework .....	53
Critical Narratives .....	53
Research Design .....	54
Participant Selection.....	54
Setting.....	55
Data Collection.....	55
Coding and Analysis of Data.....	55
Limitations and Delimitations .....	56

<b>CHAPTER 4: CRITICAL NARRATIVES: VOICES OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE IMMIGRANT LATINO MALE STUDENTS .....</b>	<b>57</b>
Participant Profiles .....	57
Participant Stories.....	58
Paulo .....	58
Cesar .....	65
Lempira.....	70
Silverio .....	77
Cuauhtémoc .....	82
Emiliano .....	89
Escutia .....	101
Summary.....	108
 <b>CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, FINDINGS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....</b>	 <b>111</b>
Emergent Themes .....	113
Personal Life Experiences .....	113
Home Culture and Language.....	113
Immigrant and U.S. American Intersectional Identity. ....	116
Immigrant Identity’s Effect on Educational Goals .....	118
Parental Support .....	120
Family Centeredness .....	122
Navigating the Community College Experience.....	123
First Generation College Student Status.....	123
The College Culture .....	124
Cultural Knowledge Brought to College.....	131
Question of Cultural Representation .....	133
Recommendations for Immigrant Latino Male Success .....	135
College Support for Student of Color Issues.....	135
Connections with Latino Faculty and Mentors of Color .....	138
Reframing the Success for Critical Bicultural Latino Masculinities .....	139
Future Research .....	143
Conclusion.....	146
 <b>EPILOGUE.....</b>	 <b>149</b>
<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>152</b>

## LIST OF TABLES

<b>Table</b>	<b>Page</b>
1. Educational Attainment among U.S. Immigrants .....	7
2. Participant Profiles and Pseudonym Significance .....	58

## LIST OF FIGURES

<b>Figure</b>	<b>Page</b>
1. Conceptual framework and analysis.....	19
2. The bicultural process represented along a dialectical .....	45

## **ABSTRACT**

Critical Bicultural Masculinities:  
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Among Latino Immigrant Male Students

by

René Lozano Esquivel

By employing critical narratives, this qualitative study examined the lives of Latino male immigrants and their educational experiences in the California community college system. Seven Latino male immigrants matriculated at a community college participated in the study. The study utilized Critical Bicultural Theory and Latino Masculinity Theory frameworks to analyze the male students' narratives. Findings speak of their unique racialized and gendered experiences as they navigate their community college educational experiences. This study contributes to the field by identifying what Latino immigrants need to co-construct their own educational success in a way that employs their strong familial and cultural knowledge. The goal of study was to inform and develop specific ways that community colleges can actively engage Latino male immigrant students.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Contrary to the United States' western notions, my father did not bring his family to the United States to pursue the "American Dream", which represents more of a political distortion than truth (McNamee & Miller, 2014). Instead, he emigrated to the United States in pursuit of economic survival, a decision brought upon by political push and pull factors influenced by a strong U.S. capitalist agenda that has historically exploited neighboring third world countries, like my country of origin, Mexico (Acuña, 2015). Consequently, my life as a U.S. citizen epitomizes a political statement. I embody various communities that, historically, have been left out of the higher education academic pipeline. Moreover, as a working-class Latino male immigrant college student, I have always related to the unique experience that members of this community face in higher education.

My mother immigrated to the United States with my sister and I in July of 1976, two weeks shy of my sixth birthday. My father, like many men that immigrate to the United States in search of an opportunity to provide a better quality of life for their families, arrived a year earlier to earn money to send back home to Mexico City, where he left my mother and his two young children. My parents decided to live permanently in the United States in order to ensure improved economic and educational opportunities for their children. Hence, I initiated my bicultural existence as an undocumented, non-English speaking immigrant, living in a low socioeconomic environment, silenced by a heteronormative ideology, and catechized by a Catholic upbringing.

Navigating my entire K-12 education while embodying multiple identities—Latino, working class, first generation, gay, and brown-skinned—quickly taught me that American schooling was neither just nor inclusive, as so often proclaimed. I often felt like an asterisk within the dominant cultural narrative, comprised by an ethos derived from a male, heterosexual, white ethnocentric history, and the “othering” of anyone who did not encompass these three privileged identities. Furthermore, I experienced an intrusive acculturation manifested by constant “English only” messages, and an imposed U.S. “American” cultural rhetoric. Spanish, my native language was discouraged in the classroom and considered inferior to the English language (Darder, 2012). I quickly learned that in order to be a true U.S. “American,” I needed to embrace assimilation, where the elements of my identity, including my native language and Mexican culture, were considered liabilities in my path of educational success.

More significantly, despite my rapid acquisition of the English language and development of sound academic skills, I never felt like the author of my own academic success story. Despite my family’s economic and political survival and my own resilience, in the midst of a school-challenging home life balance, it seemed as if the broader world around me did not acknowledge my existence, even less, my achievement. Politicians, the media, and my peers reminded me that I was an outsider and should be grateful for anything that the “American Dream” bestowed upon me—a phenomenon that also created much ambivalence, rendering me as suspect, given the contentious politics of affirmative action within education and society at large.

At home, I carried out many roles. I was an interpreter for my parents when they required a translator at government agencies, such as the Department of Motor Vehicles. I was the

accountant when they needed someone to decipher utility bills or letters from the Internal Revenue Service. Beyond traditional student academic success, such as good study skills, time management, and a strong intrinsic motivation, I knew deep down that my true success emanated from somewhere deeper and more personal. I knew that my personal success was characterized by more than rigid grading, standardized testing, and limiting meritocratic measures of my humanity. Seldom in my schooling did any acknowledgement of beginning the race far behind the starting line, as compared to my white middle class peers, exist. As such, my educational experience quickly taught me that I would have to prove myself twice as much as my classmates and that my schooling was anchored to a banking model of education (Freire, 1970), where I was to gratefully report to school for my daily deposit of knowledge into my “empty”, questionably uneducable head.

Needless to say, I began my university experience filled with academic self-doubt despite substantial K-12 scholastic success. My university lecture experiences were replete with affluent white male college students who interrogated my social and political points of view as a “person of color”, failed to acknowledge their own privilege, and resented my admission into *their* university, without knowing anything about my academic past or personal background. Although I earned a solid and competitive high school GPA, my university admission was often questioned; the color of my skin seemed to warrant an invitation for students from the dominant culture to question the merit of my presence at the university, especially in an era when affirmative action was in place.

Darder (2012) posited that “the language that many bicultural students bring to the classroom is systematically silenced and stripped away through values and beliefs that render it



inferior” (p. 35). Therefore, the cultural knowledge with which I walked into the classroom did not seem to carry any value. Throughout that first year, I found myself wrestling with guilt when affluent peers questioned my utilization of services provided by programs that served students of color. The issue of perceived unfairness was raised when asked why I took part in tutoring sessions, met with peer advisors of color, or was granted any type of financial aid. “Why can’t you do the college thing on your own?” was the number one question I was asked. Like many students of color, I began internalizing oppressive messages that attempted to keep me in my place of subordination as a student, un-deserving of the same access to college as my affluent peers.

Moreover, I discovered that there exists a false notion of neutrality in higher education. I felt culturally neutered by the hegemonic expectations of college faculty that remained “objective,” dispassionate, and, thus, neutral, in response to their teaching practice (Darder, 2012). However, as a Latino educator, I have chosen to intentionally challenge this alleged neutrality in the community college setting. In concert with Freire’s (1970) perspective on education as a political act, I refute the idea that education is neutral and have vociferously disagreed with colleagues who claim that their professional mission entails teaching students in a neutral, apolitical manner. I do not possess the privilege to live my personal and professional existence in neutral terms or purport that I must remain apolitical, given that the surrounding world is politically shaped by the forces of racism, class inequalities, and xenophobia to name just a few.

However, despite conditions I faced as a working-class Latino male immigrant, two pivotal moments that took place at university sociology lectures that addressed social inequality

and race relations challenged my self-concept once and for all. The first incident involved a professor educating students that complained about being singled out as the “oppressors of people of color.” When they voiced discomfort in class, he conveyed a validating satisfaction for creating a lesson that taught them how people of color experience daily micro aggressions (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) in the face of oppression brought about by racism, class discrimination, sexism, and heterosexism. The second incident involved a professor who asked to see me after class due to his observation of my repeated challenging of peers’ stereotypes and inaccurate assumptions about working-class Latino students from impoverished environments. Assuming that I was in trouble for speaking my mind, I was pleasantly surprised when, instead, he thanked me for contributing to what he called “real education,” which required the varied points of view from all students and their diverse backgrounds. This second incident was my first lesson in recognizing my own social agency and the cultural knowledge I possessed, which contributes to the education of others and, more importantly, the reimagining of my own education as a Latino male concerned with questions of social justice and human rights in education and society. Hence as a faculty of color myself, the needs of Latino immigrant males in the community college setting where I now work has occupied my concerns and has led me to conduct this study.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The Latin American immigration wave is one of the most extensive in U.S. history. Therefore, it is not surprising that Latinos have represented the largest number of the immigrant student population in U.S. schools, often identifying themselves as both bilingual and bicultural. According to the 2000 Census, the Hispanic population (Central and South American heritage)

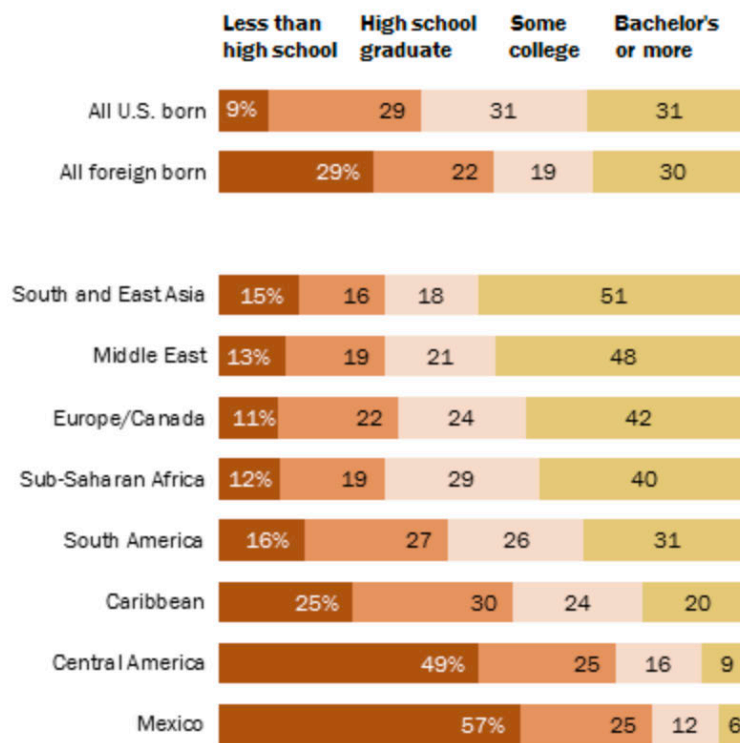
will be the largest and fastest growing minority by 2050, comprising 25% of the U.S. population. and Mexican Americans will make up 64% of that U.S. Hispanic population (United States Census Bureau, 2009). Yet, one of the great concerns of our time is that today's Latino immigrants "will not enjoy the same upward mobility experienced by the offspring of European immigrants in previous centuries (Pew Research Center, 2013). In fact, 57% of immigrants from Mexico and 49% from Central America are less likely to be high school graduates than U.S.-born students and only 9% of Mexican and 6% of Central American immigrants graduate from a four-year college (Lopez & Bailik, 2017).

If this issue is not addressed by an extensive action research agenda—with the goal of informing higher education policy via initiatives and Latino male-gender inclusive interventions—Saenz and Ponjuan (2009) have argued that California higher education Latino males will be pushed into the low skilled workforce (Pew Hispanic Center, 2005), the military (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense, 2003), or the prison system (Sabol, Minton, & Harrison, 2007). Nowhere is this phenomenon more blatant than in the education of Latino immigrant male students in the community college system. It is not unusual for these students to be among those who "are more likely to find themselves bogged down in remedial and E.S.L. courses—for no credit—and see the hurdles to college completion growing more difficult rather than easier. In public colleges particularly, there might not be enough guidance counselors to "goad, console or advise them" (Berger, 2010). Moreover, Saenz and Ponjuan (2009) have argued that "Latino students are 'vanishing' from the American education pipeline that is specifically evident at the secondary and post-secondary levels" (p. 1). Accordingly, Latino immigrant male students are among the most segregated student populations, "segregated along

racial, socio-economic, and even immigrant characteristics” (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009, p .9). Hence, given the significant role the community college system has played in the education of working-class men of color (Cohen & Brawer, 2014), and Latino immigrant men in particular, there is a need to more closely examine their experiences, with respect to academic success.

Table 1  
*Educational Attainment among U.S. Immigrants*

*% among those ages 25 and older*



Note: "Some college" includes those with two-year degrees. "High school graduate" includes persons who have attained a high school diploma or its equivalent, such as a GED certificate. Middle East consists of Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Israel/Palestine, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, Yemen, Algeria, Egypt, Morocco and Sudan. Source: Pew Research Center tabulations of the 2015 American Community Survey (1% IPUMS).

**PEW RESEARCH CENTER**

Note: Source: "Key Findings about U.S. Immigrants" by G. Lopez and K. Bialik, 2017, Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center. Copyright 2017 by Pew Research Center. Used with permission.

## **The Community College System**

The California community college system is the largest public post-secondary system in the nation (California Community College Chancellor's Office, 2007). It is comprised of 115 community college campuses and educates about 2.1 million students on an annual basis. It represents 75% of all California public undergraduate college enrollments. The system educates the largest student population of color, including 42.7% Latinx, 28.1% Caucasian, 10.9% Asian, 6.6% African American, 3.3% Filipino/Pacific Islander, 0.4% American Indian, 3.8% multiracial, and 4.2% unknown (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office Management Information Systems, 2016). Statistically, Latino males are the largest matriculated ethnic subgroup in the entire system, with close to half a million Latino male students enrolled in California community colleges. A social justice violation occurs when the largest group's needs within a system are not addressed.

According to the 2016 U.S. Department of Education Report titled "The State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce" over 80% of the U.S. teaching force identifies as white (Policy and Program Studies Service, 2016). As such, the community college faculty does not represent the ethnic diversity of the student population they are hired to teach. Faculty are hired based primarily on their subject expertise, while they are expected to teach community college students with very little professional training aimed at developing culturally relevant educational approaches for working class Latino male students. Although white teachers may have opportunities to attend professional development conferences on diversity or read multicultural pedagogy literature, these practices are not effective in learning about different cultures, without living the daily lives and historicity of their students of color (Darder, 2012).

Moreover, Darder (2012) discussed how:

[T]he underpinnings of white superiority at work here function to silence the voices of bicultural students by ignoring their daily lived experiences of racialized oppression.

Hence, unexamined racialized assumptions work to support an assimilative bias held by many teachers—teachers who often fail to perceive the process of racialization inherent in their tendencies to judge and compare the success of poor and working-class bicultural students against that of students from the dominant culture. (p. 38)

Under the guise of neutrality, Giroux (1983) described a perspective of culture that has been traditionally based on a westernized, all-embracing and neutral construct. Moreover, Giroux (1983) challenged the notion of a neutral culture as “the structures, material practices, and lived relations of a capitalist society” that are “not in themselves a unified culture” (p. 163). Giroux (1983) stated that such cultural forces are “forged, reproduced, and contested under conditions of power and dependency that primarily serve the dominant culture.” (p. 63) As this notion of neutrality applies to public education, Darder (2012) has argued that “educators have most often been involved with definitions of culture derived from a scientific rationality that is individualistic, apolitical, ahistorical, instrumental, and based on positivist notions of value-free inquiry and interpretation” (p. 25). She referenced Giroux’s work when noting that such structures, practices, and relations are “a complex combination of dominant and subordinate relations that serve the function of the state”, which often “results in oppressive cultural forces, including schooling” (p. 28).

Public higher education is often revered as the epitome of an objective democratic schooling experience, which presumably leads all students, no matter their economic, political or

social standing, to a fair opportunity for college success. More specifically, California community colleges are touted as the ultimate open-door educational system that provides such an equalizing experience. However, access without engagement of students' culture and lived experiences does not serve Latino students on an equal footing. Darder (2012) has posited that “hegemony in American schools results more specifically from institutional social relations of power that are systematically asymmetrical, and therefore unequally privilege students from the dominant culture and class over working-class students from subordinate cultures,” (p. 33). Even more alarming, meritocratic measures of success hold up a mirror to subaltern students that communicate to them that they are not as capable of success as their white peers. This system of meritocracy does not live in a neutral educational environment any more than the educational institution lives in a neutral society. Within relations of power and culture and how they play out in the educational setting, a meritocratic system of education echoes the dominant culture of society, where the culture of students of color is subordinated (Darder, 2012).

Furthermore, educational settings rarely ask bicultural students to reflect on what they bring to their own education, the educations of others, and more importantly what they require of educational institutions in order to experience academic support and validation. If the educational system is to function as a true democratizing process for students, the ways that democratic principles play out in the classroom and the schooling environment must also be examined. However, a long overdue examination and comparison of students' cultural and gendered lived experiences within the context of the college culture is key to reimagining their personal success—a personal success that must challenge an institutionally-defined meritocratic success.

Therefore, students continue to experience the banking model of teaching (Freire, 1970), within a community college environment that does not acknowledge what Latino male students bring culturally to their own college learning and development as successful students. This dehumanizing process further alienates Latino male students from their own success by defining it extrinsically, ignoring the humanizing intrinsic dimensions of academic success. More often than not, this phenomenon leads to deficit language when describing Latino male student populations, blaming these students for a faculty-perceived description of such students as inherently unmotivated, sub-intelligent, and academically lazy.

Thus, the onus for achieving academic success is placed solely on students. To make matters worse, as it pertains to students of color, a detrimental tradition of a deficit lens and racializing language have been utilized to explain the “lack of academic success” often assumed about such students. Historically ranging from a racist assessment of subpar intelligence (Coleman et al., 1966; Jensen, 1969) to a perceived lack of “pro” education culture brought about by an environment of poverty (Bloom, 1964; Cohen, Frankel, & Brewer, 1968; Lewis, 1966; Miller, 1958; Moynihan, 1965), past research that has examined student of color success has established a long history of unfounded reasons why they are not deemed as “successful” as their white peers.

### **Context of Deficit Thinking**

In 1947, a federal court case, *Mendez et al. v. Westminster School Dist. of Orange County et al.*, held that segregation of Mexican and Mexican American students into separate “Mexican schools” was unconstitutional. This federal case was the first United States ruling against segregation and set a precedent for 1954’s case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, an



important civil rights victory for desegregated African American students. The Chicano high school student walkouts of 1968 in Los Angeles protested the school district unfairly punishing students for speaking Spanish and discouraging Latinx students from pursuing higher education. The walkouts' historical contribution led to reform and an increase in enrollment into colleges for Latino communities. Another historical benchmark in Latino education was achieved when bilingual education expanded in public school education when Congress passed the *Equal Educational Opportunity Act* of 1974.

Documented incidents surrounding issues of segregation, cultural warfare, and language discrimination are key to understanding and setting the stage for educational policies that have been set up to legitimize continued school segregation. Modern segregation examples include tracking of students of color that are relegated to limited educational opportunities. Although the community college has served as a pivotal point of access and entry into higher education for Latinx students, the community college system could stand to do a better job of not perpetuating further segregation. The language used to describe students of color and their educational experiences would be a good start in addressing segregation practices such as deficit thinking, tracking, and adhering to a traditional academic measure of success devoid of the challenges, stories of resilience, and the cultural assets found in the lives of students of color. Meritocracy without democracy can lead to further oppression of already disenfranchised communities of color.

The U.S. traditional meritocratic system utilizes a lot of labels to describe students that do not reach specific benchmarks of success, based on academic standards created by educational institutions and mandated by legislative policies. Discriminatory college practices, often

disguised as rigid academic standards, further stratify student populations leading to a gross underrepresentation of students of color. Often educators label students of color with terms such as “basic skills” or “at risk.” The deficit thinking that often informs these views can further oppress students of color and can cause them to feel like outsiders within mainstream educational environments (Darder, 2012). As such, deficit views do not allow students of color to *own* their success—success earned through their efforts—on their personal educational journey, especially if they are first generation immigrants from working class Latinx communities.

Although more recent research exists that addresses a wider spectrum of Latinos, most of the early research on Latino educational success has focused on the U.S southwest, Mexican American experience. Darder (2012) has posited that:

Language domination silences student voices and seriously curtails their active participation in school life. With few opportunities to enter into dialogue, to build on their pre-existing home knowledge, or to reflect on their lived experiences, many working-class bicultural students are left marginalized in their classrooms. (p. 37)

Much of the literature references Richard Valencia’s (2010) extensive work on “deficit thinking.” Deficit thinking with its long-standing racist roots, gained momentum when examined from a “cultural difference” framework that Valencia traced back to the early 1960s. He stated that, “the deficit thinking model, at its core, is an endogenous theory-posing that the student who fails in school does so because of his/her internal deficits or deficiencies” (Valencia, 2010).

Valencia has also discussed how Latino student school achievement had some origins with the 1848 U.S signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo with Mexico. Upon acquiring a great part of the southwest, the United States began a mass segregation movement, separating white

students from Mexican American students. Mexican students were perceived as inferior in comparison to their white counterparts (Valencia, 2010).

In Saathoff's (2015) work on educating pre-service teachers, she criticized deficit models that blame Mexican American students for their academic failure and pointed out that these models lack an understanding of historical background and inequalities faced by these communities. She drew on Gonzalez's (1997) work in the Americanization program, a program that has systematically oppressed Mexican American students by way of imposing culturally insensitive English-only language policies and forcing students to acculturate to U.S. "American" ways. The Americanization program fostered assimilation theories based on English as the only common language of instruction leading to educational policies established by the State Department of Education. Gonzalez (2013) described how programs of Americanization send messages to Mexican children that their family, community and culture are obstacles to their college success.

The traditional meritocratic system at work in U.S. schooling utilizes a problematic nomenclature to describe students that do not attain prescribed benchmarks of success. Rooted in academic standards, such benchmarks are enforced by educational institutions that are informed by administrators and state-mandates devised by politicians who are often disconnected from the actual needs of a growing diverse student population and deny the significance that cultural, class, gender, and sexual diversity can have on the education of historically underrepresented students.

Similarly, banking models of education and neoliberal influences characterized by the tracking of an overrepresented Latino male population in the California community college

system contribute to an overarching economic definition of success. This becomes even more apparent at the community college level where the “vocalization” of higher education (Frye, 1992; Maclean & Pavlova, 2013) bolsters a tracking system that funnels working class Latino male students into short-term vocational occupations, such as auto technology, welding, and/or air conditioning and refrigeration. This type of tracking further supports the notion of community college as an institutionalized extension of racialized capitalism (Darder & Torres, 2004) versus the traditional rhetoric of higher education as a means for teaching democracy and fostering an intellectualism that goes beyond utilitarian purposes.

Higher education institutions do not exist in an isolated bubble, devoid of the influences of politics and social processes that inform U.S. American life. College faculty, therefore, play a major role in perpetuating neoliberal ideology within public higher education. Few studies have focused on community college faculty behaviors that contribute to embedded ideals predicated on neoliberalism. Levin and Aliyeva’s (2015) work, however, has focused on the socio-economic aspect of neoliberalism when dissecting its role as it relates to faculty behaviors in California higher education institutions. Although these researchers’ work has outlined how faculty behaviors from all three California public higher education systems—University of California (UC), California State University (CSU), and the California community college system—perpetuate neoliberal policies, this study was interested in findings that relate specifically to community colleges, the most underexplored system of the three (Levin & Aliyeva, 2015).

Striving for prestige, academic status, resources, and recruiting students by producing more “product” by way of research are the overt ways that the UC and CSU systems are

responsive to free-market influence. However, community college examples have a strong focus on efficient productivity, which includes an increased class size to gain full-time equivalency (FTE) and an adherence to state mandates that grant accreditation. According to Levin and Aliyeva (2015), the direct effect these neoliberal tenets have on students include a homogenized teaching method that sacrifices a “personal touch” as well as an over-reliance of hiring part-time faculty to offer a type of mass-produced education, dependent on changes in student enrollment demographics, as well as local economic needs.

The current neoliberal context of education, therefore, can often minimize the Latino male student’s worldview and lived knowledge rooted in their primary culture. A rigid meritocratic education system that utilizes a language foreign to students unfamiliar with college culture and expectations works to further oppress students coming from historically underrepresented groups. Motivation and measured success require a broader, more inclusive, definition to encompass the development of a male student’s healthy self-identity and his personal self-actualization. Furthermore, hegemonic beliefs in a culture of assimilation lead to “deficit thinking” (Valencia, 2010) when faculty address the “perceived lack” of motivation and academic potential of working class, first generation, Latino male college students.

Finally, the use of capitalist language when depicting college achievement further dehumanizes Latino male students, who are already non-beneficiaries of a political and economic structure that actively tracks them to become part of the capitalist machine as low-level workers. As such, an education that intentionally defines success in narrow economic terms can never prove emancipatory for students of color because they have not been historical heirs of wealth or political power in the United States. This study sought to interrogate this false and

apolitical notion often applied to the educational environment. The hegemony within a politicized educational environment must be disrupted by way of highlighting the historically silenced voices of Latino immigrant male self-identified success. It also aimed to develop a new critical framework from which to understand Latino male success, non-reliant on neoliberal language and capitalist values.

### **Purpose and Significance of the Study**

This study aimed to contribute to the literature about working class Latino male community college students as well as call forth a culturally inclusive lens to further challenge banking models of education begun by existing cultural capital theories (Yosso, 2005). It intended to address a gap in the literature about the Latino male California community college student population. Limited literature exists that addresses Latinx students matriculated in community colleges and most research has been conducted in states, unlike California, with minimal ethnic and cultural diversity. In addition, the California community college system's unique characteristics (largest public higher education system in the United States and high heterogeneity in terms of ethnic, socioeconomic status and undocumented status) ensured a richer research environment.

The sparse literature on the California community college experience does not have a specific focus on working class male Latinos, often leading to monolithic explanations. In contrast, this study sought to engage the issues with greater specificity. Furthermore, the study intended to amplify the voice of Latino males as they self-identify needs for their own success. It was designed to encourage students to recognize and honor the ethnic cultural knowledge and agency they bring to the college setting, in order to challenge the banking model of the prevalent

hegemony of schooling. It aimed to revolutionize the language used in education when describing success in a socially-humanizing, rather than a capitalist language, in order to truly advance an emancipatory education (Darder, 2012). Therefore, this study aimed to develop and transform the dehumanizing language utilized when describing the conditions and cultural knowledge of students of color. Educational structures need to afford Latino immigrant male community college students an opportunity to achieve within a communal paradigm that is more in line with their bicultural identities and lived experience. It is precisely these issues that this study sought to address.

### **Research Questions**

The following three questions drove the development and approach to this study about the experiences of Latino immigrant males in community college, with a distinct focus on their success:

1. What are the experiences of working class Latino immigrant males in navigating the California community college system?
2. In what ways does their bicultural identity shape their educational experiences?
3. In what way are aspects of Latino masculinities reflected in the perspectives of what is needed for their own success?

### **Conceptual Framework**

Given the focus of this study, the conceptual framework brought together two important theoretical lenses: Critical Biculturalism and Latino Masculinity Theory. The study aimed to examine where these two theoretical frameworks meet and how they might provide the breadth and depth required for the critical development of this study and analysis of the data collected.

Figure 1 (below) represents the theoretical overlap between these two primary theories and the resulting Critical Latino Bicultural Masculinity theory that served as the basis for this project.

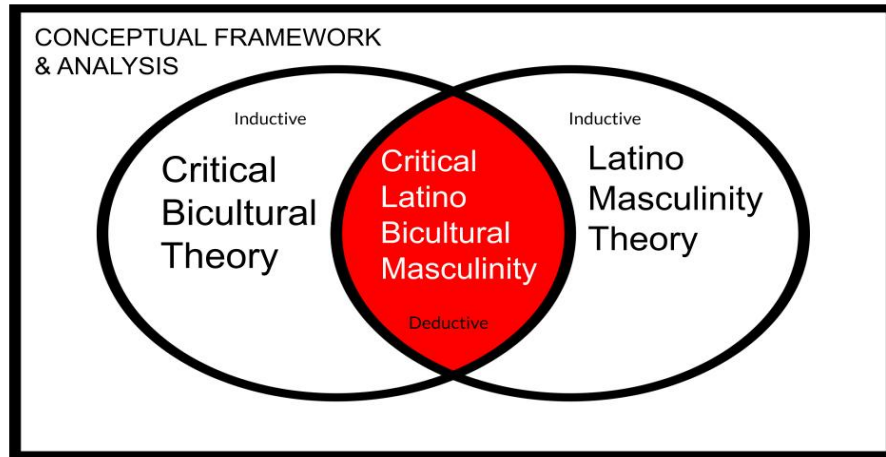


Figure 1. Conceptual framework and analysis.

Note: Source: Adapted from “Toward a Fuller Conception of Machismo: Development of a Traditional Machismo and Caballerismo Scale” by G. M. Arciniega, T. C. Anderson, Z. G. Tovar-Blank, and T. J. Tracey, 2008, *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 1(19). Copyright 2008 by the American Psychological Association; and *Culture and Power in the Classroom: Educational Foundations for the Schooling of Bicultural Students* by A. Darder, 2012, New York, N.Y.: Routledge. Copyright 2012 by Taylor and Francis.

### Critical Biculturalism

Derived from critical social theory, Antonia Darder’s (2012) theory of critical biculturalism (which is discussed further in Chapter 2) and cultural democracy was employed in the current study. Darder’s critical bicultural theory served as a lens by which to examine the relationship between culture and power in addressing the subordination experienced by Latino males in a community college environment. The Latino immigrant male students’ active participation, voice, and social agency were engaged here to better understand how they negotiate between their primary culture and the dominant culture prevalent in their college setting, in an effort to disrupt the hegemonic influence of a neoliberal meritocracy. For Darder (2012), cultural democracy constitutes the underlying aim of a critical bicultural approach, where the cultures, languages, histories, and experiences of bicultural students are engaged as



legitimate aspects of their knowledge construction and academic formation. Employing critical biculturalism also supports a decolonizing process for a more culturally democratic learning environment, where male Latino students engage their bicultural voices to identify their needs as community college students and recognize their contributions toward their own personal and academic success (Darder, 2012; Freire, 1970).

### **Latino Masculinity Theory**

A gendered theoretical framework is necessary, given that the focus of this study is on Latino immigrant male students. Pleck, Sonenstein, and Ku (1993) defined masculinity ideology “as a cultural construction, rather than a psychologically (or biologically) based characteristic” (p.140). Their work highlights the idea that “males act in ways they do not because of their role identity or their level of masculine traits, but because of the conception of masculinity they internalize from their culture” (p. 14). The male gender socialization process leads boys to internalize male appropriate cultural norms and expectations from society, peer groups, and especially for Latino males, their families (Saez, Casado, & Wade, 2009). In particular, this study challenged traditional masculinity notions, whereby males are encouraged to adopt dominant behaviors, versus nurturing ones generally associated with the socialization of females. Self-reliance, a restricted emotional life, an emphasis on toughness, and an emphasis on achieving status are some of the elements of traditional notions of masculinities (Levant et al., 1992).

Most of the literature that addresses Latino male masculinity focuses on the concept of *machismo*. Despite the strong focus on various negative definitions and explanations of what *machismo* entails, this study was interested in the more recent formulations, which embrace both

positive and negative qualities associated with Latino masculinity. In particular, this study called forth the work of Arciniega and his characterization of a bi-dimensional measure of *machismo*. In his work he described the tension between *machismo* (i.e., aggressive, hyper-masculine attitudes and behaviors) and *caballerismo* (nurturance and family centeredness) (Arciniega, Anderson, Tovar-Blank, & Tracey, 2008).

The social construction of masculinity is believed to be influenced by the male power and socioeconomic status. However, since U.S. Latino males do not possess the economic and political power afforded their white male counterparts, Latino males may tap into key characteristics of their masculinity in order to attempt to overcompensate for their inability to access white middle-class patriarchal privilege (Torres, Solberg, & Carlstrom, 2002). Similar to Darder's (2012) critical theory of biculturalism, the Latino immigrant male finds himself in an internal tug-of-war between the hypermasculinity of patriarchy (dominant culture) he was socialized into and his femininity (subordinate culture), more compatible with college-going culture (Harris & Harper, 2008). The work of Saenz, Bukoski, Lu, and Rodriguez (2013) utilized male gender role conflict (O'Neil, 2015) as a framework to address Latino male educational attainment gaps in the community college setting. The notion of Latino masculinities and their potential link to critical biculturalism is discussed further in the latter section of the literature review in Chapter 2.

## **Methodology**

Given the nature of this qualitative study, Critical Narratives were deemed the ideal qualitative method for conducting this research with Latino immigrant males, where a solicitation of their active participation and voices was encouraged. The study provided

participants an opportunity to identify “change” components needed to challenge the hegemonic educational environment, via a participatory process of deep reflection and engagement with their lived histories. As the researcher, this provided me an opportunity to engage critically with them in ways that facilitated, but did not dictate, an organic process of reflection, participation, and action, toward the goal of capturing their collective voices of self-defined success, as informed by the dynamics of their Latino and male identities.

Furthermore, the use of Critical Narratives allowed for the study to evolve through a collective emancipatory pedagogy. This approach has been shown to be more empowering than traditional research, which is generally founded on a Eurocentric epistemology (Paraskeva, 2011) that is more in sync with the dominant culture of mainstream students and tends to academically oppress low income students of color by not taking into account their linguistic and cultural needs (Darder, 2012). In contrast, the underlying values of critical narratives supported dynamic democratic participation as part of the research process, where the cultural values, personal experiences, and lived histories of participants were at the center of the research process.

### **Positionality**

Many working-class Latino male immigrant students begin their education at a community college for numerous reasons. Some begin their undergraduate studies at the local community college due to a broken K-12 system that failed to provide them a solid college-ready academic foundation. Others choose the community college system due to the proximity to a home where they often contribute financially and play a pivotal role in their family unit. As the Transfer Center coordinator and head transfer counselor at my institution, I have witnessed

narratives of success emanating from personal stories of Latino males who matriculated in the California community college system, each with varying overlapping identities of ethnicity, class, legal status, and sexual orientation. Like the K-12 system, the community college measures success utilizing individualistic and narrowly defined meritocratic measures such as GPA, course completion, and graduation/transfer rates, to name a few.

Although I did not experience the community college to university transfer process first-hand, I share many sensibilities and characteristics with community college Latino male immigrant students. The varying statuses such as low-income, first-generation, bilingual, and undocumented, which may have led them to enroll at a community college, are what builds a bond of understanding and facilitates a strong rapport beyond a counselor-counselee relationship. In addition to counseling students on academic and career goals, I serve as a mentor, role model, and advocate for my students. My positionality as a faculty coordinator supports my role as a student champion at retreats and meetings, where decisions about culturally responsive curriculum, intrusive student outreach efforts, and funding priority decisions are executed. Often these decisions, if left unchallenged, are made with alleged neutral and color-blind policies that support the status quo and fail to disrupt the dominant culture narrative.

### **Link to Social Justice**

Not acknowledging the existent differences faced by students of color within education has become the ultimate violation of social justice committed by alleged neutral higher education institutions. The cultural knowledge and awareness of working class Latino male students, as with other students of color, needs to be redressed and reparations need to be enacted within the higher educational structure, if social justice is to prevail. More often than not, the challenges

that students balance with school life are viewed as liabilities rather than life skills that can serve as assets toward their own academic success. Key examples of this phenomenon include encouraging immigrant or English as a Second Language (ESL) students to speak only English at school because it can potentially lead to more academic success. However, the opposite message is conveyed when we encourage English-only speaking U.S.-born students to learn another language because it will benefit them in the pursuit of a high-profile career and high paying employment.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

The small number of participants, a typical limitation in most qualitative studies leads to a perceived lack of generalizability. Therefore, generalizability is often named as the top limitation in a study of this nature. As researchers, we are led to believe that a small sample size negates the validity of anecdotal findings. I refute this notion since Darder's (2012) critical theory of biculturalism validates the cultural lived experiences of students, their family, and their community. This study aimed to dig deeply in a meaningful way, rather than widely at a superficial level. As a critical race researcher, I had no intention of employing any quantitative methodologies in the study in order to avoid exclusive credence to quantifiable measures of success. In addition, I took a political stand by choosing not to replicate yet another study about so called "achievement" gaps, such as high drop-out rates, low transfer rates, or extended graduation time frames—measures replete with deficit views. The hope was that the purposeful omission of meritocratic measures made room for intrinsic motivation and a cultural-knowledge based pedagogy of success.

## Definitions and Key Terms

***Bicultural:*** Term that describes an enculturation process, distinct from affluent monocultural Euroamerican students. Bicultural students grapple with two cultural/class systems and their corresponding world views, which are determined by the dynamics that result when they must navigate the tensions that result from the dominant/subordinate contradictions at work in their lives as members of a subordinated culture and class (Darder, 2012).

***Biculturalism:*** The process wherein individuals learn to function in two distinct sociocultural environments: their primary culture, and that of the dominant mainstream culture of society in which they live (Darder, 2012).

***Cultural Democracy:*** Perspective and philosophy that states that individuals have the right to an education in their own language and culture; and, therefore, the right to maintain a bicultural identity (Ramirez & Castañeda, 1974). Darder (2012) further politicized this concept by arguing that issues of culture and power must be addressed wherever social justice questions must contend with the cultural dynamics of domination/subordination, as is at work in the lives of Latino immigrant men.

***Cultural Invasion:*** Process by which the invaders penetrate the cultural context of another group, in disrespect of the latter's potentialities, by imposing their own view of the world upon those they invade by curbing their expression (Freire, 1970).

***Critical Pedagogy:*** Educational approach rooted in the tradition of critical theory; educators see their role within an emancipatory process whereby they foster an environment for students to critically examine society's role in their self-formation, their communities' histories,

and how society has directly affected their inability to transform their living conditions (Giroux, 1981).

***Culturally Relevant Education:*** Curriculum that recognizes and reflects the history, voice, and contributions of cultures historically underrepresented.

***Hegemony:*** Form of ideological control in which dominant beliefs, values, and social practices are produced and distributed throughout a whole range of institutions such as schools, the family, mass media, and trade unions (Giroux, 1981).

***Hidden Curriculum:*** The manner in which prevailing social values associated with compliance to authority, punctuality, delayed gratification, and the system of punishments and rewards were systematically enacted within classroom life.

***Masculinity:*** Socially constructed concepts of the male gender identity and the perceived corresponding expectations of such an identity.

***Meritocratic Measure of Success:*** Academic measures such as course completion data, graduation and transfer rates, grade point average, amongst other measures.

***Neoliberal Education:*** School and university structures of education that place high importance on capitalist market values and therefore create college meritocratic measures of accountability and success.

***Subaltern:*** Coined by Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci, in his work on cultural hegemony; term rooted in critical theory and post colonialism, that describes populations socially, politically, and geographically outside of the hegemonic power structure. It describes groups outside of society's established institutions (e.g., education) and who are thus denied a voice in their society (Morton, 2007).

*Working-class Latino Males*: Males who come from a low socioeconomic status and who are raised by parents that hold blue collar jobs.

### **Organization of Study**

A brief description of the five chapters comprising this study follows:

Chapter 1 outlined the statement of the problem and situated it within the community college setting. The chapter also provided the research questions that informed the study, the theoretical lens that was used in the analysis, and the participatory methodology that was employed for conducting the study. In addition, it outlined my positionality as the researcher and established my credibility via my own personal story and how I, like the participants, cultivated and learned to recognize my own cultural knowledge.

Chapter 2 discusses the literature that addresses the bicultural identities of participants and the process of biculturalism at work in their lives. It begins by discussing how Darder's bicultural theory describes the internal dissonance felt by Latino male students in a monolithic educational environment, devoid of cultural democracy. A discussion of Latino male development theory is then explored in order to capture the unique gendered experience of the Latino male within the educational system. A parallel between how Latino male students have to navigate both a racialized and gendered experience is explored with the goal of uncovering a co-created success that challenges colonizing curriculum, teaching pedagogy and the Euroamerican cultural paradigm.

Chapter 3 makes the case for utilizing critical narrative research, in order to integrate participants' voices and facilitate a research process that uncovers their own sense of success and seeks to identify institutional changes that can support their navigation of the community college



system. The chapter also presents the research design and discusses how critical narrative inquiry was utilized for the data collection and coding of emergent themes.

Chapter 4 focuses on the presentation of the data gathered from critical narratives, with the goal of identifying patterns and recurring themes that inform a more culturally inclusive education and practices for success. Moreover, the chapter presents participant stories of their lived experiences in the community college setting.

In Chapter 5, the observation data are critically analyzed and a discussion is provided regarding key implications of the findings. The analysis of the themes are utilized to inform recommendations for the community college public system of education on how to better serve Latino immigrant male students' educational, cultural and gendered needs and success, related to supporting a more socially just academic environment.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

One of the main goals of this study was to challenge the hegemonic nature of higher education via a focus on the experiences of Latino immigrant males matriculated in the California community college system. The California community college setting is an ideal educational environment to explore this issue due to the high number of students of color that begin their bachelor's degree in the country's largest open access system of higher education (Cohen & Brawer, 2014). However, success rates for Latino males are not proportional to the overall community college population, making them the ideal focus of the study due to traditional measures of success, placing the sole onus for their failure in course completion, graduating and/or transferring at the levels of their white male counterparts on the student (Hagedorn & Cepeda, 2004; Pongjuán, Palomin, & Hernandez, 2017; Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges, 2005).

The literature in the field that speaks to Latino male success has undergone an evolution from looking at quantitative meritocratic measures of success narrowly defined by capitalist values, to a more culturally-inclusive, self-defined success grounded on qualitative stories that highlight cultural strengths and responses to the oppression often experienced by Latino males in the college setting (Almeida, 2015; Bernal, 2002; Villalpando, 2004). This evolution aligned well with this study's intention and goal of shifting away the focus from quantifying success via dehumanizing meritocratic measures versus eliciting cultural knowledge that both reimagines and co-constructs that success from the fabric of students' lived experiences. Prior to examining the specific experience of the Latino male student (of which the Latino immigrant male student

is a part), it is imperative to understand the purpose of the community college system within the broader educational pipeline and the role that it plays in educating Latino male students, specifically.

In addition, the review of literature related to Latinx community college students aims to examine various student-based theories that focus on intrinsic motivators that redefine “success”, more specifically for Latino college males. Like most K-12 and higher education institutions, the community college educational culture adheres to measures of meritocratic success. Faculty members and administrators at the California public community college system often gauge student success via traditional academic benchmarks such as course completion, GPA, degree attainment and transfer rates (California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office, 2018). Although these measures are key to the funding and accreditation process of the college, they ignore the holistic teaching, counseling, and mentoring of the integral or “whole” student (Darder, 2002). A rigid meritocracy can create an oppressive environment for students that come from historically underrepresented populations such as first generation, low income and students of color (Labaree, 1997).

Furthermore, it is important to highlight the literature that critically addresses how bicultural students (Darder, 2012) engage with the hegemonic college setting. An examination of their relationship with their educational setting, how students are perceived by such setting, the level of engagement that the institutional setting provides, and the student’s dialectical relationship with their own education needs to be understood. The literature on masculinity development incorporates the necessary gendered lens to examine the intersectionality of the Latino male college student. Latino males experience educational settings differently than female

students and the unique ways that they interact with that setting are key to developing a critical bicultural Latino masculinity perspective that addresses the unique needs and issues germane to them.

### **The Community College System**

College literature has defined the purpose and mission of the community college system in many different ways over the last two centuries. The purpose of the community college has been described in curricular terms including academic, vocational and remedial tracks (Cohen & Brawer, 1996; McGrath & Spear, 1991). It has also been described in social/political terms where the purpose has been ascribed to individual/community development, social/economic mobility, and playing a role in social stratification and reproduction (Brint & Karbel, 1989; Cross, 1985; Dennison & Gallagher, 1986; Dougherty, 1994; Griffith & Connor, 1994; Weis, 1985).

However, by the end of the twentieth century, there was a shift in the mission of the community college system. Community colleges became heavily output-driven and have undergone some curricular changes to adjust to the demands of state and federal economic demands. This view of the community college has transformed colleges into utilitarian institutions that generate a workforce for a capitalist system that needs highly skilled workers. Therefore, community college curricular changes and administrator, faculty, and staff decisions have conformed to business and industry demands (Levin, 2000). “A Nation at Risk,” a 1983 report issued under the presidency of Ronald Reagan (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), recommended that the public education system function as an economic engine through the infusion of neoliberal policies, which were to “trickle down” to community

colleges, beyond the influence it had on the standardization of the K-12 educational system. A democratic education that fostered an informed citizenry has been supplanted by educational policies primarily attentive to global economic demands and the interests of the wealthy and powerful (Darder, 2017; Cohen & Brawer 2014).

Currently comprised of 115 colleges, the California community college system is the largest public system in the country and is touted as the ultimate access to education for all. The current system provides various certificates and associate degrees in various technical fields that can potentially place students into short-term career paths. It can also serve as a springboard to the university by offering general education and transfer preparation curriculum. Admission policies only require 18 years of age or a high school diploma, making it the most accessible of all higher education institutions, when compared to the University of California (UC), the California State University (CSU) and the independent university systems. It offers an educational pipeline starting point for various student populations grossly underrepresented in higher education, including working adults, immigrants, and students of color such as African American and Latinx populations (Bragg, 2001). However, access without engagement is not sufficiently adequate for fulfilling the commitment of democracy that community colleges have the unique opportunity to realize (Rhoads & Valadez, 1996).

Furthermore, some existing literature argues that community colleges further stratify the higher education pipeline and actually impede certain populations of students from transferring from the two-year community college into the baccalaureate degree-granting university (Brint & Karabel, 1989). Kenneth M. Meier (2008), in his multidisciplinary historical analysis of the community college, combined historical research, organization theory, and consensus social

movement theory to address the gap in literature about the social and educational forces that have shaped its national mission. Meier's (2008) study highlighted Brint and Karabel's (1989) critique of the community college as having an undercover vocational mission that redirects students away from collegiate education into vocational tracks along class lines, in order to produce workers for the labor market.

The well-rounded nature of general education and the transfer function is more clearly associated with democratic educational principles and the characteristics of open access, equal opportunity, and civic participation, which support the notion of an informed citizenry versus a capitalist worker socialization (Dowd, 2003). Dowd's work referenced much of Labaree's (1997) three primary goals of schooling: "democratic equality", "social efficiency", and "social mobility". Labaree argued that the democratic community college goals of equal access to schooling and a full civic and political participation were undermined by the neoliberal meritocratic agenda of social efficiency and mobility that assigns students the role of consumer versus citizen. More importantly, the meritocratic nature of public schooling stratifies educational institutions and further reproduces class interests by hijacking educational achievement to legitimize social position.

### **Meritocratic Measures of Success**

In 2004, California Assembly Bill 1417 created a system of performance measurement called the Accountability Reporting for the Community Colleges (ARCC), an annual report produced by the California Community Colleges' Chancellor's Office. The current version of the ARCC is called the Student Success Scorecard and it is composed of a common set of metrics that measures statewide educational outcomes for the system and its colleges. The metrics

measure student enrollment relative to state population, course completion rates awarding of degrees, remedial course completion and persistence rates, and transfer data, to name a few. Currently the Scorecard is not tied to any funding and its primary source of data comes from the Chancellor's Office Management Information System (COMIS), a system that collects students and course level data from each of the college districts at the completion of each term.

Most of the literature related to the success of students of color focuses on meritocratic benchmarks such as the ones outlined and mandated by the ARCC. The entire California community college system adheres to these benchmarks and develops program reviews, long term planning and funding goals in order to meet these benchmarks. The main problem with this type of success assessment comes from the fact that a "one size fits all" model is applied to all student programs, regardless of the unique needs of specific student populations. Not questioning an allegedly neutral meritocracy places the blame for failure on students who grapple with economic, political, and social inequalities, making it difficult to reach their educational goals on their own (McNamee & Miller, 2014). More importantly, with social justice in mind, educators must not allow the myth of meritocracy to distract us from questioning how we address the conditions of oppression students face (Liu, 2011).

Since the 2000s, according to Harris and Harper (2008) most of the scarcely existing published research regarding Latino college motivation leading to persistence and academic achievement pertains to enrollment, educational goals, certificate/Associate of Arts degree attainment, and high school graduation or community college transfer rates. Historical meritocratic measures of academic success overlook the intrinsic success factors that Latino students employ as active participants of their own success, including survival practices and

resilience as demonstrated by personal success, despite an array of social barriers brought about by racism, low income level, and first-generation status. Latino students' coping skills as a response to their struggles and communal, family-based cultural practices are two great examples of success measures generally ignored by a meritocratic, often oppressive educational system.

When examining effective intrinsic models of motivation, it is important to distinguish between extrinsic and intrinsic sources of motivation. Most of the research showed that Latino male students, when intrinsically motivated, had higher levels of college retention and persistence. Trevino and Craft DeFreitas (2014) discussed the need for studies about first-generation Latino college students to focus on the positive role of intrinsic motivation on academic achievement. They argued that intrinsic motivation is a key factor that leads to student academic success, achievement and persistence. They also discussed how extrinsic motivation performed for external tangible rewards (e.g., wealth, fame, popularity) leads to a decrease in persistence, classroom engagement, and negative academic outcomes.

The meritocratic education system utilizes a language foreign for students not familiar with college culture and expectations. Motivation and measured success require a broader, more inclusive definition to encompass the development of a Latino male student's healthy self-identity and his personal self-actualization. Furthermore, an educational system rooted in a dominant culture-based, capitalist model leads to "deficit thinking" (Valencia, 2010) when addressing the "perceived lack" of motivation and academic potential of Latino male college students; and more so, if they are first-generation college students.

Research shows that intrinsic motivation is a prevalent key factor in student academic success, achievement, and persistence. A holistic examination of more comprehensive student-



based approaches must encompass an identification of intrinsic and cultural student development theories that address male Latino motivation that leads to college retention (Peña, 2013). Like numerous studies before, in her work with Mexican American college students, Burns (2010) highlighted academic concerns such as lack of preparation for college level coursework, poor past academic performance, and lack of career and educational goals. More importantly, she went beyond meritocratic measures and extrapolated various non-academic factors that affect the Latinx student population such as familial relationships and expectations, feelings of self-worth and confidence, college-going culture, and financial issues. In particular, Burns referenced Vega's (1990) work on familism (cultural value emphasizing closeness and loyalty). Familism is of particular importance to the critique of capitalist values fostered by neoliberal education, such as individuality and independence. Putting the needs of the family first, even if it leads to personal sacrifices (including schooling), affects the school-defined success of Latinx students and such students and their families are often scapegoated as unmotivated and uninterested in higher education, despite research that shows that Latino parents value education for their children (Arellano & Padilla, 1996; Peña, 2013).

### **Challenging the Banking Model**

Although community colleges operate as open-door institutions for all, the system tends to prioritize programs that serve dominant culture students, such as “colorblind” honors programs and culturally non-inclusive curricula that normalize white middle-class culture and ostracizes first-generation, low-income, students of color. In fact, when budget cuts are implemented, it is often programs that serve the needs of subaltern students that are downsized or

eliminated first, since these students are often perceived as students that are not likely to make it through the educational system as successful members of the college.

To make matters worse, Latinx students and their families, who are often economically disadvantaged, not culturally deficient as some educators claim, are often perceived as not valuing education, which leads to a deficit views of Latino male students as unmotivated, lazy, and uninterested in higher education. In fact, in an outcome-driven environment, higher education institutions view these students as liabilities in their pursuit of public funding, based on fulfilling certain state mandates and applying for private corporate grants. However, various longitudinal studies have identified psychological and family cultural resources including ethnic identity, family interdependence, and parental support as “protective factors” that counteract the effects of socioeconomic disadvantage (Ong, Phinney, & Dennis, 2006).

Although a high number of Latino male students hold down part-time or full-time jobs to counteract poverty, they still manage to balance school, work, and family demands—contrary to racialized deficit perspectives of these students. According to Ong, Phinney, and Dennis (2006), family interdependence fosters a strong desire to do well in school in order to compensate their parents, especially immigrant parents, for the sacrifices they have made for the sake of their children. Arellano and Padilla (1996) tied academic resilience to supportive family ties. Studies of this nature dispel myths that Latino families do not value education for their children or that they somehow stand in the way of their college success by demanding their focus on things other than their academic goals.

More importantly, the extensive work of Phinney (1992) amongst others, firmly established ethnic identity as a key factor to Latinx students’ college success. Originating from a

developmental perspective, her work explored the connection between a strong ethnic identity and a high educational engagement. A strong ethnic identity and affiliation with culture and family facilitates the utilization of familial support as a cultural asset, not a liability, as it pertains to motivation and college persistence. All research that explores Latinx students in a more comprehensive manner contributes to a broader definition of success and a resilience that goes beyond narrow academic definitions. This type of success encompasses various domains, including emotional, social, and personal success; thus, humanizing the experience of the Latino male student beyond materialistic success.

### **Latino Male Students in Community College**

Certain themes emerge in the literature about Latino male community college students. One study about Mexican American males in community college by Peña (2013), for example, outlined self-defined characteristics or themes identified by Latino community college males as playing a key role in their academic success. These were considered to be intrinsic in nature and challenged extrinsic economic motivators fostered by the neoliberal agenda in higher education. The following eleven themes were considered significant to Mexican American male students:

***Personal Identity:*** The male student participants named an “identity” anchored in self-pride and driven by inner motivation as a strong factor in their personal success. Their identity was further supported by a culture of family, including making their mothers proud.

***Personal Demographics:*** An inner drive and self-motivation to succeed were identified as being inculcated early in life by parents and mentors.

***Resilience:*** Self-belief despite coming from an economically disadvantaged home by turning disadvantage into resiliency.

**Networking:** Networking with community and friends stemming from the close proximity and access to their local college.

**Family Support:** Students credited their family for supporting their efforts and for encouraging them to delay gratification. Students also gained the ability to turn negative family support into motivation to succeed.

**Motivation:** Most students mentioned self-motivation, family motivation, and teacher motivation as contributing factors to their success. Reflection about past early academics also emerged as a motivator. In particular, positive influence and mentorship from teachers and other successful individuals in their lives was another source of motivation.

**Peer Influence:** Family and peer influence propelled further self-motivation to attend college. A communal camaraderie characterized by similar interests was cited as a key component.

**Inspiration and Mentorship:** A majority of the students found inspiration from their mothers. The need to help others that did not speak English was another motivating factor to pursue their own education with the purpose of helping others, which was another example of a communal concept.

**Significance of Degree Attainment:** Pride emanating from being the first to graduate college and having their parents be proud of them was another intrinsic motivator.

**Academic Rigor and College Preparedness:** Adapting to unknown new environments and developing a discipline was identified as a cultural strength as a response to the challenging academic rigor.

*Strong Mentorship Advising:* Several students mentioned relationships with guidance counselors, teachers, staff, and family friends as another communal practice.

There remains a dearth of literature that examines masculinity issues of Latino male college students, and almost no literature that engages the experiences of Latino immigrant males. Much of the literature on male college students and masculinity focuses on African American males (Mason, 1998; Stevens, 2006; Wood & Essien-Wood, 2012). However, there are certain parallels in the African American male experience that can be applied to Latino college males, including Latino immigrant male students. There is substantial literature that acknowledges the influence of capitalism on higher educational institutions, but very little on its psychological effects on students of color. One important parallel from African American research consistent with Latino immigrant males, is that they, like African American males, represent a subpopulation with a history of supplying a cheap or free labor in the form of slaves, factory workers, farmhands and domestic workers (Ferguson, 2011).

The parents of Latino immigrant males may work as farmworkers, factory workers, day laborers, and domestic nannies and maids. Like Latino males, African American male students pursue a community college education with hopes of gaining job and occupational skills or a job certification, which can lead to immediate job placement. External factors such as work, family obligations, and dependents impact their college success. In addition, there are Latino male cultural and masculinity roles that call for males to become providers of overall economic support for their families. Attending a community college that offers short-term skill training and industry and technology degrees with the goal of placing students in the workforce further feeds into the capitalist machine (Bowles & Gintis, 2011; Meier, 2008).

One particular study carried out at a community college in the Southwestern United States addressed the psychological effects that a neoliberal community college education can have on African American males. The study coined the term, “capital identity projection” to describe the negative effects that materialism and excessive consumerist values can have on males of color matriculated in college (Wood & Essien-Wood, 2012). The researchers described this type of projection as a psychosocial disorder that occurs when socioeconomic achievement is prioritized over students’ personal welfare via a “capital image.” This particular study linked psychological outcomes to the economic system that fosters them. The ultimate contribution this study provided is the connection between projection and capitalism and how this concept can challenge deficit language when describing Latino immigrant male students, their families, and communities. The blame for non-success is shifted from the student to the system of capitalist values, which cultivates individualism, excess, and “glory seeking” (Wood & Essien-Wood, 2012).

A noteworthy amount of research conducted on males of color in college has utilized qualitative methods of narrative inquiry, looking at both Latino and African American males when examining issues of masculinity (Bukoski & Hatch, 2016). This type of research has sought to acknowledge male of color success as a way to address the bigger issue of historically underrepresented communities. One interesting and relatively new concept that has emerged from recent literature is the dichotomous concept of male privilege versus dis-privilege (Bukoski & Hatch, 2016). These studies explore the notion that although maleness is a societal privilege, males of color, including Latino immigrant males, have a difficult time finding validation within male white spaces.

The complexity of belonging to more than one identity challenges the assumptions made about male privilege when considered within the realm of educational attainment. Literature on this issue has also revealed the lack of a student development theory for men, in order to challenge hegemonic notions of masculinity. One of the challenges in addressing community college males of color is the fact that motivational theories are seldom gender specific. Additional literature revealed a good number of motivational-based theoretical frameworks that were not male gender specific. There was an even bigger gap in the literature, as shown by the absence of a Latino male theoretical framework and an almost non-existent Latino immigrant male focus.

One influential measure of masculinity-femininity and gender roles named the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI), which has been used to assesses how people identify themselves psychologically (Bem, 1974). The Bem Sex Role Inventory explored 60 different personality traits and characterized personality as masculine, feminine, androgynous, or undifferentiated. The BSRI, based on gender stereotypes, measured how people fit into traditional sex roles (Bem, 1974). However, like other personality assessment tools from that era, they had ethnic and class biases and were not very effective when researchers of color conducted studies on men and women of color. They did not take into account the varied and nuanced cultural differences of non-white populations. To address this issue when studying Latino males, Alfredo Mirande (1997) developed his own assessment called the Mirande Sex Role Inventory (MSRI). On the issues of masculinity and Latino culture, he stated that:

But Latino conceptions of masculinity and femininity, I believe, are more situational and are best understood within a collective sociocultural context rather than as individual

traits. The Latino sense of masculinity and femininity is often determined by the response of the collective. (p. 34)

According to Harris and Harper's (2008) work, societal and cultural expectations of masculinity are incompatible with a healthy integrated psychological development more conducive to foster the social relationships with faculty, staff, and peers required for college success that males, like any other student, requires to achieve success. Major influential groups in the lives of male students that serve as barriers include parents and families, male peer groups, and schools. All three contribute to a patriarchal male privilege system that carries throughout their educational experiences. Male peer groups have a stronger influence than parental influence. Fellow male students measure each other's success in non-academic ways. The heavy emphasis in physical prowess paints good student characteristics such as disciplined study skills as too "feminine." School-related assignments and good study habits are not perceived to be masculine by boys.

In addition, campus culture creates a sexist and heterosexist environment that challenges boys to pursue the opposite sex and restrict their emotional connection to people, limiting their emotional skills needed later in college for in-person, social networking opportunities. Assessing the gender-specific needs of Latino males and identifying strategies to address the societal and cultural barriers they face is important. Unearthing intrinsic gender specific motivational factors is key to male college success.

### **Critical Biculturalism**

Darder's (2012) critical theory of biculturalism provides a useful lens by which to examine how working-class Latino immigrant male students experience the California public



community college system, how they identify their own success within it, and how the development of both their Latino and male identities contribute to their self-defined success. To begin, it addresses the type of deficit language this study aims to challenge. Here, the theory intentionally employs the term bicultural versus “minority” due to the latter term’s linguistic and political perpetuation of viewing students of color as deficient and as subordinated subjects.

In addition, the term biculturalism sheds light on what Darder (2012) has described as an “enculturation process” whereby working-class students’ development occurs within a dual cultural/class system with conflicting values and tensions associated with the dominant/subordinate societal dynamics they must navigate daily as subaltern subjects. Culture is not neutral, despite the traditional discourse that education peddles to students of color. Students are indoctrinated into an alleged scientific, rational, individualistic, and supposed value-free culture that claims to be apolitical and neutral (Giroux, 1983). However, college culture is neither neutral nor static; it is a living, breathing extension of the political, historical, and ever-evolving reality of racism and other forms of oppression students experience every day. As such, students of color must negotiate between a dominant monocultural, Eurocentric culture and their own subordinated culture, which results in a social, political, and historically oppressive reality—vastly different from the reality of students from the dominant culture. Hence, Darder (2012) has characterized the biculturation process of students “as a deeply complex process encompassing a variety of both conscious and unconscious contradictory, oppressive, and emancipatory responses that are at work along a continuum [see Figure 2] that moves, conceptually, between the primary culture and the dominant culture” (p. 50).

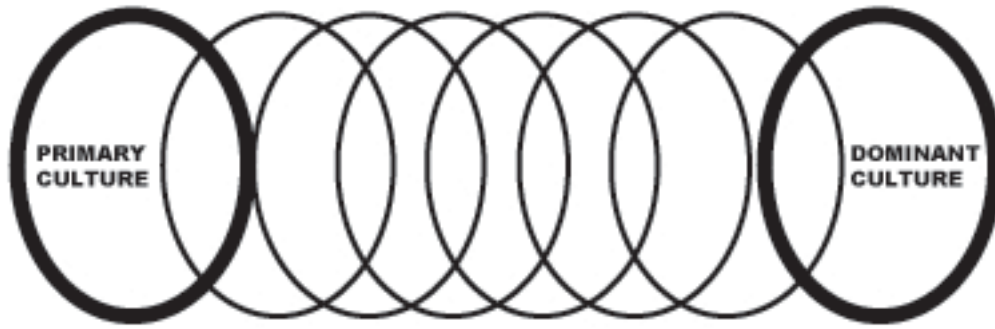


Figure 2: The bicultural process represented along a dialectical.

Source: *Culture and Power in the Classroom: Educational Foundations for the Schooling of Bicultural Students* by A. Darder, 2012, New York, N.Y.: Routledge. Copyright 2012 by Taylor and Francis. Used with permission.

Furthermore, bicultural students also have to negotiate their development within educational institutions that uphold monolithic Eurocentric values, an American capitalist system, and an alleged “color-blind” meritocracy (Darder, 2012). Due to the high number of matriculated students of color, the California community college system is often viewed as a more open-access educational system serving racialized communities (Darder 2012). Although this may be true in theory, the gaps in educational attainment for these communities compared to white student populations continues to indicate there is a huge disparity; even in a system that is considered a new start for all students, regardless of race, socioeconomic level, and/or academic preparation.

Post-civil rights, a shift occurred from primarily attributing the failure of working-class students of color to genetics (Coleman et al., 1966; Jensen, 1969) to attributing their failure to the environment (Bloom 1964; Cohen et al., 1968; Lewis, 1966; Miller, 1958; Moynihan, 1965). Though well-intentioned, white liberal educators who attributed failure to the environment (i.e., poverty, “bad neighborhoods”, and a lack of formal education within their family history), still placed the blame on the student for their inability to adapt to educational cultural expectations

(Darder, 2012). Often, white liberal educators design and implement programs that target low-income students of color in order to address the effects of students' "culturally-deprived" environment, prior to entering college. Though there is recognition of the deep inequality created by racism, classism, and other forms of discrimination, the white liberal college culture expects students of color to change, instead of addressing the real problem—the system itself (Darder, 2012).

Another key component of Darder's bicultural theory lies in the relationship described between culture and power within American society and how this relationship plays out in education. Enacting a context of cultural democracy within public education serves to support human rights and a socially just environment for all students. Hence, educating Latino students in their primary language and culture as well as incorporating their voices into the public schooling discourse are prime examples of how to enact cultural democracy and put it into action. (Darder, 2012; Ramirez & Castaneda, 1974). Darder referenced the work of Foucault (1977) and Johnson (1986) to call out the false notion of an autonomous culture of knowledge within education. Moreover, she described the role that education plays in disguising the narrative of an intentional dominant culture, which serves capitalist interests in controlling wealth, power, and knowledge.

In contrast, cultural democracy emanates from the cultural knowledge and lived experiences of students, challenging oppressive practices of capitalist and racialized subordination. Yet, for the most part, public education fails to provide working-class students of color with what Darder (2012) described as an environment where "individuals have the right to cultivate and maintain a bicultural identity with their culture of origin while learning to survive

effectively within the institutional values of the dominant society” (p. xix) via culturally inclusive curriculum and an educational pedagogy responsive to their lived, sociopolitical, and economic histories.

Accordingly, Darder (2012) argued that students from subaltern communities are socialized to accept their subordinate place within a hierarchical structure embedded in a schooling system engrained with values that benefit the dominant culture and class. Critical biculturalism critiques traditional educational practices and how they have contributed to the “underachievement” of bicultural students. As such, meritocratic measures of success benefit students from the dominant culture. Public schooling utilizes curriculum to legitimize the dominant culture and rewards the acquisition of knowledge and success of the individual, rather than the collective (Giroux, 1985). Latino culture is based on a group, community, and family paradigm (collective), therefore making Latino students’ lived reality often incompatible with public education’s dominant culture pedagogy.

Darder’s (2012) perspective supports this study’s goal of redirecting academic failure away from the individual and attributes it to the educational system’s inability to connect classroom knowledge to the cultural knowledge of the students being taught (Giroux, 1981). The emancipatory element of this study is tied to a critique of how public education utilizes the hierarchical structure as a colonizing force, therefore limiting the social agency and self-determination that bicultural students have over their own lives, including the alleged choices available within an instrumentalizing and “neutral” learning environment (Giroux, 1981). Key to a culturally democratic lens is that the onus of responsibility for students’ difficulties is placed on what Darder called the “high risk institution,” rather than on the so-called “high risk student.”

## **Latino Masculinities**

Like Latinx bicultural students that grapple with ethnic hegemonic forces in their educational environments, Latino immigrant males specifically engage in the same struggle along gender lines. It is important to note that Latino males experience educational settings differently than female or white male students. There are numerous male identity development theories that address overall male student populations, but few that focus specifically on Latino males (and far less on Latino immigrant men) and how their identities challenge monolithic notions of masculinity. However, a few perspectives in the literature can be helpful in better understanding the issues at play in the lives of Latino immigrant men.

### **Minority Masculinity Stress Theory**

Lu and Wong (2014) employed what they called Minority Masculinity Stress Theory in a study of Latino American men to address how rejecting gendered expectations of their role-identity is in direct opposition to hegemonic masculinity. Latino men are indoctrinated with stereotypical messages and hegemonic norms that directly devalue their identity and negatively affect the positive self-concept they may have of themselves in a racist-free environment. They engage in role-identities that perpetuate stereotypes in order to address the stress that comes from responding to oppression. This perspective, moreover, is pivotal to this study in connecting how bicultural men experience both racial and gender-based oppression.

According to Lu and Wong (2014) racism and its corresponding stereotypes are the key differences that explain how Latino men experience a racialized masculinity, different from white men from the dominant culture. Although males are privileged along gender lines, Latino males are still marginalized within a racialized hierarchy of hegemonic masculinity (Torres et al.,

2002). Lu and Wong (2014) focused on the negotiation of two male cultures (dominant and marginalized) and the struggle of having to adhere to both American and Latino societal expectations of masculinity and the psychological stress Latino males experience as they negotiate their own positive self-concept when attempting to overcome stereotypes.

Lu and Wong's (2014) work contributes to the notion of two masculinities (identities) that place Latino males in a bicultural dichotomy. First their work describes a hegemonic masculinity (primarily white and heterosexual) that exists within the dominant culture. Second, Lu and Wong (2014) referenced past literature (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Demetriou, 2001) that situated Latino males belonging to a more subordinate masculinity (working class, gay, etc.), which may also attempt to uphold hegemonic masculinity practices (i.e., self-reliance, competitiveness, etc.).

There have been various studies that have reframed masculinity for Latino males and, thus, have served as a direct challenge to stereotypes such as machismo, rejecting hegemonic masculinity (Hurtado & Sinha, 2016; Mirande, 1997; Peña-Talamantes, 2013). Mirande (1997) argued that characterizations of Latino males as aggressive, assertive, and emotionally restrictive are more dominant culture representations of masculinity, not culturally inclusive of positive Latino characteristics such as responsible, respectful, altruistic, noble, and family-oriented (Lu & Wong, 2014). Similarly, Arciniega, Anderson, Tovar-Blank, and Tracey (2008) engaged with the concept of *caballerismo*, which represents a positive cultural masculinity value within Latino culture, emphasizing nurturing relationships with family, often a source of motivation for Latino male students.

Further, Peña-Talamantes' (2013) work described a Latino awareness of U.S. American *machismo* notions and acknowledged that Latino males seek to redefine their masculinity and embrace the value of an education, in direct contrast to violent or irresponsible behaviors that paint Latino males as unmotivated or lazy. In addition, Peña-Talamantes' (2013) study described a "machoflexible identity", which is considered key to reconstructing masculinity out of a hegemonic and heteronormative model. This concept promises new possibilities in Latino males reimagining their own college success by challenging their teacher's perceptions (Cerezo, Lyda, Beristianos, Enriquez, & Connor, 2013) of them due to their race and gender.

### **Toward a Critical Latino Bicultural Masculinity**

Like Darder's (2012) critical theory of biculturalism, this study aimed to examine the relationship between culture and power, challenge traditional public education's meritocratic culture, and explore the experience of subaltern students of color in the community college environment. However, the key to articulating a perspective of Critical Latino Bicultural Masculinity lies in the intersectionality of the Latino male's ethnic identity and how masculinity within this subordinated cultural environment is negotiated. *Machismo* is one of the most common stereotypes associated with Latino males and often viewed as a liability toward their success by many researchers (Torres et al., 2002). Negative stereotypes are one-dimensional and do not address the varying experiences of Latino males. Such stereotypes are often internalized along with their respective male gender roles. Similar to Darder's (2012) critical bicultural theory, Latino men struggle with negotiating between Latino cultural male expectations and dominant culture masculinity norms (Lu & Wong, 2014).

The aim of this study was not to focus on the stress caused by this constant negotiation but rather, to answer a key research question posed in the study by identifying the ways in which aspects of Latino masculinities are reflected in the perspectives of what is needed for their own success, which is more complex than the one-dimensional stereotypes of masculinity that Latino males are subjected to, given hegemonic race and gender expectations (Smith, 2003). The ultimate goal was to address educational achievement differences by helping to situate Latino male success within the framework of their social environments, such as racialized segregation that fosters an unhealthy hypermasculinity to deal with oppression brought upon by poor economic and social conditions (Rios, 2011; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009, Halx & Ortiz, 2011). Through the process of critical narrative research with a group of working-class Latino immigrant men, this study sought to examine a critical bicultural Latino masculinity perspective that could bring greater specificity to their experiences of success within the community college setting.



## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study of the lived experiences of Latino immigrant men attending the same community college took place in California, which provided an ideal setting for this investigation into the manner in which in their cultural and genders sensibilities shape their needs related to and views of success. During the 2016-2017 academic year, there were 453, 293 Latino male students enrolled in the California community college system, a number that represents 42.17% of the total male population. The Latino male population is almost double that of white males (27.4%) enrolled in the California community college system (California Community College Chancellor's Office, 2007). Therefore, Latino males comprise the largest male population in the entire California community college pipeline. This chapter discusses the methodological framework, the rationale for employing critical narratives, a discussion of the research study and design, participant selection and description, as well as data collection and analysis that guided this study. The delimitations and limitations conclude this chapter.

#### **Research Questions**

The major research questions that inform the study's critical narratives include the following:

1. What are the experiences of working class Latino immigrant males in navigating the California community college system?
2. In what ways does their bicultural identity shape their educational experiences?
3. In what way are aspects of Latino masculinities reflected in the perspectives of what is needed for their own success?

## **Methodological Framework**

This study sought to create a space in which Latino immigrant male community college students could both identify and challenge neoliberal influences within educational settings that impact their lives, and together give voice to the academic, social, and cultural needs and resources needed by Latino immigrant men in community colleges that will support their academic success. Toward this end, the qualitative methodology employed in this study also aimed to free the notion of educational success from the shackles of individualistic models of achievement and re-envision it as a more collectivist phenomenon, which represents a more culturally appropriate understanding. Since this study sought to integrate the voices of Latino immigrant male students in ways that created the conditions for them to recognize their own cultural agency, and reimagine and advocate for liberatory conditions, a qualitative approach that opens the field for a more rich examination of phenomena was employed. Moreover, utilizing a qualitative methodology by way of critical narratives provided a formidable option for honoring participants' voices and creating a space for participants to self-identify their own needs and to identify how conditions and practices within community college impact the conditions of their own success.

### **Critical Narratives**

Past academic studies focused on community college students and their success have historically employed a plethora of quantitative and qualitative methodologies that measure success in meritocratic terms. Unfortunately, these methodologies confine the agency of the study solely to the researcher, seldom extending to the members of the community being studied. Critical narratives, a qualitative research method, was utilized for its storytelling elements to

commission Latino males' own voices and encourage them to take ownership of their own agency. Critical narratives possess the strongest potential to disrupt hegemonic structures of education and elicit from the students' voices a reframing of what it means to be successful. In addition, there exists vast literature that has addressed reasons why students of color have not been successful at closing what colleges have called educational gaps based on alleged objective and neutral meritocratic measures of success. However, so-called objective measures of success lack the knowledge that can only be derived from the students' deep lived experiences and the complexity of meaning found only in their intersectional identities as immigrant male Latinos.

### **Research Design**

The following provides a description of the research design that describes the collection and analysis of the data generated by this study.

### **Participant Selection**

Participant criteria for selection included: Latino, male, community college student, working-class, first-generation, and immigrant. I conducted narrative sessions with seven community college male participants with the goal of examining experiential knowledge rooted in their biculturalism that yielded emerging themes. The participants in the study were Californian male college students residing in the Los Angeles county, who identified as Latino and were matriculated at a community college. For convenience, they were recruited from my networks as a community college educator/counselor across various community colleges settings. To protect the confidentiality of participants, pseudonyms were assigned to ensure participant confidentiality, as well as encourage high levels of trust, openness, and risk-taking when sharing during the collection of narratives process. The pseudonyms assigned were based

on Latino male political figures known for their political and social justice inclinations in history. Factors such as age, sexuality, and country of origin or Los Angeles city they reside in composed the participant profile data collected and was considered in the analysis only where pertinent to the study.

### **Setting**

I conducted the critical narrative sessions at the student's college and/or neighborhood setting, in order to situate them in a presumably familiar environment. My hope as the researcher was to tap into a culture fostered by their family life, neighborhood upbringing, and Latino identity.

### **Data Collection**

I engaged participants in individual one-hour critical narratives. The questions were purposefully designed as open-ended questions to generate non-restrictive reflection and a soul-searching, humanistic assessment of the participants' truth around their own personal success stories.

### **Coding and Analysis of Data**

The group's recorded dialogues were recorded and transcribed in their entirety. Data was first deductively analyzed utilizing the lenses of Darder's (2012) critical theory of biculturalism and various masculinity development theories. In addition, data yielded from the critical narrative sessions were manually analyzed and inductively coded, in order to identify emerging themes. Special attention was paid to what students highlighted as their own self-defined perspectives of student needs and success, in order to identify those elements that spoke most strongly to their social agency. In addition, attention was paid to the participants' own self-

definition and understanding of success and a collectivist co-construction of language rooted in Latinx culture that challenges individualistic and a capitalist-based vernacular used in cultural capital models by moving toward a more collectivist definition of student needs and success.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

A traditional qualitative research ethos may suggest that limitations of the study include the inability to generalize due to the small sample size of participants and question whether the sample is representative of the population about which the study wishes to make inferences upon its completion. A delimitation of the study may come from the open-ended dialogical nature of the critical narrative process itself that may bring into question the validity and reliability of the research. However, this study vehemently rejected these critiques as barriers to challenging and disrupting the status quo under the guise of objective inquiry. Instead, the authority of lived experience (hooks, 1994) and perspectives of the participants that drove this study were directed toward the collection of rich data that could engage the social phenomenon under study with greater depth.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **CRITICAL NARRATIVES:**

#### **VOICES OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE IMMIGRANT LATINO MALE STUDENTS**

This chapter introduces seven working-class, Latino male students matriculated in the California community college educational system. At the time of the study, all seven participants attended the same community college in southern California and the critical narratives were conducted in the fall of 2018. At the time that the critical narratives were recorded, all of the participants were one or two years away from transferring to a university, where they planned to complete their bachelor degrees. All seven participants were Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients, except for the most recent immigrant participant, who travelled to the United States with a green card acquired for him by his parents. All of the study participants credited an opportunity for a better education as the primary reason their families migrated to the United States. All of the participants spoke their native language at home and adhered to various Latino cultural traditions due to the fact that their parents were not as acculturated to U.S.-centric culture as their children. In addition, all participants shared that they code-switched between speaking English at school to speaking their native Spanish language at home.

#### **Participant Profiles**

Participants hailed from three different Latin American countries including Mexico, Brazil, and Peru. Although having migrated from Mexico, one of the participants identified himself as half Mexican, half Honduran. Table 1 highlights the demographic data for each participant. In order to maintain the anonymity of their identity, the participants were assigned pseudonyms that represented the names of Latino political and social justice leaders that

correspond to their country of origin. This assignment of pseudonyms was executed as an ode to the important contribution these participants have made to this study. In addition to a brief biography detailing each student’s immigration story, themes that characterize commonalities amongst all participants are highlighted.

Table 2  
*Participants’ Profiles and Pseudonym Significance*

Name	Country of Origin	Immigration Status	Historical Figure Name
Paulo	Brazil	DACA Recipient	Paulo Freire
Cesar	Mexico	DACA Recipient	Cesar Chavez
Lempira	Mexico/Honduras	DACA Recipient	Lempira Lenca Ruler
Silverio	Peru	DACA Recipient	Jose Silverio Olaya
Cuauhtémoc	Mexico	DACA Recipient	Aztec Ruler of Tenochtitlan
Emiliano	Mexico	DACA Recipient	Emiliano Zapata
Escutia	Mexico	DACA Recipient	Jose Escutia

### **Participant Stories**

This section presents the stories and voices related to the experiences of the Latino immigrant male community college students who participated in this study. These are each presented as an individual recounting of each man’s narrative, with the use of participant words as much as possible, in order to preserve the integrity of participant voices, ideas, and insights. At the request of one of the participants, the critical narrative was conducted completely in Spanish. A translation of his specific narrative has been provided.

#### **Paulo**

Paulo was born in Brazil and emigrated with his mother to the United States at the age of one. He was raised by a single mother due to his father’s early death, when he was an infant. Therefore, he grew up without a male figure in his life. His mother works an office job and is the

primary financial provider of the family, and Pablo described her as a strong person, willing to do anything for her son's college education. Accompanied only by his mother and grandmother, he traveled to the United States with tourist visas that eventually expired, leaving all three family members undocumented. Upon arrival, they moved in with an aunt in the South Bay area of Los Angeles.

Paulo balanced schoolwork with a thirty-six hour a week job in order to not add additional financial burden to his family. He has never applied for financial aid, under the erroneous assumption that he would not qualify due to his non-U.S. citizenship status. Due to his busy life, he did not have time in his hectic schedule to utilize campus resources such as the health center or join student organizations. Despite growing up as an only child he described himself as a social person who craves and enjoys conversations with his friends, his primary source of happiness. Paulo lived near a very small extended family consisting of only one aunt and a cousin. He communicated via phone conversations with his much larger extended family in Brazil, whom he wishes he had more personal contact with on a regular basis.

In our session, Paulo spoke about the precautions a young immigrant has to take, often taken for granted by U.S citizens:

Well, I don't know about school, but outside I just behave differently because I am an immigrant . . . I never break the law. My mom made sure that I did not break the law and didn't get in trouble because of our situation. I didn't have a license, so instead of driving illegally we had to Uber all the time. It got really expensive, but my mom didn't care because she thought it outweighs the risks for sure of getting in trouble.



Paulo discussed the stress an immigrant experiences when negotiating between two identities and finding himself in a place where he had to deny his immigrant identity:

Being an immigrant can be really stressful, and not thinking about it is just my coping mechanism and it works. In my eyes, when I walk down the halls or whatever . . . I try not to be an immigrant. When I go home, or when I'm with my friends, just the way I behave and stuff like that can be . . . it's different . . . as far as other people, I'm not an immigrant. I have no problem identifying as an immigrant, but it's something I don't share with the world. I don't even think I can trust them to tell them . . . just because I've been doing it my whole life . . . but I can see why other people would be angry all the time. I can see how it could take an emotional toll, but I try to live without stress . . . I just don't think about it . . . that's made my life easier.

Paulo also described his Latino household as non-American and more culturally Brazilian where Portuguese serves as his family's primary language. He understood spoken Portuguese but has difficulty speaking it fluently to his family. In addition to Portuguese, his mother spoke Spanish due to her Spanish-speaking Latino friends.

Aside from Paulo's challenges with the Portuguese language he noted a difference between his culture at home versus his friends' white American culture at school:

Well my mom and grandma live with me, and it's just like they're not American. Let's say the food I eat is different or the shows I watch are different. They both speak Portuguese. The way my mom raised me is just different from my friends sometimes. Paulo described his neighborhood as a tight, very social, and culture-rich Brazilian community.

My grandma always goes to the barbecue in our complex and the whole neighborhood okay, all our neighbors are Brazilian. There's a pool . . . they have cookouts and everyone just talking. It's like a party, but every day basically. There's just barbecues and stuff like that. It's a really close, tight community in the complex at least.

Paulo also talked about how well he performed academically in school up until the sixth grade. That year represented a harsh realization in his life because he recalls the very moment he found out he was an immigrant:

Sixth grade is when I found out I was an immigrant and I didn't think I could go to college at that point. I really didn't try. I didn't care for school at all. I failed a lot of classes, and I did really bad . . . then again, senior year I didn't think I was gonna go to college at all.

Paulo believes that Latino culture defines manhood as someone that has to take care of and support his family:

That's the closest thing I have to masculinity in my life, was my mom being tough. She's not masculine, but that's what I associate those two words with . . . masculinity and toughness . . . I don't like to complain to other people and talk about my problems . . . growing up people would always tell me, oh, you're the man of the house, you have to take care of mom, so being a man is just supporting your family.

During our time together, Paulo also spoke of the college culture as an isolating and disconnected environment for him:

Yeah, most people don't talk in classes. Most people don't form connections because it's just first semester, and you'll never see that person again. It's really isolated at

community college. It doesn't have to be, but usually it is. It's really independent . . . everything is by yourself, for yourself. Teachers they tell you to do your work, but if you don't do your work it's not their problem.

Similarly, Paulo expressed that he feels invisible in his college environment due to its white American culture. He stated that all literature and history courses he has ever taken in high school and college have all had a strong white American focus with the exception of one English cultural course:

Education is very . . . it's always about American . . . in English, all the studies, all the books you read were by American authors about American culture, and it's always American literature . . . history, obviously is American.

More importantly, Paulo spoke about how significant it was for him to see Latino immigrants like himself being visible and represented in higher education:

It's not something that I think about, but I do think it is important to be represented . . . because if we're not then no one cares about us, you know what I mean? . . . If we're not represented, no one knows about us, no one cares about us, so yeah.

Here, Paulo also discussed the key role that such forms of representation played in an immigrant's self-concept and belief in his potential to succeed in higher education:

Seeing themselves, I think if I heard more stories about people like me when I was younger it would have made a difference if they were successful . . . maybe if it was an immigrant story about a kid who's valedictorian or something like that, and they were an immigrant, I think yeah that would.

Paulo noted in our session that he was aware that many Latino parents do not possess the same college knowledge, compared to his white peers' parents:

My friends that are Latino, they wouldn't go to college as much as my white friends.

Their parents didn't go to college, so just growing up it's different . . . a different community basically, because all my white friends, all their parents went to college. They all knew how to apply and stuff. They knew what to do because of their parents. My Latino friends did not know, and it was their first time. My friend's parents are really informative, or they know exactly what to do at the community college . . . They know exactly how to weave their way their way through the school transfer. My mom has no idea. So, when I'm here I have to ask counselors . . . or just staff members here for help,

One contribution that Paulo credited for his general success is his Brazilian culture's social quality:

In terms of culture . . . all my neighbors being Brazilian, they would be very social. I wouldn't have a problem being social or talking to other people in school, which is very helpful . . . I have no social anxiety just talking to other people, which a lot of people do. A lot of people tell me they suffer from social anxiety and being at home I would never have that problem because of the environment I grew up in.

Paulo also touched on the issue of meritocracy when he spoke about what grades represent and whether earning good grades are the only legitimate measures of success:

I don't know because I feel like if I said yes that would mean that someone who doesn't pass their classes is not successful, and I don't think that's true . . . grades just show what I am capable of doing from what I thought I wasn't capable of doing . . . the "A" grade

shows that I can do what I thought I couldn't, which is a mental barrier I have to get over . . . it just shows that if I stick it out, and if I try my hardest I can do well.

A story that Paulo raised during our session was about the first time Paulo met with a Latino counselor at the community college:

For sure because the second I found out I still didn't think I could go to college even though I was at the community college . . . I didn't think I could go to the university, let's say. When my counselor told me there's lots of grants and stuff, and it's affordable, that changed a lot of things. That made me a lot happier. I tried a lot harder, and I got a lot better grades. Basically, finding out that I could go to college was a really big incentive, and I did better because of that.

Furthermore, Paulo identified the impact his Latino male counselor had on his own self-imposed attitude and effort to try harder in school:

I think it was talking to my community college counselor, because before talking to him, I never thought I would go to college. He was talking about how close I was to applying and what kind of schools I could get into. It just completely changed. I remember when he told me I could talk to UC Santa Cruz . . . never thought I could try or go to school or anything like that . . . let's say UCSB . . . I really wanna go so I'm just gonna try as hard as I can for as long as I can get into that school. But it made me really happy just thinking that I can go to a school I wanna go to. At first, I was doing really bad because I didn't really try. Literally the second I knew I can get to a university. . . I never imagined myself going to a university ever, even though my mom always wanted me to go, and when I could see myself going I just . . . I don't know. I studied really hard. It became a lot easier

because I tried . . . definitely hard work. Studying and then the motivation for sure, because without the motivation I wouldn't have cared. I probably would've just be stuck here forever.

## **Cesar**

Cesar emigrated from Mexico City before his first birthday and was told his travel story by his parents due to his very young age at the time it occurred. A pastor friend of the family travelled into the United States with a visa and crossed Cesar as if he was his own son. His mother arrived later with her own visa that eventually expired, leading to her own undocumented status. He has two siblings and grew up with only his immediate family isolated from any extended family members with the exception of occasional visits from grandparents that travelled from Mexico. The details of his father's immigrant journey are blurry in his recollection of events due to what he described as a troubled history in their relationship. He described the challenges of growing up in the Compton/Watts area of Los Angeles.

In our narrative session, Cesar talked about how there was a time in his life where he felt shame about his Latino identity and on coming to accept himself:

I used to be ashamed of identifying as Latino, having that, I guess it's a stamp, but I know that you get it when you're a baby. I have it right here . . . *la vacuna* (vaccine) and just even telling people that my parents clean homes, because I know that it's a stereotype. It hurts talking about stuff like that . . . It hurts knowing that there's an invisible border in your mind that you can't go anywhere, that you can only stay where you are . . . I think now, more than ever, I don't care about these walls. I don't care about these limits that they put on us. I don't care what people think. I'm going to express

myself the way that I want to express myself . . . I've matured. I'm Latino. I'm going to tell people . . . I'm not ashamed about talking in Spanish anymore. I don't care how my Spanish sounds. That's why I try so hard to seek more and learn more about my culture and about other cultures. I'm open to all of this now . . . I'm still trying to learn more.

Cesar spoke about coming to truly understand his undocumented status upon applying to the community college, when his mother revealed to him that she applied for DACA, a status he had no idea existed or what it entailed with respect to his education:

When I was applying to community college, during that process was when my mom told me, "You know you have DACA, right?" I was like, "What is that?" She was like, "During your senior year, remember when I told you I was fixing, I was doing stuff, and I was asking you for all this paperwork and stuff? That's what I did for you. You got DACA." I was like, "Okay." . . . I didn't even know. I didn't know that there were restrictions for me.

When asked whether he saw the college experience of males as different from females, Cesar said the following:

The way you're supposed to be a man can limit you at times in the college atmosphere because you have to do things on your own, because you can't interact with others, because you can't ask for help. Because if you're me, then, hey, then suck it up. I mean I have seen it. As I said, people have shared their own journeys . . . I need help and I'm struggling bro . . . If I would have continued to follow that perception of how a male was supposed to be . . . I would go into office hours and be like, no I can't. I don't need help. I'm good. I can do this on my own.

In our discussion, Cesar also elaborated on the effect that his relationship with his father has had on him and its impact on his way of relating to others:

Growing up and having . . . or being really separate from him and not having that son to dad moments with him, it was, I strived to be like him. I am who I am because of my dad because he's like that, I'm like that. That's why I'm serious. That's why I block people. That's why I am this way. And at school, that's how I was. It affected me, because I would isolate myself, and I would be serious. I wouldn't talk to anybody.

As far as the question of college expectations are concerned, Cesar stated that his parents didn't really understand the realities of his college experience:

They don't know how it is . . . They don't really know the actual struggles that I go through. It was definitely a tough situation, dealing with stuff at home, dealing with stuff on my own, not telling anyone, because that's just who I am. It's hard for me to share things . . . I was having to deal with personal issues on my own. I feel like doing everything on your own was really hard, and that's I'm still doing that now, because I do have my parents' support, but nobody's guiding me at home, and that's where I want it. I mean, at the end of the day, you want your parents to help you out in this transitional process to a university of all places, but they didn't go to a university. They barely finished high school. I definitely struggled with the transitional process, because being a first gen and then my parents not really knowing what to do in this case, going to college, whether it be me going to a community college or if I would've gone to a university. It would've still been me on my own. I had to take care of everything.

When describing the classroom environment, Cesar had this to say:



I think when I walk into a white classroom, I can't contribute anything. There's nothing that I can connect to so I just sit there and learn. But, then when I get to hear about my culture or just any other culture I feel more free . . . I feel like I can be vulnerable in that classroom whether it would be Latino studies, Pacific Islander studies, just anything but white. There's always that community . . . you see the difference in the classroom.

There's more community and I saw the difference in my history classroom with a white professor compared to my ethnic studies classroom with a Latino professor like you see that difference in the environment I guess I feel like I can share my story and help others with it. I do because I think my story is knowledge.

When describing his household Cesar shared:

My household is big on humble . . . my grandparents have taught my mother that . . . my grandmother from my dad's side was extremely humble and extremely kind . . . relationship-wise, being humble, being kind to each other . . . growing up.

That's what I get from home now, being really humble and really supportive . . . I'm big on helping people, because of what I've learned from home, because of what my parents and my grandparents have taught me, of going above and beyond no matter who you are.

Cesar pointed to the role that faculty can play in their students' educational path:

I think that educators being more vulnerable with students. Mentorship . . . to hear people's stories not just judging them off of a couple days because you don't really know what we go through sometimes. I mean just from other people's stories, I tell myself, "Man, I've got it good compared to what you've been through." I think providing more support. Mentally, I know that sounds a lot of students get anxiety and that go through

depression and I don't really know where those resources are for counselors provide like a space to just release that stress, that anxiety and find people who can relate to that. No. I think, more than anything, provide a space . . . and be advocate a little more. I guess I don't know how to say it. Yeah, advocate it more because as I said in this space it feels like you're . . . There's not a community on campus. Changing that atmosphere on campus by providing more programs for students of color, opening up doors for a program for DACA recipients or undocumented students so that, because undocumented students have their own like stuff that they deal with. Even if we're in that type of environment where it's a Latino community, it's still not the same as having a community of undocumented students. Listen, listen to what we have to say like being more available for us one and then hearing that nobody is really listening to what we have to say about Why should we have to basically beg for your time? Why can't you just be available for us? Be more available.

Cesar followed this by discussing the importance of making connections with his professors, in order to connect with their story and seek out their assistance and support:

Asking questions of the professors. Having that one-on-one connection with your professors. Once again, no matter how hard they are, no matter how tough and stubborn they can be, still going to those office hours and getting to know who your professor is. Getting to know their journey, their life story, that's a big thing with me that I've carried on from high school to college. I love getting to know my professors and my teachers. In that, I get I guess a little more help because we have that like one-on-one and we know each other a little more. If I need help it's like I got you.

Cesar also spoke extensively about how the willingness of faculty to be vulnerable can lead to a connection with their students and the importance of holding students to high expectations:

I have to take the right professor to have a sense community and to know my history. For example, a history teacher that I took, she told us her journey. She was open with us. She was vulnerable with us and they're just some professors that come to class and they just . . . it feels like they're tired like they're bored all the time. I think if you don't put that effort in the classroom, then why should I, right? If you come to class like do this and this and that and I'm asking you for help and it just seems like you don't want to help me out, then how do you expect us to get these perfect grades and be the perfect student if you don't . . . It's like practice what you preach, right? You want us to be the get A's and all this, and I think it starts at high school especially in the communities that I come from. Teachers go in some. Teachers go into the classes that are already giving up on this because of who we are because of where we live because we're the bad kids and we're not going to get anywhere. I think that sometimes it carries on into college and it shouldn't, right? It should be a totally different or I'd expect that it would be a different environment . . . I mean you're a professor, you should be more willing to help me out and once again, you already gave up on me just because I'm undocumented, because I'm this, because I'm that.

### **Lempira**

Lempira was half Honduran, half Mexican and emigrated from the Mexican state of Colima. Since his immigration journey began at the age of 12, he has had full awareness of his

undocumented status since he moved to the United States. His father emigrated a year earlier in order to work and eventually returned for his family and brought them to the United States. The whole family proceeded to travel back and forth between the United States and Mexico as tourists until their visas expired. His family's initial reason to come to the United States was to visit Disneyland but decided to stay and live with a relative in order to provide a better educational opportunity for their children. His immediate family lives in a small house with a living room that had to be converted into his bedroom due to limited space and the large number of family members living in the house.

Lempira went on to discuss how he felt immigrants always have to prove themselves worthy within a U.S. society:

Well as an immigrant, there's such a bad view of an immigrant, I feel like I have to prove them wrong . . . I guess society here in the United States, the media, and for right now the President as well to prove them wrong, making sure that they know that we are not here just to be drug addicts or anything like that . . . so for me, I wanted to keep studying to prove a point that immigrants are not here to do bad things or anything like that.

Lempira, in particular, noted his experience with code-switching back and forth between Spanish, his primary language spoken at home, and English, the language spoken at school:

I think the main thing is just when you walk in, you talk in Spanish the whole time . . . they don't speak English and my mom is trying to learn how to speak English, but at the moment, we all speak Spanish no matter what, like at home, it's different, you go from somewhere where you speak all English to Spanish.

At one moment, Lempira described some important differences he has noticed between the culture of his home country and U.S. culture:

Because I know that back then, it was a lot giving back to the community, like helping each other. I don't see it much here, but I did see it a lot over in Mexico . . . well, when I was growing up, it was a small town so everybody cared for each other . . . because I know here, they're very set on their own ways . . . I think that's what I feel like, because a lot of communities here are very divided, in sense of their nationality, rather than being Latino.

Lempira reminisced about how he has always been inculcated to be a good student. An expectation that began during his life back in Mexico before his arrival to the United States:

Yeah, I feel like the way I was growing up in Mexico, it kinda shaped me because I know that back in Mexico, I really wasn't sociable I think I was brought up to just focus on school, don't socialize, make sure you get good grades, that way you can have a career. I was always someone who'd be able to do good in school, I was always an "A" student. when I was growing up in Mexico, my dad was very strict in terms of like you have to go to school and you have to get good grades.

He proudly discussed how making his parents proud plays an important part in the parental support he receives at home:

You know what, I was very proud whenever I had good grades and also my dad . . . it made my dad happy, and he'll be very supportive because I got good grades, so that's one of the things that I mainly focus on school, and be someone to be proud of.

In our session, Lempira also shared that a Latino male is expected to disregard his own physical and emotional well-being, if necessary:

A male is someone who will disregard his health so that he could provide for his family, even though he might be hurt, he'll suck it up and he'll go to work . . . like anything that he feels, he'll suck it up; he has to make sure that he doesn't show it to other people . . . not showing, like little to no emotions to other people.

He spoke vividly about what being a man signifies when it comes to dealing with school challenges and the direct effect this has had on him:

I think that when everything went downhill, I wasn't feeling the need of sharing with my family . . . I wouldn't share with anybody and it kinda got into my head, because I was a male Latino and I had to suck it up and then had to deal with that situation by myself . . . I think that's one of the things that affect me . . . I mean like how being a male because you can't share or really show your emotions and I guess have to be a man . . . the male has to figure out how to get around it, without asking anybody.

With regards to college culture, Lempira described it as more individualistic, where "students are walking being individuals" and noted that if students do not join student support programs, the general college environment does not offer an opportunity for them to feel connected to others in the same ways it does for mainstream students. On the academic front, Lempira critiqued traditional ways of grading college success, offering a different approach to assessing students:

I think comparing the classes you take with the amount of hours you're working . . . well I know that if there's a student who has a B or a C and is working 40 hours a week, he's

actually putting in more work, he's actually being more successful than someone who's getting A's but not working at all.

When our session turned to considering personal growth factors that are important to academic success, Lempira considered confidence as being significant:

I think it's like if you're more confident with yourself . . . being someone that's confident, not arrogant, but confident is someone that defines success . . . because you're proud of yourself . . . you're proud of what you did and what you've accomplished. I'm more confident in myself than I was back then . . . I know I'm someone that could accomplish something I put my mindset.

Lempira similarly discussed the importance of being within community, as an important aspect of his academic success within the community college setting:

I think I'm more successful now than how I was before . . . I feel more out there because I look around instead of just being by myself . . . I know that education has helped me look around and see the community . . . because back then, I was just by myself . . . I didn't have any type of awareness.

Lempira specifically credited the PUENTE program's human development curriculum component, which he felt had taught him a great deal about personal and career exploration as part of his first college experience. He spoke about the manner in which this opportunity for personal growth was connected to his own success:

Like that program really helped me a lot in terms of socializing like networking with other people, and it helped me be a very social person like before. When I first started at the community college, I started as a PUENTE student . . . the human development class

really taught me a lot on basically who I was and who I want to be . . . that's when I started doing things for myself.

In addition, Lempira discussed how PUENTE's learning community model helped him establish a peer group of support:

I used to sit down and talk to other classmates . . . I liked it because we had similar ideas. I know that's when I made one of my closest friends, we used to talk about certain things . . . we would feel like we were part of family, because me and him would joke around a lot but we would also do our homework there . . . so it helped me stay there . . . and if I was struggling in one class, what we can do to help each other . . . it felt to me that I wanted to go to that spot, because it felt like I was getting helped.

At this juncture, Lempira also compared the PUENTE program culture with that of the broader college culture. Here, he pointed to some key distinctions:

That's the one main thing I like about my college, because when you go over there, it's a community college, they would just go to class and then go home, but there are certain things that will make you stay longer and make you feel like you're a part of that small community there. I guess it felt very welcoming . . . that's what helped me get through the first year of college and that transition phase.

Furthermore, Lempira talked about the connection to peers that the PUENTE program had offered him and how it was also different from his home life:

It felt like a safe space . . . because we would talk about our past like where did we used to go, like our high school experience . . . how we ended up here and what we're going to



do after, like what our main goals after community college . . . my parents helped me but I was more secure at college than at home.

In a variety of ways, Lempira spoke about the supportive culture within the PUENTE program at the community college he attended:

Well, I felt like it was very friendly, especially when at my community college I had the support of my Puente counselor. It was the PUENTE program that helped me feel welcome at the college . . . there were a lot of professors that would help me as well . . . it was very friendly . . . it was welcoming as well.

Lempira elaborated on the personal growth he experienced from participating in PUENTE:

I don't know because I wasn't very social, but when I go to school, I felt a need to be more talkative and more, I guess communicate more with everybody else . . . because it was me just trying to prove myself, to be honest . . . I think every time I was growing up, I was a lonely kid, like a quiet person . . . I'm very shy at first and I wanted to change that, so I always wanted to try harder when I would go to college, to talk to other people even though it was hard for me to do.

Regarding college programs on campus, it is not surprising that Lempira spoke about the importance of helping others and allowing oneself to be helped by others:

I know there was this one group I joined, it helped me to be part of the club where you help out another student that was an immigrant or and AB-540 student . . . that program really helped me a lot because I didn't feel by myself because there were other students with the same situations as me who needed help as well . . . so that I think that other

programs really helped me realize that I wasn't by myself, that there were other students with the same struggles as me.

In his reflection on campus student support groups, he perceived these as a different approach to offering help:

I guess having more groups that would make you feel welcome and make you feel more, how can I say this? . . . More groups that will help you ask to help basically like there are times when you're scared to ask for help . . . yeah I mean let's say if you have any type of questions you know, ask and we'll help you out with whatever you are having trouble with . . . that would be an interesting approach because other people don't, like me for example, I don't really go ask for help, because sometimes I feel dumb for the question, or it's very private, or I don't know, it's like I don't really want to go out there . . . I don't know, there are things that hold me back from asking for help . . .that having someone that would help me throughout the process.

### **Silverio**

Silverio emigrated from Peru at the age of five or six years old. On their first trip to the United States, his parents left him and his sisters with his grandparents in Peru for a short period of time before eventually sending for them. He remembered one day, out of the blue, boarding a plane and flying to Florida. After a few days, he flew to Texas where the whole family shared one small room in a relative's home. He remembered his father working long days but struggled to remember his mom's presence when they first moved to Texas until much later in his life when he found out that his mother did not immigrate with any legal documentation. They proceeded to move to another place in Texas where his parents had to beg his mother's friend to

let them live in her family's house. Eventually, they moved to Los Angeles where the family now resides.

During our time together, Silverio described his home culture as one where he and his family are slowly losing their traditional Peruvian roots, customs, traditions, and native Spanish language. In addition, he described evidence of the Americanization process that his family is undergoing the longer they have lived in the United States. For example, they watch more English language television shows and movies. He wondered if there will be less evidence of their Peruvian culture in the next generation:

I feel like sometimes we may be losing our identity as Peruvians slowly and surely . . . I feel like we're losing our Peruvian identity. My Spanish is diminishing, my sister's Spanish is worse. My older sister has memories of Peru, and she speaks the best Spanish. My parents are slowly learning English. But the accents are like dying off on my part, on my siblings' part . . . so that kind of did make me reflect, like who are we? It's a mixture of us, the food's there, the love is there, the Peruvian knowledge is there. But slowly, I always thought about it, if I have a kid or my siblings have a kid, they're gonna be more American than anything, and we're gonna be integrated 100%. That kind of scares me a little bit. We shouldn't forget where we come from.

Silverio further asserted that respect and warm hospitality are a key part of his Latino culture at home:

It's a lot of respect in the household. Culturally, like my sisters have always been respected, too . . . the best thing to compare it to is like when you have the Southern love, you have that warm that comforts you in our home. We have that Peruvian love, that we

don't judge you, we want you, and we want to feed you. We want to make you feel as comfortable as possible. We want to show you that it's a warm environment and the love we provide.

Silverio shared that his parents never pressured him to get a job. He expressed that he felt he received strong parental support to go to college, particularly from his mother:

My mom was a huge, huge, huge supporter. Because I remember she would come home and she would be tired and working after two or three jobs just to put my sister through school and our necessities and everything. Just working a job, and then she would come home tired, like beat . . . I didn't understand at the time, and she would tell me, in Spanish, "*no trabajes como un burro*", it was like get an education so you don't work like a donkey. . . when DACA came, my mom was the first one to say go get it. This is a huge opportunity. She was the one, she was like we're gonna give you the money and everything.

His discussed with me his mother's support for him and his sister, no matter how many jobs she had to take or how much her health was affected. This caused Silverio to feel torn emotionally, due to her current health problems. This was emotionally apparent on his face, when he shared:

And that always stuck, and my mom said from day one, she's like, "Get an education because that's something no one's ever gonna take away from you," . . . she never said go get a job. She always supported our education, no matter what. She always said there's ways . . . and I remember after my sister was put through five years at UCLA, I remember, it was my turn to go to school, as well. I decided to go to community college

and she said, “I would do the same exact thing. Work four jobs non-stop just to put you through.” And that tore me up inside.

Silverio also shared his feelings of uncertainty upon discovering at an early age that he was an undocumented immigrant. In particular, he spoke of having to be more cautious as part of everyday life, for the sake of both his and his family’s safety:

My mom would always tell me be careful about what you say. I remember around middle school, because I knew we were immigrants, and I knew we were kind of undocumented because my mom once said you know we’re undocumented. But it started becoming serious when I could get myself into trouble, not that I was doing anything, but she started becoming conscious, like that’s a possibility . . . so she sat us down and was like if you do anything stupid, like drinking, partying and you beat up somebody and you get caught, anything and whether it be police or immigration or anything, they’ll write you up and they will find out. So, you gotta be careful with what you do . . . yeah. I don’t want to do anything, protecting my family. That’s scary.

Hence, it is not surprising that when Silverio spoke about masculinity, he described being a man as a male who is “strong. Should be very determined. Decisive, not indecisive. They should know what they want. They should put family and God first.”

As Silverio’s story turned to the college campus, he described the knowledge he believed Latino students brought to the classroom in the following way:

I believe we come in with a certain knowledge. It may not always be book smart because that’s what we’re going there for, but when it comes to life you learn organizational skills, you learn logical skills, comprehension. You learn things. Experience. You learn

how to be on your own. You learn how to take things responsibly . . . there's no class for that, and I don't think there will ever be a class for that. I see kids my age, they're still at home. They're more privileged. But from what I've seen, what I'm learning and what I'm going through, I don't think unless they actually experience it, it's a different story. Being Hispanic is different. On top of that, being an immigrant is different. So that on top of the other, I felt was a catalyst for you to grow up, have these skills. You need to learn how to go for help, be on your own. Same with my sister. Crazy, crazy. She learned from taxes. My parents didn't know anything. They're like you need to help us with this. She's 14, 15 years old. Taxes. Medical insurance. Real estate. She learned how to cook. It's funny, she changed my diapers. She could be a nanny. She was a babysitter. Crazy things. So, you learn all these aspects of life. The more struggles you go through, the faster you need to grow up. And I feel like sometimes some people can't handle that. I feel like it makes us grow up. It makes us have our own experience. I take pride in that.

In reflecting on the community college needs of Latino immigrant students, Silverio asserted that all educators in college have to become far more aware of immigrant student life issues:

For certain counselors and certain professors, faculty, to be more aware of sometimes our situations . . . if they could understand that a little bit, it would help out a lot . . . we want our voices to be heard, but we sometimes we want to be anonymous. We don't want to take that role and be like, yeah, I'm a DACA recipient. Don't put it out there. Yeah, we're loud and proud, but I don't want to, for my family's sake. And once that situation's over, I'm gonna go and be as proud as I can because they can't do anything.

In addition, Silverio stressed that educators had to understand the diversity within the undocumented student population—not all undocumented students are Latino and not all Latino immigrants are Mexican:

And also, just be a little bit more aware. We all come from various backgrounds, culturally, we all come from different environments. We're not all Mexican. We all love each other just as much, brown love, but we don't always socially identify as being Mexican. We all identify as being DACA recipients . . . because DACA recipients come from everywhere, China to Middle East . . . it would be really cool to see a representation of others, to show the awareness that we all come from different backgrounds. And to be supported, I don't believe you have to be brown or white, or legal or not illegal, or DACA recipient or not DACA recipient. You can be anybody you want. And I don't think we should push anybody away. Help them be aware about situations, how scary things can be, or how sensitive things could be.

### **Cuauhtémoc**

Cuauhtémoc emigrated from Mexico City and arrived to the United States in January of 2001 at the age of three years old. He travelled with one sister and left behind an older sibling that chose not to accompany them. Their official U.S. entry point was located in Tijuana, Baja California where he and his sister were crossed by a “coyote.” They crossed the border in possession of identifications not belonging to them. His sister told him that she had to make sure he did not make noise when crossing the border since he was just a baby. Otherwise, the coyote would have to administer him a sleeping pill to minimize the risk of getting caught, something

his sister did not allow to happen so that he would not sleep through the whole border crossing journey.

In his narrative session, Cuauhtémoc described his experience when applying for financial aid for the first time:

I mean, let's take when I was applying my first time for financial aid. I obviously had to do the DREAM act, which is a lot different for the financial aid application. I had to go to a larger process not having a Social Security number. I think that idea of having to do a complete a different application from financial aid application is one of the things that I felt like pushed me back . . . I was looked at different in some sense because, "Oh, why is this guy doing a different application? . . . It made me stand out from everybody else. I knew there were other immigrants in my classroom, in my class, but I felt like I was the most outsider.

In reflecting about his family, Cuauhtémoc shared that he had absolute support from his parents to go attend college. He called his mother his "sidekick, his "sun", his "cheerleader." He believed wholeheartedly that she wanted college success for him, just as much as he wanted it for himself. Moreover, he credited his views about success to his Latino immigrant identity and community values—values linked to a sense of unity and sincere caring for one another. About this, he noted:

I think that comes from being an immigrant because I think . . . as an immigrant, I feel like my family's a lot more together, united in the sense that most of us are immigrants, so we sort of have to look out for each other. Check up on each other, "How are you



doing? How you doing with this?” I feel like that’s how I’ve been able to sort of idealize that.

Cuauhtémoc also discussed the importance of being a role model for his sisters, as also being something that motivated his success:

One of them is that I was able to, for my little sister . . . I’ve sort of become her role model. In school, she’s written me multiple letters, multiple cards, where she says, “I thank you. You’ve been such an inspiration. Thank you for caring for me.” And I know that’s what brothers and other siblings are supposed to do . . . for me, seeing that from my little sister is the most heartwarming thing ever because it just shows that if I’m able to impact my little sister, I can do so much more and impact so many lives in a positive way. I think that would be one of my most successful things.

When the narrative session turned to his experiences in community college, Cuauhtémoc expressed feeling overwhelmed and very much on his own when he began his community college experience. One of the difficulties he faced was that he did not have anyone to talk to about college enrollment issues. He described this in the following way:

So, when I first started off, obviously it was a bit overwhelming coming straight out of high school. You’re on your own. You don’t have anybody to tell you, “Take this class.” Because at first you don’t know anybody unless you’re like in EOPS or any other sort of program. You’re signing up for classes on your own. In my first semester, it was pretty much on my own. I didn’t have anybody to ask questions.

It was at this juncture that Cuauhtémoc shared his views related to how males in community college may experience the context differently than do their female peers:

In the college setting, I've always thought that women might have it a little easier. I know that's all far-fetched, but I think that's because women are more pushed to go to school. I think it just goes back to the idea of being a man and being masculine. Because men usually don't go to school. They're the ones providing the money, so after high school you should go immediately to work . . . for me I think the idea that men usually don't go to school.

Furthermore, Cuauhtémoc discussed the issue of asking for help when it comes to males and how doing this might feel intimidating:

I feel like whenever you ask for help, women are more well-received. That might be, I don't know . . . from my counselors in anything. They're more approachable I guess that's what it is. That might be because of physical traits. A guy who might come up to you, he's super kind, super gentle, might look intimidating and you might not want to help him because you might come up with stereotypes you might, "This guy is dangerous." But if women pretty much approaches . . . they're more easy to talk to in the sense that it's not as intimidating. You don't assume as much when you see a woman at first.

In considering his experiences within the culture of community college, Cuauhtémoc recalled discrimination he faced in this setting that involved a faculty member:

Well, actually there was a math professor that did have . . . he was an older white guy . . . in that class I felt like the whole class was talked down . . . that whole class actually was majority Latino . . . when everybody spoke out or when everybody asked a question, he'd always put his foot down, like "No, this is the way to do it. It's in the book." He wasn't

open for questions or anything like that. It wasn't more directed to us as individuals, but just him as an individual because he was very keen on sticking to the criteria.

Similar to some of the other participants in this study, Cuauhtémoc described the college culture as being very different than his home culture. He explained it in the following way:

It's everybody pretty much on their own, but what's different at home is we're family, we're still talking to each other. We have fun. Compared to here, every class I've been in, since I've been here, I've only been able to connect with two people. Everybody's pretty distance. Everybody here is, "I'm in this class, don't talk to me. I want to get in, I want to get out." I feel like it's always been a disconnect between everybody because pretty much nobody really wants to talk anybody . . . Maybe the majority, like I said, they have other things going on. They might be working and working and school it's hard to balance. Maybe they just don't want to talk to other people. I feel like that's because of the lack of clubs and communities that are seen in other colleges that isn't really seen here.

When describing his own comfort level at home versus college Cuauhtémoc stated:

At home obviously, I'm a lot more . . . I'm able to talk to my sisters and my stepdad about anything or ask for help. But here, I've always felt scared to ask anybody because I feel like they might give me some pushback. Obviously, at home, I'm a lot more, in general, I'm very caring for other people and do whatever they do. For me, when I've always asked people for help, they've always been like, "Well ask some freshman." Or other classmates. When I've asked a professor, they've helped me perfectly fine. It's just like with students it's like there's a sense of, "I don't want to help you. I want to be in . . .

I'm in my own bubble; don't enter my bubble." And at home, obviously, it's a lot different because you're able to intervene in their bubble and just ask for help.

When asked if he considered himself successful thus far, Cuauhtémoc responded in a very affirmative manner, saying:

Definitely! To start off, I'm still in college, and I'm gonna transfer within a year. I'm gonna be in a different place in a different year. For me, that's so successful because, like I said before, I never thought I'd go to college or actually continue to pursue further education because not only as an undocumented immigrant, I've always thought that after high school I was going to go to school and do some trade job, get my certificate, start working. But now, just being here and seeing that I'm able to transfer soon is, I think, super successful in my view as an undocumented immigrant.

However, Cuauhtémoc recognized the support of others as something that was imperative to his own success:

Yeah, because I don't think you're able to be successful, for example, in college, for me personally, because I'm too, I guess you could say, I'm too dependent on other people. I want the help from others and that's one of the main reasons obviously I'm in college. In college, you're on your own, and if you can't ask anybody but the people who are there and you can't really, or you don't feel comfortable sharing your stuff with them, then I feel that limits your success, you know? Cause you can't get the proper information you need from them, so it's just a block that's stopping the success and it's just staying where you are. Think I realized that . . . Well, one of them is that I can't do really stuff on my own. I've always needed that extra help that extra hand because I've always been too

afraid to ask questions. As a Dreamer, as a Latino, so, I've always thought that I've always been scared to ask anybody so that's why I've always been reaching out to certain individuals and asking them for help personally because I can't do it with anybody who I don't personally identify with or who I'm able to connect with I guess, on a more deep level.

It seems logical then that Cuauhtémoc defined his success as linked to familial or communal success, in that his success will benefit the whole family:

Because I see it in my mom. The main reason she brought us to this country is to go to school and have a better life and not live the one she did, so for me success and going to college and graduating college is the ultimate success because it's not only my personal success, it's success with my family. More specifically, my mom wanted us to go to college and live the life she envisioned. She hopes to one day live. That's success for me. For my mom, when she tells me, "Go to school." She seems to get excited . . . she's more happy herself because she knows that we're doing what she wanted. Obviously, for when I graduate from wherever I go to school and obtain my diploma and start working a better job, the money isn't just only for me. I'm helping my family financially . . . that's when we all win because we're just doing together, we're doing a lot better as a whole.

In reflecting on suggestions for increasing college support for Latino immigrant males, Cuauhtémoc spoke of specific resources needed for undocumented students like himself:

I think, well the first thing that came to mind was a Dreamer's Office. Yeah, Dream Center because, and not only for as a Dreamer, but I think every ethnic group should have their own office and should be able to go anywhere where they feel comfortable enough

to express how they feel and get the help that they want from people who they're able to identify with. Just really become . . . because, like I said, I'm always going to go back to the financial aid because I've never been able to identify with anybody at Financial Aid, especially as a Dreamer. I can't seem to go down there comfortably and talk about myself.

Cuauhtémoc spoke at length about the role that Latino student organizations play in the lives of community college immigrant Latino male students:

There's a Latino club that was started by one of the professors, he sponsored the club. It's not necessarily a club, but more of a community build that they wanted to do. That's why I've always felt like there's always that disconnect between, among students, not necessarily just between professors and students, but just among students there's that disconnect between everybody. If that makes any sense? . . . A part of the culture, it's . . . You can't really feel it, even though the majority of the campus is Latino and there's a large Latino presence. It just doesn't feel like that . . . for me, if there's enough clubs or maybe a school-sponsored program that it might feel, principally for me, more Latino. Because there's just not enough opportunities I guess to connect with other Latinos.

### **Emiliano**

Emiliano immigrated to the United States with his family from the southern part of Mexico when he was about 18 months old. His father arrived first and eventually brought his family with him to the United States when it became financially feasible. He remembers very little about his immigration story except for the small details his older brothers sometime fill in for him. Since at home his parents only spoke Spanish, he relied on television shows like Sesame

Street to learn English. He grew up in south Los Angeles where Spanish-only speaking students were commonly placed into English learner programs. He shared early memories of being placed into a separate room, different from his usual classroom to practice reading, writing, and speaking the English language in order to gain proficiency. After one year, he was placed back into English-only courses and that is where the struggle began for him. This struggle was a constant reminder that English was not his first language.

In his narrative account, Emiliano described his home as “the first thing you would notice when you come to my house, a big family, one house, sharing one bedroom with four people.” In addition, he vividly described his neighborhood, which is comprised of low income and working-class immigrant people:

Everybody is doing something. So, immigrants you'll always think of people trying to make that extra income because they need it. So, my neighbors they always have a garage sell every other day or so. I always see people going, so I guess they have some sort of business like that. I guess in my house in my neighborhood, where it's like a neighborhood of immigrants as well because I know I'm not the only one.

As he reflected on the question of cultural differences, Emiliano described the different cultural experiences he saw between his parents and the children in the family:

I guess with kids it's more like what you'd expect. Like an American teenager going to school. And that's kind of like normal because we are going to American schools, so they have those American ideals, but the parents are the ones that are . . . you can tell they're more like immigrants because they still keep their culture and they know, oh you gotta have baby Jesus in the living room because of their culture or stuff like that.

Emiliano described his family home life as a supportive environment:

At home you think there are other people like you, other immigrants. Everybody wants to make so if one person makes it, that's good. Then you say, the rest of us can make it, so now we all got to make it. Then at school it's kind of more like every individual is for themselves and that's when you kind of like don't get that support anymore. It's like a dog eat dog world here on the college level, and I guess that's kind of how it is out in the real world and that's how every college believes they can help students, but I think that's the wrong way of doing it because we're all going to think of some group to identify with, so why try to break us up?

Emiliano also discussed the difficulties he faced in his coming process as an immigrant:

At first, I didn't tell much people about it because who do I even tell? Why would anybody care, but lately if anybody has asked, I will tell them because I think it's important that people should know because people don't believe or they don't even know that people like us exist. They've heard of undocumented students but probably never met one or even if they have met one, they wouldn't even know because most people don't say, yeah, I'm undocumented because it's looked down at because you're just in a really bad situation and there's not much help for you.

Emiliano too discussed having strong parental support, even when they cannot fully understand the demands or expectations he is facing as a community college student:

I guess the message is that if you go to college you're going to be successful in life, because my parents they have no education, so they believe that through education you can become a success. They don't know what college is like, what you have to do. It



includes sacrifice whether you like it or not. They don't understand that so when I tell them I can't do this or that because I have school, they just accept it. Not everyone understand that education could be beneficial, it varies with parents . . . yeah, I do believe that, but I'm not sure with every parent because everyone is different . . . I'm privileged to have that in comparison to other immigrants who may or may not have that.

In our time together, Emiliano also spoke about the differences he has noticed in the educational setting between males and females:

I do believe males experience higher education different than females. I guess I didn't notice it but . . . if you're a female, other males try to help you, even if you don't ask for it. I thought about it . . . no other person has tried to help me. It's really more like you're on your own. If you notice, all the females here are getting help from males and all the males are just doing it by themselves. They're not really trying to help each other. I think if you're a male, it's kind of like you got to do it on your own. You gotta toughen up and just deal with it and do it on your own and stuff like that.

In reflecting on the culture of the college, Emiliano described the current meritocratic educational environment as a contest amongst students where a prize must be won:

Yeah, it's definitely more like get a group of five people to go enter this contest where they can show how great they are . . . you might win this prize . . . you don't really think about working in groups. I think that's true in a lot of universities as well . . . you don't really like talk . . . like let's all make study groups so that we can pass this class. You think more, I need to make my grade up. You only think of yourself. I think that's kind of like the wrong way to go about it because we're actually a group and I guess since people

don't make us think about it that way, we never think about it that way until you join a club or something like that where everybody has the same goal.

Furthermore, Emiliano expressed a sense of resistance, as he explained that grades do not form part of his identity:

I think what I have to tell would be . . . you are worth more than a grade. I think that not just immigrants, but when we are given that grade we kind of think of it as like our worth in the school system. So, I think our identity becomes some of that. Like if we fail, then we kind of like think that we can't do it anymore, but it needs to change because we are more than just a grade, and I do believe it doesn't really reflect who you are, but our identity kind of like overwhelms us and we cannot make it in higher education, then we cannot make it out in the real world, so I think it should change so that it reflects more than just a grade.

Consistent with his view on grades, Emiliano's expressed the following about the need for a change in the grading system:

I do think we need to have a change of how the grading system works. I think as an immigrant, when I think of higher education, my only concept is from grades in school. I think it's something of more like how I engage in that knowledge and how I try to like . . . based on what I learn from this, how would I teach somebody about this or how I would think about this knowledge. So I think my identity would be more like how I can teach others or educate them or better somebody. That's more reflective of my identity, how I can express it, more than just what I receive as a grade. I think that's where the school system kind of fails because it's important but there's not much done about it.

Emiliano shared ideas on how student assessment could potentially be changed:

So I would tell the administrators that there should be a change of how student assessment is done . . . there should be more of a culture to get students more involved with each other. A culture where teachers would be like, “Get into groups and work together to solve these questions,” because the first time that I had that done, that’s when I truly believe that I learned a lot in one day than I did the whole last week. When we work in groups, I think you can learn a lot better . . . you can teach others, and if you can teach others, then you know what you’re good at. So I think we should tell the administrator that they need to change that so that it’s not just like you’re on your own. It should really be changed.

As Emiliano shared his ideas of college success during the session, he also seemed to push back here with respect to the traditional definition of success:

I think college success should be like how well have you’ve grown since you started. You know, it’s not a race. It’s more of just getting it done and getting it done well. I think success is more like, can you use the skill you learned in school outside the world to live to better yourself or better other people that are educating anybody else. Can you help others with what you’ve learned or what you’ve experienced? To me that’s success in college . . . but I don’t believe other people see it that way because when they think of college, they think like I need this diploma to get a job and a career and make this amount of money and stuff like that . . . but I think success is showing that you’ve grown. You can think for yourself. You think critically. You don’t just accept facts as the way they are. You make your own decisions.

As Emiliano continued to reflect on the issue of his success, he discussed, with a sense of pride and agency, the importance of his being a mentor at his high school and in his old neighborhood:

Because I try to like educate other people. I guess I first started doing this in my own high school, letting other people know this is my experience in college. Your experience may be different but since I am somebody who came from the school, I think you may benefit from this. You can be more inspired because I came from the same place as you. I took the same courses. If I can be successful, so can you. If I can become a better person and think more for myself, then I believe that you can also do the same. So, when I thought about success, I only thought people who are making big money, but I never thought about other people like me. So, I decided that I need to show, hey, I'm smart. I can do a lot of things. I need to show you that you can also do the same thing. We don't really have that around in my area in south L.A., where we have people that are coming to school and saying, "Hey we're successful and we're doing great things." So I believe that I should at least be starting to at my own school.

Emiliano also talked about his parents coming to the United States, specifically, because they wanted a better education for their children:

I think of my parents. When I ask them why they came to America, they never said to make more money. They said for better education for me and my brothers. So, when I ask anybody who's an immigrant why did you immigrate, it's always been for a better life, because they want like a second chance to do better, because probably from where they're from they probably don't have that chance.

In a poignant sense, Emiliano shared with me that his immigrant identity was always confusing for him, because he seldom had a clear sense of whether he was born in the United States or in Mexico. He had no memories of Mexico, therefore, he expressed always feeling like a U.S. American. Moreover, he noted that this feeling of existing in between is seldom understood by most people:

In the beginning I didn't know whether I was an immigrant or U.S.-born because I knew that I wasn't from here but I felt like I grew up here because I had no memories coming from Mexico. I didn't really know . . . I didn't understand what it meant. I knew I was an immigrant but I didn't know that I was technically an illegal immigrant. I didn't know that there was a law saying you have to have a green card, you have to have this sort of paperwork. So back then, I didn't know what that meant. I didn't know how many of us there are or anything about it because I didn't know I was one. I didn't know much about it, so I can't really tell anybody. To me I was just a student from south L.A . . . that's what I identified at the time, so it's definitely something people don't understand.

In fact, Emiliano did not learn that he was undocumented until he applied to the CSU system and was denied a fee waiver based on how he answered a residency question on his admissions application. Consequently, he struggled with the legal implications of being undocumented. He described this experience at length:

I started applying for financial aid, my counselor said, "Oh, well if you don't have a social security, it's most likely you're an illegal immigrant." I started thinking, what does that even mean? Illegal immigrant? So it kind of made me feel like a criminal because of the word illegal. So, when I first started applying . . . that was when I finally understood

what it meant to be an illegal immigrant because that was when I first applied, we had those fee waivers for when you applied . . . I got denied . . . this must be a mistake, so I called and I told him why am I being denied? So, the lady said, “Oh, you were denied because you put on your questionnaire that you are from Mexico.” And she was like, “Well, you’re not from here. This is for citizens or permanent residents.” I was like, “Well I’ve lived here basically my whole life, so why would that deny me?” She was like, “Well, because you’re an immigrant.” And I was like, “Well, technically I’m not an immigrant because I’ve lived here all my life.” And she was like, “Yeah, I know you feel like you’ve lived here all your whole life but you’re not a citizen from here. You’re an immigrant and so I’m sorry that you feel that way, but you are not an American, you are an immigrant.” So that was the first time that even though I feel like am American, I’m not an American, so that was like a big blow to me because that was the first time my status, I denied from something . . . yeah. I think that’s kind of true for a lot of us because a lot of us, we also kind of had that same experience. We didn’t really find about being a documented student until high school. It wasn’t part of our identity until that point, and even then we didn’t really understand what that meant until you actually go through all the steps of trying to be like, hey I matter you know. I’m not just somebody who came here illegally.

In reflecting on the cultural experience on the campus, Emiliano expressed that he does not feel represented at his college either within his courses or the student support programs that are available at his community college:

Well because as a Latino male immigrant, I believe we're not really thought of to be placed in the books. When we think about our experience, the books that we read are other people who are not like us experience different things, so we kind of just read about their perspective and what they think . . . what would be the Latino culture lens of looking at this book. So, the only way is to take some Latino culture class and even then, there aren't that many offered. I do believe we're underrepresented . . . also, thinking of programs, you don't see any Latino, so I don't think that many Latino students even participate, so it kind of feels like we're kind of left out from higher education.

Emiliano also touched on the issues of masculinity when he explained that one of the big ways that messages about being a man have affected his academics is how it has prevented him from admitting he needs help and, therefore, interfered with his ability to ask for help, even from his girlfriend who is also a student at the community college he attends:

I'm a little ashamed to admit it because . . . it's not something that I tried to do but I just did without even thinking about it, so my girlfriend she's like really good at studying. She's an A student and I'm not, so she will try her best to help me, and I would be like I don't need your help. I can do this on my own and that's sort of the masculinity that I kind of like embrace . . . but in reality, I do because she's excelling where I'm failing and that's something I don't really . . . I never told her about it because I don't want her to think less of me because of that.

However, Emiliano did proceed to explain to me how he is working on asking for help and learning to how to get better at asking for help. Yet, as he explains here, the process has not been an easy one:

I needed that help and I didn't ask anybody. I didn't know where to go. Or like if somebody said, "Do you need help?" I would say, "No." Immediately what I was saying . . . like I would think of saying no without saying no and it's kind of like a behavior that I sort of had since I was in high school because in high school I did excel and I did do great and my dad would always say, "You have to be the top. You have to be the best." You know, that's how you should be, so if I wasn't like that . . . I wanted to do it on my own so I could say, "Yeah, I did it on my own. I didn't get any help from him." I looked down at it because it was something that only weak people do. Not the strong. The strong get things done. The weak seek for help from others and all of that. So, I did believe that the way my dad said it or the way that people make it seem like if you're seeking for help it means you can't do it on your own. You can't do it on your own now, but eventually you will be able to do that.

In discussing if Latino immigrant male students bring valuable knowledge to the community college setting, Emiliano stated:

I think so, because we all come from different backgrounds and our different backgrounds gives us different experience, so what somebody's answer about certain questions might be different than my answer because I've experienced it differently. When somebody says like, "Do you think Latinos can be good at this?" Somebody who has never met a Latino would be like probably not. I've never seen a Latino make it . . . coming from a Latino area, I've seen many Latinos make it. We have our own knowledge and our own experience. But still they don't think about us, our knowledge and what we think . . . I think we do have some knowledge before taking the class about certain



subjects, but they don't ask us about what you know and how you think of it, it's more like, this is a fact. Now accept it as truth. I think that's not a good way because whenever somebody tells you to do something . . . we're not actively engaged by teachers to be like, what do you think about this? Or do you think this is wrong? They don't question what you know or they don't ask . . . they don't question your knowledge. Like do you think this is how it is? Why or why not? I think there are some lecture where they kind of do that but I think more classes should be like that.

When the narrative turned to the college support that is required for Latino immigrant males to succeed, Emiliano stressed the importance of having staff that can help first-generation college students like himself:

I think the staff that do try to help are the ones that help students like me, who have no experience of going to college or anything like that, because that's really all that help we're going to get because we don't have any parents or any like higher people or people in our immediate family or friends that are higher education, so it's an entirely different experience for me as an immigrant because the only help is what people can offer me. I didn't even know that I needed that help until it's too late, so now that I'm like four years into it, I'm like, yeah, I went about it all wrong.

Most importantly, Emiliano spoke at length about how educators and college institutions need to treat Latino immigrant male students:

I would tell them they need to start treating us like . . . like the way that the school, it's sort of like the culture for students in higher education, it's more like you're just a grade and that's really how it feels and that's a terrible way of seeing higher education, because

that's how I felt inside until somebody tells you, hey, you're more than just a grade. What you do on a test doesn't define how well you do in this, so they need to do something where they evaluate students not just how they perform on tests. Because if it was more like that then I think more students would try to like improve more instead of just like, oh man, if I don't do well on this test, I'm done for, why even try? Because honestly, I choke up on tests quite a lot and my girlfriend doesn't and that's why she does so well. I don't believe my grades reflect of how well I do in courses or how well I learn.

Furthermore, when comparing the daily realities of immigrants to those of non-immigrants in college, Emiliano concluded:

Well for me, I feel like I am more motivated than my . . . when I think of my friends who are not immigrants, they treat it like, whatever. Where like my friends that are immigrant are like, yeah, I gotta work my ass off . . . and I think my friends who are born here, they don't have to worry about getting kicked out of here . . . they'll just be playing all day. Like, come on man, do something with your life. I see my friends who are immigrants, they're all trying to work hard in their studies and try to get a job and work their way up. As an immigrant you have to think of yourself as even better than people who are born here because, as an immigrant I face deportation. I just think of myself that I have to be better because that's my only selling point or else I'm going to get kicked out.

### **Escutia**

Escutia emigrated from the state of Michoacán in Mexico. His parents were already living in the United States with an older sister and he was left behind in Mexico with a brother and a younger sister. He arrived to the United States two years ago at the age of 18 years old.

However, he recalled how he felt when his parents informed him of the impending move to the United States, a decision both of his parents made in order to have him and his siblings be educated in the United States. As the most recent immigrant in the study, Escutia has the most challenges with the English language and is the least acculturated participant within the Americanization that occurs to immigrants in the United States.

At the beginning of our narrative session together, Escutia described his experience in the short time he has lived in the United States:

*Pues, yo más que nada siento algo negativo porque no me siento simplemente . . . no me siento a gusto en este país siendo como Latino, pues no soy simplemente de este país ¿verdad? . . . entonces no me siento a gusto, es como, un ejemplo, voy a una casa de un desconocido, entonces estoy ahí pero no estoy a gusto, porque no estoy en mi casa, no puedo hacer . . . como lo que yo quiero y a lo mejor puedo hacer cosas que yo no sé y les puedo parecer mal a la gente de aquí . . . no me siento a gusto, no puedo ser simplemente yo . . . porque son diferente culturas . . . pero me tengo que acoplar. [Well, I am only saying that I feel some negativity because I simply do not feel . . . I do not feel comfortable in this country being a Latino, since I am simply not from this country, right? . . . therefore I do not feel comfortable, it's like an example, I go to some stranger's house, therefore I am there but do not feel comfortable there because I am not in my house, I can not do . . . like what I want and I may do things that I don't know, may not be looked upon favorably by people here . . . I do not feel comfortable, I cannot simply be myself . . . because there are two different cultures . . . but I have to cope.]*

This then moved him to comment further on the impact of the difference of his culture and that of the community college setting and its impact on his interactions with others:

*En mi casa yo soy . . . puedo decir que soy muy alegre, soy muy expresivo, si algo no me gusta yo simplemente lo digo, lo platico. Me gusta saber muchas cosas, preguntar, interactuar, conocer personas o en este caso a mi familia o cualquier cosa. Me gusta platicar mucho, en realidad. Pero, estando aquí exactamente en esta escuela, con personas exactamente de aquí, no me siento a gusto porque siento que les molesto porque he tenido un par de ocasiones en las que quiero interactuar con personas que son de aquí, pero una, se me hace como extraño por su forma en la que empiezan a hablar, y otro porque como que no les gusta hablar, como que no se sienten a gusto, no sé si platicando conmigo o simplemente no son muy amigables . . . no sé si sea rechazo o simplemente son así, pero van algunas personas que lo hacen. Entonces, prefiero evitar ese tipo de cosas y concentrarme en mis estudios. [At home, I am . . . I can say happy, I am very expressive, if I do not like something, I simply say it, I discuss it. I like knowing about many things, inquire, interact, meet people or in this case my family or whatever. I enjoy conversing a lot, in reality. But, being here exactly at this school, with people from here, I do not feel comfortable because I feel like I am bothering them because I have experinced a couple of occasions in which I try to interact with people from here, but one, it seems strange to me the manner in which they intiате a conversation, and second because it seems that they do not like to talk, it seems they do not feel comfortable, don't know if not comfortable talking to me or if they are simply not friendly . . . dont know if*

it's rejection or if they are simply like that, but there have been a few people that have done it. Therefore, I prefer to avoid those types of things and focus on my studies.]

Escutia associated a sense of strength and happiness with respect to his Latino immigrant identity. He described this feeling in the following way:

*Yo como emigrante me siento como fuerte, como muy feliz. Me gusta ser a la vez emigrante ¿por qué?, porque tengo nuevos retos y estando aquí puedo ser lo mismo que ellos, entonces pues me siento . . . lo voy a decir, como superior. Superior porque estando en la clase he escuchado comentarios de las personas de aquí, como tratando, no exactamente de burlarse de mí, pero como que hay algo contra mí, posiblemente por ser emigrante. Entonces, yo me siento superior a ellos porque, aunque no tengo muy bueno mi inglés, estoy tomando la misma clase que ellos y voy mejor que ellos, entonces por eso es que yo me siento superior, me siento grande, me siento mejor que ellos. Entonces, siento que ser un emigrante es bueno. Siento que me ha cambiado a ser un poco más maduro . . . siento que soy ahora un poco más humilde, siento que estoy más sentado. [I*

as an immigrant feel like strong, like very happy. I like being an immigrant. Why?

Because I have new challenges and being here I can do the same as others, therefore, I feel . . . I am going to say it, superior. Superior because while in class I have heard comments from people here, like trying to not exactly making fun of me, but having something against me, possibly for being an immigrant. Therefore, I feel superior to them because, even though my English is not so great, I am taking the same course as them and am doing better than them, therefore that is why I feel superior, I feel big, I feel I am better than them. Therefore, I feel that being an immigrant is a good thing. I feel that I

have changed and have matured . . . I feel that I am a bit more humble, I feel more centered.]

With a sense of gratitude and pride for his parents, Escutia described how their support for him began at a very young age, when they lived in Mexico. Moreover, he expressed that money has never been a deterrent to his educational opportunities:

*Los padres siempre van a estar ahí . . . en todos los sentidos. Hasta mi hermana me ayudó, entonces siento que los padres Latinos si quieren que los hijos sean exitosos. Quieren lo mejor para nosotros, conmigo lo han demostrado, estando aquí o estando en México. En México era un poco difícil, entonces vinimos aquí pero siempre me han ayudado. Por ejemplo, yo en México también estuve en escuelas particulares porque quieren una educación buena para mí. Podían meterme en una escuela pública y ahorrarse ese dinero, pero, no . . . para que yo tenga lo mejor en educación. Mi papá siempre ha sido de la idea de que si yo le digo “Yo quiero estudiar” entonces él va a estar ahí conmigo hasta el último día y va a verme graduar. Él siempre me va a apoyar, mi mamá y mi papá, los dos. Algo que agradezco claramente.* [Parents will always be

there . . . in all respects. Even my sister had helped me, therefore, I feel that Latino parents do want their kids to be successful. They want the best for us, with me they have proven it, both here and in Mexico. It was challenging in Mexico, that’s why we came here but they have always helped me. For example, I was enrolled in private schools in Mexico because they want a good education for me. They could have enrolled me into a public school and saved money, but no, so that I could have the best education. My dad has always adhered to the idea that if I tell him “ I want to study” then he will be there

with me until the last day to see me graduate. He will always support me, my mom and my dad, both of them. Something that I clearly appreciate.

When comparing his desire to learn with his U.S.-born classmates, Escutia noted:

*Pues yo siento que pasión para aprender. Porque yo siento que yo demuestro en el salón de clases como como que yo realmente quiero aprender. A lo mejor no pregunto en el salón de clases, por lo mismo de la sociedad, pero yo voy a lo que es la oficina del maestro y yo ahí trato de expresarme y siento . . . el deseo de saber las cosas, por eso lo digo como pasión. Siento que otras personas . . . lo he visto, simplemente se quedan ahí y no preguntan . . . no disfrutan la estancia de estar en la escuela . . . venir feliz a la escuela porque yo realmente me gusta venir a la escuela a aprender cosas . . . haz algo que a ti te guste, que puedas encontrar la felicidad y vas a ser feliz. Entonces, por eso lo digo, siento que somos muy apasionados a la hora de aprender.* [Well I feel a passion for learning. Because I feel that I prove in the classroom that I truly want to learn. I may not ask questions in the classroom due to societal expectations, but I visit the teacher's office hours and it is there that I try to express myself and feel . . . the desire to know things, that's why I call it passion. I feel that other people . . . I have seen it, they are simply just there and do not ask . . . they do not enjoy school . . . to come happy to school because I truly enjoy coming to school and learn things . . . do something that you like, where you can find happiness and you will be happy. Therefore, that's why I say it, that we (immigrants) are very passionate when it comes to learning.]

As Escutia considered his experiences on the college campus, he explained that when he meets other Latinos on campus, he experiences not only a greater sense of connection with them, but he also recognizes that his experience feels different with others:

*¡Ah! Y lo digo porque he conocido también gente Latina, como por ejemplo un colombiano . . . y con él puedo ser yo porque él en muchas cosas me entiende y piensa exactamente como yo, somos . . . interactuamos entre nosotros, entonces yo veo la gran diferencia de ser un Latino a como ser de aquí . . . se puede decir que es igual que yo, porque tiene las dos culturas. Entonces, como sabemos cómo somos latinos, nos llevamos un poco mejor. Mientras que cuando trato de hacer lo mismo con otro tipo de personas, no lo logro o cosas así. [Oh! I say it because I have met other Latinos, for example a Colombian . . . and with him I can be myself because in so many ways he understands me and thinks exactly like me, we are . . . we interact with each other, therefore I see the big difference between being a Latino versus being from here . . . one could say that he is just like me, because he lives in two cultures. Therefore, since we know we are Latinos, we get along a little better. Yet when I try to do the same with other type of people, I do not achieve that or stuff like that.]*

Escutia described a college environment where each culture can have their own separate space to succeed:

*A lo mejor va a sonar un poco raro, pero me gustaría que fuera separada la educación. Mi cultura Latina como un lado y la otra en otro lado. Porque simplemente si yo voy a ese tipo de escuela, sé que me voy a encontrar gente como yo. En cambio, ahorita estoy en una donde todos nos mezclamos y a veces es algo bueno, pero no realmente para mí,*



*porque no puedo ser yo. No puedo como aprender, no puedo . . . en mi caso, simplemente no puedo ser yo y si la separamos entonces yo voy a estar en ese grupo donde me siento bien, voy a aprender.* [It may sound a little weird, but I wish that education was separated. My culture on one side, and the other one on the other side. Because, simply put, if I attend that type of school, I know I will find people like me. Yet, right now I am enrolled in one where we are all mixed in together and sometimes it's a good thing, but not really for me, because I am not able to be myself. I cannot like learn, I cannot . . . in my case, simply not be myself and if we could separate it, then I can be in the group where I can feel good, I can learn.]

### **Summary**

The stories and insights expressed by the seven working class Latino immigrant males in this study highlighted their unique yet similar immigrant stories. The narratives also shed a much needed light on the major issues that comprise their experiences at the community college, which addressed the study's broadest research question. The narratives vividly described their experiences as immigrants at home, at school, and within the larger U.S. society. In a variety of ways, the narratives tackled such important issues as college culture, the challenges of being first-generation college-going students, and parental support. Moreover, across the critical narratives a number of overlapping themes emerged. Three major categories surfaced: 1) personal life experiences; 2) college community navigation experiences; and 3) Latino masculinity and recommendations for Latino immigrant male college success. Various themes associated with these three major categories of responses included:

### **Personal Life Experiences**

- Home Culture and Language
- Immigrant and U.S. American Bicultural Identity
- Immigrant Identity's Effect on Educational Goal
- Parental Support
- Family-Centered (Caballerismo)

### **Navigating the Community College Environment**

- Being a First-generation College Student
- The College Culture (i.e. meritocracy, English use, individualism, tracking, etc.)
- Cultural Knowledge Brought to College
- Question of Cultural Representation

### **Recommendations for Immigrant Latino Male Success**

- Latino Masculinity (Critical Bicultural Masculinity)
- College Support for Student of Color Issues
- Connections with Latino Faculty/Mentors of Color

These themes and their subthemes will be analyzed and discussed more fully in Chapter 5, considering the literature in the field and what these themes have to say about improving the educational experience of Latino immigrant male students in community college settings. The analysis included highlights the agency participants possess in their educational environments, keeping in mind their intersectionality as both Latinos and males. The analysis is also aimed toward generating student-centered recommendations to inform community college pedagogy

and practices that can facilitate a more culturally relevant and culturally democratic learning environment for working-class, Latino immigrant male students in community college settings.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION, FINDINGS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the colonizing impact of schooling processes shaped by the forces of cultural invasion, any attempt to create effectively a critical foundation for bicultural education must also challenge those ideologies and practices of hegemony that result in further domination of students based on the color of their skin and the language they speak. Hence understanding how the dominant culture perpetuates language domination and racism and its debilitating impact on the intellectual formation of students from racialized communities must be examined if educators are effectively to create a context for cultural democracy in the classrooms.

Darder, 2012, p.35

The narratives by seven Latino working-class immigrant males about their educational experiences while matriculated in the California community college system offered unique insights into their process of navigating their biculturalism within a community college culture—a culture steeped in a “dominant discourse of [neoliberal] educational institutions and the realities that they must face as members of subordinate cultures” (Darder, 2012, p. 45). Key elements linked to Darder’s (2012) critical bicultural theory seem to inform some of the experiences shared by the study’s participants. In particular, were the hegemonic influences of the college culture; the relationship between culture and power in their lives; their negotiation of the college’s dominant culture; the desire for a more cultural democratic experience in college; and the emancipatory inclusion of students’ histories, participation, and voices.

Moreover, participant narratives also reflected their unique gendered relationship with their educational institutions, highlighted by their efforts to negotiate between their Latino home

culture and the hegemonic educational culture of the community college campus. As males, the participants had to contend with their educational journey via a distinctly gendered lens. Their masculine identity, which “varies within any society by the types of cultural groups that compose it” (Kimmel & Messner, 1992, pp. 9-10), must be examined via a Latino cultural lens; otherwise, “we risk collapsing all masculinities into one hegemonic version” (Kimmel & Messner, 1992, pp. 9-10). Doing so means engaging gender privilege but simultaneously ignoring experiences related to the lack of power or status associated with their ethnic group affiliation within mainstream U.S. society. This to say that even when educational institutions engage privilege along gender lines, Latino males are marginalized by way of hegemonic masculinity predicated along racial lines, tied to notions of a racialized hierarchy of hegemonic masculinity (Torres et al., 2002). For Latino males, including those who participated in this study, a racialized masculinity is plagued with racist stereotypes that lead to a different male experience and expression of their masculinity, as compared to males from the dominant culture (Lu & Wong, 2014).

With all of these points in mind, the following analysis and discussion focuses on the emergent themes in addition to the relationships of these themes to the literature in the field. This discussion moves to delineate recommendations derived directly from the participant narratives, to again honor and make central their voices and insights, with the hopes that their voices will assist us in better understanding how to serve Latino immigrant male students on community college campuses.

## **Emergent Themes**

The emergent themes derived from the critical narratives call forth the need for challenging oppressive educational practices and establishing a culturally democratic and “socially-just” community college culture, “where the lived cultures of working class bicultural students are critically integrated into the pedagogical process” (Darder, 2012, p. 42).

Furthermore, the voices of immigrant Latino male students represent an element for achieving a liberating and socially just learning environment, since “the participation and voices of students of color are of the utmost importance in fostering such a democracy and must be incorporated into their educational setting in order to support their emancipation (Darder, 2012, p. 44).”

## **Personal Life Experiences**

This first section presents the themes that surfaced inductively in participant narratives under the category of personal experiences.

### **Home Culture and Language**

Educational institutions overlook the cultural knowledge that students bring into their educational environment (Freire, 1970). When educators fail to acknowledge such knowledge, they miss an opportunity to facilitate student self-empowerment and fail to make them co-partners of their own educational experience. Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti’s (2009) work on funds of knowledge addressed this issue and provided an alternative framework for looking at the assets that students bring with them (culture, family values, etc.) versus accumulating assets (grades, high income, etc.) within the college setting and upon earning their college degree.

Challenging what Freire (1970) called the “banking model” of education, funds of knowledge theory honors the cultural life lessons of resilience that emerged in these narratives

from lives characterized by participants' challenges and response to difficult educational conditions. In a variety of ways, the narratives point to the need for educational institutions to meet the challenge of better supporting Latino immigrant male students to hone in on the cultural resources they bring to their learning. This is also in concert with Carlos Velez-Ibanez and James Greenberg's (1990) study that examined the cultural knowledge challenges of educational institutions like the California community college system, which "often ignore the strategic and cultural resources" cultivated in students' households. They further argued that these "cultural systems . . . are also important and useful assets in the classroom" (p. 26).

Although all of the participants considered themselves as American as their U.S-born peers, all were raised with a strong sense of their home culture and communicate with their families in their native language, due to living in households where their parents do not speak English. Past literature regarding Latino student success has shown that teaching Latino students in their primary language and culture is a key component of allowing their voices to be heard and incorporated into their education (Darder, 2012; Ramirez & Castaneda, 1974). Lempira described the codeswitching that occurs for him when he walks through the door of his home as "When you walk in, you talk in Spanish the whole time . . . you go from somewhere where you speak all English to Spanish."

The participants also described a culture at home rich in Latino traditions and love versus a more hegemonic U.S. American culture outside of the home, which again echoed both Darder's (2012) work on biculturalism and the funds of knowledge work of Gonzalez et al (2009). Paulo considered his mother and grandmother as "not American" and described the culture he was raised in as "different from my friends." Emiliano described his U.S life as one of

an “American teenager going to schools . . . with American ideals” whereas he stated that “you can tell they [parents] are more like immigrants because of their culture.” However, despite the prevalence of a rich cultural Latino experience at home, the effects of an “Americanized” acculturation was expressed as a concern by Silverio, when he mentioned that at times he feels that “we may be losing our identity as Peruvians slowly and surely.” This fact led him to reflect and ask himself, “Who are we?” and he expressed firmly that, “That kind of scares me a little . . . We shouldn’t forget where we come from.”

Moreover, Latino culture has a more collectivistic focus than U.S. American culture and, therefore, family is central to members of Latino culture (Santiago-Rivera, Arredondo, & Gallardo-Cooper, 2002; Willerton, Dankoski, & Martir, 2008). The critical role of family during the developmental stage of adolescence may be particularly important for the mental health of Mexican American youth, given they are more likely to depend on family during this age period. The narratives in this study revealed a strong communal paradigm when describing their home, family, and Latino culture. Silverio described his home culture as one of respect and “the best thing to compare it to is like when you have the southern love, you have that warmth that comforts you in your home.”

Similar to Sáenz, Garcia-Louis, Drake, and Guida’s (2018) research on the concept of *familismo*, the participants described their families as a source of motivation to persist in college due to the strong relationships of support fostered at home. Cuauhtémoc described his immigrant home culture as “more together, united in the sense that most of us are immigrants so we sort of look out for each other.” In fact, he described the close relationship he has with his younger siblings and often the older sibling becomes the mentor to the younger children in a Latino



family. He stated that for his little sister “I’ve become sort of her role model . . . and I know that’s what brothers and sisters are supposed to do . . . I think that would be one of my most successful things.” Emiliano spoke about how at home, since he lives with his family of immigrants, it is a very supportive environment. He stated that, “Everybody wants to make it so if one person makes it, that’s good . . . then you can say the rest of us can make it, so now we all got to make it.” Escutia described the positive environment at home and how that facilitates his ability to be his authentic self when he shared, “*En mi casa yo soy . . . puedo decir alegre, soy muy expresivo*” [At home I am myself . . . I am very happy, I am very expressive.] Finally, Lempira described Latino culture as a culture that “gives back to the community, like helping each other.”

### **Immigrant and U.S. American Intersectional Identity**

It is important to highlight the literature that critically addresses how bicultural students (Darder, 2012) engage with the hegemonic college setting. The participants expressed the challenges of living an immigrant identity within a U.S. American culture. Paulo described it as “being an immigrant can be really stressful.” and added that when he “walks down the halls, I try not to be an immigrant . . . it’s something I don’t share with the world.” Navigating their immigrant and U.S. American identities has had a direct effect on the participants’ psychological and identity development. Cesar spoke about a time in his life where he felt “ashamed of identifying as Latino” and pointed to his arm at his “*vacuna*” (vaccine) scar, very common amongst immigrants—a strong symbol of the immigrant identity. He expressed that it “hurts knowing there’s an invisible border in your mind that you can’t go anywhere, that you can only stay where you are.” Lempira also addressed the stigma associated with being an immigrant and

expressed feeling like he always has to “prove them wrong.” Silverio recounted how his “mom would always tell me to be careful about what I say . . . gotta be careful with what you do.”

These aspects of the narrative confirm the tensions experienced by Latino immigrant male students as they struggled to navigate the two worlds of their bicultural existences (Darder, 2012). Cuauhtémoc described how immigrants experience different processes in college, as compared to his U.S.-born peers, which speaks to the examination of their relationship with their educational setting and how students are perceived by such settings. He believed this leads to an “othering” of Latino immigrant students, which has had a negative impact on him. He shared, “I think that idea of having to complete a different application is one of those things that I felt pushed me back . . . I was looked at different in some sense . . . it made me stand out from everybody else . . . I felt like I was the outsider.” The educational institution must make an effort to understand the dialectical relationship with their educational setting. For example, when it comes to college life, Emiliano noted his early hesitation about sharing his undocumented immigrant status, which he considered a sort of invisible identity.

Darder (2012) has argued that the students’ educational institution must make an effort to understand the relationship between the student and the institution and examine how students are perceived by such institution. Cuauhtémoc highlighted this point when he talked about how “at first, I didn’t tell much people about it because who do I even tell? . . . why would anybody care.” He then stated, “So back then, I did not know what that meant . . . to me I was just a student from south LA . . . that’s what I identified at the time.” Furthermore, bicultural students often speak of the disconnect felt with U.S. American culture. For example, Escutia expressed this by saying, “*no me siento agusto en ese pais siendo como Latino . . . no puedo ser yo . . .*

*porque son diferentes culturas . . . pero me tengo que acoplar*” [I do not feel comfortable in this country being like being Latino . . . I cannot be me . . . because it’s two different cultures . . . but I must cope.] This recalls what Darder (2012) referred to as the negotiations students must undergo in the process of their academic formation within Eurocentric educational institutions.

### **Immigrant Identity’s Effect on Educational Goals**

The narratives in this study also seem to be in sync with Peña’s (2013) work, in that various self-defined characteristics were identified by the Latino male college students in the study as playing a key role in their academic success. These included personal identity, personal demographics, resilience, networking, family support, motivation, peer influence, inspirational mentorships, degree attainment, academic rigor and college preparedness, and strong mentorship advisement. Intrinsic in nature, such characteristics challenge extrinsic economic motivators (high paying job, economic status, name brand material possession) fostered by the neoliberal agenda in higher education.

The male student participants in this study named an “identity” anchored in self-pride and driven by inner motivation as a strong factor in their personal success. Their identity was further supported by a culture of family, including making their mothers proud. In this study, Paulo proudly shared that his mother represents his biggest source of support. He reminisced about how his mother would remind him why they moved to the United States and that “other than for a better life, she really wanted me to go to school, so that’s why we came here.” On a scale between one and ten, he claimed her support is a definite ten, always willing to do whatever it takes to support his education.” Silverio also described his mother as his “huge, huge supporter” that “always supported our education, no matter what.”

An inner drive and self-motivation to succeed were identified as being inculcated early in life by parents and mentors. Self-belief despite coming from an economically disadvantaged home by turning disadvantage into resiliency. Networking with community and friends stemming from the close proximity and access to their local college, students credited their family for supporting their efforts and for encouraging them to delay gratification. Students also gained the ability to turn negative family support into motivation to succeed. Most students mentioned self-motivation, family motivation, and teacher motivation as a contributing factor to their success. In particular, positive influence and mentorship from teachers and other successful individuals in their lives was another source of motivation. Family and peer influence propelled further self-motivation to attend college. A communal camaraderie characterized by similar interests was cited as a key component.

A majority of the participants found inspiration from their mothers. The need to help others that did not speak English was another motivating factor to pursue their own education, which was another example of a communal concept. Pride emanating from being the first to graduate college and having their parents be proud of them was another intrinsic motivator. Adapting to unknown new environments and developing a discipline was identified as a cultural strength as a response to the challenging academic rigor. Several students mentioned relationships with guidance counselors, teachers, staff, and family friends as another communal practice. Participants also emphasized repeatedly the significance of having Latino educators in their educational environment to support their success. Paulo, for example, stressed, “Before talking to him [Latino counselor], I never thought I would go to college.” He further shared that when his Latino counselor informed him of his admissions and financial possibilities of

attending college, he “tried a lot harder, got better grades . . . finding out that I could go to college was a really big incentive, and I did better because of that.”

At least half of the participants spoke about the impact that finding out about their immigrant status had on their young lives. Despite their intelligence and potential, there was a psychological effect that led them to believe that perhaps college was not something worth pursuing, due to their newfound awareness of status. Paulo found out he was an immigrant during sixth grade and immediately thought, “I didn’t think I could go to college at that point.” He expressed, “I really didn’t try. . . senior year I didn’t think I was gonna go to college at all.” Cesar shared that he found out his immigration status “when I was applying to community college . . . during that process was when my mom told me, ‘You know you have DACA right?’ and I was like, ‘What is that?’ . . . I didn’t know there were restrictions for me.” Emiliano talked about the impact finding out about his immigrant status had on him and his peers, saying, “I think that’s kind of true for a lot of us, we also kind of had that same experience . . . we didn’t really find out about being undocumented students until high school.” He connected it to their identity development by stating, “It wasn’t part of our identity until that point.”

### **Parental Support**

Consistent with recent literature that has challenged the notion of lack of parental support (Eamon, 2005; Ong et al., 2006), all of the participants expressed receiving strong parental support at home. The findings of this study are in concert with Langenkamp’s (2019) recent study on immigrant Latinx parents, which connected parental high educational aspirations for their children with their lived experiences, along with educational and work challenges, their immigrant status, and their perceived U.S. opportunities. This study reinforced this important

connection between parental support of their children's educational attainment and the messages of resilience they teach their children at home.

The ultimate proof of parental support comes from the sacrifice that parents made in leaving their home country and families in order to offer their children better educational opportunities in the United States. Jones (2013) noted, "Sacrifice is one of the major themes in the immigrant narrative; children of immigrants . . . are at least remotely aware that our parents gave up *something*, sometimes many things, in order to give us 'a better life.'" Cuauhtémoc recounted that, "The main reason she [mom] brought us to this country is to go to school and have a better life and not live the one she lived." Emiliano proudly shared that "when I ask them [parents] why they came to America, they never said to make more money . . . they said for a better education for me and my brothers." Regarding parental support, Emiliano surmised, "I guess the message is that if you go to college you're going to be successful in life, because my parents they have no education, so they believe that through education you can become a success." Lempira emphasized the importance of making his parents proud as a key element of parental support when he shared, "I was very proud whenever I had good grades . . . it made my dad happy and he'll be very supportive because I got good grades, so that's one of the things I mainly focus on, school and be someone to be proud of."

In reflecting on his parental support, Silverio affirmed that his father supports his pursuit of higher education and shared that his "dad was more like, "Go to a school with respect and dignity." Despite lacking the knowledge regarding how college works, Emiliano described his parental support by sharing the messages he received at home: "I guess the message is that if you go to college, you're going to be successful in life . . . they believe that through an education you

can be become a success.” Aside from economic support, Escutia expressed his father’s support when sharing, “*Mi papa siempre ha sido de la idea de que si yo le digo ‘yo quiero estudiar, entonces el va a estar ahí conmigo hasta el última día y va a verme graduar’*” [My dad has always had this way of being that if I tell him, I want to study, then he will be there with me until the day he sees me graduate.]

### **Family Centeredness**

Although most participants did view their male role as that of supporting their families, their definition went beyond one of financial provider. Paulo talked about the importance of being “tough,” “supporting your family,” and shared that, “I don’t like to complain to other people and talk about my problems.” The narratives strongly reflected the concept of *familismo* (Ojeda, Navarro, & Morales, 2011) with respect to Latino masculinity. *Familismo*, as a core Latino value (Castillo, Conoley, & Brossart, 2004), entails loyalty and connectedness within the family (Villarreal, Blozis, & Widaman, 2005). This value, which holds the family as central to the self, is critical to understanding Latino immigrant male student experience because, as the narratives showed, it is to the family that many Latinos men turn for support (Marin & Marin, 1991).

However, the participants highlighted the unique experiences males endure in college by virtue of their gender and its influence on their perceptions of self and the world (Perez, 2012). Most participants brought up issues such as having to do things on their own without asking for help. For example, Lempira noted that “anything that he feels, he’ll suck it up . . . not showing, like little to no emotions to other people . . . the male has to figure out how to get around it, without asking for help.” Cesar spoke about “the way you’re supposed to be a man can limit you

at times in the college atmosphere because you have to do things on your own . . . because you can't interact with others . . . because you can't ask for help.” Cuauhtémoc expressed a belief that “in the college setting, I've always thought that women may have it a little easier . . . but I think it's because women are more pushed to go to school . . . because men, they usually don't go to school.” He also brought up the possibility that Latino men are victims of a type of microaggression along gender lines “that might be because of physical traits . . . a guy might come up to you, he's super kind, super gentle, might look intimidating and you may not want to help him because you might come up with stereotypes.” Emiliano described the differences he perceives when comparing the college experiences of males versus female students. He stated, “I do believe males experience higher education different than females . . . I think if you're a male, it's kind of like . . . you gotta toughen up and just deal with it and do it on your own.”

### **Navigating the Community College Experiences**

The following section engages the various themes that emerged from the narratives related to community college experiences.

#### **First-Generation College Student Status**

Participants in this study all discussed the challenges of being a first-generation college student and how their parents' lack of college knowledge affected their initial college going experiences (Cerda-Lizarraga, 2015; Falcon, 2015). Paulo discussed how his white friends' parents are very “informative” and “know exactly what to do at the community college.” In concert with Yosso's (2005) notion, he also made references to the cultural capital that his white peers have available to them compared to his experiences as a first-generation Latino student. He described how his white friends “know what to do because of their parents” versus “my Latino



friends did not know, and it was their first time.” He talked about how “at home, I won’t get that.” and how “it’s not that she [mother] won’t help, it’s just that she can’t.” Cesar described the effect of having to do things on his own since his parents “don’t really know the struggles that I go through.”

Despite having his parents’ support, Cesar shared that “nobody’s guiding me at home, and that’s where I want it . . . I definitely struggled with the transitional process . . . because being first gen and then my parents not really knowing what to do . . . they barely finished high school.” Cuauhtémoc described his first year of college as “a bit overwhelming coming straight out of high school . . . you’re on your own . . . you don’t have anybody to tell you, ‘take this class’ . . . in my first semester it was pretty much on my own . . . I didn’t have anybody to ask questions.” Attributing it to his first-generation status, Emiliano shared that his parents “don’t know what college is like, what you have to do . . . it includes sacrifice whether you like it or not.”

### **The College Culture**

The participants’ sense of college culture reflected the neoliberal tenets of the institution and its debilitating chokehold over traditional notions of U.S. college success (Levin & Aliyeva, 2015). U.S. community college education exhibits much evidence of individualism whereby, analogously, one might say that students possesses sole “private ownership” of their own individual success (U.S. schooling) with a focus only on their own “means of production” (grades) with the purpose of gaining a career that leads to the ultimate capitalist measure of success—”profit” (high paying job). Giroux (1983) stated that such cultural forces are “forged, reproduced, and contested under conditions of power and dependency that primarily serve the

dominant culture.” Moreover, the neoliberalist influence seeped within college culture compromises students’ humanity and taints their sense of identity (De Lissovoy, 2013).

The participants in this study repeatedly refuted a one-dimensional economic identity and spoke about not letting such a phenomenon identify them. Cuauhtémoc, for example, noted, “Personally, I know myself . . . I realize that I’m more, I’m bigger than money. I want to go to school and make my mother proud, not only through money, but with the intent of realizing why she came to this country in the first place.” Escutia expressed, “*Yo prefiero tener felicidad a tener millones de dólares, y no puedo ser feliz . . . para mí, familia es felicidad. Yo prefiero estar con mi familia que tener mucho dinero. Yo siento que eso no vale la pena, tener mucho dinero y no tener felicidad.*” [ I prefer to acquire happiness versus having millions of dollars, and not be happy . . . for me, family is happiness. I prefer to be with my family than to have lots of money. I feel that it is not worth it to have a lot of money but not have happiness.] Cuauhtémoc also refuted a money-center definition of success saying, “when people say you’re most successful when you have more money, you’re doing well financially, but are you really successful? . . . For me, I think it’s not.”

Overall, the study’s participants described college culture as an individualistic, isolating and disconnected environment, reminiscent of Cupples and Grosfoguel’s (2018) concerns regarding Eurocentrism within the Westernized university. Paulo noted, “most people don’t talk in classes . . . most people don’t form connections.” He described the community college culture as “really isolated” and really independent . . . everything is by yourself, for yourself.” Emiliano described college culture as a “dog eat dog world” where unlike at home, you “don’t get that support anymore.” Cuauhtémoc, in fact, said he had “only been able to connect with two people .

. . . everybody's pretty distant." He added that he thinks it's "because of the lack of clubs and communities that are seen in other colleges that isn't really seen here."

Pedagogically speaking, neoliberal practices have transformed education into pre-determined curriculum and prescribed competitive, educational practices devoid of historical, cultural, and dialogical principles, which are imperative to creating a critical learning environment (Darder, 2012; Freire, 1970). As such, colleges are set up as a competition among students with the quest of earning the highest grades in order to achieve huge income potential as the ultimate prize handed at the end of the proverbial educational race (De Lissovoy, 2013). Emiliano asserted this notion of the educational environment as a contest amongst students versus a communally supportive environment; "like get a group of five people to go enter this contest where they can show how great they are . . . you might win this prize . . . you don't really think about working in groups . . . you think more, I need to make my grade up . . . you only think of yourself." As such, the educational environment becomes one whereby cooperation among students is discouraged and where success is achieved when students beat each other in the game of college to the finish line—graduation and earning a degree within a pre-determined timeframe. When students do not achieve success under these expectations, they are labeled unsuccessful. Hence, like capitalism, education has become a series of transactional practices rather than a democratic process of education where success is often thought of as an exercise in individualistic achievement (Cupples & Grosfoguel, 2018; De Lissovoy, 2013).

Furthermore, the insight of participants confirms research that shows California community colleges need to examine the role that teachers play in the lives of the students (Xu, 2018). The critical narratives in this study revealed the issue of teachers often blaming the

students for lack of motivation, when in reality it is often the teachers that need to hold themselves accountable for learning about the lives of students and how that affects their academics (Saathoff, 2015). When describing most of his professors, Cesar expressed that “it feels like they’re tired, like they’re bored all the time.” He elaborated by saying, “teachers go into the classes . . . already giving up . . . because of who we are . . . because I’m undocumented.” This has a direct effect on students’ motivation, as Cesar describes, “I think if you don’t put that effort in the classroom, then why should I? . . . I’m asking for help and it seems like [teachers] don’t want to help me out, then how do you expect us to get these perfect grades and be the perfect student.”

Meritocratic grading practices are part of the alleged “objective” nature of education, which supports the status quo and conserves the dominant culture’s power over subordinate communities through a predominant white teacher force (Darder, 2017; Cohen & Brawer, 2014; De Lissovoy, 2013). Darder (2012) spoke to the debilitating impact that meritocracy can have for students of color. In particular, she noted that subordinate cultures are oppressed “through an ideology that functions to marginalize and invalidate cultural values, heritage, language, knowledge, and lived experiences which fall outside of the purview of capitalist domination and exploitation” (p. 29). Cuauhtémoc, for example, recalled a white professor that adhered blindly to meritocratic practices within a classroom with a majority of Latino students: “I felt like the whole class was talked down . . . when everybody spoke out or when everybody asked a question, he’d always put his foot down like, ‘No, this is the way to do it . . . it’s in the book’ . . . he was very keen on sticking to the criteria.”

In contrast, critical views of education question how colleges can effectively teach students without first establishing an environment that is dialogical in nature and where learning doesn't begin where students find themselves (Darder, 2012, 2017; Freire, 1970). True to this concept, the study's participants expressed the importance of being heard, creating a safe space where help is offered, even when not asked for, due to their challenges as males in asking for assistance. They also noted that community college educators must become more aware of their biased assumptions about their racial identity (Lin-Sommer & Lucek, 2015).

The study's participants challenged defining success in a narrow academic manner. Meritocratic measures can further oppress students by leading to a process of negatively internalizing grades and tainting their identity development (Darder 2017; De Lissovoy 2013). The study's participants were very vocal about not allowing grades to define their potential or their overall identity. Paulo expressed that if asked about the legitimacy of grades in measuring success, "grades just show what I am capable of doing from what I thought I wasn't capable of doing . . . it just shows that if I stick it out and I try my hardest, I can do well." Humanizing the grading system emerged then as an important issue for the study's participants. As such, participants challenged meritocratic practices, reimagining success on a more dialogical and personal level versus an emotionally detached relationship stripped of the humanity that teacher-student relationships should engender. In this sense, the study supports Fuller's (2012) notion that humanizing assessment of students must be a dialogical act. When speaking about grades, Paulo shared, "the A grade shows that I can do what I thought I couldn't, which is a mental barrier I have to get over. Lempira advocated for "comparing the classes you take with the

amount of hours you're working" to develop a fairer system, given that a B/C student can be "putting more work . . . more successful than someone who's getting A's but not working at all."

Participants described success not as a continuum with a starting and end point, but rather as on-going process of personal check-in, based on self-reflection. In this sense, compared to grades, the typical measure of success (Jennings, Lovett, Cuba, Swingle, & Lindkvist, 2013), Latino immigrant male participants in this study considered social issues of life far more significant. Another element of success that came into question in this study is the notion that success is an end goal. The participants expressed strong statements about how they consider themselves already successful in various ways. Personal achievements such as overcoming academic insecurities, building a stronger self-confidence, and developing a strong sense of self-pride were key themes in the narratives. Lempira expressed it as being "more confident with yourself" and being "proud of what you did and what you've accomplished." Lempira noted feeling "more successful than before" because "education had helped me look around and see the community." Paulo humanized success when saying, "success is different for every single person." and important to achieve it "being happy while you're doing it, because if you're not happy while you're doing it then what's the point?"

Latino culture represents a communal culture where the group's welfare is more important than the individual. This view is in direct opposition to the institutional individualism and instrumentalist nature of a neoliberal education (Cupples & Grosfoguel, 2018; De Lissovoy 2013). Therefore, Latino male students have to contend with living in two opposing and conflicting worlds. Group cooperation and the building of community is not encouraged in college (Gonzalez, 1997). However, Latino male students, more often than not, express their

success in communal terms, which leads to a creation of a cultural dissonance within their college experience (Martinez-Taboada et. al., 2017). This leads to a perceived sense of sub-achievement in comparison to their peers, due to their inability to view success as solely about competitive and individual prosperity. Therefore, traditional educational values judge Latino communal culture as a liability to students' pursuit of individualized success (Wortham & Contreras, 2002). Coming from a more communal view of success learnt at home, Cuauhtémoc affirmed, "I see it more being successful with others because how I grew up, we were taught that if we all work, if we are doing pretty bad at home, we're all doing bad. If one person's struggling with something, we're all struggling."

As noted earlier, the critical narratives accentuated a communal sense of success that stems from Latino culture and family values. Darder (2012) affirmed the importance of seeking a communal understanding of biculturalism to inform a critical theory of cultural democracy (p. 46). Reflecting this issue, Cuauhtémoc compared individualistic college culture to his more group-minded Latino home culture: It's everybody pretty much on their own, but what's different at home is we're family, we're still talking to each other . . . everybody here is, "I'm in this class, don't talk to me. I want to get in, I want to get out." In addition, Cuauhtémoc envisioned his success in a more communal manner: "not only my personal success, it's success with my family . . . that's when we all win because we're just doing [it] together." Emiliano challenged traditional definitions of success by sharing, "I think college success should be like how well you've grown since you started." Rather than viewing success as a "race," he asks "can you help others with what you've learned or what you've experienced? . . . to me that's success in college."

## **Cultural Knowledge Brought to College**

Consistent to the existing banking model (Friere,1970) of education still operating today in higher education, college environments seldom take into account what students contribute to their own education. Yet, participants in this study highlighted what Latino immigrant males contribute toward their own education and success. They described immigrants in college with words such as “hardworking,” “independent,” “determined,” “decisive,” “passionate,” “loyal,” “honest,” and “trustworthy,” to name a few. Instead of Latino stereotypical characteristics such as passive and lacking social agency, Silverio sees himself and other Latino immigrants as a “different breed that pushes forward” and has “something to say for ourselves, our culture, our community.”

Participants, therefore, challenged the passivity expected by the banking model of education, proudly identifying various values and strengths as the type of cultural knowledge they bring into their own college success. Aside from hardworking, Paulo named independence as one of the main contributions he brings to his own college success. He spoke about how at home “both my grandma and mom are very independent . . . they bestowed that quality in me . . . so in school I would try to be independent.” Moreover, he noted, “I have no social anxiety talking to other people . . . because of the environment I grew up in.” Cesar credited his home life and culture for “being really humble and being really supportive . . . big on helping people because of what I’ve learned from home.” He shared how humility learned at home is something he brings into his college environment to build community with others. Silverio shared, “[Y]ou learn how to be on your own, you learn how to take things responsibly.” Escutia expressed



bringing a “*pasion para aprender*” [passion for learning] that he feels is lacking amongst his U.S.-born peers.

In terms of the college culture, when reimagining a success model, Lempira stated, “you’re more confident with yourself . . . you’re proud of what you did and what you’ve accomplished.” Lempira also added a community-minded dimension to success, “I know that education has helped me look around and see the community . . . when I go to school, I felt the need to be more talkative.” Silverio stated, “I believe that we come in with a certain knowledge . . . it may not always be book smart . . . you learn things, experience . . . you learn how to be on your own . . . you learn how to take things responsibly.”

Educational policies responsive to economic demands (Cohen & Brawer, 2014; Darder, 2017), the vocationalization of higher education (Frye, 1992; Maclean & Pavlova, 2013), and the fact that California Latino males are the primary subgroup pushed into the low-skilled workforce (Pew Hispanic Center, 2005; Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2009) were all aspects that surfaced within narratives of the Latino immigrant male students that participated in this study. For example, Cuauhtémoc noted, “I’ve always thought that after high school I was going to go to school and do some trade job, get my certificate, start working.” However, more recently, he considers himself “super successful” in his view as an immigrant because he thought he would “never go to college or actually continue to pursue education.” Furthermore, he stated “I want to help others and that’s one of the main reasons why obviously I’m in college.” Meanwhile, Escutia expressed a passion for learning as the major quality he brings to his continuing studies: “*el deseo de saber las cosas, pero eso digo la pasion*” [the desire to know things, which is why I say passion].

In the process of studying, Latino male immigrant students must exercise more focus and persistence in order to succeed, given the obstacles they must overcome (Soria & Stebleton, 2013). They seek to learn, integrate into society, provide for their families, and give back to the community. About this Lempira notes, “I guess an immigrant would focus on what they are doing . . . because they’re fighting for someone, they’re fighting for something . . . that’s why they are more resilient because they moved to a different country to get a better life . . . we want to form part of society and be able to give back to the community that helped us as well.” In speaking about what education means to immigrants like himself and others, Emiliano explained, “I think education is something wonderful for me. It has empowered me. It’s made me think differently. It’s made me think like more of trying to help others because I’ve gotten help through education, so with education I can help others. So, any way that I can help, whether through example or helping somebody in need, then I will do that.”

### **Question of Cultural Representation**

It is important for students of color to see themselves in their own education and community colleges must do a better job of incorporating Latino male students’ cultural knowledge in the teaching pedagogy and student support educational practices (Barabé, 2017). Paulo, for example, affirmed that it is “important to be represented . . . because if not, then no one cares about us.” He described the college environment as “always American . . . in English, all the books you read by American authors, about American culture . . . history, obviously American.”

Darder (2012) pointed out that a working-class student from a racialized community must not only contend with learning a second language, but also “with the negative messages about

the primary culture and language that abound in assimilative classroom environments” (p. 46). All of the study’s participants talked extensively about not feeling culturally represented in the curriculum and the classroom environment. Paulo expressed “feeling invisible” in his college environment, due to the white mainstream culture. He also spoke about the importance of being represented, saying “I do think it’s important to be represented . . . if we’re not represented, no one knows us, no one cares about us.” The various participants voiced the need for immigrants to be able to see themselves reflected in their higher education, in order to foster a belief in their own potential. Paulo recounted, “I think if I heard stories about people like me when I was younger it would have made a difference if they were successful.”

The participants also spoke about the importance of college offering spaces for the expression of their cultural knowledge (Barabé, 2017; Soria & Stebleton, 2013). Hence, it is not surprising that Cesar stressed the importance of the presence of faculty of color who can teach curriculum about communities of color, in order to encourage student educational contributions. Regarding this issue, he stated: I think when I walk into a white classroom, I can’t contribute anything . . . there’s nothing that I can connect to, so I just sit there . . . but when I hear about my culture . . . I feel more free . . . I feel like I can be vulnerable . . . [because] there’s always that community . . . you see the difference in the classroom.” And when taking a course with a Latino professor, Cesar expressed, “I feel like I can share my story and help others with it because I think my story is knowledge.” In contrast, Emiliano stated that he does not feel represented “because as a Latino immigrant . . . I believe we are really not thought of to be placed in books . . . the books we read are other people who are not like us, experience different things . . . what would [be] the Latino lens of looking at this book?”

## **Recommendations for Immigrant Latino Male Success**

This study has sought to shift views about what students need in order to succeed in college by creating an opportunity to hear from the immigrant Latino male students themselves. Unfortunately, it has not been enough to have an open-door community college admissions policy (Rao, 2004). From the narratives emerged various recommendations that can better inform community college practices as these pertains to more intentional engagement with the education of Latino immigrant males. Transactional practices and fleeting state-wide neoliberal policies will always prove ineffective in supporting Latino immigrant males, if their voices are absent and practices are not anchored in their genuine needs and recommendations that can foster their success (Martinez, 2016). Hence, this section related to the last category of the emergent themes examines recommendations for immigrant Latino male success. The recommendations are particularly aimed at community college professors and administrators and can serve as effective ways to offer support to Latino immigrant males.

### **College Support for Student of Color Issues**

College support was defined by the participants in various ways as it pertains to students of color. As noted in literature in the field (Pongjuán et. al., 2017), taking courses with professors of color and courses that teach about the experiences of people of color were two key elements that the participants identified as support. Cesar highlighted the importance of ethnic studies courses that build community and allow students of color to share their stories. He shared that in these courses “there’s more community and I saw the difference with a white professor compared to my ethnic studies classroom with a Latino professor.” Moreover, he emphasized two key components; 1) the “difference in the environment” and 2) “I guess I feel like I can

share my story [because] my story is knowledge.” Hence, in concert with Darder’s (2012) notion of biculturalism within the classroom, their cultural sensibilities, lived histories, and bicultural voices were experienced as being welcomed within these courses.

Funding and implementation of programs for students of color is another key way that colleges can support Latino male students (Falcon, 2015). Lempira spoke about human development curriculum component of the Puente program at his community college, which “really helped me a lot in terms of socializing like networking with other people . . . [and] really taught me a lot on basically who I was and who I want to be . . . that’s when I started doing things for myself.” In addition, he discussed how the program fostered a sense of community and described the friendships he made as “we would feel like we were part of family . . . so it helped me stay there . . . it felt like a safe space.”

The community building and sense of belonging that such programs provide was also named as an important contribution toward the success of students served by such programs. Lempira stated that “the program really helped me a lot because I didn’t feel by myself because there were other students with the same situations as me who needed help . . . there were other students with the same struggles as me.” Similarly, Cuauhtémoc strongly supported the need for student of color organizations. In describing the environment at Hispanic Serving Institutions (HIS’s) like his college, he noted however, “you can’t really feel it, even though the majority of the campus is Latino and there’s a large Latino presence.” He attributed this to the fact that there are not enough Latino student clubs and “there’s just not enough opportunities to connect with other Latinos.”

Latino student organizations were also mentioned as pivotal resources that can facilitate the type of communication skills acquired by healthy socializing needed by Latino male students to build their success (Mercedes, 2013). Lempira shared how the PUENTE program would push him to “sit down and talk with other classmates” and the program helped him to persist with his studies. He described it as a “welcoming, safe space” that “felt like I was getting helped.” He shared that programs like PUENTE represented “certain things that will make you stay longer and make you feel like you’re a part of that small community.”

The importance of educator awareness of immigrant student culture, values, and issues consistently (Barabé, 2017; Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) surfaced in participant narratives. Silverio, for example, stated: “for certain counselors and certain professors, faculty, to be more aware of sometimes our situations . . . if they could understand that a little bit, it would help a lot . . . we want our voices to be heard.” The establishment of Dream Centers, knowledgeable of the needs of DACA students (Oliver, 2017; Mercedes, 2013), was also mentioned by several of the participants. Cuauhtémoc, in particular, described the benefit as places where undocumented students can “feel comfortable enough to express how they feel and get the help they want from people who they are able to identify with.”

A suggestion that also surfaced was that of establishing ethnic learning affinity groups, to reduce a sense of isolation and support community building (Mercedes, 2013). Escutia suggested that perhaps separating the educational environment into its various ethnic cultures, in order to create community, would lead to greater success for immigrant Latino male students. He advocated “*mi cultura como un lado y la otra en otro lado*” [my culture on one side and the other one on the other side], which speaks to a need for Latino males to have opportunities for cultural

identification with their classmates, in order to promote community building. When always forced to be mixed in with the dominant culture, Escutia felt that he was unable to learn because he could not simply be himself; however, “*si la separamos entonces yo voy a estar en ese grupo donde me siento bien, voy aprender*” [if we separate them, then I will be in the group where I feel good, I will learn].

### **Connections with Latino Faculty and Mentors of Color**

Consistent with the literature, having opportunities for connections with faculty of color was identified as an important component for their success (Barabé, 2017). Cesar, for example, referred to the importance of “getting to know their journey, their life story” and believes it facilitates getting “more help because we have that one-on-one and we know each other a little more . . . if I need help, it’s like, I got you.” He also noted, “I have to take the right professor to have a sense of community and to know my history.”

The importance of mentorship was noted by participants as a key humanizing component of their educational experiences. When identifying what educators should provide to support Latino male students, Cesar stated, “I think that educators being more vulnerable with students . . . mentorship and willingness to hear [our] stories, not just judging them . . . because you don’t really know what we go through sometimes.” Similarly, the participants spoke about how important it is for educators to listen to what immigrant Latino men have to say, to be more accessible, provide safe spaces, advocate for them, and support them more consistently.

Advocating for the expression of a healthier masculinity that challenges one-dimensional *machismo* often associated with Latino males within hegemonic gender expectations (Smith, 2003) is a concern expressed by the participants. Moreover, while mentors can come from all

backgrounds, and the differences between mentors and mentees does not preclude them from developing a strong relationship, there is something to be said “when your mentor can look like you and share similar experiences with you”, Cesar stated. It is then not surprising that consistent opportunities to establish meaningful relationships with Latino male faculty of color was among one of the most salient educational recommendations shared by the participants as central to their own success. Several participants affirmed that meeting with their Latino counselor, for example, represented a crossroads in their schooling experience. They described counseling appointments as informational, reinforcing the belief of affordability of college, but more importantly, as having a direct positive effect on their motivation to continue pursuing higher education. Paulo, for instance, talked about how “when my counselor told me there’s lot of grants . . . and it’s affordable, that changed a lot of things . . . because before talking to him, I never thought I would go to college.” Several participants spoke about the importance of not just receiving mentoring, but also giving it back to others in his community. About this, Emiliano shared, “educate other people . . . letting other people know this is my experience in college . . . you may benefit from this . . . you can be inspired because I come from the same place as you.”

### **Reframing the Success for Critical Bicultural Latino Masculinities**

The concept of Latino masculinity was reflected in different ways across participant narratives. The commentaries made brought to mind the work of Arciniega et al. (2008), who engaged with the concept of *caballerismo*—a positive cultural masculinity value within Latino culture, emphasizing nurturing relationships with family. This value seems to be a powerful source of motivation for Latino immigrant male students who participated in this study. True to this perspective, the participants did not adhere to stereotypical nor narrow notions of *machismo*.



Paulo expressed that men should exercise the right to self-define their own manhood and “being a man could be whatever or whoever he defines it to be.”

An important dimension of these narratives lies in the intersection of participants’ Latino and male identities. Critical bicultural theory supported an examination of their bicultural experiences as cultural Latinos in a neoliberal educational environment, but a more intentional focus was needed to address the issues germane to the ways that their Latino masculine identity also informed their educational experiences. Essentially, Latino male students are in constant negotiation between two sets of cultural dimensions as these relate to both ethnic and gender identities. Negotiating the tension of dominant and marginalized self-concepts is understood as key in developing self-concept (Lu & Wong, 2014). Therefore, questions related to what power students of color may or may not possess and how a lack of power may result in their debilitating subordination represents an important element when creating a bicultural approach within their educational experience (Darder, 2012). Hence, Darder’s (2012) critical bicultural theory urges educators to examine the link between culture and power in order to support cultural democracy within classroom and communities

The relationship between culture and power was evident as participants discussed challenges linked to their “Latino masculine identity” as matriculated community college students—a system that seldom acknowledges their unique gendered needs nor solicits their voices or insights to determine their needs. This practice, consequently, further dehumanizes their educational experiences by not incorporating their cultural lived experiences and cultural knowledge into the co-creation of their own educational success. Examination of their experiences taps into their bicultural Latino male voices often ignored by college administrators

and educators alike. Attention to their voices is imperative in order to challenge banking models of education that strip immigrant Latino male students of their agency and lead to educational experiences void of culturally democratic educational practices. This is particularly so given that “within a student’s primary language is contained the codification of lived experiences that provide the avenues for students to express their own realities and question the wider social order” (Darder, 2012, p. 36). Engaging the narratives in this study through the lenses of critical biculturalism and Latino masculinity yields an ethnic and gender identities intersection viewpoint often-overlooked—that is, an intersection that informs the distinct experiences of immigrant Latino male students.

What follows is a deliberation of what is needed in order to foster the cultural and gender-specific democracy required for working-class, Latino male immigrant students in the community college system. The aim of this analysis is for community colleges to take a more grounded step toward a socially-just direction in serving their largest male of color population, by engaging with the need for a bicultural gendered pedagogy absent in a system lacking intentional engagement with Latino male students despite open-door admissions policies. The themes derived directly from participant voices shed light on how community colleges can work toward supporting this specific student population and the importance of delivering on its promise of offering an education that is socially just, democratizing in nature, and one that provides a genuine opportunity for immigrant Latino male community college students to work toward a reimagined success, grounded in the culturally rich intersectionality of their identities and a strong relationship with their own co-constructed success.

Peña-Talamantes (2013) described a “machoflexible identity,” which directly challenges a hegemonic and heteronormative understanding of masculinity. Concepts like these offer a critical framework that allow Latino males to reconstruct their own college success by challenging meritocracy, ineffective educational policies, and deficit teacher perceptions (Cerezo et. al., 2013). The participants’ narratives shed some very important light on how Latino males experience college culture. Some of the issues raised by the critical narratives included the inability to express their emotions and the difficulty of asking for help. Cesar, in particular talked about how his masculine identity was shaped by the emotionally disconnected relationship he had with his father. He credits the relationship with his father for being too “serious,” “blocking people” and described how “at school, it affected me because I would isolate myself, and I would be serious and wouldn’t talk to anybody.” Moreover, Cesar asserted, “the way you’re supposed to be a man can limit you at times in the college atmosphere because you have to do things on your own, because you can’t interact with others, because you can’t ask for help.” Lempira also spoke vividly about what being a man signifies, when it comes to dealing with school challenges. He expressed not feeling the need to share with family and that being a male meant that he could not “share or really show your emotions [because] a man has to figure out how to get around it, without asking anybody for help.”

Some of the participants highlighted how males experience college differently than female students. Cuauhtémoc elaborated on this issue when he said “women are more pushed to go to school . . . I think it just goes back to the idea of being a man and being masculine and that men usually don’t go to school [because] they’re the ones providing the money.” Cuauhtémoc argued, “I’ve always thought that women might have it a little easier because women are more

pushed to go to school.” He went on to state that “women are more well received” by educators because they are perceived to be more approachable than their male counterparts.

An open mind, vulnerability, and high expectations were key qualities mentioned in the critical narratives and were identified by the participants as vital in faculty supporting immigrant Latino male college success. A number of the participants noted how important it is to feel that one belongs on the campus and that one’s stories are respected and welcomed in the classroom. For example, Cesar expressed the importance of having faculty “more available for us and hearing that nobody is really listening to what we have to say.” Sharing their personal stories and Latino male mentorship were also key concerns for the participants. Cesar advocated for “a one-on-one connection with your professors . . . [and] getting to know their journey, their life story . . . [because]” we have that like one-on one and we know each other a little more.” The sense here is that having access to a culturally responsive male mentor creates a significant resource within respect to the development of Latino masculinities and their community college success.

### **Future Research**

There is a need for future research as it pertains to the experiences of Latino male immigrants. Considering the strong connections and close relationship with family that the participants vividly described in this study, and examination of family voices may prove invaluable. After all, if a communal paradigm is what is needed to support Latino male immigrant success, a deeper exploration of their communal cultural roots may shed greater light on more effective ways that schools can engage immigrant families and learn from the support the family unit offers their sons. In addition, it would be important to listen to and learn from the teachers’ perspectives and inquire about what they perceive is needed versus what students

identify as their needs, in supporting their success. Perhaps a deep examination of where those needs intersect or differ may shed needed light on which issues are being appropriately addressed and which issues are being inadvertently, yet systematically, overlooked.

Employing a Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology in a future study would achieve the ethical goal of advocating for social change, based on an investigation by the community, with the community, and for the community (Cahill, 2007). PAR would emphasize both participation and action. A PAR methodology would further place the student voices as the nucleus of the study, determining the purpose of the study and leading to the development of grounded knowledge that supports emancipatory possibilities of the group and, similarly, the collective movement of participants toward transformative action (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013). PAR would, moreover, foster the participants' agency in deeper and more meaningful ways, by making them true co-researchers of the study.

Due to the fact that most of the participants are Mexican, this study may be more representative of a Mexican-centric perspective. A future study that recruits a broader and mixed group of Mexican, Central American, and South American participants may prove beneficial in facilitating more generalizable findings applicable to all Latinos. In addition, although this study was interested in the male immigrant experience, regardless of immigration status [naturalized citizen, permanent resident, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipient, or undocumented], all but one of the participants were DACA recipients. Due to the dearth in DACA research, future studies on Latino male immigrants like the work of Gonzales, Elis, Rendon-Garcia, and Bryant (2018) would be beneficial in examining how a DACA status could have a positive impact on their transition from undocumented to "DACAmented" status and an

improvement in their adult trajectories. Lastly, despite the fact that immigrant Latino males identify mostly as American, their critical narratives also revealed an affinity with the culture corresponding to their home country. Future research may benefit from a look at the transnational experiences of immigrant students. This is especially important for immigrant students that arrive to the United States during the teenage years versus early childhood. Research shows that latter age migration leads to a stronger identification with their home culture and less of an acculturation with U.S. American cultural values (Darder, 2012).

Lastly, it is important to re-examine literature that delves into cultural capital theory (DeNicolo, Gonzalez, Morales, & Romaní, 2015; Sáenz, Garcia-Louis, Drake, & Guida, 2018; Yosso, 2005) because it represents a framework that has successfully challenged banking models of education and acknowledges the strengths students bring with them into their educational setting. Funds of Knowledge theories have helped further develop an asset-based approach in which educators think about what students bring into the classroom and college setting to contribute toward their own success and have directly disputed what Freire (1970) called the “banking model” view of students. In other words, this theory has strongly acknowledged that students of color bring with them a type of cultural acumen gained from growing up in low economic situations, family culture and expectations, and resilience developed via the direct survival response that are associated with their everyday efforts to battle political and social oppression. Many of these aspects are also inherently at work in Darder’s (2012) theory of critical biculturalism, as discussed earlier, which is useful in better understanding the forces at work in the experiences of Latino immigrant male students.

However, it is necessary to note that cultural theories such as “funds of knowledge,” that define it as knowledge and skills accumulated over time that originate in the household (Gonzalez et al., 2009) often employ economic language tied to capitalism to describe students’ innate success. Financially-inspired terms often utilized include “funds of knowledge,” “cultural capital,” “social capital,” and “stakeholders,” amongst others. This suggests the transformative need for a more collectivist or humanizing language when engaging students’ cultural knowledge and its role in their own academic success. This is in sync with Freire and Macedo (1987), who affirmed the power of language with respect to educational research that intersects questions of culture, class, and social justice as seen in Darder’s (2012) work. This is essential to challenging racism and neoliberal influences in education, in ways that can assist educators to decolonize educational practices, particularly with respect to the needs of working-class Latino males.

### **Conclusion**

Facilitating an opportunity to hear from community college Latino immigrant male students is a long overdue research endeavor. Offering an open-door admissions policy without real engagement of students’ lived experiences nor engagement of what educators can learn from these students is a disservice to the largest male of color population in the largest public educational system in the country—the California community college system. The narratives from this study provided a juxtaposition of the individualistic culture of the community college environment and the participants’ Latino immigrant communal view of education. The ultimate benefit of this study comes from what students can offer community college educators and administrators to better serve their unique needs and support their college success. Moreover, given the xenophobic political climate of the Trump administration and the threat of closing the

southern border to immigrants seeking a better life and educational opportunities (like the parents of the study's participants), this study could not be more timely.

At the heart of the narratives is the desire for Latino immigrant male students to be heard by college faculty and administrators in addressing issues germane to their experiences. The participants have clearly identified the unique issues that they grapple with as their male identity intersects with their immigrant identity. By far, the identification of a strong Latino male presence was called upon by the participants as a key element necessary for their college success. Beyond transactional mentorship, students have a strong desire to see themselves reflected within the faculty that teach them and the counselors and college staff that advise them. More importantly, they want their culture and experiences represented in the classroom environment and curricula at their respective community colleges. The participants expressed undocumented immigrant pride and wholeheartedly believe that they bring cultural knowledge into their own educational experiences.

There are a handful of programs in place within the community college system that address more highly addressed student populations such as students of color, first-generation college-going populations, and women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math fields, to name a few. However, undocumented student populations remain one of the most underserved subgroups within the community college system, given these students' well-justified fear of coming out as undocumented to educators. More than ever, it is imperative that California Community Colleges form partnerships with political, social, and community organizations that advocate for the rights of immigrant students such as Immigrants Rising, United We Dream, and the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights Los Angeles. Through such community



collaborations the possibility of Latino immigrant male student success is supported and enhanced in ways that will enhance the future overall well-being of Latino immigrant communities in the United States.

## EPILOGUE

At the beginning of the doctoral program, when friends and family asked me why I chose to pursue a doctoral program in educational leadership, I used to answer that question by emphasizing the importance of having the intersectionality of my multiple identities represented. Latinx students, immigrants, and gay men of color are all grossly underrepresented in higher education at the doctoral level. Therefore, I sought to represent my multiple identities when researching the ways that I can foster leadership at my educational institution for the benefit of my students. However, as I find myself at the end of my doctoral program experience, I now state that my main reason is to create the research I wish I had read and studied while pursuing my bachelors and masters degrees. As I expressed in the introduction of this dissertation, I always felt that my lived experiences were relegated to an asterisk within mainstream research I read, throughout my educational journey.

Conducting the critical narratives collaboratively with community college immigrant Latino males in order to develop this dissertation has been an emotionally taxing experience. Hearing the stories of my participants has in many ways re-triggered the trauma I experienced as a formerly undocumented student during my K-12 schooling years. The participants reminded me what it was like to live with fear, yet simultaneously, tap into hope. They reminded me of the strengths that we as immigrants bring to our own lives and educational paths and the unwavering desire to succeed for both ourselves and our families. They reminded me that we possess cultural knowledge sowed at home by our parents. They reminded me that as Latino males, we have a difficult time asking for help, something I grappled with throughout my dissertation writing process. However, having an intimate personal experience with an undocumented status has also

helped me be more in concert with the hard working and resilient spirit with which my immigrant undocumented students pursue their own higher education.

It is precisely an affinity with a complex identity that led me to anchor it within my dissertation topic. For almost a quarter of a century (25 years!), I have counseled thousands of Latino male immigrant students during my tenure in higher education. It is precisely my extensive career trajectory paired with my own lived experiences that has led me to know with certainty that success requires a more comprehensive definition—a definition generated by the creators of their own education, the students themselves. Undocumented students receive messages from politicians, conservative media outlets, and teachers at their respective colleges outlining reasons why they are not as successful as their U.S.-born peers. I know better. I also believe the students themselves know better, but neither our educational institutions nor educators validate this awareness.

Therefore, a key goal of this study was to place an “academic research” microphone, if you will, to capture the students’ voices. After all, how can I serve as an educator for a system of higher education that is known for its open-door policy, yet not do everything in my power to encourage my colleagues to engage our students in a more humanly and in more effective ways? In my daily practice, I have borne witness to the inspiring resilience of my students, which I recognize because I too have had to tap into those life skills in order to pursue my own higher education.

Therefore, as educators, let us break the cycle of placing the sole onus upon students for not attaining an institutionally defined measure of success and begin, instead, fostering culturally democratic learning environments, where immigrant Latino male students can reimagine their

own success. Only then can we truly create a genuine democratic and socially just educational system that can serve all of our students upon entering our institution's educational gates.

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