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A Phenomenological Approach Examining the Completion of Latino High School Students through the Lenses of Critical Race Theory

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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH EXAMINING THE COMPLETION OF
LATINO HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS THROUGH THE LENSES
OF CRITICAL RACE THEORY

by

Anna M. Rangel-Clawson

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Western Michigan University
April 2016

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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH EXAMINING THE COMPLETION OF LATINO HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS THROUGH THE LENSES OF CRITICAL RACE THEORY

Anna M. Rangel-Clawson, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University, 2016

Latino students represent 24% of the American student population (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2002, 2013). Dropout rates for Latino students living in severe poverty are twice the dropout rate of other Americans at the same income level (National Center Educational Statistics, 2002, 2013). The strongest factor that influenced those who choose to drop out seems to be related to a family's socioeconomic status (Fry & Taylor, 2013; Rumberger & Lim, 2008; Swanson, 2004).

This study sought to elicit the voices of Latino students who successfully completed high school in a school district with significantly lower graduation rates for Latinos as compared to their district non-Latino counterparts. Through these voices, and the narratives of their high school experience, this study sought to delve deeper into where and how these students experienced both inhibiting (or negative) and contributing factors to high school completion, and how they actually overcame these inhibiting factors to the point that enabled them to persist in school until graduation.

A transcendental phenomenological approach gave a voice to this marginalized population by utilizing a lens from the non-dominant worldview. Critical race theory guided this study by focusing on experiences of 10 Latino students who completed high

school with their corresponding cohort. Critical race theory enabled me to focus on an oppressed population by utilizing race as a venue for framing and shaping the world around this particular population (Goldberg, 2002). This study, however, is unique in that it investigated the phenomenon of persistence to high school completion from the lens of Latino students themselves.

By utilizing a critical race theory lens in combination with a qualitative study, I underscored not only the importance of race, but also investigated this phenomenon through a social justice framework. These methodologies enabled me to interpret the meaning of experiences from the perspective of 10 Latino high school graduates. In this study, graduates of a marginalized population were given a voice. These graduates managed to beat the odds, despite having risk factors associated with school dropout.

Eighty percent of the participants had thoughts of giving up and dropping out at some point in their high school career. Several of the participants experienced a significant event, which influenced their high school career, including parent's deportation, homelessness, teen pregnancy, suspensions, expulsions, and repeated failures. These events were exacerbated by repetitive marginalizing behaviors and demoralizing comments they had to deal with on a daily basis leading to feelings of disconnectedness and a lack of belonging to the school community.

The study concludes by making recommendations school personnel may wish to consider as they seek solutions to serve marginalized students attending America's public schools.

Educational systems can begin by creating processes and policies that address racism, marginalization, and stereotypical behavior. The implementation of multi-cultural

programs that educates, celebrates diversity, encourages advocacy, promotes reporting of injustices, and restores relationships will create a welcoming environment conducive to learning and positive educational outcomes for all Latinos including other marginalized populations.

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“It always seems impossible until it’s done.” – Nelson Mandela

Anna M. Rangel-Clawson

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The objective of this study was to investigate the phenomenon of Latino students who have overcome obstacles and completed high school. I am interested in gaining a rich understanding of the social, emotional, academic, and personal lives of academically successful Latinos. Approximately three-fourths of White students graduate from high school, in comparison to only one-half of Latino students (Mishel & Roy, 2007; Weber, 2011). Since Latinos are projected to comprise as much as 25% of the American population by 2022 (Fry, 2014), the persistence of their high levels of high school non-completion holds great significance for the educational system, economy, and communities within the United States (Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Lockwood & Secada, 1999).

A transcendental phenomenological approach gave a voice to this marginalized population by utilizing a lens from the non-dominant worldview. Critical race theory guided this study by focusing on experiences of Latino students who completed high school with their cohort. Historically, Critical race theorists focused on oppressed populations and have insisted on the ordinary quality of race in framing and shaping the world around us (Goldberg, 2002). This study, however, is unique in that it investigated the phenomenon of persistence to high school completion from the lens of Latino students themselves.

Background

High school dropout rates continue to gain substantial attention throughout the nation. This attention is justified through the documentation of dropout related problems, such as family destruction, delinquency, lower wages, and the cycle of poverty. Thus, the nation's focus has shifted to the plight of increasing numbers of children in circumstances which place them at risk of educational failure, particularly in inner-city communities. Many major cities have dropout rates approaching 50%, and the total number of dropouts across the country is almost 4 million (Boston Youth Transitions Task Force, 2006). The quality of life in cities with high dropout rates is jeopardized by poverty, a lack of employment opportunities, poor health care, high crime rates, fragmented services, and feelings of hopelessness and despair (Barton, 2005; Fine, 1991; Gandara, 2010; Weber, 2011).

There exists a substantial amount of research from which I can draw conclusions as to why the dropout rate has not improved over the past several years. Most of the research includes recommendations, solutions, and resources, which claim to address issues contributing to dropout rates. But if so, why are we not seeing an improvement in success rate?

As a Mexican-American alumnus of a Midwestern City High School, in City, Michigan, I have a vested interest not only in the City Community, but in City Public Schools as well. The 17 years that I have worked at City High School have been a heart-wrenching experience. The suspension list I view on a daily basis contains a disproportionate amount of minority students. As I walked by the In-School Suspension room, I noticed dark-skinned youth occupying most, if not all, the seats. I have watched

as many of the same youth continue to “drop out” for various reasons. Over the years, I have personally reached out by mentoring and providing academic and emotional support to many of these youths. Despite these efforts, the dropout of many of these students continues unabated. The research of Rumberger (1983), Fry and Taylor (2013), Orfield, Losen, Wald, and Swanson (2004), Barton (2005), and Sum and Harrington (2003) have shown that the issues I witnessed are not unique to City Public Schools. Educational literature indicates that the dropout rate of Latino youth continues to rise despite the vast amounts of research, including longitudinal studies (Mendez-Tavitian, 2013; Rumberger & Lim, 2008), on this matter.

The rising dropout rate for students is at an epidemic proportion that must be confronted. The consequences are dire both for the students who drop out and for society (Albert, 1999; Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Kafele, 2013; Milliken, 2007; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2004). According to a report by the Boston Youth Transitions Task Force (2006),

Researchers have paid increased attention to the dropout problem. A number of reports argue there is a hidden dropout crisis, in the US, and that the nation must confront this crisis directly and comprehensively. A college graduate earns three times the lifetime revenue of a dropout and lives nearly a decade longer. A student who drops out of high school risks closing the door on a lifetime of learning, work, and family support options. The dropout problem hurts all of society, fueling poverty, exacerbating conditions in the community, and raising public costs for health care, housing, law enforcement, and social services. Nationally, the dropout problem wreaks economic havoc, costing the United States \$200 billion each year in lost productivity and tax revenue. (p. 3)

Latino students continue to have the highest dropout rates in the nation (Fry, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics [USDoe NCES], 2002, 2013). While Latino students represent 24% of the American student population (USDoe NCES, 2002, 2013) dropout rates for Latino students living in severe

poverty have at least twice the dropout rate of other Americans at the same income level (USDoe NCES, 2002, 2013). In 2000, a total of 1.5 million Latinos were dropouts, representing about 27.8% of all Latino young adults ages 16-19 and under in the United States (USDoe NCES, 2002). The strongest factor which influences those who choose to drop out seems to be that of the socioeconomic standard of the family. Latino students are more likely to live in poverty, thus are more susceptible to dropping out (Fetler, 1989; Fry & Taylor, 2013). This finding is substantiated by several other studies reviewed, including those by Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, and Rock (1986), Rumberger (1987), and Wehlage and Rutter (1986).

Much of the literature provides explanations for high school dropout rates. According to Gene Maeroff (1996b), staff writer for *Breaking Ranks*, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, and the National Association of Secondary School Principals, in the report *Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution*, makes the following observations: a lack of positive relationships that extend outside of the institution, lack of acceptance and respect for diversity, lack of personalized educational plans, larger schools, large class sizes, non-authentic curriculum and instruction, and anonymity are some of the issues that lead to student alienation. Furthermore, “the breakdown of family and community across the United States has left alienation in its wake” (Maeroff, 1996a, p. 2; 1996b, p. 8). Other causes and correlations of dropping out have been cited in various research studies by Ekstrom et al. (1986), Rumberger (1987), and Wehlage and Rutter (1986), including poor assimilation, language and cultural barriers, low academic and career expectations, uninspiring curricula, low parental involvement, alienation from school, a lack of connection with

peers and adults, and the students' perception that teachers treat them differently than they do non-Hispanic students. A more in-depth look at the contributing and detracting factors will be covered in Chapter II.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework supporting this study comes from understanding that students' perceptions are their reality (Glasser, 1965, 1998, 2010). If students' perceptions are negative, based on their experiences, then they often become guarded and defensive and have difficulty building trusting relationships. Unfortunately, this is most often the case with marginalized or oppressed populations. Critical race theory, to be used in this study, is often used in education to examine the inequalities that exist between marginalized and oppressed populations.

The basic premise of critical race theory is that we live in a racialized, White-dominated society. The goal of a critical race theorist is not for equality, but for social justice through reform and action (Price, 2010). Color blindness exacerbates the discrimination that is aberrant in our society and deeply embedded within our schools (Price, 2010). Critical race theory provides a voice to marginalized groups by the use of storytelling and narratives. Through this study, I hoped to give a voice to the marginalized students who have completed high school. By hearing their story, I hoped to learn how they stayed engaged in school and whether or not (and if so, how) this involved building trusting relationships and bonds while living in a racialized society.

Critical race theorists, who are educators by trade, will argue that institutional racism not only exists but is, in fact, embedded in our society, including our schools (Zamudio, Bridgeman, Rios, & Russell, 2011). "Race and culture linked inequalities in

the rates of high school completion are among the most important social dilemmas faced by modern American leaders” (Doll & Hess, 2001, p. 351). Civil rights activists may have played a key role in the passing of legislation, which removed the most blatant barriers to equal schooling; however, institutional barriers continue to exist today.

Zamudio et al. (2011) describe how these institutional barriers take place from the instant a minority student walks through the school doors. He observes the following:

Students of color are allowed to enter the classroom but never on an equal footing. When they walk in, they are subject to the same racial stereotypes and expectations that exist in society. Students of color do not have the advantage of walking into a classroom as individual; they walk in as black, brown, or red persons with all the connotations such racialization races in the classroom. They do not walk into a classroom where the curriculum embraces their histories. They walk into a classroom where their histories and cultures are distorted, where they feel confused about their own identities, vulnerabilities and oppressions. (Zamudio et al., 2011, p. 18)

Critical race theorists argue that there is no simple way to change the experiences of students of color or to create policies that close the achievement gap between minorities and Whites without challenging society as a whole. Equal rights via laws do not equate to equal treatment in society or in the real world (Zamudio et al., 2011).

Race permeates much of our system of beliefs and ideologies. The very notion that race no longer matters is part of an ideology that justifies and legitimates racial inequality in society (Zamudio et al., 2011, p. 3). First impressions are often made based on the color of one’s skin. Most people are “unaware that these ideologies and stereo types often shape our initial impressions and judgments” (p. 3). These beliefs are embedded in our educational systems and society and are tough to change.

Unfortunately, it is students of color who find themselves attempting to navigate and make sense of the race-based beliefs and contemplate the decision of whether or how

to address them on an individual level. Many choose not to address the stereotypes, misperceptions, and racism for fear of being looked at as disrespectful, defiant, or “playing the race card.” As a result, students are left feeling helpless, hopeless, alienated, and alone. Some have succumbed to the fact that this is simply how life is; others will continue to hope and believe that a future unbiased world, filled with equality and peace, does exist.

Students who harbor negative feelings may develop disengagement, negative perceptions toward school, and reluctance to build trusting relationships. Students who experience such negativity are pushed away from the very institution established to provide them an equal opportunity (Zamudio et al., 2011). A study conducted by Capuzzi and Gross (1993) found that students who had dropped out of school described their school experience as very negative. The negative perception, or experience, led to disengagement, alienation, and loss of commitment to the goals of graduating and continuing with an education. Fine (1986, as cited in Capuzzi & Gross, 1993) found that most students who dropped out felt “thrown or pushed out by school personnel” (p. 353). The students described feelings of alienation and powerlessness. Alienation is powerlessness, meaninglessness, self-estrangement, social isolation, and cultural estrangement (Barrera, 2007; Kafele, 2013; Weber, 2011).

In contrast, by providing these students with positive experiences, believing in them, and letting go of the stereotypes that society has placed upon them, we allow them the opportunity to be free to engage, explore, and trust. Students who are engaged in school are more likely to complete high school (Croninger & Lee, 2001; Gregory & Ripski, 2008; Kafele, 2013; Martinez, DeGarmo, & Eddy, 2004; Wehlage, Rutter, Smith,

Lesko, & Fernandez, 1989). According to Wehlage et al. (1989), school engagement can include a student's affective, cognitive, and behavioral responses related to attachment, sense of belonging, or involvement in school. Furthermore, students who perceive these experiences in a positive manner are more likely to have positive academic outcomes as well.

The conceptual framework that bounds this study is guided by the premise that students of color (Latino) who experience positive experiences are more likely to build positive relationships and become more engaged, thus completing high school. In contrast, students who perceive their experiences as negative will become disengaged, lack trust, begin to withdraw, feel alienated, and begin making choices which lead to negative consequences, ultimately reinforcing the cycle of negative feelings. Figure 1 outlines the route students are likely to take based on a negative or positive experience.

Other detracting factors not listed in Figure 1 include, but are not limited to, low socioeconomic status, delinquency, having quit school to support the family, teenage pregnancy, family structure, language barrier, and low academic and career expectations (Albert, 1999; Barrera, 2007; Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Kafele, 2013; Milliken, 2007; Thernstrom & Thernstron, 2004; Weber, 2011).

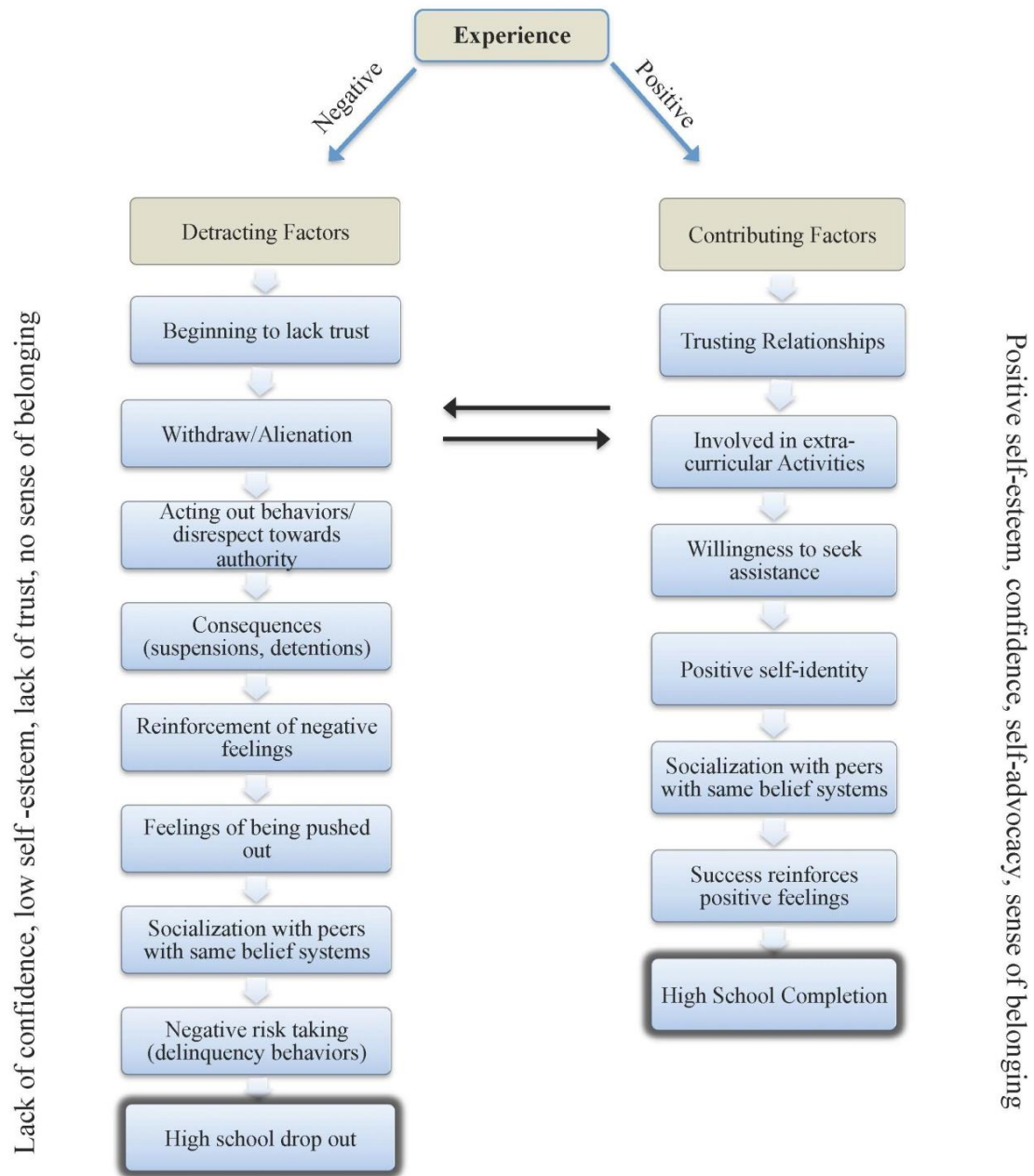


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework Through a Critical Race Theoretic Lens

In contrast, the contributing factors include, but are not limited to, middle to high socioeconomic status, parental involvement, fluency in the English language, strong sense of belonging or social bonding, and high expectation and career goals (Croninger & Lee, 2001; Gregory & Ripski, 2008; Kafele, 2013; Martinez et al, 2004; Wehlage et al., 1989). These factors will be covered in Chapter II, Review of the Literature.

Theoretic Framework

The theoretical framework supporting this study comes from the basic understanding that positive relationships promote healthy development and improve the chances of students graduating from high school. Social bond theorists propose that there is a strong correlation between student connectedness and school performance (Catalano, Haggerty, Oesterle, Fleming, & Hawkins, 2004; Gandara, 2010; Henry, Knight, & Thornberry, 2012; Witt, Doerfert, Ulmer, Burris, & Lan, 2013). Thus, students who are connected with a person or institution are more likely to complete school. A student who has a positive relationship with a teacher, peers, or a coach, or has a sense of connectedness with the school environment is more likely to succeed. “If a student is involved in school, and perceives that involvement as being positive, the youth will be a better student and perform in a positive, socially acceptable manner in the social context of school, family, and community” (Barrera, 2007, p.10).

Social bond theory is referred to as school connectedness, school engagement, school attachment, school belonging, and teacher support. It describes the emotional and behavioral investment the student has with school (Catalano et al., 2004). Many terms throughout the literature describe behavioral and emotional involvement in school, including school attachment, school bonding, school support, teacher support,

attachment, connectedness (with teachers, peers, and activities), commitment, positive relationships, belief, bonding, identification, investment, and belonging. In contrast, negative terms include isolation, alienation, withdrawal, disengaged, and delinquency.

For the purpose of this study, the term school bonding will be used to indicate a student's involvement in school both emotionally and behaviorally. A student who develops a positive relationship with school personnel develops a sense of identification with school and school related activities, demonstrating a factor known as school bonding (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009; Cernkovich & Giordano, 1992; Finn, 1989). A longitudinal study conducted by the Centers for Disease Control (2009) found that school connectedness to be the strongest factor to decrease "at risk" behaviors and increase positive educational outcomes. In contrast, students lacking school connectedness were found to be more likely to choose "high risk" behaviors and low academic performance. Some studies have concluded that a positive relationship with a teacher can reduce the probability of a student dropping out by 50% (Blue & Cook, 2004). Students who feel they are valued and have established positive relationships are less likely to drop out.

Latino students' perceptions about school have a direct impact on their likelihood to drop out of school. Latino students' perception of teachers has a significant impact on their willingness to invest or create a social bond with the school environment. This condition inadvertently impacts their decision to drop out from school. Studies have shown that students who have dropped out hold the perception that the school and teachers are unfair, racist, or against them (Waymen, 2002). In contrast, students who have socially bonded with the school describe the school and staff in a positive manner.

These students tend to be connected with staff, peers, or involved in an extra-curricular activity (Waymen, 2002).

Student perceptions of teacher ethnic bias have been linked to behaviors which prevent the social bonding between the student and the teacher (Waymen, 2002). Lack of social bonding is a strong contributing factor to a student's decision to stay in school or to drop out (Barrera, 2007; Capuzzi & Gross, 1993; Catalano et al, 2004; Milliken, 2007; Rumberger, 1983; Waymen, 2002).

Focus of the Study

The Problem

According to the U.S. Department of Education National Center for Educational Statistics (2002), Latino students continue to have the highest dropout rate in the nation, with the rates remaining steady between 30-35% over the past 25 years. Data indicate Latino dropout rate is not improving in comparison to that of other ethnic groups. The Latino dropout rate is 2.5 times the rate for African Americans and 3.5 times the rate for White non-Hispanics (USDoe NCES, 2002). In the year 2000, a total of 1.5 million Hispanics were dropouts, representing about 27.8% of all Hispanic young adults (USDoe NCES, 2002). While many Latino students live in conditions of severe poverty, the dropout rates are at least twice that of other Americans at the same income level (USDoe NCES, 2002). According to the Hispanic Dropout Project (Secada et al., 1998), wealthy Latinos are twice as likely as wealthy Whites or wealthy African Americans to drop out of school. Given the vast amount of research focusing on the dropouts, a study focusing on the voices of Latino youth who have graduated from high school, despite the odds, is warranted and past due. Understanding the challenges Latino high school graduates have

overcome and how they remained resilient will provide insight into the changes or recommendations for schools to increase Latino graduation rates.

Deficiency in the Research

As illustrated in the conceptual framework for this study and the literature review to follow in Chapter II, previous research has gone far in identifying factors that relate to both positive and negative experiences in school, and thus, students' decisions to either persist through to high school completion (i.e., graduation) or drop out before high school completion. Much of the findings, however, are generally applicable to all students or non-White students in general and more limitedly identified as differentiated in some way for specific non-White student populations. Even where there are studies that drill down into how those positive and negative factors are reflected in the school experiences of Latino (or Hispanic) students, the research falls short of offering a full picture of how this population overcomes experiences related to the detracting factors for high school completion and how they accrue experiences that build contributing factors for high school completion.

Purpose Statement

This study sought to elicit the voices of Latino students who successfully completed high school in a school district with significantly lower graduation rates for Latinos as compared to their district non-Latino peers. Through these voices and the narratives of their high school experience they provided, this study sought to delve deeper into where and how these students experienced both inhibiting and contributing factors to high school completion, and how they actually overcame inhibiting (or negative) factors to the point that enabled them to persist in the school environment until they graduated.

In other words, this study sought to create a fuller picture of how Latino students navigated life as a high school student in a traditionally White-dominated school community despite the increasingly significant percentage of the student body identifying as Latino. Further, the purpose of this study was to explore the stories of Latino students who were also economically disadvantaged, yet persisted in high to graduate with their cohort. In doing so, this study will consider implications from their stories to develop further insight into their school lives related to the following questions:

1. How do these students describe their high school experiences?
2. What are some of the high and low points of their years in high school?
3. How do they connect their experiences in and out of school and interpret the impact of those experiences on their persistence in school achievement?
4. How do they connect their school experience with their anticipated goals for the future?

The dropout rate of Latino students in comparison to that of other ethnic groups has been studied; however, the focus has been on the dropout and contributing factors toward that decision. Only a limited number of studies focus on Latinos who have graduated from high school, or who are successful and have earned further degrees. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the social, emotional, academic, and personal lives of Latinos who have graduated from high school. Through personal stories shared by a sample of Latino graduates from City High School, this study examined the perception, thinking, attitudes, and other variables that contributed to Latinos who have graduated from high school.

Research Questions

This study explored the experiences and decisions of Latino students who achieved a high school diploma despite experiencing similar factors and characteristics experienced by a high numbers of their corresponding counterparts that dropped out of high school. This research study was guided by one overarching question: What traits, characteristics, or attributes do these students have that enable them to persist in school that may differ from their corresponding counterparts that did not graduate from high school? Additionally, this study sheds light on the following sub-questions:

1. What factors lead to the success of Latinos who graduate? How did these factors come to be part of the student's experience and how do the students describe their response to these factors?
2. What is the graduate's perception of self, school, and success?
3. In what ways did self-perception and attitude contribute to the decision to stay in school?
4. How do Latino graduates describe the ways they responded to and overcame the factors that previous studies associate with being at-risk for dropping out, e.g., poverty, cultural differences, parental factors, etc.

This study examined the differences in experiences, along with certain demographic variables, that contributed to the achievements of Latino students that have graduated from this Midwestern high school.

Overview of the Methodology and Procedures

The purpose of this study was to investigate the phenomenon of Latino students who have overcome obstacles and have beaten the odds by completing high school. By

employing the transcendental phenomenological approach, this study sought a much richer, greater, and deeper understanding and insight into factors, traits, and conditions that may have contributed to successful completion of Latino students in this Midwestern City High School.

The context for this study is a Michigan urban K-12 district with a significant and growing Latino population. The reason I chose this setting is twofold. First, the trends of City High School signify a growing increase in the population of Latinos in this community, with a corresponding decline in the White population. And secondly, notwithstanding the loss of Latino students from their freshman year to their senior year, there is a growing trend that the rate of Latino students dropping out of school is significantly higher than White students.

Significance of Study

An extensive amount of research focuses on the Latino dropout rate throughout the United States (Fry & Taylor, 2013; Orfield et al., 2004; Rumberger, 1983); despite the vast amount of statistical research and literature on this matter, the Latino dropout rate remains stagnant at best (Ekstrom et al., 1986; Jasinski, 2000; Rumberger, 1987; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). Current research has failed to investigate the reality of Latino students who manage to graduate from high school—even though they share many of the characteristics and demographic characteristics associated with their corresponding counterparts that dropped out of high school before earning a diploma (Mendez-Tavitian, 2013).

There has been minimal attention in the research examining how Latino students beat the odds associated with poverty combined with social and cultural barriers and who

graduate from high school and perhaps go on to postsecondary education. While the research has been extensive and recommendations have been made, the dropout rate continues to escalate (Fry & Taylor, 2013; Mendez-Tavitian, 2013; Orfield et al., 2004; Rumberger, 1983).

It was hoped that Latino students who overcame the factors that put them at risk for dropping out could provide important insights into another set of factors or characteristics which are associated with their ability to persist in their education, at least to the point of achieving a high school diploma. Or the students who participated in this study may shed more light on how Latino students who have graduated from high school understand their own experiences with the inhibiting and contributing factors already identified in earlier studies and navigate those experiences toward a successful high school completion.

This study will be of interest to school administrators, school boards, policy makers, and stakeholders having an interest in educating all children. By eliciting insights from Latino students who persist in school to achieve a high school diploma, this study will help define issues that need to be addressed for that population. Furthermore, the knowledge gained from this study will inform stakeholders how better to educate and meet the needs of the Latino population in order to improve the likelihood of graduation.

Definition of Terms

Definitions are provided to bring clarity to terms that are frequently used throughout this study. The terms *Latinos* and *Hispanics* are used interchangeably throughout this study. Neither Latino nor Hispanic represents one ethnic group but an “ethnic category, an umbrella label that was first employed by the U.S. Census of 1970”

(Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2004, p. 102). More than 24 different national origin groups represent the people described as Latinos. Most relevant educational data have been tabulated grouping Latinos together and the data by groups of origin have not been extrapolated. For this very reason, this study does not differentiate between varying groups based on origin. However, it is worth mentioning that approximately two out of three Latinos living the United States are of Mexican American descent (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2004).

Status dropout: Status dropout accounts for the number of 15- to 24-year-olds that are not enrolled in school and have not obtained a high school diploma or GED.

Event dropout: Event dropout is the number of students dropping out of school over a particular time period.

Poverty: Poverty is the inability to afford resources that meet human basic needs.

Racialization: Racialization is creating a race or identity, or injecting a racial element into a situation.

Disproportionality: Disproportionality is the over-representation of a particular group of people in a particular system.

Summary

The perspectives of Latino students who have persisted to high school graduation, despite life circumstances, needed to be explored in order to provide insight into the Latino success possibilities. What are the characteristics, factors, and trends among those who graduate? Why, within the same school, within the same family, or similar socioeconomic backgrounds, do some Latinos dropout and some stay in school? Communities and schools need to hear the voices of those who persisted in order to lower

the incidences of Latinos dropping out and to increase the success rate of Latino graduates.

By eliciting insights from Latino students who persist in school and achieve a high school diploma, this study will help define areas needed to better educate that population. In addition, this study examined the differences in perception, thinking, attitudes, and other variables that Latinos connect with their ability to complete a high school education.

Educational literature indicates that the dropout rate of Latino youth continues to skyrocket despite the vast amounts of research (including longitudinal studies) and recommendations. In Chapter II, Review of the Literature, I will provide the reader with issues that contribute to the dropout rate, which include the following: (a) socioeconomic factors, (b) family structure, (c) behavioral related factors, (d) discrimination, (e) organizational and structural factors, (f) fragmented services, and (g) feelings of helplessness and alienation. Factors that promote high school completions will also be explored, including the following: (a) social capital, and (b) social bond theory and connectedness.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The high school dropout rate has been a concern for educators, parents, employers, and society for over 30 years (Haycock & Huang, 2001). It is a sign that “society has failed to prepare its youth for a successful transition into adult hood” (Kushman & Kinney, 1993, p. 345). There are more than 3.5 million Americans from the ages of 16-25 who have dropped out of high school (Milliken, 2007). The distant future is dismal for these students, at best. According to Milliken (2007), they are more likely than their peers to be unemployed, live in poverty, experience chronic poor health, depend on social services, and go to jail. Some reports show that more than 50% of prison inmates are high school dropouts (Kaufman, Alt, & Chapman, 2004; Milliken, 2007; Rodriguez, 2010).

From a societal perspective, dropouts are associated with crime, low wages, unemployment and a cycle of poverty that affects their children. The dropout is seen as contributing less in taxes than graduates and diminishing the economic productivity crucial to the nation’s competitiveness. Research reveals that dropping out of school has devastating and far-reaching social consequences for the individual students, their families, and society. (Mendez-Tavitian, 2013, p. 2)

Other negative outcomes to dropping out, as reported by the U.S. Department of Education National Center for Educational Statistics (2008), include the average income of people ages 18 through 65 who had not completed high school was about \$20,100 in 2005. The average income of people ages 18 through 65 who completed their education with a high school diploma, including a General Educational Development (GED)

certificate, was nearly \$29,700 (USDoE NCES, 2008). “Dropouts also make up disproportionately higher percentages of the nation’s prison and death row inmates” (Laird, DeBell, Kienzl, & Chapman, 2007, p. 1) and are less likely to be in the labor force than those with a high school diploma or higher and are more likely to be unemployed (Barton, 2005; Fashola, 1997; Mendez-Tavitian, 2013; Rumberger & Larson, 1998; USDoE NCES, 2008).

The consequences of dropping out not only affect the students and families, but also have a great impact on the American society as a whole. “The combined income and tax loss from a single year’s dropouts is about \$192 billion—1.6 percent of the gross domestic product” (Milliken, 2007, p. xxii).

Reports indicate that living in conditions associated with low socioeconomic status increases the likelihood of high school non-completion (Milliken, 2007; Reardon, 2013; Rumberger, 2011; Rumberger & Larson, 1998; USDoE NCES, 2013). Students who live in poverty are disadvantaged both in the academic setting and in life (Mishel & Roy, 2007; Neuman, 2013; Reardon, 2013), “even when the economy is stable” Juenke, n.d., p. 3). Children, and especially children that are the progeny of Latino parents, who are born into poor families and whose parents that did not graduate from high school, are more likely to not graduate themselves (Gandara, 2010).

Land and Letgers (2002) suggest that there are more opportunities for students who hold a high school diploma in comparison to those who have dropped out of school. Furthermore, there is a significant difference in the costs to society between students who hold a high school diploma and those who have dropped out of high school (Barton, 2005; Fine, 1991; Haertel, 1997; Land & Letgers, 2002). Those who have earned a high

school diploma are more likely to have a job, not rely on public assistance, have the potential to earn more money, and have a support network (Barton, 2005; Fine, 1991; Land & Letgers, 2002; Weber, 2011). Smith (2003) noted that students who have returned to school and have earned their Graduate Educational Development (GED) do not have the same potential as a high school graduate, underscoring the significance of a high school diploma.

For many, many years research has focused on the dropout epidemic (Henry, Knight, & Thornberry, 2012; Mendez-Tavitian, 2013). In sifting through the extensive amount of research, one will find several themes. Factors that have been

shown to correlate with dropout rates are gender, ethnicity, parental education, scholastic ability and achievement, self-esteem, socioeconomic status, drug and alcohol use, parental involvement, peer relations, school climate, class size, and participation in extracurricular activities (Battin-Pearson, et al., 2000; Cairns, Cairns, & Neckerman, 1989; Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986; Fine, 1989; Garnier, Stein, & Jacobs, 1997; Oakland, 1992; Parker & Asher, 1987; Rumberger, 1995; Weis, Farrar, & Petrie, 1989). (Davis, Ajzen, Saunders, & Williams, 2002, p. 810)

For the purpose of this study, I did not focus on all these contributing factors in depth, but focused on the factors that seemed to affect the Latino population more than the others.

For more than 20 years, dropout rates among Latino youth have continued to remain stagnant, at best. Some research has stated that as high as 50% of the Latino population is considered dropouts, that is, do not hold a high school diploma. Latino youth continue to have the highest dropout rate in comparison to other ethnicities (Fry, 2003; Fry & Taylor, 2013; Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Mishel & Roy, 2007; Rumberger & Rodriguez, 2002).

According to a report from Education Week and the Editorial Projects in Research Center (EPE) (Swanson, 2012), the national graduation rate for the class of 2009 is

73.4%. The graduation rate for Asian Americans is 81%, 79% for Whites, 63% for Latinos, and 59% for African Americans. For the first time in history, the Latino graduation rate has surpassed African Americans in their respective subgroup. “Although the most current data show improvement in graduation rates across all groups, the *Diplomas Count* report concludes that gains are offset by the graduation gap between students of color and their counterparts” (Mendez-Tavitian, 2013, p. 4).

It is estimated that 1.1 million students from the class of 2012 did not graduate, amounting to “6000 students each school day, or one student every 29 seconds” (Swanson, 2012). Latino students account for 310,000 or 27% of the 1.1 million students who did not graduate (Swanson, 2012). According to Llenas (2012), the “Latino graduation rates are particularly significant because Latino students represent an estimated 20% of high school and elementary students across the country, and, as a fast growing demographic, are predicted to represent 30% of the nation by 2050 at 132 million students” (p. 1). Swanson (2012) concurs: “It’s no exaggeration to say that the educational and economic future of the nation will hinge on our ability to better serve the nation’s large and growing Latino population, which faces unique challenges when it comes to success in high school and the transition to college and career.”

Critical Race Theory as the Epistemological Frame for this Study

Critical race theory emerged in the 1970s as an “offshoot of critical legal studies” (Price, 2010, p. 150). Many critical legal practitioners realized that the political process reproduces socioeconomic privilege by upholding the law, in essence reinforcing White supremacy. In addition, scholars, lawyers, and activists questioned the lack of momentum and advances that had been gained during the civil rights era of the 1960s. Not only had

the momentum stalled, but some felt it was going backward (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). As a result, activist across the United States came together to study the relationship of race, racism, and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Price (2010) describes the “immediate project of Critical Race Theorist was to question the outcomes of the Civil Rights era, legislation, as well as the underlying approach to understanding and thus redressing the racialized injustice in the United States” (p. 150).

Critical race theory is often used in education to examine the inequalities between marginalized and oppressed groups. “Critical race theorists in education examine the profound contradiction that exists between the promise of schooling as the great equalizer and the concrete reality of educational inequality” (Zamudio et al., 2011, p. 16). The disproportionate amount of student discipline between minorities and White students is alarming. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) agree that class and gender alone do not account for the “high rates of school dropout, suspensions, expulsion, and failure among African-American and Latino males” (p. 51). According to Skiba et al. (2011), “For over 25 years . . . students of color have been found to be suspended at rates two to three times that of other students, and similarly, overrepresented in office referrals, corporal punishment, and school expulsion” (p. 86). In addition, “students from African American and Latino families are more likely than their White peers to receive expulsion, or out of school suspension as consequences for the same or similar problem behavior” (Skiba et al., 2011, p. 85). Furthermore, Balfanz, Byrnes, and Fox (2013) found that being suspended just one time in ninth grade increases the probability of the student dropping out by 32% (p. 6).

A report from the Minnesota Department of Education describes “dropping out of school as a process of disengagement” (Anfinson, Autumn, Lehr, Riestenberg, & Scullin, 2010, p. 1). The report argues that suspension and expulsion increases the probability of misbehavior, while decreasing academic engagement. Thus, suspensions and expulsions, as an intervention, have the “opposite educational outcome than that intended by school administrators and teachers” (p. 2). Skiba et al. (2011) summarize:

The racial and ethnic disparities in education ranging from the achievement gap (Ladson-Billings, 2006) to disproportionality in suspensions and expulsions to the dropout and graduation rates (Wald & Losen, 2007) have led some to question the extent to which the promises of Brown have been fulfilled (Blanchett, Mumford, & Beachum, 2005). (p. 86)

Critical race theory attempts not only to understand our “social situation, but to change it. It sets out not only to ascertain how society organizes itself along racial lines and hierarchies but to transform it for the better” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 3).

W.E.B. Du Bois and Carter G. Woodson used “race as a theoretical lens for assessing social inequality in education” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 30). Critical race theorists believe that “racial inequalities determine the educational experience of minority children and youth” (Zamudio et al., 2011, p. 16). Brayboy, Jones, Castagno, and Maughan (2007, as cited in Zamudio et al., 2011) argue that these “experiences translate into poorer schools, deficient teaching, lower achievement, and inadequate preparation for meaningful economic engagement” (p. 16).

Critical race theorists utilize narratives and stories in order to gain a better understanding of how the American society views race and to allow the minority groups to share their perspective. It is hoped that a heightened awareness and the reality that racism still exists will be gained from the stories that are told. Furthermore, “stories serve

a powerful psychic function for minority communities. Many victims of racial discrimination suffer in silence” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 43). Stories give these minorities a voice and knowledge that they do not have to cope with this alone. From a social justice or critical race theory standpoint, their perception and experiences are their reality. Their lens is a significant experience, which needed to be explored.

Critical race theory presents a strong lens to analyze qualitative findings (Catlin, 2008). By utilizing a critical race theory lens in combination with a qualitative study, I underscore not only the importance of race, but also the validity of conducting research within a social justice framework. Specifically, grounding the research in critical race theory’s social view supports the choice of transcendental phenomenology as the research design and epistemological positioning of the researcher in this study.

Detracting Factors

Socioeconomic

It has well been established that poverty is clearly linked to academic performance. The strongest factor which influences those who choose to drop out seems to be that of the socioeconomic status and structure of the family. Russell Rumberger concurs, “Research has consistently found that socioeconomic status, most commonly measured by parental education and income, is a powerful predictor of school achievement and dropout behavior” (as cited in Orfield, 2004, p. 138). School reformers have recognized the connection and have poured funds into serving the “at risk” student in an attempt to close the achievement gap and to increase graduation rates.

Thirty percent of Latino children live in poverty stricken environments (Krogstad, 2014, ¶5) and attend financially challenged school districts (Rumberger, 2013). “Schools

reflect their neighborhoods and are often economically segregated, exacerbating the problem of inequality” (Neuman, 2013, p. 22). Schools in poor areas often struggle with high turnover for teachers and administrators, resources for texts and supplies, high discipline referrals, minimal parental involvement, and lack of quality curriculum (Neuman, 2013; Reardon, 2013).

Mishel and Roy (2007) found that the dropout crisis is concentrated in approximately 20% of high schools. In their examination of graduation rates by socioeconomic status, the upper three fifths of the economic ladder have a graduation rate of 97%, a dropout rate of only 3%. They noted that this graduation rate included students who returned to obtain a Graduate Educational Development (GED) credential. In contrast, 27% of the bottom fifth did not complete high school. The dropout crisis “is primarily a crisis of youths at the bottom of the socioeconomic scale, regardless of race (although race, which plays a far too important role in our society, is clearly the strongest factor in relegating students to the bottom fifth)” (Mishel & Roy, 2007, p. 21). Mishel and Roy argue that the only way to overcome this crisis is to fight poverty by creating better employment opportunities, wages, and early childhood programs. The disparities in educational attainment between the affluent and the poor are significant, especially by income and race even when they begin kindergarten (Mishel & Roy, 2007; Neuman, 2013; Reardon, 2013).

Reports indicate that there is a substantial correlation between living in poverty and high school non-completion (Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Laird et al., 2007; Milliken, 2007; Rodriguez, 2010; Wehlage, 1991). Students who live in poverty are

disadvantaged both in the academic setting and in life (Mishel & Roy, 2007; Neuman, 2013; Reardon, 2013) “even when the economy is stable” (Juenke, n.d., p. 3).

High school dropouts are four times more likely to be on welfare than individuals who complete high school (Fashola, 1997; Millikin, 2007; Rumberger & Lim, 2008). Children who are born into poor families and/or to parents who did not graduate from high school have a higher chance of not graduating themselves. Thus, such children can become victims of a vicious cycle, which gets harder to break as it continues through generations.

Family Structure/Background

Family structure has also been shown to have a correlation with high school completion (Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Lutz, 2007; Rumberger & Lim, 2008). Children who come from single parent families tend to have a higher mobility rate and lower academic achievement (Lutz, 2007). Furthermore, many of these families live in poverty and tend to live paycheck to paycheck (Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Lutz, 2007; Rumberger & Lim, 2008).

Single parent families often rely on their oldest children to work in order to assist in paying the monthly bills. Many of the older siblings are left no choice but to drop out in order to support their family, either by working or staying home to care for younger siblings while their parent is at work (Dunham & Wilson, 2007; Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Lutz, 2007; Rumberger & Lim, 2008).

Single parent families that are trying desperately to survive do not necessarily hold their children’s education as a priority. Many find their priority is to provide food, clothing, and a home. Needless to say, parental involvement in school, or parent teacher

conferences, is the least of their worries. Many families are trying to figure out where they might sleep at night or where to go to find a meal for their children. Studies show that students who have parents who are “not involved” in their child’s education tend to struggle academically and are more likely to not complete school (Behnke, Gonzales, & Cox, 2010; Orfield, 2006). Many single parents simply do not have the time or financial resources to establish involvement with their children’s education while struggling to meet the family’s basic needs (Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Lutz, 2007; Rumberger & Lim, 2008).

Many of these challenges often lead to delinquent tendencies. Many students who are delinquent and find themselves involved in the court system come from unstructured, single parent families that lack resources, structure, and boundaries (Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Lutz, 2007; Orfield, 2006; Rumberger & Lim, 2008). Recently, a probation officer who services the school district selected as the site for this study disclosed that of the 25 students on his caseload, only one came from a two-parent household. This demonstrates how intertwined the detracting factors are when looking at students who have dropped out of school. Furthermore, students who come from single parent, low socioeconomic households tend to live in high crime, high poverty neighborhoods, and thus are surrounded by dysfunction and are often on survival mode (Aud et al., 2012; Gandera & Contreras, 2009; Orfield et al., 2004). Many students that I have worked with in the past disclosed that they liked to be “locked up.” They explained that it was structured; they could sleep peacefully; their basic needs were met; and there were no surprises.

Behavioral Related Factors

Although I will not go into great detail regarding behavioral issues related to dropping out, it should be noted that students who have behavioral issues tend to become disengaged and dropout of high school (Henry et al., 2012; Losen, 2011; Rumberger, 2013; Rumberger & Lim, 2008). One can argue that students with behavioral issues tend to act out due to feelings and perceptions of not getting the support and encouragement needed to be successful in school. The perception of being “pushed out” exacerbates the feelings of mistrust and hopelessness and leads to students becoming disengaged (Gandera & Contreras, 2009; Henry et al., 2012; Losen, 2011; Orfield, 2006; Rumberger, 2013; Rumberger & Lim, 2008).

Lack of engagement can lead to behavioral problems. The literature provides, as an explanation contributing to the high school dropout rate, alienation or disconnectedness.

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the National Association of Secondary School Principals, in their report, “Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution” suggests that student alienation stems from problems in the schools, including a lack of personalized programs, ever larger schools, over structuring of the classroom seating arrangement, and overuse of the lecture format and student anonymity. (Maeroff, 1996b, p. 8)

Feelings of alienation often lead to behavioral issues and consequences such as suspensions (Amurao, n.d.). Furthermore, students who feel alienated from society and do not feel a sense of belonging are more likely to drop out of school (Barrera, 2007; Crockett, Randall, Shen, Russell, & Driscoll, 2005). Amurao (n.d.) argues that students who are “forced out of school for disruptive behavior” (p. 1) are sent back to their home environment, which is often negative. They become “stigmatized and fall behind in their studies; many dropout and commit crimes in their communities” (p. 1).

“Dropping out of school is described as a process of disengagement” (Anfinson et al., 2010, p. 1). Research indicates that suspensions and expulsions begin the process that leads to high school dropout (Bahena, Cooc, Currie-Rubin, Kuttner, & Ng, 2012; DeRidder, 1991; Skiba et al., 2011) and increased chance of involvement in the juvenile justice system (Balfanz et al., 2013; Townsend, 2000; Wald & Losen, 2007). Many refer to this process as the “School to Prison Pipeline.” Fernandez (2014) explains:

Excessive use of school discipline can increase students’ negative feelings about and alienation from school; suspicions of mainstream authority; negative academic identity; and feelings of disenfranchisement. Exclusion from the classroom also diminishes learning opportunities and exposure to instructional time, which leads to poor academic performance, dropout, and potential involvement in the school-to-prison pipeline. (p. 2)

The number of suspensions and expulsions given to minority students reinforces their feelings of alienation and being “pushed out” of schools. “African-American students, overall, are now nearly three times as likely to be suspended, and Latino students are nearly one-and-a half times as likely to be suspended as their white peers” (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People [NAACP], 2013). Studies show that minority students receive harsher punishments for the same behaviors exhibited by white students (Losen, 2011; NAACP, 2013). The racial disparities in discipline have received increased attention over the past few years. In 2010 the topic of disproportionality and disparities in discipline was addressed at a conference of civil rights lawyers in Washington, D.C. At this conference, U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan both “affirmed their departments commitment to ending such disparities.” (Losen, 2011, p. 1). These disparities not only lead to feelings of being “pushed out” but also feelings of discrimination (Losen, 2011; Losen & Martinez, 2013; Skiba et al., 2011; Vaggins, 2014).

Discrimination

Many students feel that they are discriminated against or treated differently because of their race. Their perception is reality (Glasser, 1965, 1998, 2010). Delgado and Stefancic (2001) argue that racism is normal, ordinary, and not aberrant in American society. We live in a society where color-blindness is acceptable. We live in a society in which people believe that discrimination no longer exists, where race is irrelevant, when in actuality, it continues to be embedded in the everyday life of a person with non-white skin color. Parker, Deyhle, Villenas, and Crossland (1998) explain that color-blindness is a term, which allows people to disregard the racial construction of whiteness, while promoting White privilege. Whiteness remains the norm, the dominant culture. As a result, color-blindness creates disregard for institutional and societal structures that promotes discrimination (Losen, 2011; Marx, 2008; Parker et al., 1998; Zamudio et al., 2011).

Marx (2008) conducted a study in a secondary school of 26 staff members and 800 students regarding their impressions of Latino students. Marx found that Latino students were not as content with their school experience in comparison to the White students. Twenty-four percent of the Latino students commented on inequality, or being treated differently based on their race. Furthermore, White teachers indicated that they were contributing to their students feeling of alienation or “disenfranchisement by insisting that Latino student home cultures do not matter, by rejecting Spanish in their classrooms and by believing in the importance of assimilation” (Marx, 2008, p. 82). “Colorblindness and resentment of Latino students characterized their responses,” (p. 83) revealing that it was the student’s responsibility to adapt to the school and assimilate into

the White culture, abandoning the Latino culture and traditions. Teachers' responses indicated that they desired for the Latino students to assimilate into the Whiteness of the school so "their presence as a culture would not be noticeable" (p. 83).

Marx (2008) found that teachers and administrators who embrace colorblindness by denying students to take pride in their culture and language and by forcing them to assimilate have a negative impact on the students' education and may act as a barrier to high school completion. Marx argues that by "purposely avoiding its racial issues it is undoubtedly exacerbating them" (p. 85).

The feelings of discrimination are not only a perception of many youth, but are validated by data. In the report, *Discipline Policies, Successful Schools, and Racial Justice* (Losen, 2011), the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights found racial disparities in regards to suspensions and expulsions. In instances requiring a judgment call by teachers or administrators' minority students are disproportionately disciplined compared to their White peers. As a result, the report concluded that discipline that is "racially neutral on its face but has discriminatory effect may be found unlawful" (Losen, 2011, p. 13).

Organizational, Structural, and Institutional Factors

Research on the dropout epidemic has not solely been limited to factors external to the educational setting. Institutional practices, school structure, and school organization in relation to dropping out have also been studied.

Lee and Burnham (2003) explored how high school structure and organization may influence students' decisions to stay in school or to drop out. In a quantitative study of 3,840 students in grades 10-12 in areas in the United States, the authors found that explanations of dropouts that rely solely on students' social background and school behaviors are incomplete—schools can exert important

organization effects on students' decisions to dropout or staying in school. (Blue & Cook, 2004, p. 7)

For example, small school size seems to positively affect the chances of students to stay in school (Gandara, 2010; Lee & Burkam, 2003; Rumberger & Palardy, 2005; Rumberger & Thomas, 2000). Small school size and small classroom size are likely to result in a positive student-teacher relationship, which is easily established with a smaller number of students within each classroom (Maeroff, 1996b; Marx, 2008).

In addition, changing classrooms, which is typical of a high school setting, does not bode well for students' ability to build positive and meaningful relationships with staff. Changing classes frequently, or every hour, does not give the student "ample opportunity to develop the kinds of interpersonal relationships that allows for feelings of support and the confidence to approach teachers with their problems" (Behnke et al., 2010, p. 399).

Some organizational policies and procedures can create barriers limiting students' success and increase feelings of being "pushed out." The American Liberties of Civil Rights Union explains "the 'school-to-prison pipeline' refers to the policies and practices that push our nation's schoolchildren, especially our most at-risk children, out of classes...." ("What Is the School-to-Prison Pipeline?" n.d.). Furthermore, the ACLU argues that lack of resources, lack of qualified teachers, over-crowded classrooms, and insufficient funding encourage dropping out of school.

Many minority students argue that they experience a high rate of institutional barriers, such as discrimination, low access to resources, feeling unwelcomed, lack of encouragement, a demand to assimilate quickly, being forced to abandon their culture and

not being understood by teachers (Carrillo, 2009; Conchas, Oseguera, & Vigil, 2012; Croninger & Lee, 2001; Martinez et al., 2004; Velez & Saenz, 2001).

In his article, “The Cost of Success: Mexican American Identity Performance within a Culturally Coded Classroom and Education Achievement,” Carrillo (2009) argues that the cost of success for Latinos “directly result[s] from the structure of the United States public education system, which holds white, middle-class identity performance as the standard” (p. 643). The structure and pressure to assimilate in order to be successful “frequently result in psychological, sociological, and economic costs to many Mexican Americans” (p. 643). “The constant identity performance takes work which white students need not perform, and Latinos suffer as a result” (p. 642).

“Margaret Montoya asserts cultural assimilation requires Latinos to hide their true cultural selves behind constructed public personas” (Carrillo, 2009, p. 666) in order to be accepted as capable. Latinos who desire an education often have to make sacrifices White children do not have to make. They are put in situations where they must choose between their culture and that of the dominant White culture in order to succeed. For example, they have to respond to comments from White peers such as, “You don’t act Mexican,” “I didn’t mean you when I was talking about the stupid wetbacks—you’re different,” or comments from Latino friends and family such as “You’re trying to be White,” “You’re a sell-out,” or “You think you’re better than us.” Although a Latino might think they know who they are and who they want to be, comments such as these make them question if the sacrifices they are making are worth it. I know I certainly did when the above statements were made to me during my years in high school and even Hope College. It causes one to

question if he should challenge the ignorance and risk the chance of alienation. Carrillo (2009) explains:

Constant identity performance [acting white], including strategic behavior, may cause Latinos to have internal doubts about what they have sacrificed for academic success. In this sense, concerns about ethnic identity and personal authenticity are a cost of educational success as a Latino. This is especially relevant given the necessity of Latinos to perform identity in the classroom. Performing identity may cause a Latino student to ask, “Who am I really?” (p. 667)

Latino students striving for the “American Dream” can find themselves feeling isolated, confused, or even alienated by peers and family members. For many navigating the education system, including but not limited to, learning White middle-class classroom codes, the decision between assimilation versus acculturation, language barriers, and the stress of identity performance can be overwhelming and simply do not outweigh the risks. They are left wondering what life would be like without having to succumb to the pressures of being not only successful but the added stress of being a successful Latino in the dominant White society. They contemplate the benefits and costs not knowing the full significance it will have socially, emotionally, and psychologically in their future.

These institutional barriers can quickly spiral into lack of trust, alienation, delinquency issues, behavioral issues, and overall lack of school engagement. “Invisible by most school officials, social estrangement of adolescents and lack of trust and confidence in significant others and in key school agents result in a lack of help-seeking initiative and overall resignation to unsponsored self-reliance” (Martinez et al., 2004, p. 146). These factors highly contribute to a student’s decision to drop out (Carrillo, 2009; Croninger & Lee, 2001; Martinez et al., 2004; Velez & Saenz, 2001).

Contributing Factors

Social Capital

The high Latino dropout crisis is not a matter of immigration but more a matter of social capital (Gandara & Contreras, 2009). In their study, Croninger and Lee (2001) describe social capital as student's belief about how much their teacher supports their efforts to succeed in school and teacher reports of whether students receive guidance from them. They found that "teacher based forms of social capital" (p. 548) are important for students. These teacher-based forms of social capital reduced the probability of dropping out by nearly 50% regardless of low socioeconomic status. Kafele (2013) concurs that it is essential to believe in your students in order to close the achievement gap and promote high school graduation.

In another study, Velez and Saenz (2001) described social capital as "the degree and quality of middle-class forms of social support present in a young person's interpersonal network" (p. 455). Social capital can also be described as a person's advantages or disadvantages through experiences and situations. The more families are able to provide experiences, the more it shapes the kind of capital the students obtain.

Gandara and Contreras (2009) found a strong correlation between the parents' level of education and the likelihood of student completion of high school. Parents with a high degree of social capital, such as a middle class parent, with middle class values, and a high level of education, are more likely to be able to provide resources and a variety of life experiences for their child, hence the higher the likelihood of the child completing high school. These parents not only are able to provide resources, but also are involved in their child's education. Parental "involvement may be the most important factor

predicting academic achievement among Latino youth (Alfaro et al., 2006; Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2005; Zuniga, 2004)” (as cited in Behnke et al., 2010, p. 398).

In a study conducted by Ruben Rumbaut of over 2,400 eighth and ninth grade immigrants, he found that immigrant students that were in the process of learning English outperformed the native-born students who had greater English skills (Gandara & Contreras, 2009, p. 2). In his study, Rumbaut concluded that assimilation or acculturation might be “counterproductive for educational achievement” (Gandara & Contreras, 2009, p. 3). Many coin this as “immigrant optimism.” Immigrants who are self-aware, confident in their identity, seem to outperform native-born students.

Social Bond Theory/Student Connectedness

Students who feel connected to school often have better grades (Blue & Cook, 2004; Johnson & Perkins, 2009; Marx, 2008). Several factors contribute to school connectedness, including being on a sports team, participating in clubs, having a positive relationship with a teacher, and having a positive relationship with peers (Behnke et al., 2010; Kafele, 2013).

Lee and Burkam (2003) concur, that students who feel that they have a positive relationship with their teachers are less likely to drop out of school. In a study conducted by Worrell and Hale (2001), students who had hope for the future rated perceived school climate more positively than dropouts. Furthermore, “hope in the future significantly predicted dropout versus graduate status for participants” in the study (Blue & Cook, 2004, p. 8). Students who have nurturing, caring and positive adults that believe in them are more likely to succeed and graduate from high school. Schools that provide a caring and nurturing school climate that “affirms culturally relevant, caring pedagogy can result

in student academic success” (Blue & Cook, 2004, p. 8). Reyes, Scribner, and Paredes-Scribner (1999, as cited in Blue & Cook, 2004) “found that collaborative governance and leadership, including clear vision shared by the school community, collaborative dedicated administrators, and humanistic leadership philosophies were among the attributes of schools that were successful in educating Latino students to high levels of achievement” (p. 8).

Other research conducted with high-risk students found that lack of school engagement is a major contributing factor to dropping out. It was also found to be a leading factor in delinquent behaviors (Johnson & Perkins, 2009). “Research indicated that students who had higher confidence levels generally had higher grades in schools and were more likely to be engaged in various school activities and organizations” (Johnson & Perkins, 2009, p. 128), or have a positive relationship with a trusting adult (Kafele, 2013).

Research suggests that there is a relationship between school bonding and academic performance (Barrera, 2007). If students feel a sense of belonging they are more apt to stay engaged, thus stay in school.

Summary

There is an extensive amount of research that focuses on the Latino dropout rate throughout the United States. Interestingly enough, regardless of where the studies were conducted, many had similar results. For example, studies that were conducted in New York, California, Texas, and Illinois have comparable outcomes. As mentioned previously, the studies mainly focused on the dropouts themselves, the contributing factors, and provided recommendations. Many of the studies conducted indicated that

school organization, culturally relevant teaching practices, and caring school climate were factors that contributed to the success of Latino students. Researchers note social/economic background, life circumstances, school behaviors, and feelings of alienation as contributing factors leading to dropping out of high school.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the phenomenon of Latino students who have overcome obstacles and have beaten the odds by completing high school. I was interested in gaining a rich understanding of the social, emotional, academic, and personal lives of Latinos who have succeeded. The overarching research question that guided this study is how do Latino students who share many of the factors and characteristics associated with dropping out of high school manage to persist through high school completion? Particularly, how do these students describe their high school experiences? What are some positives and challenges of their years in high school? How do they connect their experiences in and out of school and interpret the impact of those experiences on their persistence in school? Finally, how do they connect their school experience with where they want to be in the future?

This chapter will outline the study, including a description of context, setting, sampling, epistemological frame used to guide the study, data collection procedures, process for data analysis, ethical considerations and trustworthiness, and, finally, limitations and delimitations of the study. This chapter also provides an in-depth look into the demographics for the study.

The Research Design

A qualitative research design was utilized in order to gain a better understanding of the issues at hand. Creswell (2008) describes qualitative research in “which the researcher relies on the view of the participants; asks broad, general questions; describes and analyzes these words; and conducts the inquiry in a subjective manner” (p. 46). Qualitative studies are often used to explore, investigate, and examine patterns of meaning based on the participant’s own words (Creswell, 2008).

Qualitative methods are superior to other research methods for achieving “in-depth understanding of a complex process or phenomena” (Conklin, 2007). The qualitative researcher is attempting, searching to understand ways in which the participants make meaning of their experiences. In doing so, researchers attempt to avoid the development of assumption or hypothesis, prior to collecting data (Dobrovolny & Fuentes, 2008).

In this case, I inquired into the meaning that Latino students ascribe to what is happening related to their success. I used a qualitative approach that emerged and collects data in the natural setting of the school. The data analysis included an emergent intuitive process to establish patterns and themes. A final report represents the voices of the Latino students along with their personal interpretation of success in school.

The Research Method

The research method used for this study is a phenomenological approach. “A phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experienced of a concept or a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007, p. 57). After eliciting each participant’s personal story and interpretation of their lived experiences with the

phenomenon under study, the researcher extrapolates prominent themes that connect the prominent elements participants reveal as they describe their experience. Each participant's description consists of what they experience, how they experienced it, and the meaning derived from it. "The aim of the researcher is to describe as accurately as possible the phenomenon, refraining from any pre-given framework, but remaining true to the facts" (Groenewald, 2004, p. 5) by capturing each participant's unique experience and finding the connecting themes that link their experiences into a clearer understanding of the phenomenon for the population studied.

Creswell (2007) describes two types of phenomenological studies: hermeneutic and transcendental. For the purpose of this study, the transcendental approach will be utilized. Transcendental phenomenological (also known as psychological phenomenology) emphasizes the descriptions that the participant discloses. Additionally, the transcendental approach guides the researcher to engage participants in the interpretation of the meanings they derive from their own experience.

By employing the transcendental phenomenological approach, the study sought a much richer, greater, and deeper understanding and insight as to the high school completion for Latino students who have succeeded. With a fuller understanding of Latino students' successes, this study adds to an understanding of the persistently high rate of non-completion (or drop out) for this population. These deeper understandings of the high school experience for Latino students will assist the educational system to be better equipped with the knowledge necessary to provide support and resources needed for our Latino population who persist to graduation, to further their education, and become a productive citizen.

Setting, Subjects, Access

The context of this study is a Michigan urban K-12 district with a significant and growing Latino population. The reason I chose this setting is twofold. First, the trends of City High School signify a growing population of Latinos and a slight decline in the White population. Furthermore, the loss of Latino students from their freshman year to senior year is alarming, in comparison to the White students. Table 1 shows the trends of the district student population over an 11-year period. You will notice that the Latino population may seem to be decreasing; however, due to being cited by the Michigan Department of Education for disproportionality sanctions (for suspensions of Latino and African-American students), the district chose to mask the effect of suspensions by re-classifying students that were multi-racial (i.e., White and Hispanic) into a new category called “Multi-racial.” This reclassification specifically occurred from 2009-2010, when the district was first cited by the state.

One can see that City Public Schools has changed dramatically over the past nine years. As a 1989 graduate of City High School, I can attest to these changes. I was one of few minorities at City High in the 80s. My graduating class had 242 students of which 30 were Hispanic (13%). The most recent graduating classes from City High School have a larger population of Hispanic students, in comparison to White students, than when I attended. In the 10-year span illustrated in Table 1, the White student population dropped from about 53% to 30%, while the Hispanic population increased from about 34% to 45%, while other racial groups changed only slightly. At the same time, the economically disadvantaged population of this school district made a dramatic increase from an already high 48% in 2003, to almost one third (65%) of the total student population in 2013.

Table 1

Key Demographics and Trends of City Public Schools

Comparison/Trends	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006	2005	2004	2003
Enrollment by race/ethnic group											
White (%)	39.10	51.00	40.70	41.30	41.50	43.90	43.70	45.70	48.10	52.10	52.60
Black (%)	7.70	6.03	7.08	7.04	6.43	6.33	6.34	5.59	5.46	5.50	5.40
Hispanic (%)	44.80	36.10	43.90	17.50	25.70	38.00	39.30	39.30	37.70	36.50	33.80
Asian/Pacific Islander (%)	2.90	3.10	3.91	3.85	4.32	4.49	4.47	4.82	4.98	5.50	5.50
American Indian/Alaska Native (%)	.40	0.27	0.25	.0.30	0.32	0.24	0.24	0.26	0.28	0.50	0.40
Multi-racial (%)	4.90	3.47	4.06	29.80	21.70	7.06	5.92	4.60	3.45	0	0
Economically disadvantaged (%)	64.70	64.90	64.80	64.60	63.10	54.10	53.30	50.30	45.60	44.70	48.00
English language learners (%)	10.10	9.00	7.04	6.84	7.14	8.68	9.06	8.21	10.90	24.00	20.50
Students with disabilities (%)	15.60	16.70	15.90	16.90	16.30	16.40	16.40	16.20	15.10	14.30	13.40

The combined effect of these demographic changes in the racial and economic make-up of City School District's student population makes this district an opportune setting for this study.

Specifically, the Hispanic (or Latino) students who participated in this study will have come through the school system during a major period of demographic shift comparable to the kinds of demographic shifts that urban school districts all over the U.S. have experienced in the last decade. The students in the target population for this study (students graduating between 2010 and 2014) have experienced being part of a significant and growing non-White student population that identifies as Hispanic (or Latino) during a time of significant demographic shift within the City Schools community including a major increase in economically disadvantaged households (as illustrated in the dramatic increase in percent of students identified as economically disadvantaged in Table 1). Since this community still retains much of its heretofore White middle-class dominated culture and self-image, the school district that serves this urban community in the later stages of major demographic shift is an opportune environment from which to explore the experiences of Hispanic or Latino students who persist to high school completion.

Examining the cohort data will give the reader a better understanding of the changes and dynamics that are taking place within City High. Not only have the demographics changed, but also the number of Hispanic students that do not continue to graduate with their cohort is increasing unabated. Table 2 shows the attrition rates for the population of the Latino students in comparison to the White population of City High School over a four-year period.

Table 2

City High School Demographics by Cohort Illustrating Comparative Attrition Rates

		Hispanic	White
		Male/Female/Total	Male/Female/Total
Class of 2010 Cohort	9 th Grade Year	108/90/198	14/21/35
	10 th Grade Year	79/79/158	14/18/32
	11 th Grade Year	41/50/91	12/17/29
	12 th Grade Year	32/41/73	20/24/44
	Total loss or gain over 4 years	-123 students (-62%)	+9 students (+27%)
Class of 2011 Cohort	9 th Grade Year	117/96/213	64/60/124
	10 th Grade Year	61/55/116	58/62/120
	11 th Grade Year	34/33/67	60/64/124
	12 th Grade Year	37/41/78	64/70/134
	Total loss or gain over 4 years	-135 students (-63%)	+10 students (+8%)
Class of 2012 Cohort	9 th Grade Year	104/97/201	60/58/115
	10 th Grade Year	47/48/95	55/57/112
	11 th Grade Year	34/36/70	54/55/109
	12 th Grade Year	42/44/86	61/63/124
	Total loss or gain over 4 years	-115 students (-57%)	+9 students (+8%)
Class of 2013 Cohort	9 th Grade Year	81/82/163	62/55/117
	10 th Grade Year	50/52/102	56/56/112
	11 th Grade Year	55/45/100	68/57/125
	12 th Grade Year	45/47/92	68/57/125
	Total loss or gain over 4 years	-71 students (-56%)	+8 students (+9%)
Class of 2014 Cohort	9 th Grade Year	87/83/170	74/77/151
	10 th Grade Year	62/69/131	64/74/138
	11 th Grade Year	58/61/119	60/70/130
	12 th Grade Year	56/57/113	56/67/123
	Total loss or gain over 4 years	-57 students (-66%)	-28 students (-19%)

Table 2 demonstrates that of the graduating classes from 2010 to 2014 approximately 60% of Latino students that began their 9th grade year at City High School did not graduate with their cohort. These data demonstrate a significant loss in the Latino population in the traditional comprehensive high school setting. Table 2 shows between 35-38% of Latinos begin their 9th grade year at City High School and continue on track to graduate four years later. However, it should be noted that an alternative high school was opened in the Fall of 2009. Table 3 shows the demographic of City Alternative High School from 2009-2014.

In the first year of operation, of the 186 students that were enrolled, 133 (71%) were Latino and 24 (13%) were White. By the fifth year of operation of the 148 students enrolled, 85 (58%) were Hispanic compared to only 33 (22%) White students. It is difficult to decipher in which cohort the students originally belong, as the City Alternative High School re-classifies its students based on course credits. The school offers an 18.5 credit diploma in comparison to the high school with a 28-credit diploma. All students that attended City Alternative High School were significantly behind in credits at City High School and had no means to recover enough credits to enable them to graduate with their cohort. All of these students were not on target to graduate with their cohort; therefore, these students would have been considered a “drop out” through the state.

Table 3

City Alternative High School Demographics

Race by ethnic group	School Year	School Year	School Year	School Year	School Year
	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014
White (%)	13	15	24	26	22
Black (%)	12	14	12	13	11
Hispanic (%)	71	60	59	53	58
Asian/Pacific Islander (%)	3	4	2	1	1
American Indian/Alaska Native (%)	0	0	0	0	1
Multi-racial (%)	2	7	4	5	6
Unidentified	8	0	N/A	N/A	N/A

The second reason I chose City High School was due the accessibility, convenience, and depth of knowing the community and programs within the school. The study drew from Latino students that have graduated from the comprehensive City High School with their cohort within the 2010-2014 school years.

Sampling

Several types of sampling strategies were utilized based on the work of Creswell (2008) and Marshall and Rossman (2006). The first sampling strategy was *purposeful sampling* in which researchers “intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007, p. 214). Purposeful sampling is often used in phenomenological studies (Creswell, 2007), hence fits nicely with this research project.

Purposeful sampling allowed me to apply my findings to similar population and to replicate my study in other districts. Purposeful sampling is considered by Welman and Kruger (1999, as cited in Groenewald, 2004) “as the most important kind of non-probability sampling to identify the primary participants” (p. 8). I looked for participants that had a “similar experience relating to the phenomenon to be researched” (Kruger, 1988, as cited in Groenwald, 2004, p. 9), in this case, Latino graduates from City High School.

Moreover, since this is a phenomenological study, all participants must have undergone the same experience; therefore, *criterion sampling* was also used. Criterion sampling works well when all the participants being studied have all experienced the same phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). According to Miles and Huberman (1994) criterion

sampling is “useful for quality assurance and includes all cases that meet some criterion” (p. 28).

For a phenomenological study, Creswell (2007) recommends 3 to 10 participants but no more than 25. Morse (2000) suggests at least 6, and Englander (2012) recommends at least 3, however, clarifies that some studies may require 5 to 20. Of utmost importance was sampling until a point of saturation was reached (Creswell, 2007; Englander, 2012; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Morse 2000; Saldana, 2009) and no new themes emerge. For this study, it was essential that participants had a shared experience.

Participant Recruitment and Selection

Participant recruitment began by obtaining a listing of Latino students that successfully completed City High School between the years 2010-2014. The original listing contains 458 potential participants. After verifying the subjects on the listing fit the parameters for this study, I utilized purposeful sampling techniques (Patton, 2002) for the identification of possible respondents for this study. Potential study participants met the following criteria: (a) must identify as Hispanic or Latino, (b) must have qualified for free and reduced lunch at some point during their high school years, and (c) must have completed a successful/positive graduation audit and graduated with their cohort between the years of 2010-2014.

Alphabetical lists of each graduating class fitting the parameters of the study were numbered beginning with number 1 progressing consecutively until all students meeting the criteria were numbered. An online number generator was utilized to randomly select 40 possible recruits for the study. As a school administrator in the City School District, I received permission from the superintendent to send a direct mailing to possible study

participants. A recruitment letter was mailed to each of the 40 recruits in the potential pool through his or her last known home address.

A follow-up phone call was made within three to five days of the letter being sent to verify the letter was received and their decision to participate. All participants that agreed were emailed a copy of the study consent form, demographic survey, and the interview protocol, and arrangements were made to meet within a month at an agreed-upon location and time. I offered participants who were interested, but had questions, to meet with them to provide a full description of the study and review the consent form. I also employed a snowball approach encouraging qualified potential participants to forward my recruitment email to other Hispanic/Latino students from their graduating cohort. I continued this process until I identified 10 individuals who met the study participant criteria and were willing to complete the consent process. See Appendix E for copies of the approval letter from the superintendent for recruiting study participants through school district student address records, the recruitment letter (Appendix A), demographic survey (Appendix D), and the consent forms (Appendix B). All communications were provided in both English and Spanish to better accommodate the pool of potential study participants.

As each consent form was secured from each potential participant, interviews were scheduled. Two participants who originally agreed to participate did not return the form, nor did they return my follow-up phone call or emails. Of the remaining 28 letters that were sent, two were returned, four numbers were incorrect, and messages were left with the remaining 22. In addition, two participants returned my call, but were in college out of state and could not participate. Two additional participants who did not receive a

letter contacted me through a participant who had received a letter. I verified the two potential participants based on listing I had received from City High and they did qualify for the study, but had not been randomly chosen to participate. These two participants made the 10 needed for the study.

In the case that I determined that I needed more participants to achieve saturation or in the case a participant in the first pool dropped out, I prepared a second mailing. This mailing was not needed, therefore was not sent out. Participants were given the option, if they so desired, to meet at a location that is considered a safe haven for this population (e.g., the local Latin American United for Progress, or L.A.U.P.) conference room or in a conference room at City High School. Both settings allowed for privacy and respected confidentiality. All 10 participants chose to meet at City High. Most had not been in City High since the re-construction of the new high school and were eager to return to their alma mater.

Consent forms were provided at the interview site in the case that participants had not already signed and returned them to me or in case they had forgotten to bring the form with them to the interview. In all cases, potential participants were given a copy of the consent form for their review prior to scheduling the interview meeting. The consent form was provided in both Spanish and English. The consent form explained the purpose of the study, the data collection and analysis process, and storage methods that were used. The following was clearly articulated:

- Interviews may take approximately 60-90 minutes each;
- A second interview may be needed to gain more information;

- Numbers will be used to respect their identity, the information provided, and to ensure they are protected;
- Each interview will be audio recorded and transcribed;
- Once transcribed, the recordings will be deleted;
- A hard copy of the transcript will be provided to each participant after each interview to ensure accuracy. Participants will be able to make any changes, if needed;
- Transcripts will be secured in a locked file cabinet at the home of the researcher until the conclusion of the process, in which they will be moved to a secure location at Western Michigan University;
- Participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty;
- The study will be shared with my dissertation committee;
- The dissertation that results from this work will be published and a hard copy will be housed in the library of College of Education and Human Development at Western Michigan University;
- My chair's personal contact information was provided in the case they should have any questions.

HSIRB Approval

Prior to selecting participants, the process to seek and obtain approval from Western Michigan University's Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) was followed. The process included providing a description of the study, providing a sample of an informed consent form, and having the project reviewed (Creswell, 2008).

Written consent from each student was obtained before they participated in the study. In order to protect participant's identity, each was given a number. I clearly communicated to each student that he/she may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. I explained the data collection and storage process, and where the information would be secured, including the length of time. Participants were informed of the benefits and possible risks of their participation. The research did not proceed until permission from the HSIRB was granted. See Appendix H for copy of approval.

Data Collection Methods

The data were collected through an in-depth, personal interview and a demographic survey. I created a safe, non-judgmental, supportive environment so the participants felt comfortable to speak freely. This is of utmost importance for it is crucial to establish a supportive, nurturing environment that encourages the expressions of different perceptions, viewpoints, and opinions.

The interviews took place at City High based on each individual participant's request. Prior to the interviews, participants were emailed a copy of the interview protocol, interview questions, participant survey, and a consent form, which was reviewed and signed by the participant. Each session was audio taped, transcribed, and reviewed by the participant to ensure accuracy. Recording the interviews allowed me to provide undivided attention to the participant and focus on what was being said. Once transcribed, the audiotapes were destroyed as a further measure to ensure confidentiality and to protect the participants. All materials were kept in a locked cabinet in my home until the conclusion of the study, at which time they were transported to a secure location at Western Michigan University for at a minimum of three years after the study.

Interviews were conducted with each participant so that I, the researcher, could identify trends, which were reviewed by careful analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). I utilized an open-ended, face-to-face, in-depth interview approach. As the facilitator, I probed for more information, when needed (Patten, 2005). Participants were given a copy of the protocol prior to the interviews. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Each interview was scheduled to last approximately 60-90 minutes in length. The average interview took approximately 70 minutes. Throughout the interviews I asked open-ended questions in order to allow the participant to voice thoughts, feelings, and experiences without hesitation. Open-ended questioning also allowed for an open-ended response, hence not leading the participant to answer the question in a certain way, or leading the conversation in a certain direction. This type of questioning allowed the participant to speak freely and openly. The intent of the interview was to capture the participants' stories as naturally as possible.

Validity and Reliability

Triangulation. The purpose of collecting data from multiple informants is a form of triangulation. Data triangulation is used to contrast data and validate the data (Groenewald, 2004, p. 11). In order to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon, researchers suggest using multiple methods of checking for understanding (Creswell, 2008; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Interviews, demographic surveys, field notes, and maintaining a journal were utilized for triangulation. Data collection interviews continued until the topic was saturated, when informants introduced have no new data or perspectives on the topic, or no new themes emerge.

Member checking. Following the interview, I solicited participant feedback on the transcription of the interview through the process of member checking to ensure completeness and accuracy in capturing a rendition of participants' experiences. "Member checking is a process in which the researcher asks one or more participants in the study to check the accuracy of the account" (Creswell, 2008, p. 267). Each participant was asked to review the aspects of the transcript of their own interview. Member checking allowed the study participants to clarify, add, or expand upon their stories.

Bracketing. Prior to the interviews and upon completion of each interview, I used a journal to write about my own reflections, thoughts, and personal feelings. This is known as bracketing or epoche. This allowed me, as the investigator, to put aside my own personal experiences and biases and to "gain clarity from [my] own pre-conceptions" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 148).

Memoing. Additionally, I used a process of memoing to both track and bracket my thoughts and to maintain a log trail of my data collection and analysis activities. These memos allowed me to capture and examine my thinking as I proceeded through the many steps of collecting and analyzing data, identifying where my thinking might either align with (conform to) the data or diverge from it. When I identified divergence, I bracketed those thoughts as my own and not as emerging from the data. Where I identify convergence, I used those thoughts to further guide my distillation of the data into themes and sub-themes that I could confirm in the data. This allowed me as the investigator to put aside my own personal experiences and biases and to "gain clarity from [my] own pre-conceptions (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 148). According to Wall, Glenn, Michinson, and Poole (2004, as cited in Wojnar & Swanson, 2007), "bracketing is an

investigator's attempt to achieve the state of transcendental subjectivity (neutrality) by putting aside prior understanding or preconceptions about the phenomenon under investigation" (p. 175). Journaling, using field notes, or a reflective diary will accomplish bracketing. It was crucial that my personal experiences did not interfere, cloud, or lead the interview in any way. I wanted each interview to be free flowing, comfortable, honest, and without judgment; furthermore, the interpretation of the data from the interviews was completed in a manner that conforms to the data and achieves the goal of giving voice to those participants who provided the data.

Peer Audit

In developing my themes, I was fortunate to have a colleague who is also working on her dissertation. We worked closely to review each other's research, discuss our findings, discuss themes, and ensure that I had labeled my themes accurately. In addition, I have worked closely with my chair and my committee members. This additional support and review of my work increases the validity and reliability of my research.

Data Analysis Process and Procedures

Phenomenological reduction in which the data are clustered around themes and supporting sub-themes was utilized followed by "*structural synthesis*, which calls for the exploration of "all possible meanings and divergent perspectives" (Creswell, 1998, as cited in Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 148). A more in-depth description is described later in this chapter.

As described in the Data Collection section, I invited each participant to review the transcript and add to it if they felt they had more to say, to clarify or extend what they

provided in the interview. Three of the participants returned the transcripts with no changes. The others did not respond.

Before attempting data reduction through coding, I read each transcript multiple times. Notes were taken carefully as I read each transcript. Significant statements were highlighted, extrapolated, coded, and placed in an Excel spreadsheet or *in vivo* codebook. The significant statements and quotations were then placed into clusters of similar meaning. These clusters were then further reduced to categories, themes, and sub-themes.

An emergent intuitive analysis was utilized for this study. Coding categories were developed that are closely aligned with the research questions. The data were analyzed thoroughly. As Creswell (2007) suggests, interviews which are transcribed were reviewed and significant statements and quotations, which provide understanding for how the “participants experienced the phenomenon” (p. 61), were highlighted in order to develop a list of significant statements, called *in vivo* (or open) codes. Key ideas and constructs from the literature review and theoretical framework of Social Bonding was used to guide the search for significant segments of meaning, but did not confine the search.

The significant statements and quotations were placed into clusters of similar meaning. These clusters were then further reduced to prospective categories and eventually to themes and supporting sub-themes where the data provided such. The meaning segments clustered together to suggest and support the emergent categories of meaning were reviewed and tested against other possible combinations of meaning units or codes until achieving a final set of coding categories that conformed best to the data. Once a best conforming set of coding categories was established, I assigned tentative thematic titles to those categories using language that as closely as possible captures the

essence of participants' natural language. After tentatively naming the coding categories, I analyzed the coding units within each category to look for a further clustering of codes that could represent sub-themes of the overarching theme for that meaning group. Significant statements that emerged as outliers during the data reduction process were placed into a "holding" category to cross analyze with the emergent themes and sub-themes analyzed in order to determine if other elements are relevant or if any other codes should be created. A cross tabulation of themes was completed in order to establish the strength of the categories and sub-themes across the data from all participants.

The emergent themes and their supporting information were further reduced into thematic frames that provide the textural and structural descriptions, which explain the "what" and the "how" of the experiences. A written description encompassing the textural and structural descriptions was completed, hence the *essence*. The essence is the end result of textural and structural descriptions.

I established parameters to determine what constituted a theme. For the purpose of this study, a common shared experience that was evident in six (60%) or more participants was considered a theme. All shared experiences that fell within the realm of a particular sub-theme were listed.

Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

One of the most important elements of qualitative research is that of trustworthiness. It is of utmost importance that the researcher builds a positive and trusting relationship with the participants. Maintaining high ethical standards and trustworthiness is not only moral, but also essential. There are several reasons.

First, if the participants did not feel that they were respected and if they did not trust me, they would have been guarded and unwilling to disclose pertinent and personal information, which defeats the purpose of the study. If the information they disclosed was limited, guarded, or defensive, the study would have been invalid. This is especially important given that the population for this study was a marginalized and oppressed population. I knew it was very likely that much of this population, including their parents, have experienced discrimination or hardships based on their race. Let us not forget that the lens of critical race theory contends that the society in which we live is one of racialization and inequalities. This became evident as I began hearing their stories.

Second, ethical considerations and the goodness of the researcher are often missed and yet are an essential part of “rigorous research” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 47). As a licensed social worker, I was well aware of the ethical and moral considerations when interviewing clients or participants. Nespor and Groenke (2009) stress, “A key component of the researcher’s obligation is to accurately explain to potential participants what is being asked of them, to lay out the risks and benefits of participation, and then to allow people to full exercise of their agency in giving or refusing informed consents” (p. 997). In order to maintain high ethical and moral standards and to build trusting relationships with the participants, I did several things including, but not limited to the following:

- I followed the process of informed consent from the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board of Western Michigan University, and obtained written permission from the board prior to conducting my study;
- I clearly identified verbally and in written form the objectives for the study;

- I conducted the interviews in the natural or comfortable setting (i.e., the school in which they attended);
- During the interviews, I allowed participants the choice to turn off the recorder at any time;
- I allowed the participants to withdraw from the study at any time, if requested;
- I made individual transcripts available for each participant and allowed them to review and clarify (see references to member checking under data collection and data analysis);
- I was respectful and will continue to be, both to the information they provided and to the participants as persons. I will continue to hold the participants with high regard demonstrated by the use of numbers for their school and their names in order to protect identifying information.

In order to ensure confidentiality, all data were stored in a locked file cabinet in my home office. Data were stored in standard record storage boxes with covers. The data boxes were highly organized and properly labeled. All audio recordings were kept in a safe and locked location until transcribed, at which time they were destroyed.

At the conclusion of the study, all data were transported and stored in the office of Dr. Walter L. Burt, principal investigator, at Western Michigan University until transferred to the university archives for a minimum of three years. Records will be available only upon request to authorized department faculty and the researcher.

Third, I am taking many steps to establish conformability (Mertens, 1998) of my research findings to the actual experiences of my study participants and they understand them. Those steps are identified in both the data collection and data analysis sections of

this chapter and include bracketing, completing an epoche, member checking, peer audit, and steps to accomplish saturation.

Fourth, by carefully selecting a school and community site with a demographic profile that is broadly representative of the urban communities in which many Latino students live and attend school, I am increasing the potential of transferability (Mertens, 1998). My findings may be transferable to other settings and other students who share the same or similar demographic profile as the participants in my study. Similar demographic characters include the following: economically disadvantaged Latino high school graduates, Latino graduates from a historically predominantly White community, Latino students from a predominantly White school district, a community where the Latino population has grown substantially (to at least one-third to one-half of the total school population), and a community where the White student population has decreased substantially (to one-third to one-half of the total school population).

Fifth, I address the credibility (Mertens, 1998) of my findings by conducting long in-depth interviews through open-ended interviewing combined with semi-structured probes to delve deeper and derive rich and full renditions of experience and meaning from participants. I further extend credibility through data triangulation accomplished through a combination of member checking and added participants to achieve saturation. Credibility is also enhanced by the combined procedures of researcher reflection through epoche, memoing and bracketing, and maintaining reflexivity (i.e., critical self-reflection (Schwandt, 2001) throughout the study.

Finally, I have built into the process of study design and conduct several strategies that qualitative researchers use to increase authenticity of their study and study findings

(Mertens, 1998). These strategies include (a) allowing participants' interpretations of their own stories to override mine (see description of member checking), (b) using bracketing to put aside my predispositions and assumptions; (c) rereading (or revisiting) the data multiple times to avoid missing or ignoring important elements of meaning; (d) systematically seeking alternate interpretations of both the raw data and the emergent themes throughout the analysis process; and (e) allowing codes and meaning units to emerge and be treated with equal levels of importance even if they conflict with the literature based lens for this study (Mertens, 1998).

The Researcher

According to Creswell (2003), there are three considerations in matching research design to a problem: the audience, the problem, and the personal experience of the researcher. Qualitative research is an “inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social human problem. The researcher builds a complex holistic picture, analyzes work, reports detailed view of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting” (Creswell, 1998, p. 15).

A factor to consider is the personal experiences of the researcher. This type of research is most fitting based on my past experiences. My experience as a clinical social worker highlights my interviewing strengths. Conducting assessments, conducting personal histories, collecting data, analyzing data, interviewing, and inquiring underscores my strength as a researcher. Social workers are trained to look at individuals within their natural setting or environment as well as to recognize patterns from stories that are being shared. While interviewing, I not only listened to detailed descriptions, but also used observations to assess non-verbal communication. This was facilitated by

building rapport while increasing a deeper understanding of their experiences. As a social worker, I am a researcher.

Creswell (2003) argues that the “success of qualitative studies depends primarily on the interpersonal skills of the researcher . . . building trust, maintaining good relations, respecting norms” (p. 118) are of utmost importance. My strength in building strong, trusting relationships and bonds with adolescents has been proven over the years. The number of students that come to me in order to disclose deeply personal issues and to obtain guidance and support is noteworthy.

Being of Mexican American decent was also an advantage for me as the researcher in interviewing Latino students. I truly believe that there is a reason that my office is filled with minority students before school, during lunch, and after school. Most people, including staff members, think it is odd that any student would desire to voluntarily “hang out” with an administrator at the high school as much as these minority students choose to do so. Various studies have shown that we, as human beings, tend to navigate toward people who are similar to ourselves. Being Latina facilitated the trusting relationship that was essential for this study. During a recent expulsion hearing of a minority student, the superintendent asked the student, “Who at the high school can you go to for help?” The student replied, “No offense to anyone who has tried to help me, but I go to Mrs. Clawson, she is like me, she understands me, and she can help me calm down when I’m upset.” This exemplifies my ability to connect with students by understanding the culture, listening, and empowering them to make good choices.

By working in the school system, I am also familiar with the policies, politics, and relationships that take place within the organization, which Creswell (2003) terms,

“interpersonal considerations” (p. 118) which should not be overlooked. My closeness to the system in which I conducted my study is addressed in Limitations and Delimitations in Chapter I of this study.

I cannot deny my experiences, nor can I deny my nationality, my culture, nor the fact that I am a minority. Throughout this research study, I needed to be cognizant of my biases. The success of minorities and the heartbreaking statistics of minorities that drop out are too real for me. I need to seriously consider my own ability to bracket and what implications there might be if I could not bracket appropriately, to the extent needed, in order not to contaminate the study.

Thus, prior to the interviews and upon completion of each interview, I used a journal to write about my own reflections, thoughts, and personal feelings. This is known as bracketing or epoche. This allowed me, as the investigator, to put aside my own personal experiences and biases and to “gain clarity from [my] own pre-conceptions (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 148).

Limitations, Delimitations, and Considerations

Many limitations exist when conducting a phenomenological study. First and foremost, the researcher must have a solid understanding of the philosophical principles, which are the underpinnings of a phenomenological research study (Creswell, 2008). Secondly, the researcher must carefully choose the participants to ensure that they all have the phenomenon. If this had not been addressed adequately at the beginning of the study, it could have had a devastating effect on the integrity of the research study. Time, energy, and money would have been wasted.

Bracketing may be extremely difficult for some individuals. The researcher needs to self-evaluate in order to identify how and in what ways their own personal biases, experiences, and judgments could manifest itself in the study. The researcher must be cognizant in the fact that they are the instrument in a qualitative study. It is crucial that research journals or documents in some way shape or form their personal experiences and how they might perhaps play into their role as the sole instrument for their study.

Developing a trusting relationship in which the participants feel comfortable in a short amount of time could have created a challenge. Throughout this study I was probing into the participants' personal lives in order to gain a better understanding of how they have overcome obstacles. It may have been difficult for the students to be honest during the interviews without having an established relationship prior to the interview.

Transferability of phenomenological study is a limitation. The study may be replicated at a different setting but may not be generalized into the mainstream population. "Transferability allows for temporarily understanding" (Cziko, 1992, p. 10) of a particular group being studied. The results of this study may not necessarily be transferred or applied to another setting. It is dependent on the similarity of the two contexts.

Time and cost can be limitations to a phenomenological study. Phenomenological research can be very "labor intensive" (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 100), which can be translated into a large time commitment, which can lead to higher costs. However, this research can be duplicated at any school with a population of Latino students and may even be duplicated with other subgroups.

Lastly, completing research in one's own setting or a setting in which one is familiar can be problematic. The familiarity the researcher has with the setting and the people, the transition from researcher to "employee," ethical dilemmas, and issues with disclosure (Marshall & Rossman, 2011) can all be concerns and limitations that should be thought through carefully.

There are also many other positive aspects in completing one's research in one's own setting, such as ease of access to information, ease of access to participants, less time for data collection, little to no travel time, familiarity with the system, suitable location for research, and the ability to establish trusting relationships in a shorter time (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Toma (2000) concurs, "Closeness to the people and the phenomenon through intense interactions provides subjective understanding that can greatly increase the quality of qualitative data (as cited in Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 101).

Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the study, including a description of context, setting, sampling, epistemological frame used to guide the study, data collection procedures, process for data analysis, ethical considerations and trustworthiness, and, finally, limitations and delimitations of the study. This chapter also provided an in-depth look into the demographics for the study.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to investigate the phenomenon of Latino students who have successfully completed high school in a school district with significantly lower graduation rates for Latinos as compared to their district non-Latino peers. The researcher was interested in gaining a rich understanding of the social, emotional, academic, and personal lives of academically successful Latinos.

A transcendental phenomenological approach was used to give voice to this marginalized population by utilizing a lens from the non-dominant worldview. Critical race theory was used to guide this study by eliciting the voices and narratives of their high school experiences. This study sought to delve deeper into where and how these students experience both inhibiting and contributing factors to high school completion, and how they actually overcome inhibiting (or negative) factors to the point that enables them to persist in the school environment until they graduate.

Research Questions

This research study was guided by one overarching question and four sub-questions. They are as follows:

Overarching Question:

What traits, characteristics, or attributes do these students have that enable them to persist in school that may differ from their corresponding counterparts that did not graduate from high school?

Sub-questions:

1. What factors lead to the success of Latinos who graduate? How did these factors come to be part of the students' experience and how do the students describe their response to these factors?
2. What is the graduate's perception of self, school, and success?
3. In what ways did self-perception and attitude contribute to the decision to stay in school?
4. How do Latino graduates describe the ways they responded to and overcame the factors that previous studies associate with being at-risk for dropping out, e.g., poverty, cultural differences, parental factors, etc.

These questions were designed to investigate the issues contributing to the academic success of Latino students. This study examined the differences in experiences, along with certain demographic variables, that contribute to the achievements of Latino students that have graduated from this Midwestern high school.

The Participants

Ten Latino students who successfully completed City High School participated in this study. All participants met the following criteria: (a) identified as Hispanic or Latino, (b) qualified for free and reduced lunch at some point during their high school years, and

(c) completed a successful/positive graduation audit and graduated with their cohort between the years of 2010-2014.

The participants in this study were initially contacted via a letter in the mail and personal phone communication. Each participant that agreed to be interviewed was emailed the Interview Protocol, Demographic Survey, and the Consent Form. A location, date, and time for their interview were then scheduled.

Two sources of data collection instruments were used for this study: a demographic survey and interviews. The demographic survey took each participant approximately 5 to 10 minutes to complete. Each interview lasted approximately 60-75 minutes depending on the responses of the participants. All 10 graduates answered each interview question and, furthermore, provided additional thoughts, suggestions, and comments that were not sought by the study.

Academic Demographic Information

The academic portion of the survey included the following: graduation year, gender, high school grade point average, community/school activities, employment status, and highest degree accomplished. Table 4 contains a summary of participants' academic and selected demographic data that they provided.

In summary, the sample consisted of four (40%) males and six (60%) females; one (10%) graduate from the class of 2011, two (20%) from the class of 2012, three (30%) from the class of 2013, and four (40%) from the class of 2014. Four (40%) students had a high school grade point average of 2.01–2.50, four (40%) had 2.51–3.0, and two (20%) earned a 3.51–4.0. All but two (20%) participants were actively involved in community or school activities while in high school. All (100%) participants were

currently employed; four (40%) were employed full-time and six (60%) part-time. Seven (70%) of the 10 participants were currently taking college courses or enrolled to do so in the fall of 2015.

Table 4

Academic and Selected Demographic Data of Participants

Participant	Graduation year	Gender	H.S. GPA	Community/ School Activities	Employment Status	Highest Degree
1	2013	M	2.51-3.0	Football, B & G Club	PT	Currently in college
2	2012	F	3.51-4.0	Latin Club, Adelante, PALS	PT	H.S. diploma
3	2014	F	2.51-3.0	Church youth group	Full	Currently in college
4	2013	F	3.51-4.0	Choir	Full	Currently in college
5	2014	F	2.01-2.50	None	PT	Currently in college
6	2011	M	2.01-2.50	Soccer	Full	H.S diploma
7	2014	M	2.01-2.50	Soccer	PT	Currently in college
8	2012	F	2.51-3.0	None	PT	Currently in college
9	2013	M	2.01-2.50	Football, track	Full	H.S. diploma
10	2014	F	2.51-3.0	Softball, Dutch Dance, Band	PT	Currently in college

Personal Demographic Information

The personal demographic information of the survey included the following: generation in the United States, primary language spoken in the home, place of origin and education level of both mother and father, and information regarding siblings. Table 5 contains a summary of participants' personal demographic data that they provided.

Two (20%) of the graduates in this study are 1st generation U.S. citizens, two (20%) are 2nd generation United States citizens, four (40%) are 3rd generation U.S. citizens, and three (30%) are immigrants from Mexico. Two (20%) graduates have one parent that is an immigrant and the other graduate born in the United States. These students considered themselves 2nd generation Mexican-Americans.

Six (60%) of the participants' fathers are immigrants; the other four (40%) were born in the United States. Three (30%) of the fathers have fewer than 12 years of education, five (50%) have a high school diploma, one (10%) earned a GED, and one (10%) has an advanced degree.

Six (60%) of the participants' mothers were immigrants, and four (40%) were U.S. born. Four (40%) have fewer than 12 years of education, four (40%) have a high school diploma, one (10%) has a GED, and one (10%) has taken some college courses.

Four (40%) of the 10 participants' primary home language was Spanish, five (50%) spoke English, and one (10%) participant speaks both languages at home.

Six (60%) of the 10 participants have older siblings. Of the six, five (50%) had older siblings graduate from high school. In addition, three (30%) of the six have siblings that are currently taking college courses.

Table 5

Personal Demographic Details of Participants

Participant	Generation	Language Spoken at Home	Father's Information		Mother's Information		Siblings		
			Born	Education Level	Born	Education Level	# of Siblings	HS Diploma	Attending College
1	2nd U.S.	English	Immigrant	Adv. Degree	U.S. born	GED	3 – 1 older, 2 younger	1	0
2	1st U.S.	Spanish	Immigrant	<12 years	Immigrant	< 12 yrs.	4 – 1 older, 3 younger	2	1 current
3	1st Immigrant	Both	Immigrant	HS diploma	Immigrant	HS diploma	1 older	0	0
4	2nd U.S.	English	U.S. born	GED	Immigrant	HS diploma	3 older	3	3 current
5	3rd U.S.	English	U.S. born	HS diploma	U.S. born	< 12 yrs.	2 younger	0	0
6	1st Immigrant	Spanish	Immigrant	<12 years	Immigrant	< 12 yrs.	2 older	0	0
7	1st Immigrant	Spanish	Immigrant	HS diploma	Immigrant	HS diploma	2 younger	0	0
8	1st U.S.	Spanish	Immigrant	HS diploma	Immigrant	HS diploma	2 younger	1	1 current
9	3rd U.S.	English	U.S. born	< 12 years	U.S. born	Some college	1 older, 2 younger	1	0
10	3rd U.S.	English	U.S. born	HS diploma	U.S. born	< 12 yrs.	1 younger	0	0

Data Analysis and Results

Prior to the interviews and upon completion of each interview, I used a journal to write about my own reflections, thoughts, and personal feelings. This is known as bracketing or *epoche*. This allowed me, as the investigator, to put aside my own personal experiences and biases and to “gain clarity from [my] own pre-conceptions (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 148).

Each interview was transcribed and provided to participants. Participants were asked to check for accuracy, known as member checking. Three of the participants returned the transcripts with no changes. The others did not respond.

I read each transcript multiple times. Notes were taken carefully as I read each transcript. Significant statements were highlighted, extrapolated, coded, and placed in a excel spreadsheet or *in vivo* codebook. The significant statements and quotations were then placed into clusters of similar meaning. These clusters were then further reduced to categories, themes, and sub-themes.

I established parameters to determine what constituted a theme. For the purpose of this study, a common shared experience that was evident in six (60%) or more participants was considered a theme. All shared experiences that fell within the realm of a particular sub-theme were listed.

Themes and Subthemes

Nine major themes and 21 sub-themes emerged through the data analysis process. A shared experience that was evident in six (60%) or more of the participants constituted a theme. Table 6 provides an overview of the distribution of themes and related sub-

themes. Each theme, sub-theme, and supporting evidence will be discussed in this chapter.

The nine major themes that emerged from the 10 participants' transcripts are as follows:

1. Positive Interaction and/or Relationship with an Adult
2. Thoughts of Dropping out or Giving Up
3. Cross Cultural Risk Taking
4. Feeling I Belong
5. Difficulty Transitioning to High School
6. Teacher Persistence
7. Messages, Norms, and Processes that Marginalize
8. Realization after Significant Experience
9. Support Group

Theme 1 – Positive Interaction and/or Relationship with an Adult

The theme of Positive Interaction and/or Relationship with an Adult emerged in all 10 interviews. The level of Positive Interaction and/or Relationship with an Adult varied from participant to participant. Some of the graduates described long-term adult relationships or mentors within the school setting, others had mentors through outside organizations, and at least two (or 20%) described family members as their strongest adult influence. Other graduates described day-to-day interactions, comments, or feelings from teachers and staff members that encouraged success in school, thus leading to graduation. The levels, intensity, duration, and variation of the relationship are described in the sub-themes.

Table 6

Distribution of Themes

Themes	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	%
1. Positive Interaction and/or Relationship with an Adult	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	100%
1.1 Trusting adult relationship	X			X	X	X	X	X	X		70%
1.2 Accountability	X			X	X	X	X	X	X		70%
1.3 Communication: Belief in student	X			X	X	X	X		X		60%
1.4 Adult that could relate	X			X		X	X		X		50%
1.5 A non-judgmental adult	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	80%
1.6 Positive teacher experience		X		X	X	X	X			X	60%
1.7 Exposure to opportunities	X	X	X	X				X	X		60%
2. Thoughts of Dropping Out/ Giving Up	X		X	X	X		X	X	X	X	80%
2.1 Monetary purposes	X								X		20%
2.2 Difficulty/loss of interest in school	X			X				X	X		40%
2.3 Personal issues	X			X	X	X	X		X		60%
3. Cross Cultural Risk Taking	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	80%

Table 6—Continued

Themes	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	%
4. Feelings of Belonging	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	80%
4.1 Participation in athletics/extra-curricular activities	X	X				X	X		X	X	60%
4.2 Participation in school events	X	X			X	X	X		X	X	70%
5. Difficulty Transitioning to High School	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X		80%
5.1 Conflicts with students	X			X		X		X		X	50%
5.2 Changing friendships		X				X		X			30%
5.3 Difficulty navigating school system				X		X	X	X			40%
6. Teacher Persistence	X		X	X	X	X	X		X	X	80%
7. Messages, Norms, and Processes that Marginalize		X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	80%
7.1 Segregation		X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	80%
7.2 Racial comments		X		X		X					30%
7.3 Implicit bias by adults		X		X			X	X	X	X	60%
8. Realization after a Significant Event	X		X		X	X	X	X	X		70%
8.1 Home-related event	X					X	X	X	X		50%
8.2 School-related event	X				X	X		X	X		50%
8.3 Goal Setting	X	X		X	X	X		X			60%
9. Support Group		X	X	X	X	X		X		X	70%

Sub-theme 1.1: Trusting adult relationship. Seven (70%) of the graduates described a trusting adult they could confide in, use to problem solve, or seek out when an issue arose, or for a source of motivation. Participant 1 described his teacher-mentor relationship, the significant impact it had on him, and how his mentor kept him “on track” by providing his personal time and encouragement. Participant 1 explained how this relationship kept him from dropping out of high school:

I was gonna drop out my sophomore year and he just kept me after class and was constantly, trying to get dropping out of high school out of my head, and it worked. Yeah, he had me get on track real quick. I had him in 8th grade. That’s where the whole relationship with him started. Umm, we had talked a lot. It was more than just like the teacher to student relationship. We were like real good friends. We’d work out together like at the high school gym. We just talked, and I guess we like knew each other through that.

Not all participants had a positive student-adult relationship within the school setting. Participant 8 described an overall difficult high school experience, which was exacerbated by personal home-life circumstances, which were out of her control. She felt a disconnection from school and most adults within the school setting. She attributes her success of high school graduation to a mentor from a local community agency.

Participant 8 explained:

I had a mentor who helped me out, and got me through it all. . . . I don’t know what I would do without her because that got me through a lot of stuff and got me through a lot of situations. I think um, I wouldn’t be here right now if it wasn’t for her. We’d go through goals, and I told her that my goal was to graduate from high school, and to attend college and she helped me through that. My mentor was a really big influence—positive influence on my life.

Several participants described their relationship with their mentor several times throughout the interview, which underscores the significance and impact of a positive adult mentor.

Sub-theme 1:2: Accountability. Seven (70%) of the participants described adults in their lives that held them accountable. They described the support and accountability as contributing factor to their perseverance. Participant 7 described the accountability provided by her family and counselors: “I had my mom, and I had my counselors and people in my family so like keeping me in check like ‘you need to be good in school because you need to graduate.’”

Accountability and influence came from a combination of friends, family members, and outside support people for Participant 10: “Cause there’s a lot of people who influence me like friends and my sisters, and outside of school I have a family, they are there to motivate me to keep going. Tell me I have to do it. Right now at work with my other friends—they motivate me.” Participant 9 commented, “I know there were a lot of things that made me want to finish, when I had one-on-one tutor. I liked how she came and checked on me when I was at [City High] she would make sure I was doing fine.”

Sub-theme 1:3: Communication/belief in student. Positive Interaction and/or Relationship with an Adult did not always take the form of an elaborate, time-consuming, long-lasting relationship. Six (60%) of the participants described teacher communication and/or statements of encouragement or belief from teacher toward participant that had a significant impact on their high school experience leading to belief in themselves. Many of these interactions were in the form of seemingly small gestures and or comments. Participant 4 described an interaction that took place in her Advanced Placement Psychology course, a course in which she was the only minority student and felt a lack of belonging and isolation in the class. During a particular lesson, the class was discussing careers in the field of psychology and behavioral profiling, when the teacher stopped,

pointed to her and stated, “‘You could do something like that, that’s all psychology based,’ and I was like, ‘Oh, that would be so awesome.’” During the interview she went on to describe how this short interaction began a chain of thoughts including, belief in self, career possibilities, and thoughts that the teacher “believes in me—that I *could* [emphasis added] do it.”

One graduate who had been recently expelled was reinstated and described feeling disconnected and explained to this interviewer how one seemingly small teacher/coach interaction changed his high school experience. Participant 6 described his astonishment: “He *actually* [emphasis added] talked to me and made me try out for soccer.” He further described the positive adult and student relationships that were established by being a member of the team and the associated feelings that accompany. Participant 9 shared a similar experience with related thoughts that resulted from the adult interaction: “And I thought they actually want me, that I can actually go-, like it actually made me think that I had a choice to go. Like I can actually do it.”

Sub-theme 1:4: Adult that could relate. Five (50%) of the graduates shared the importance of an adult that could relate to their circumstances, culture, and/or personal experiences. Participant 6 explained:

Um, well, there was, uh, the principal here, he was Latino. Well, he would always talk to us in Spanish, to all the people, like, in the hallways and stuff. And he would be nice about it, and he would always talk to us about how he didn’t want us to be in trouble because he didn’t want Latinos to look bad in front of all the people, the white people and stuff, and, um, he was really nice and he was always giving advice to us Latinos. So it is always nice to have someone that speaks the same language just because, just because of all the things we go through so Because he knew where I was coming from, like he could understand anything, and well, he would always talk to us in Spanish, you know, when nobody was around, you know. He was, like I said, he was like a friend, not like a teacher. We wouldn’t see him like that because he would make you feel comfortable

talking, just like talking to him. Yeah, because he was, I mean we would be in trouble but at least he would talk to us about the things that we did, why did that happen, and we talked to him; we would talk them through, we talk to him as if he was our friend.

Participant 9 explained what happened when he reached out to his principal and how this impacted his thought process and decision making regarding dropping out of high school:

I wanted to drop out, but I texted Principal J. He just told me what he'd been through in life, and the people in his life that made it still. Instead of doing what I wanted to do, just get out of school and be gang banging and make money that way, the wrong way. And then he made me think about it the right way.

Sub-theme 1:5: A non-judgmental adult. Eight (80%) participants spoke of the importance of an adult that was open-minded, non-judgmental, and accessible.

Participant 9 explained:

Ms. Assistant [pseudonym to maintain anonymity] helped me by keeping her office open when I needed help. Everything she could help me with she would help me with. Mrs. Teacher 1 [pseudonym] did the same thing. And if I ever got in trouble or something if ever I needed to go talk to somebody or put my side instead of just the teacher's side 'cause you know everyone always takes the teacher's side, but like Mrs. Teacher 2 [pseudonym] would actually listen to my side sometimes. So like Mr. Principal [pseudonym] would actually listen to my side. It just helps me when they actually listen to you instead of just taking the teacher's side.

Participant 8 described her relationship with her mentor as a non-judgmental, reciprocal relationship in which they both learned from each other, developed trust, and support.

Participant 8 explained:

She was very open-minded and she listened to me and she wanted to learn. She even told me one time "I'm learning from you just as much as you are learning from me," and like I told her everything I poured myself out to her because I could trust her and I think that was the biggest thing, just even with a lot of students they don't trust people . . . she didn't judge me or judge my lifestyle you know like it was okay coming into you know our dirty apartment or she was very understanding.

Sub-theme 1:6: Positive teacher experience. Six (60%) of the participants in this study described positive experiences within the classroom setting, including engaging instruction, welcoming environment, and teacher-student interactions.

Participant 2 described her experience: “Teachers made class fun/engaging. . . . They were just, I felt like they were so charismatic, and they made it fun, they didn’t make it just about the work. Because they actually kind of like talked to everyone. They didn’t just signal out people.”

Participant 10 further explained:

Just the school is not that big of a school so I got closer to people. Every teacher really bonds with the students. . . . If you need help usually they’ll come early or stay late for you. If I had problems, I had tutors, she would come in and we would work together, and go to our classes if we needed help reading. I liked our teachers there, at the high school, and I actually liked school. So it made it better for like you to go.

Sub-theme 1:7: Exposure to opportunities. Six (60%) of the participants described being exposed to opportunities that influenced their decision to stay in school and most importantly planted the seed of possibilities. Participant 1 shared his experience, “I started doing college visits. Talking to schools, but that was another eye opener. Like maybe I do have a chance to go to college.” Participant 9 shared a similar experience: “It showed me there was more to life than dropping out. And it helped that coaches helped me find a way to college. He showed me the way to college that helped me a lot.”

Essence (Meaning) of Theme 1: Positive Interaction and Relationship with an Adult. Ultimately, the participants desire a meaningful, caring, open, and honest relationship. They valued the adults that allowed them to use their voice, an adult who “listened” to them, valued them “as a person,” and cared for them without conditions.

They value a person who will not judge them, will be open-minded, takes interest in them, and exposes them to opportunities, and, most importantly, someone who takes time to “get to know them” and will believe in them no matter what—a person who will help them believe in themselves.

Theme 2 – Thoughts of Dropping Out/Giving Up

Eight (80%) of the 10 participants described thoughts of dropping out of high school or “giving up.” The purpose and/or motivation leading to the thoughts of dropping out were dependent on the individual and their circumstance.

Sub-theme 2:1: Monetary purposes. Two (20%) of the participants discussed the importance of working, and did so while attending school and without thoughts of dropping out. Other participants clearly articulated thoughts of dropping out of school for monetary purposes. Participant 1 expressed the desire to drop out of high school to work full time in order to afford material items: “Trying to make as much money as I could . . . when you see other people that have nice cars and nice things you just want that.” These thoughts were reinforced and magnified by his reality of the possibility to break the cycle of poverty with little support from family members. He explained, “Why am I wasting my time going to school if I’m just going to end up like the others. I might as well start working now—I had two jobs. I’ll be working as much, maybe a little less, but I mean I’d be on my own anyways.”

Participant 9’s contemplation of dropping out was twofold, he honestly explained: “I just wanted to go to the gang life and make money through the gang life which is only selling drugs or robbing people.” He further explained the H-Gang [pseudonym used to

maintain anonymity] was “like his family.” Therefore, he could be with his “family” and make money simultaneously.

Sub-theme 2:2: Difficulty/loss of interest in school. Four (40%) of the participants described times in which they felt a loss of interest in school. Participant 3 had difficulty clearly identifying the precipitating factors leading up to her thoughts of dropping out of school. She explained:

I think it was like my tenth, my sophomore, or junior year. I was like ready to like give up, and, I like, I don’t know what happened . . . well, I didn’t stop going cuz like my parents made me go to school, but like, I just really didn’t want to come anymore just because! I don’t know! I feel like it was really hard for me, or, I don’t know I really don’t know what it was. I was just like, I didn’t want to come! But then in the back of my head I’m still like, “Oh, your brother didn’t graduate, so you kinda have to do this” and like, I don’t know so I just told a church mentor . . . then I got focused.

Participant 4 clearly articulated the stress of high school as factors leading to her thoughts of leaving school. She stated,

And just like with the stress of school and then having to deal with people always saying like little smart comments, I was like, you know, I’m sick of this. I was never the point where I want to dropout; it was the point where I want to leave this school kind of thing and go somewhere else. Somewhere else like where there is more like acceptance I would say.

It is difficult to speculate if the “grass would have been greener on the other side” per se. However, it is evident that high school was a negative stressor in her life.

Sub-theme 2.3: Personal crisis. Six (60%) of the participants could clearly explain the precipitating factors that led to their thoughts, or desire, for wanting to drop out of school. Participant 7, for example, articulated that his desire to drop out of high school stemmed from notification that his family may be deported back to Mexico. He explained:

Umm, it was pretty rough because my mindset was like well there's nothing we can do now cuz we are leaving. And then I mean I didn't really care anymore because like there's no point of me trying if I'm gonna end up leaving anyways. And then towards the end she had to go meet with an officer in Detroit and I didn't go with her the second time. And then he was telling her cuz he had kids and they were Mexican as well and he was like "I will give you guys till like June 20th so your kids can finish school and then you guys can leave."

Fortunately, Participant 7's parents were able to find arrangements for him to stay with another family within the district while they went back to Mexico in June.

Essence (Meaning) of Theme 2: Thoughts of Dropping Out. Various precipitating factors led up to thoughts of dropping out. Many participants contemplated dropping out due to a lack of culturally relevant curriculum. Finding employment and avoiding "wasting time sitting in class" was mentioned several times. Others used dropping out as a means to escape the environment, the negative, racially motivated comments, the marginalization, and the persistent messages of failure and lack of worth. And yet others felt they had no other choice but to drop out based on their circumstances.

Theme 3 – Cross Cultural Risk Taking

Eight (80%) of the 10 participants identified taking risks by communicating, socializing, and or stepping out of their comfort zone in regard to meeting new peers, particularly non-Hispanic peers. Participant 2 recalled her first Advanced Placement course, which was composed primarily of non-Hispanic students:

Oh, when I first started taking like advanced or AP classes. None of my friends were in there so I just had to go in there and talk to new people and then the course work I couldn't ask them for help because they weren't in there. They were all in regular courses. That was really challenging. I feel like we did not have much in common but we still wanted to talk and get to know each other. Like I said we didn't have much in common. Like if it was a girl I feel we'd have more in common because we're both girls. But if it was like there was a guy in the project he would just kinda like say "Okay, well, you have to do this and this and we have to finish the project." It'd be more, more along like . . . it be more focused on the schoolwork.

Participant 2 continued to share that all contacts that were made remained in the realm and context of the Advanced Placement setting and course work. Conversations regarding personal lives, cultures, traditions, or families were not discussed.

Participant 1 described stepping out of his “comfort zone” as a highlight of high school. He reflected,

Umm, I don’t know, I guess meeting new people, like finally getting out of my comfort zone and talking to other people. Umm, it helped me out now, and then it didn’t but now that everybody’s out of high school and doing their own thing. I have a lot of people to talk to and got real close.

Participant 6 reflected how making the varsity soccer team changed his view of non-Hispanic students. “Well, um, I met like new white people and that like really, they were really nice about things and, you know, we all got along.” Participant 7 described his high school highlights as “meeting new people.”

Essence (Meaning) of Theme 3: Cross Cultural Risk Taking. Eighty percent of the participants in this study had the courage to take risks outside of their comfort zone. By interacting, socializing, communicating with “White” students, participants were able to find commonalities. These students had the courage to step out of their current community and step into a different community of students. This provided access to multiple identities by becoming members of more than one community. These risks enabled friendships that often bridged two different worlds. Those who stayed within the academic setting and boundaries were able to interact and communicate but did not establish the level of friendships as those who chose to share their personal lives beyond the classroom.

Theme 4 – Feeling I Belong

Eight (80%) of the 10 participants described a Feeling of Belonging at some point, typically near the end of their high school career. A sense of belonging is defined by participants as being involved in either an organized extra-curricular activity or club, and/or participation in school events.

Sub-theme 4:1: Athletics and extra-curricular activities. Six (60%) of the participants described being involved in athletics and/or extra-curricular activities. Participant 6 explained how athletics impacted his overall high school experience: “Another really good thing that I played soccer, like, in my senior year, so I really enjoyed talking to people my senior year, and it was a really good experience here at [City High].”

Participant 9 described his sport team as a “family.” He further explained, “When it comes to a sports team you’re like family; especially with football coaches. Especially with Coach Football [pseudonym to maintain anonymity] and the manager, they were really nice. And they actually got on you when you weren’t in school.”

Sub-theme 4:2: Participation in school events. Involvement in school events and activities was a common sub-theme for participants in this study. Seven (70%) of the participants expressed participation and involvement in school activities and events as a highlight of their high school career. Participant 5 explained further: “Positive things that stick out was like when we all went to football games, basketball games. I mean we all kind a participated together and we all just kinda had fun as a class pretty much. That’s what I enjoyed the most.” Participant 10 agreed: “All the activities, you like do—pep

assemblies when we're all together. Football games, when we got our presentations for the year"

Essence (Meaning) of Theme 4: Feeling I Belong. Actively participating in school events and activities creates a sense of belonging and naturally establishes a support system composed of peers. Participation builds a sense of confidence, acceptance, and recognition. Participants who were involved in school-related activities described a sense of community and a sense of belonging. Many in this study stated the need for more extra-curricular activities to "bring the whole school together" as a recommendation to improve school climate, culture, and a greater sense of belonging.

Theme 5 – Difficulty Transitioning to High School

Eight (80%) of the 10 participants described a difficult transition to high school for various reasons. Some described conflicts with other students, loss of friends, and/or change in friend groups, while some struggled with becoming accustomed to the high school structure.

Sub-theme 5:1: Conflicts with students. Five (50%) of the participants described conflicts with students during their first two years of high school. Participant 1 recalled the difficulties: "My first year in high school I had a lot of problems with other, like, students." Participant 4 further explained, "Some people were nice and down to earth and then the others kept poking fun at that. I know not to associate myself with them but with these people who are actually making high school enjoyable not just poking fun at the fact that I'm in all these honor classes."

Sub-theme 5:2: Change in friendships. Three students (30%) identified change in friendships during their transition to high school. Participant 2 explained her

experience with the loss and change in friendships: “You got here and you could see who were your real friends and who just kind of like needed someone in middle school to kind of just hang out with.” Participant 8 added,

I realized who are my true friends and who aren’t my true friends. With me talking differently, acting differently . . . maybe hang around the same people but that, that’s tricky because you are who you hang out with so, um, I’ve just kinda put distance from those people.

Sub-theme 5:3: Structural. Four (40%) of the students identified difficulty until they were accustomed to the high school culture, setting, and expectations. Participant 7 explained, “I want to say over all it was pretty good. The first two years were kind of rough and then as time went on I got accustomed to the way high school worked so my last two years went pretty well.”

Essence (Meaning) of Theme 5: Difficulty Transitioning to High School. The transition from middle school to high school is extremely challenging. Students felt lost and did not know who to seek out for assistance in problem solving. It takes one to two years for students to establish a comfort level in which they could navigate the system and advocate for themselves. More supports are needed due to students feeling lost, helpless, and isolated. Students felt deserted by their peer group and betrayal based on changing identity issues and trying to figure out where one belongs.

Theme 6 – Teacher Persistence

Eight (80%) of the participants stated teacher persistence as a contributing factor to their success. Teacher persistence was described as teachers pushing them to complete work, to re-take tests, staying after for assistance, and others as described in the following section.

Participant 3 recalled her experience:

I think the teachers I had were like a really good influence. I would always just like give up so easily, so that they would like just keep pushing me and push me until like I don't know and they motivated me to do better, I guess (p. 1). They just kept pushing me to do stuff so that's like how they influenced, influenced me but there was like this one teacher who like at first I didn't like but, she was like my English teacher, um, and like we butt heads a lot but like she still like, like made me keep going . . . she doesn't give up easily . . .

Participant 5 remembered how teachers pushing changed his perception of a D:

Sometimes a couple of teachers would be like, "Hey, you know you've got this grade and if you only retook this test or turn this in then, you know, you would be bumped up to a higher grade," or whatever and before I'd be like, "Oh, well, I'm passing so I'm fine," you know what I mean. I felt like if it's at a D or above I'm fine, I'm okay.

Essence (Meaning) of Theme 6: Teacher Persistence. Participants want accountability and teachers to take the time to notice them. When teachers take time to reach out to a student, they are demonstrating care and belief in that student. Students might state that they do not need the assistance or behave as if they do not care; however, they are attempting to test limits to see how far one will go before giving up on them. Their perception of a teacher is determined by how much a teacher pushes and whether they give up or not.

Theme 7 – Messages, Norms, and Processes that Marginalize

Various challenges were identified and described by eight (80%) of the participants in this study. The challenges that were most prominent entailed cultural differences, such as feelings of segregation and/or isolation, experiences of racial comments, and implicit bias. It should be noted that many themes overlap.

Sub-theme 7:1: Segregation. Segregation was a common theme, which emerged in eight (80%) of the interviews. Participant 8 described her experience of being placed in an alternative program within the high school setting and associated feelings: "I felt like

an outcast cuz you were put in a room and then you're at the high school and these people are all regular high school students so everyone is like, oh, 'they're bad.'" Participant 10 recalled, "When they like set groups up we were like separated. Other people didn't bring people in the mix, so the group is mostly Hispanic." Participant 8 concurred: "I still remember being like a sophomore and like the classes ahead they all had their own groups and everything. Mostly there were like the Hispanics, the whites, the blacks."

Participant 8 described segregation based on social-economic status:

. . . not feeling like you belong, not feeling comfortable, um, how should—let's just say it how, it is you see all of the white kids at City High [pseudonym to maintain anonymity] and they all have money they are all driving nice jeeps and here you are sitting all alone. . . . They would all leave for lunch and you got to stay for lunch.

Participant 8 continued by explaining the "hostility" due to racial segregation:

Um, well, I hung out with the same group of people and we were all minorities except one of my friends who was like half, but, um, and then you know, everyone stand, would stand in their own like area, you know, the red hall and, yeah, um, I don't know you could just feel the hostility and you know you were different.

Participant 4 recalled her experience in her Advanced Placement course:

Because of the fact that I was in AP and Honors like I did feel left out just because of the comments they would make and how they would always all just hang out and me not just necessarily off to the corner but just like . . . I would hang out with the other races. Like we would be like, yeah, we can go study down town, we can go do this. But as far as the white kids no. They planned their own thing or do their own thing and not worry about anyone else.

Sub-theme 7:2: Racial comments. Three (30%) of the participants described their experience regarding racial comments in which they endured. Participant 4 recalled her experience in Advanced Placement courses, specifically racial comments and her feelings associated with her experience:

And the way they made it seem like I shouldn't be in those classes. So like that kind of made me want to like show even more, "no I do need to be in these classes." These are the classes I need to be taking. Just because we are not the same skin color or because my mother was not born here doesn't make a difference. At one point I mentioned that my first year was paid for and someone was like, "Oh, it's because you are Mexican." Then I was like no it's because I have the grades as well. It's not just because of my skin color or because I'm Mexican.

Participant 2 recalled a similar experience: "Then when we did talk about race in those classes . . . they would always make some funny joke about any other race because there were only white people in those classes." Participant 2 recollected a time when the teacher blatantly ignored racial comments made by students: "But I know that in one my other classes they hear all the stereotypes cause we talk about them. But they [teachers] don't say anything."

Sub-theme 7:3: Implicit bias. The Kirwin Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity ("Understanding Implicit Bias," 2015) defines implicit bias as "our attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner." Six (60%) of the participants in this study described situations in which they felt they were treated differently based on stereotypes and race. Situations were not limited to students, but teachers, staff, and administrators as well. Several participants shared their frustration with the process for course selection, the challenges to be placed in advanced classes, and their perception of being de-valued and incapable as part of the process.

Participant 2 shares her thoughts regarding peers, scheduling into classes, and tracking, "I think they weren't pushed hard enough . . . thinking 'yeah you can probably take this class.' I don't think they were given that option since they were put into that second group. . . . But we weren't really encouraged when we were signing up for

classes.” Participant 2 recalled her experience with a counselor when attempting to enroll in an additional Advanced Placement course:

From the high school I felt like when we were separated into those two groups that kind of had an impact. Because I would try . . . well, I had one incident I was signing up for classes and I was like “Oh, yeah, I think I can sign up for another AP class,” so I signed up for an AP Bio and an AP . . . AP English and an AP Calc. And I wanted to try seeing if I could sign up for like . . . I thought it was like an AP Psychology or something or sociology but Mrs. Counselor [pseudonym to maintain anonymity] said “I don’t think you should start with that many. I think you should lower it down to two since you had one last year.” So I was just like “Oohhh.”

During her disclosure of this event, Participant 2 became distraught and emotional. The interview was stopped for several minutes in order for her to regain composure. I reminded her of the right to withdraw from the interview without penalty at any time. She chose to continue with the interview once she regained her composure. She further explained that the incident was extremely painful, as she knew she was capable of several AP classes; however, the counselor did not “believe in her.”

Participant 10 described actions of one of her teachers: “She would laugh more with her kids, and we’d have like down time. We wouldn’t talk before, she wouldn’t talk to us but like to the preps.” She further explained, “I think we are looked down on. Like people think all Hispanics are going to drop out. So then we are not really motivated to keep going. Like they think I’m going to drop out because I’m not that good.”

Essence (Meaning) of Theme 7: Messages, Norms, and Processes that Marginalize. In all honesty, this theme was the most difficult for both the participant and for me as a researcher, alumni, and employee of City High. When describing their “lowlights” of their high school experience, many, if not most, of the participants became extremely emotional. I had to stop the tape for one participant as she sobbed describing

how a counselor denied her the opportunity to take Advanced Placement courses as she desired. I listened as they expressed pain, sadness, and frustration. The overall essence is they felt City High did not afford them with their right to an equal education. Some stated, “This school is racist,” they are inferior, looked down upon, and the climate and culture is one that not only condones, but reinforces biases, stereotypes, and marginalization.

Theme 8 – Realization after Significant Experience

Seven (70%) of the 10 participants had a significant experience within the school setting or within their personal lives, which led to the realization of the importance of high school graduation.

Sub-theme 8:1: Personal – home related. . Five (50%) of the participants shared a personal significant experience which impacted their decision to stay in school.

Participant 8 shared her experience when visiting her mother in Mexico shortly after her mother was deported:

[Visiting mom in Mexico], was a reality check. It was kind of another motive to do even better like I had never left the country before, the United States, it was like little kids walking around with no shoes on, walking around with trash all around. Made me appreciate things here more, um, for sure made me appreciate everything that I have, despite the situation that I was in at that time.

Participant 6 shares his thoughts after working in the fields for close to a year with his parents, as a result of an expulsion from school:

I didn't want to keep doing that. I DON'T want to keep doing this the rest of my life, because right now I'm working full time too. Well, cuz, uh, my parents. Well, they've been working their whole lives, just for us, like me and my brother, their whole life. And I don't want to be working my whole life like them and then not have anything.

Sub-theme 8.2: Personal – school experience. Five (50%) of the participants described a school experience which influenced their decision to stay in school.

Participant 5 described the time in which she realized she was credit deficient, which may result in placement in an alternative education program or being sent back to resident district. Stated the following:

I found out that I did not have enough credits. Like sophomore year when they had told me I did not have enough credits and that I could make it if I passed every class. Mrs. Counselor [pseudonym to maintain anonymity] said, “From here on out if you pass every class you know then you will be able to make it but there’s like you know . . . however, many classes that you don’t pass either VR Tech or you know you are gonna have to go to possibly to your home district,” or whatever she said. I guess it kind of scared me, you know what I mean and it pushed me.

Sub-theme 8.3: Goal setting after significant experience. Six (60%) of the participants described setting goals after their significant experience. Participant 1 described how he set goals following his return from an expulsion and working in the fields with his parents:

After my second year, I really wanted to finish high school and have my diploma, so I started to—I tried my best in my classes and I started working so I had my grades up in my classes. I didn’t pass the previous year and, um, I just, it was hard for me to finish it, but I finished it.

Participant 5 realized, “I kinda found out you know I had to straighten up, fix myself up. Get a better grade point average, get into college, that’s when that really started kicking in.”

Essence (Meaning) of Theme 8: Realization after a Significant Experience.

Seventy percent of the participants had a significant event in their life, which forced them to reflect on their current path, re-route, and set goals. This event encouraged them to begin to think critically about the choices they were making, the implication of those

choices, and changes that needed to be made to get them in the direction leading to the outcomes they desired. This significant event was a “wake-up call,” per se, for most of these participants. Some were given a second opportunity to succeed and they made an assertive (some aggressive) effort for a comeback. They will explain it was not easy, but with hard work they did it.

Theme 9 – Support Group

Seven (70%) of the participants indicated they had a positive, influential, support system of either adults, or students, in which to discuss issues, problem solve, and seek out for guidance. Support systems also served as a sense of belonging, to build self-confidence, and self-worth.

Participant 4 shared the encouragement and support she received from peers, family members, and how it impacted her motivation to continue:

He'd always be like, you know, you're smart, you can do this, don't let the stupid little comments bug you. Show them that they are wrong. You have all this people supporting that believe in you, keep going. It's kind of like you don't want to disappoint kind of thing. Like because so many people believe in you so many support you I feel I don't want to let them down. I want to keep going and keep bettering myself.

Essence (Meaning) of Theme 8: Support Group. Surround yourself with positive peers and adults that will support you, listen, and provide productive and sound feedback. This support group serves as a sounding board, problem-solving support, and a resource for strategies and skill building. They provide positive feedback, validation, and assist in building self-confidence.

Findings Applied to Research Questions

Research Sub-question 1

What factors lead to the success of Latinos who graduate? How did these factors come to be part of the student's experience and how do the students describe their response to these factors?

Emergent themes indicative of success in school include Positive Interaction and/or Relationship with an Adult, Feelings of Belonging, Teacher Persistence, Risk Taking, A Support Group, and Realization after a Significant Event.

According to the data, the largest factor leading to successful high school completion was Positive Interaction and/or Relationship with an Adult and/or a relationship. The extent, duration, frequency, and type of interaction varied from graduate to graduate. Some graduates described long-term relationships in the form of a teacher-student mentorship, a formal mentorship initially established via a community agency, or an adult family member. Others described interactions with adults who provided structure, accountability, and belief in the student.

Participant 8 described the importance and impact of her adult relationship:

I didn't have a lot of like role models honestly I didn't have a lot of support, um, no so as far as education goes that was on me. It still is all me. But my mentor was a really big influence positive influence on my life, like she introduced a lot . . . she showed me, "like I got this other thing that you can do. . . . You know you don't have to get in trouble like there is other things that you can do to occupy your time like. . . ." She showed me that like, um, just, we would do different things. . . . We'd go through goals, and I told her that my goal was, my goal was to graduate from high school, and to attend college and she helped me through that.

Most participants, similar to Participant 8, described a positive adult who had a significant influence in their lives. They often referred to this adult as their role model, mentor, coach, problem solver, confidant, and/or someone they could trust.

Other participants described small, short interactions, which were frequent in duration ultimately demonstrating care and belief in the student. During an interview, one participant shared her frustration and dislike for a particular teacher yet acknowledged that it was that particular teacher “that made me keep going . . .” (Participant 3) during a time in which the participant “wanted to give up.”

A need for a warm welcoming, non-judgmental, engaging, and safe classroom environment emerged, according to the data. Participants attributed this environment, or positive teacher experience, to the adult within the classroom or setting. They described classroom settings in which teachers and/or adult interactions were positive, classes that were engaging, fun, teachers that were “charismatic and made class fun,” teachers who were there to support them, push them, and most importantly, saw them “as a person.”

Table 7 below summarizes the statements from the participants’ description of the positive adult that had an influence in their lives and the impact it had on them.

Table 7

Teacher Behaviors and Student Impact as Described by Student Participants

Teacher Behaviors	Impact on Student
Teachers who pushed and never gave up	Build confidence in me
Teachers who believed in me	I started believing in myself
Made me think “maybe I can do that some day”	It made me think of all the possibilities and start setting goals
Had an open door not matter what!	I knew they were there for me

Table 7—Continued

Teacher Behaviors	Impact on Student
Never judged, even when I acted hard	I knew they cared unconditionally
Viewed me as a person	I knew they cared unconditionally
Actually talked to me	Felt like I was important
A friend	Trust
Non-judgmental	Not racist
Supportive	There for me
Encouraging	Believed in me.
Helped me out a lot	Taught me compassion
Came in early, stayed late although they had a family	Taught me I was worth it.
We'd work together	Taught me to work as a team.
Teachers who helped me set goals	Taught me how to set goals.
Teachers helped me problem solve	Taught me how to problem solve.
Spoke my language	They understood me.
Listened to my side of the story when in trouble.	Taught me fairness, honesty, and ownership.
They actually talked to us and got to know who we are	Taught me that not all white teachers are racist
Motivating me not to give up	Taught me, I could do it with perseverance
Made class fun and engaging	Made me love class and learning
Latino Role Model	If he did it, so can I
Although he was busy, he took time to be in the halls and actually talk to us	He cares about us, we are important
Held me accountable	Taught me responsibility
Treated me as a person	I began to think "I'm worth it"
Gave me a 2 nd chance	He wasn't going to give up on me
Provided options	Let me choose, thus it is on me
Listened to me, wanted to learn from me, and about me	Learned I have something to offer.

Participants also described Teacher Persistence (Theme 6) as a factor leading to their success by providing opportunities. Participant 7 explained, “The teachers there were very helpful. They push you to do better. To turn in your work they give you a lot of opportunities.” Participant 10 described a similar teacher experience at the local Careerline Tech Center: “My teachers from tech center helped like with our goals. Like if we weren’t doing too good, she would give us other options.”

A Feeling of Belonging (Theme 4) and a Support Group (Theme 9) were factors that participants described as part of their experience leading to positive outcomes. These factors provided a network of resources in the form of coaches and peers who could relate to their experiences, have common interests while providing guidance and support. Participant 2 spent most of her day in Advanced Placement classes. When asked what specific things influenced and affected her experience at City High, she described a sense of belonging while spending lunch time with Latino peers as illustrated in the comments below:

I would feel like culture really did because I feel like I kind of hung out with the Hispanic kids. I think mainly because we are so similar like we could just joke around with our parents being like overly religious and like being strict and we could just relate a lot more.

Some students found a sense of belonging and support systems by crossing cultural barriers in the form of Risk Taking (Theme 3). Thus, meeting new people, trying new activities and/or clubs and creating multi-cultural relationships formed an environment where students felt empowered. When asked to describe some of the highlights of high school, Participant 7 explained how trying out for soccer and a supportive coach made a significant positive impact despite his parents recently getting deported. He made the following observation:

Being on the soccer teams. It was just like the relationships that were made with some of the boys on the team and then winning districts my senior year and the coaches. I would say it was going to my junior year. It was just right after that had happened with my parents I was living with [another family] and soccer tryouts were coming up and I was not going to go to it. And it was two weeks after soccer tryouts and I had a friend of mine and he had told Coach everything that happened and Coach said even though it's passed—like the tryouts time—bring him and I'll give him the tryouts. . . . even though like he didn't come to tryouts stuff.

Participant 7 shared how he continues to have a close relationship with this coach and he continues to assist this student at the Citywide Summer Soccer Camps.

Participant 7 experienced a realization after a significant event (Theme 8). He shared how he “didn't really care . . . we were in the process of moving so like that just like, well, I mean I'm moving so I might well not even try. Which made that year even worst than the year before.” He then considered the sacrifices made by his parents and chose to put forth effort leading to graduation. Table 8 summarizes the themes in relation to research sub-question 1.

Table 8

Factors That Lead to the Success of Latinos Who Graduate, How the Factors Come to Be Part of the Student's Experience, and How Students Describe Their Response to These Factors

Themes (Factors)	Percentage
Theme 1: Positive Interaction and/or Relationship with an Adult	100%
Theme 3: Risk Taking	80%
Theme 4: Feelings of Belonging	80%
Theme 6: Teacher Persistence	80%
Theme 8: Realization after a Significant Event	70%
Theme 9: Support Group	70%

Research Sub-question 2

What is the graduate's perception of self, school, and success?

Eight of the 10 participants (80%) described a difficult transition to high school (Theme 5). When participants were asked to describe these challenges, they reported experiencing implicit bias, negative racial comments, and/or a negative experience with an adult staff member within the school setting. These events led participants to perceive lack of belief from the adults and within the graduate themselves, thus resulting in a negative self-perception and dislike for school. Consequently, these negative experiences, coupled with the risk factors associated with the Latino high school dropout population, increased the likelihood of emergent thoughts of dropping out of high school. Not surprisingly, 80% of the graduates disclosed they had contemplated dropping out (Theme 2), or leaving City High during this transition. Within a minimum of two years, most participants had support systems, and/or other factors, leading to success (described under research question #1 as illustrated in Table 8).

Several of the participants' reflection revealed a significant change in perception of the definition of "success." During the difficult transition from middle school to high school success was defined as dropping out and "trying to make as much money" as possible (Participant 1) to changes in their thought patterns of the possibility of not only high school completion but goals of attending a college. In addition, students who actively participated in school events described a positive sense of belonging, thus creating a positive self-perception, perception of school, and success. It goes without saying, the increased number of factors leading to success that are present (Table 8), the more favorable and positive the descriptors of their high school experience, thus the more

positive their self-perception and self-worth. This concept, in addition to the new conceptual framework, will be further elaborated upon in Chapter V.

Research Sub-question 3

In what ways did self-perception and attitude contribute to the decision to stay in school?

The participants in this study validated the correlation between self-perception and attitude. Belief in self and motivation led to increased effort and perseverance. Actively participating in school events and activities creates a sense of belonging and naturally establishes a support system composed of peers. Participation builds a positive self-perception, sense of identity, confidence, and recognition. Success led to success as students realized they were capable of continuing to increase their own expectations of themselves. Participant 8 explains what occurred after she was placed in an alternative education program due to failing all classes the previous year. She reported the following:

I basically just like realized it wasn't a bad thing trying to do good in school you know like it's okay to try to have A's I don't like to brag . . . the only reason that I got through everything was I pushed myself, I got through it. My senior year I made the honor roll.

Participant 4 explained how she used negative comments to motivate her. She stated: "Negative comments kept me going, kept me wanting to be like, yeah, you are wrong, I am capable of this and I will prove you wrong, I will go to school, I will graduate with my class and walk across that stage."

Participant 6 explained his situation after returning from Mexico following a 180-day expulsion, which placed him one full year behind his cohort. He made the following observation:

After my second year, I really wanted to finish high school and have my diploma, so I started to—I tried my best in my classes and I started working so I had my grades up in my classes. I didn't pass the previous year and, um, I just, it was hard for me to finish it, but I finished it. I mean, you feel that you can do it; you feel that you can do anything you want if you really want it!

Research Sub-question 4

How do Latino graduates describe the ways they responded to and overcame the factors that previous studies associate with being at-risk for dropping out, e.g., poverty, cultural differences, parental factors, etc.

In addition to success factors listed previously (Table 8), seven of the 10 participants (70%) had a significant life changing event and/or series of events that occurred in their life. This event forced self-reflection, ultimately leading to changes in thought patterns, goals, and behavior choices. Participant 1 explained his thought process upon discovering he was going to be a father: He quipped:

I don't know, Just seeing my parents going in and out of jail; seeing my friends in and out of jail. I knew that wasn't the lifestyle I wanted. Especially knowing I was going to be a father someday. And then it came sooner than I thought, change had to come quick. I don't know, I just, I picked and chose what situations I was willing to put myself in. . . . So I knew I had to kind of step away from I guess you could say living carelessly. I realized ok you're gonna be a father, you have to set examples for your son or daughter, whichever is on the way. Which she preferred a daughter, but, yeah, I just needed to, I needed to become someone; better than just another person that drops out.

Participant 1 began taking Advanced Placement classes, graduated from City High, and proceeded to attend and play college football for a local four-year college.

Participant 8 shared her thoughts to provide an understanding of how she overcame and responded to her mother's unexpected deportation:

We literally lost everything it was really unexpected. Like to some people those things are expected, like okay, it might happen it might not happen but it was really uncalled for um, so that hit me hard. I was just getting in trouble just hanging around with the wrong people. But I decided to change things because I

was like you know I have little sisters. . . . I didn't want to disappoint my dad like I wanted to, I wanted him to be proud of me you know just to show him, hey, your hard work pays off your kids aren't gonna do you this way . . . I wanted to prove to him I was thankful for everything that he had done for me and I wasn't gonna make his life more difficult that it already was. So I realized I didn't like the way I was living here I didn't like the way things are now. I want to make a difference I don't want to be a statistic no more, I wanted to be different . . . and still be myself but it doesn't mean you can't . . . be successful.

Most of the participants contribute their success to hard work, motivation to break the cycle of poverty, wanting to give back to their parents and family members, and support from a positive adult influence.

Participants in this study were also asked to share their thoughts and suggestions on what can be done to improve the Latino graduation rates based on their experiences. Their thoughts and suggestions will be discussed in Chapter V.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this research study was to investigate the phenomenon of Latino students who successfully completed high school in a school district with significantly lower graduation rates as compared to their non-Latino peers. This study sought to delve deeper into where and how these students experienced both inhibiting and contributing factors to high school completion, and how they actually overcame inhibiting (or negative) factors to the point that enabled them to persist in the school environment until they graduated. The results of this study indicated there were several contributing factors that influenced these students' decision to persevere and graduate from high school despite having detracting factors that are closely associated with those who dropped out of high school.

Participants described difficulty transitioning into the high school setting. Conflicts with peers, loss and change in friendships, and difficulty navigating and adopting to a new setting were struggles they shared. The first two years were the most trying for most. Their voices told stories filled with hurt, sadness, hopelessness, and despair. Many had significant events that compounded the negative day-to-day judgments, stereotypes, and marginalization they endured. Most suffered in silence by “ignoring it” in hopes it would cease. While others vocalized their thoughts of racism and prejudice only to find it made “things worse.”

Eighty percent of the participants shared thoughts of “giving up” and/or dropping out during their high school career. Most persisted by surrounding themselves with a positive peer support group, positive adult interaction, and cross cultural risk taking. Cross cultural risk taking is described as meeting new “White” people, participating in athletics, extra-curricular activities, or high school events in which diverse, multi-cultural populations interact and cross both cultural and social barriers.

According to the response of participants in this study, the largest factor leading to successful high school completion was positive interaction and/or a relationship with an adult. The extent, duration, frequency, and type of interaction varied from graduate to graduate. Some graduates described long-term relationships in the form of a teacher-student mentorship, a formal mentorship initially established via a community agency, or an adult family member. Others described interactions with adults whom provided structure, accountability, and belief in the student.

Adults served as a confidant, friend, problem-solver, listener, role model, and, most importantly, confidence builder. It was evident that all students had an adult who

believed in them which, in turn, empowered self-confidence. As one student stated, “We need teachers to build us up, not tear us down.”

In the next and final chapter, Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations for further study, the investigator will compare the current findings in relation to the literature review, interpret the findings, present a new conceptual framework, and make recommendations for practice and for further research.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Chapter I provided an overview of the research study including the background and significance of the study. Despite the extensive amount of statistical research and literature which focuses on the dropout epidemic within the United States (Fry & Taylor, 2013; Orfield, Losen, Wald, & Swanson, 2004; Rumberger, 1983), the Latino dropout rate remains stagnant, at best (Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986; Jasinski, 2000; Rumberger, 1987; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). Current research has failed to investigate the reality of Latino students who manage to graduate from high school—even though they share many of the same demographic characteristics as their corresponding counterparts that dropped out of high school before earning a diploma (Mendez-Tavittian, 2013).

This study sought to elicit the voices of 10 Latino students who successfully completed high school in a school district with significantly lower graduation rates for Latinos as compared to their district non-Latino peers. Through their voices, I wanted to understand where and how these students experienced both inhibiting and contributing factors to high school completion, and how they actually overcame inhibiting (or negative) factors to the point that enabled them to persist in the school environment until they graduated. I wanted to create a fuller picture of how Latino students navigate through high school student in a traditionally White-dominated school community despite the increasing percentage of students identifying themselves as Latino.

Additionally, the purpose of this study was to explore the stories of Latino students who were also economically disadvantaged, yet persisted in high school to graduate with their cohort. In doing so, this study considered implications from their stories to develop further insight into their school lives. One overarching question and four sub-questions guided this study. They are as follows:

Overarching Question:

What traits, characteristics, or attributes do these students have that enable them to persist in school that may differ from their corresponding counterparts that did not graduate from high school?

Sub-questions:

1. What factors lead to the success of Latinos who graduate? How did these factors come to be part of the students' experience and how do the students describe their response to these factors?
2. What is the graduate's perception of self, school, and success?
3. In what ways did self-perception and attitude contribute to the decision to stay in school?
4. How do Latino graduates describe the ways they responded to and overcame the factors that previous studies associate with being at-risk for dropping out, e.g., poverty, cultural differences, parental factors, etc.

This study examined the differences in experiences, along with certain demographic variables, that contributed to the achievements of Latino students. The goal was to describe and interpret the lived experiences of these 10 students.

I hoped that these 10 Latino students who overcame the factors that put them at risk for dropping out of school would provide important insights into another set of factors, or characteristics, which are associated with their ability to persist in their education, at least to the point of achieving a high school diploma. Or, the students who participated in this study would shed more light on how Latino students who graduate from high school understand their own experiences with the inhibiting and contributing factors already identified in earlier studies and navigate those experiences toward a successful high school completion.

Chapter II provided historical data of students who dropped out of high school in comparison to students who had successfully completed high school from 2010-2014. The literature review outlined issues Latino students faced up to, including factors, both detracting and contributing, that added to their school success.

Critical race theory as the epistemological frame for this study was explained. The lens of critical race theory was used to analyze the findings of this qualitative research study. As previously mentioned, critical race theory presents a strong lens to analyze qualitative findings (Catlin, 2008). By utilizing a critical race theory lens in combination with a qualitative study, I hoped to underscore not only the importance of race, but also the validity of conducting research within a social justice framework.

Chapter III outlined the research methodology explaining how the research study would be conducted. Two sources of data collection instruments were used for this study: a demographic survey and interviews. The purpose of the demographic survey was to use the information to describe characteristics of each of the 10 participants. In employing a phenomenological approach, the main source of data collection was interviews. The

chapter delineated the methodological framework to be used in this study, including the (a) research design; (b) research method; (c) setting, subjects, access; (d) sampling; (e) participant recruitment and selection; (f) data collection methods; (g) data analysis process and procedures; (h) trustworthiness and ethical considerations; (i) the researcher; and (j) limitations, delimitations, and considerations.

I used an interview protocol (see Appendix C) for my phenomenological interviews with 10 Latino graduates who fit the parameters of the study. Throughout the interviews I probed for more information, if needed, and asked open-ended questions in order to allow the participant to voice thoughts, feelings, and experiences surrounding their high school experiences without hesitation (Patten, 2005). Open-ended questioning also allowed for an open-ended response, hence not leading the participant to answer the question in a certain way, or leading the conversation in a certain direction. This type of questioning allowed each participant to speak freely and openly. The intent of the interview was to capture the participants' stories as naturally as possible.

Each interview was transcribed and then read multiple times. Phenomenological reduction in which the data are clustered around themes was utilized followed by “*structural synthesis*, which calls for the exploration of “all possible meanings and divergent perspectives” (Creswell, 1998, as cited in Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 148). Several themes and sub-themes emerged, which are described in Chapter IV.

The nine major themes that emerged from the 10 participants' transcripts are as follows:

1. Positive Interaction and/or Relationship with an Adult
2. Thoughts of Dropping Out or Giving Up

3. Cross Cultural Risk Taking
4. Feelings of Belonging
5. Difficulty Transitioning to High School
6. Teacher Persistence
7. Messages, Norms, and Processes that Marginalize
8. Realization after Significant Experience
9. Support Group

Chapter IV describes the personal and academic data that each of the 10 participants shared. Each emergent theme and sub-theme, including how each theme and sub-theme relates to each research question, is expounded upon.

Findings Related to Current Literature

A summary of the major findings in relation to the literature is discussed in this section. The focus of this study was on interpreting the meaning of experiences from the perspective of Latino high school graduates. By eliciting insights from Latino students who persist in school to achieve a high school diploma, this study assists in defining issues that need to be addressed for the Latino population in order to improve the likelihood of graduation.

Through personal stories shared by a sample of Latino graduates from City High School, this study examined the perception, thinking, attitudes, and other variables that contribute to Latinos who have graduated from high school that have not been revealed in previous studies.

Table 9 outlines each of the four research questions, the findings that emerged in my study, and the relation of the findings to previous literature.

Table 9

Relation of the Research Findings to Literature Review

Relation of Clawson's (2016) Research Findings to Previous Literature	Literature Review
<p><i>Positive Interaction and/or Relationship with an Adult</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ Trusting adult relationship ~ Communicate belief in student ~ Positive teacher experience 	<p>Aligns with:</p> <p>Croninger and Lee (2001) describe social capital as student's belief about how much their teacher supports their efforts to succeed in school.</p> <p>Kafele (2013) found that it is essential to believe in your students in order to close the achievement gap and promote high school graduation.</p> <p>Lee and Burkam (2003) found that students who feel that they have a positive relationship with their teachers are less likely to drop out of school.</p> <p>Students who feel they are valued and have established positive relationships are less likely to drop out (Blue & Cook, 2004).</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ Accountability—teachers who held students accountable. 	<p>New Findings:</p> <p>No relevant research found.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ Adult that could relate—such as a Latino role model, or an adult that has had the same experiences ~ A non-judgmental adult 	<p>Adds to:</p> <p>Many minority students argue that they experience a high rate of institutional barriers, such as discrimination, low access to resources, feeling unwelcomed, lack of encouragement, a demand to assimilate quickly, being forced to abandon their culture and not being understood by teachers (Carrillo, 2009; Conchas et al., 2012; Croninger & Lee, 2001; Martinez et al., 2004; Velez & Saenz, 2001).</p> <p>A student who develops a positive relationship with school personnel develops a sense of identification with school and school related activities, demonstrating a factor known as school bonding (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009; Cernkovich & Giordano, 1992; Finn, 1989).</p>

Table 9—Continued

Relation of Clawson's (2016) Research Findings to Previous Literature	Literature Review
<p><i>Thoughts of Dropping Out/Giving Up</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ Monetary purposes ~ Difficulty/loss of interest in school due to lack of authenticity ~ Personal issues 	<p>Aligns with:</p> <p>Culturally relevant, caring pedagogy can result in student academic success" (Blue & Cook, 2004)</p> <p>Other detracting factors such as low socioeconomic status, delinquency, having quit school to support the family, teenage pregnancy, family structure, language barrier, and low academic and career expectations (Albert, 1999; Barrera, 2007; Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Kafele, 2013; Milliken, 2007; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2004; Weber, 2011).</p> <p>Many of the older siblings are left no choice but to drop out in order to support their family, either by working or staying home to care for younger siblings while their parent is at work (Dunham & Wilson, 2007; Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Lutz, 2007; Rumberger & Lim, 2008).</p>
<p><i>Cross Cultural Risk Taking</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ Meeting new people (outside own culture) ~ Taking advance courses 	<p>Contradicts:</p> <p>In his study, Rumbaut (Gandara & Contreras, 2009) concluded that assimilation or acculturation might be "counterproductive for educational achievement" (p. 3).</p> <p>Contradicts:</p> <p>Marx (2008) found that teachers and administrators who embrace colorblindness by denying students to take pride in their culture and language, and by forcing them to assimilate has a negative impact on the students' education and may act as a barrier to high school completion. Marx argues that by "purposely avoiding its racial issues it is undoubtedly exacerbating them" (p. 85).</p>
<p><i>Feelings of Belonging</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ Participation in athletics and extra-curricular activities ~ Participation in school events 	<p>Aligns with:</p> <p>Several factors contribute to school connectedness, including, being on a sports team, participating in clubs, having a positive relationship with a teacher, and having a positive relationship with peers (Behnke et al., 2010; Kafele, 2013).</p> <p>Research suggests that there is a relationship between school bonding and academic performance (Barrera, 2007).</p>
<p><i>Difficulty Transitioning to High School</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ Conflicts with other students 	<p>New Findings:</p> <p>No relevant research found.</p>

Table 9—Continued

Relation of Clawson's (2016) Research Findings to Previous Literature	Literature Review
~ Change in friendships	<p>Adds to:</p> <p>The structure and pressure to assimilate in order to be successful “frequently result in psychological, sociological, and economic costs to many Mexican Americans” (Carrillo, 2009, p. 643). “The constant identity performance takes work which white students need not perform, and Latinos suffer as a result (p. 642).</p> <p>They are put in situations where they must choose between their culture and that of the dominant white culture in order to succeed (Carrillo, 2009).</p>
~ Getting used to high school life	<p>Aligns with:</p> <p>Changing classrooms, which is typical of a high school setting, does not bode well to students’ ability to build positive and meaningful relationships with staff. Changing classes frequently, or every hour, does not give the student “ample opportunity to develop the kinds of interpersonal relationships that allows for feelings of support and the confidence to approach teachers with their problems” (Behnke et al., 2010, p. 399).</p>
<i>Teacher Persistence</i>	<p>Adds to:</p> <p>Croninger and Lee (2001) describe social capital as students’ belief about how much their teacher supports their efforts to succeed in school.</p>
~ Teachers not giving up on students.	
~ Assertiveness by teachers	<p>New Findings:</p> <p>No relevant research found.</p>
<i>Messages, Norms, and Processes that Marginalize</i>	<p>Aligns with:</p> <p>Critical race theorists believe that “racial inequalities determine the educational experience of minority children and youth” (Zamudio et al., 2011, p. 16).</p> <p>Many minority students argue that they experience a high rate of institutional barriers, such as discrimination, low access to resources, feeling unwelcomed, lack of encouragement, a demand to assimilate quickly, being forced to abandon their culture and not being understood by teachers (Carrillo, 2009; Conchas et al., 2012; Croninger & Lee, 2001; Martinez et al., 2004; Velez & Saenz, 2001).</p> <p>Student perceptions of teacher ethnic bias have been linked to behaviors, which prevent the social bonding between the student and the teacher (Waymen, 2002).</p>
~ Feelings of segregation	
~ Experience of racial comments and stereotypical behavior	
~ Implicit bias	

Table 9—Continued

Relation of Clawson’s (2016) Research Findings to Previous Literature	Literature Review
	<p>The feelings of discrimination are not only a perception of many youth, but are validated by data, according to the report <i>Discipline Policies, Successful Schools, and Racial Justice</i> (Losen, 2011).</p> <p>These disparities not only lead to feelings of being “pushed out” but also feelings of discrimination (Losen, 2011; Losen & Martinez, 2013; Skiba et al., 2011; Vaggins, 2014).</p>
<i>Realization after a Significant Experience</i>	
~ Home related	<p>New Findings: No relevant research found.</p>
~ School related	<p>New Findings: No relevant research found.</p>
<i>Support Group</i>	<p>Aligns with: Several factors contribute to school connectedness, including, being on a sports team, participating in clubs, having a positive relationship with a teacher, and having a positive relationship with peers (Behnke et al., 2010; Kafele, 2013).</p> <p>Lack of social bonding is a strong contributing factor to a student’s decision to stay in school or to drop out (Barrera, 2007; Capuzzi & Gross, 1993; Catalano et al., 2004; Milliken, 2007; Rumberger, 1983; Waymen, 2002). These students tend to be connected with staff, peers, or involved in an extra-curricular activity (Waymen, 2002).</p> <p>Students who feel alienated from society and do not feel a sense of belonging are more likely to drop out of school (Barrera, 2007; Crockett et al., 2005).</p>
~ Positive, influential support system of adults and/or peers.	

Interpretation of Major Findings

As indicated in Table 9, in relation to the literature review (Chapter II), this study consisted of six findings that aligned to the research, three findings that add to the current research, two contradictions, and four new findings. This section focuses on interpreting the findings, including differences and similarities, as listed in Table 9.

Findings Aligned to the Research

The remaining findings of this phenomenological study were affirmed by the literature review. The most difficult affirmation in regard to the comparison of findings to the literature review was the reality of the extensive amounts of *Messages, Norms, and Processes that Marginalize* students at City High described. Their lived experiences of “segregation,” “negative racially-based comments,” “stereotypical behavior/comments from others,” and “implicit biases” had a significant impact on their lives. This theme emerged in 80% of participants. In the report *Discipline Policies, Successful Schools, and Racial Justice*, Losen (2011) finds the feelings of discrimination are not only a perception of many youth, but are validated by data. Many minority students argue that they experience a high rate of institutional barriers, such as discrimination, low access to resources, feeling unwelcomed, lack of encouragement, a demand to assimilate quickly, being forced to abandon their culture, and not being understood by teachers (Carrillo, 2009; Conchas et al., 2012; Croninger & Lee, 2001; Martinez et al., 2004; Velez & Saenz, 2001).

Student perceptions of teacher ethnic biases have been linked to behaviors, which prevent the social bonding between the student and the teacher (Waymen, 2002), thus perpetuating the cycle of misunderstanding, strengthening cultural barriers, and reinforcing ignorance.

Findings that Add to the Research

An adult that could relate and *a non-judgmental adult* were sub-themes of Positive Interaction and/or Relationship with an Adult. The literature review addresses the value of positive relationships as a contributing factor of student success to high

school completion. However, it falls short of explicitly describing the characteristics of what it looks and feels like, or the meaning of a positive adult relationship. My study expounded and delved deeper into the meaning, characteristics, and qualities of the relationship. Five of the 10 participants described the importance of an adult that could relate to their experiences, situation, or background. Eight of the 10 participants described the importance of having an adult that was non-judgmental. Several qualities of a non-judgmental adult were shared by participants: someone who is open-minded; an adult who listens to their side of the story during disciplinary issues or conflict; an adult who is not quick to pass judgment; and someone who wants to learn about the student and their life, and cares about them as a person.

Teacher Persistence, particularly assertiveness by teachers, was not fully addressed in the literature review. Croninger and Lee (2001) describe social capital as students' belief about how much their teacher supports their efforts to succeed in school. Eighty percent of participants in this study expressed teachers not giving up on them, continuously pushing them to complete missing work, encouraging them to re-take tests or quizzes to improve their grade, and providing additional one-on-one assistance as a contributing factor to their success.

Contradictions

Two contradictions arose when comparing the literature review to this current research study. *Cross Cultural Risk Taking* (Theme 3). Eighty percent of participants described “meeting new people” in the form of structured activities, athletics, or social gatherings as an experience that had a significant positive impact on their lives. Participants described “taking advance courses which ‘forced’ them to step out of their

comfort zone and communicate with students unlike themselves.” One participant commented that meeting non-Hispanic students changed his view of “white people.”

In contrast, Rumbaut (Gandara & Contreras, 2009) concluded that assimilation, or acculturation, might be “counterproductive for educational achievement.” Contrary to his conclusion, all students in this study successfully completed high school.

New Findings

Accountability is a sub-theme of Positive Adult Relationships that emerged in my study. The literature review discusses the importance of positive relationships in the form of Social Bond Theory. However, adults holding students accountable as part of the trusting relationship was absent in the literature. Seven of the 10 participants described adults and/or a positive peer group holding them accountable as a contributing factor to their perseverance. Participants described adults checking in with them weekly, providing support, encouragement, as a means of motivation.

Five of the 10 participants shared that *conflicts with other students* (a sub-theme of Difficulty Transitioning to High School) were an issue they faced upon moving to the high school. Several participants alluded to the fact that conflicts escalated to the point warranting consequences such as suspension and one expulsion. Peer conflicts were not addressed in the literature review yet was present in this study.

Realization after a Significant Experience (Theme 8) was not present in the literature review. Seventy percent (70%) of the participants in this study shared a significant experience, either in their home life, or within the school setting, which prompted self-reflection regarding the initiation of goals related to academics.

New Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is a model that describes the phenomenon in which a person would like to study. It encapsulates the ideas, beliefs, and theories surrounding and informing the research to be investigated (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Jabareen (2009) describes a “conceptual framework as a network, or ‘a plane,’ of interlinked concepts that together provide a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon or phenomena. The concepts that constitute a conceptual framework support one another, articulate their respective phenomena, and establish a framework-specific philosophy” (p. 51).

Maxwell (2005) emphasizes, “The most important thing to understand about your conceptual framework is that it is primarily a conception, or model, of what is out there that you plan to study, and of what is going on with these things and why—a *tentative* [emphasis added] theory of the phenomena that you are investigating” (p. 39).

The initial conceptual framework that bounded this study was guided by the premise that Latino students who experience positive experiences are more likely to build positive relationships, become more engaged, and thus complete high school. In contrast, students who perceive their experiences as negative, will become disengaged, lack trust, begin to withdraw, feel alienated, and begin making choices which lead to negative consequence ultimately reinforcing the cycle of negative feelings (Figure 1 on page 9 outlines the route students are likely to take based on either a negative or positive experience).

Other detracting factors not listed in Figure 1 include, but are not limited to, low socioeconomic status, delinquency, having quit school to support the family, teenage

pregnancy, family structure, language barrier, and low academic and career expectations (Albert, 1999; Barrera, 2007; Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Kafele, 2013; Milliken, 2007; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2004; Weber, 2011).

In contrast, the contributing factors included, but are not necessarily limited to, are middle to high socioeconomic status, parental involvement, fluency in the English language, strong sense of belonging or social bonding, and high expectation and career goals (Croninger & Lee, 2001; Gregory & Ripski, 2008; Kafele, 2013; Martinez et al., 2004; Wehlage et al., 1989).

Upon completion of the interviews, data analysis, and critical examination of the findings in comparison to the literature review, I find the need to modify my initial conceptual model to accurately depict my findings.

The detracting and contributing factors described above, in addition to those outlined in Figure 1 (page 9), are merely symptoms and/or behaviors of underlying issues. My research sought to delve deeper into the high school experiences of Latino students who persevered despite having the risk factors of students who dropped out of high school. As a result, my research revealed the underlying factors, the core, or root causes that enable these students to succeed, and, consequently, thus beat the odds of graduating.

In my study, 100% of participants had detracting factors associated with dropping out of high school. Eighty percent had an extremely difficult transition to the high school setting, resulting in loss of friendships, behavioral issues leading to suspensions, expulsions, failures, and feelings of being pushed out by being placed in an alternative education program.

Eighty percent experienced negative messages, norms, and processes that marginalized. Many felt they “didn’t belong.” These feelings were reinforced by having to tolerate stereotypical behaviors and racially based comments on a daily basis. They expressed having limited opportunities in comparison to their White peers.

Consequently, these detracting factors created feelings of isolation, lack of belonging and a negative perception of self and school. Ultimately, this thinking led to developing thoughts of dropping out, or “giving up,” for 80% of the students in this study.

Furthermore, 70% of the participants expressed a significant experience during their high school career. The remaining 30% described having an extremely supportive family.

A contributing factor that was evident in all participants was the importance of “positive adult interactions and relationships,” which is strongly supported by research and the conceptual framework of Social Bond Theory. This study, however, takes the term *relationship* a step further by examining the essence of meaning in the relationship.

Participants described positive adults as an influential force in their lives. This condition was best described as a non-judgmental relationship in which their voices were heard, a genuine belief in the participant and the participants’ ability to succeed, an adult that demonstrated they truly “cared about me.” They described an unconditional availability where they were “always there no matter what,” and lastly, an adult that “wanted to learn from me just as much as I was learning from them.”

Participants described *teacher persistence* as someone who would go above and beyond the normal scope of the responsibility of their teaching. They described these

teachers as “not giving up” to the point of being “annoying.” These teachers continued to persist and push, not only to meet expectations, but also to exceed exceptions, thus demonstrating a belief in students when they lacked confidence in themselves. Participants mentioned that these teachers exposed them to opportunities they had not been exposed to previously. Participants described feelings as if they were capable of high school graduation, and possibly postsecondary education, for the first time in their lives.

Similarly, participants noted their encouragement and support from high school athletic coaches that encouraged them to participate in extra-curricular activities, events, clubs, and athletics that led to their increased positive perception, belief in self, and positive perception of school. Ultimately, this encouragement and positive reinforcement led, in their voices, to a path that resulted in their eventual graduation from high school. Given these observations, the reader is now referred to Figure 2 for my new conceptual framework.

Implications for Practice

There was intentionality in using the lenses of critical race theory for this phenomenological study. Tillman (2002, as cited in Howard, 2008) explains: “Critical race theorists seek to illuminate the voices of individuals that have been historically silenced in educational research thus providing a counter script to mainstream accounts of their realities” (p. 956). Therefore, it seems only fitting that the voices of this marginalized and remarkable group of young adults be heard directly. In doing so, this section, *Implications for Practice*, was taken directly from the participants’ voices.

At the conclusion of each interview, the participants in the study were asked for suggestions on improving the graduation rate and decreasing the dropout rate of the Latino population. Their responses are described in Table 10.

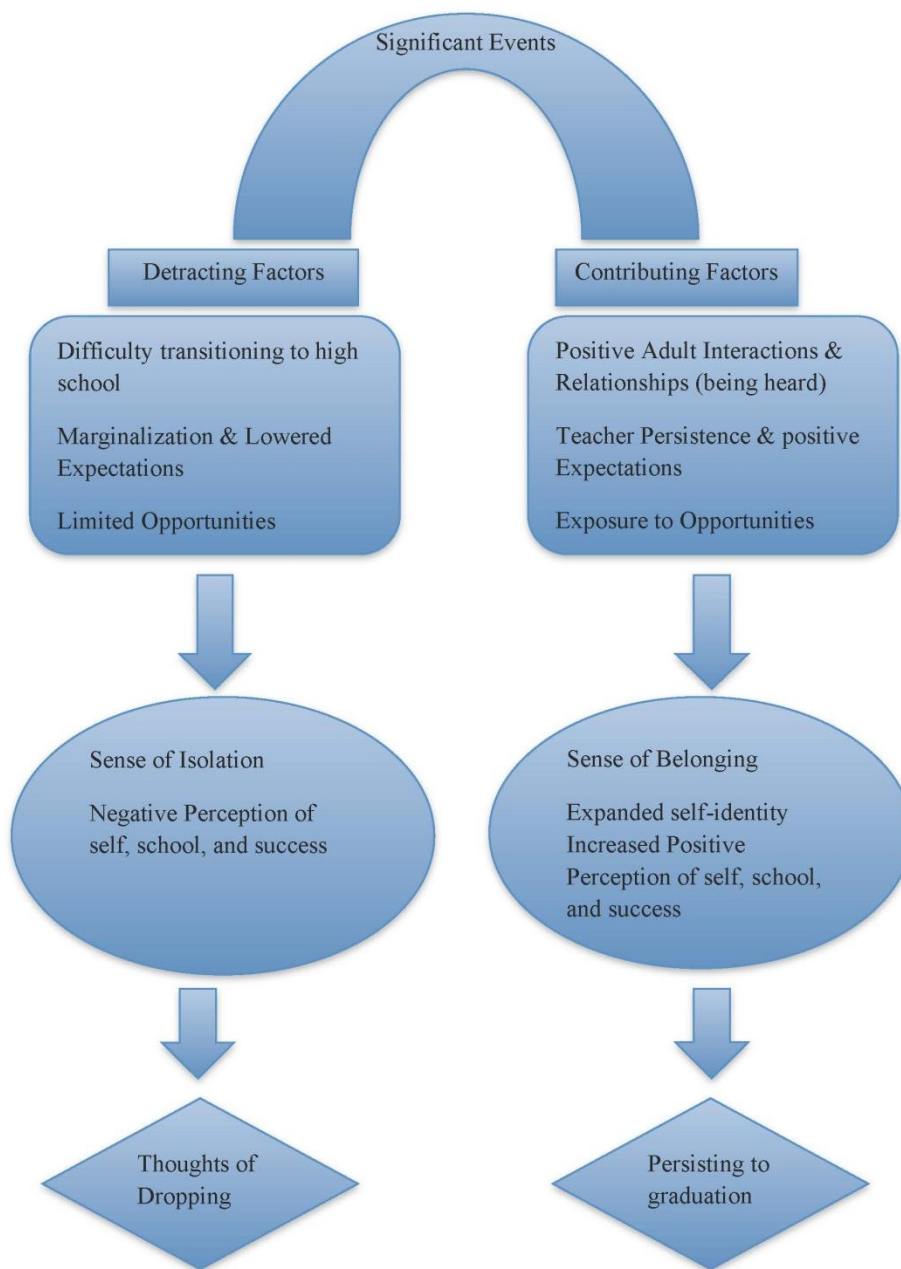


Figure 2. New Conceptual Framework

Table 10

Participants' Voices on Implications for Practice

Participants' Voices	Meaning –What can be done!
<p>“That’s where the issue is, you can’t necessarily tell when a person is struggling or they need help. Most people just hide it. They just try to act like they’re happy rather than be happy. And they’re constantly trying not to be judged so they don’t want to tell people their issues” (P. 1).</p>	<p>~ Be non-judgmental</p> <p>~ Be genuine</p> <p>~ Do not give up on them</p> <p>~ Be open, honest, and available</p>
<p>“Finding somebody to talk to about how important it is, like, to finish high school in order to have a better life, something like that cuz there was nobody to talk to here, and—like, nobody would—none of the teachers would ask you, like, why do you do that? Or ask you what’s wrong?” (P. 6).</p>	<p>~ Take interest in your students</p> <p>~ Notice change in behavior</p> <p>~ Talk to your students</p> <p>~ Show care and interest in their lives</p> <p>~ Get to know who they are</p>
<p>“I think the counselors could play a big role too just—you know the students are uncomfortable asking questions about their schedule—and not just giving them a schedule, maybe giving them options and letting them know “hey this class. . .” (P. 8)</p>	<p>~ Take time to explain to me my, schedule and options</p> <p>~ Take time to get to know me, my interests, and capabilities.</p>
<p>“Show people what their options are” (P. 4).</p>	<p>~ Just take the time to care!</p> <p>~ Take interest in me</p>
<p>“Maybe something to motivate and drive to want to come to school and like to want to learn. Maybe more activities for everybody to do” (P. 5).</p>	<p>~ Provide fun opportunities for me</p> <p>~ Provide me a chance to belong</p>
<p>“Keep pushing, keep pushing” (P. 4).</p>	<p>~ Keep pushing me</p>
<p>You can keep doing this like, no matter what and just like keep pushing him and pushing him even if he didn’t want to be pushed. Like push them, so . . . (P. 3).</p>	<p>~ Keep pushing me more</p> <p>~ Don’t give up on me</p>
<p>“Tell the child it’s possible for you. Act like no matter how long it takes . . . but it’s possible” (P. 4).</p>	<p>~ Believe in me; let me know it is possible. No matter what!</p>
<p>Need “like counselors or people to go to if you need help” (P. 10).</p>	<p>~ Help me</p> <p>~ Reach out to me</p> <p>~ Be there for me</p>
<p>“No tracking” (P. 2).</p>	<p>~ Do not marginalize me by limiting my opportunities</p>

Table 10—Continued

Participants' Voices	Meaning –What can be done!
Have more options for us. Like advertise more help, encourage us. (P. 10).	~Don't hold me back
"With those stereotypes constantly reinforcing everyone it's kind of like you know I feel it's never gonna go away" (P. 4).	~ Don't treat me like a stereotype ~ Be cognizant of your implicit biases
"Just let them know it's possible. I mean I feel like they need that reassurance and kind of like ignore what people are saying. Don't listen to them; don't let them get in your head. You know this is the option you have, but if that doesn't work here's another one" (P. 4).	~ Provide opportunities for me by challenging me. ~ Believe I can succeed ~ Encourage positive friendships
"It's connected with the people you are surrounded with and like they influence you. But if you surround yourself like with good people that influence you in positive ways they make you realize that there's more" (P. 7).	~ Encourage positive choices, without passing judgment
"If you have a talk or like if you're having a one on one or whatever and they like seem really frustrated or whatever like, they're still listening to you, they might not seem like it. What you say really like makes an impact on people like, like the little things, so. . ." (P. 3)	~ Do not give up on me ~ Be patient with me ~ Be a good listener ~ Allow me to be heard; hear my voice
"Yeah. Like for people that don't get to travel. Like probably a lot of Latinos don't get to travel because of poverty, like they don't get to see what is outside of where they live. Like the world is big but it's also a small place. But it's big and there are a lot of opportunities. First show them what there is in life rather than telling them. Like you can show them either you have this or this. You can have a good life or a bad life. The struggle or the not the struggle. It's either this car or that car. Like if I had someone show me, you want this house or this house; this is if you graduate and this is if you don't, I'd rather graduate" (P. 9).	~ Do not judge me ~ Be open-minded ~ Provide me opportunities ~ Show me what is available.
"Teachers should try to connect with their students more, not necessarily become friends with them and talk to them outside of school, but actually be there for their students. Not necessarily, 'Oh, raise your hand when you need help on this problem,' but more of a mentor type of person. I mean they spend more time with their teachers than they do with their family, because their family is also working. For the most part, I mean most of the families of the Hispanic or Latino race are working two jobs just to bring enough food on the table. But sometimes those two jobs are not even enough" (P. 1).	~ Know me ~ Understand my struggles ~ Connect with me ~ Be there when I need you, even when I don't ~ Be my mentor, my role model ~ I need you ~ Show me you do care ~ Be available to help me

Table 10—Continued

Participants' Voices	Meaning –What can be done!
<p>“Showing them like someone like does care about them, and that like no matter what, you can like come and like get help on your school work” (P. 3).</p>	<p>~ Teach me life skills ~ Be my role model</p>
<p>“They just taught us education is needed, but you need to know about life to you can’t just teach us education and not teach us life. Like our family is supposed to teach us life but some of us don’t have the family to teach us the life. Like our parents are probably out working” (P. 9).</p>	
<p>“Relationship that you have with your counselor, it’s not just to get your schedule, you know! You’re a person let’s treat you like a person type of thing. . . . I don’t know just feeling like your teachers care a little bit, because if they’re failing hey ask them ‘What is going on? Can we accommodate you in anyway? What’s going on is there anything we can help you with?’ um, things like that” (P. 8).</p>	<p>~ Treat me like a person ~ Care about me ~ Ask me what is going on in my life ~ Ask me how you can help me ~ Don’t give up, no matter what</p>

Concluding Remarks

In this study, graduates of a marginalized population were given a voice. These graduates managed to beat the odds, despite having risk factors associated with dropping out. Not surprisingly, 80% of the participants had thoughts of giving up and dropping out at some point in their high school career. Several of the participants experienced a significant event, which influenced their high school career, including parent’s deportation, homelessness, teen pregnancy, suspensions, expulsions, and repeated failures. These events were exacerbated by repetitive marginalizing behaviors and comments they dealt with daily, ultimately leading to a feeling disconnectedness and a lack of belonging to the school community.

As a result, participants described feeling isolated, alienated, and often alone. Their perception of school was that of an unwelcoming, uncaring environment in which they did not belong, nor was it a place in which they felt welcomed nor supported.

Participants contributed their perseverance and, for some, change in perception, to positive adult interaction from a non-judgmental teacher, coach, counselor, mentor, or family member who took the time to listen to their stories, hear their voices, and love them unconditionally.

The encouragement and belief from a caring adult that refused to “give up” despite being met with defensive, belligerent, or “hard” behavior, as one participant stated, gave these participants the ability to finally believe in themselves. By demonstrating empathy and care, we are teaching and modeling patience and compassion. As one student said to me, “You opened up my heart. You are making me feel for people.” We often tend to retrieve or back off at the “hardness” for fear of pushing too hard. What I have learned from these amazing young people is that sometimes we need to keep on pushing. And when they push back, we need to push even harder. If we do not keep pushing, then we have stopped believing in them; therefore we have ultimately given up.

The reality is, that the fate of these 10 individuals may have been drastically different if it had not been for the time and belief of a non-judgmental adult. I think they are worth it. Do you?

When synthesizing the comments from participants, and based upon the personal background and experiences I encountered as a Latino who grew up in a similar milieu, I

reflected upon the many voices and sentiments that helped me to persevere and attain life goals that eventually led me to attain goals that I couldn't even realize.

In concluding this final section, I provide suggestions for future researchers who may wish to delve deeper into these fertile grounds that may help to provide support to this growing population of marginalized students that are moving to, and eventually enrolling in, America's public school systems.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study clearly demonstrates the contributing factors leading to high school completion despite multiple characteristics and risk factors of students who historically dropout of high school. This research underscores that it is possible to change the trajectory of "marginalized" students despite what current research indicates. The findings of this study unequivocally supports the contention that all students can "beat the odds" if they are provided with caring and supportive staff that truly believe that "all" students can learn. To gain a deeper understanding of contributing and detracting factors with marginalized populations, I recommend the following suggestions for future researchers who wish to expand their understanding of the challenges faced by Latino students in Midwestern suburban and rural school districts.

I recommend that this study be replicated. The sample size should be increased to include other areas that are representative of populations that enroll Latino students in Midwestern school districts. Future studies should consider the use of quantitative designs to examine whether factors such as school location (i.e., urban, suburban, rural), coupled with investigating the relationship between Latino students' graduation success with selected demographic variables such as socioeconomic standing, family and school

demographic characteristics, participation in curricular and extra-curricular activities, etc., have an influence on Latino students' success in school.

Future studies should further explore the development of expanded versus single and multiple identities. While there is much research on the concept of single and multiple identities, my study may have uncovered a new way to understand identity as an expanding or evolving aspect of a person's experience. This study may have exposed a promising feature of a child's school experiences, i.e., adding new affiliations through access to new experiences.

Future studies should include perceptual data from the following: community stakeholders, parents, teachers, and others that have an interest in improving the culture and climate of the community. These *ex post facto* studies should be used to determine the impact community stakeholders play in supporting both the educational needs of Latino students and how they assist Latino students to overcome the barriers they face in completing their secondary education. Findings from these studies should be used to inform current policies and practices to better serve the Latino community, thus impacting the future of our American society as a whole.

Reflection of the Impact of Study

As described in Chapter III, various measures were taken in order to manage myself as the instrument and to complete this study with fidelity. Prior to the interviews and upon completion of each interview, I used a journal to write my own reflections, thoughts, and personal feelings. This is known as bracketing or epoche. This allowed me, as the investigator, to put aside my own personal experiences and biases and to "gain clarity from [my] own pre-conceptions" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 148).

It would be untruthful to state that this study did not have a profound impact on me as a person, as a Latina, and as an educator. This study impacted me both emotionally and intellectually. It challenged, and at times reinforced, my thoughts, beliefs, and values. I hope I encapsulated my experience and the impact in the following section.

Growing up in a Mexican-American Catholic family in a predominantly white Christian Reformed community and school district was challenging. I quickly learned the need to assimilate and “fit in” to be accepted. I was repeatedly reminded by loved ones to “just ignore” the racial comments, slurs, innuendos, and ultimately disrespect. I was told to “rise above it” and not to let it bother me. In essence I was taught not to “make waves” or cause conflict. I was told to “work harder” and to “try harder.” I was also told I could accomplish anything I set my mind to, with hard work.

We spoke only English in my household. When questioned, I was told my parents did not want me to struggle as they did by not knowing how to speak English at a young age. In retrospect, I sometimes feel I was “robbed” of a piece of my culture, my heritage, and my right to speak the language of my people.

I thank the Lord everyday for the time I had with my grandparents. Due to my parents’ work schedules my grandparents cared for me from six weeks of age through kindergarten and every summer thereafter. Being immigrants from Mexico, they spoke only Spanish. It is with them I learned to make homemade tortillas, empanadas, and my version of arroz y frijoles. It is with them I learned to work the blueberry fields.

These experiences are what helped shape who I have become. My loved ones stressed, “Don’t ever think you are better than anyone” and “never ever forget where you

came from.” These words are much more powerful now after listening to the voices of my participants, than ever before.

In reflection, I ask, “How must I only learn English, yet be true to who I am? Why must I assimilate in order to be successful? Are we asking the same of our students? Is this fair? Is this just? I realized, there are mixed messages thrown at our students daily. Have we created a culture in which we must mask our true identity in order to be accepted, if so, at what cost?”

With all due respect to my parents, I have realized that conflict is ok! Without conflict things will remain unchanged. By ignoring comments, by avoiding conflict, by not “rocking the boat” I have allowed teachable moments to pass and ignorance to prevail and fester. By ignoring comments I have condoned hurtful statements and stereotypical messages that marginalize. In reality I have changed nothing. I ask myself, what path have I paved for the next generation?

The fact is life is not much different for my bi-racial children. My daughter that asked to be taken out of honors classes in order to be in classes with her minority friends speaks volumes. My daughter that has to choose between a table with her white friends or her black and brown friends during lunch. Or the times when she questions why she is treated differently when others realize she is half Mexican. Her response, “It shouldn’t matter what color I am or what color I am not.”

As an educator, I walk through the halls every day and wonder, how many of our students feel welcomed, safe, and a sense of belonging? I wonder how many feel marginalized, alone, or misunderstood. Listening to the participants’ voices gave me a heightened awareness of issues they continue to endure daily. Disproportionality of

discipline is a concern in our district. Minority students often are suspended for disrespect, insubordination, and non-compliance. I have learned that the system we have created provides consequences for the behavior, yet fails to ask, “What are the behaviors trying to tell us?” It is not about the disrespect, the cursing, the yelling, or the anger. We need to ask, “Why are they angry?” “What were the precipitating factors that caused this reaction?” We need to look beyond and beneath the anger in order to uncover the frustration, sadness, hurt, or betrayal. We need to look beyond the behavior to most importantly understand.

Perception is reality. Until we begin to hear their voices, see through their eyes, and from their perspective, we have failed to truly understand. We continue to reinforce the notion that their voices are not important. We fail to teach how to advocate and we have failed how to model empathy.

In the past, I have been criticized for allowing students to speak to me in a certain “tone” or with certain words. I was told I needed to suspend more, and not to “put up with those behaviors.” Recently, I had one of “those students” return to City High to see me. He apologized for the way he had “treated me” in the past and to tell me “thank you.” In his words he thanked me for “not giving up” on him and for “believing in him” when he did not believe in himself. He went on to explain, “I don’t know why you didn’t give up, and why you kept caring. Even though I was so mean and disrespectful to you. You saw through it. I kept screwing up and you kept picking me up and telling me to keep going. It’s because of you I made it. So, I came to say, ‘Thank you.’” He went on to describe how he left the gang life, is now married with three children, and at the age of 30 is graduating with a bachelor’s degree. He smiled and said, “I didn’t give up.”

Yes, of course, there were times I issued him consequences; however, it was never about the consequence, it was about hearing his voice. This study has taught me to ask myself, “*How many Ismael’s are walking our halls today?*” Do we see an angry, belligerent, non-complaint student? Or students that are trying to tell us something the only way they know how? It is up to us to listen closer and to look beyond the behavior.

Hearing the participants’ voices reinforced that every decision we make can influence the outcome of a student’s future. We may not know it at the time, or may think we are not making an impact—but I have learned that sometimes it takes time.

No child should be invisible and all children should be heard in whichever language or behavior they chose to express themselves. I chose to see each child as a person. I chose to be purposeful in letting the students know their voice matters. They matter! I choose to create conflict for without it nothing will change! I cannot single-handedly change the culture of the community, the district, or the school. But I can start with one child or one adult at a time.

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Appendix A
Request Participation Letter
English/Spanish

April 20, 2015

Dear Fellow City High School Graduate,

My name is Anna Rangel-Clawson and I am an Assistant Principal of City High School. As a Latina alumnus of HHS, I would like to invite you to participate in a research project about Latinos who have successfully completed high school. This research project is part of the requirements for the doctoral degree in Educational Leadership at Western Michigan University, in which I am a student.

To be a voluntary participant in this study, you will be asked a series of questions asking about your experiences while at HHS. The interviews will take place in a private setting at either the Latin American United for Progress office or Holland High School. You may chose the time and setting which works well for you. The interviews will be recorded and transcribed. You will also be asked to fill out a demographic survey about yourself. The survey, interview questions, and consent form will be provided to you prior to the interview(s).

Your participation is completely voluntary and there is no penalty if you choose not to participate. During the study you can choose to stop participating in the study at anytime for any reason. To protect your identity you will be given a participant number and will be referred by your participant number for the remainder of the study to ensure complete anonymity. There are no other known risks from participating in this study.

I appreciate your consideration in participating in this study, which will help me learn more about how to help Latinos stay in school and become successful citizens. If you are interested in learning more about participating or have questions, please contact me at 616-494-2217 (office), 616-566-1470 (cell) or via e-mail at aclawson@hollandpublicschools.org.

I will be contacting you within the next few days to answer any questions you may have and to see if you are willing to participate.

Thank you for your consideration,
Anna Rangel-Clawson

20 de febrero 2015

Estimado compañero de secundaria,

Mi nombre es Anna Rangel-Clawson y yo soy una subdirectora de secundaria. Como Latina graduada de HHS, me gustaría invitarte a participar en un proyecto de investigación sobre los latinos que han completado con éxito la escuela secundaria. Este proyecto de investigación es parte de los requisitos para el título de doctorado de Educación de Liderazgo de la Universidad de Western Michigan, en donde soy un estudiante.

Para ser un participante voluntario en este estudio, se le harán una serie de preguntas acerca de sus experiencias durante la secundaria. Las entrevistas se llevarán a cabo en un ambiente privado, ya sea en la oficina de Latinoamericanos Unidos para el Progreso o en la escuela de Holland High. Usted puede elegir el tiempo y el lugar que sea mejor para usted. Las entrevistas serán grabadas y transcritas. También se le pedirá que llene una encuesta demográfica sobre usted. La encuesta, preguntas de la entrevista, y el formulario de consentimiento será proporcionado a usted antes de la entrevista (s).

Su participación es completamente voluntaria y no hay penalidad si decide no participar. Durante el estudio usted puede optar por dejar de participar en cualquier momento por cualquier razón. Para proteger su identidad se le dará un número de participante y será referido por su número por el resto del estudio para garantizar el anonimato completo. No existen otros riesgos conocidos por participar en este estudio.

Le agradezco su consideración en participar en este estudio, lo que me ayudará a aprender más acerca de cómo ayudar a los latinos a quedarse en la escuela y convertirse en ciudadanos exitosos. Si usted está interesado en aprender mas sobre la participación o si tiene preguntas, por favor comuníquese conmigo al 616-494-2217 (oficina), 616-566-1470 (celular) o por correo electrónico a aclawson@hollandpublicschools.org.

Estaré en contacto con usted dentro de los próximos días para responder a cualquier pregunta que pueda tener y para ver si está dispuesto a participar.

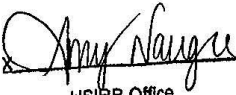
Gracias por su consideración,

Anna Rangel-Clawson

Appendix B
Participant Consent Form
English/Spanish

Western Michigan University
H.S.I.R.B.
Approved for use for one year from this date:

APR 20 2015


HSIRB Office

**Western Michigan University
Department of Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology**

Principal Investigator: Dr. Walter Burt
Student Investigator: Anna M. Clawson
Title of Study: Transcendental Phenomenology

You have been invited to participate in a research project titled "*A Phenomenological Approach Examining the Completion of Latino High School Students through the Lenses of Critical Race Theory*." This project will serve as Anna M. Clawson's research project for the requirements of obtaining a Doctor of Philosophy. This consent document will explain the purpose of this research project and will go over all of the time commitments, the procedures used in the study, and the risks and benefits of participating in this research project. Please read this consent form carefully and completely and please ask any questions if you need more clarification.

What are we trying to find out in this study?

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the social, emotional, academic, and personal lives of Latinos who have completed high school. This study will examine the differences in perception, thinking, attitudes, and other variables that Latinos connect with their ability to complete a high school education. By eliciting insights from Latino students who persist in school to achieve a high school diploma, this study will help define issues that need to be addressed for that population.

Who can participate in this study?

Participant selection began by obtaining a list of Holland High School graduates who met the following criteria: a) Must be Latino; b) Must have qualified for free and reduced lunch; and c) Must have been through a successful/positive graduation audit and graduated with their cohort between the years of 2010-2014.

Where will this study take place?

You will be given the option, if the so desire, to meet at the local Latin American Untied for Progress (L.A.U.P.) conference room or in a conference room at Holland High School for both the consent, data collection, and reviewing the final transcript, if you choose to do so. Both settings will allow for privacy and respect confidentiality.

What is the time commitment for participating in this study?

Your total time commitment to the study will be approximately two to two and a half hours. The first meeting will include an informed consent agreement that will be reviewed thoroughly lasting approximately ten minutes, a demographic survey lasting

Western Michigan University
H.S.I.R.B.

Approved for use for one year from this date:

APR 20 2015


HSIRB Office

approximately 5 minutes, and individual interview lasting approximately 60 to 90 minutes. A second visit lasting approximately 30-45 minutes will allow you to check the accuracy of your interview and to add any additional information that you feel is important or to provide additional clarification to any of your responses.

What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate in this study?

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to review and sign a consent form, complete a demographic survey, and participate in at least one interview. During the interview you will be asked a series of twelve questions related to your high school experience. Based upon your responses more questions may be asked. The interview will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes. The interview will be audiotaped and later transcribed. You be invited to return once the transcription is complete to review the transcription for accuracy and add clarifying or addition information if needed. This information is not mandatory but encouraged. The amount of time for this additional review is expected to take thirty to forty-five minutes.

What information is being measured during the study?

A demographic survey will be given to obtain basic information about you as a participant. This will assist me in providing a detailed description about the participants of study. This information will not include your name or other identifying information that could be attributed back to you. The interview will be used to collect responses from each participant based on twelve that will be asked. You will be asked to describe your experiences while you were a student at Holland High School. These descriptions will be used to identify common themes that attributed to your successful completion of high school.

What are the risks of participating in this study and how will these risks be minimized?

There are no known risks for your participation in this study

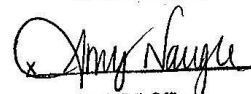
What are the benefits of participating in this study?

The potential benefits of your participation in the study include: 1) information gained on the experiences of Latino students that have overcome obstacles and have graduated from Holland High despite adversity; 2) an understanding of factors that contribute to success of Latino graduates; and 3) the ability for both the researcher and participant to partake in a qualitative research study.

This study including the information you provide may be valuable to school administrators, school boards, policy makers, and stakeholders having an interest in educating all children. The knowledge gained from this study may inform stakeholders how better to educate and meet the needs of the Latino population in order to improve the

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likelihood of graduation. Your participation is completely voluntary and there is no penalty if you choose not to participate

Are there any costs associated with participating in this study?

You will be asked to meet me on two different occasions at either the LAUP office or HHS, whichever is most convenient and most comfortable for you. Depending on where you live, there will be cost associated with you traveling to whichever location by personal vehicle or public transportation, if you not close enough to walk. Assistance in transportation and transportation costs can be provided upon request. There are no other monetary costs for participation.

Is there any compensation for participating in this study?

Participants who fully participate in the study including the completion of the consent form, demographic survey, interview and invitation back a second time to check for accuracy of the interview transcription will receive a \$30 Speedway gift card. Participants who do not participate in the second invitation back but complete all other requirements will receive a \$20 Speedway gift card.

Who will have access to the information collected during this study?

The principal investigator, student investigator and transcriptionist will all have access to the information collected as part of this study. Once transcribed, the digital recordings will be deleted. All information will be treated with complete confidentiality. You will be assigned a specific participant number to protect your identity and ensure confidentiality of your responses.

Written transcripts will be filed in a locked cabinet in my home office until the study is completed. Once completed the transcripts will be housed and stored in the Office of Dr. Walter L. Burt at Western Michigan University for a minimum of 3 years (per HSRIB guidelines). The dissertation that results from this work will be published in hard copy and housed at the library of College of Education and Human Development at Western Michigan University. This study will be shared with my dissertation committee members, superintendent of Holland Public Schools, and all stakeholders that have an interest in educating the Latino youth of Holland High School.

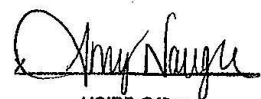
What if you want to stop participating in this study?

You can choose to stop participating in the study at anytime for any reason. You will not suffer any prejudice or penalty by your decision to stop your participation. You will experience NO consequences, penalty, or judgment if you choose to withdraw from this study.

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Should you have any questions prior to or during the study you can call me, the student investigator, at 616-494-2217 (office) or 616-566-1470 (cell) or via e-mail at aclawson@hollandpublicschools.org. You may also contact the primary investigator, Dr. Walter Burt at 269-387-1821 or via e-mail at walter.burt@wmich.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at 269-387-8298 if questions arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

I have read this informed consent document. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I agree to take part in this study.

Please Print Your Name

Participant's signature

Date

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Western Michigan University
Departamento de Liderazgo Educativo, Investigación y Tecnología

Investigador principal: Dr. Walter Burt
Estudiante Investigador: Anna M. Clawson
Título del estudio: Fenomenología Trascendental

Usted ha sido invitado a participar en un proyecto de investigación titulado *"Un enfoque fenomenológico Examinando la finalización de los estudiantes latinos en las Escuelas Secundarias a través de los lentes de la teoría crítica de la raza."* Este proyecto servirá como proyecto de investigación de Anna M. Clawson para los requisitos de obtención de un doctor de Filosofía. Este documento de consentimiento le explicará el propósito de este proyecto de investigación y los compromisos de tiempo, los procedimientos utilizados en el estudio, y los riesgos y beneficios de participar en esta investigación. Por favor, lea este formulario de consentimiento con cuidado y por completo, haga cualquier pregunta si necesita más aclaraciones.

¿Qué estamos tratando de averiguar en este estudio?

El propósito de este estudio es obtener una mejor comprensión de la vida social, emocional, académica y personal de los latinos que han terminado la escuela secundaria. Este estudio examinará las diferencias en la percepción, el pensamiento, las actitudes y otras variables que los latinos se conectan con su capacidad para completar una educación secundaria. Por la obtención de puntos de vista de los estudiantes latinos que persisten en la escuela para conseguir un diploma de escuela secundaria, este estudio ayudará a definir los temas que deben ser abordados para esta población.

¿Quién puede participar en este estudio?

La selección de participantes se inició mediante la obtención de una lista de los graduados de secundaria Holland High que cumplieron con los siguientes criterios: a) debe ser latino; b) Haber clasificado para almuerzo gratis o a precio reducido; y c) Debe haber sido a través de una exitosa auditoría de graduación / positivo y se graduó con la generación de los años 2010 a 2014.

¿Dónde se llevará a cabo este estudio?

Si usted lo desea, se le dará la opción, de reunirse en el la sala de conferencias las oficinas de Latinoamericano Unidos para el Progreso (LAUP) o en una sala de conferencias en la Escuela de Holland High. El consentimiento, la recopilación de datos, y la revisión de la transcripción final, si decide hacerlo. Ambos ajustes permitirán a la privacidad y respecto de confidencialidad.

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¿Cuál es el compromiso de tiempo para participar en este estudio?

Su compromiso con el tiempo total en el estudio será aproximadamente de dos a dos horas y media. La primera reunión incluirá un acuerdo de consentimiento informado que será revisado a fondo una duración aproximada de diez minutos, una encuesta demográfica que dura aproximadamente 5 minutos, y entrevista individual con una duración aproximada de 60 a 90 minutos. Una segunda visita que dura aproximadamente 30-45 minutos le permitirá comprobar la exactitud de su entrevista y añadir cualquier información adicional que usted considere importante o para proporcionar aclaraciones adicionales a cualquiera de sus respuestas.

¿Qué le pedirán que haga si usted decide participar en este estudio?

Si está de acuerdo en participar, se le pedirá que revise y firme un formulario de consentimiento, completar una encuesta demográfica y participar en al menos una entrevista. Durante la entrevista se le pedirá una serie de doce preguntas relacionadas con su experiencia en la escuela de Holland High. Con base en sus respuestas se les puede pedir más preguntas. La entrevista tendrá una duración de aproximadamente 60 a 90 minutos. La entrevista será grabada en audio y posteriormente transcrita. Usted será invitado a regresar una vez que la transcripción sea completa, a revisar la transcripción de la precisión y añadir la aclaración o información, si es necesario. Esta información no es obligatoria, pero se le recomienda. Se espera que la cantidad de tiempo para esta revisión adicional se tome treinta-cuarenta y cinco minutos.

¿Qué información se medirá durante el estudio?

Una encuesta demográfica se dará para obtener información básica sobre usted como participante. Esto me ayudará a proporcionar una descripción detallada de los participantes del estudio. Esta información no incluirá su nombre u otra información de identificación que podría atribuirse de nuevo a usted. La entrevista se utiliza para recoger las respuestas de cada participante sobre la base de doce que se preguntó. Se le pedirá que describa sus experiencias mientras usted era un estudiante en la Escuela Secundaria Holland. Estas descripciones se utilizan para identificar temas comunes que atribuyen a su finalización con éxito de la preparatoria.

¿Cuáles son los riesgos de participar en este estudio y cómo se van a reducir al mínimo estos riesgos?

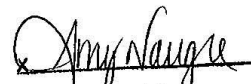
No hay riesgos conocidos para su participación en este estudio.

¿Cuáles son los beneficios de participar en este estudio?

Los beneficios potenciales de su participación en el estudio son: 1) la información obtenida en las experiencias de los estudiantes latinos que han superado obstáculos y se han graduado de Holland High a pesar de la adversidad; 2) la comprensión de los factores

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que contribuyen al éxito de los graduados latinos; 3) la capacidad tanto para el investigador y el participante para participar en un estudio de investigación cualitativa.

Este estudio, incluyendo la información que proporcione puede ser valioso para los administradores de escuelas, consejos escolares, los responsables políticos y partes interesadas que tengan interés en la educación de todos los niños. El conocimiento obtenido de este estudio puede informar a los interesados la mejor manera de educar y satisfacer las necesidades de la población latina con el fin de mejorar la probabilidad de graduación. Su participación es completamente voluntaria y no hay penalidad si decide no participar.

¿Hay costos asociados con la participación en este estudio?

Se le pedirá que nos reunamos en dos ocasiones diferentes, ya sea en la oficina de LAUP o en HHS, lo que sea más conveniente y más cómodo para usted. Dependiendo de donde usted viva, habrá costos asociados a usted al viajar a cualquier lugar en vehículo personal o transporte público, si no lo es suficientemente cerca para caminar. Asistencia en transporte y costos de transporte pueden ser proporcionado a petición. No hay otros costos monetarios de participación.

¿Hay alguna compensación por participar en este estudio?

Los participantes que participan plenamente en el estudio que incluye la realización del formulario de consentimiento, estudio demográfico, la entrevista y la invitación de nuevo una segunda vez para verificar la exactitud de la transcripción de la entrevista, recibirá una tarjeta de regalo de \$ 30 de Speedway. Los participantes que no participan en la segunda entrevista, pero cumplen con todos los demás requisitos recibirán una tarjeta de regalo de \$ 20 Speedway.

¿Quién tendrá acceso a la información adquirida en este estudio?

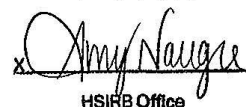
El investigador principal, investigador y estudiante transcriptor todos tendrán acceso a la información recopilada como parte de este estudio. Una vez transcritas, se eliminarán las grabaciones digitales. Toda la información será tratada con total confidencialidad. Se le asignará un número específico participante para proteger su identidad y garantizar la confidencialidad de sus respuestas.

Transcripciones escritas serán archivadas en un armario cerrado con llave en la oficina de mi oficina hasta que se complete el estudio. Una vez completadas las transcripciones serán almacenadas en la Oficina del Dr. Walter L. Burt en la Universidad de Western Michigan durante un mínimo de 3 años (según las pautas de HSRIB). La tesis de que el resultado de este trabajo será publicado en formato impreso y alojado en la biblioteca de la Facultad de Educación y Desarrollo Humano de la Universidad de Western Michigan. Este estudio se compartirá con los miembros de mi comité de tesis,

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superintendente de las Escuelas Públicas de Holland, y todos los interesados que tienen un interés en la educación de la juventud latina de la Escuela Secundaria Holland.

¿Qué pasa si usted quiere dejar de participar en este estudio?

Usted puede optar por dejar de participar en el estudio en cualquier momento por cualquier razón. Usted no va a sufrir ningún perjuicio o sanción por su decisión de dejar de participar. Usted experimentará NO consecuencias, pena o juicio si decide retirarse de este estudio.

Si usted tiene alguna pregunta antes o durante el estudio, me puede llamar a mí, el investigador, al 616-494-2217 (oficina) o 616-566-1470 (celular) o por correo electrónico a aclawson@hollandpublicschools.org. También puede ponerse en contacto con el investigador principal, el Dr. Walter Burt al 269-387-1821 o por correo electrónico awalter.burt@wmich.edu. También puede comunicarse con el Presidente de Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) al 269-387-8293 o el Vicepresidente de Investigación en Temas 269-387-8298 si surgen preguntas durante el curso del estudio.

Este documento de consentimiento ha sido aprobado para su uso por un año por Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB), como indica la fecha estampada y la firma del presidente en la esquina superior derecha. No participe en este estudio si la fecha estampada es mayor de un año.

He leído este documento de consentimiento informativo. Los riesgos y beneficios han sido explicados. Estoy de acuerdo en participar en este estudio.

Por favor escriba su nombre

Firma del Participante

Fecha

Appendix C
Interview Protocol
English/Spanish

Interview Protocol

Project: A Phenomenological Approach Examining the Completion of Latino High School Students through the Lenses of Critical Race Theory

Start Time of Interview: _____

End Time of Interview: _____

Date of Interview: _____

Location: _____

Interviewer: _____

Participant #: _____

Thank you for consenting to participate in this study. I would like to record the interview so the study can be as accurate as possible. You may request that the recorder be turned off at any point of the interview.

Questions that the subjects will be asked include:

1. Describe your overall high school experience?

Notable Observations:

2. What have been some of the specific things that have influenced or affected your experience?

Notable Observations:

3. What are some of the high lights of your years in high school?

Notable Observations:

4. How would you describe some of the challenges you faced during your high school years?

Notable Observations:

5. As you reflect on these experiences, describe any points of time when you thought about dropping out? What was contributing to these thoughts, and what helped you persevere and continue?

Notable Observations:

6. What have been specific things that influenced your experiences?

Notable Observations:

7. Are there any specific incidents, people, or events that had an impact on your perseverance?

Notable Observations:

8. How do you connect experiences in and out of school and interpret the impact of those experiences on your persistence in school achievement?

Notable Observations:

9. How do you connect your high school experience with your post-secondary goals?

Notable Observations:

10. Please reflect and provide your thoughts to the following statement:

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2002, 2011), the Latino dropout rate has remained between 30-35% over the past 25 years, and is 2.5 times the rate for African Americans, and 3.5 times the rate for White non-Hispanics (NCES, 2002). While the statistics have improved from 32% in 2000 to most recent data of 14% in 2011, Latino students continue to have the highest dropout rate in the nation and as the fastest growing population, are predicted to represent 30% of all students by 2050.

Notable Observations:

11. What should be done in order to improve the Latino graduation rate?

Notable Observations:

12. Any other information your thoughts you would like to share?

Notable Observations:

Thank you for your time today. I appreciate your willingness to participate. The information you shared is valuable. The next step will be for the recording to be transcribed. I have hired a transcriptionist for this and she has signed a confidentiality agreement and will not know who provided me with the information. Her job will be to transcribe the recording verbatim as they were stated. Once the recordings are transcribed I will contact you so you may review the transcription to ensure that it accurate and reflects what you said. This process is completely voluntary. Your review of the transcription will help me validate the research and make it more credible and reliable. This process will take me approximately two-three months to complete. Do you have any questions?

Thank you.

Entrevista de Protocolo

Proyecto: Un enfoque fenomenológico que Examina la finalización de los estudiantes latinos en la Escuela Secundaria a través de los lentes de la Teoría Crítica de la Raza

Hora de inicio de la Entrevista: _____

Hora de finalización de la Entrevista: _____

Fecha de la entrevista: _____

Ubicación: _____

Entrevistador: _____

de Participante: _____

Gracias por dar su consentimiento para participar en este estudio. Me gustaría grabar la entrevista para que el estudio pueda ser lo más preciso posible. Usted puede solicitar que la grabadora se apague en cualquier momento de la entrevista.

Las preguntas que se les pidió a los sujetos incluyen:

1. Describa su experiencia de la escuela secundaria?
Las observaciones notables:

2. ¿Cuáles han sido algunas de las cosas específicas que han influido o afectado su experiencia?
Las observaciones notables:

3. ¿Cuáles fueron los momentos sobresalientes en la escuela secundaria?
Las observaciones notables:

4. ¿Cómo describirías algunos de los retos que enfrentaste durante los años de la escuela secundaria?

Las observaciones notables:

5. Al reflexionar sobre estas experiencias describe si en algún momento, pensaste en abandonar la escuela? ¿Qué contribuyó a estos pensamientos, y que ayudó a perseverar y continuar?

Las observaciones notables:

6. ¿Cuáles han sido las cosas específicas que influyeron en tu experiencia?

Las observaciones notables:

7. ¿Hay incidentes específicos, personas o eventos que tuvieron un impacto en tu perseverancia?

Las observaciones notables:

8. ¿Cómo conectas experiencias dentro y fuera de la escuela e interpreta el impacto de esas experiencias en su persistencia en el logro escolar?

Las observaciones notables:

9. ¿Cómo conectas tu experiencia en la escuela secundaria con sus metas post-secundarias?

Las observaciones notables:

10. Por favor, reflexiona y ofrece tus pensamientos a la siguiente declaración:

De acuerdo con el Centro Nacional de Estadísticas Educativas (2002, 2011), la tasa de abandono Latino se ha mantenido entre 30 a 35% en los últimos 25 años, y es 2,5 veces la tasa de los afroamericanos, y 3,5 veces la tasa de blanco no-hispanos (NCES, 2002). Si bien las estadísticas han mejorado hasta 32% en 2000 a los datos más recientes de 14% en el 2011, los estudiantes latinos continúan teniendo la tasa de abandono más alta del país y como el más rápido crecimiento de la población, se prevé que represente el 30% de todos los estudiantes para el año 2050 .

Las observaciones notables:

11. ¿Qué se debe hacer para mejorar la proporción de graduación del Latino?

Las observaciones notables:

12. Cualquier otra información o pensamiento que te gustaría compartir?

Las observaciones notables:

Gracias por su tiempo. Aprecio su participación. La información que ha compartido es valiosa. El siguiente paso será que la grabación que se transcriba. He contratado a un transcriptor para este y ella ha firmado un acuerdo de confidencialidad y no sabrá quién me proporcionó la información. Su trabajo consistirá en transcribir la grabación textualmente tal como figuran. Una vez que las grabaciones se transcriba me pondré en contacto con usted para que usted pueda revisar la transcripción para asegurarse que sea exacta y refleje lo que dijo. Este proceso es completamente voluntario. Su revisión sobre la transcripción me ayudará a validar la investigación y hacerla más creíble y confiable. Este proceso me tomará aproximadamente dos o tres meses para completar. ¿Tiene alguna pregunta?

Muchas Gracias.

Appendix D
Demographic Survey
English/Spanish

Demographic Survey**A Phenomenological Approach Examining the Completion of Latino High School Students through the Lenses of Critical Race Theory**

Participant # _____ **Date:** _____ **Graduation Year:** _____

Place an X before each response that best describes you as a participant in this study.

Generation:

_____ 1st _____ 2nd _____ 3rd
_____ Immigrant _____ U.S. Born

High School Grade Point average:

_____ 0.00 - 2.00 _____ 2.01 - 2.50 _____ 2.51 - 3.00
_____ 3.01 - 3.50 _____ 3.51 - 4.00 _____

Primary Language Spoken at Home:

_____ English _____ Spanish _____ Other (_____)

Employment Status:

_____ Full-time _____ Part-Time _____ Unemployed

Highest Degree Completed:

_____ High School Diploma _____ Currently in college _____ College Degree

Community/Extracurricular activities while in high school:

Sports: _____

Clubs: _____

Youth Group: _____

Other: _____

Father's Information

_____ Immigrant

_____ U.S. Born

Education Level

_____ <12 years

_____ G.E.D.

_____ H.S. Diploma

_____ Some College

_____ Advance Degree

Mother's Information

_____ Immigrant

_____ U.S. Born

Education Level

_____ <12 years

_____ G.E.D.

_____ H.S. Diploma

_____ Some College

_____ Advance Degree

Siblings

of Older Siblings _____ # Graduated from high school _____

Graduated from College or currently in college _____

Number of Younger Siblings _____

Encuesta Demográfica

Un enfoque fenomenológico que examina la finalización de los estudiantes latinos en las Escuelas Secundarias a través de los lentes de la Teoría Crítica de la Raza

de Participante _____ Fecha: _____ Año de graduación: _____

Marque con una X antes de cada respuesta que mejor le describa como un participante en este estudio.

Generación:

_____ 1st _____ 2nd _____ 3rd
_____ Inmigrante _____ Nacido en EE.UU

Grado promedio de la secundaria:

_____ 0.00-2.00 _____ 2.01-2.50 _____ 2.51-3.00
_____ 3.01-3.50 _____ 3.51-4.00

Idioma principal que se habla en el hogar:

_____ Inglés _____ Español _____ Otros (_____)

Situación laboral:

_____ Tiempo completo _____ Medio Tiempo _____ Desempleado

Grado más alto que allá terminado:

_____ Diploma de secundaria _____ Actualmente en la universidad _____ Titulo universitario

Actividades extraescolares/Comunitarias durante la secundaria:

Deportes: _____

Clubes: _____

Grupo de Jóvenes: _____

Otros: _____

Información de su padre

_____ Inmigrante _____ Nacido en EE.UU

Educacion

_____ <12 años _____ GED _____ Diploma de Secundaria

_____ Alguna educación universitaria _____ Titulado

Información de su madre

_____ Inmigrante _____ Nacido en EE.UU

Educación

_____ <12 años _____ GED _____ Diploma de Secundaria

_____ Alguna educación universitaria _____ Titulado

Hermanos

De hermanos mayores _____ # de los que graduaron de la secundaria _____

Graduados de la universidad o actualmente en colegio _____

de hermanos menores _____

Appendix E

Access/Permission to Conduct Research

Access/Permission to Conduct Research
Western Michigan University
Department of Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology

Principal Investigator: Dr. Walter Burt, Principal Investigator
Student Investigator: Anna M. Clawson

Title: A Phenomenological Approach Examining the Completion of Latino High School Students through the Lenses of Critical Race Theory

February 15, 2015

Dear Mr. Davis,

As you are aware I am currently conducting a research project about Latinos who have successfully completed high school. This research project is part of the requirements for the doctoral degree in Educational Leadership at Western Michigan University, in which I am a student. I am conducting this research under the supervision of Dr. Walter Burt, my advisor and dissertation committee chair.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the phenomenon of Latino students who have overcome obstacles and have beaten the odds by completing high school. By employing the transcendental phenomenological approach, this study seeks a much richer, greater, and deeper understanding and insight into factors, traits and conditions that may have contributed to successful completion of Latino students in a Midwestern High School, specifically, Holland High.

Participant selection will begin by obtaining a listing of Latino students that successfully completed Holland High School between the years 2010-2014. Both purposeful and criterion sampling techniques will be utilized for this study. The data collected must meet the following criteria: a) Must be Latino; b) Must qualify for free and reduced lunch; and c) Have been through a successful/positive graduation audit and graduated with their cohort between the years of 2010-2014.

Twenty-five participants will be randomly chosen. Fifteen participants will be invited to participate in the study. The remaining ten consent participants will be kept in a

reserve pool in the case that I determine that I need more participants to achieve saturation or in the case a participant selected randomly in the first pool drops out. The fifteen selected participants will be contacted through a written letter and a follow-up phone call.

If they agree, arrangements will be made to meet either at the Latin American United for Progress office or at a Holland High School conference room. Both settings will allow for privacy and respect confidentiality.

Participation will include an individual interview and the completion of a demographic survey. During the interview participants will be asked a series of questions asking about their experiences while in high school. They will be invited to a second interview, if needed. Each interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes. Once transcribed, they will be provided with a written copy of the interview and invited to review and make changes to the transcriptions to ensure accuracy of the information provided.

This study will be shared with my dissertation committee and other appropriate members of Western Michigan University. In addition, it may be published in a university document or professional journal. Any identifying information or descriptions will be removed from the document. Any information gained from the digital recordings will not be linked to participant's identity. Each participant's name will be replaced by a participant number and will be referred to by the number in order to ensure confidentiality. "Holland High School" will be replaced by "City High School." Therefore, complete confidentiality is ensured.

Only I, as the researcher, and the transcriber will have access to the digital recordings and transcriptions. Once transcribed, the digital recordings will be deleted. Written transcripts will be filed in a locked cabinet in my home office until the study is completed. Once completed the transcripts will be housed and stored in a secure location at Western Michigan University for a minimum of 3 years. The dissertation that results from this work will be published in hard copy and housed at the library of College of Education and Human Development at Western Michigan University.

The benefits of this study include: 1) information gained on the experiences of Latino students that have overcome obstacles and have graduated from Holland High despite adversity; 2) an understanding of factors that contribute to success of Latino graduates; and 3) the ability the researcher, a Holland Public School Administrator to

partake in a qualitative research study and earn her doctorate in Educational Leadership.

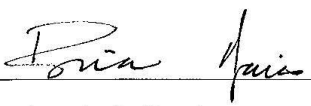
This study will be of interest to school administrators, school boards, policy makers, and stakeholders having an interest in educating all children. By eliciting insights from Latino students who persist in school to achieve a high school diploma, this study will help define issues that need to be addressed for the Latino population. Furthermore, the knowledge gained from this study will inform stakeholders how better to educate and meet the needs of the Latino population in order to improve the likelihood of graduation.


In compliance with Western Michigan University's graduate college, this project will be registered and will be approved by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at Western Michigan University.

If you have any questions, please feel free to call me, the student investigator, at 616-494-2217 (office) or 616-566-1470 (cell) or via e-mail at aclawson@hollandpublicschools.org. You may also contact my committee chairperson, Dr. Walter Burt at 269-387-1821 or via e-mail at walter.burt@wmich.edu.

Please sign below if you are willing to allow the use of a Holland High School conference room and access to the 2010-2014 data as stated in the dissertation research project outlined above. A signed copy of this consent form will be given to you for your records.

I have read the information provided above and approve to allow access to the data and a location at Holland High School for the completion of this study. I understand that the results could be published and will be shared with Western Michigan University. I have received a copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to participate in this study.

 3/13/15
Superintendent's Signature Date

Consent Obtained by:  3/13/15
Interview/Student investigator Date

Appendix F

Confidentiality Agreement with Transcriptionist

Confidentiality Agreement-Data Collection Transcriptionist

A Phenomenological Approach Examining the Completion of Latino High School Students through the Lenses of Critical Race Theory

**Western Michigan University
Department of Teaching, Learning, and Leadership
College of Education**

Principal Investigator: Dr. Walter Burt

Student Investigator: Anna M. Clawson

I understand that I have been asked to transcribe interviews as part of a doctoral research study for the doctoral student listed above. This research has been approved by the Human Subject Institution Review Board (HSRIB) of Western Michigan University and is approved doctoral research project. I have been thoroughly trained in the transcription protocol and I will not deviate from the protocol as presented.

I, _____, transcriptionist, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all audiotapes and documentation received from Anna Clawson related to her doctoral study. Furthermore, I agree:

- To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of audio taped interviews, or in any associated documents;
- To not make copies of any recordings or computerized files of the transcribed interview texts;
- To store all study-related audiotapes and materials in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession;
- To return all audiotapes and study-related documents to Anna Clawson in a complete and timely manner.
- To transcribe the information collected verbatim to express the complete intent of the participant without adding any additional information, context, meaning or judgment.

I am aware that I can be held legally liable for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the recordings and/or files to which I will have access.

Transcriber:

Signature

Date

Student Investigator:

Signature

Date

Appendix G

Western Michigan University Human Subjects Institutional Review Board Approval

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY



Human Subjects Institutional Review Board

Date: April 20, 2015

To: Walter Burt, Principal Investigator
Anna Clawson, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number 15-04-19

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled "A Phenomenological Approach Examining the Completion of Latino High School Students through the Lenses of Critical Race Theory" has been **approved** under the **expedited** category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note: This research may **only** be conducted exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project (e.g., ***you must request a post approval change to enroll subjects beyond the number stated in your application under "Number of subjects you want to complete the study."*** Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation. In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

Reapproval of the project is required if it extends beyond the termination date stated below.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: April 19, 2016

1903 W. Michigan Ave., Kalamazoo, MI 49008-5456

PHONE: (269) 387-8293 FAX: (269) 387-8276

CAMPUS SITE: 251 W. Walwood Hall