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First-Generation Latino Men's Perceptions of Masculinity during their Higher Education Experience

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by

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The dissertation of Moises Alvarado Garcia is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to the following people:

Moises Alvarado (Dad)	Gracias por enseñarme a persistir, resistir, fallar y enorgullecerme de mi trabajo. Me enseñaste a ser una buena persona. Una persona que asume la responsabilidad de todas las acciones e inacciones que toman. Estaré por siempre agradecido. Te amo.
Sandra Garcia (Mom)	Siempre me has enseñado a actuar con amor y respeto. Puedo ver cuánto sacrificaste por mí. Gracias, mamá, por nunca rendirte conmigo y empujarme a dar lo mejor de mí. No podría haber llegado a ser quien soy sin su guía y apoyo. Gracias por criarme para ser yo. Te amo.
Gaby Alvarado (Sister)	My favorite twin. Thank you for always being a rock for me and for our family. You've always inspired me to take risk, grow as a person, and to stay grounded. I'm so proud of the person you are and grateful to have you in my life. I love you.
David Alvarado (Brother)	David, this work was for us. I hope that you step through the doors our parents and siblings have opened for us. Continue growing as a person. Know that I will always be by your side as you go through your own journey. Be your authentic self, it will always be enough. I'm proud of you. I love you.
Mayra Castro (Partner)	Mi amor. I am a better person because you came into my life. I'm excited to continue learning, growing, and thriving together. I love you.
Future First-Generation Latino Men	Our experiences are unique. They are challenging. We are told to suffer in silence. Don't. Love yourself because, you are enough. Tu puedes. Te amo.

Epigraph

It is important for all of us to appreciate where we come from and how that history has really shaped us in ways that we might not understand.

Sonia Sotomayor, U.S. Supreme Court Judge

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Abstract of the Dissertation

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by

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Manuel Vargas, Chair

This study examined masculine identity, particularly *machismo*, as a social construct and its potential influence on first-generation of Latino men's experiences in higher education. In particular, the study explored how perceptions of Latino masculinity affect the values, attitudes, beliefs, and actions Latino men bring to their college journey. Latino men experience a variety of barriers, making persistence and graduation more difficult to attain. While university enrollments of Latino populations continue to grow, Latino men's academic attainment lags behind many

other students, including their Latina peers. Latino students rate among the highest percentage of students who leave the university without completing a degree. Bronfenbrenner's (1992). Ecological Systems Theory (EST), Museus's (2014) Culturally Engaging Campus Environments model, and Torres et al.'s (2002) Masculine Identity Spectrum explain, respectively, that people's core environment shapes their identity and that universities play a large role in the overall success of all students. Through a phenomenological approach—a type of qualitative research—this study examined data collected from self-identified first-generation Latino men, ages 18-21, low-income status, and full-time college students. This dissertation contends that Latino men's perception of masculinity may play an essential role in the overall higher education experience, including low academic attainment. Additionally, this may be partly due to the lack of a culturally engaging campus environment.

Keywords: Latino students, masculinity, masculine identity, machismo, persistence, retention, degree completion.

Chapter One: Introduction

Background

There is great urgency in understanding Latino men as a specific group of students in higher education when examining the demographic reality of communities across the country. Changing demographics in the United States of America (U.S.) have profound implications for higher education institutions. The number of traditional college-age Latinx youth has snowballed, and as a result, higher education institutions see similar increases in enrollment. The number of people identifying as Latinx, or Hispanic, makes up 18.4% of the U.S. population, increasing by 3.1% in 2014 (United States Census Bureau, 2019). By 2060, it's projected that the Hispanic population in the United States will reach 111 million people, or about 28% of the total population (United States Census Bureau, 2018). With Latinx youth representing a large percentage of this growth, there is a strong possibility of having the most significant impact on higher education. From 1980 to 2000, Latinx college enrollment increased from 4% to 10%. Then from 1999 to 2009, it increased again from 14.8 million to 20 million (Ponjuán, 2011). Despite this increase in Latinx enrollment in higher education, degree attainment has been disproportionate compared to White students' academic achievement. Based on 2016 data, the percentage of adults, aged 25 or older, who had completed a bachelor's degree, or higher, included 35% White, 54% Asian, 21% Black, and 15% Latinx (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Institutions of higher education can expect a continuous increase of Latinx students each year. With this anticipated increase, university personnel are forced to reflect and act on how best to meet the needs of Latinx students enrolling at their institution.

The educational future of Latinx student population in the United States is in a state of crisis, particularly for Latino men. Despite the boost in matriculation numbers, Latino men continue to fall behind, even when compared with Latinas and other ethnic groups, in degree completion rates (Holloway-Friesen, 2018; Michel & Durdella, 2018). Latino men have some of the lowest high school graduation, college enrollment, and completion rates of any demographic. This growing academic gap has implications for educational policy and practice in higher education, especially when considering the rapid enrollment increase driven by the high population growth. Given the ongoing demographic shifts towards a younger, more Latino labor force, this group represents the fastest-growing employment group and the most underutilized intellectual talent pool (Sáenz & Ponjuán, 2009). The current educational trends could limit Latino males' ability to fulfill the critical economic and social roles vital in developing prosperous communities across the nation. Employer demand for an educated, diverse workforce emphasizes the need for the U.S. education system to ensure the academic success and degree completion of students from diverse backgrounds (Maldonado & Farmer, 2006). In 2019, 15.7% of all Hispanics lived below the poverty line, one of the highest percentages amongst racial and ethnic groups (Creamer, 2020).

For this reason, Hispanic students must attend and graduate from college. College education benefits both the student and the nation because it affords many social and economic advantages. A college degree can significantly increase lifetime earning potential and improve the overall quality of life. Research has shown that a college degree has become one of the essential tools for social and economic mobility within the United States (Lewis, 2019; Sáenz et al., 2015).

Latino men face a unique set of challenges in higher education environments (Contreras, 2011; Harper & Harris, 2010). These challenges are magnified because of the lack of awareness, the framework used in support services, and limited resources to address issues throughout Latino men's college experiences (Sáenz et al., 2016). By understanding these challenges and gaining a deeper understanding of external factors, such as pre-college inputs and individual influences, academic administrators can better address the growing achievement gap and develop a more culturally engaging campus environment (Museus, 2014; Sáenz et al., 2016). Historically, research on men of color has been conducted through a deficit lens—beliefs based on the perceived weaknesses of an individual or a group. Consequently, it is crucial to ensure researchers use an identity-conscious, strengths-based lens instead. Researchers must encompass Latino men's holistic identity rather than just focusing on their shortcomings or faulting their cultural traits (Harper, 2016; Lewis, 2019).

Scholars have found traditional cultural foundations theories, such as Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993), to be culturally biased and thus to disadvantage students of color (Rendon et al., 2000; Tierney, 1992, 1999). This traditional research usually describes these students as unable to adapt to the college campus culture and lacking adequate preparation for collegiate studies, which might explain the discrepancy between enrollment numbers and graduation rates (Gummadam, Pittman, & Ioffe, 2016; Lewis, 2019; Matos, 2015; Perez & Sáenz, 2017). An often-targeted Latino trait in this research is masculinity and how it affects Latino men's experience in higher education. Historically, most research on college-age men, and their perception of masculinity, has been done on middle-class White men (Harper & Harris, 2010; McGowan, Tillapaugh, & Harris, 2019). More research needs to be conducted on first-

generation, low socioeconomic status (SES) Latino men and how they experience higher education. This type of research would benefit many learning communities, especially higher education.

This study focused on how Latino men's perception of masculinity may affect their college experience. The study attempted to move away from the toxic masculinity concept of *machismo* as a deficit lens imposed on Latino men through stereotypical and often unexplored notions of Latino masculinity (Estrada & Jiménez, 2018; Duran, 2021). The study challenged and re-defined the concept of masculine identity among first-generation Latino men by exploring the experiences of a small group in a Latino community within one Southern California four-year public institution. The following will explore why this specific population needs additional attention.

Latino Trends in Education

While university enrollments of Latino populations continue to grow, Latino men's academic attainment lags behind many other students, including their female Latina peers. For example, Latino men have the lowest high school graduation rates and some of the most insufficient college enrollment and program completion rates (Sáenz et al., 2016). Latino men are not keeping pace with their peers at crucial transition points throughout the educational pipeline. Low enrollment rates in early childhood education may play a role in these early years and can significantly affect early academic success. For example, children have established a learning pattern that shapes their entire schooling career by the third grade (Sáenz et al., 2016). Another potential indicator of these early struggles may be the differential rates of suspension and expulsion Latino men experience (Contreras, 2011; Harper & Harris, 2010; Sáenz et al.,

2016). More specifically, on average, Latino boys were more than twice as likely to be held back a grade across the entire K-12 educational pipeline (Sáenz et al., 2016).

During the middle and high school years, Latino boys begin the process of masculine socialization through mainstream media, traditional gender role constructs, and a lack of identification with positive role models, specifically men of color, in their communities. Men are taught to disconnect from their innate emotional understanding and sensitivity to become a "man." Socially, they are also taught to fear the perception of femininity and homosexuality (O'Neil, 1982). Society teaches Latino boys to disconnect from the natural part of human emotional connection. This connection is used to interact with others, build a community, and help create positive relationships with others. The male Gender Role Conflict (GRC) analysis, developed by O'Neil (1982), can explain the issue of masculine socialization. This author contends that the analysis can be defined as a psychological state in which socialized gender roles negatively affect individuals. These conflicts often lead to feelings of isolation, depression, and negative attitudes toward help-seeking. While going through these experiences, non-minority teachers often hold lower expectations for underrepresented students, including Latino men. These biases can lead educators to place little or no effort into supporting Latinx students' academic goals (Contreras, 2011). These issues pose significant barriers as Latino men attempt to navigate high school degree completion, college enrollment, transitions from one level to the next, and college academic degree finalization.

Problem Statement

There are unique barriers and leaks in the Latino educational pipeline where educators are losing far too many students, especially Latino men. This creates a significant urgency to

have a deeper understanding of Latino men. Higher education must rectify these leaks to create a more equitable educational experience where Latino men thrive in a culturally engaging environment. Higher education institutions have the opportunity and the moral obligation to be the leaders in these efforts. While college tuition continues to rise to extreme levels, these institutions must fulfill the promises of providing an equitable experience for all the students they choose to matriculate. In doing so, these institutions will fulfill the commitments they have set for their students. Colleges and universities have the potential to become leaders in educating a large, untapped workforce that can help stimulate and strengthen the United States economy. They can do this by awakening the "sleeping giant"—a term commonly applied to the Latino community that has historically been unsupported in realizing its full educational, economic, political, and labor-force potential (Contreras, 2011; Harper & Harris, 2010; Maldonado & Farmer, 2006; Sáenz et al., 2016).

One of the most under-researched barriers that Latino men face is the sociocultural transition into college and the role masculine socialization plays in the perception of their own masculinity and the overall educational experience (Sáenz & Ponjuán, 2009; Sáenz et al., 2016). It is difficult for young Latino men to abide by society's gender role script of what constitutes becoming and being a "man." This self-perception and additional cultural gender roles often clash with current perceptions of what traits or actions include a successful college student. Latino men receive a plethora of mixed messages on expectations to fit into the multiple social circles where they are expected to develop a sense of belongingness (Sáenz et al., 2015; Michel & Durdella, 2018). As first-generation college students, this is a brand-new cultural social circle that these young men are transitioning into with little to no guidance on how to succeed.

Reverting to culturally traditional gender norms often serves as a defense mechanism to navigate these new spaces, especially spaces like higher education. Students may not have any direct connection to understanding how these new spaces function.

For many first-generation of college Latino men, the perception of masculinity plays a prominent role in their attitudes, beliefs, and actions in higher education (Duran, 2020). Many historical higher education retention theories put the responsibility of degree completion solely on the individual student. Yet, they fail to recognize institutions' commitment to understanding their students and creating an environment where all students have the support that works for them. Early theories, like Tinto's Retention Theory (1975, 1987, 1993, 2006), were used as a backbone for creating student support programs on college campuses. This one-size-fits-all theoretical backbone failed to acknowledge and understand fully the future diverse student populations entering the university and what would work best for them (Lewis, 2019; Samuelson & Litzler, 2016; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2005). Newer theorists have been highly critical of Tinto's culturally biased theoretical foundation, the limitations of the self-deterministic nature of the theory, and the lack of understanding of the psychological dimensions of students' sense of connection to their institution. On the other hand, Museus's (2014) Culturally Engaging Campus Environment model acknowledges the multiple indicators that are the institution's responsibility to promote and achieve college success outcomes. Some of these include cultural familiarity, culturally relevant knowledge, culturally validating environments, and proactive philosophies that collaborate with individual influences, external influences, and pre-college inputs toward successful outcomes. Simply put, if higher education institutions do not have a level of cultural proficiency needed to support Latino, first-generation men, then these students

will find it hard to succeed. Latino men's perception of their masculinity plays into many intersectional parts of their identity; for example, how others see and interact with them and how Latino men see and interact with others. Tapping into this phenomenon could help future educators understand how to interact with and support first-generation Latino men.

Unfortunately, there is limited academic literature on the perception of masculinity and its effects on higher educational experiences, especially among Latino men. This lack of information about first-generation Latino men leaves a significant gap in the literature. Thus, researching this area is vital to understanding how Latino men experience higher education and help higher education institutions develop a deeper cultural understanding of this population.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative study, which utilized a phenomenological approach, was to explore how Latino men's perception of masculinity affects their overall college experience. Campus climates and environments can contribute to the development of masculine identity that may either create barriers or support successful student outcomes. Latino men display increased feelings of isolation, or not "fitting in," around university environments (Duran, 2021; Lewis, 2019). Intentionally or unintentionally, transformative experiences that occur on college campuses, or other environments, may alter how Latino men perceive their own masculine identity. This would also affect how Latino men behave within the college environment. Positive masculine identity experiences that occur on campus may help first-generation of Latino men become more connected to the university and develop a sense of belonging (Duran, 2021). This connection and sense of belonging may function as key factors to motivate Latino male students persist and achieve degree completion in higher education (Lewis, 2019).

Definition of Terms

The following terms and concepts are intended to provide a common understanding for this study.

Masculinity refers to the roles, behaviors, and attributes considered appropriate for boys and men in society. Masculinity is constructed and defined socially, historically, and politically rather than being biologically driven. A term that can be understood only regarding other identities or as being located within complex, unequal power relations, and structural inequalities. Researchers find Latino men do not constitute a monolithic, homogeneous, unvarying mass depicted in traditional socialized masculinity. This suggests that there is not one masculine mode but a variety that are different and, often, contradictory (Figueroa, Perez, & Vega, 2016).

Machismo as a sociocultural term is associated with men's (and women's) socialization around gender roles and expectations. Specifically, Latinx cultures are a strict set of learned values, attitudes, and beliefs about masculinity. Examples include not expressing a full range of emotions and being only limited to expressing feelings through violence and aggression for fear of being seen as weak by others.

Caballerismo refers to a positive image of a man as the family provider who respects, protects, and cares for his family. As the opposite of machismo, it depicts men as chivalrous, nurturing, noble, and allowing them to express these emotions and feelings freely.

Familismo describes an ideology that prioritizes the needs of the family over that of the individual. It also refers to a strong sense of ethnic identification with and loyalty to nuclear and

extended family. It includes a sense of protection of familial honor, respect, and cooperation among family members.

First-generation college students (FGCS) are individuals whose parent(s) and/or legal guardians have not completed a bachelor's degree in the United States, making them the first in their immediate family to attend a four-year college or university.

Low-income students come from families with annual incomes in the lowest 20% nationally or below 200% of the federal poverty line (Choy & Bobbitt, 2020).

Research Questions

Year after year, first-generation Latino men increase their enrollment at colleges and universities across the country. Yet, their retention and graduation rates remain stagnant (Holloway-Friesen, 2018; Michel & Durdella, 2018). Masculine identity perception may be an important factor that, when understood, may shed some light into persistence and graduation rates for Latino men. This reality begs the question: What can institutions of higher education do to address this challenge? Does the Latino man's masculine identity play a critical role? The following overarching questions assisted me, as a researcher, in addressing the masculinity of Latino men in higher education and its potential intersections with academic.

1: How do microsystem environments contribute to the masculine identity development of first-generation Latino Men?

2: How does masculine identity alter first-generation Latino men's sense of belonging at their university?

3: What aspirations do current first-generation Latino men have for the masculine identity formation of future first-generation Latino men?

Chapter Three describes a more detailed data-gathering protocol, which provides further guidance to explore the above overarching questions.

Methodology

Qualitative research explores the meaning of individuals or groups connected to a problem or situation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Along with the qualitative research models, this study utilized a phenomenological approach to explore masculine identity and its intersection with the college experience of first-generation, low-income, college Latino male students. This approach allowed study participants to share their stories via personal interviews. By using a phenomenological research design, study participants described personal experiences as a shared phenomenon. In this case, a phenomenological research design was the most appropriate approach to explore how students' perception of their own masculine identity may have affected their overall college experience. This design may help identify factors within the university environment that contribute to understanding the masculine identity of Latino men in higher education. More concretely, this qualitative study also served as a platform to gain a deeper understanding of the Latino masculinity phenomenon and its interactions with the overall college experience.

Seven participants were selected from an institution of higher education in the Southern California region. In line with the research questions, participants were asked to describe their overall college experience, perception of masculinity, and any potential barriers or advantages they may have had during their educational journey, especially regarding their own perception of masculinity and thoughts on what could have enhanced their experience. Each study participant

was asked to be a part of an interview. They were also asked to review—member-checking—the researcher's findings to capture their voice correctly (Candela, 2019; Maxwell, 2012).

Significance of Study

A large majority of Latino male college students identify themselves as first-generation. Their access, and success within higher education institutions, influence their entire family, thus resulting in a generational impact. The Latino community is underserved in the United States, especially in higher education as evidenced by Latinos' high enrollment numbers and low program-completion rates. The number of Latinos attending college has steadily increased over the past decades (Contreras, 2011; Serrata, 2016; Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2009) and colleges and universities continue to diversify and market equitable opportunities for all students to succeed at their institutions. Yet, there is limited research to illuminate the strengths that Latino men bring to university campuses; consequently, more research must be done. This researcher and a few others contend that Latino men's perception of their masculinity may play a prominent role in their attitudes, beliefs, actions, and overall experiences (Duran, 2020, Harper & Harris, 2010). Additionally, this research attempted to identify potential benefits of developing culturally engaging campuses that build a strong sense of belongingness, including cultural familiarity, which may contribute to students' transformative development experience and college success outcomes (Museus, 2014). Research needs to highlight these experiences and provide institutions of learning an in-depth understanding of potential solutions to ensure students' retention and degree completion. The researcher conducted an in-depth literature review—included in Chapter Two—which provides additional context to the connection between perception of masculinity, higher education institutions' role in student success, and reimagining how educators view Latino

masculinity. This study also used a set of guiding principles, which constituted the theoretical framework of this research, based on the following authors: Bronfenbrenner's (1992) Ecological Systems Theory (EST), Museus's (2014) Culturally Engaging Campus Environment model, and Torres et al. (2002) Latino Masculine Spectrum. Latino men are socialized into traditional perceptions of Latino masculinity. Social environments, such as college campuses, may play a significant role in the development of masculine identity. This identity can have both a negative or a positive effect on the overall college experience, thus resulting in low or high levels of academic attainment. Chapter Two has a more in-depth description of the Theoretical Framework.

Chapter One Summary and Overview of Chapters Two and Three

Latino men's enrollment in colleges and universities increases every year while degree completion rates remain low (Holloway-Friesen, 2018; Michel & Durdella, 2018). This study represents an attempt to provide an insight into the experiences of Latino men and build a level of understanding that can potentially help colleges and universities create a more culturally engaging campus environment. Chapter One described the increase of the Latinx population in the United States in general, as well as undergraduate enrollment of this population in higher education. Retention and degree completion rates of this population, specifically Latino men, have lagged compared to their White counterparts and other underrepresented groups. This dissertation contends that Latino men's perception of masculinity plays an important role in the overall higher education experience, including low academic attainment levels. This may be partly due to the lack of culturally engaging campus environment.

Chapter Two reviews existing literature about Latino masculinity, *machismo, caballerismo, familismo*, and how all of these interact with the Latino men's college experience. It also explores Latino men's relationship with their own masculinity and how this relationship appears through the philosophies, attitudes, and actions they demonstrate. Since the literature on this topic is limited, Chapter Two will include a review of available literature and, when appropriate, other populations of men of color will be included. Chapter Two also reviews Latino cultural values and the intersection with multiple identity layers that influence Latino men's perception of masculinity. Lastly, Chapter Two describes the Theoretical Framework, which will guide research questions and data analysis, and will serve as a lens to examine this phenomenon.

Chapter Three describes the qualitative research methodology, specifically the phenomenological approach, which was used in the study. The chapter will also provide an overview of the research design, as well as a description of the site in Southern California of a four-year, public institution selected for this study. Chapter Three will also describe participant sampling and selection process, as well as an in-depth description of data collection and analysis. Lastly, the chapter discusses limitations to the study, the researcher's positionality, and methods used to address validity concerns. Data gathering and analysis may help understand barriers related to degree completion, as well as individual Latino men's strengths and findings institutions of higher education can tap into to support this population.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This dissertation explored how Latino men's perception of masculinity may affect their overall college experience. Campus climates and environments can contribute to developing a masculine identity that may hinder or support successful student outcomes. Study findings may provide an understanding to increase the persistence and graduation rates of first-generation Latino men in higher education by exploring the concept of socialized masculinity and identity development. To provide background on this topic, Chapter Two reviews the historical construct of masculinity, patriarchy, and the intersection with Latino masculinity. Historical context is important for understanding the deeply rooted socialization that occurs with Latino men and how this can affect the development of their values, attitudes, belief, and actions. While there is a traditional understanding of male socialization roles, this dissertation acknowledges men's wide masculinity spectrum and takes a deeper look at these concepts. Then, the researcher reviews traditional masculinity's negative effects on Latino men when left unchecked.

This dissertation principally looks at the concept of masculinity within the higher education environment. The researcher explored the connection between the perception of masculinity and college experiences for Latino men in higher education, especially since higher education institutions have begun to adopt the "student-centric" operating model—an environment which prioritizes the needs and interests of the students, rather than focusing first and foremost on the interests of higher education institutions and the demands of the research enterprise (Contreras, 2011). The researcher explains the institution's role when addressing masculinity identity development, specifically, the positive traits of Latino masculinity that institutions could tap into to create an environment where this population can truly succeed.

Some promising practices are already being developed that have adopted an anti-deficit framework to serve this population. The end of this chapter will describe, in more detail, the theoretical framework guiding research questions, data gathering, and data analysis.

Masculinity

From the moment people are born, they are taught about gender. They are assigned a "sex at birth" identity that has values, beliefs, attitudes, and actions assigned to that gender. Masculinity is a term that refers to the roles, behaviors, and attributes that the dominant society sees as appropriate for those it identifies as male (Harper & Harris, 2010). Some examples include showing leadership, being physically and emotionally tough, and being a perpetrator but never a victim of violence. These traits and values are upheld and passed on through a patriarchal social system—a system that insists men are inherently dominant and superior to women. This subsequently leads to the practice of patriarchal masculinity or the ideas and practices that emphasize the superiority of masculinity over femininity. For Latino men, there is an additional layer associated with the masculine concept that combines modern views of masculinity, patriarchal society, and cultural background often defined as *machismo*. Machismo is an extreme gender schema consisting of behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs, which can be either positive or negative and traditionally associated with Latino men (Casas et al., 1995). Machismo is often used to describe masculinity, hyper-masculinity, or toxic masculinity within the Latinx community. First, a historical view of the formation of this additional cultural layer about Latino masculinity can paint a clearer picture of attitudes and practices we see Latino men engaging in today.

According to Torres et al. (2002), the roots of machismo can be traced to the attitudes and behaviors emerging from Spain that were carried over to parts of the new world, such as modern-day Mexico. These authors also contend that the benevolent sexism ideology traced to the Iberian Peninsula was rooted in a culture that viewed men as warriors and protectors of womanhood. Upon arrival to and colonization of Latin America, settlers would view native men as fierce protectors of their land, culture, and families, specifically women, and thus derived the term machismo. This is especially important when understanding the relationship between Latino men and Latina women, which will be explored later in this chapter. Machismo is rooted in the Spanish word *macho*, a noun that describes a male animal. Thus began the dehumanization of native men and the hyper-masculinization of today's modern Latino men. Hyper-masculinization is perpetuated and upheld by modern-day patriarchal systems where Latino men live. The social construct of machismo came with a set of gendered norms, constituting society's perception of manly behaviors, which included, among others, the following: never show emotions, weakness, or any need for support; instead, one should portray the ability to be self-reliant. Current definitions of machismo include complex interaction of learned and reinforced social, cultural, and behavioral components, which exist in male gender-role identities in the context of Latino society (De La Cacela, 1986; Deyoung & Zigler, 1994).

Machismo has historically been seen as one of the most unfavorable traits of Latino men. This myopic perception of Latino men continued until scholars re-defined it as an extreme gender schema consisting of behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs traditionally associated with men, which may be either positive or negative (Estrada & Jiménez, 2018). Researchers explored deeper into this social concept and found that there were some positive associations with Latino

masculinity. Yet, most literature has often associated Latino masculinity with negative characteristics such as sexism, hyper-masculinity, and chauvinism (Anders, 1993; Arciniega, et al., 2008; Ingoldsby, 1991; Mosher & Tompkins, 1988). While a dominant combination of views, attitudes, and beliefs make up today's masculine identity, it is important to note that self-perceptions of masculinity lie on a spectrum that varies from person to person.

Masculinity Spectrum

When discussing Latino masculinity, the term is often referred to as machismo and used interchangeably. However, Latino masculinity is more complex because it is not a static cultural model but a shifting set of normative and gender-specific behaviors, attitudes, and practices that depend on social and cultural contexts (Figueroa et al., 2016). Researchers who have examined Latino masculinity have found that Latino men do not constitute a homogeneous, monolithic, or unvarying mass of men depicted in more traditional models of masculinity. Their findings suggest that there is not one masculine model but a variety of modalities that are not only different but can also be contradictory (Archer, 2003; Figueroa et al., 2016; Gutmann, 2007; Mirande, 1997).

Machismo and caballerismo are commonly used to describe the different extremes of the Latino masculinity spectrum. Researchers have referred to traditional masculinity as a masculine identity that includes hyper-masculine qualities such as aggression, homophobia, and prejudiced loyalty behavior—personality traits frequently expressed through intolerance of differences in other men—, underdeveloped coping skills, and sex-role dominance (Arciniega et al., 2008; Sáenz et al., 2015; Saez et al., 2009). On the other end of the spectrum, researchers have described caballerismo through a more advantageous contribution of the Latino masculinity lens.

For example, Caballerismo is attached to more nurturing traits such as family-centric, noble, and chivalrous (Arciniega et al., 2008; Sáenz et al., 2015). Other researchers have explored even more profoundly multiple masculine identities within this spectrum.

For example, Torres et al. (2002) explored this research and established five groups under which Latino masculinity falls: traditional machismo, machismo, conflicted/compassionate machismo, contemporary machismo, and contemporary masculinity. In the traditional machismo group, men tend to be more dominant, rigid, and demanding family respect and obedience. Such a traditional view differs from the contemporary masculinity group that characterizes men as being flexible and collaborative, demanding less family respect and obedience, and seeking cooperation and harmony. The middle group has a combination of characteristics such as emotional expressiveness levels, valuing tradition, and lower levels of traditional machismo when considering patriarchal stoicism and dominance (Torres et al., 2002). These authors' study further examined the construct of machismo in relationship to measures of machismo, masculinity, and gender role identity. In these studies, researchers recruited 148 Latino men with an average age of 36. They utilized previous research tools such as the personal attribute questionnaire, the macho scale, and the gender role conflict scale; in addition to their interviews, researchers came up with five groupings. Each grouping had a cluster of characteristics that helped demonstrate multidimensional aspects of Latino masculinity where Latino men can move in and out of (Torres et al., 2002).

Further research helps illustrate how these groups are not fixed but incorporate a more fluid masculine perception based on one's changing circumstances, such as socioeconomics and environment-related. Consequently, while Latino masculinity may be multidimensional, some

may argue that it is just one's perspective of masculinity. These perceptions can shape how Latino men negotiate between their previous and new environments (Sáenz et al., 2009; Sáenz et al., 2015). This suggests Latinos' perception of masculinity is vital to understand, as it will affect their life decisions.

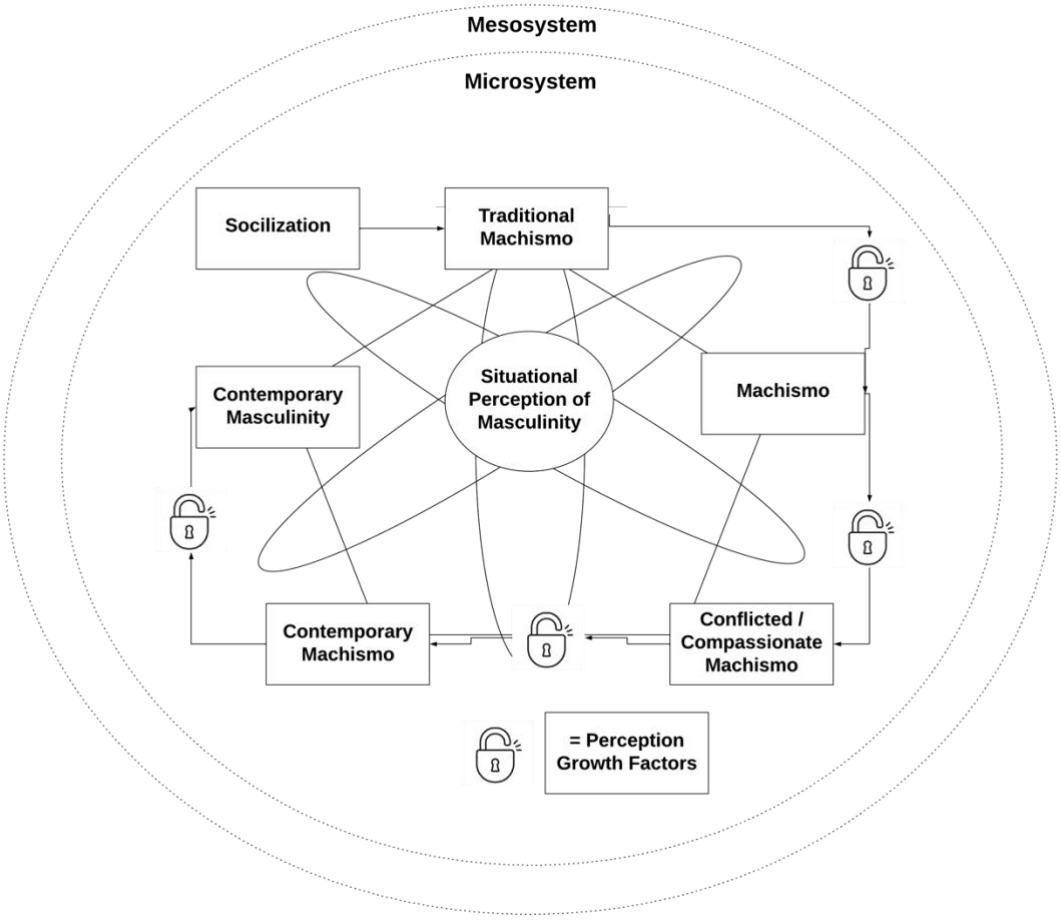

Figure 1.1

Situational Perception of Masculinity

Note: The socialization of Latino men within their microsystem contexts is depicted in this figure. Latino men may have transforming life experiences that "unlock" newer, more contemporary ideas of what it means to be a man. Depending on the circumstance, Latinos may exhibit traits linked to these masculine ideas once they are unlocked.

Socialization of Masculine Identity in Latino Boys

While these different dimensions of Latino masculinity exist, society still socializes Latino boys to adopt a particular set of masculine ideologies typically referred to as machismo. Researchers who have looked at machismo almost uniformly characterize it as destructive. A common occurrence in research is to assume machismo is violent and defined by aggressive acts or beliefs (Arciniega et al., 2008). Machismo has been seen as one of Latino men's most historically negative traits. It is often used to describe what constitutes a “real man.” Latino cultures consistently hold men to the expectations of becoming good men by following a strict gender role schema and being solid providers for the nuclear family (Ballysingh, 2016; Estrada & Arciniega, 2015). These ideologies continue to be socially upheld through images used in popular media that depict what “real Latino men” behave like, value, and believe. The core of these beliefs surrounds a fear of femininity and how men regard their feminine characteristics as dangerous to their male identity (O’Neil et al., 1986). Researchers have described this phenomenon as men’s socialization and the masculine mystique with six complex dimensions that stem from the fear of femininity. These include (1) restrictive emotionality; (2) homophobia; (3) socialized control, power, and competition issues; (4) restricted sexual and affectionate behavior; (5) obsession with achievement and success; and (6) health care problems (O’Neil et al., 1986).

In the United States, as boys grow up, there is a point in their lives where they begin to adopt an American culture of masculinity. For example, in adolescence, boys tell researchers about their love for their friendships and appear clear about their desire for emotionally intimate male friendships. Then, they begin to say phrases like “no homo” in response to emotional

interactions with their close male relationships, such as giving a hug or saying, "I love you." In their minds, to become a "man," one must disconnect from the innate emotional acuity and emotional sensitivity (Way, 2013). Latino boys experience all these behaviors with an additional cultural layer that includes familial responsibilities, upholding the family honor, clearly visible strength, and behaviors that embody cultural norms. In 2019, for the first time, the American Psychological Association (APA) issued an official warning against traditional and/or toxic masculinity, like traditional machismo. The APA states these norms can result in masking distress, leading to traits like homophobia and increased suicidal ideation, among others (American Psychological Association, 2019).

The Danger of Traditional Masculinity

Society cannot deny that Latino men certainly maintain power and privilege based on their gender in their communities. Yet, it is crucial to think critically about the anecdotal and empirical data that show how Latino men face dangerous and complex challenges and obstacles in their lives, especially college Latino students (McGowan, Tillapaugh, & Harris, 2019). Harper and Harris (2010) have argued that college men are mistakenly seen in problematic and flawed ways regarding their developmental needs and lived experiences. In response, these researchers identified the model gender majority myth, which includes five flawed assumptions:

1. Every male student benefits similarly from gender privilege.
2. Gender initiatives need not include men unless focused on reducing violence and sexual assault against women.

3. Undergraduate men do not encounter harmful stereotypes, social and academic challenges, and differential treatment in college environments because of their gender.
4. Male students do not require gender-specific resources and support.
5. Historical dominance and structural determinism ensure success for most contemporary college men.

These assumptions systematically uphold the dangers of traditional masculinity in society and on college campuses. These assumptions also support the toxic cyclical socialization in the United States for all boys. While Latino men do have privileges from their male identity, they also face disproportionate rates of harsher discipline in school, academic challenges, mental health issues, and a wide variety of life challenges (e.g., relational problems, family well-being, and others) (American Psychological Association, 2019). Many men in the United States have been socialized to use aggression and violence to resolve interpersonal conflict. Then, some will turn to alcohol or drugs as a trauma-related avoidance response to difficult emotions and uncomfortable situations. With the additional cultural layer of masculinity that socializes young Latino boys towards a more traditional machismo perception of their masculinity, these issues are highly enhanced throughout their experiences (American Psychological Association, 2019; Harper & Harris, 2010; McGowan, Tillapaugh, & Harris, 2019).

Additionally, many men do not seek help when needed because they are socialized to adopt the traditional masculine ideals, behaviors, and attitudes—of self-reliance. This is the case for Latino men. When working with this group of students, it is essential to have these considerations. Higher education practitioners must recognize that masculinity is constructed

based on social, cultural, and contextual norms; this means that men can develop their masculine identity. Critical parts of this development include understanding that men integrate aspects of their social identities across their lifespans. Thus, places of learning must strive to help men engage in health-related behaviors to help them develop a comprehensive understanding of masculine identity and how it affects their college experience (American Psychological Association, 2019; Harper & Harris, 2010; Serrata, 2016). To understand how these affect college Latino men, we can begin by understanding how this population is doing in higher education settings.

Latino Men in Higher Education

The number of Latinx people in the United States continues to grow and alter the country's demographics. By the year 2060, it is projected that the Latinx population in the United States will reach 111 million people, or about 28 % of the total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). By 2045, people identified as White will be in the minority compared to the growth of the Hispanic, Black, Asian, and multiracial populations (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). As a result of this growth, Latinx people have quickly become the most prominent underrepresented students seeking post-secondary education (Fry & Taylor, 2013). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), within the 2010 national enrollment of first-time, first-year students seeking degree completion, only 54% of Latinx students graduated within the first six years. Of these students, 58% identified as female, which means far fewer Latino men completed their degrees (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019).

As the number of enrolled Latinx students rises, colleges and universities seek to obtain Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI) accreditation, which means they are degree-granting, public

or private institutions of higher education with 25% of total undergraduate Latinx student enrollment. Once designated as an HSI, universities become eligible to receive additional grant funding; however, these grants are not restricted to supporting Latinx students.

Instead, grants can be another source of financial help for the entire university population. As of this writing, the United States Department of Education does not require HSIs to provide a framework of essential services, organizations/departments, and/or outreach programs to support Latinx students. HSIs can become a central hub to support Latino men's academic achievements. However, not all institutions consider the idea of "Hispanic Serving" central to their institution's identity (Contreras et al., 2008; Hurtado & Ruiz, 2012). For Latino men, other salient parts of their identity affect how they interact with the university.

While not all Latino students identify as first-generation college students, a large majority do, which affects how they experience college (Contreras et al., 2008). A first-generation college student (FGCS) can be defined as a student whose parents or legal guardians have not completed a four-year bachelor's degree in the United States. This means that they are the first in their family to attend a four-year college or university to complete a bachelor's degree. These students are more likely to take remedial classes, come from a family of immigrants, be in low-income households, and represent about 11% of low-income first-generation students earning a degree within six years (Gardner & Holley, 2011). Many first-generation college students disproportionately come from underrepresented backgrounds with lower college participation rates in the United States. This group of Latino men tends to be older, have less financial support from their parents, and are more likely to have multiple responsibilities outside of college. Some of these responsibilities may include but are not limited to changing jobs, managing finances,

health, familial obligations, citizenship status, and others (Chen, 2005; Choy, 2000; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). In addition to these responsibilities, Latino men continue to experience male-gender role conflict in their masculine identity development.

Male Gender Role Conflict in Higher Education

Researcher O'Neil (2008, 2013, 2015) describes this gender role conflict (GRC) as a problem that results from adherence to rigid, sexist, and restrictive gender roles learned during socialization and which also results in the personal restriction, devaluation, or violations of self and others. GRC has demonstrated that men experience conflict in four different domains: (1) success, power, and competition; (2) restrictive emotionality; (3) restrictive emotional behavior between men; and (4) conflict between work and family relations (American Psychological Association, 2019). O'Neil argues that for Latino men to progress in their masculine identity development, they must undergo transformative experiences that challenge how they perceive their identity. If no transformative experiences occur, intentionally or unintentionally, Latino men will adopt a socialized traditional machismo masculine identity. Some examples of how Latino men experience male GRC in higher education include the following: (1) forming relationships and engaging with college peers; (2) increasing pressure to be self-reliant; (3) having a negative attitude towards help-seeking; (4) having restrictive expressions of feelings or vulnerabilities; (5) abusing alcohol and drugs; and (6) experiencing imposter syndrome (Estrada & Arciniega, 2015; Sáenz et al., 2015).

Imposter syndrome can be described as an internal perception of intellectual phoniness, creating doubts about personal skills, talents, or accomplishments. Students who experience imposter syndrome may fear or build anxiety about being exposed as a "fraud." Anyone can

experience this phenomenon, but it is especially common among first-generation, underrepresented students who attempt to navigate a college system built to serve a specific privileged demographic (Arbelo-Marrero & Milacci, 2016; Clayton et al., 2017; Clance & Imes, 1978). Social engagement and peer connections for Latino students have been identified as critical to their academic success and help facilitate social adjustment to college and enhance their sense of belonging (Brooms et al., 2018). Socialized traditional machismo perceptions of masculinity view these relationships as too feminine, which conflicts with conventional masculinity values and the importance of remaining tough, strong, and silent. For Latino men, the concept of familismo adds yet another cultural layer to these perceptions.

Familismo can be defined as an ideology that prioritizes the family's needs over those of the individual. It refers to a strong sense of ethnic identification and loyalty to the nuclear and extended family. For Latino men, this includes a sense of protection of familial honor, respect, and cooperation among family members (Ayon et al., 2010; Marin & Marin, 1991; Sáenz & Ponjuán, 2009). This can be described as a strong cultural value for Latino men and directly relates to Latino men's perception of masculinity. This concept can be compared to a well-known Latinx saying, "*la familia primero*," (family comes first) (Duran, 2021). The core concepts of Familismo and the wide spectrum of Latino masculinity can be applied to either support socialized traditional machismo or help Latino men move towards a more contemporary masculine identity. According to Duran (2021), it will require considerable introspection and intentional transformative experiences to help Latino men claim new perceptions of their masculinity. If managed with the right support and guidance, the favorable characteristics pulled from Latino masculinity can be used as a form of resilience to navigate new settings, including

higher education. Duran (2021) believes that it all comes down to students' perceptions of their masculinity.

Student Perception of Masculinity

Masculinity ideologies can vary Latinos' ability to negotiate among people and groups; they may also change over time. Some ideologies are more powerful when determining what normal masculine behavior is. For Latino men, there seems to be an internal conflict where more traditional behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions of masculinity clash with behaviors and attitudes expected for a successful transition into college settings (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Blazina & Watkins, 1996). When entering new environments, Latino college men's internal conflict seems to include two underlying factors: restriction-related and achievement-related GRC (O'Neil et al., 1986). For example, behaviors such as not showing emotion or having close friendships with other men for fear of being labeled a homosexual are prime examples. Achievement-related GRC refers to ideas and perceptions of success, power, and competition. This can be viewed as a conflict between Latino students' academic goals and familial responsibilities. Latino men may often have to choose between academic success or the current needs of their core family throughout their college careers (Contreras et al., 2008; Hurtado & Carter, 1997). For instance, they may choose to engage in a non-paid internship in their field of study versus working a part-time job to fill the family's financial needs. Another example is the familial pressure of not currently providing for the family, which leads to Latinos leaving the university settings and entering the workforce instead of staying and completing their degree.

Many behaviors can lead to college success not aligning with traditional socialized perceptions of Latino masculinity. Behaviors such as help-seeking, developing close

relationships with other male college students, seeking counseling, or choosing to engage in campus activities over familial responsibilities are examples of clashes with traditional perceptions of masculinity (Estrada & Jiménez, 2018; Saez, Cassado, & Wade, 2009). Researchers discovered activities that focus on reducing restriction-related components of GRC helped develop more positive attitudes and that perceptions towards these behaviors can all support the student's ability to be successful on a college campus (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Ballysingh, 2016; Estrada & Arciniega, 2015; Good & Wood, 1995). While achievement-related GRC is less researched, researchers believe these ideas and perceptions could be moderated by basic psycho-social processes and reframing, encouraging a more positive attitude towards seeking help. More research needs to occur to understand how Latino college students' thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of masculinity are influenced by their environment (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Ballysingh, 2016; Estrada & Arciniega, 2015; Good & Wood, 1995).

According to Addis and Mahalik's (2003) findings, when men faced issues that altered their perception of self-reliance, or issues that got in the way of achieving their goals, they tended to change their perception of masculinity. Some ways in which men could foster adaptive help-seeking included following some psychological processes to normalize the behavior. Latino students are socialized to hold onto what they perceive as their masculinity. They use this sense of traditional machismo as a scale of self-worth and a rite of passage to belong to the Latino community. By re-framing some of these thoughts to align with gender norms, men were likelier to have a positive attitude towards help-seeking (Estrada & Jiménez, 2018; Saez, Cassado, & Wade, 2009). As Latino men altered their perception of masculinity to align with a more contemporary masculinity ideology, they were more willing to engage in practices like help-

seeking. For example, a core value of familismo is to support and provide for the family. While traditional machismo teaches Latino men to be self-reliant in the process of achieving this goal, contemporary masculinity ideologies help men see help-seeking and college engagement as a tool to use toward academic achievement, which will put them in a stronger position to provide for the family (Addis & Mahalik, 2003). While many diverse student populations need additional support, Latino men rank among the highest demographic in college departure (Aguinaga & Gloria, 2015). Latino masculinity is a concept affecting how Latino men understand themselves and the role influencing their actions. Understanding Latino masculinity and its foundational effects on this population could be a key to increasing the retention and graduation rates of this group of students (Aguinaga & Gloria, 2015; Arciniega et al., 2008; Ballysingh, 2016; Estrada & Jiménez, 2018; Sáenz, Mayo, Miller, & Rodriguez, 2015).

The Role of the Institution

Latino men face new and unique challenges in the world of higher education. Compared to their peers, their disproportionate academic outcomes make it evident higher education institutions need to invest more actively and support the Latino community (Duran, 2021). For so long, higher education institutions have been operating on theoretical foundations which place Latino students at a disadvantage. Early theories, like Tinto's theory of retention (1975), were used as a backbone to create programs, policies, and practices for all students. Yet, these "one-size-fits-all" theories failed to acknowledge and fully understand the future diverse student population entering the university (Lewis, 2019; Samuelson & Litzler, 2016; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2005).

Theoretical perspectives began to shift because researchers sought to examine the relationship between the growing population of new diverse students and the institutional environment effects on a student's decision to stay or leave the university. Some scholars highlight the importance of cultural validation and integrity where institutions celebrate students' identities and offer culturally relevant programs and practices, promoting students' success (Attinasi, 1989; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Museus & Saelua, 2017; Rendón, 1994; Rendón et al., 2000; Tierney, 1992, 1999). New theoretical concepts and practices challenge colleges and universities to take institutional responsibility for the success of all their students using identity-conscious and asset-based approaches (Pendakur, 2016). This means viewing students as assets to the university who come with a wide array of strengths, knowledge, and diversity, which offer the potential to strengthen the institution. With this new approach, colleges and universities are challenged to learn more about their student admissions. Understanding the strengths, challenges, values, practices, backgrounds, and subcultures is key to developing support areas and programs to increase the retention of these students. This new approach results in complex but necessary tasks to ensure higher education institutions demonstrate their commitment to student success. Current asset-based research challenges institutions to acknowledge the external influences and pre-college inputs when Latino men enter the university and thus provide a culturally engaging campus environment that supports Latino students' sense of belonging, academic disposition, and academic performance. This must all be done to achieve favorable college success outcomes (Museus, 2014). Using this as a core framework to move forward, this study seeks to pull from the positive characteristics of Latino masculinity and develop a strengths-based Conceptual Framework to see how we can better serve Latino men in higher education.

Positive Traits Associated with Latino Masculinity

Two commonly used terms to describe the positive traits of Latino masculinity include familismo and caballerismo—concepts that embody strong feelings about family, ethnic identity, and problem-solving skills. As a result, Latino men operate within the perception of masculinity to demonstrate common characteristics such as loyalty, responsibility, protection, provider, and self-sacrifice of one's own needs for the family's greater good (Arciniega et al., 2008; Marin & Marin, 1991; Sáenz& Ponjuán, 2009). When we look closer at the term caballerismo, it translates to English as "chivalry" and constitutes the root of *caballero,* which translates as "gentleman." Within contemporary Latinx culture, these terms reflect positive male traits such as respect, ethnic pride, emotional intelligence, advocacy for those in need, and one who lives by an ethical code of chivalrous values (Arciniega et al., 2008; Duran, 2021). Other studies have found that Latino men who identify masculinity with these terms correlate more favorable traits toward academic success. These traits include the ability to adjust to new environments, overcome barriers to academic success, responsibility, more positive attitudes toward help-seeking, grit, and community-building (Arciniega et al., 2008; Marin & Marin, 1991; Sáenz & Ponjuán, 2009).

Latino masculine identity develops, directly or indirectly, in the environment where individuals live. Torres et al. (2002) define the core concepts of caballerismo and familismo within the group's contemporary machismo and contemporary masculinity. It is also important to remember that the Latino masculinity spectrum is nonlinear. This means that Latino men do not necessarily achieve new perceptions of masculinity in the order they are listed from more conservative attributes to less. Depending on the current situation and environment, Latino men's behaviors can be a combination of attributes within different groups. Therefore, higher education

institutions need to understand this phenomenon more deeply. Creating an environment where these terms, characteristics, and values are supported and celebrated could help Latino men achieve a healthier perception of masculinity (Duran, 2020).

This literature review demonstrates how higher education institutions can play a role in positive Latino masculine identity for first-generation Latino men. A culturally engaging campus environment that intentionally creates transformative experiences challenging socialized masculinity can lead to desired academic outcomes (Duran, 2020; Museus, 2014). Environments that support positive masculine identity development lead to Latino students engaging in healthier and more favorable characteristics toward academic achievement (Duran, 2020; Estrada & Jiménez, 2018). As Latino men grow in their masculine identity, socialized perceptions of Latino masculinity can be re-envisioned and applied to the difficult journey of being a first-generation Latino man. Next, the literature review will include examples of current practices that have begun this development.

Promising Practices

The literature on the challenges and experiences of Latino men in higher education and their disproportionate academic outcomes is evidence higher education institutions should be more actively invested in supporting and developing this population. These institutions are responsible for intentionally creating policies, practices, and interventions at all levels to support Latino men's positive masculine identity development (Arciniega et al., 2008; Marin & Marin, 1991; Sáenz & Ponjuán, 2009). Fulfilling this responsibility would help increase the percentage of Latino men graduating from college on time. The following examples show how some universities take positive steps in this direction.

In 2016, California State University, Fullerton, created an official department called the Male Success Initiative ("About us - male success initiative*," n.d.)*. The department is open to all students interested in supporting and advancing the potential of undergraduate men of color. This department's goal is to support men of color to gain the skills and knowledge needed to foster academic success and increase their graduation rates. This is achieved by programming around four pillars: Academic coaching Leadership, Engagement, Enrichment, and Development (LEED), career trajectory, and gender and masculinity. The first and fourth pillars serve as the foundation of this institution's work as it acknowledges that this is a key component to men of color's academic success. University officials strive to provide vulnerable spaces to discuss questions like "What does it mean to be a man? A man of color?" These programs offer a supportive environment where men of color can embrace the complexities of their masculine spectrum and various intersections of identity.

A new example of institutions investing in this work is Project MALES (Mentoring to Achieve Latino Educational Success) at the University of Texas at Austin. This program researches the Latino educational experience of men and the role that mentors of color play in the lives of these students (Sáenz, Ponjuán, et al., 2015; Vincent, 2014). From here, the University has also developed the African American Male Research Initiative (AAMRI), a faculty-led academic initiative designed to increase the graduation rates of African American men (Duran, 2021). This work needs to be done at all levels. Research needs to occur to understand these experiences further and implement them into policy and programming. As a researcher and practitioner, I plan, through this study, to provide more information to support the development of support systems, such as the above examples.

Strengths-Based Masculinity Conceptual Framework

Researchers who have looked at Latino masculinity have almost uniformly defined it as machismo, which, as described above, has represented a destructive combination of characteristics, behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs (Arciniega et al., 2008). This singular view of Latino masculinity was a commonly adopted point of view until recent scholars began to view the complexity of the masculinity spectrum's positive and negative implications (Arciniega et al., 2008; Estrada & Arciniega, 2015; Sáenz et at., 2015; Torres et al., 2002). Therefore, this study seeks to further this line of research through asset and strengths-based approaches. It is vital to avoid exposing only potential negative traits within first-generation Latino masculinity to accomplish this. Instead, this study seeks to provide alternative narratives and perceptions, so Latino men may view themselves through a more uplifting and less harmful perspective of masculinity. To this end, I propose a strengths-based conceptual framework that can help first-generation Latino men understand masculinity from a positive perspective as they navigate their higher education experience. This strengths-based conceptual framework is a combination of Bronfenbrenner's (1992) Ecological Systems Theory (EST), Museus's (2014) Culturally Engaging Campus Environments, and Torres et al.'s (2002) Latino Masculine Spectrum.

Bronfenbrenner's (1992) EST states that a person's development is affected by everything in their surrounding environment. He divided the person's environment into five different systems: namely, the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. These five different systems range from closest to the person to the furthest, with the closer environments making a more significant impact on a person's development. For this study, the focus will be on the microsystem—the closest to the person and the one with which he

has direct contact. The groups included in this environment are family, peers, home, and school. This implies that colleges and universities may play a significant role in first-generation Latino men's masculine identity formation. Thus, Bronfenbrenner's EST helps us understand the context within which Latino men develop their concept of masculinity. We must consider that if Latino men in higher education are not exposed to people, experiences, and environments to help them counter the traditional cycle of machismo, the negative influence of socialized masculinity may continue to dominate them throughout the college experience.

Museus's (2014) culturally engaging campus environments (CECE) model states that to have positive college success outcomes, universities must acknowledge the external and pre-college inputs that students bring with them when entering the university. This model also shows that universities are responsible for creating a culturally engaging campus environment through nine different elements. The nine elements include cultural familiarity, culturally relevant knowledge, cultural community service, opportunities for meaningful cross-cultural engagement, collectivist cultural orientation, culturally validating environments, humanized educational environments, proactive philosophies, and availability of holistic support. These elements contribute to developing a sense of belonging, academic dispositions, and academic performance, which play a large role in persistence and degree completion. Therefore, by combining these two sources of information, colleges can play a significant role in masculine identity formation and lay the foundations of culturally engaging campuses, resulting in successful college outcomes.

Torres et al.'s (2002) Latino Masculine Spectrum gives the conceptual framework clear groupings of attributes displayed by Latino men along the masculinity spectrum. These

groupings include traditional machismo, machismo, conflicted/compassionate machismo, contemporary machismo, and contemporary masculinity. Torres et al. (2002) also help us understand that Latino men can move between these groupings based on their current situation. As Latino men have transformational experiences, they "unlock" these new perceptions of their Latino masculinity which they can then operate within or revert to traditional perceptions based on the situation. Each grouping within the masculinity spectrum offers alternative characteristics, values, beliefs, and attitudes. Depending on the context of their current situation, Latino men can operate within these new groups and pull from characteristics that align with such groups or mix and match from others that have been "unlocked." While this is a complicated process, one can imagine this as an atom of Latino masculinity that Latino men can operate within, depending on the context of their situation and their perception of masculinity.

We know that first-generation Latino men enter the university with unique challenges and enormous talent and strengths (Yosso, 2005). While traditionally, Latino masculinity has been seen as a barrier to students' success, we can use this conceptual framework to pull the positive traits that support desired student outcomes. Higher education institutions have a prominent role in the ecological systems that Latino students operate in and have an even more significant role in designing culturally engaging campus environments to enhance the experiences of their Latino male population.

Chapter Three: Methodology

It is well documented that the enrollment of Latino men in higher education has consistently increased in the last five decades; despite this fact, degree completion among this population remains low (Estrada & Jiménez, 2018; Lewis, 2019; U.S. Department of Education, 2017a; U.S. Department of Education, 2017b). For first-generation of college Latino men, undergraduate completion rates remain idle throughout this increase in enrollment, leading this population to remain among the smallest groups to have a college degree. In existing literature related to this topic, authors focus on how students' perception of their masculinity can affect their overall college experience (Arciniega et al., 2008; Duran, 2021; Estrada & Jiménez, 2018; Harper & Harris, 2010; Sáenz et al., 2009). Proper support for Latino masculine identity development may be a factor in increasing Latino men's graduation rates. But the problem remains—Latino men are not graduating from university at the same rate as their peers, which results in a reduced number of these students continuing in higher education. Thus, this dissertation aimed to explore what role, if any, the masculine identity of Latino men plays in the overall college experience. The findings of this study may assist university officials in developing support systems, policies, and programs that might increase retention and degree completion rates for this college population.

In Chapter Three, I present the research methodology for this study. The research methodology outlines the structure of the study, which will include a description of qualitative research with a specific emphasis on a phenomenological approach, research questions, researcher's positionality, participant recruitment and selection, data collection instrumentation,

data protection procedures, data analysis, procedures for reliability, ethical considerations, and research limitations.

Study's Research Design

This qualitative research utilized a phenomenological approach. This phenomenological approach aimed to explore how perceptions of Latino masculinity may affect a student's college experience. Within this dissertation, I chose a phenomenological research design because individual participants had the opportunity to share their unique perspectives on their own experiences. A phenomenological approach is beneficial because it provides a deep understanding and unique perspectives and yields rich data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Maxwell, 2012). Other advantages of using a phenomenological approach included helping people understand how people create meaning and contributing to developing new theories (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Through this process, I can capture the essence of an individual's experience, providing insight into the impact of a shared phenomenon. A phenomenological approach is appropriate because it assists the researcher in identifying and understanding the influential factors of these students as they pursue their undergraduate degrees. These interpretations, by both participants and the researcher, helped make meaning of actions taken. Using a combination of data collection designs allowed participants to describe experiences of perception of masculine identity phenomenon and helped identify meaning-making processes to interpret masculinity (Cresswell, 2014). The data collection types used in this research included personal interviews and observations taken through interview memos.

Interview Questions

This study used a semi-structured interview protocol, which included open-ended questions to capture the voices of study participants. First, the researcher begins with an introduction; that explains the purpose of the study and interview protocol; the researcher then describes safeguards to ensure confidentiality and informs participants they were able to skip any question or stop the interview at any time without any adverse consequences. The interview questions were framed around the conceptual framework, which will follow three research questions. During **Research Question 1** sub-questions, study participants were asked to talk about college environments where they may have been challenged or supported in their understanding of masculine identity, including the Anglo-Saxon and Latino perspectives. **Research Question 2** sub-questions explored Museus's (2014) Culturally Engaging Campus Environment model. The questions asked study participants' reactions and interactions with programs or support systems the university has in place to improve academic outcomes, sense of belonging, and other student-centered services. **Research Question 3** sub-questions focused on participants' masculine identity aspirations (Torres et al., 2002) and final thoughts they may have had regarding any of the previous questions. Once those questions were answered, the researcher wrapped up the interview. The overarching questions are listed below:

1: How do microsystem environments contribute to the masculine identity development of first-generation Latino Men?

2: How does masculine identity alter first-generation Latino men's sense of belonging at their university?

3: What aspirations do current first-generation Latino men have for the masculine identity formation of future first-generation Latino men?

The researcher included additionally related questions (See Appendix A) to allow study participants to share unique accounts where they may have experienced intersections of masculine identity and their overall college experience.

Data Collection Methods

The study used individual interviews and researcher interview memos as primary data-collection methods. The data collected were transcribed and coded. Interview memos provided a wider context to the transcriptions as an additional data source.

Individual Interviews

Study participants were asked to engage in an in-depth interview which lasted approximately between 60 and 90 minutes. Interviews allowed the researcher to focus on questions targeting Latino men's masculine identity and intersections with the overall college experience. The goal was to gain a deep understanding of the perception of the masculine identity phenomenon and its potential intersections with college life by allowing study participants to elaborate on their own personal experiences (Yin, 2018).

Interviews were semi-structured to allow flexibility for the participants' narratives and allowed the researcher to ask open-ended and follow-up questions. These interviews enabled study participants to articulate their stories and personal views on the perception of masculine identity phenomenon, as well as potential influences such phenomenon may have had on their overall college experience. The interviews were conducted in a one-on-one, virtual setting and in a private Zoom room to safeguard confidentiality. Zoom is an online, private, encrypted video

conference application. In this video-conferencing application, the interview audio and video are available, which allowed for recording and transcription. The one-on-one option was intentionally selected to provide participants with a comfortable setting where they could feel more at ease to share openly and honestly about their college experiences. All participants were assigned pseudonyms to safeguard personal and confidential information; furthermore, they were asked to avoid using their names or any identifiable information while the interview was in progress. During this interview, the researcher wrote and recorded electronic interview memos right after the completion of each interview. To protect the confidentiality of participants, all notes, recordings, and identifiable information were kept in a password-protected computer and password-protected documents. For accuracy, once transcripts were completed, upon request, the researcher e-mailed participants a transcript of their interview and a summary of central themes that emerged to ensure a precise representation of what was shared. This was a process called member-checking (Candela, 2019; Maxwell, 2012).

Researcher's Interview Memos

Analytical memos are brief notes about the thoughts, ideas, and questions that come to the researcher's mind during data collection (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018; Maxwell, 2012). Qualitative researchers use memos to jot down their reflections, code them, and add them to their research. This process helps researchers' critical thinking and helps challenge assumptions that a researcher may have (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018; Maxwell, 2012). These memos are important because they allow researchers to reflect and record their thoughts, remember things that may not have been written down, explore other phenomena, and provide supporting documentation for the research (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018; Maxwell, 2012). These memos

were written down right after each interview to ensure the thoroughness of the information gathered. Later, the researcher referred to these memos during the coding process.

Data Analysis

The ability to make sense of the text is critical to generating answers to research questions when analyzing qualitative data (Cresswell, 2012). Collected data will vary depending on the information and the methods used. Since individual interviews were the primary data source, the researcher concentrated primarily on this source. Cresswell and Cresswell (2018) suggest a five-step data analysis process, which the researcher adopted for this research. First, data was consolidated and prepared for analysis by scanning materials, organizing raw data, arranging it by type, and transcribing all interviews onto electronic media. This was possible since interviews were recorded using the recording feature on Zoom. Second, the researcher conducted a review of all the data collected to garner a general sense of the information and reflect on the overall meaning. Research interview memos were used to look back and pinpoint areas of interest in participants' interviews.

The researcher conducted the first round of a coding process. Then reviewed memos and interview transcripts to create categories that cluster around similar topics. They also conducted an open coding—a process where information is broken down, or disassembled, by generating categories and grouping them together (Yin, 2018). Categories were constructed when codes are assigned to pieces of data from the interviews and other data gathered. Following the interview coding process. As the researcher engaged in axial coding—a process where developed categories are linked with subcategories—the new or more developed codes were organized into bracketed chunks (Yin, 2018). The researcher then sorted these chunks into keywords or phrases

that represent each group. Grouping these open codes into categories was completed by analytical coding, which resulted from the interpretation and reflection of the data's meaning (Yin, 2018). Next, the codes were grouped through the coding process as they relate to or reveal some link to the categories or themes being explored in this study. The data was recorded and reanalyzed as necessary. Finally, the findings were conveyed and discussed. Chapter Four contains a detailed review of the findings, and Chapter Five discusses the connections between those themes.

Positionality and Role of the Researcher

I am a first-generation college student who self-identifies as a Latino and Mexican-American male. Growing up, I was taught by both the Mexican-American community and the overall American, Anglo-Saxon, White society what were acceptable characteristics to demonstrate to society that I was a "man." I have had experiences navigating higher education where my socialized perception of masculinity, the overall American, Anglo-Saxon White dominant definition of masculinity, was supportive but also challenging. These experiences have led me to reach conclusions regarding the role higher education played on my masculine identity development and the overall influence on my college experience. My motivation to conduct this research comes from generational teachings passed down to me. My grandfather, a bracero—farm worker—was brought to the United States to fill the labor shortage during the World War II era and worked his entire life as an agricultural manual laborer. Although he experienced unjust living and working conditions, pay discrimination, and racism throughout his time, he wanted to pass down lessons to leave a mark on the world and make it a better place. He accomplished this by planting thousands of trees during his lifetime. This same lesson was taught to my father, who

co-taught it to me at a young age when the three of us planted a fruit tree in my childhood home's backyard. "*Qué será tu 'árbol'*? What will your 'tree' be? My grandfather asked me, which now I can answer: "My tree will be this dissertation." I want my research to help institutions of higher learning create opportunities to support first-generation Latino college students pursuing and completing an undergraduate degree.

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), personal background, biases, and values can shape the researcher's interpretations produced during the study when considering the strategic, ethical, and personal facets of the qualitative research process. These researchers describe qualitative research as a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. Reflexivity is necessary to identify personal feelings and reactions, as well as the potential influence they may have on the direction of the study. Researchers note two key points when using reflexivity during a research study: past experiences and how past experiences shape interpretations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher incorporated journaling and reflexivity to identify personal feelings and reactions to past experiences, as these may have influenced interpretations. The researcher used a variety of validity strategies, such as triangulation, and participant feedback, throughout the data-gathering process. The choice of a phenomenological approach was done purposefully to focus solely on the lived experiences of individual participants and not those of my own. A phenomenological approach is a form of qualitative inquiry that emphasizes experiential and lived aspects of a particular experience. This type of inquiry helps a researcher identify the essence of a human experience of a phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Creswell and Creswell (2018) identified the role of the researcher as that of an inquirer who is involved in both a sustained and intensive experience with study participants. My role as the researcher included being an interviewer, data collector, and data evaluator. Additionally, the role required that I be an active listener when interacting with study participants, as they shared their lived experiences on the phenomenon of masculine identity in general, as well as masculine identity self-perceptions. The role of the researcher also calls for the identification of possible participants based on criteria that center on the demographics being studied (Lewis, 2019).

Research Site

The research site for the study was a four-year, public, research-based institution located in Southern California. In the 2020-2021 academic year, this institution had a total of 39,576 undergraduate students. The undergraduate ethnic composition included 37.1% Asian American, 20.8% Chicano/Latino, 19% White, 17% international citizens, 3% African American, 0.4% American Indian, and 0.2% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. The undergraduate gender distribution included 49.8% women, 49.4% men, and 0.74 nonbinary. The university considers itself an aspiring Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) with the goal to achieve such HSI full status within the next five to ten years. The institution has a decentralized seven-college system. Each of these seven undergraduate colleges offers all majors but has unique general education requirements. This deliberate design has the goal of offering students an intimate college experience with the resources of a large research-one institution.

Study Participants' Profile and Recruitment

Cresswell (2014) contends that an estimated number of participants for a strong phenomenological study should range from three to ten individuals. An adequate sample of

seven participants was reached and the researcher noticed that data no longer provide new insights and saturation of themes occurred (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018; Maxwell, 2012). For this study, seven individuals helped capture the essence of lived experiences in the perception of the masculine identity phenomenon. The anticipated number of participants was appropriate since a larger number may have led to repetitive or redundant data with no new insights revealed (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018).

Study participants were self-identified as first-generation college students, Latino/Hispanic men, ages 18-21, low-income, with full-time enrollment at the university. Participants were recruited via marketing communication through institutional support programs working with this demographic. The researcher created marketing materials that included a contact information form. The form asked potential participants if they met the five characteristics needed to be a part of this study (full-time college student enrolled at the research site, Latino, men, first-generation college student, and low-income), and collected basic contact information (Appendix B). Participants who submit the information form were selected randomly through an online generator (wheelofnames.com) and received direct communication from the researcher. Then, the researcher communicated with the selected pool via email to schedule an appropriate and mutually convenient time for individual interviews.

Limitations and Validation

There were limitations to this study. For example, some of the participants may have had a difficult time remembering specific experiences that supported or challenged their masculine identity. There was an assumption that individuals want to grow in their masculine identity and that a university environment may be a place to do so. Also, as described in the definition of

Latinx/Hispanic/Latino, this group contained a diverse population of individuals of Latin American descent. While experiences may be similar, those experiences by potential participants of Mexican descent are different from those of Puerto Rican, or any other Latin American background. Additionally, there were participants from first-generation college students who had older siblings and who experienced higher education and served as a point of support, something that may have altered the college experiences of some students. Finally, it is also well noted that women, especially women in the Latinx family, play a large role in the masculine identity development of Latino men (Duran, 2020). While the literature is limited on this topic, this proposed study seeks to gain a deeper understanding of this phenomenon and serve as a bridge for future research.

To ensure the accuracy and credibility of research findings, it was important to determine the findings were indeed accurate and that the approaches used were stable and consistent (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018; Maxwell, 2014; Yin, 2018). In this study, the researcher utilized different strategies to ensure dependability. These strategies included:

1. Triangulation
2. Rich data
3. Member-checking

Triangulation is the process of collecting data from a diverse range of individuals and settings through a variety of methods (Maxwell, 2012). This study collected data from individual participants and researcher's memos. Using this wide range of data collection provided ample insight into the phenomenon under study. The expression-rich data refers to an intensive review of the collected information that can provide a full and revealing picture of what is occurring

(Maxwell, 2012; Yin, 2018). In this study, that was accomplished by having detailed transcriptions of the interviews and memos right after each interview. Finally, member-checking is the process of soliciting feedback from the people researchers have collected data from to ensure there is no misinterpretation of what study participants said (Maxwell, 2012). This was done to minimize errors and make sure to avoid the shift of code definitions. As driven by the research questions and conceptual framework, data was grounded with a greater context when such data was analyzed. The researcher maintained consistent documentation of the data collected, interview protocols, and interview memos.

Chapter Four: Research Findings

Introduction and Research Questions

This study aimed to explore how Latino men's perceptions of masculinity affect their college experience. The findings are organized as follows: (a) summary of participants' profiles and (b) primary themes and subthemes associated with this study. Individual interviews, which represented the main data-gathering activity, also provided additional exciting information which will not be part of the study's primary data analysis. Instead, such knowledge about other emerging themes will be shared later in the implications for the future research section of the dissertation. The study's initial research questions were the following:

1: How do microsystem environments contribute to the masculine identity development of first-generation Latino Men?

2: How does masculine identity alter first-generation Latino men's sense of belonging at their university?

3: What aspirations do current first-generation Latino men have for the masculine identity formation of future first-generation Latino men?

In addition to the above questions, a set of principles guided this research, including Torres et al.'s (2002) masculinity spectrum, Bronfenbrenner's (1992) ecological systems theory, and Museus's (2014) culturally engaging campus environments (CECE) model. Each of Torres et al. principles include characteristics that helped demonstrate the multidimensional aspects of Latino masculinity, where Latino men can operate. It is also important to note that to act in a more contemporary perception of masculine identity, Latino men need to experience moments of

growth to “unlock” these new perceptions. From more traditional to more modern forms of masculinity, the groups included: traditional machismo, machismo, conflicted/compassionate machismo, contemporary machismo, and contemporary masculinity. Each group has different characteristics to describe the values, beliefs, and actions men operating within that group may demonstrate. The ecological systems theory, developed by Bronfenbrenner (1992), explains how social settings affect human development. According to this belief, one's upbringing impacts every aspect of life. Chapter Five will analyze and discuss the results using Museus’s (2014) lens of culturally engaging campus environments (CECE).

Participants Profiles

Study participants included seven full-time students enrolled at a Research-One institution in Southern California. All participants self-identified as first-generation college students, low-income, Latino males between the ages of 18-21. It is important to note that a few participants also identified as members of the LGBTQ+ community. The intersectionality of these shared and non-shared identities came out in the participant's responses. The summary below further describes study participants by name (pseudonym), academic year, and major program.

Pseudonym	Academic Year	Major
Jesus	4th Year	General Biology
Gustavo	4th Year	Real Estate and Development
Alejandro	3rd Year	Theatre/Dance double major
Michael	3rd Year	Communications
David	3rd Year	Global Health
Enrique	3rd Year	Cognitive Science w/Spec Design & Inter
Julio	*1st Year (Transfer Student)	Communications

*Note: *First Year at the institution, Academic Status of a 3rd-year college student*

Figure 2.1

Participant Summary

Overview of Emerging Themes

Five main themes, and two to three sub-themes under each theme, emerged from the interviews related to students' perception of masculinity, which study participants believed altered their higher education experience. Theme One—The double-edged sword. This theme focuses on Latino males' challenges in the college environment. Although study participants recognized their male privilege and conditional sense of agency, such realization did not diminish their unique challenges. Theme Two relates to the family as a resource, obstacle, and motivator. While participants' families served multiple roles, they demonstrated that their families both upheld gender roles and gender policing. Family members also served as a primary motivation for persistence and degree completion. Theme Three relates to masculinity traits as persistence tools. This theme explores how Latino men use features typically associated with machismo and how they adapt them as tools for academic achievement. It is important to note that participants shared how the recognition of their male privilege and re-defining of masculine identity worked together to allow them to access these tools in a "non-toxic—which does not

uphold customary machismo principles, standards, and practices—way." Theme Four relates to self-perception. This theme explores how participants engaged with the university community in ways that were socially acceptable for them. By redefining what masculine identity looked like, they could open opportunities that allowed them to feel more at home in the university environment, build community, and participate in activities that may have previously been "socially unacceptable." Theme Five relates to the betterment of the future society. This theme goes over the aspirations of current first-generation college Latino men for prospective community members and their masculine identity formation. These aspirations altered how participants behaved at their institution and could be seen by the extra work participants took to support this goal.

Emerging Theme One: The Double-edged Sword of Being a Latino

This theme addresses how intersecting identities, such as first-generation college students, socioeconomic status, immigration status, sexual identity, and others, influence the collegiate experience. Study participants discussed their male and Latino identities, resulting in privilege and a conditional sense of agency. The participants acknowledged they had a complex relationship with privilege and oppression as Latino men. Participants spoke about how experiences that may be perceived as solely beneficial proved to have inherent challenges. Enrique described one of these challenges in this way:

> I was the first one ever to come here to study college. And I remember that at the time. Well, I have older sisters, but even still being the man, I felt like a burden of having to be strong enough for myself. Do you know what I mean? Like, in a way, having to be the older brother, even though I was the youngest, just because I was a man and coming here, I had to be, I don't know, I had to do better than what the standard is… I'm a man like I'm from Mexico. I have to do great here. I had this chance; I got this far. Like I have to be perfect from now on.

In the microsystem (Research Question 1) of Enrique's home environment, he described some of his benefits as the only man among other siblings. For example, being able to go out later in the night without explaining whom he will be with and when he may be getting home, or not having to worry about the responsibility of cooking or cleaning. Enrique recognizes this privilege awarded to him and not his other female siblings. Nevertheless, as the youngest male child, he was expected to excel in all areas of life with potentially little to no support. This theme will be related to other pieces in this chapter. Michael, another participant, described the college environment microsystem as follows:

> It has definitely like added some unnecessary pressures, in my opinion, throughout different settings and events that I've been able to, you know, partake in throughout my time here in college, even in class. I am aware of whether I found one of only a few men in a room or even the only men in a room. And like I'm raising my hand to discuss, I always try to make sure that I'm aware of how I sound and what I'm saying so that it doesn't ever sound like I'm trying to, again, assert a very controlling and dominant voice in those like spaces; but instead, like contributing to like a more extensive discussion and, you know, very much open to hearing from anybody else. I also think in just my social interactions with people in primarily feminine expressing people that I don't want to like ever like give the impression that I, you know, I'm, I'm a very masculine man and I, you know, just, I don't want to hear anything that opposes that.

While, from an outside perspective, commanding a room and having a dominant voice may appear to be nothing more than a positive, for Michael, this is something that he needs to be aware of in his environment due to how others perceive masculine identity. He acknowledged that this is an advantage and additional pressure to be socially accepted by his peers. Some would be quick to "call him out" rather than "call him in " to discuss his actions or how he is perceived. Michael noted that he did not mind being challenged to grow in his identity

development but feared being perceived as someone unaware of his male privilege as he continued to learn about it. David described his thoughts on this theme in this way: “As a Mexican male and the second male son in the family, I feel you have some expectations to fulfill. You either have to like go to school, be successful, work, get a family and be successful, or you just have to carry on the family legacy to move forward with life.” While these expectations are clearly stated and reinforced, there was little in the way of support to carry out these responsibilities as a first-generation college student having to navigate new spaces unknown to him and his family members.

Sub-theme: Recognition of Male Identify and Privilege. The first sub-theme was the recognition of male identity and privilege. Throughout the interviews, participants acknowledged that they were awarded privileges due to their status as perceived men in the Latino community. It is important to note that participants also shared how these privileges were granted when they perceived masculinity in the microsystem environments (Research Question 1) where they found themselves. Alejandro talked about when he arrived at college, he made an effort to make sure that he was perceived as masculine to be awarded the full privileges of his male identity. As a queer man, Alejandro could not bring his entire self into spaces because he recognized those male privileges were only awarded when others in the community perceived him as a masculine man. Alejandro stated:

> I feel like my experience with masculinity, especially with friends and others, and especially concerning my sexuality, has been excused a lot. And when I say that, I feel like when I mention my sexuality, it is almost permission for me to ask to act less masculine. And I want to preface that because everyone's experience with masculinity is different. Still, I feel like mine is incredibly unique just because of my sexual orientation and how that has necessarily lightened the load [pressure of adhering to masculine ideologies], if that makes sense.

Multiple participants talked about recognizing these male privileges, accessing them, and the challenges they may face when trying to understand their own masculine identity. For example, Michael described this as follows: “I don't want to have to be like that all the time. And so again, I think I'm still very much influenced sometimes. And like in terms of how I have to be as a man and in a Latino culture. I try to be mindful of it and of actions or what I say and truly make sure that it's like what I believe and not what I've been taught or trained to think or do.” Michael discussed the challenge of developing his masculine identity in a way that goes against traditionally socialized masculine norms. As others perceive him as a manly man, privileges are awarded but also assumptions about Michael’s values, beliefs, and actions. These assumptions altered how Michael operated in this microsystem (Research Question 1). The recognition of male privilege was not only in the individual participants recognizing their privilege but also in how people in their communities recognized and awarded them those privileges.

Sub-them: A Conditional Sense of Agency. The second sub-theme, conditional sense of agency, discusses Latino men's freedom compared to Latina women. This freedom, or sense of agency, could only be retained if Latino men adhered to the traditional socialized parameters of masculinity or machismo. Those who did not abide by the expectations found in traditional machismo were subjected to gender policing in multiple environments, social sanctions, or the stigma associated with their social deviance. Like Latina women who would experience marginality and restrictions to machismo, Latino men shared the constraints placed on them by different members of their environments. Alejandro shared:

> I have two older sisters, and my parents gave me more freedom because of gender roles and masculinity. And I recognized that they gave me more freedom to do

> whatever I wanted. Not everything I wanted, but you know, like they let me do many things my sisters couldn't do. For example, I could stay out past midnight with my friends whenever I wanted. I realized that whenever my sisters wouldn't pick up their phones, my parents would call me and tell me to look for them.

In this example, Alejandro was only allowed to have these privileges as long as he, the youngest child, upheld his parents' machismo standard of an overseer. Alejandro then shared the story of choosing his academic major in college, Theatre/Dance double major, and how family members would pressure him into choosing a more perceived "masculine major," such as business or engineering. However, his older sisters did not receive as much pushback when selecting their academic majors. Julio also shared how these contingencies proved to be a barrier to navigating, stating the following:

> Because I think it enforces the stereotype that men are just supposed to be emotionless, or they're supposed to be very controlled and reserved and calm. And while I think that controlling your emotions is fantastic and that everyone should be able to do so. I also think it's harmful to say that you should never let anyone see you're sad, or you should never let anyone see you cry beside us because that also builds trust issues within you. After all, no matter who it is, if it's your best friend, or if it's your partner, you're always going to have in the back of your mind, I can't show weakness to them.

To gain some of the privileges that come with his perceived maleness, Julio speaks about how he needed to behave in an emotionless way. He speaks about the difficulties of being vulnerable with people who were important to him. He and other participants talked about this constant tug-and-pull situation, describing it as almost a point system to be perceived as male enough to access the benefits of that identity's privilege. Nevertheless, the majority of participants in this study spoke about wanting to grow in their masculine identity development and wanting to create new norms for future generations of Latino males.

Emerging Theme Two: The Role of Family

This theme focuses on the microsystem of family and home environment (Research Question 1). Microsystem relationships in the mesosystem layer are bi-directional, which means participants were influenced by other people in their environment (parents, siblings, and community members) but were also able to influence actions and beliefs in these people. This theme covers how first-generation Latino men navigated two core microsystems—home and college—as these environments would often give opposing messages on their masculine identity role. In several examples, study participants shared expectations and responsibilities their family placed on them as males and how they acted as both obstacles and motivators for them. David shared what some of these expectations look like: "As a Mexican male and the second male son in the family, I feel like you have some sort of expectation to fulfill. You either have to like go to school, be successful, work, get a family and be successful, or you just have to carry on the family legacy to move forward with life."

When David arrived at the university, he shared that he started receiving new messages about masculine identity expectations. This created a tug-and-pull effect where he, and other participants, started questioning where he stood on the masculine identity spectrum and what that meant. Growing up in the home microsystem, the expectations were to learn from male role models and community members in their lives. Yet now Latino males are going to a new microsystem that allows them to explore masculine identity for themselves. Entering the university environment is an opportunity for males not to be told what masculine identity expectations are but to start selecting those for themselves (Research Question 1). David shared more about these expectations and tugs and pulls experience in the following quote:

> I feel like most families in Mexico are somewhat conservative family within their culture... They want you to maintain it the same, and God forbid you to change it because you're a curse to the family, you know? I feel like due to that same issue because you're afraid to change it. It feels hella weird doing it at school. Like why would I do it when my family tells me not to? Do you know? It's like, whom do I listen to? Someone who tells me strictly not to do it or someone [university] who allows me to do it and explore it. So it's like, that's where I feel the school probably needs to understand that aspect better.

Sub-theme: Familismo. Familismo describes an ideology that prioritizes the needs of the family over that of the individual. It also refers to a strong sense of ethnic identity and loyalty to nuclear and extended family. It includes a sense of protection of familial honor, respect, and cooperation among family members. Jesus talked about how even his academic achievements are related to the responsibilities he has in his family. He mentioned that he was expected to maintain a strong presence in his household and sacrificed that time to do well academically. While his family proved to be a vital source of motivation, these different expectations became stressful points for him as he felt unable to rely on his family for academic support. Jesus stated:

> Because of that [masculine identity], I have always thought of myself as needing to use education to give my parents [immigration] papers or the opportunity to have some sort of stability within that [documentation] sense. And so, I believe that a man's perception was someone who provides, doesn't complain, and gets the job done. I also had a strenuous relationship with my family in terms of not seeing or using them as a sense of support throughout my college career. [because he would not visit as often as his family would have liked] And would instead prefer to maybe not see them during the weekends to just, you know, get some work done out of the way here.

For other participants like Enrique, this strong sense of duty, responsibility, and family pride showed the importance of giving back to the family in any way possible. Enrique discusses

family members' sacrifices to ensure he had the opportunities they never had. Due to this reason, he had to repay this debt to his family to make them proud. Enrique shared:

> You want to make them proud! They're your family. I don't know if it's just a Latino thing, or I would think everybody would like to make their family proud. Maybe I'm wrong. But yeah, you want to make them proud. You want to, in a way, give back to them. Because I feel I owe them a lot, and it's not their fault. Like they are giving me a lot of [emotional] support. Maybe I was not raised wealthy, but I was raised with two parents, and I know that's something precious. Not many people have. I was raised with a roof over my head. I had food every day. I didn't go to public school; I went to a private elementary school and junior high, and for the U.S., that was not cheap.

The financial struggles that Enrique witnessed his parents go through to give him the best possibility to go to university served as a strong motivator for him to persist after a challenging first year. For Enrique, there was no option of quitting. Although he had failed classes his first year, the strong sense of familismo was a constant motivating factor. In Enrique's mind, he had to continue and find a way. This extreme pressure to succeed was a factor in developing his masculine identity ideology from more traditional to more contemporary views. Contemporary views of masculinity ideology proved to be more helpful to his academic needs. A deeper explanation of this will be discussed in chapter five.

Sub-theme: Family Role Models. For study participants, their families' direct members served to uphold traditional machismo beliefs, values, and actions. In contrast, other immediate family members challenged those values to help participants develop their masculine identity. Once participants entered the college microsystem, which competed against the traditional masculine ideologies of their home microsystem, it was the start of their own individual male identity development. From what participants shared, up until they entered college, their male

identity was told to them rather than developed independently. David explained it in this way: “I looked at my dad to see how he acted with his family and how he, as a man, socialized, and the same with my grandparents. I did the same with them, and you see a pattern. So because you're not influenced by anything else but your family, it seems like it's the right approach to do the same and follow in their footsteps.”

Julio talked about how the women in his family played a role in this masculine identity formation but still upheld some of the more traditional machismo values. He shared the following:

> My mom and sisters validated my feelings and emotions, constantly letting me know I could be vulnerable if needed. There was a moment where my mother told me and what I've taken is that I can cry to them but not cry to the world, which is I could see why that would be considered a little toxic, but at the same time, I'm grateful to at least know that my own family is there as my support system. And yeah, my family has allowed me to be vulnerable with them.

Julio’s mother taught him that he was allowed to share emotions with them, but only with them. While this is a bit more contemporary than traditional machismo, the family still adhered to strict gender roles outside the nuclear family.

Sub-theme: Tug and Pull. For many reasons, the ability to explore masculine identity development did not begin until these Latino men left their home microsystem and entered the new college microsystem. The interactions within the mesosystem—home and college—are very personal and crucial for supporting development. Participants' descriptions of this tugging and pulling were evident when they frequently entered and exited various environments during their academic careers. Jesus discussed it in this way:

> Realize that the way you were raised or grew up doesn't define how you have to live your life. Like at one point, you make your own decisions. You decide what is right and what is wrong for your own life. What works for you? I struggle with that a lot just from being the oldest, being undocumented, being very close to my family, and having such a close-knit community. But yeah, I would say overall, it came to a shift in, like, my own religious beliefs in how I wanted to live, about life, and just realizing that there's not a right or a wrong, or just one way to go about things.

For Jesus, solid religious beliefs went hand in hand with traditional socialized perceptions of masculinity. These were perceptions supported not only in his home but also in the community he came from. Upon entering the university and being exposed to much more demographically diverse people with different ideologies about what makes a man, he was able to begin his exploration. Jesus shared how there were still moments in college when he would remember what he was taught at home, influencing his decisions on campus. Jesus also spoke about how being in this new college environment allowed him to return to his home microsystem and influence how his family thought about their traditional beliefs. Michael shared an example of how he would still uphold some of the more conventional masculine ideologies within the university environment.

> I try to be very aware of my masculinity and avoid aspects of what I think would make up what toxic masculinity is in people's minds when I can. I still have respect for my dad, who, again, probably lives a more traditional masculine type of role and lifestyle. Still, I have become somebody who believes that's not always necessarily healthy or the right way to go. I try just to be my person now more, and I try to. There are still some parts of my life where I find myself trying to live up to those masculine traditions. Like for things as simple as like, if I go out with a girl, for example, I have, it's, it's a little difficult for me to accept like a splitting a bill or her paying for me even because my dad just never did that really with my mom; he would always take the bill and pay for it.

For study participants, this was a consistent theme that showed up differently. They had to balance what values, beliefs, and actions they would take in different situations and environments. It was clear that, although participants developed their masculine identity, they could jump into and between other points of the masculinity spectrum.

Emerging Theme Three: Masculine Traits as Persistence Tools

The third theme, masculine traits as persistence tools, highlights moments where participants acknowledged utilizing an attribute, or value, associated with traditional machismo and reframing it to navigate their college environment (Research Question 1). Participants talked about taking the lessons they have learned of what it is to be a man and applying them to build community, navigate barriers, and succeed socially and academically. Michael reflected on his first year of college and shared the following:

> I was trying to adhere to all the factors and aspects taught to me of what a man should be. I was nervous starting. Like my experience here in college, I wanted to ensure that I came off as reasonably confident in any new setting. I found myself in. I also wanted to ensure that I took a solution-based approach to many things, even when it came to something that I wasn't too familiar with or didn't even know how to help out properly. That's what the men in my family or my dad have tried to instill in me by teaching me different ways to fix actual objects or just kind of like mitigate conflicts between people.

In traditional machismo beliefs, values, and actions, Latino men are expected to appear confident and knowledgeable on all things regardless of the support or experience with the matter. Here, Michael described his attitude toward a new microsystem environment (Research Question 1) and his strategy to navigate completely new spaces for him and his family. The

lessons taught him at a young age ensured that Michael entered the university with a high level of navigational skills, critical thinking skills, problem-solving skills, and research ability. Participants talked about how they took those lessons, values, and beliefs and reframed them as persistence tools. For example, Julio mentioned that traditional socialized machismo norms taught to him were not all negative, as it has been traditionally seen. He described this as follows:

> My brother and father always told me that if you like something, you should do it as well as possible. I guess it stems from the belief that we work very hard. I've always been pretty lazy, but when it does come to things that genuinely interest me and that do very much excite me, I do give it a hundred percent. It comes from this kind of feeling of pride as well, that I want to become somebody that my own family can view and be very proud of and be like, 'yeah, that's, that's my son. He did that.' So that's why I try to put in the best possible work to excel in school.

The expectation to protect the family honor and pride often falls on Latino men versus their Latina counterparts. For many, this responsibility serves as both an extreme pressure but also a huge motivator to return to the home microsystem having succeeded. In a sense, this return home after accomplishing tasks, such as graduation, proves to be a badge of honor not only for the student but for his family and community.

Sub-theme: Code-Switching. Code-switching is typically described through a social lens as the practice of a person changing the way they speak and act depending on whom they are talking to and what environment they are in. For this dissertation, code-switching will refer to participants moving in, out, and in between different points on the masculinity identity spectrum, depending on whom they are talking to and their environment (Research Question 1). Participants shared how for social acceptance, they needed to move in and out of different points

of the masculinity spectrum – the five identity dimensions identified in Torres et al. (2002) study – in different situations. Participants attributed the growth to their masculine identity development to when they were in a socially accepting community. Alejandro shared the following:

> I feel that because of my masculinity, I've been able to code-switch, not negatively, but because of my ability to expand my sphere of influence and my close friend circle because of my ability to code-switch between different social groups….So back home, like when I lived in Sacramento home with my parents because I did go to a performing arts high school where many people were very, very accepting of how I presented myself, the person that had to be at school versus the person I had to be at home was really, really different.

For Alejandro and David, the ability to code-switch came from the traditional machismo value of not being perceived as too feminine or homosexual. As queer men, this was something that at different times was and was also not accepted in their home environment (Research Question 1). However, when they entered their college environment, where they described the perception of homosexuality as more widely accepted, they could utilize the code-switching ability to build a community with multiple groups to enhance their student experience. David shared his thoughts on code-switching this way:

> And in my way of fun, it's like just being yourself and putting yourself out there. Be the loud one, be the funny one, you know? And that at home is basically like not permitted because they correlate that to like gay and like the feminine kind of. So, that's why when I go home, I'm like a more shallow, dark, and macho man, then over here [university environment], I'm more like, well, they characterize me as being like the sunshine being really like happy, just hopping around, being myself. I mean, eventually, that's going to happen at home, but not yet, I guess.

Alejandro also shared that while code-switching was a tool he could use to navigate different social groups on campus, it was also a barrier to his relationship with his family. He shared the following:

> I don't need to put it on the façade. It's much more accepting here, but when I go back home and see family, it's a little different…My family has said this to me a lot, not my immediate family, but my extended family, cousins, aunts, everything. It's just like this idea, especially regarding my sexuality. I bring up my sexuality so often because I feel like it, I hide, or I, I guess I hide my sexuality through my masculinity and this façade. And I feel like I will try to build that wall again when I return home.

For Alejandro, learning and understanding the different traits associated with other points on the masculinity spectrum proved to be a way to protect himself. He knew what traits, mannerisms, and expectations were placed on him as a Latino man. He could switch into that facade in unsafe spaces and back into his whole self in safer areas.

Sub-theme: Persistence and Determination. Study participants shared that they learned the characteristics of traditional machismo men through their home environments (Research Question 1). An example of this characteristic would be the belief that men complete any task they set their minds to accomplish without regard for their well-being. If they can complete these tasks that provide for the family, then they are awarded certain privileges. These privileges are granted to only those deemed worthy of the title of man. Not achieving this title potentially causes harm to the family's honor and pride. Because of this, participants shared that they entered the university environment with little sense of belonging (Research Question 2) but a high determination to persist and graduate. David shared some of his experiences: “I went through academic probation. I was almost kicked out because of my grades. I got academic

integrity twice, so I got suspended for a quarter. So, I've been through everything. Every time my friend's struggle and stuff, I'm like, you haven't gone through anything. So, get your shit together and go, fight for your right to be here."

David stated that he would rely on this determination to accomplish his academic goals to make his family proud and saw it as a pathway to raise his family's socioeconomic class. He also shared that because of a lack of representation among peers, faculty, and staff, his new environment (Research Question 2) had a low sense of belonging. It was not until he could connect with a staff member in a retention program that he was invited to participate and started feeling that he belonged. This was due to the program's identity-conscious and individualized approach when working with students in the program. As trust in this staff member grew, David saw accomplishing his academic goals as more important than being perceived as a masculine man who did not seek support. For several study participants, the importance of persisting and graduating opened their minds to grow in their male identity development. Michael shared the following related to this topic:

> But I'm pretty sure that traditional masculine cultures and ideals influence how much a man is willing to ask for help. And so that could be the case now where there's much Latino identifying men here that are struggling with something, and they're not asking for help for the same reason that they don't want to look, you know, in unknowledgeable or, you know, inadequate in some way. And they kind of just have to play things off or pretend as they know, or they're fine when it's not the case many times. So, I think bringing this, like this conversation up and sharing this knowledge with them can make them more comfortable seeking assistance or support when needed. And also again, like not carrying that kind of burden that I think could like to linger in these people or like men of having to live up to this perception or expectation of masculinity, but instead like them having the freedom to express how they truly want.

Gustavo also shared the importance of being the household's "breadwinner.". The determination to become financially stable was more important to him that appearing knowledgeable in different environments. Hence, he was willing to adopt a more contemporary perception of masculine identity. Overall, his goal was to graduate from college, which was the key to opening financial opportunities for himself. Again, this outweighed his socialized traditional machismo characteristics when he entered the university. He shared the following:

> I think one of them, for sure, and you know, obviously, it's changing, but one of them just had to be like being the 'breadwinner.' Both my parents do work but back in Mexico, when I went to visit my uncle like they still had that notion like, you know, the man works, and the woman stays at home to clean the house, ensuring everything's okay. So even though it's bad. It helped me get through college because as much as it sucks…it's not necessarily a healthy way of thinking. I'm like money-motivated.

While this characteristic stemmed from a more traditional view of machismo, Gustavo could recognize it, combine it with new perceptions of masculinity learned in college, and utilize it as a determination and persistence tool to help him succeed academically.

Sub-theme: Competitiveness. Apart from solid determination, study participants also shared that they would tap into their competitive characteristics to succeed academically. A feature that stemmed from a more traditional machismo ideology that was adapted to be used as a tool to navigate a new environment (Research Question 1). Enrique talked about using this competitiveness in one of his classes in this way:

> One of the examples was chemistry. I remember taking it with two of my friends simultaneously; they took chemistry in high school. I've never taken it. So, I felt lousy because they were like doing things so easily in that class. And I was like struggling. So, I would go home and study, or instead of going out and hanging

> out, I would like to try to go to tutors or ask my other friend for help. I would reach out and like, 'hey, can you help me?' Can we go over this during lunch or whatever? Like when we eat. Yeah, I put those extra cents there mainly because I was with my friends, and they were doing better than me.

Enrique wanted to ensure that he was up to the standards his friends set even though they had previous experience with the subject, which he did not have. Because of this, he felt the need to put in the extra effort to catch up and do just as well in class. This is an excellent example of how Enrique's masculine identity development grew, which allowed him to be more open to asking for and receiving support. David also talked about his competitive nature coming into college and how it developed while working one-on-one with a staff member who shared his ethnic background. David stated:

> I feel like it is because of a masculine identity... it's more of a, oh! I did it first before you, kind of scenario. And I think that's an issue. I feel it leads to many not-great things because you do whatever it takes to win in a competition. Do you know what I mean? So, assuming that approach, I feel you don't care about whom you hurt. You don't care about who or what you mess up. Like all you want, all you do is see the end of the path rather than in between. And I feel like the approach I took with [staff member] was like, yeah, this is your primary goal, but look at these small goals first. So you can kind of work your excitement up if that makes sense.

Being more open and willing to ask for support allowed David to learn from the staff member in the retention program about how not to overwhelm oneself with huge goals. Instead, break up goals into smaller ones to have a sense of accomplishment and keep his motivation high as he goes through his college journey. David's competitive nature was results-oriented in comparison to his peers. For example, if his peers got a B on an assignment, he had to get an A to beat them. By adopting this strategy, David's competitive nature began to be practiced-

oriented, where success did not rely on the performance of others. His goals went from “Getting an A in a class” to “going to tutoring twice weekly for the quarter.” Thus, he was competing against himself to have the discipline to form healthy practices supporting his academic goals. He then shared how he would pass on the lesson to his peers as a strategy that could help them all achieve their individual goals.

Emerging Theme Four: Self-Perception

This theme focuses on how participants started viewing themselves within the context of the masculine identity spectrum. This was a critical theme that provided a variety of masculine identity growth factors. Many growth factors relate to how participants started seeing themselves versus how others perceived them, or the fear of what others would think of them. As participants began focusing more on how they viewed themselves versus how others perceived them, they had a stronger sense of belonging (Research Question 2) to the university. Michael recalls an example from his first year at the university when he tied all the ideologies of what it was to be a man to his academic success. For Michael, a man was supposed to appear and be successful in everything he did. He shared the following:

> I could remember a reoccurring experience with, like, me in academic settings...I try to always study on my own. And it's because whenever I find myself studying with somebody else or around others, somebody always gets the wise idea to test each other out or share what we're trying to remember or learn. And I feel like if I have trouble retelling what I am studying over, or, you know, giving all the facts of whatever I'm studying and don't sound knowledgeable of it. I start feeling incompetent and just super down on myself and not even so much like, oh, I'm not like a good student, no, like I'm not, I'm not a man right now.

Demonstrating competence for Latino men is something that is taught to them starting at a young age. Latino men are instructed that if they are incompetent or appear incompetent, they are less of a man and are not awarded the privileges that come with the male identity. Participants shared that they had similar experiences of thinking about this subject. Some of the masculine identity growth factors from entering the university environment included exposure to diverse people and ways of thinking, safe spaces for dialogue within the university, student organization programming, connecting with other Latino men, and more. Access to these masculine perception growth factors helped study participants see themselves as more than just Latino men. They accepted that the male identity was not the only critical identifying factor they had about themselves.

Sub-theme: Exposure to Diverse People. This sub-theme focuses on study participants sharing how and when they started seeing all their silent identities. While their male identity was still important, experiences in this new college environment (Research Question 1) allowed them to view themselves as more. This created another tug-and-pull experience of accepting that they had other vital identities instead of community members in their environments continuing to reinforce strict gender roles. While this was not true for all community members, experiences in their home and university environments where important members upheld traditional male socialized roles made it difficult to accept these new perceptions of masculine identity fully. One example is in a story that Gustavo shared. He shared his experience seeking mental health support as he engaged in his university environment, where he would receive messages about

how men may identify as men even when seeking mental health support. It still took him time to accept that because his home environment sent messages stating the opposite. Gustavo stated:

> I saw my dad holding every emotion in and holding every conversation he had. Just so much on the shoulders, and that happened to me because my parents, my mom, and my sister were not on the best terms during my first year [of college]. And I was holding so much that everything hit me at once in the spring quarter. It wasn't until summertime that I reevaluated everything. I finally decided to seek help because, you know, my masculine identity, what I grew up on, um, was really holding me back.

David also shared the story of how things have changed for him since entering the new college environment. He talked about how he connected with people from a diverse group of identities and was able to see himself as more than just a man while still adopting some of the more traditional aspects of his male identity, such as protector. For David, this characteristic went from being a "protector" to being an advocate for people from different backgrounds. David shared:

> It's like, it has changed me completely. Right. I have become a lot more open-minded; I've learned how to listen to stories, put myself in [other people] their situation, and understand their situation. And so, someone kind of advocate for everyone, no matter what, like now again, [the university] has really like exposed me to so many cultural backgrounds and identities.

David combined some of his more traditional lessons with what a man is supposed to be with an understanding that it is not black and white. He was able to see how being a Latino man was not always about being the protector of those in his community but how he could be an advocate for others without centering himself.

Sub-theme: Identifying with Other Latino Peers. Identifying with other Latino peers was a significant source of masculine identity development. Study participants shared how witnessing a group of Latino men connect emotionally and intimately on a high level was a norm in their college environment (Research Question 1). For many participants, this was not a message they received in their home environment. In their home environment, which tended to be more traditional machismo, the message was to do all in one's power not to appear homosexual. While some participants identified with the LGBTQ+ community, the expectations at home were that they would not demonstrate characteristics that are stereotypically associated with that community. Entering the university, participants shared how connecting with other Latino peers who created spaces where this was socially acceptable opened their minds to what a man is allowed to do. This catalyzed their masculine identity development in other areas of the spectrum. For example, Gustavo shared about joining a Latino-based social organization and his first experience with such organization members. This organization had a common practice of spending general body meeting time to have members connect emotionally on social justice and masculine issues affecting their community. Gustavo shared the following:

> I joined [student group] reasonably early on. I joined in week one of fall 2018 when I entered. So… first week and boom, general body meeting (GBA). And I was like… excuse my French. Like, this is what you all do here [Have deep intimate conversations between Latino men]. Like this type of shit, like, you know, this is what you all talking about. Like that's deep. I was like, damn. So it was like immediately I started to learn about this thing [connecting emotionally with other Latino men], and it took some learning… in the beginning, but after a while…I was like, maybe it is time for me to start talking, especially when I could relate to the topic being discussed.

While it took Gustavo some time to adjust to an environment where Latino men were so open about their emotions, he saw this as an opportunity to dive into his masculine identity development. He learned from his peers that he was allowed to behave in different ways, which differed from what he had been taught at home. This student-created and student-led space played an instrumental role in Gustavo's development. He later shared that the group provided him with a sense of belonging (Research Question 2) and a safe space to be his whole self where he did not need to adhere to societal expectations of being a Latino man. Julio also shared his experience of connecting with other Latino peers who held different points of view than socialized traditional machismo. Julio stated:

> I don't think I've felt any kind of toxic masculine pressure at school. My roommate was a gay man, and I think I still had some pretty toxic views coming into college. With his help and that of other peers with similar backgrounds, they taught me a non-toxic point of view. Just talking to them and having conversations with them eased those beliefs out of me.

David connected with Latino peers, which helped him develop his masculine identity to be more open to other identities. When study participants were asked why they believed they were getting these different messages from home, there was an overwhelming response of not blaming their families for teaching them to think this way. David shared:

> You're expected to act and dress in specific ways when you're back home. But when you're in school, you don't have that restriction. So, therefore, people take the liberty to dress however they want, act however they want and love whomever they want. So it's like, it's new to you, you got the choice to do so… If you got the option to be, be feminine, you got the option to do as well. Like at home, you, you can't, you see it, you see masculinity and femininity clearly, but you only belong to that one set of the spectrum. Right. So you can't shift over. So I feel like that's the most significant difference.

Alejandro stated:

> I don't blame my parents. I do. I still recognize that my parents did perpetuate the gender binary in prioritizing cooking and cleaning for my sisters because they're girls, … but I can't ignore the fact that they did also perpetuate that… I know talking about my parents and talking specifically about my dad. He grew up in a machismo household and came to the United States. It was hard, and he never even considered…to do things like this [performing arts] because he grew up poor and had to work, and he didn't have the luxury of doing what he wanted. But mostly because doing something outside the norm was impossible for him, because it was so instilled that that [traditional machismo characteristics] was expected.

Many participants shared that this was generational and wanted to be the change that would end this cycle. They spoke about how their grandparents taught these ideologies to their parents and how that was passed on through both men and women in their families that would uphold gender norms and patriarchal ideologies. Many participants shared that their families never even had the opportunity to be able to explore masculine identity because they were focusing on fulfilling basic survival needs. Alejandro talked about his experience with his academic major and connected it to his opportunities, but his family did not. He shared the following:

> It's always been… be a man. Don't feel any emotions. Don't cry. Don't do any of this. And I feel like, because it's, it's not because like, oh, I go on stage and I cry, or I go on stage, and I do vulnerable work. But because I feel like my career path is non-linear to the masculine stereotype, they [family members] start questioning that. And I feel like they don't put themselves in that position mainly because, culturally, they've never been given access to be put in that position.

Participants consistently shared that as they developed their masculine identity, there was a deep understanding of why their families stayed within this socialized cycle of teaching young boys what a man is supposed to be, typically, traditional machismo characteristics. With this understanding, participants understood that they were allowed to tell the world what made them a man versus waiting for others to say to them if they were or were not. Something that aided in this growth was a new environment that came out during the interview with participants.

Sub-theme: Digital Environmental Influences. Study participants shared that a new non-physical ecosystem—an environment that affects how one develops and is out of their control (Bronfenbrenner, 1992)—became a microsystem. The researcher concluded that this exosystem became a microsystem environment due to the dramatic technological increase. Participants can now select and filter what content they choose on their social media platforms, which was not the case when Bronfenbrenner (1992) developed his Ecological Theory. Participants described this new microsystem as their digital environment (Research Question 1) and explained how it played a prominent role in their masculine identity development. This environment also served as a developmental environment that taught them more contemporary masculine ideologies. For this dissertation, this digital environment represents any digital media that includes, but is not limited to, social media, television, celebrities, athletes, and musicians. Participants talked about how seeing highly admired stars who identified as men behaved in ways that challenged the traditional machismo mindset allowed them to develop their own masculine identity. Along this line, Gustavo shared the following:

> I saw a Bad Bunny dressing in a certain way, wearing a [traditionally feminine] thing, wearing his hairstyle. Seeing at fashion shows, a well-known fashion designer, like go against the norm of the masculine identity…he [fashion

> designer] decided to switch it up and, you know, wear skirts. When I started to follow people [on Twitter] from the LGBTQ+ community, they post about drag, and I was like, dang, like, these people who identify as men do drag. And that's when it started to change my perception of the masculine identity of what it is to be "a man."

Enrique also shared his experience with the digital environment and how it opened his mind to think differently about what makes a man in the following way: "There's this interviewer that interviews pop stars from Mexico. He was interviewing an [Mexican] ex-professional boxer from the eighties. And they would talk about the struggles of being a boxer. They would talk about their emotions. And I don't know that. I was like, wow, they're talking about this. They're opening up." When asked what he learned from seeing this, Enrique replied: "That it's okay to open up. It's okay. To be weak. You don't always have to have your guard up. You can just open up, even to another guy. That's another thing, maybe to another man. You can comfort each other. That's another friend, friends being friends." Other participants shared how prominent celebratory figures in the Latino community continue challenging the socialized perceptions of masculinity amongst Latino men. This has supported the lessons they have learned in their college environment and allowed them to bring their whole selves into these environments. Other figures like Canelo (Mexican boxer), Harry Styles (singer), and Bad Bunny (Latino singer) were also brought up. Participants shared the positive impact that seeing this role modeling through a digital environment helped them expand their thinking on masculine identity development.

Emerging Theme Five: Growing for the Betterment of their Community

As part of this study, the researcher wanted to determine what current first-generation Latino men hoped for masculine identity formation of future first-generation college Latino men. Participants' responses are summarized in this theme. They wanted to see masculine identity development happen for the betterment of their community. After developing in the university environment, participants acknowledged the dangers of traditional machismo and socialized masculine ideologies in their community. They hope future first-generation college Latino men would not experience the pressure of " living up" to standards of the male identity created by society (Research Question 3). They also hope future generations will be allowed to operate within all points of the Latino masculinity spectrum and still be socially accepted by their community. Michael summarized his thoughts in this way:

> I aspire to a future where these Latino men …are very knowledgeable, informed, and conscious of how much this could have a severe effect on people that are just like them or like younger Latino men that are coming up behind them and have total self-independence and self-formulated beliefs and ideals to where if they choose to express themselves in a way that again is traditionally perceived as masculine, then at least them doing that while being very much aware and conscious of that. And also, being comfortable enough with the idea that somebody else may not want to perceive or express themselves in that way, even if they are men, they could still identify [themselves] as masculine men…and also just becoming more open to the idea of like, it's more about the experiences and shared experiences that these people have, not so much like what, like masculine culture and tradition looks like.

This leads to the first sub-theme that participants focused on: allowing future young men to define their masculinity for themselves rather than having others do it for them.

Sub-theme: Allowing Young Men to Define their Masculinity. As participants spoke throughout the interviews, they were asked to reflect on the ideologies they came into the university regarding masculinity. Then they were asked how they grew in their ideologies, specifically their perception of masculinity, and what they would want for future Latino men. Overwhelmingly, participants shared that they came into the university with an idea of what a Latino man is supposed to be and then moved into a new ideology. This ideology was that the identity of Latino men can be anything on a wide range of the spectrum and that this should be taught more frequently. Some of the participants even committed to teaching their future children. Jesus shared the following:

> There doesn't need to be anything. A Male can be whatever it is that you want to be. To make it at the end of the day is what I would like for everyone. To believe there's no, there's no point in living by such rigg ragged boundaries to live. Like it's your life. Like you can make it however it is that makes it most makes you the happiest. And so yeah, that's a message I'd hopefully like to teach my kids and would love for the future.

Julio spoke about being a role model for younger generations of Latino men to challenge their current perceptions of what makes a man and ensure they define that for themselves. He shared the following: “Become a mentor and role model for these children and an example of what they want to become or, at the very least they. These young adults challenge their perception of what it is to be a man and make them do their own kind of soul search, seeking to find out what defines masculinity.”

Along these lines, several participants talked about the importance of allowing young men to explore the masculine identity spectrum free of judgment to limit feelings of isolation. They also acknowledged the current stigma of mental health support for young Latino men. They

spoke about how they were taught from a young age that Latino men do not need mental health support. It was just not acceptable in their community.

Sub-theme: Men's Mental Health. Study participants talked about how the new college and digital environments served as a developmental playground where it was more socially acceptable to explore their masculine identity. As they went through their college experience, a constant tug-and-pull experience would occur when they went home. One participant spoke about how, as he developed in his masculine development, he started noticing the dangers of what was taught at a young age. This was especially apparent in interactions he saw when going home and observing such interactions that his immediate family had with his younger cousin. Alejandro stated:

> I have little cousins at home in Sacramento whom I don't see very often. And like, every time I go back, I feel like they're losing a little bit of their charm because they've been told to calm down or knock it off [acting in more traditionally feminine ways]. And there have been times when my little cousin was having a panic attack because he didn't know how to process his feelings and emotions. And his parents just said he had a "freak attack." And I was like, no, that's toxic masculinity that you're teaching him. And it sucks. (Research Question 3).

Many other study participants discussed their early masculine identity's barrier to seeking or receiving mental health support. In their home environment, they were constantly taught that it was not acceptable for Latino men who needed to appear physically and mentally strong. Participants shared that mental health in their home environments was seen as something for only mentally ill people, and having someone who was mentally ill in the family would bring down the family honor. Gustavo shared how entering the university environment enabled him to explore the importance of men's mental health through both a digital environment and the wider

university environment. He discussed seeing an Instagram post from the university's Instagram pages that addressed men's mental health. He said:

> [the university] posted about the number of men who have depression... it was a big number. It was like right there...this shit's like big, you know, it's like really that many dudes are like depressed or like that many dudes like I thought I was like one of the only few, but it was, it was, that's what I thought when I saw, I was like, I thought I was only a few, but it was just more men.

Gustavo also shared how his journey to seek mental health support was challenging due to the messages he would get when he went home. For Gustavo, he had to hit what he described as a low point in his life. It was not until this happened that he was open to connecting with the university's counseling and psychological support staff. After this experience, he shared the importance of allowing Latino men to seek this support early without stigma for the betterment of themselves as individuals and to serve as role models for other Latino men.

Sub-theme: Community Acceptance. Social and community acceptance was one of the factors study participants brought up most when talking about what allowed them to grow in their masculine identity. When participants felt they were in a space or environment where they would be accepted for behaving in a certain way, they were more open to exploring their masculinity. This was another sub-theme when speaking about their aspirations for future Latino men. Julio summarized it in this way:

> Well, first, I just hope there are no expectations for them [future Latino men] that they don't feel forced to be anything by a certain age or in a specific path in their life. That is for them to be comfortable, to be able to create their way, and have the support, whether from their family or friends or sources like the school to pursue those opportunities. I also hope that this issue of pride and ego slowly diminishes and that we view each other as allies and brothers more than as competition.

Gustavo also shared his thoughts in this way:

> Yeah. I just hope for someone to be open about their emotions, be comfortable in their own skin, and be able to wear whatever they want without getting judgment. Whether that be fashion, you know, taking care of themselves in a certain way, you know, go-getting facials, um, you know, doing things that women have; have done in the past that often do to like male doing; to like men doing them and being like, and not being judged is something that I'd love to see more.

Participants shared their hopes for the future to be a space of non-judgment and community acceptance regardless of how future Latino men chose to behave or express themselves (Research Question 3). They would often bring up their challenges going through this experience, mainly when loved ones acted as a barrier for them to express themselves. There was also a sense of commitment for future generations and how they can play a role of support for them.

Chapter Five: Discussion

In this chapter, I summarize the study beginning with goals, problem statement, research questions, methodology, and conceptual framework's guiding principles. After summarizing the results, I offer suggestions for future studies, actionable recommendations for higher education programs, and potential implications for change. Finally, I provide a succinct summary of the study.

Brief Review of Study Goals, Problem Statement, Research Questions, Methodology, and Conceptual Framework

This qualitative study aimed to explore how Latino men's perceptions of masculinity affect their college experience. This is significant given the Latino population growth in university enrollments and projected increments for the future. Despite such growth, Latino men's academic attainment lags behind many other students. These disproportionate academic rates have created a Latino retention crisis, which should not be regarded as an individual Latino issue, but as an institutional challenge. The statistics are clear: many students are not completing their undergraduate degrees, let alone post-baccalaureate programs. Higher education institutions contend they embrace a "student-centeredness" approach as part of retention and graduation strategies. Also, many of these institutions, including the Research One site for this study, aim to be accredited as Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI). In this study, using the lens of Museus's (2014) Culturally Engaging Campus Environments model, participants shared how their institution lacked many Culturally Engaging Campus Environment (CECE) indicators needed to support successful student outcomes. Thus, this study aimed to explore Latino men's perception of masculinity as a phenomenon within a university environment, which may affect their overall

college experience. The study utilized a phenomenological approach—a qualitative type of research—to address the following research questions:

1: How do microsystem environments contribute to the masculine identity development of first-generation Latino Men?

2: How does masculine identity alter first-generation Latino men's sense of belonging at their university?

3: What aspirations do current first-generation Latino men have for the masculine identity formation of future first-generation Latino men?

Three sets of principles—which represent the Conceptual Framework—provided guidance to explore the above questions. First, Torres et al. (2002) research address the myth of sameness among Latino men and their machismo. Here, Torres et al. (2002) share differences between masculine identity groups within which Latino men can operate and transformative events that need to happen to "unlock" more modern views of masculine identity. The second set of principles comes from Bronfenbrenner's (1992) Ecological Systems Theory (EST), which provides guidance to understand the critical impact identity development has, for Latino men, within multiple levels of surrounding environments where they grew up. I specifically looked at the Microsystem—study participants' immediate environment—and Mesosystem—study participants' interactions within broader and more encompassing systems. Finally, when examining the study results, I used Meseus's (2014) CECE model to discuss findings and provide recommendations for future research and higher education practices.

Summary of Research Findings: Emerging Themes and Connections to Main Questions

The findings of this study generated five main themes: Theme One—The Double Edge Sword of being a Latino Man—describes masculine identity as having both favorable and unfavorable consequences. Study participants shared how their masculine identity awarded them privileges within their home microsystem; yet this was only upon conditions of living up to home expectations of what makes a "man." Participants talked about how their male identity came with privileges and the challenge of living up to potentially "toxic" masculine characteristics. These include not asking for help but also attaining academic success, distancing themselves from feminine attributes, limiting emotional displays, and more.

Theme Two—The Role of Family—describes the tug-and-pull between responsibilities, values, beliefs, and actions study participants needed to balance as they operated within the family mesosystem—a layer that serves as the relationship between two microsystems; in this case, the home environment and the college environment. As first-generation college students, these connections were entirely new, with only a few participants having older siblings who experienced college as a point of support. For study participants, nuclear and extended family and community were focal points in developing their masculine identity. Participants shared that they entered the university with a masculine identity that was taught to them rather than one they explored and adopted by themselves. Entering the university was the first-time participants were allowed to explore new perceptions of masculinity. In this case, they became the primary connection that brought these perspectives into their home microsystem. While family supported some aspects of these new perceptions, others were met with strong resistance as they attempted

to uphold vital and more traditional gender roles. Therefore, participants viewed their families as points of stress and a source of motivation.

Theme Three—Masculine Traits as Persistence Tools—describes how study participants adopted some of the characteristics from a traditional machismo perspective and repurposed them as navigational tools for academic success. Participants spoke about their ability to interact with diverse people who may have more conservative ideologies of masculinity and people who have more contemporary ideologies. This occurred not only when participants went home but also within their university environment, depending on whom they interacted. Code-switching frequently occurs in academic settings and social settings because of the importance of how people perceive each other. This is a vital characteristic of traditional machismo masculine identity. Other robust features adopted and repurposed included a strong sense of solution-oriented thinking, persistence, determination, and competitiveness. Participants tapped into these strengths during moments of extreme difficulty. These moments served as one of many transformational moments where participants began to explore more contemporary forms of masculine identity.

Theme Four—Self-Perception—describes transformative moments that aided study participants' masculine identity development. The university served as a more accepting environment for these participants to explore masculine identity. As participants were removed from their home environment, which typically meant less gender policing, this was their opportunity to decide about the perception of what makes a “man.” Exposure to diverse people and different ways of thinking, identifying with other Latino peers, a new microsystem, and the

digital environment (Bronfenbrenner's exosystem) served as solid points for identity development.

Theme Five—Growing for the Betterment of their Community—describes study participants' aspirations for future generations of men who might identify with similar challenges as they did. Participants demonstrated a deep understanding of socialized traditional machismo's dangers in their community. They wish for younger generations to avoid difficulties with masculine identity development. Participants also showed a deep need for community acceptance in allowing young men to define masculinity for themselves. This indicates the importance of support for Latino men by the entire community, not just men, women, and other gender nonbinary people. A focal point in this theme was the importance of Latino men's mental health. Through the changes in masculine identity development they experienced, they demonstrated how their home microsystem could benefit from connecting with the university microsystem in achieving some of these aspirations.

The following section of Chapter Five connects research findings to the main research questions this study set out to answer.

Research Question 1

How do microsystem environments contribute to the masculine identity development of first-generation Latino men? Latino men are continually expected to live up to the standards of being good men by adhering to rigid gender roles and acting as reliable providers for the nuclear family in their immediate microsystem (Ballysingh, 2016; Estrada & Arciniega, 2015). Previous research has stated that images that reflect how "genuine Latino males" act, value, and think are exploited in popular media to perpetuate such ideals. These ideals are based on the concept that

males fear being feminine and thus see femininity as a threat to their masculine identity (O'Neil et al., 1986).

While this standard still holds in many cases, study participants shared that their digital environment was a platform where they could explore new contemporary forms of masculine identity since high-profile celebrities, for example, were role models in breaking gender norms. It is important to note that as participants viewed these celebrities demonstrating more modern forms of masculinity, the societal consensus was that stars were still awarded the privileges that come with the male identity. Participants who connected to a contemporary masculine digital environment felt reaffirmed that they could maintain their masculine male identity regardless of what values, beliefs, and behaviors they demonstrated. For participants, this was important because of the robust familismo responsibility to uphold family honor (perceived to remain masculine men), even when adopting more modern forms of masculinity.

Familismo played a significant role in the home and university microsystem contributing to participants' masculine identity development. This solid dedication to upholding beliefs and values generationally passed down was evident in the data gathered. The traditional machismo beliefs and values were also perpetuated through all genders of the nuclear and extended family and community in the home microsystem. There were examples of how older male and female siblings, who had a college experience, would return to study participants' home microsystem and challenge these traditional values. Yet, these values were so deeply rooted in the family microsystem that it proved challenging to develop fully into more modern forms of masculine identity. It was not until participants entered a new microsystem, college, that they could build their male identity and influence members of their home microsystem.

Upon entering the university microsystem, study participants were allowed to explore their masculine identity with fewer constrictions than at home. Regardless of the openness of the new microsystem, there was a transition period when participants began to navigate this new environment which varied in length of time for everyone involved. One of the most promising CECE indicators in this microsystem, which supported masculine identity development, was opportunities for meaningful cross-cultural engagement. These were opportunities to interact constructively and purposefully with students from other cultural backgrounds, improving college achievement and benefitting from meaningful experiences (Museus,2014). Participants shared that most of them came from non-diverse communities which shared their identities or traditional masculine ideologies. Upon entering the university environment, they were naturally exposed to a very diverse climate compared to what they were accustomed to. Daily interactions with peers and other university community members from diverse backgrounds allowed them to broaden their thinking on masculine identity. It is important to note that participants mostly shared about student-led social efforts. Participants shared little about university-sponsored initiatives, programs, or events.

Study participants also mentioned the greater need and availability of holistic support for Latino men. This is the extent to which postsecondary institutions give their students access to one or more professors or staff people they feel comfortable approaching in hopes they will provide them with the knowledge they need, offer assistance if they need it, or connect them to the inside or support they require (Museus, 2014). Participants also shared how opportunities to connect with faculty, staff, and peers with similar identities presented themselves through a more "stumble upon" approach versus an intentional effort on the part of the institution. Participants

shared how these high-impact experiences profoundly contributed to their masculine identity growth when these connections occurred. Some of these examples include: (1) identity-based student organizations leading discussions about masculine identity; (2) identity-conscious retention programs meeting Latino men where they were in their masculine identity and providing individualized coaching to develop that identity; and (3) engaging with faculty that identify as men of color.

Additionally, participants shared how they wished more Latino men could participate in these opportunities in the college environment. Participants also declared themselves "lucky" to be in the right place at the right time and have those experiences. This will be further discussed in the Recommendations section below. The following Research Question 2 will include more about CECE indicators.

Research Question 2

How does masculine identity alter first-generation Latino men's sense of belonging at their university? According to the CECE model, undergraduate students who experience more culturally engaging campus environments are more likely (1) to show a stronger sense of belonging, more positive academic dispositions (academic self-efficiency, academic motivation, & intent to persist), and higher levels of academic performance and, in the end, (2) be more likely to continue their studies until graduation (Museus, 2014). Study participants acknowledged how the imposter syndrome—an internal feeling of intellectual phoniness—has afflicted them frequently and continues to do so, casting doubt on their abilities, talents, and successes. Anyone can experience this phenomenon, but first-generation, underrepresented students who attempt to navigate a college education system designed to cater to a particular

affluent group are more prone to feel that way (Arbelo-Marrero & Milacci, 2016; Clayton et al., 2017; Clance & Imes, 1978). Latino students' social involvement, staff relationships, and peer relationships are essential to their academic success, aid their social adjustment to college, and increase their sense of belonging (Brooms et al., 2018).

Three leading CECE indicators were referenced by study participants when discussing how their masculine identity affected their sense of belonging at their university. These included (1) Culturally Validating Environments, where students experienced more favorable outcomes and were more likely to be successful in college, especially if they were surrounded by postsecondary professors who affirmed their cultural backgrounds and identities. The next CECE, (2) Humanized Educational Environments, refers to the degree university learning spaces are humanized for students. Campus settings are defined by institutional representatives who are dedicated to, care for, and form close bonds with students. Finally, CECE (3), Proactive Philosophies, describes when instructors and staff go above and beyond simply providing information and support to students. Instead, they bring that knowledge and consent to them directly to increase their chance of success (Museus, 2014). Study participants also shared experiences when faculty, staff, and peers did not understand the unique challenges of being a first-generation Latino college student. Participants felt invalidated in their efforts to develop their masculine identity because this growth only occurred in pockets of safe spaces within the university environment. Those spaces include religious groups, peer-led organizations, and structured retention programs. These spaces become essential.

Study participants shared that outside of these typically social spaces, the academic areas they engaged with proved to be dehumanizing. In the interviews for this research, there were

multiple examples of how participants felt like they were “just a number” in the classroom. There were even moments when they were experiencing challenging personal struggles. Thus they chose not to share these with faculty in academic settings as they received the message that Latino men “solve their problems.” These experiences decreased participants' sense of belonging on their college campuses. There were more examples.

Another example of how participants' perceptions of masculinity affected their sense of belonging relates to the ideology of rigid, structured environments. Entering college with more traditional views of machismo, the thinking was that things “are the way they are” and “real men deal with it and find a way to succeed.” While this ultimately ended up being a philosophy adopted as a persistence tool, some study participants adopted it with the amendment that “Latino men ask for help to achieve their goals because their family is depending on them.” The lack of proactive practices from faculty and staff to provide early orientation to maximize Latino men’s likelihood to succeed proved to be a decreased sense of belonging as study participants felt everything was their responsibility and had little to do with faculty or staff support.

In conclusion, conventional machismo ideology prevents Latino men from seeking support due to their high value of self-reliance. A high indicator that allows Latino men to seek support through university faculty and staff are factors that connect them on a social-emotional level, such as cultural representation. Participants shared that their intuition had minimal faculty and staff members that were able to create culturally affirming environments intentionally. There were few culturally affirming environments, humanized learning environments, and proactive philosophies visible on the campus of the study participants. Participants may have felt a lower sense of belonging due to this. In the microenvironments where they were able to encounter

these CECE indicators, participants were able to explore more modern perceptions of masculinity. Characteristics associated with more modern masculinity helped Latino men view help-seeking as a tool to achieve their academic goals. They also helped Latino men lean toward a collectivist mindset versus an individual mindset when accomplishing their goals. Latino men can't afford any more obstacles that prevent them from connecting with faculty, staff, and peers who offer environments where students can feel more at home. The conventional machismo group's traits discourage Latino men from forming these connections or seeking assistance. However, traits from the modern masculine perspective see these connections as essential to creating a sense of community and succeeding in school.

Research Question 3

What aspirations do current first-generation Latino men have for the masculine identity formation of future first-generation Latino men? Study participants demonstrated a deep understanding of the dangers of socialized traditional machismo in their community and spoke highly of wanting something better for future generations. Their aspirations could be summarized in the following three points: (1) Acknowledge and support Latino men's mental health; (2) allow Latino men to develop their definition of what makes a Latino man; (3) move towards a social and community acceptance of more modern perceptions of Latino masculinity.

While Latino men enjoy certain privileges because of their gender identification, they also experience disproportionately harsher school punishment, academic difficulties, mental health problems, and other challenges, including relationship issues, family well-being, and others (American Psychological Association, 2019). In the United States, many men have been conditioned to settle disputes through anger and violence. Some will use alcohol or drugs as a

trauma-related coping mechanism for undesirable feelings and circumstances. These problems are greatly exacerbated throughout the young lives of Latino boys who experience an additional cultural layer of masculinity, which socializes them into a more typical machismo perception of their masculinity (American Psychological Association, 2019). According to Harper and Harris (2010), when it comes to their lived experiences and developmental needs, college men are incorrectly viewed in problematic and defective ways. In response, these researchers debunked the myth of the model gender majority, which contains five false premises: (1) Gender advantage comparably benefits all male students; (2) men need not participate in gender programs unless they aim to reduce violence and sexual assault against women; (3) men in their first years of college do not experience negative preconceptions, difficulties in their social and academic lives, or unequal treatment because of their gender; (4) male students don't need resources or support tailored to their gender.; and (5) most modern college males succeed because of historical supremacy and structural determinism.

We can confirm the validity of Harper and Harris's (2010) false premises regarding the model gender majority holds based on research study results. Gender does not benefit all male students in the same way. As we can see, based on this research study, Latino men only have a conditional sense of agency. Participants aspire to drop these conditions in their nuclear and extended family and the community. Latino men need to engage in intentional gendered programs that support the exploration of new perceptions of masculinity and male mental health. Latino men in this study aspire for future generations to build intimate relationships with people from any gender to adopt a more collectivist approach to achieving their goals. This can only be

done when members from genders work together to create an environment where Latino men can succeed.

Implications for Social Justice

When higher education is focused on retention efforts through a "student-centeredness" approach, such campus environment should prioritize the needs and interests of students rather than focusing on the interests of higher education institutions and the demands of the research enterprise. We must increasingly focus on student populations that have historically been excluded from higher education. Institutions have a responsibility to students to provide a CECE in which all students can succeed. Latino student enrollment continues to increase while their graduating rates stagnate and are lower than other peers. Implementing an equitable conceptual framework in higher education policies and practices, like Museus's (2014) CECE, can help increase successful college outcomes for all students.

Institutions of higher learning need to reassess how they ensure all enrolled students have the support necessary to stay at the university and graduate, predominantly Latino male students. Because the institution fails to understand and support this group of students, they continue to be limited in socio-economic advancement opportunities. Although there is a consistent rise in Latino male student enrollment, the higher education system in the United States continues to fail them. Institutions have made promises they need to uphold.

Implications and Recommendations for Higher Education

As a result of this study, research findings point to three recommendations that higher education institutions may use in supporting low-income, first-generation Latino students. Increase marketing and services that advocate for male (1) mental health. Implement practices

(2) to build a deeper connection between college and home environment for students. Implement procedures and policies to develop (3) culturally engaging campus environment indicators, such as (a) culturally relevant knowledge, (b) cultural community service, and (c) collectivist cultural orientations.

Study participants talked extensively about their experiences with mental health throughout this research study and how their masculine identity would hold them back from reaching out for support. Participants would often share how Latino men would wait until they hit “rock bottom” before deciding to seek mental health support. Based on these research study results, for Latino men, seeking mental health support was seen as taboo in their families, and they were also told that “real men do not need mental health support.” Participants also shared how when they got to the college campus environment and started seeing marketing about male mental health, it was the first time they had considered seeking support. This indicated to them that ensuring mental health services were widely available; consequently, marketing these services may be a critical factor in Latino student success. It is also essential that mental health providers have the cultural familiarity and relevant knowledge to create culturally validating spaces when Latinos decide to seek this support. While providers do not have to be Latino men to create such spaces, Latino male mental health providers can be an excellent resource when starting this process.

Study participants also talked about how they were the only connection between their home and college environments. Bronfenbrenner's (1992) mesosystem shows the relationship between two microsystems, college and home, and plays a vital role in identity development. Creating programs that deepen this relationship can help Latino homes open up to other

perceptions of masculine identity, just like students did when they entered the university environment. These connections could be meaningful for Latino students to avoid experiencing a dramatic tug-and-pull effect when moving between these environments. Consequently, social acceptance in their home environment can support the masculine identity growth that happens in the college environment. This can positively affect the factors needed in the CECE model to produce college success outcomes (Museus, 2014).

Finally, this research study recommends that higher education institutions focus on three CECE indicators which, based on study participants, were lacking and could have benefitted their experience. The first is culturally relevant knowledge, which includes opportunities for students to develop, maintain, and broaden their understanding of their native cultures and communities, enhancing their experiences and achievement. Cultural community service refers to what educational institutions can offer students in terms of opportunities and resources to support and improve their cultural communities through a variety of initiatives, such as activities to raise awareness of local problems, encourage community activism, community service and service-learning, and involvement of students in problem-based research projects that address local issues. Finally, with collectivist cultural orientations, students are more likely to succeed when exposed to institutional settings based on more collectivist cultural attitudes than individualistic ones (Museus, 2014). Study participants identified all three of these indicators as lacking in their experience. For example, they mentioned how they could engage in some of these indicators, but this only happened in the micro pockets of the larger university environment. Many study participants had these indicators, but they were only student-led

opportunities. While institutions may have programs to address these indicators, pushing for a campus-wide adoption becomes essential.

Recommendations for Future Research

This phenomenological study aimed to contribute to the limited body of knowledge to address Latino masculinity for first-generation, low-income students. This research study recommends four areas for future research. First, further studies should be conducted to analyze specific masculine identity growth factors within the home, university, and digital environments. Such research should focus on connections between these environments in Bronfenbrenner's mesosystem and how those connections could be used to support Latino success in higher education institutions. Future research should also focus on gathering student voices through storytelling which challenges dominant narratives and stereotypes—including students' voices in scholarship regarding student persistence allows for a deeper analysis and understanding of the topic (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Maxwell, 2012).

The second recommendation is for future studies to focus on the effects that perceptions of masculinity have on the mental well-being of first-generation, low-income Latino males. This was a topic participants identified as an aspiration for future generations of Latino men in higher education; thus, researchers should honor this request. Such research should also focus on promising practices that higher education institutions could implement to support this population of students.

The third should focus on the effects traditional socialized machismo has on the experiences of Latinas. Study participants discussed the conditional sense of agency when upholding strict gender norms within their environments. Participants shared witnessing a similar

phenomenon with female-identified people in their families and community. Traditional machismo affects not only male-identifying people but also all members of the family, extended family, and the wider community. Consequently, future research should focus on Latinas' perception of masculinity in their own higher education experiences.

Finally, future studies should address the role of non-male-identifying people responsible for perpetuating traditional socialized machismo in their communities. Participants frequently brought up experiences of gender policing within all environments they operated. One participant's aspiration was for social acceptance of Latino men exploring their masculine identity. To accomplish this, future research may focus on what role non-male-identifying people have in this phenomenon and the roles Latino males can play in making this goal a reality.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research study provided an in-depth look at the educational experiences of seven low-income, first-generation Latino males during their masculine identity development, which coincided with their undergraduate educational journey. Study participants explained the challenges they encountered in navigating multiple critical microsystem environments, such as the double-edged sword of their Latino male identity, establishing a sense of belonging at their institution, and developing their masculine identity for the betterment of their community. Despite these unique challenges, participants continued to persist by tapping into traditional machismo characteristics and repurposing them through transformational experiences that opened their minds to new perceptions of masculine identity. When institutional support was inadequate, participants were lucky to "stumble upon" and find opportunities within culturally validating spaces that supported their masculine identity development. The

environments participants found helped this development because of the multiple indicators that created culturally engaging campus environments. These factors positively affected participants' quest for a sense of belonging, academic disposition, and academic performance. These experiences overall led them to successful college outcomes as all participants, at the time of this study, were on track toward degree completion. It is important to remember that the success of Latino male students benefits the entire university. The CECE model is a concept that aims to explain how circumstances affect the academic achievement of racially diverse groups, including White students and students of color (Museus, 2014). The nine CECE indicators constitute a synthesis of the elements of campus environments, which, based on this study's participants, represent evidence to promote student success (Museus, 2014).

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Thank you for participating in this interview. My name is Moises Alvarado Garcia and I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership program—a joint doctoral program through UC San Diego and Cal State San Marcos.
We are here today to learn about the university environmental factors that contribute to the development of masculine identity and its effect on your overall college experience. **The goal of this interview is to identify factors and variables of first-generation, Latino men's masculine identity that may affect their overall college experience.**

If you are not comfortable responding some of the questions, you do not have to answer.

Our conversation will last approximately 60 -90 minutes, and will be audio, and potentially video, recorded to make sure I don´t miss anything you say. After the interview, you may request a copy of the recording as well as the transcripts. I will be sending you a summary of my findings to ensure that your voice is accurately portrayed in my study.

All the information that you share will be confidential and anonymous. Your name will not appear on any document resulting from this study.

If at any point you feel uncomfortable, we can stop this interview. Additionally, if at any time you do not want to answer any particular question, please let me know and we can move on to the next question.

Please remember that there are no right, or wrong, answers; we are just focusing on your personal experience.

Do you have any questions before we begin? Let's begin.

Interview Questions

I have organized the interview questions in following three categories:

1: How do microsystem environments contribute to the masculine identity development of first-generation Latino Men?

2: How does masculine identity alter first-generation Latino men's sense of belonging at their university?

3: What aspirations do current first-generation Latino men have for the masculine identity formation of future first-generation Latino men?

General Questions

Let's begin our conversation with some general questions before we get into the different categories of questions.

1. Based on your background and culture, how would you describe what makes a "man"?
2. For you, how would you describe your masculine identity when you started at the university?
    a. Can you tell me more about those aspects?
    b. How has this masculine identity changed over the last few years? What led to that change?

Research Question 1: In this category of questions, I want to focus on the silent environments that may contribute to your masculine identity, which is your current college environment.

3. What messages about masculine identity does your university send you?
    a. Are these different from the ones you received at home?
4. Describe your current environment and how it contributes to socialized perception of masculinity.
    a. Can you give me a specific example of this?
5. What factors in your college environment support or challenge the socialized perception of masculine identity?
    a. Are there specific traditions, related to masculine identity, that you enjoy?
6. In what ways, if any, does your culture and environment contribute or challenge the socialized perceptions of masculine identity?
    a. Can you give me a specific example of this?

Research Question 2: In the next questions, I want us to talk about your college experience

7. Based on what we have been discussing, what effect have these perceptions (or understandings about masculine identity) had on your college experience?
    a. How do you think your environment contributes to this?
8. In what ways, if any, do people or programs influence the way you perceive your masculine identity?
    a. Are there any examples you can give me where your college made you feel proud to be a Latino man?
9. How has your perception of masculinity affected your overall college experience?
    a. Can you give me a few examples of how this perception shaped the actions you took in college?
10. How did you feel when your perception of masculinity was challenged?

Research Question 3: Finally, let's talk about masculine-identity aspirations (briefly explain Torres et al.'s levels of aspirations here)

11. Based on our conversations (with peers, parents, teachers, professors, and others) and your experiences, in what ways could the university support first-generation Latino men more effectively?
    a. Are there any examples which are working for first-generation to go to college of Latino men?

12. In your opinion, what should future, first-generation Latino men aspire to regarding masculine identity?
13. Are there any other topics/comments that have not been discussed that you would like to bring up?

Appendix B: Researcher Outreach Communication

Recruitment Email

Hello,

My name is Moises Alvarado Garcia and I am a doctoral student in Educational Leadership—a Joint Doctoral Program at the University of California, San Diego, and California State University, San Marcos. I am reaching out to seek assistance with my doctoral dissertation titled Perception of Masculinity Effects on Academic Achievement for First-Generation Latino Men in Higher Education.

I am interested in finding out more about how first-generation Latino men in higher education experience the phenomenon of masculine identity and how that perception can affect their academic achievements.

For this study, I am looking for participants who meet the following criteria:

- identify as a first-generation college student (neither of your parents and/or legal guardians hold a four-year college/bachelor's degree from the United States)
- identify as a low-income student (come from a family with annual incomes in the lowest 20% nationally or below 200% of the federal poverty line)
- are full-time enrolled undergraduate students at UC San Diego
- self-identify as a Latino/Hispanic male
- are between the ages of 18-21

Would you be willing to help me distribute this call to your students? If you know anyone who might be interested in this study, I would be grateful if you could forward this information to them.

All information submitted for this study will be kept confidential and secure. Only pseudonyms will be used in data collection and publication of my dissertation.

Participants who are interested in being a part of the study should fill out the following interest form and I will provide them with more information about the study.

https://forms.gle/BNUib9ShMQrmCcPNA

If potential participants have any questions, they may contact me at Moalvara@ucsd.edu.

Respondents who agree to participate will be interviewed and receive two $20 Visa gift cards for their time. First, participants will receive $20 for completing an interview; then, another $20 after completing a member-checking process (review of interview transcript).

For questions about this study, please call me at 909-743-9483 or email moalvara@ucsd.edu. You may also contact my research advisor, Dr. Manuel P. Vargas at mvargas@csusm.edu.

I greatly appreciate your support!

Moises Alvarado Garcia, M.S.

Doctoral Student - Cohort 16
Joint Doctoral Program - Educational Leadership
University of California, San Diego
California State University, San Marcos

Appendix C: Information Sheet

Information Sheet

Dear Participant:

My name is Moises Alvarado Garcia and I am a doctoral student in the Joint Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership between UC San Diego and CSU San Marcos, Education Studies Department and School of Education. I am conducting a research study to examine what effects Latino men's perception of masculinity have on their academic achievement in higher education. The purpose of this form is to inform you about the study.

Why am I being invited to take part in this study?
You are invited to take part in this study because you have self-identified as meeting the following criteria: (a) identify as a first-generation college student (neither of your parents and/or legal guardians hold a 4-year college/bachelor's degree from the United States); (b) self-identify as a Latino/Hispanic male; (c) you are a full-time undergraduate student enrolled at UC San Diego; (d) you are between the ages of 18-21, and (e) identify as a low-income student (come from a family with annual incomes in the lowest 20% nationally or below 200% of the federal poverty line). This study will be conducted to examine how first-generation Latino men make sense of their experiences with Latino masculinity during their higher education journey.

What will I do if I agree to participate?
If you agree to participate in the study, you will participate in a one-on-one semi-structured interview that will last about 60-90 minutes and one review process that will last about 60 minutes. All interviews will be conducted in person or using Zoom depending on the research sites COVID-19 protocols. Zoom is a cloud-based video communications program that allows users to collaborate via audio conferencing. You will be given instructions on how to obtain and download the program, if needed. All transcripts from the initial interview will be available for you to review and make corrections to. Once you complete the transcript check we will have a final short meeting on Zoom. All interview data will be audio recorded, transcribed into text, and kept on a university laptop that will be password secured.

What happens if I say yes, but I change my mind later?
Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decline to participate at any time, even after the study has started. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study, there will be no penalty, and you will be able to keep any incentives you have earned up to the point at which you withdraw.

What are the benefits to me of being in this study?
Although there are no direct benefits to participants, this study may increase knowledge about the educational experiences of first-generation Latino men in higher education, which may

benefit other Latino men in the future. Furthermore, knowledge gained from this study may lead to a better understanding of students from diverse backgrounds.

What happens to the information collected for the study?
Your responses will be confidential. Only the researcher and faculty advisor will have access to the recorded data. All the data will be stored on a password-protected laptop that belongs to the researcher. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name will not be used, nor any information which may identify you. After data analysis, the researcher will hold on to the data for three years and then delete the data.

Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me? Is there any risk to me by being in this study? If so, how will these risks be minimized?
There are minimal risks and inconveniences to participating in this study. In this case, potential risks include: (1) the time required to participate in the interview may be inconvenient; and (2) you may experience emotional stress when answering some questions about your school experiences which require you to recollect unfavorable memories.

SAFEGUARDS:
To minimize these risks and inconveniences, the following measures will be taken:

- You can skip any questions that you feel uncomfortable answering during the interview.
- I will send you the list of questions for the interview(s) ahead of time. If you decide you do not want to answer any questions, we will leave those out of the interview process.
- You will be provided with resources for counseling or social support services if you require them (see below).
- The interview may be scheduled at a time that is convenient to you.
- You can cancel or stop the interview at any point before or during the recording.

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)
Call - 858-534-3755
Website - https://caps.ucsd.edu/

Who should I contact for questions?
If you have questions about the study, please e-mail me at moalvara@ucsd.edu. You can also contact my faculty advisor Dr. Manuel P. Vargas at mvargas@csusm.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the IRB Office at irb@csusm.edu or (760) 750-4029.