

UNDERSTANDING PERSISTENCE OF THE LATINO/A ADULT STUDENT AT
THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

by

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DEDICATION

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ABSTRACT

Student persistence has been a topic of discussion in higher education for decades. Researchers have examined factors that affect persistence for traditional-aged students with research focusing on quantitative studies that fail to acknowledge the individual experiences of persistence. Likewise, there is minimal research on Latino/a adult students and their experiences with persistence at community colleges. This dissertation study examined the Latino/a adult student at the community college to gain a better understanding of their lived experiences of persistence. This study took place at an urban, two-year institution in south Texas that has a high number of Hispanic or Latino/a students and a low number of adult students. For this study, I examined the following overarching research question: Looking through the lens of Latino/a adult students, what explains the phenomenon of their persistence at the community college?

This study utilized a phenomenological, qualitative approach to explore the overarching question. The study followed a phenomenological methodology in order to focus on the lived experiences of the participants and to further explore the phenomenon of persistence. Two semi-structured interviews and a critical incident reflection were used to gather data from the participants. The themes that emerged from the data analysis were the following: the past will not define my future, moving into higher education, finding my place in higher education, aiming for a better life, what matters to me, making connections, and looking into a mirror. Sub-themes were identified for each of these themes as well, and study findings were interpreted in light of existing research literature and the study's conceptual framework encompassing Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1981) and Yosso's theory of Community Cultural Wealth (2005). The study adds to the body of literature on Latino/a adult students and their persistence and also provides implications for practice for practitioners in the field of higher education.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Student persistence in higher education is a topic that has been at the forefront due to the high level of attrition for students enrolled in colleges and universities (Barnett, 2011). Early researchers, like Spady (1970), have examined student persistence and retention to determine what factors impede a student from returning to school and what factors encourage their continued enrollment. Researchers have provided a vast overview of findings that focus on the retention of college students and the motivations that may contribute to their continued enrollment from semester to semester; however literature in the field of higher education often focuses on the traditional-aged student at four-year institutions and fails to fully explain the factors or experiences that lead to persistence for the adult, community college student (Tinto, 1975, 1982, 1993; Bean & Meztner, 1985; Donaldson & Graham, 1999).

Research in the fields of both higher education and adult education is also limited in acknowledging the experiences that are associated with persistence for specific student populations, in particular Latino/a adult students. Continued research that focuses on this population is important for community colleges to explore, since these institutions tend to serve larger numbers of adult students and underserved populations including, Latino/a adult students. According to Katsinas and Tollefson (2009), community colleges serve over 66 percent of all Hispanic undergraduates. Community college research has focused on access, student success and other similar areas, but has failed to provide adequate research about ethnicity (Floyd, Felsher & Ramdin, 2016). With community colleges serving over half of the higher education population and retaining less than half of their

student population, it is of importance to further explore how Latino/a adult students successfully persist at community colleges and examine their lived experiences, in order to gain a better understanding of their ability to be successful in a college environment.

Statement of the Problem

Enrollment in postsecondary institutions of students who are 25 to 34 years old increased 51 percent between 1997 and 2011, with enrollment for students 35 years and older also increasing by 26 percent (Husser & Bailey, 2014). Adult students in these age groups are projected to have grown by 20 percent and 23 percent, respectively, from 2011 to 2022 (Husser & Bailey, 2014). This increased enrollment falls in line with enrollment trends that began in the early 1970s and 1980s and continue to this day. According to the American Association of Community Colleges (2017), the average age of community college students across the nation is 28 years of age, with adult students making up about 44 percent of students at community colleges compared to 20 percent at public, four-year public institutions in 2014 (Ma & Baum, 2016). Although both types of institutions have seen increases in adult student populations, these statistics reflect the relatively greater proportion of adult students at community colleges versus four-year institutions. Still, Davidson and Holbrook (2014) among others argue that although we are seeing an increased number in the adult student population, institutions still do not fully understand and lack awareness of adult student success.

The needs and goals of adult students are important and differ from their younger counterparts, due in large measure to life experiences (Kasworm, 2003). Adult students, like other college students, face a multitude of challenges as they pursue their educational goals. However, these students face additional challenges that compete for time outside

of the classroom. Adult students are often employed full-time, are typically caring for families and are often balancing work, life, and academic obligations. They often have a difficult time staying in school due to financial obligations, employment obligations, and other challenges that may inhibit their college career. In addition to their external obligations, adult students also fall out of sequence with the traditional academic timeline and therefore feel that they do not belong in a higher education environment (Hagedorn, 2005b). This notion creates an additional challenge for adult students who are looking to pursue their undergraduate degree. Feeling as though they do not belong in higher education may contribute to their withdrawal from the institution. Adult students are steadily increasing and a better understanding of this population will aid institutions in awareness of adult student success.

Latino/a Students

The demographic makeup of the United States is changing with an increased number of Latino/as and it is projected that there will be continued growth of this group. According to the United States (U.S.) Census Bureau (2011), the Hispanic population grew by 43 percent between 2000 and 2010. In 2015, Hispanics comprised about 56,754,000 of the total population or 17 percent of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014c). Even though there is exponential growth in the Latino/a population, Latino/as still lag in educational attainment when compared to their White counterparts (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014b). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (Ryan & Bauman, 2016), in 2015 Hispanics lagged in educational attainment by about half in comparison to their White counterparts. Associate degree attainment for Hispanics was 22.7 percent of the population, with White non-Hispanics making up 42.8 percent of Associate degree

attainment (National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2015; Ryan & Bauman, 2016). The increased Latino/a population and limited higher educational attainment creates a challenge for the future of the nation, as well as for the individual learners it impacts. It is imperative to further explore this issue in order to ensure the success of both the individuals and of the nation as a whole.

Likewise, the Latino/a student population has also seen an increase in the number of students attending college. Community colleges are seeing an increase in Latino/a adult student populations due to changing economic and technological times. According to the Association of Community Colleges (2017), Latino/as comprise 23 percent of the community college population and 39.1 percent of the population in the State of Texas (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). The growth in the Latino/a population demands further exploration into this group at the community college. Focusing on Latino/a adult students at community colleges will provide additional insight into the factors that aid the success of this specific underserved population.

Community Colleges

Community colleges serve a distinct student population with varied academic needs and are challenged with ensuring that all students are successful. Community colleges play a critical role in educating our society and providing access to education for all students. In 2018 public two-year colleges, in the state of Texas, served 746,010 students compared to 658,219 at public universities, which is over 50 percent of the total number of students enrolled in public higher education institutions (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), 2016b). With community colleges serving over 50 percent of the total college-going population in Texas, it is of significance to

focus on adult students at the institutions to understand how to help them be successful.

Persistence at the community college for adult students is a challenge due to the external obligations that can inhibit their continued enrollment. Student persistence and retention has been a topic of importance since the early 1970s when Spady (1970) examined the college dropout process and determined that students who were not intellectually and socially integrated would be more likely to drop out of college. Scholars have continued the research and have further examined attrition, retention and persistence of traditional-aged students (Tinto, 1975) and non-traditional students (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Donaldson & Graham, 1999).

Persistence and retention continues to be at the forefront for community colleges due to funding being increasingly tied to student success and also the introduction of performance based budgeting models in various states. In the state of Texas community colleges are facing pressure from state entities to produce successful students who persist, graduate and transfer. These institutions have seen state funding of their operating budget decline from 68 percent in FY 1985 to 24 percent in FY 2009 (Texas Association of Community Colleges (TACC), 2011). State funding is not automatically awarded and a portion of it is directly tied to student success at the college. Funding mechanisms have shifted to focus on student success and how a student progresses through the academic pipeline. Student success points are awarded according to the completion of milestones within the students' academic careers and take into account that students enroll with varying levels of college preparation (TACC, 2017). The impact of student success on funding highlights the importance of examining persistence for all students, but in particular Latino/a adult students at the community college due to the increased numbers

for this population. As the number of Latino/a and adult students continues to increase, it is imperative to understand their experiences and how they contribute to their persistence at the community college and also aid in assessing how to retain this type of adult student.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to gain an understanding of the phenomenon of persistence for adult Latino/a students at a large, public, urban community college in south Texas with a high percentage of traditional-aged students. For the study, I interviewed participants to understand the lived experiences of Latino/a adult students who persisted for three consecutive semesters, in order to gain an understanding of the phenomenon of persistence for this student population. The study explored participant's lived experience to gain insight into "what" he or she experienced and "how" they experienced the phenomenon of persistence (Moustakas, 1994). Utilizing Scholssberg's (1981) transition theory, the research will examine students' lived experiences to help understand how Latino/a adult students persisted for three consecutive semesters and how they have successfully transitioned to the role of community college student. Although previous research highlights factors that aid students in being successful, this research examined each individual student's experience to determine whether students share a common experience with regard to persistence and how this has translated to their success at a community college with a high number of traditional-aged students. This study will utilize a phenomenological approach to understand how Latino/a adult student experienced persistence at a community college.

Overview of Methods

This research study utilized a qualitative, phenomenological approach. A qualitative study is appropriate for this topic because I am interested in exploring individuals' experiences with persistence. The phenomenological method focuses on understanding the lived experience of participants and exploring a phenomenon (van Manen, 2014). A phenomenological approach allowed me to explore the phenomenon of persistence and understand how individuals experienced persistence. In order to gather data specifically for Latino/ adult students in community colleges, I utilized purposive sampling to recruit participants who shared this lived experience. Purposive sampling allowed me to select participants that were *information-rich* and provided insight into the topic of interest (Patton, 2015).

Once the participants were selected, data were collected by conducting semi-structured interviews, gathering critical incident reflections and from my own field notes. Once the data were collected and transcribed, I applied Colazzi's (1978) phenomenological methods, as cited in Sanders (2003), to aid in analyzing the data.

Researcher's Positionality

I am a Latina, first-generation PhD candidate that has an interest in adult students and community college. My professional experience in higher education has been primarily in community college and providing access to higher education for individuals who may not have the opportunity to participate otherwise. As a daughter of immigrant parents, I understand the importance of education as one of the social equalizers in our society. For some adult students, life situations have prevented them from completing their educational goals and therefore they are returning to fulfill a personal goal or an

educational goal that they trust will aid in their upward mobility. As a Latina PhD candidate, I am an adult student who is trying to manage my personal responsibilities with my academic responsibilities. Although I have not experienced undergraduate work as an adult student, I do have an understanding of the struggles of adult students who are trying to balance both academic goals and personal responsibilities outside of the classroom.

I currently serve as a supervisor in the admissions office and supervise a team that works with entering students. In this position, I oversee a team that works mostly with entering high school students who are attending college for the first time. In my role I have limited contact with the students during their admissions process and limited contact after the semester has started. I also serve in a faculty role at the institution and teach a first-year-experience course. I have not had an extensive opportunity to work with adult learners at the college. But my limited contact inspired my interest in this study, and underscored my impression that a study focusing on these students would both contribute to the existing literature and potentially provide information that may be helpful to the institution in planning appropriate student support.

I first began to have an interest in adult students when I began my work in community colleges. Community colleges serve different types of returning adults and my interest in adult students in community colleges started to peak when I had the opportunity to work with a Latina adult student who was returning to college and was feeling overwhelmed with the experience. When I first encountered her she was confused and having difficulties with the admissions process. I was able to provide her with assistance, but found that this student continued to contact me throughout her time at

the college. There were times when she needed assistance or just needed feedback on how to navigate the collegiate environment. The interactions with the student led me to think about the resources that we had available on the college campus for adult students and the support that adult students need beyond the classroom. This student was able to persist from one semester to the next, but these interactions peaked my interest in Latina/o adult students and their experiences with persistence. My experiences as a Latina adult student and my interactions with adult students furthered my passion of exploring the successes of Latino/a adult students at community colleges and their experiences.

Research Orientation

As an adult student, my research orientation lies in the interpretivist paradigm. Interpretivism is an attempt to “understand and explain human and social reality” (Crotty, 1998, p. 67). Through the interpretivist lens, who we are is determined by our experiences and how we experienced those situations. The interpretivist paradigm highlights the importance of experiences and how those experiences aid in shaping an individual’s worldview. In essence, interpretivism does not seek to provide a universal overview, but focuses on “culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 67). Through this paradigm, participants will have the ability to provide their own experiences with the phenomenon of persistence, which will aid in understanding this phenomenon. Interpretivists are focused on the following when it comes to research:

What is of importance to know then is how people interpret and make meaning of some object, event, action perception etc...accessing the perspectives of several

members of the same group about some phenomena can begin to say something about cultural patterns of thought and action for that group. (Glesne, 2011, p.8)

Analyzing individual experiences about a particular phenomenon is the hope of this research, with the goal of gaining a broader understanding of persistence.

Conceptual Framework

Latino/a adult students have their own individual experiences when it comes to success at the community college and their collective experiences provide a glimpse into the phenomenon of persistence. Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory aids in providing an explanation to how individuals experience the world. This theory provides a framework for how adult students react to change and transition and how this affects the outcome of the transition. Transition theory posits that individuals react to change and transition in different ways, therefore varying the outcome of the transition for each individual. Schlossberg (1981) suggests that the outcome of the transition can vary by individual due to how each person reacts to the situation. She describes a transition as something that can be a gain or a loss for that individual. In this study individuals experienced both gains and losses as part of their transition to college; however, they all had persisted thus allowing for the use of a phenomenological approach to acknowledge their unique experience and find the common themes reflecting what the participants have experienced.

Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) note the complexity of how individuals experience change and introduce a transition framework that aids in gaining a better understanding of the complexity of adult transition. The transition framework highlights four variables that interact to create an individual's response to a transition:

situation, self, support and strategies or the 4 S's (Schlossberg, et al., 1995). The interaction of the 4 S's to a certain situation will determine how the individual responds to the transition. However, Schlossberg et al. (1995) recognized that an individual's *situation, self, support* and *strategies* also vary depending on their current situation. Donelda Cooke (1994), as cited in Scholssberg, et al. (1995), suggests that resources for coping through a transition differ from individual to individual. For instance, the resources available to a low-income, minority student and to a middle-class working professional student can vary greatly, thus creating different outcomes. The outside world determines what types of resources individuals have available to help them cope (Cooke, 1994). Cooke's view of how transition theory may be different for individuals based on their situation provides the opportunity to incorporate the notion of community cultural wealth and how this can be an asset for Latino/a adult students who are pursuing their education.

As a complement to the framework of transition theory, the theory of community cultural wealth further adds to this theory by suggesting that minority students may have resources and additional cultural wealth that may be overlooked. Yosso's (2005) theory of community cultural wealth highlights the importance of cultural wealth that is considered an asset for minority students. She states that communities of color have cultural wealth that can aid students in being successful. Yosso (2005) highlights six types of cultural capital: aspirational capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, social capital, navigational capital and resistant capital. Incorporating cultural wealth into transition theory allows for the introduction of other types of resources that may be specific to minority students or in the case of this study, Latino/a students. Yosso's

(2005) theory aids in expanding transition theory to include cultural resources that may otherwise be overlooked; however, cultural wealth has an influence on minority students and could help explain how Latino/a adult students persist in college. The interpretivist paradigm further supports the research study by identifying that each individual experiences the world in their own way and is shaped by those experiences. Utilizing this conceptual framework will provide a better understanding of how Latino/a adult students have successfully transitioned into the community college and how they experienced persistence.

Research Questions

The dissertation study was guided by the following research question with a subset of questions to help guide the data collection:

Looking through the lens of Latino/a adult students, what explains the phenomenon of their persistence at the community college?

- a. How have Latino/a adult students successfully transitioned and completed three consecutive semesters at the community college?
- b. What factors are perceived by adult Latino/a students as contributing to their persistence at a community college with a high number of traditional-aged students?
- c. What external factors, if any, contribute to the persistence from semester to semester of Latino/a adult students?
- d. What internal factors, if any, contribute to the persistence from semester to semester of Latino/a adult students?

Significance of the Study

Community college leaders need to be cognizant of their diverse student populations and ensure that they are aware of the challenges that these populations face, in order to implement practices that will assist them in being academically successful. Increases in the numbers of Latino/a adult students and the significance of student

success on state funding have created a heightened awareness on the importance of focusing on the adult student to ensure their success at the community college. Like other institutions, community colleges have challenges with student persistence; however, exploring the phenomenon of persistence by Latino/a adult students may lead to a better understanding of how these students were able to persist with limited support from the institution. As community colleges face scrutiny over retention of students and completion of certificate and degree programs, it is imperative to gain a better understanding of what leads to Latino/a adult student persistence, in order to have the ability to adequately serve students and ensure that both the student's and the institution's goals are achieved.

Definitions

A glossary of terms is provided below to provide context to how terms are being utilized for the research study. The subsequent literature review provides additional context to the terms being defined below.

Adult student: a student who is 25 years of age or older (American Council on Education (ACE), 2005). Adult students have sat out of school for a few years and are returning to higher education to gain a specific skill, attend courses for continuing education purposes or are looking to achieve a degree for upward mobility purposes (Cerccone, 2008)

Non-traditional student: nontraditional students have characteristics that reflect the following; delayed postsecondary enrollment following high school, enrolled in a postsecondary program on a part-time basis, employed full time, classified as financially independent for financial aid purposes, has dependents other than a spouse, is a single parent, and/or does not have a high school diploma or GED (Horn, 1996; Choy, 2002)

Traditional student: the traditional college student is aged between 18-24 years of age (Wyatt, 2011).

Community college: any not-for-profit institution that is regionally accredited to award the associate in arts or the associate in science as its highest degree (Cohen, Brawer & Kisker, 2014).

Persistence: continued enrollment of students, usually fall-to-fall re-enrollment. The NCES makes a distinction that students persist and institutions retain students (Hagedorn, 2005a).

Full-time student: a student who is enrolled for 12 or more credits per semester (NCES for Education Statistics, 2016a).

Part-time student: a student enrolled for either less than 12 semester hours or less than 24 contact hours a week each term (NCES, 2016b).

Retention: a measure of the rate at which students persist in their educational program at an institution, expressed as a percentage... for all other institutions this is the percentage of first-time degree/certificate-seeking students from the previous fall who either re-enrolled or successfully completed their program by the current fall (NCES, 2016c).

Hispanic/Latino/a: a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011; NCES, 2016).

Chapter Summary

Chapter I provided an overview of the dissertation study and the reason why it is important to take a closer look at this problem. With more Latino/a adult students

attending community college, it is imperative to understand persistence for these students in order to ensure their success. “Student retention of Hispanic students has come to the forefront in part because the number of Hispanic students enrolling in higher education has increased, and with this, the number of Hispanic students dropping out of higher education has also increased” (Garcia, 2010, p. 840). This reflects the state of the community college system and the importance of focusing on persistence of adult Latino/a students. The following chapter will provide additional insight into previous research and literature in the field that support this study.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This research is focused on examining stories of persistence for adult Latino/a students who are enrolled at a large, urban community college in the southern United States. Chapter II includes literature on the history and role of community colleges in the United States, adult students in higher education, Latino/a students in higher education, retention, persistence and demographic/academic factors that are associated with persistence of adult students and also expand on the conceptual framework introduced in Chapter I. This literature review also provides the framework for the research study and highlights previous studies that guided this study.

History of Community Colleges

Community colleges were established in the early 20th century as a way to provide access to education and opportunities for individuals who were otherwise restricted from pursuing higher education. Early on, community colleges were referred to as junior colleges and their sole purpose was to provide a route to four-year institutions for students, mostly just leaving high school, who were in need of a pathway to the university. These institutions were focused on providing the first two years of a baccalaureate degree (Boggs, 2011). As the United States developed throughout the 20th century, junior colleges began to mature into the community college system and expanded their programs and services to encompass not only the transfer function, but also vocational/technical programs, continuing education and other educational programs that served the communities in which they were located (Vaughan, 2006). Although the establishment of these institutions began in the early 20th century, the roots of

community colleges date back to the mid-1800s.

Roots and Expansion of the Community College

The roots of the community college can be traced to the passing of the Morrill Act of 1862 (Cohen, et al., 2014). The Morrill Act was the first piece of legislation that acknowledged higher education as an opportunity that was only available for the privileged few and attempted to address that inequity (Collins, 2015). The Morrill Act focused on the idea of providing access to education for all individuals regardless of income, race and class. This act was instrumental in addressing the inequities of higher education and tried to create opportunities for all Americans with the establishment of land grant institutions. The act granted states 30,000 acres of land that could be utilized for the establishment of land-grant institutions or profits from its sale could be used for technical and vocational education (Collins, 2015).

Land-grant institutions were established to provide agricultural and vocational training to individuals who would otherwise not have access to higher education (Collins, 2015). This piece of legislation acknowledged that education in the 1800s was class-based and was not afforded to all United States citizens. Through land-grant institutions, individuals had access to regional schools that focused on agriculture and mechanical trades and provided educational opportunities close to their places of residence. This act helped expand higher education from liberal education that was only accessible to the privileged few, to include, vocationally centered education that was accessible to all. Land-grant institutions were accessible to more students, but were still out of reach for some individuals who lived in remote places, had a longer commute or were excluded based on race. However, the Morrill Act of 1862, nonetheless, provided a stepping-stone

for access to higher education for those less privileged and people who would otherwise not have access to higher education.

The second Morrill Act (1890) further established the mission of access to education for all by penalizing states that refused admission based on race, requiring that race be removed from admissions requirements or that separate institutions of higher education for people of color be established (Collins, 2015). The second Morrill Act built on the ideals of the first Morrill Act and expanded access to all individuals, regardless of race. The establishment of land-grant institutions and the focus on vocational and technical skills through the first Morrill Act provided individuals with educational options outside of the liberal arts. The focus on these areas would later be expanded to community colleges and would become a part of the mission of these institutions. The second Morrill Act laid the foundation for the creation of many of the institutions now referred to as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

The first and second Morrill Acts, which paved the way for community colleges, marked the onset of the idea of access to education for all. The notion of access to higher education was further explored in 1901 with the development of course offerings past the high school level in Joliet, Illinois (Collins, 2015). The people of Joliet recognized that education past high school was important for its citizens and the school board authorized the school to offer courses for two years post-high school. In 1916 the post-high school courses were separated from the high school and a year later, the separate program was renamed Joliet Junior College, the first junior college in the United States (Phillippe and Sullivan, 2005). Similar movements followed in California in 1907, Kansas and Michigan in 1917 and began to spread to other states (Collins, 2015). This was the

beginning of the establishment of the junior college, which would eventually evolve into a growing number of junior colleges and lead to the establishment of the American Association of Junior Colleges in 1920. Junior colleges were defined as “institution[s] offering two years of instruction of strictly collegiate grade” and focused on providing individuals with the first two years of higher education (Bogue, 1950). Students would then transfer over to a university to complete the final two years of their education and complete a bachelor’s degree. Junior colleges furthered the mission of providing access to higher education for all citizens by providing a lower cost alternative to elite universities.

In the 1930s the mission of the junior college was further enhanced due to the challenges that came with the onset of the Great Depression. During these challenging economic times, junior colleges shifted their focus to workforce training and providing workers with updated skills to help ease widespread unemployment (Kasper, 2003). Junior colleges during these times were pressed to move toward more vocational training to ensure employability of their students. Educators during this time began to focus on more practical coursework that would prepare students for jobs. Junior colleges began including business, engineering, and nursing programs and also prepared individuals for vocational jobs that would result in employment (Cohen, et al., 2014). At this point junior colleges began to see their focus shift to emphasize the vocational aspect of training, which provided the foundation for the modern day community college.

Truman Commission Report

After World War II, the President’s Commission on Higher Education for Democracy issued the Truman Commission Report, which addressed the role higher

education would play in preserving the democratic ideals of the country (Vaughan, 2015). The purpose of the Truman Commission Report was to continue the progress toward access to higher education for all. This report addressed the low college going rate of U.S. citizens, with the goal of doubling the college going rate by 1960 (Gilbert & Heller, 2013). The Commission introduced the term community college to refer to these institutions and highlighted their role as institutions that would serve multiple purposes like being a cultural center, offering community education and offering technical and vocational courses. The Commission's hope was that these institutions would be accessible to all, charge little or no tuition, and would be part of the state's higher education system (Vaughan, 2015). One of the main concerns of the Commission was the idea that if college opportunities were restricted to those with higher incomes, we would perpetuate a society with class distinctions that had no place in American society (Truman Commission Report, Vol. II, p. 23). The Truman Report reaffirmed the idea of accessibility to education for all by doubling the number of community colleges in the United States and expanding the role of the community college to ensure its position as an indispensable part of the education system.

Access to higher education during this time was further expanded due to the introduction of the GI Bill of Rights. After World War II (WWII), the United States was struggling to determine what options to provide the millions of servicemen that were returning from the war. The country was concerned with not having adequate employment to absorb these individuals and feared falling into another economic depression (Vaughn, 2015). In response, the GI Bill of Rights was introduced, which would absorb returning servicemen and provide job training. The GI Bill of Rights was

the first large-scale financial aid package that financed both tuition and living expenses for military veterans (Cohen, et. al., 2014). This unprecedented bill allowed millions of Americans returning from war to break social and financial barriers and demystified the idea of higher education (Vaughn, 2015). The return of military veterans after WWII increased the number of individuals attending college and further expanded access to higher education for Americans (Cohen, et al., 2014). Institutions of higher education, including community colleges, saw unprecedented growth with the influx of American veterans who were taking advantage of the GI Bill of Rights. Community colleges were able to provide veterans with training to aid in their employability (Vaughn, 2015). This bill furthered the idea of providing access to higher education for Americans.

Present day community colleges still strive to fulfill the goals of access for all, open admissions, service to the community and low tuition (AACC, 2017). Community colleges are unique to America and have made strides to continue the mission of educating individuals in various areas (Boggs, 2011). Whether through general education, vocational training or continuing education, these institutions continue to provide services to fulfill the needs of their community.

Serving the Underserved: A Cornerstone in the Mission of the Community College

The mission of the community college from the onset was one of serving underserved populations. In the early 20th century the underserved were individuals who had limited access to financial resources and were not considered to fall within the elite classes in America. The goal of the community college was to provide access to education for all individuals in the United States, as highlighted by the Truman Commission Report. In the 21st century, community colleges still retain a mission of

access to education for underserved populations and statistics from these institutions reflect that community colleges serve these populations in large numbers. These institutions have served millions of low-income, first-generation, immigrant, minority and adult students and have been able to do so by ensuring that all areas from the registration process to course availability and location are in line with accessibility and open to the entire populace (Morest, 2013b). Community colleges provide underserved students with the ability to begin their education at an affordable cost and transfer their coursework to universities.

Currently, one of the primary purposes of these institutions is to provide services to their immediate community by fulfilling their social and cultural needs (Hanson, 2006). The purpose of the community college drives them to be responsive to the community that they serve and ensure that they are providing learning experiences that are valuable to students and the community (Spellman, 2007). Developing partnerships with area businesses and industry is one characteristic of the community college that helps develop programs and skills needed within the surrounding community and also ensures that the skills students are acquiring fall in line with the needs of the area (McCabe, 2000). This type of response to the community is what sets community colleges apart from their university counterparts—the strong sense of responsibility to respond to their community’s needs.

In addition to preparing students for four-year universities, Geigerich (2006) stresses the role of community colleges in preparing students for the workforce. By continually changing and growing, community colleges ensure that students’ leave with the skills needed for the job market. They are also providing training for higher skilled

jobs. This is a crucial part of the community college mission, ensuring that students are able to take the skills acquired and apply them in a workplace. As Grubb (2012) notes, individuals who have minimal education find it difficult to find opportunities for employment that will fulfill their daily needs. He further acknowledges that the economic gap between skilled and unskilled workers continues to increase and in order to be competitive, individuals need to acquire those skills that are required in the workplace. An unskilled workforce can have a negative effect on America's economy and can affect our nation's competitiveness as it moves from an industrial to information technology society (Carnevale & Desrochers, 2004; Merisotis, 2005). Now more than ever educational attainment is linked to wages and salaries and community colleges are able to provide these underserved students with the pathway to securing better paying employment.

In 2009, President Barack Obama unveiled the American Graduation Initiative, in which he highlighted the importance of educating the workforce in order for the United States to be competitive in the global economy. In providing a rationale for this initiative, President Obama emphasized that jobs requiring associate degrees were projected to grow twice as fast as those that require a high school diploma and community colleges could help in training workers to fill those jobs. President Obama highlighted the critical role that community colleges will play in educating and retraining lower-skilled workers in order to increase America's competitiveness in the global economy.

President Obama's 2015 speech, *America's College Promise*, he further highlighted the critical role that community colleges play in providing access to

education, but also the role in providing opportunities for upward mobility.

For millions of Americans, community colleges are essential pathways to the middle class because they're local, they're flexible. They work for people who work full-time. They work for parents who have to raise kids full-time. They work for folks who have gone as far as their skills will take them and want to earn new ones, but don't have the capacity to just suddenly go study for four years and not work. Community colleges work for veterans transitioning back into civilian life. Whether you're the first in your family to go to college, or coming back to school after many years away, community colleges find a place for you. And you can get a great education (Obama, 2015).

This speech emphasized the role of the community college in serving all types of students who may not fit into the traditional four-year university model. As stated above, these institutions are critical in minimizing the gap between lower-skilled and skilled workers. They provide individuals the opportunity to obtain skills that allow for upward mobility, increased financial support and also serve to sustain America's competitiveness in the global market.

Underserved populations face a different set of challenges that require more attention and intervention than other students do (Shaw & London, 2001). Shaw and London (2001) argue that community colleges are better equipped to serve the underserved because teaching is the main focus for faculty in the community college. Faculty members in community colleges are more likely to have the capacity to interact and connect with students who may come with a varying level of educational needs and also have the ability to spend more time with these students. Unlike their university

counterparts, research is not obligatory for community college faculty. With minimal research expectations, faculty at community colleges can focus on teaching and aiding the student in achieving their potential. The nature of the community college to serve the underserved lends itself to flexible class schedules, lower tuition, varying class locations and course offerings that may extend beyond the traditional face-to-face class (Shaw & London, 2001). The flexibility and accessibility that is offered by community colleges creates an ideal environment for the adult student who is seeking to take classes in a learning environment conducive to their busy lives.

Adult students. Adult students within higher education are defined in varying ways in the literature. The terms most often used in the literature for this type of student are adult student and nontraditional student. These terms are used interchangeably in the literature and there is some overlap in characteristics of students typically intended by each term; however these terms and the populations within them are not synonymous. Defining these terms will highlight how previous literature has defined the terms and the overlap that may exist. Adult students are typically defined as students that are 25 years of age or older (ACE, 2005). Kasworm (2003) further defines the adult student as:

One who represents the status of age (typically defined as twenty-five years of age and older); the status of maturity and developmental complexity acquired through life responsibilities, perspectives, and financial independence; and the status of responsible and often competing sets of adult roles reflecting work, family, community, and college student commitments (p. 3).

Kasworm expands the definition of the adult student to include other defining characteristics and experiences that adult students have encountered. Adult students' life

roles may create challenges that traditional-aged students may not face. This definition provides a glimpse into the complexities of the adult student and the varying life experiences that they also bring into the classroom.

While the term nontraditional student was earlier used in a more inclusive way, to describe adult students, students of color, and others who were typically enrolled in college (Cross, 1981), more recently *nontraditional students* have been defined as having one or more of the following characteristics: delayed postsecondary enrollment following high school, enrolled in a postsecondary program on a part-time basis, employed full time, classified as financially independent for financial aid purposes, has dependents other than a spouse, is a single parent, and/or does not have a high school diploma or GED (Choy, 2002; Coley, 2000). Thus, a nontraditional student has similar attributes as an adult student, however students can be considered nontraditional at any age, as long as they have one or more of the characteristics listed. For instance, nontraditional students can be individuals who are under the age of 25, attend part-time and have children.

The term nontraditional can refer to one or a variation of the above characteristics and are not confined to an age limit, although notably, Choy (2002) reports that students' risk of non-completion of both two year and four-year degrees rises with the number of nontraditional characteristics possessed. Adult and nontraditional students are similar in the characteristics that they bring to the educational environment, as both reflect the additional responsibilities that these types of students have outside of the classroom. A brief review of these two terms provides context as to why these terms are sometimes used interchangeably. However, for the purpose of this study, I will utilize the term adult student or adult learner to refer to the population being explored, along with using age as

a criterion for sample inclusion.

Adult students differ from their traditional-aged counterparts. As individuals 25 years of age and older, adult students typically bring greater life experience with them to the community college environment than traditional-aged counterparts. Adult students return to higher education after a stop out that can occur after leaving or completing high school, and in some cases after beginning college earlier. Ordinarily, these students have been out of school for a few years and are returning to higher education to gain a specific skill, attend courses for continuing education purposes or to achieve a degree for upward mobility purposes (Cercione, 2008).

Adult students come to higher education with different motivations and may be more committed to their education because they are attending for a specific purpose, but may, nonetheless, experience feeling out of place in the educational environment.

Traditional students see college as a natural progression in their education timeline, but adult college students fall out of line with the traditional timeline and therefore may face additional challenges (Hagedorn, 2005b; Kinser & Deitchman, 2007). With adult students falling out of sequence with the traditional timeline they may feel isolated and uncomfortable in the education environment, which can cause them to withdraw from the institution (Markle, 2015).

In Markle's (2015) study, participants contemplated withdrawing from school because they "felt out of place" and not comfortable in the college environment.

Students shared that the institution was geared toward traditional students and failed to meet their needs. One participant stated, "class schedules, advisor schedules, and professor schedules are all geared toward traditional students. As an older student I often

feel out of place.” Institutions of higher learning can also create an intimidating environment, where nontraditional students can feel a lack of belonging (Exposito & Bernheimer, 2012). The sentiment reflected above resonates with previous studies of older, adult students. Cox and Ebbers (2010) noted that participants felt that they should be further along in their studies, which coincides with Hagedorn’s (2005b) idea of falling out of line with the traditional timeline.

Role strain. With family, employment, financial responsibilities, home life and student responsibilities, adults are faced with multiple roles that can inhibit their retention from semester to semester. Researchers have suggested that these multiple roles inhibit their progressions through their academic journey and can cause students to withdraw from the institution (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Kasworm, 2010). Markle’s (2015) findings suggest that adult students find college more difficult compared to their traditional-aged counterparts due to the various roles that they have. One participant resonated this feeling by sharing that her student role is just one of the many roles that she needs to fulfill in her demanding schedule (Markle, 2015).

Adult students have various role relationships. According to Goode (1960) role relationships have certain demands that individuals must meet in order to fulfill that particular role relationship. When individuals have multiple role relationships that are competing for resources, they can experience role strain. Goode (1960) discusses the idea that roles compete for time and resources, may require different obligations, and may demand several responses. Further complicating this is the fact that individuals participate in multiple role relationships with different persons, which can lead to role strain. Goode’s (1960) theory of role strain is the idea that individuals may experience

challenges in fulfilling their multiple roles due to “insufficient resources, energy and so on” (p. 485). Role strain is the notion that individuals have difficulty fulfilling the demands of different roles, which Goode concludes is a normal part of the person’s life. Role strain can create challenges for Latino/a adult students who are attempting to satisfy their student role, but also fulfill the roles of parent, employee, caretaker and the myriad of other roles that these individuals have. Latino/a adult students may experience difficulties in attempting to fulfill all roles and may be unable to manage their time and balance their responsibilities.

Role strain also has additional dimensions that can affect how a student manages role responsibilities. Home’s (1998) research on women highlights the likelihood that role conflict, role overload and role contagion further complicate role responsibilities. Role conflict can be experienced when individuals are involved in multiple roles that have “simultaneous, incompatible” demands. Role conflict occurs when meeting the demands of one role are made more difficult by the demands of the other (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

Research suggests that the two roles that may generate the greatest conflicts for students are that of family and school (Edwards, 1993; Home, 1998). These two institutions are described as “greedy institutions” that demand time, loyalty and flexibility (Coser, 1974). As individuals begin the transition into higher education, they may experience difficulties in finding a balance between family and school that ensures each role receives the time and focus that it requires. In a 1998 study, adult students reported that while work has fixed hours, family and student responsibilities “just never end” (Home, 1998). This finding reinforced the idea that these two institutions have demands

that extend beyond the classroom and beyond family time.

Giancola, Grawitch and Borchert (2009) argue that role conflict can expand beyond family and school. Their research expands the notion of role conflict to include additional combinations of role conflict that individuals can experience: family–school (family demands make it difficult to meet school demands), school–family (school demands make it difficult to meet family demands), work–school (work demands make it difficult to meet school demands), and school–work (school demands make it difficult to meet work demands). This study further discusses how these role conflicts can redirect an individual’s time to one role or the other thus creating a struggle of roles.

Competing demands of various roles can lead individuals to have difficulty completing the demands of each role, which could cause individuals to redirect the amount of time spent on each role or could cause an individual to drop a role and focus on the required roles. For instance, Markle (2015) found that women in school did not have sufficient time to spend on their roles and therefore experienced stress. One participant described her role conflict as follows:

I feel that I am an A student but I do not feel that I am able to spend the time needed to do my very best. I feel I am not giving anything—children, marriage, school, work—my best (p. 11)

This student’s experience provides a glimpse into the conflict that students feel when returning to school. Cox and Ebbers (2010) further discuss the juggling of multiple roles that adult female students face when returning to school. The researchers highlight the notion of adult students identifying as adults first and students second. For Latino/a adult students, role conflict can create a barrier that could lead to withdrawing from school and

redirecting their focus on the roles that are necessary, like work and family. Markle (2015) suggests that school, work, and family all require high levels of engagement and therefore can further create role conflict for individuals.

Role overload can occur when individuals do not have sufficient time to meet the role demands. Adult students may experience this type of overload because they are committed to multiple roles and may feel like they do not have enough time to fulfill them all. Home (1998) describes overload as feeling you are “spread to thin” or “always playing catch up” and not having the time or resources to fulfill the demands of multiple roles. This study indicated that although individuals felt role overload, they were unable to reduce their workload. Home suggests that lower income individuals may be especially likely to fall victim to role overload, as their financial situation and family responsibilities do not allow for a reduced workload. Adult students have the responsibility of working to provide for their families and therefore cannot stop either work or family responsibilities. In one study by Cox and Ebbers (2010), the participants discussed the notion of juggling multiple roles, being tired, exhausted and their roles being time consuming. With role overload, time is limited and consequently adult students turn their focus onto their required responsibilities and may find that their studies suffer. Full-time students report role overload, and student, family, and job demands all contribute to role contagion (Home, 1998). Home (1998) highlights the full-time student, but part-time students may also experience role contagion because adult students attend part-time due to their responsibilities outside of the classroom.

Role contagion is described as the notion that an individual is preoccupied with one role while performing another (Home, 1998). Students beginning the student role

may not anticipate how external roles may impact their student role. For instance, students may find themselves in class, but focused on a family issue or may find themselves focused on a work project. As Markle's (2015) research suggests, student and family responsibilities are never-ending and tend to overlap, which creates role contagion for individuals. When adults decide to enroll in college, they face the idea of having to rearrange their time commitments in order to make room for this additional role. Adult students need to find a way for their education to fit into the "boundaries of their lifestyle" (Hagedorn, 2005a). Role strain and the dimensions of role conflict, role overload and role contagion are notions that Latino/a adult students must navigate in order to be successful in their multiple roles, but also the new role of student.

Latino/a students. The Latino/a population is one of the fastest growing minority groups in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2011), Latino/as increased by 15.2 million citizens between 2000 and 2010. This increase accounted for over half of the population growth in the United States (Ennis, Rios-Vargas, & Albert, 2011). Some states have also seen growth in the Latino/a population. For instance, in Texas Latino/as saw a growth of about 3 million from 2000 to 2010 to represent over 37.6 percent of the state population (Ennis, Rios-Vargas, & Albert, 2011). The overall Latino/a population has continued to increase at a high rate and projections reflect this continued growth at both the national and state level.

Higher education has also seen an increase in Latino/a students, which reflects the national and state trends in growth of this population overall. In the state of Texas, community colleges have seen an increased growth in Latino/a students with the population increasing from 125,222 in 2000 to 294,406 in 2015, a growth of 135.1 percent

(THECB, 2016b). Although there is an increased population enrolled in community colleges, the Latino/a population remains underrepresented when it comes to college completion, as students withdraw from the institution before completing. In 2012-2013, over one million associate degrees were awarded at community colleges across the nation, with White students making up 62 percent and Hispanics comprising of 16 percent of the total recipients (NCES, 2015a). A report on the state of community colleges in Texas further highlights the lack of minority student completion. “Most Hispanic and African-American Texans start at 2-year colleges and few graduate even when given three times longer” (Complete College America, 2013, p. 13). This statement reflects the disparity in completion of certificates or associate degrees at the community college and reinforces the importance of exploring strategies to retain and help Latino/a students persist.

Latino/a students are often drawn to community colleges due to the affordability and accessibility of these institutions. According to the American Association of Community Colleges (2017), more than one half of Latino/a undergraduates attend community colleges. These institutions are viewed as the gateway to higher education for Latino/a students who are interested in completing a certificate, associate degree or transferring to a four-year institution (Perna, Rowan-Kenyon, Thomas, Bell, Anderson, & Li, 2008). Community colleges provide Latino/a students with options to continue their education and receive skills that will help further their career goals.

There are additional reasons why Latino/a students attend community colleges. Research suggests that Latino/a students attend community college because they want a better future, want to learn a new skill or were enrolled for their family. For instance,

Samuel and Scott (2014) state that most students were paying for their own college with cash, which reinforces the notion that Latino/a students are looking for an affordable option to continue their education. According to Kurleander (2006), individuals from lower socioeconomic statuses are more likely to attend a community college versus four-year institutions. The findings suggest that regardless of race, students from lower socioeconomic statuses have a higher likelihood of attending community colleges. However, the research posits that Latino/a students have a higher propensity to come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds compared to their White peers and therefore are more likely to gravitate to community colleges. Thus, there are higher percentages of Latino/a students at the community college. However, one of Kurleander's (2006) findings suggests that Latino/as of higher socioeconomic backgrounds tend to gravitate toward community colleges as well, rather than four-year institutions. Multiple research studies posit that Latino/a students of varying socioeconomic backgrounds choose community college over four-year institution, further supporting the high proportion of Latino/a students at community colleges compared to other racial groups (Kurleander, 2006; O'Connor, 2009; Villalpando, 2010; Hernandez, Slate, & Joyner, 2015). With community colleges serving large portions of the Latino/a student population and yet not always demonstrating a strong record of program completion for these students, it is important to further explore this population to gain some understanding to what can aid Latino/a students in persisting from semester to semester.

As noted above, the Latino/a population continues to increase, with more Latino/as attending college. However, Latino/as still remain underrepresented in higher

education (Santiago, 2007). Researchers have found that this underrepresentation results from poor K-12 preparation, poor guidance, having limited financial resources, and limited parental knowledge about college (Bagnato, 2005; Collatos, Morell, Nuno, & Lara, 2004; Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Latino/a adult students face many challenges in getting to college, but once in college, they may also have experiences that can lead them to withdraw from the institution. Latino/a students may experience dissatisfaction, cultural barriers and other challenges that may discourage them from continuing in their educational pursuits.

In a study that focused on Latino/a non-traditional students, Zell (2010) found that Latino/a students felt that being a minority student had a negative effect on their educational opportunities. Participants shared their experiences of feeling marginalized and also feeling that college was not for them. Many of these students did not attend college right after high school and experienced self-doubt about succeeding in college. Participants in this study highlighted the notion that Latino/a may face other challenges when navigating the college environment and may experience doubt due to those challenges. Studies on Latino/a students have found that these students lack social capital for academic success and may also lack information networks to guide them through the college norms (Coleman, 1988; Saunders & Serna, 2004; Strayhorn, 2008). Many Latino/a students have parents with limited formal education and minimal experience with higher education, therefore they are unable to guide or aid their students in navigating college (Laden, 2001). Although Latino/a's may lack social capital to aid in guiding them through the college experience, these students have a wealth of other support and knowledge that can aid in their success.

Research on science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) Latino/a students highlighted the importance of the family in supporting the student through the college experience. In a study by Peralta, Caspary and Boothe (2013) Latino/a students shared how their parents were unable to assist them with their academics, but were able to show support in other ways. Latino/a STEM students discussed how their parents inquired about their grades and provided encouragement. The students also shared how their parents reminded them of the hard work that they had to endure or shared their own experiences of not having the opportunity to attend school. This type of support provided motivation for the students to continue with their educational journey. Although the parents of these students were unable to support them directly with their academics, they were able to provide support through interest in their student and by sharing their own experiences. Family support plays a critical role in the success of Latino/a adult students and this research highlights the notion that support may come in various roles, but nonetheless provides students with encouragement to persist through their academics.

Persistence in Higher Education

Student persistence and retention has been a topic of importance since the early 1970s. Spady (1970) examined the college dropout process and determined that students who were not intellectually and socially integrated would be more likely to drop out of college. Many scholars have studied retention and persistence to determine what factors affect whether a student stays or leaves. Research in this field is vast and covers traditional students, adult students, and the internal and external factors that contribute to persistence in college (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Donaldson & Graham, 1999; Tinto, 1975, 1982, 1993). Persistence in higher education is a challenge for both traditional-aged and

adult students and continues to be examined at colleges and universities.

Models of Persistence for Adult and Nontraditional Students

Early attrition models attempted to provide a framework to explain why students leave their institutions. Literature on traditional student persistence has provided a glimpse into the challenges that these students face at their institution (Tinto, 1975, 1982, 1993). However, most of this literature focused on traditional students who resided on campus at four-year institutions. Tinto's integration model recognized that college students arrive on campus with individual characteristics, but these attributes alone did not determine persistence (Tinto, 1975). The interaction of these characteristics with social and academic integration, were determined to impact a student's persistence at the institution. If students were not socially and academically integrated on campus, they were likely to leave the institution.

Questioning the generalizability of these findings, Bean and Metzner (1985) focused on the nontraditional student and developed a conceptual model that emphasized environmental and psychological factors that contribute to attrition. Bean and Metzner defined the nontraditional student as a student who fit the following characteristics:

Older than 24, or does not live in a campus residence (e.g., is a commuter), or is a part-time student, or some combination of these factors; is not greatly influenced by the social environment of the institution; and is chiefly concerned with the institution's academic offerings (especially courses, certification, and degrees). (p. 489)

Their model focused on external factors like family, employment, finances, employers and psychological factors like utility, stress and goal commitment. According to Bean

and Metzner (1985), nontraditional students have increased interactions with external factors and very minimal interactions with faculty and peers. They suggested that since adult students have more interactions with the external environment these factors have a greater impact on the success or withdrawal of an adult. Although Bean and Metzner (1985) examined the nontraditional student, including those over 24, this research did not specifically address the adult student at the community college.

Donaldson and Graham's (1999) model furthered the research on adult students and focused on developing a model of college outcomes that emphasized six components of an adult's experience. Donaldson and Graham identified the following areas:

- (a) Prior experience and personal biographies; (b) psychosocial and value orientations; (c) adult cognition; (d) the connecting classroom as the central avenue for social engagement on campus; (e) life-world environment — the different contexts in which adults live, defined by the roles they occupy in their various work, family, and community settings, in which they learn and develop knowledge structures that differ from the academic knowledge structures of the classroom; and (f) college outcomes — different types of outcomes such as learning new content to finish a course, to really understand it, to apply it in authentic settings, and to use it to improve the lives of others.
- (para. 13)

Through this model, the researchers provided a framework to reflect the complexities of the adult student experience. Donaldson and Graham (1999) used this model to explain adult undergraduate experiences in higher education and how these experiences affect their learning. Donaldson and Graham (1999) also introduced the notion of the

connecting classroom and the positive role that classroom integration has on the persistence of an adult student. The researchers highlighted the various factors that affect the adult student during their time at the institution and provided insight into how an adult student's experience can vary greatly from that of their traditional-aged counterparts. These models help in framing the current study and provide aspects that will guide the research in determining what factors contribute to persistence for these populations.

As stated previously, adult students have multiple responsibilities that they hold in addition to their student responsibilities. Community colleges are adaptable to the student needs and therefore have an increased adult student population. Philibert, Allen, and Elleven (2008) suggest that adult students have a higher likelihood of attending a community college than their traditional-aged counterparts due to the external commitments that they have and also due to the low cost of attending these institutions. This research is corroborated by Kasworm's (2010) research that highlights community colleges as having the highest enrollment of adult students. Latino/a adult students continue to increase in higher education and therefore there is a need to determine what factors help in predicting whether a student is retained at the institution, and in particular through program completion at the community college.

Demographic Factors Relating to Persistence

There are seven characteristics that can contribute to attrition for adult students; delayed entry, part-time enrollment, full-time work, financial independence, dependents, single parenthood, and community college attendance without a high school diploma (Choy, 2002; Coley, 2000). These characteristics are mentioned earlier as being

associated with being a non-traditional student. Many of these characteristics are associated with adult learners and therefore suggest that adult learners could be at risk of attrition. The literature on demographic factors and persistence varies and researchers have found both negative and positive relationships with persistence. According to Markle (2015) there is minimal evidence that demographic factors influence persistence of adult students. Taniguchi and Kaufman (2005) suggest that race/ethnicity, gender and income are not significant in determining persistence for adult students, with age having a small negative effect on degree completion for men, but not women. However, Markle (2015) discusses the finding that age does play a role in determining persistence for the adult student. Since the findings with regard to other demographics are mixed, it is of interest to pursue this research to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of adult Latino/a students and their persistence.

Income. One of the misconceptions about adult students is that they are financially stable and therefore do not have concerns about financing their education. Adult students are considered financially independent based on financial aid guidelines because they may work full-time; therefore, these students may not qualify for financial aid due to their income (Spellman, 2007). However, even though they are considered financially independent, they still may be unable to afford tuition at a community college due to their numerous other financial responsibilities. For Latino/a students this is an evident concern as these students often come from low-income households (Samuel & Scott, 2014). The literature highlights that adult students have cited financial concerns as a challenge to persistence. Kinser and Dietzman (2007) suggested that income and the availability of financial aid had an impact on adult students. In their study, adult students

“were stymied in the past by their financial situation, but were now motivated in the present to use college to improve their income potential” (p. 90). The researchers studied both traditional students and adult students and determined that both groups exhibited concerns over financing their education. However, the researchers found that adult students have external obligations that may limit their financial resources for college. Adult students may have their income appropriated for family and financial obligations that fulfill their everyday needs. In a study that examined retention and non-completion in adult students, McGivney (2004) indicated that financial support for adult learners contributed to success. Analysis of student records determined that adults who received financial support were less likely to drop out of college. This analysis also determined that financial support had a greater impact on adult students than on traditional students. Financial support provided students with financial stability and led to retention of these students.

Bergman, Gross, Berry and Shuck (2014) found that encouragement and having money to complete their degree were positively associated with persistence. “As students agreed more strongly that they had money to complete their degree, the odds of persisting increased by about 40 percent, controlling for all else” (Bergman, et al., 2014, p. 97). Kasworm (2003) notes that adult students report financial resources as one of the most important and most stressful issues that they face. She adds that unlike traditional students, adult students may finance their education through limited household income and many times are supporting a spouse or other dependents. Some adults may have the options of using employer benefits, but many do not. This creates a challenge for the adult student who may not have disposable income to finance their college education and

whose lifestyle makes it difficult for them to carry sufficient hours to be eligible for some form of financial aid.

Age. The literature with regard to age and persistence is limited and mixed, with most persistence literature focusing on traditional-aged students. At traditional, four-year institutions age is positively associated with withdrawal (DesJardins, Ahlburg, & McCall, 1999). This finding suggests that at traditional universities, older students may feel out of place, which can subsequently lead to their attrition. As stated in the literature, adult students are at risk of withdrawing from school due to the multiple roles that they need to fulfill (Choy, 2002; Coley, 2000). Adult students have competing roles to fulfill and therefore are more susceptible to attrition than their traditional-aged counterparts (Goode, 1960).

Sorey and Duggan (2007) found that student persistence, within a single institution, varied by age. In this quantitative study, the researchers focused on retention of traditional-aged and adult students at community colleges and found that retention varied based on the student's age. Interestingly, adult student retention was influenced by social integration, unlike previous research suggested (Bean & Metzner, 1985). Other studies have noted that age may be positively associated with semester-to-semester persistence and year-to-year persistence. (Cofer & Somers, 2000; Somers, 1995). Likewise, Calcagno, Crosta, Bailey and Jenkins (2005) found that older students had a higher likelihood of graduating. Although the literature on adult students and persistence focuses on the challenges that adults face and how this can sway a student to withdraw, some studies have found that age is positively associated with persistence and completion for adult students. This further reinforces that Latino/a adult students may have the

maturity to look for support systems to aid them through their college career.

Academic Factors Relating to Persistence

Similar to the findings with demographic factors, research results with regard to academic factors has been mixed. Bean and Metzner (1985) indicated that students persisted due to academic and environmental factors. The literature on academic factors varies and researchers have found mixed results with specific academic factors.

Researchers have found a positive relationship between grade point average (GPA) and persistence (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Capps, 2012; Gigliotti & Huff, 1995), others have found no relationship between the two (Bergman et al., 2014). Part-time enrollment has also produced conflicting results with positive relationships between enrollment and persistence (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Gigliotti & Huff, 1995), negative effects (Taniguchi & Kaufman, 2005) and no effect at all on persistence (Bergman et al., 2014). In addition to these factors, research also indicates that interaction with faculty is positively associated with persistence (Exposito and Bernheimer, 2012; Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011). For adult students, the classroom is an important part of the college experience. Previous literature has suggested that the college classroom provides older students with a connection (Kasworm, 2003, 2005; Samuels, Beach, & Palmer, 2012). With such varying results regarding academic factors and persistence, it is important to further review these academic factors to better understand the role of academic factors in adult student persistence.

Grade Point Average (GPA). Research focused on GPA's has suggested that there exists a correlation between GPA's and success in coursework. However, research has produced mixed results, with some findings suggesting that there is a positive

relationship between GPA and current success in coursework, and other findings suggesting a negative relationship. Bergman, et. al's (2014) research found that the internal campus environment had an effect on student persistence. Their research suggests that campus environment provided more variation in adult student persistence than external factors or student entry characteristics. The campus environment included GPA and other academic factors. However, since GPA was not controlled for specifically, it is difficult to make the assumption that GPA had a positive or negative effect on persistence. Davidson and Holbrook's (2014) research suggests that high GPA's in the first academic term can lead to persistence. They found that first term academic behaviors are predictors of student persistence from fall to spring, fall to fall, and degree completion. This study suggests that first term academic behaviors provide a foundation for future academic behaviors and therefore show a positive relationship to persistence.

In another study, Markle's (2015) research on adult men and women found that higher GPA's were correlated with persistence for both men and women (2015). In this study a positive association between GPA and persistence was found for both males and females. One explanation may be that students who have higher GPA's are more involved with their coursework, which also suggests they have more interaction with faculty (Astin, 1985; Wirt & Jaeger, 2014).

Enrollment (part-time versus full-time). Researchers have suggested that the number of hours that students take per semester can influence whether a student persists or withdraws from school. Adult students tend to enroll part-time due to their numerous responsibilities outside of the classroom (Kasworm, 2003). Researchers have found that

part-time adult students persist at lower rates than students enrolled full-time (Jacobs & Berkowitz-King, 2002; Taniguchi & Kaufman, 2005). This would suggest that adult students attending part time might be more at risk of withdrawing than students who enroll full-time. Kasworm (2014) further suggests that institutions should encourage full-time enrollment of adult students because there is a higher probability of persistence. Shapiro, Dundar, Che, Ziskin, Park, Torres and Chiang's (2012) research indicated that adult students who entered as freshmen, were able to finish their degree in a six year period... and were driven by the completions of full-time students who were their peers. This study suggests that adult students who enroll full-time have a higher likelihood of completing their degree and found motivation in interacting with other full-time students. One of the challenges with full-time enrollment for adults is that they have external responsibilities that take up time and resources. For instance, some adult students work full-time to provide for their family and therefore are unable to enroll full-time in school. Therefore, students often will enroll part-time because that is what they can manage. With adults historically enrolling on a part-time basis, this could be a barrier to persistence for this population.

In Zell's (2010) research, students who tried to work full-time and enroll in school full-time often failed courses and withdrew from courses. She found that students who had been out of high school for a while and returned to college were in a rush to finish their degree and utilized overloading to complete and transfer in a timely manner. However, students would often return to part-time status because they were unable to keep up with their schoolwork. One participant in Zell's (2010) study described his/her experience taking full time courses and reiterates the challenges that adult students face

in balancing school and work.

Actually, I should have finished. But I can't take more, the most I took in the semester is 4 classes, and working full-time, and come to school full-time, it was horrible. I was able to get a B in my classes, but I used to cry all the time, because it is so much, you know, a lot of pressure and a lot of stress (p.175).

Although part-time enrollment is typically seen as having a negative influence on student persistence, part-time enrollment was positively associated with persistence in another study. Markle (2015) found that women attending school full-time were less likely to persist than women attending part-time. Full-time enrollment in this study led to women withdrawing from the institution, but did not have the same effect for men. Markle (2015) found that full time enrollment for women created role conflict. The research further suggested that work-school conflict and school-family conflict influenced withdrawal. Full-time enrollment did not allow women flexibility when it came to the role-conflict, whereas part-time enrollment allowed women the opportunity to manage their multiple responsibilities and still fulfill their role of student.

Academic/faculty engagement. Tinto's (1975) research suggests that students persist in college due to their engagement on campus. He posits that persistence at the university is linked to social and academic engagement. However, research on persistence of adult students has found a link to academic engagement, and more specifically classroom engagement (Wyatt, 2011). Wyatt's (2011) research indicates that students over 25 years of age are not interested in engaging in on-campus social activities, however are more inclined to demonstrate classroom engagement with faculty and other students, if they are interested in the class. This study suggests that adult

students will engage with the institution, but that engagement will happen in the classroom. Based on the study findings, Wyatt (2011) suggested that the classroom is central to the adult student academic experience. This reaffirms Tinto's (1997, 1998) and Donaldson and Graham's (1999) findings of the classroom being central to academic integration. Tinto's (1997, 1998) research highlighted the importance of faculty actions in the classroom as the key to student retention and also suggested that the classroom was the central point of academic and social integration. In Donaldson and Graham's (1999) model "the classroom is seen as the fulcrum of the collegiate experience for adults, mediating the psychosocial and value orientations, the life-world environment, the adult cognition and the outcomes components involved in the collegiate experience" (p. 31). This model highlights the importance of the "connecting classroom" and the role of the classroom in connecting adult students to the institution.

Kasworm, Polson, and Fishback (2002) reported that undergraduate adult students value learning in the classroom and the *connected classroom*. They suggest the *connected classroom* recognized students as adults and connected their academic learning to their work, family and community. They highlighted the strong relationships with faculty, which were established in the classroom. Interactions in the classroom occur with faculty and other students, but faculty play the most important role in a student's academic experience. Kasworm et. al (2002) also suggest that students valued their peers, but their limited interest in other activities redirected their focus on building relationships with faculty. With community college students attending part-time and having limited time for other types of engagement, the classroom is where interactions with faculty occur (Wirt & Jaeger, 2014).

Wirt and Jaeger's (2014) research found that there is a positive correlation between GPA and student-faculty engagement. Students who interact with their faculty have higher GPA's and are successful in their courses. This success in courses can lead to student's persisting from one semester to the next. Wirt and Jaeger's (2014) research reaffirmed a previous study by Thompson (2001), which suggested the importance of community college student's informal interaction with faculty. This study indicated that a greater number of informal interactions with faculty led to more effort and greater academic success in math and science from students. At community colleges faculty spend 90 percent of their time teaching, which provides opportunities for faculty to engage with their students. Faculty members are a critical component to student success and are able to influence whether students stay or withdraw from an institution (Exposito & Bernheimer, 2012).

Research on Latino/a community college students also highlights the importance of faculty engagement. In research conducted by Sandoval-Lucero, Maes, and Klingsmith (2014), Latino/a community college students discussed relationships developed with college faculty and how critical their instructors were to their success. The participants described their faculty as willing to provide support outside of class and being accessible to students. For the participants in this study, access to faculty made a difference in the success of these students. Similarly, Sorey and Duggan (2008) also found that it is important for faculty to make themselves accessible to their students and also to encourage faculty contact outside of the classroom. These two studies suggest that connection within the classroom is important, but also access to faculty outside of the classroom can aid in reinforcing the success of students. Exposition and Bernheimer

(2012) maintain, if faculty do not engage with students or “make an effort to bridge the cultural and social gaps,” students may choose to withdraw from school. For Latino/a adult students, closing these cultural and social gaps is important in order to help these students in adapting to this new environment. As one study suggests, the frequency and quality of interactions with faculty had a positive effect on Latino/a GPA’s and can provide students with the opportunity to connect with faculty in their area of interest (Lundberg and Schriener, 2004). Hagedorn, Chi, Cepeda, and McClain (2007) also found that Latino faculty on campus had a positive impact on Latino student grades and course completion. As Latino/a adult students acclimate to the academic environment, the reinforcement of faculty interactions in the classroom and after hours can aid in the success of these students.

The literature highlights the critical role that faculty have in the success of students, but studies (Laden & Hagedorn, 2000; Turner & Myers, 2000; Zurita, 2004) indicate that in order for students to be engaged, institutions should look at the recruitment and retention of Latino/a faculty. Data collected by the NCES’ (2016d) in 2013, indicated that 4 percent of full-time faculty at degree-granting institutions were Hispanic. Such a low percentage of Hispanic faculty creates a challenge when looking at the success of students in higher education. Studies have shown that Latino/a faculty are able to provide students with emotional support, encouragement, and are able to raise student aspirations (Laden & Hagedorn, 2000; Turner & Myers, 2000). This importance of Latino/a faculty was further reinforced in Zurita’s (2004) research. In this study, participants commented on the importance of having Latino/a faculty. Participants commented that they felt at home with Latino/a faculty and also felt that White faculty

did not really understand what Latino/a students go through. The researcher suggested that Latino/a faculty could help ease the transition for Latino/a students because they may have had similar experiences. Latino/a faculty can aid students in their transition into the academic environment and can also assist in providing support, guidance and encouragement for Latino/a students.

Community College Funding and Accountability

Community colleges across the nation vary in how they are funded. In the State of Texas, community colleges are funded by three sources of revenue: tuition and fees, local property taxes, and state appropriations (TACC, 2017). Community colleges are able to provide lower tuition costs due to state and local funding; however, this also creates pressure from state and local governmental entities to produce results (Freeman, 2007). Community colleges are criticized for consistently having low completion rates. One of the criticisms of community colleges suggests that their open admissions policies create a revolving door of students who do not complete (Goldrick-Rab, 2010). Yet, open admissions allow community colleges to serve students of varying academic abilities and those who are also attending for continuing education purposes. This criticism reflects the challenge that community colleges face: trying to fulfill their mission, but also remaining accountable to outside entities. This lack of completion is even more evident for minority students who attend community college. In Texas, minority students who start their education at a community college, frequently fail to complete a certificate or degree within six-years (Complete College America, 2013). This statement highlights the deficiency in community college completion for minority students and the work that still needs to be done to help these students be successful. For

Latino/a students, lack of college completion is even more pronounced, which may suggest an ineffective higher education system (Scott-Clayton & Rodriguez, 2012). Lack of completion for Latino/as further widens the educational attainment gap, and challenges community colleges to be aware of the needs of their minority students. With community colleges serving a large percentage of Latino/a adult students, this creates a challenge for increasing educational attainment for this group. This gap in completion further emphasizes the need for research that focuses on Latino/a student persistence in community colleges to determine how institutions can aid them in their pursuit of college completion.

Recently, there has been increased interest in holding community colleges accountable for completion rates in terms of degrees and certificates awarded (Morest, 2013b). State and local lawmakers are focusing on completion rates to determine the success of community colleges. In 2000, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) initiated *Closing the Gaps: The Texas Higher Education Plan*, which focused on the areas of participation, success, excellence, and research (THECB, 2016). The plan had a goal of awarding over 250,000 undergraduate degrees and certificates by 2015. In 2010, a national call to action was instituted to increase the number of degrees and certificates awarded at the community college. In the report, *The Completion Agenda: Call to Action*, there is a call on community colleges to “produce 50 percent more students with high quality degrees and certificates by 2020, while increasing access and quality” (McPhail, 2011). The report outlined key points on how to achieve this goal to increase community college completion across the nation and highlighted the importance of improving student engagement and enhancing student services in order to

achieve this goal. This focus on completion of degrees and certificates can create a challenge for community colleges, which are tasked with providing affordable access to higher education for all.

With community colleges serving a variety of student needs, completion is not necessarily a goal for all students. Some students have the intent of completing a certificate or degree, but others are at community colleges for continuing education or lifelong learning purposes. Ewell (2011) argues that using a traditional graduation rate to measure accountability is not appropriate for community colleges because of the variety of students that these institutions serve. If accountability were based on completion, these students would not generate funds for community colleges and could shift the mission of community colleges to focus on serving students with intent to complete.

Bailey, Jenkins, and Leinbach (2006) noted that for some students, being enrolled for six years might be considered successful depending on the challenges that they may face. This can very well be true for Latino/a adult students who have multiple responsibilities outside of the classroom and thus can result in more years at the community college. This creates a conflict for community colleges aiming to serve all students versus showing expected results. Kasworm (2010) suggests viewing higher education participation, not as a pipeline, but representing “segments across the life span of adulthood and based on learner specific goals and needs” (p. 24). Whether a student’s goal is to complete a degree or not, community colleges still have the obligation to serve all students. However, it is up to administrators at the community college to ensure that those who intend on completing actually do so.

Historically, funding for community colleges was tied to enrollment, contact

hours, and graduation rates. However for community colleges, these measures do not tell the entire story of student success. It has been suggested that in order to gain a better understanding of student success, student progression should be utilized as an additional accountability measure (Ewell, 2011). In Texas, student progression has started to be taken into account. The Texas State Legislature modified the funding model and introduced student success points, which ties funding to student success.

The 83rd legislature proposed a student success model for funding community colleges, which separated state appropriations into three areas: core operations, student success points, and contact hour reimbursement (TACC, 2017). For core operations, each community college district receives \$1 million each biennium (TACC, 2015). Contact hour reimbursement is awarded based on enrollment of students and base year contact hour information. This portion of state appropriations falls in line with how community colleges have been funded in the past and still constitutes about 90 percent of how community colleges are funded.

Student success points, though, focuses funding on student progression. Student success points are awarded based on how a student progresses through the educational pipeline. This model takes into account the idea that community college students enroll with varying academic levels and also a variety of goals (TACC, 2017). For instance, student success points are awarded for different accomplishments throughout the students' education. Completion of developmental coursework, completion of the first college level course, and completion of 15 college credit hours are examples of how student success points are awarded. Although only 10 percent of state appropriations are tied to student success points, this model aids in changing the mindset of accountability

for community colleges. This accountability piece aids in keeping community colleges accountable for progression rather than completion. Future legislative sessions may look at increasing the percentage that is tied to student success points, which reinforces the importance of understanding student success and persistence. Research focused on Latino/a adult students and persistence can provide a better understanding of student success, which in turn could provide more funding for community colleges.

Conceptual Framework

Previous research suggests that persistence is associated with various internal and external factors that can affect whether a student is retained from semester to semester. The models examined in this literature highlight factors that contribute or inhibit persistence for traditional-aged students. However, for adult students there are also additional constraints that can affect whether or not a student is successful in college. Bean and Metzner (1985) and Donaldson and Graham (1999) examined adult students to gain a better understanding and develop models that would aid in our understanding of adult student retention. They highlighted the idea that adult students have other factors that can affect their persistence in higher education. For Latino/a adult students these factors vary and the interaction of these factors determines the outcome of their transition into higher education. Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory, along with Yosso's (2005) theory of community cultural wealth can aid in guiding our understanding of an adult student's transition into higher education and what influences their persistence.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory

Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory is an adult development theory that focuses on the transitions that adults experience in their life and their ability to cope and manage

these situations (Schlossberg, et al., 1995). This theory highlights the notion that individuals are constantly experiencing change throughout their life and it is how the individual adapts to change that determines their success or failure. “It is not the transition itself that is of primary importance, but rather how that transition fits with an individual’s stage, situation, and style at the time of transition” (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 5). Schlossberg’s theory posits that individuals react to change and transition in different ways, which can affect the outcome of the transition. She posits that even though the transition event may be the same, each individual has their own experience and reaction to the transition.

Schlossberg (1981) further discusses the notion that these transitions are constant and do not occur in any specific, sequential order. This theory provides potential insight for understanding the experiences of adult Latino/a students who are experiencing the transition of attending community college. Previous research suggests that adult students falling out of sequence with the traditional timeline feel out of place when they return to college (Hagedorn, 2005b). For adult Latino/a students, who are beginning their college experience, this falls out of line with the traditional time line and occurs out of sequential order. These adult students experience this transition later in life than their peers and therefore must find a way to manage the transition into college. The experiences that these students have and the resources available to them to aid them in the transition determine success or failure.

Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006) state that there are four major factors that can affect an individual’s transition, the four S’s: *situation, self, support and strategies*. The interaction of these four factors can determine how an individual reacts to

the transition and can affect the outcome of the transition. Since individuals have different resources within these four categories, the outcome of the transition can vary from person to person. In transition theory, the four S's can be viewed as assets and liabilities that affect how an individual responds to that change in their life. The interaction between these four factors creates complexity when an individual is transitioning and therefore aids in developing the outcome to that transition.

Goodman, et al. (2006) discuss each factor individually to aid the reader in understanding how complex a transition can be depending on each individual factor. For instance, the factor of situation has multiple elements that can affect an individual's response to a transition. The authors look at what triggered the change, the timing of the change, whether a role change is involved, what is the duration of the transition, the individual's experience with the transition, whether there is concurrent stress and whether the individual sees this transition in a positive or negative way (Goodman, et al., 2006). How an individual responds to each of these areas within situation can determine how that individual responds to the transition. For instance, Latino/a adult students are influenced to return to school due to life transitions that can occur in the individual's life and may change their perspective on the necessity of a college education (Kasworm, 2003). Kasworm (2002) notes that individuals may return to school due to a divorce, job loss, the return of children to school or the lack of upward mobility. These events can trigger a negative or positive experience and therefore can affect how the student transitions to college.

Likewise with the notion of self, a person has their own individual characteristics that they bring to the specific situation that will also guide the outcome of the transition.

Goodman, et al. (2006) identify the following characteristics as relevant to how an individual manages change: personal/demographic, socioeconomic status, gender, age and stage of life, state of health, ethnicity/culture, psychological resources, ego development, outlook, commitment and values, and spirituality and resiliency. The individual characteristics that fall within self can be assets or liabilities depending on the situation. For instance, in this study all students will be adult students and may view the characteristic of age as either an asset or liability depending on how the participants have experienced their time at the community college. As previously cited literature stated, some adult students may view their age as a liability since they fall out of line with the traditional timeline of attending college and are older than their traditional-aged counterparts (Hagedorn, 2005b). However, according to Goodman, et al. (2006) other students may see their age as an asset, since they have life experience and have a different outlook on their education. Every transition and how an individual copes through the change will be dependent on the interaction of these characteristics.

Research on Latino/a students has indicated that these students channel their own individual characteristics to help them be successful in college. Goodman, et al. (2006) describe positive outlook as one of the characteristics that can aid a student. Sandoval-Lucero, Maes, and Klingsmith's (2014) research highlighted aspirational capital as a motivating factor for Latino/a students at community colleges. Yosso (2005) describes aspirational capital as motivation based on the future. They found that participants experienced personal and professional barriers, but were able to channel their aspirational capital to persist. Many of these students were the first in their family to attend college, but were able to look to their future as a way to motivate them through the obstacles.

In addition to situation and self, Goodman, et al. (2006) discuss the notions of support and strategies that can further aid an individual through the change that they are experiencing. The researchers acknowledge that support can come in various forms like “intimate relationships, family units, networks of friends, and the institutions and/or communities of which the people are a part” (Goodman, et al., 2006, p. 75). The authors note that social support is critical to helping individuals through stressful situations or transitions in general. These networks can provide both physical and emotional support to aid an individual. For Latino/a adults, they may have social and navigational capital that can aid them in their transition to higher education (Yosso, 2005). This support may provide Latino/a students with additional resources that may be needed to be successful. For instance, Latino/a adult students are motivated by their families and also see family as a source of support to aid in their success at the college. Zell (2010) noted that students in her study did not find support at the institutions, but looked to their family for emotional and other types of support. Parents showed support to their students by acknowledging the importance of education and also provided more concrete support through caring for children and excusing students from family functions. This type of support provides Latino/a adult students with the time that they may need to attend classes and fulfill the responsibilities of the student role.

Sandoval-Lucero, Maes and Klingsmith’s (2014) research also found that family support was essential to the success of Latino/a students at community colleges. Participants in this study defined support in various ways. Support for some was described as the ability to live at home while attending school, while for other students it was the ability to rely on a spouse for financial support. For one participant, her ability to

rely on her spouse for financial support during her academic career allowed her to focus on her studies. For this adult student, receiving financial and household support, allowed her to commit the time to her schoolwork. Latino/a adult students also shared the importance of encouragement toward schoolwork. Another participant shared her experiences with the encouragement she received from her son to study for exams and continue with her studies. Family support in this study came from spouses, children, siblings and parents. This research highlighted the important role that family has in supporting Latino/a adult students through their academic endeavors.

Lastly, the researchers discuss the factor of strategies. Strategies are the ways in which individuals cope with transition. “By coping we refer to the things people do to avoid being harmed by life strains” (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978, p. 1). Individuals will respond to transition in different ways and utilize various strategies to help them deal with the situation at hand. Goodman, et al. (2006) identify three types of coping: “responses that modify the situation, ...control the meaning of the problem, and responses that manage stress” (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978, p. 6-7). These three types of coping are by no means all encompassing of how individuals cope with change, but Pearlin and Schooler (1978) identified these as ways to systematically view strategies that are used to cope through change. The interaction of the 4 S’s creates a complex environment that determines how the individual moves in and through a transition. The utilization of transition theory will guide the research study and provide a framework to understand individual experiences with persistence. Transition theory guides this research study to be open to the complexity of human transition and how individuals experience various situations.

Yosso's Theory of Community Cultural Wealth

Transition theory aids in furthering our understanding of how adults transition and cope with situations, and in particular may support how Latino/a adults transition to college. However, Yosso's (2005) theory of cultural wealth can further our understanding of Latino/a adult student success and highlights other types of resources available to minority students. According to Yosso (2005), communities of color hold cultural wealth that support and aid students. Yosso (2005) states that academic environments operate from the assumption that students of color have cultural deficits, which may lead to difficulties in the college environment. However, the theory of community cultural wealth counteracts this idea and emphasizes the cultural wealth that communities of color hold. Yosso's (2005) theory of community cultural wealth highlights various types of capital that these communities hold. This theory focuses on six types of cultural capital: aspirational capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, social capital, navigational capital and resistant capital.

Yosso (2005) argues that these different types of capital provide Latino/a students with distinctive types of support that should be viewed as assets for the student and not as deficits. Aspirational capital is an asset for students of color and is the notion of having hopes and dreams in the face of adversity. Latino/a students may face barriers to their education, but having this type of capital gives them hope to continue pursuing their dream. This type of capital can aid a student in overcoming barriers that they may experience in higher education. Along with aspirational capital, communities of color also hold social and navigational capital. Yosso (2005) states that these two types of capital are connected together because individuals are utilizing their social capital to aid

them in navigating situations.

Social capital focuses on creating networks of people and resources. For instance, individuals from these communities who have gone through the college process or have completed a college degree would be able to guide students who are interested in pursuing a college education. Navigational capital refers to navigating through social institutions, like the education system, that have not been developed with communities of color in mind (Yosso, 2005). Sandoval-Lucero, Maes, and Klingsmith (2014) found that participants who withdrew from school and reenrolled at a later time were more successful. The research showed that these students had the cultural capital to succeed the first time, but did not understand the significance of this type of capital. Findings suggest that cultural capital was important to a students' sustained success at the community college.

Latino/a students are able to refer to both social and navigational capital for support and guidance. Yosso (2005) suggests that these social and navigational networks can aid a student in various aspects of the college process and are assets for these students who may be the first in their family to navigate the college environment. Navigational capital provides individuals with a resource to help navigate challenging environments. For instance, this type of capital can aid a student by providing the resources to navigate stressful situations and self-doubt that could lead to attrition. Although Latino/a adult students experienced self-doubt, they were able to look to their family as a source of inspiration to be successful. Yosso's (2005) theory of community cultural wealth provides a frame that highlights the importance of cultural wealth and how these assets assist Latino/a adult students in creating a support network that incorporates various

facets of cultural wealth.

Aspirational capital provides Latino/a students with motivation based on their future, regardless of their current challenges (Yosso, 2005). Cohen et al. (2014) state that minority students may attend community college as a way to facilitate social mobility. Research on Latino/a students by Santos (2004), found that Latino/a adult students see college as a life-changing experience that can provide a way to a better life. This study found that Latino/a students attend college as a way to improve their lives and a college education is an opportunity to become self-reliant, increase their earning potential and “reduce the gap between their perceived self and their ideal self” (Santos, 2004). Latino/a students see community college as a financially viable option that can lead to a better job and a better future. As Yosso (2005) states, aspirational capital is described as resiliency that allows individuals to look to the future, regardless of their present challenges, and focus on goals even without a way to achieve those. Another way to view aspirational capital is the idea of dreaming big and working hard to achieve it. A two-year degree may be the goal that these students aspire to achieve and persisting from semester to semester is how they will get there.

Latino/a adult students face challenges, but these students have aspirations that extend beyond their goals and extend to family members. Latino/a students find motivation within their family and achieving their goal is something that reflects on the entire family. Arbelo-Marrero and Milacci’s (2016) research found that family motivated participants and completing their goal was important because it provided family members with role models for higher education. One participant highlighted the importance of persisting in order to serve as a role model for his nephew. The participant wanted his

nephew to see the importance of going to college and also serve as a role model of completion. For another student his motivation for completing his degree was his kids, wife and ultimately for himself. Likewise, Zell (2010) found that participants' desire to be role models pushed them to achieve academic success. In her study individuals also discussed the notion of being role models for children, sisters, nephews, nieces, friends and other family members. Attending college and persisting was not only an individual goal for the students, but students felt a sense of responsibility to be an example for their family members.

Understanding how an adult student experiences the transition to college and being familiar with the cultural resources available, can aid in further understanding the Latino/a adult student and the challenges that they may experience. Likewise these theories further reinforce the need to examine individual Latino/a adult student experiences to gain insight into how each individual manages this transition. Previous studies have provided findings that generalize what factors can determine persistence for Latino/a adult students; however, as Schlossberg (1981) suggests each individual student has varying characteristics that can affect the response to a transition. Likewise, as Yosso (2005) states Latino/a students also hold resources and support systems that may not be recognized, but are critical to understand and take into account when looking at this population. This further supports the need to of explore each individual student through a qualitative study that will allow them to share their own experience of their transition and also provide the opportunity to view the phenomenon of persistence through their lens.

Chapter Summary

The literature reviewed in Chapter II provides a background for the dissertation

study and the methodology. It provides a foundation for future exploration and encourages continued research in this field. The review highlights literature on the history and role of the community college and the current state of the community college system. It also provides a review of the pertinent literature on Latino/a students, adult students, and factors that prohibit or encourage student retention in higher education. In addition, the literature review highlights relevant theoretical frameworks that guided me in exploring the success of Latino/a adult community college students, specifically Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory and Yosso's (2005) theory of community cultural wealth. Transition theory provided a framework to analyze the phenomenon of the adult student's journey and improve understanding of factors influencing these students' persistence from semester to semester. Yosso's theory of community cultural wealth provided a framework to examine the strengths that Latino/a students hold that may not have been considered in previous bodies of research.

Like other institutions, community colleges have challenges with student persistence; however, exploring persistence for adult Latino/a students and understanding their personal stories may lead to a better understanding of how we can support this population. The needs and goals of adult students are important and differ from their younger counterparts, due to life experience (Kasworm, 2003). As the number of adult Latino/a students continues to increase, it is imperative to understand what contributes to their persistence at the community college and reassess how we serve this type of student.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Chapter III reviews the methodology that was applied to examine the lived experiences and common themes of adult Latino/a students who are enrolled at the community college and how they experienced persistence at the community college. This was a qualitative, phenomenological approach to explore how Latino/a adult students have been successful from semester to semester at a community college and examine the internal and external forces that have aided in their success. The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the common themes that these students share and how they have contributed to their success. This research is important in furthering institutional planning and developing programs to aid Latino/a adult students in their academic journeys. The study took the phenomenological approach in order to gain insight into the phenomenon of persistence from semester to semester. This chapter provides a framework for the methodology used, to include the rationale for a qualitative phenomenological approach, the selection of participants, the setting for the study, the strategies for data collection and analysis, and the methods used to enhance the rigor of the study and the limitations of the study.

Rationale for a Qualitative Phenomenological Methodology

For this research study, I chose to use a qualitative approach in order to further explore the phenomenon of Latino/a adult student persistence at community colleges. Previous studies have examined persistence of traditional-aged students at four-year institutions, with limited research focused on Latino/a adult community college students

(Bean & Meztner, 1985; Donaldson & Graham, 1999; Tinto, 1975, 1982, 1993). To gain a better understanding of how students have been successful, in the less frequently studied community college context, a qualitative study is appropriate in order to explore the topic and have the ability to gain insight into the phenomenon of persistence of these students who may be overlooked (Creswell, 2013).

Qualitative research “is a situated activity that locates the observer in the natural world” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3). In this type of research, the researchers “study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3). A qualitative approach allowed me to make sense of how these participants were able to navigate the college environment and be successful. Qualitative research allows the researcher to further explore common themes and experiences. This type of research allows the researcher to “use a lens not based on scores, instruments, or research designs but a lens established using the views of people who conduct, participate in, or read and review a study” (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Qualitative inquiry focuses on gaining insight into individual experiences and allowing individuals to share their stories, narratives and other insights.

In particular, this research study followed a phenomenological methodology in order to focus on the lived experiences of the participants and to further explore the phenomenon of persistence. Phenomenology has its underpinnings in the philosophical writings of Kant, Hegel and later Brentano (Dowling, 2007). These philosophical foundations provided the basis for one of the leaders of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl. The twentieth century work of Husserl developed phenomenology into a body

of practice that soon developed varying strands of phenomenology that encompassed positivist, post-positivist, and constructivist paradigms (Dowling, 2007). Yet, phenomenology has continued to develop over time and can be viewed in terms of different periods of phenomenology with scholars offering unique contributions to the field (Van Manen, 2014).

Phenomenology originally developed as a philosophical concept that focused on the notion of understanding and classifying conscious acts (Moustakas, 1994). Husserl's phenomenology focused on understanding lived experiences pre-reflectively, without interpretation (Van Manen, 2014). Husserl's phenomenology focused on the description of the phenomenon and did not discuss the notion of interpretation of the experiences and phenomenon. Martin Heidegger a student of Husserl, later proposed a phenomenology that not only discussed the description of the phenomenon, but discussed the need for interpretation (Crotty, 1998). Heidegger (1962), as cited in Crotty (1998), states that the meaning in phenomenological research lies within the interpretation. "The task is to unfold this rudimentary understanding and render explicit and thematic what is at first implicit and unthematized" (p. 97). Heidegger's branch of phenomenology utilizes the description of the experience without previous interpretations, but also suggests that the researcher analyze the data and provide interpretation on the experiences of the phenomenon.

Generally speaking, phenomenological research focuses on describing the common meanings for individuals about their lived experiences (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenological inquiry allowed me the opportunity to explore the phenomenon of persistence of Latino/a adult students and interpret the lived experiences of each

participant to find the common experiences and the common themes that these experiences share. This approach provides a description of the phenomenon, but also is an “interpretive process in which the researcher makes an interpretation of the meaning of the lived experiences” (Creswell, 2013, p. 78). Through phenomenology, I highlighted the common experiences of the participants and describe “what” they experienced and “how” they experienced it (Moustakas, 1994). Van Manen (2014) notes that phenomenology does not develop theory, but provides insight into reality and connects us to the living world. The phenomenological approach allowed me to further explore the phenomenon of persistence and gain insight into how students transition into the college environment and how they make sense of this new academic world. Phenomenology aids in “understand[ing] the constructs people use in their everyday lives to make sense of their world” (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, Ormston, 2013, p. 18). Latino/a adult college students are coming into a new world when they enter higher education and this approach provided me the opportunity to attempt to understand how they make sense of this new world. This approach was valuable in gaining insight into how Latino/a adult community college students made meaning of their experience in persisting from semester to semester but it also focused on the individual meaning making of their experiences.

Research Questions

The dissertation study was guided by the following central research question with a set of subsidiary questions to further aid in gaining insight into the phenomenon.

Looking through the lens of Latino/a adult students, what explains the phenomenon of their persistence at the community college?

- a. How have Latino/a adult students successfully transitioned and completed three consecutive semesters at the community college?

- b. What factors are perceived by adult Latino/a students as contributing to their persistence at a community college with a high number of traditional-aged students?
- c. What external factors, if any, contribute to the persistence from semester to semester of Latino/a adult students?
- d. What internal factors, if any, contribute to the persistence from semester to semester of Latino/a adult students?

Research Site

The setting for the dissertation study was a large, public community college in Texas. Both for ethical reasons and in order to gain access to this site, I completed the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process at the institution. After I received approval from the Institution's Review Board, I began and completed the process of IRB approval through the Texas State University IRB Committee. The college is part of a larger community college system in Texas and served an estimated 16,752 students for the 2018-2019 academic year. In the fall of 2018 the demographic make-up of the institution was 62 percent Hispanic/Latino, 24 percent White, and 14 percent other (NCES, 2018). Seventy-five percent of the student population attends on a part-time basis and 25 percent attends school on a full time basis. Twenty-one percent of the population is over the age of 25 and may be considered adult students for the purpose of this study and 79 percent of the student population is under the age of 24 and would be considered traditional-aged students (NCES, 2018). Literature in this field often describes community colleges as institutions that serve more adult students than traditional-aged students. This, in part, is due to the mission of the community college to provide access for all types of students. This research site differs from the literature, to some degree, in that it serves a relatively high proportion of traditional-aged students versus adult students. This research site will nonetheless provide a glimpse into the community college context and how adult students

have persisted within it. According to the NCES (2018), the retention rate at this institution from fall to fall for first time students was 70 percent (among students enrolled full-time) and 50 percent (among students enrolled part-time). The research site serves a large number of adult students, however currently does not have any type of programs or policies that target this population of students.

Participant Selection Criteria and Recruitment Strategies

For this study, criteria-based purposive sampling was conducted to ensure the participants shared a common experience of the phenomenon under study. In purposive sampling, “the sample units are chosen because they have particular features or characteristics which will enable detailed exploration and understanding of the central themes and puzzles which the researcher wishes to study” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). This type of sampling ensured that the participants had the ability to share their experience on the successful completion of three academic semesters and their experience with this particular phenomenon. In order to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon, each participant met the criteria and was able to share their lived experiences and discuss the phenomenon of persistence of Latino/a community college students.

I recruited participants for this study by sending out a recruitment email to students who self-identified as Latino/a adult students on their initial admissions application, who were over the age of 25 and had continued enrollment for three consecutive semesters. After IRB approval from both institutions, I worked with the Institutional Research Office at the college to identify students who fit the criteria. Once the students were identified, an email was sent to all students on this list to inform students of the study and request participation. Students interested in participating were

asked to fill out the interest form included in the email.

The following criteria was utilized to identify participants for the phenomenological study that explored the phenomenon of persistence for adult, Latino/a students in a large Southwestern community college.

- A student over the age of 25 years old
- Self-identifies as Hispanic or Latino/a
- Enrolled either as a full-time student or part-time student
- Enrolled for three consecutive semesters

For this study, I identified eight Latino/a adult students who confirmed that they met the criteria as participants, as this number provided sufficient saturation of data to feel confident in the study findings.

Ethical Considerations

In line with institutional IRB procedures, once the participants were identified for the study, they were provided a letter that outlined the purpose of the study and also were presented with a consent form that further outlined the procedures of the study, any risks associated with the study, and the benefits that this research will bring to the higher education community. The individuals agreed to participate by signing the consent form for the study. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time, if they chose to do so.

In addition, each participant was assigned a pseudonym to ensure that the data collected is confidential. I used the pseudonym in any field notes, transcription or any reference to that participant. This ensured that the information collected could not be traced back to the individual participant. The research findings discuss the phenomenon

of persistence and include supporting quotes from the individual participants using a pseudonym. Any data collected and associated with the research study to include researcher notes, field notes, recordings and transcription of the interviews were stored in a safe, secure location on an encrypted computer to ensure that the data was only accessible by the researcher.

Data Collection

The phenomenological study used semi-structured interviews, a critical incident reflection and researcher notes as primary forms of data. These three data sources aided in exploring individual experiences and the phenomenon of persistence at community colleges. In addition, at the start of the interview I gathered the following demographic data from the participants: age, gender, enrollment status (full-time or part-time) and also assigned a pseudonym.

Interviews

In qualitative research, interviewing is seen as one of the most important data collection methods (Fetterman, 1998). Through interviews, researchers have the ability to gather information from participants that we may not be able to observe (Patton, 2015). As qualitative researchers, we are unable to observe feelings, thoughts, intentions, behaviors or situations that have occurred prior to the study, therefore interviews and other forms of data collection are imperative to gain insight into the lived experiences of individuals (Patton, 2015). Through interviews, it is possible to gather data from participants of previous events or situations and mine the data to find the common experiences shared by the participants. For this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted to provide a framework for the interviews, but also allowed for additional

questions for clarification or to delve deeper into a specific experience. Semi-structured interviews provide guiding questions, but also allow the researcher to “follow the leads” of the participants and probe into areas of interest (Hatch, 2002). Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein (1997) suggest that in order to have a good interview, the researcher must be “both structured and flexible at the same time” (p. 233), suggesting that the researcher needs to be open to asking follow up questions and expect to stray from the planned questions. According to Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein (1997), the “energy that drives a good interview—for both you and your informant—comes from expecting the unexpected” (p. 233). A semi-structured interview supports a phenomenological approach because it allowed me to keep the phenomenological question at the forefront, but also explore any additional experiences that would support the research.

Two semi-structured interviews of approximately one hour each were conducted with each of the participants with the second interview allowing for initial member checking, follow-up questions and clarification of any data collected in the first interview. I conducted the interviews with a set of questions that focused on the phenomenon being researched, but the semi-structured format allowed me fluidity in the interview. This structure allowed me to delve deeper into some areas of interest and allowed me to gain insight into that particular participants experience. As part of the interview process, I “tr[ied] to obtain concrete stories of particular situations or events,” in order to have adequate data to share the lived experiences of the phenomenon of persistence (Van Manen, 2014). The purpose of the interview is to “gain experiential material that is rich and detailed” (Van Manen, 2014). Van Manen (2014) notes that it is easier for participants to share about their experience versus to share an “experience as

lived through” (The Phenomenological Interview, para. 1). Individuals will tend to provide opinions and interpretations of events rather than share a detailed experience. Through this interview, the participants were able to share their lived experiences, but in order to obtain the rich description, I had to ensure that the phenomenological question remained at the forefront. In addition, phenomenological researchers suggest asking specific questions that highlight what the experience is like or what is the essence or meaning of the phenomenon by those experiencing it (Polit & Beck, 2008; Van Manen, 1990). These types of questions allowed me to gather detailed accounts that share how the individual lived through experience.

The interviews were scheduled with each individual participant at a mutually convenient time and held at a location and time of their choosing. This allowed the participant to feel comfortable in the space and it was also more convenient for the participant. In order to gain insight into an individual’s detailed experiences, Van Manen (2014) suggests that researchers ensure that a comfortable time and location is provided for the interview. He also recommends researchers develop a friendly environment to allow the participant to feel comfortable to share their experiences. I understood that this study focused on adult students who have time limitations, so therefore allowing the participants to choose the time and location allowed them to fit these interviews into their busy schedules. If the participant did not have a specific location in mind, we met at a study room located in the college’s library. The library is situated on the research site and provided a quiet, private space for the interview. This neutral space is a familiar site to the participant and is easily accessible by the participants. The interviews were recorded on two audio recorders, in order for me to have the ability to refer to the first-

person description of the events, as shared by the participant. The second audio recorder served as a back up audio recorder, in case of technical difficulties with the first audio recording. The interviews were transcribed verbatim through a transcription service for timely transcription and to facilitate the data analysis process in a timely manner. I reviewed the transcribed interviews and listened to the audio files multiple times to verify that the transcribed data was accurate.

Critical Incident Reflection

In addition to the interviews, the participants were also asked to provide a written critical incident reflection on an event that impacted their ability to persist from semester to semester. Critical incident reflections are based on the critical incident technique (CIT) established by J.C. Flanagan (1954). CIT is a technique that allows the participants to share, in their own words, a particular incident, how they managed the event and what resulted from it (Chell & Pittaway, 1998). This technique is utilized with the goal of providing an avenue for the participant to share the experience in his or her own words. A critical incident reflection was appropriate for this study because it focused on a critical incident that made an impact on the phenomenon of persistence (Bitner, Booms, and Tetreault 1990; Grove and Fisk 1997).

For this study, participants were asked to reflect on an event that impacted their persistence from semester to semester. Specifically, I was interested in understanding at what point in their initial semester participants became confident in their ability to persist. After the initial interview, participants were sent a prompt (see Appendix F) via email. Delving into this particular event provided me with insight into what the participants were experiencing during this time period. Chell and Pittaway (1998) note that through

critical incident reflections, participants are able to share their story in their own words, which allows them to explain the incident in own terms and language. This type of data collection provided a specific experience to review that aided in further exploring the phenomenon of persistence at a community college.

Researcher Notes

Researcher notes were used to supplement the interviews and the research process. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) suggest taking notes during the interview process to capture the researchers responses to the participants interview and also to highlight the importance of a certain responses. This aided in jogging my memory through the data analysis process. It provided important prompts in how the participant reacted to certain questions and allowed me to highlight areas of importance. Also, this aided me in capturing additional thoughts or themes that I picked up and assisted in capturing any reactions to the interview questions. Creswell (2013) also suggests taking notes for all questions during the interview process because participants may not always answer the question the researcher is asking about. Taking notes during the interview allowed me to make notes about these situations.

Schwandt (1997) also suggests keeping a field journal “to record thoughts, impressions, initial ideas, working hypotheses, issues to pursue, and so on” (p. 52). Keeping notes in a journal also provided me a working document to capture any thoughts I had with regard to the research and also capture additional questions that may come up throughout the research process. Creswell (2013) notes the importance of these “reflective notes” to capture thoughts on the process, summarize conclusions and reflections throughout the process and provide a trail of the research process (p. 170).

Data Analysis

Literature emphasizes the roots of phenomenology as a philosophy, but recent literature also highlights the development of phenomenology into a qualitative methodology to explore experiences and the life world (Dowling, 2007). Although philosophers developed different branches of phenomenology, none developed research methods to aid in analyzing this method (Dowling, 2007). It was later that psychologists, like Colaizzi (1978) and Giorgi (1989), developed a method to help analyze phenomenological data. Their methods focus on dividing descriptions into units, transforming those units into meanings and creating a general description of the phenomenon. These steps provided me with the ability to utilize the rich description from the interviews and interpret those meanings to provide some understanding of the researched phenomenon. According to Creswell (2013), “phenomenological data analysis proceeds through the methodology of reduction, the analysis of specific statements and themes, and a search for all possible meanings.” (p. 52).

Once I collected all the data and in order to stay true to the phenomenological method of analysis, I utilized Colaizzi’s (1978) phenomenological method to analyze the data collected from the participants. I analyzed the data to look for common themes and experiences that the participants shared. I also looked for connections to my conceptual framework. I decided on this method of analysis due to the clear layout of the steps to analyze the collected data. Colaizzi (1978) outlined seven steps to his phenomenological data analysis method. The following steps represent Colaizzi’s method (Sanders, 2003; Speziale & Carpenter, 2007):

Step 1: Making sense of protocols. Colaizzi (1978) asks the researcher to read

and re-read the entire document to gain a sense of the data as a whole. I audio-recorded the interviews on two audio recorders and transcribed the interviews verbatim through a transcription service. Once I completed an interview, I sent it to be transcribed. After I received the initial transcribed interview, I began to review for accuracy of the transcription to ensure that there were no errors in the actual document. I listened to the audio-recorded interviews and read along with the transcription multiple times, in order to immerse myself in the data. I also reviewed any research notes that I had taken in order to jog my memory of the interview.

Step 2: Extracting significant statements. In this step, I first utilized open coding to aid me in identifying significant statements that related to the study. I open coded the statements with words like faculty, internal motivation, and previous experience. I then was able to extract significant statements that pertained to the phenomenon of persistence and supported the elements of the research study. These statements were then captured on a separate document. The statements that I extracted related to experiences in higher education, persistence, and motivating factors that the participants experienced. Extracting the statements helped me see the similarities in the statements and allowed me to begin developing high level emerging themes.

Step 3: Formulating meanings. In this step, I began the process of formulating meanings from the various statements. In this step, Colazzi (1978) highlights the importance of taking what the participants say and determine what they mean. This was a critical step because it allowed me to begin to make meaning of the statements that I extracted from the transcription. The statements had been grouped into general themes, so I began to read each statement within the cluster to understand the meaning behind the

statement and formulate meaning. This step was important because I was trying to find the essence of the participants' experiences and formulate meanings based on the intention of the participants' statements. In this process, I began to see some common experiences emerge from the data. I also conducted data reduction in order to try and find the critical pieces of data that told the story of persistence.

Step 4: Formulated meanings are sorted into categories and themes. I then began the process of sorting the statements into themes. I sorted manually via Microsoft Excel to begin organizing the statements into themes and then clustered my themes around the research questions. It was at this point that I also was able to remove any additional data that was not relevant to the study. One of the sub-themes that I chose to include was my past is my motivation. Although initially this did not seem to be important to the phenomenon being studied, I felt that in order to truly understand the essence of persistence for these students, it was necessary to include their past experiences as it provided insight into their motivations to continue.

Step 5: Findings are integrated into an exhaustive description of the phenomenon. Colaizzi (1978) describes this step as taking the themes that emerged and utilizing them in an exhaustive description of the phenomenon. From the themes, I was able to create a description of the phenomenon of persistence. I organized the themes in a format that represented their experiences with persistence from their pre-college experience, transition and to their current state. This helped in providing an understanding of the phenomenon experienced by the participants.

Step 6: The fundamental structure of the phenomenon is described. In this step, Colaizzi (1978) recommends taking the exhaustive description and developing a

short statement that captures the essential elements of the phenomenon. In this step, the researcher is trying to provide the reader with an understanding of the phenomenon. In this study I was trying to describe the phenomenon of persistence for adult Latino/a students as it occurred in the experiences of the participants of this study. Through the data analysis I was able to develop a statement that described the structure of the phenomenon of persistence for the Latino/a adult community college student.

Step 7: Returning to the participants. In this step, the participants validate the data analysis. The analysis is returned to the participants to determine if the analysis correctly reflects their experiences. In qualitative research, this step refers to member checking, which is an important part of establishing credibility and trustworthiness within the research study. In the second interview, I provided the participants with early analysis and themes that were emerging from data collected from the first interview and the critical incident reflections. The initial part of the second interview focused on providing the participants with initial analysis and allowing for the participants to agree or disagree with the findings. The participants were able to confirm my initial analysis of the data and provided additional insights to the initial findings.

Trustworthiness

In quantitative research, researchers are looking to establish the reliability of a research study through rigor and validity. Quantitative research is conducted within a controlled environment and utilizes experimental, scientific inquiry as the methodology. Through this methodology, quantitative research is able to establish rigor and validity. However, as Lincoln and Guba (1986) note, how do we leave the controlled quantitative environment to explore and understand the “real world” (p. 15)? Research conducted

within the “real world” allows researchers to study human beings within social, academic and life environments. Qualitative research also allows the researcher to “explore individual experiences, describe phenomenon, and develop theory” (Vishnevsky & Beanlands, 2004). Through qualitative inquiry, researchers can provide working hypotheses that aid in understanding experiences and other phenomenon that individual’s experience.

Guba and Lincoln (1994) presented five criteria that aid in reinforcing trustworthiness in qualitative research: credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability, and authenticity. Lincoln and Guba (1986) refer to these criteria as “criteria of trustworthiness” (p. 18). These criteria aid in establishing credibility and trustworthiness, which is equivalent to rigor and validity in quantitative research. Utilizing three of the criteria stated by Guba and Lincoln (1994) will aid in developing trustworthiness and credibility of the study.

Credibility. “Credibility refers to the truth of the data or the participant views and the interpretation and representation of them by the researcher” (Polit & Beck, 2012). I utilized various methods to aid in developing credibility of the study. Triangulation was one of the approaches taken in order to establish credibility. Denzin (1978) describes triangulation as a validation strategy that combines data from different sources that can be collected at different times, locations or from different people and corroborate data. Triangulation is the process of drawing from multiple sources of data to aid in drawing conclusions about a study (Casey & Murphy, 2009). Multiple data sources allowed me to draw conclusions about the phenomenon and served as a way to validate the participants’ experiences. “As a validity procedure, triangulation is a step taken by researchers

employing only the researcher's lens, and it is a systematic process of sorting through the data to find common themes or categories by eliminating overlapping areas" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 127). In this study, I conducted two semi-structured interviews based on an interview guide and gathered data on the common themes of the student experience. In addition, the critical incident reflection collected additional data and further highlighted an event within that individual's experience that reinforced the phenomenon being researched. I was able to analyze these data sources to find the common themes in their experiences.

In addition to triangulation, member checks also enhance credibility and further enhance trustworthiness of the research. Member checking ensures that data and researcher interpretations of the data represent the participants' lived experience. According to Maxwell (2013), this step is the "...single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say or do and the perspective they have on what is going on, as well as being an important way of identifying your own biases and misunderstanding of what you observed" (p. 126-127). Through this process of member checks, I was able to ensure that the data collected from the participants was a true representation of their experience. Member checks also allow, "the researcher [to] communicate a summary of the themes that emerged and request feedback or member check[s] from the participants" (Cope, 2014). This process allows participants to review the information and validate the conclusions made by the researcher.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), member checks are "the most crucial technique in establishing credibility" because it allows the participants to validate and

confirm the credibility of the data collected (p. 315). Creswell and Miller (2000) suggest, “throughout the process, the researchers [should] ask participants if themes or categories make sense, whether they are developed with sufficient evidence, and whether the overall account is realistic and accurate” (p.127). For this study, I provided the participants with the analysis of the data collected at the initial interview and also from the critical incident reflections to determine if the analysis described the phenomenon of persistence. The data collected and analyzed provided a cross-case analysis of multiple participants. This allowed me to provide an initial description of the phenomenon of persistence. I also provided the participants with the write up of their participant profile as a way to check that their profile was general and did not provide too much specific information. The participants confirmed their profile or provided feedback, which was then incorporated into the final narrative. The participants were also able to provide me feedback on the initial analysis and the themes that were developing from the first interview and critical incident reflection. Through member checking, I ensured that the participants were able to validate the conclusions made through the analysis.

Transferability. The term transferability references the idea that findings from a study have the ability to be applied to other research (Cope, 2014). In qualitative inquiry, the researchers aim to provide transferability by providing thick description of the data, which would allow other researchers to “apply all or part of the findings elsewhere” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that the “burden of proof lies less with the original investigator” and more with the researcher who is seeking to apply the findings to other research studies, since the original researcher is not familiar with the future research site. To enhance credibility for this research study, I provided a rich,

thick description of the data and the phenomenon in order to provide transferability. Denzin (1989) describes thick description as “deep, dense, detailed accounts” with thin descriptions “lack[ing] detail, and simply report[ing] the facts” (p. 83). By providing thick description of the research site and also the findings of this phenomenon, future researchers can use this information to understand the findings, “thereby enabling them to compare the instances of the phenomenon described in the research report with those that they have seen emerge in their situations” (Shenton, 2004, p. 70). Future researchers should utilize this study and the thick description to make their own determination as to the transferability of these findings to their own research study.

Confirmability. Confirmability is sought by ensuring that conclusions accurately represent the participants’ responses (Polit & Beck, 2012). Confirmability ensures that my biases do not distort the data analysis and that the data truly represents the experiences of the participants. In order to ensure confirmability I documented in biases that I had into my researcher notes and organized the data based on the way it was presented by the participants. Cope (2014) suggests incorporating rich quotes that represent the emerging theme to aid with confirmability. In addition, Lincoln and Guba (1985) discuss the notion of keeping an audit trail to aid in strengthening confirmability. The audit trail is a “systematically maintained documentation system” that serves the purpose of documenting the process and also allowing a third-party to audit the process of verify the procedures utilized and can confirm the findings of the research. I kept an audit trail in my researcher journal to document how I organized and analyzed the data. This audit trail allowed me to go back and refer to the process I used to derive themes. An audit trail provides a description of how the data was analyzed, which will aid in

ensuring that the emergent themes were derived from the data collected from the participants.

Chapter Summary

Chapter III outlined the methodology of the research study. The study adds to the body of literature on persistence by examining persistence through a phenomenological lens. The phenomenological method allowed me the opportunity to gain an understanding of what the participants experienced and how they experienced persistence as a Latino/a adult student at a community college (Moustakas, 1994). This method provided a glimpse into how participants persisted and how they were successful at the community college. This research can help continue the discussion on persistence, but specifically highlight the importance of examining Latino/a adult students and their persistence.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Chapter IV highlights the heart of this research study, the participants' stories. Chapter IV provides the findings of the research study that represent the lives and lived experiences of eight students who have returned to pursue their education and have persisted in higher education. This phenomenological study was designed to explore the phenomenon of persistence through the experiences of Latino/a adult students at a community college.

As a researcher, I was interested in gaining a better understanding of how these students' lived experiences impacted their persistence in higher education and also have the ability to advance the knowledge base regarding adult learners, in particular Latino/a students attending community colleges. The research provides insight into the phenomenon of persistence for researchers, administrators, community college professionals and other students. The chapter begins with a general overview of the participants (see Table 1), follows with participant profiles that describe each student's story of returning to a community college, and finally presents the themes from the data analysis process.

Table 1: Study Participants

| Pseudonym | Major | Age |
|------------------|-------------------------|------------|
| Steven | Engineering | 33 |
| Daniel | Video Production | 33 |
| Selena | Business Administration | 35 |

Table 1: Continued

| | | |
|-----------------|-----------------------|----|
| David | Philosophy | 32 |
| Sunshine | Psychology | 48 |
| Amanda | Psychology | 27 |
| Graciela | Nursing | 31 |
| Katarina | Environmental Science | 36 |

Participant Profiles

Participants were selected based on the purposive sampling discussed in the previous chapter. For this study Steven, Daniel, Katarina, Amanda, Selena, Sunshine, David and Graciela (all pseudonyms) served as participants. The participants range in age from 27 years of age to 48 years of age with three males and five females. All the participants had experiences with post-secondary education that varied from technical school to four-year universities prior to enrolling at the community college. Their stories bring light to the experiences that they have encountered as they persist through their higher education journey.

Steven

Steven is a 33-year-old male student who started college at the age of 31. After high school, Steven attended a technical automotive school, upon completion he joined the military. Steven served five years in the military and separated from the military to return to civilian life. After separating from the military, he worked in the automotive industry for a few years until he made the decision to return to school and enroll at the local community college and take courses toward an engineering degree.

Steven's decision to attend college stemmed from a declining interest in the automotive industry and the ability to pay for his college expenses thru his veteran's benefits. Steven discussed his concern with continuing in this field and plateauing in his earning potential and facing challenges in this field as he advanced in age. Steven's return to college would allow him to pursue a field with higher earning potential and also a field that would be less physical than his current job in the automotive industry. Having the possibility to pursue a degree that would lead to a higher paying job would allow him to provide a better life for his family. Initially Steven worked part-time and attended school on a part-time basis, but a change in his work situation allowed for his school situation to change, as well.

He currently works full time at a job in the automotive industry, which is flexible and allows him to be enrolled full-time. Steven is also a husband and father to four children. He has three children that reside with him and his spouse and one child that lives in another city, which requires him to travel to spend time with his child. Steven shared that it is a challenge to manage school, home and work life. He shared that his commitments outside of the classroom tend to take up much of his free time and he struggles to fulfill all his obligations.

Daniel

Daniel is a 33-year-old male student who is a veteran and started at this community college in 2016. Daniel currently works full-time and is a part-time student who is taking courses to aid in his transfer to a university. Daniel received an associate degree in Video Production and is focused on pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Communication at the university.

Daniel had previously attempted college after his military service, but had a difficult time with the transition from military to civilian life. He attempted two semesters at the community college, but eventually stopped out. He also attended a trade school and completed a certification in welding and began working in this field. Daniel quickly realized that he did not want to continue in this field, due to the working conditions, and began to explore other options. He explored returning to school to pursue a degree in a different field.

Daniel's main reason to return to school was financial. Daniel was a veteran and therefore would receive education benefits to fund his return to college. When he initially started, he was working part-time at the institution and enrolled as a full-time student. He felt that it made his transition easier to work at the institution and take classes. Daniel shared that he is motivated because he has a passion for this field and continues to be challenged in his academics because he finds interest in his field.

Selena

Selena is a 35-year-old female who started college, at this institution, at the age of 33 on a part-time basis. Selena did not attend high school and completed her General Education Diploma (GED) when she was 21 years of age. Selena currently is employed full time, is a mother to three children and has a partner. Selena considers herself a single mother when it comes to caring for her children, as her partner is often out of town on business. However, Selena shared that her children are very independent and help her with some of the household chores. Her schedule outside of school is very full with her children's homework, extra-curricular activities and her own work schedule.

She started her educational career at a technical school, but felt that the technical

school did not provide her a real college experience. She did complete a certificate program, but shared her regret in taking that route and her frustration in the amount of debt that she acquired from her time at the technical school. However, her success at the technical school provided her with an eye-opening experience and she came to the realization that if she could be successful at a technical school, she had the capability of doing well at a community college.

In addition to her experience at a technical school, Selena was also driven to return to school in order to be an example for her children, specifically to her oldest child who is also taking college courses through a dual enrollment program. Selena wants to be an example to her children and show them that if she can achieve her academic goals so can they. She also wants them to see that she has her education and is able to support them financially. Selena is 24 credit hours away from completing her Associate's degree and will then transfer to a university to complete her Bachelor's degree in Business.

David

David is a 32-year-old male who is a Liberal Arts major and started school at the age of 30 years old. David is currently working a full time job and also holds a part time job on his days off. He normally works between 50-60 hours a week and attends school on a part-time basis. David completed an Associate's degree in 2018 and is currently taking additional courses in order to transfer to a university.

David's family encouraged him to start college right after high school. In his family college was the next step after high school and it was mandatory to attend college for him and his siblings. He decided to start college at a large public institution to please his family, but did not find the point in attending since he was unsure of his career

interests. David attempted college twice, dropping out both times because he had not found his interest. After working a full time job for ten years, David found that he was ready to return to college because he was not happy in the job he was currently in. He originally began to look for other employment opportunities, but found that employers were looking for prospective employees who had a degree. He decided that in order to find a better job, he would need to go back to school, but also was focused on finding a field that he had interest in.

Upon returning to college, David shared that he was feeling the same frustrations because he was still unsure of his interests. It was not until taking a mandatory introduction to philosophy course that David found his passion for education. He found that he enjoyed learning and this course began to push him to research outside of the classroom and fully embrace the learning process. Through this course, he realized that he had an interest in how people formulate ideas and decided to pursue an Associate's degree in philosophy with a future goal of pursuing a Bachelor's degree in philosophy.

Sunshine

Sunshine is 48 years old and started school around 2009 to pursue an Associate's degree. She spent over 20 years in the military and decided to return to school after her career. She currently is taking part-time courses and works full-time, but received an Associate's degree and is completing additional courses for transfer. She currently is working full time, is single and has various volunteer commitments that fill her schedule.

Sunshine attempted college after high school because that was the expectation in her household; however, she expressed a lack of confidence in her English skills and felt that this prevented her from taking college seriously. Sunshine was also working full

time, so school was not a priority for her. She was focused on work and ultimately stopped out of school to focus on her career. After a challenging personal situation, she decided to join the military and it was in the military that she was exposed to the importance of a college education.

When Sunshine returned to college she was ready to learn and wanted to complete her Associate's degree. She was working full-time and taking classes part-time in the evenings, but eventually moved to a full-time student status. She shared that she was motivated to continue attending because people in her life either were attending school or had a degree. Sunshine mentioned that being around individuals with degrees or pursuing degrees motivated her. In addition, she also had tuition assistance from the military, so that financial assistance aided in her return to school and in her completion. Sunshine also joined a psychology student organization that she believes also aided in her success at the institution.

Amanda

Amanda is a 27-year-old college student who returned to school in 2014. She had previously attended a community college right after high school for one semester, but did not complete any courses during her time there. Amanda is a full time student who is majoring in psychology and hopes to have the ability to help people in the future. Amanda's household includes her father and her two younger siblings. Amanda is the main caregiver for her two siblings and has raised her siblings since they were young. She mentioned that her schedule is pretty full because her role in the household is equivalent to a mother and she is charged with all household duties and caring for her two siblings.

Amanda started her college education right after high school, however she only attended one semester and shared that she was not ready to attend college straight out of high school. She failed out of college that semester and decided to take a year off to focus on herself and finding her path. After the year she decided to attend a cosmetology school to pursue training in the field. Amanda completed her hours and was certified as a cosmetologist. Amanda began looking for a job in the field, but found a job as security guard for a company. After her time in this job, she realized that she did not want to pursue cosmetology or continue in her current job. Amanda found herself in a job she perceived had no future and was also experiencing a challenging personal situation where she found herself dealing with depression and feeling stuck in her situation. After pulling herself out of this situation, she thought that education was a way to pursue her happiness.

Amanda is the first one in her family to graduate from high school with her high school diploma and is the first one in her family to pursue a degree. She sees her success in college as an important milestone for her family and sees her education as an opportunity to break the cycle of having no college graduates in her family. She also wants to serve as an example for her younger siblings and hopes that her journey will motivate them to pursue a degree.

Graciela

Graciela is a 31-year-old female who started college 4 years ago. Graciela is currently employed full-time as a home health aide worker and works about 40 hours a week. She is a part-time student and is taking online courses since it allows her flexibility with her work schedule. Graciela moved from one city to another in order to

pursue upward mobility. Graciela is the child of immigrants and is the first in her family to attend college.

Graciela began her academic career at a large, non-profit, four-year institution and attended for one semester. She was unable to continue attending due to financial constraints. Although Graciela did not continue attending, she shared that she has outstanding debt with that particular school and is still paying her loans. She decided to return to school because achieving a degree has always been her goal and she knew she would return to school, but needed to address some issues before she pursued her degree. Graciela made a move from one city to another and believes that this move helped her leave a challenging home situation and allowed her to focus on her goal of attending college.

Graciela is pursuing an Associate's degree in community health and hopes to continue her education by pursuing a nursing degree in order to continue her commitment to helping others. Graciela is motivated to continue her education and is encouraged by her ability to break the cycle of poverty. She looks forward to being an example for her three nephews and also is motivated to continue to her education so she can have a steady job and have the ability to support her family financially.

Katarina

Katarina is a 36-year-old female student who started at the institution in 2017. She is married and currently is a full-time student pursuing a degree in Water Resource Management. Katarina completed an Associate degree and transferred to a university to complete a Bachelor's degree in Arts with a certification in Teaching. She was successful in completing her degree, but felt that she simply completed without really

finding her area of interest. Katarina also shared that her experience as an undergraduate was negative and felt that her whole experience was focused on how difficult her time would be after college.

Katarina returned to school after an unsuccessful attempt at teaching in an area school district and an attempt at starting a small business. She worked for the school district as a substitute teacher and her experience in the school system changed her mind about the field. She left the school district to pursue an entrepreneurial endeavor as a small business owner. Katarina started her business, however this venture was unsuccessful and she contemplated returning to school. Her return to school is an opportunity to find her passion and also provide for her family and give back to her community.

She mentioned that she feels pressure to go to school because she completed a degree, but is not working in the field. Her husband has been financially supporting the household and she feels pressure to complete her degree and begin her career in the field. In addition, she also feels challenged in her studies and finds that this has helped continue to motivate her through the program. Katarina finds that once she completes this degree she will have a higher quality of life and will have the ability of financially contributing to the household. In her program she feels valued and appreciated in the classroom, which she feels contributes for her passion to continue in this field. Her goal is to complete her Associate of Applied Science and pursue a career in water resource management.

Emergent Themes

The following themes emerged from the data analysis:

- The past will not define my future
- Moving into higher education
- Finding my place in higher education
- Aiming for a better life
- What matters to me
- Making connections
- Looking into a mirror

Each of these themes also has subthemes, which are presented along with supporting quotes from the participants.

The Past will not Define my Future

Participants in the study were of varying ages and had diverse backgrounds, but shared similar positive and negative experiences when it came to returning to college. Although they returned to college at different times in their lives, most of the participants shared in their experiences with regard to previous post-secondary experience, limited family support, personal awareness and realization of their need to return to college, and self-doubt upon their return. The following emerging subthemes highlight the shared experiences of the participants.

Previous college experience. All the participants had previous experiences in post-secondary education that ranged from technical school to a few semesters at a university. Each participant attempted college or attended technical school prior to starting their current enrollment at the community college. Their previous experiences with higher education provided insight as to why their commitment to their education is different the second time around. Participants shared their challenging experiences, but used these events as learning opportunities that have helped drive them to be successful. I found it important to include these shared experiences because they provide a lived experience that could serve as a motivator for students. Amanda shared:

I remember taking a Composition I course. There was twelve-page research essay that required many different things. I cannot lie, this intimidated me greatly. I was intimidated by my professor and felt that my questions were dumb and not necessary to ask. The more I read the outline the more I over thought and the more confused I made myself. I went home that day feeling defeated. I was beating myself up too much over this situation and let that defeat consume me. I allowed that one feeling from that class to carry on to my other classes and I started to believe that maybe I wasn't cut out for college.

Amanda's initial college experience was negative and reinforced her thoughts that she did not belong in college. This created self-doubt in her academic abilities, which resulted in her stopping out of college. "I only lasted there (another community college) for like a semester, because I felt like I was real young, like I was real fresh out of high school." She shared that she felt pressured to go to college, even though she was not ready, which resulted in her poor performance. She lacked clarity in her educational path and felt like she was wasting her time in college.

Most of the participants shared that stopping-out of college was also due to not being interested and mentally not being in a place where they were ready to learn. Sunshine shared a similar experience and started college right after high school, but was not successful after her first semester. "I attempted to go to community college, but I never really liked school, so I pretty much wasted my time taking classes where I wouldn't have to write papers. School wasn't a priority for me." In Sunshine's experience she was not in the right time or place in her life to begin her education. She decided to go to school right after high school because that was the next step, but did not

have interest in college. Before long, Sunshine decided to leave college and begin working a full-time job. At that time her focus was not on pursuing her degree, but was focused on earning money and eventually decided to join the military.

Daniel was 22 years old when he first attempted college. He also felt that the first time he attended the community college, he was not invested in his education. “I took some classes, and again, it was just to make money, but I didn’t do well in them. I don’t think I was mentally ready. I wasn’t ready to be around a bunch of kids that had no responsibility.” In Daniel’s case he too attempted college, but felt that he was not ready to embark on this journey. As an adult student, he felt that he was not mentally ready to be in a space with other students who were younger than he was. The initial experience with higher education was a defining moment for the participants. In their previous higher education experiences, the participants were not typically in a place or time to truly engage in higher education.

Some of the participants had negative experiences in higher education that led them to pursue other ventures in the workforce. However, their initial failed attempt at college did not stop them from returning to college later on. As returning adults, now they felt that they were in a place where they were ready to learn and ready to embark on this journey. Their previous college experience aided them in their successful return to college because they were able to learn from their experience and then develop ways to succeed in their studies. Their shared experience in previously attending college highlights the importance of being ready for college. Most of the participants discussed that their success in college this time around was because they were more focused and ready to learn. The participants were not successful in their initial college attempt

because they were not ready for school, but this did not deter them from trying it again later on in life. They were able to take a negative life experience and use this to help motivate them toward success the second time around.

Limited family support/encouragement for participation in higher education.

Limited family support was one of the subthemes that I developed from the data. Several participants discussed their family background in terms of the limited positive influence their parents had on their educational pathway. The similarities in family background are important to acknowledge as a subtheme due to the role that it plays in the development of the participants and their resiliency in the academic environment. Family background can be an influencing factor for individuals and in this study aided in framing the participant's view of education. However, their family background also helped to motivate them as adults to pursue their education. As Steven shared, "we were never told by our parents, "You need to go to college," that wasn't part of the culture where I grew up, for sure. I never saw it as a necessity to go to college." Likewise for Selena, her experience was also limited in her exposure to higher education:

I've never had the greatest background, or like the motivation to get an education.

Dropping out of ninth grade, my parents weren't really, "hey school's

important"...their attention to education wasn't high.

These participants shared that their families did not encourage education and they were limited in their exposure of higher education. Due to their family background, a number of the participants were focused on getting a job rather than on their education. Some of the same participants shared that there was an expectation to provide financial support to the family in order to aid them in their everyday survival.

Being the first generation to attend college was also a related sub-theme for my participants. For the most part, the participants are first generation college students who were not encouraged to attend college. Research on first-generation college students indicates that these students tend to have a difficult time transitioning to college when compared to their peers (Terenzini, Redon, Upcraft, Millar, Allison, Gregg & Jalomo, 1994). Terenzini et al. (1994) found that not only do first-generation students experience all the anxieties that other college students face, but they also face cultural, social and academic transitions. Amanda shared:

I am the first generation to be born in America, so nobody in my family has graduated from high school. Everybody else in my family didn't graduate high school, so I'm pretty much the first one that actually graduated high school... and then go to college.

For Amanda, not only is she the first to attend college, but is also the first to graduate from high school. Her experience was similar to others in that she had a family background that was limited in exposure and importance of education. Likewise, Graciela shared her experience of being the first-generation in college and also her need to work, which prevented her from attending college:

I'm also the first one to attempt college or go to school past high school. I had a pretty poor upbringing. I'm a first-generation immigrant, like a child of a first-generation immigrant...and started working when I was 16 to help my family. I think a lot of these kind of families, Latino families, children, the faster you can start working to help bring in money, and that gets in the way of college.

In addition to being a *first-generation* student, working early in life was also a

part of their family background for some participants. They were encouraged to work and contribute to the family unit rather than attend school. Selena also shared in the experience of working early on, she stated, “When I was younger, no, there was no education. I worked when I was like 13, 14 years old at an actual Mexican restaurant washing dishes just to kind of get our own stuff and kind of support my mom at the same time.” Tseng (2004) found that students from different cultural backgrounds may be required to contribute to the family, which may conflict with college responsibilities. Several of the participants shared in their experience of being focused on contributing to their household rather than pursuing college early in life. Earlier in life, these students felt that college was not an option for them because they needed to help support their family and financially provide to their family unit.

Personal awareness “The aha moment.” Making the decision to return to college can be a difficult decision for an adult student who heads a family and is working to support their family. There are many factors that an individual considers before embarking on this journey. The participants spoke of their thought process as they determined whether to return to college. For most of the participants in the study, there was a shared experience of a more acute personal awareness of their current situation and a moment of realization that returning to school was the answer. Nearly all of the participants shared that they had a moment when they realized that it was the right time to return to college. There seemed to be a change in their life situations, which allowed them time to reflect and make the decision to return.

For Sunshine, her employment situation changed and she realized she wanted to return to school. Sunshine stated:

The company that I was working for lost a contract, it was easy to quit work. I just walked away from the company, so that was perfect – it was a sign almost. Okay, go to school. It was one of those jobs where you can see yourself for the next ten years and you really didn't do anything with your life, so that is why I decided to get my associates.

For Amanda, self-reflection allowed her to analyze her life and make decisions based on her current life situation.

I was at a real low and I was working [a] security job and I just felt like I was stuck. I was like what comes after this? Am I going to be here five years still working this security job? Is this what I want five years from now or even two years from now, even a half-a-year from now? I also had a crappy boyfriend, so I ended up leaving my boyfriend. I went back home to my dad's. I would stay with my boyfriend every now and then, but I was like, "No I'm going to stay at home." Home is where I need to be despite you know them being not so nice to me or whatever. I was like I can put up with my dad's rude remarks. I can put up with trying to take the kids to school, but school is my, I guess my window to break free from the cycle that my family's stuck in, you know?

Amanda's moment of self-awareness not only occurred in her job, but it also allowed her to reflect on her life as a whole. Returning to school was a way to break out of her situation. Having that moment to reflect, allowed her to reevaluate her current situation.

Selena also discussed the moment that she realized that school was what she needed to reset her life.

I was feeling stuck, really stuck because I didn't want to just depend on my husband or my partner to finance everything for my kids. They [My children] needed to pay for this and that at school and the pay that I was getting was not enough, it was barely above minimum. So that's when I take a look around, kind of like a movie. [My boss] has degrees on the wall and still getting degrees and I was like, I want that. You look around you in that chair in your cubicle and I was like yeah – so I just got up and told the owner [that I was leaving my job]. She was kind of sad, but I told her I need this. I ran to the college and was like okay what do I got to do.

In Selena's experience she was having challenges with her finances and was ready to embark on her college journey. She was in a place where she felt like she was stuck in her job and in her life and was ready to change up her life. Prior to her realization, she had thought about school, but was not motivated to enroll. It was this particular moment that triggered her to quit her job and take the steps to start the admissions process at the community college.

For Steven his moment came from evaluating his current situation and realizing that his interest in his chosen career field was not where it was.

I don't want to work on cars because I don't enjoy it anymore and it doesn't pay good. There is so much you've got to know to really make \$65,000, which is okay money. You have to know everything and really work fast, which is fine, but you have to know a lot. I don't want to do that in my thirties, eventually you get burned out, [so] I need to hurry up and actually go to college.

Steven's realization of returning to school came after assessing his current job situation.

He came to the realization that he did not enjoy his current profession and did not see himself in this field in the future. He found that working in this field would not provide him the financial stability that he was looking for.

Having a moment of realization that returning to school was necessary was impactful for the participants. Assessing their current situation, participants felt like they were stuck in their jobs or lives. They shared in an experience where they felt that they were ready to change their current situation and all felt that school would help them achieve their goals. This moment of realization was a motivator for the participants because they presumed returning to school would aid them in changing their life situation. This moment in their lives continues to motivate them to persist at the community college because they do not want to go back to this moment in their lives. Their “aha” moment provides them with the motivation to continue moving forward, so they do not have to return to their past. That moment of realization provided a future, whether that meant finding a better job, improving their financial situation and finding purpose in life.

Self-doubt in college. Upon returning to college, all of the participants experienced some self-doubt in actually being successful in college. After making the decision, all the participants felt scared and overwhelmed with this transition. Schlossberg’s (1989) theory of marginality and mattering or not fitting in, helps to explain the feelings that the students were experiencing. The individuals felt they did not fit in the environment and faced doubt in their academic abilities, personal choices and the mere fact of returning to this environment. Reflecting on her initial start of college, Katarina shared:

The first week I questioned whether or not I should continue. This was because the subject matter was vastly different than the subjects I had studied before. I questioned whether or not I could or should continue. I experienced doubts about whether or not this would lead to a career that I would be happy with.

For Katarina, embarking on her college venture caused doubt in herself as a student and also doubt in her choice of career. She did not feel confident and was questioning her decision in returning. For Daniel, he experienced doubt in returning to the academic setting and his abilities to be successful.

I think the most difficult part of my first semester was returning to an academic setting. I tried school after separat[ing] from the military, but I wasn't successful. Making the decision to start taking classes again was a way of putting myself in a sink or swim mentality. I was either going to fall back into my old bad habits or was going to try hard, stay focused and succeed.

Daniel had previously experienced failure in academia and experienced doubt in his abilities. After his previous failed attempt at college, Daniel was concerned with his performance this time around. He questioned his ability, but made the decision to take on the challenge and used the opportunity to find out if he could be successful.

David also questioned his ability to perform academically and was concerned with being an older student at a predominantly traditional-aged campus.

I was very nervous about being in school. I was uncertain with being around younger people, unsure about how to learn again, and unsure if I could remember what I previously learned in college. I remember I had massive anxiety.

His experiences as an adult student created a challenging situation for him. David's

transition into college created some self-doubt, but his ability to overcome them aided in his development of resiliency, which motivated him to continue from semester to semester. As he states, “after the first week I realized it was a lot easier for me – the concepts which I always had problems with seemed to click faster. Everything seemed to click. I knew if I could do this myself then I could do anything.”

As the researcher, I felt it was important to include both positive and negative experiences because it tells the complete story of the participants. It allows the narrative to include challenging experiences that have helped shape each individual student and have contributed to their persistence at the community college. Negative experiences reported by some of the participants have helped in developing who they are and reinforced their ability to persist at the community college.

Moving into Higher Education

All of the participants experienced challenging situations, but were able to make the successful transition into higher education. They shared their successes and how they were able to continue to persist after initial return to higher education. Their initial success and the strategies that they developed aided in their persistence at the community college.

Success early in semester. Success in the first semester was a shared experience that motivated students to persist. They found that being successful in that first semester helped in affirming their return to college. All of the participants discussed that they felt if they could complete the first semester, they could persist. They were encouraged by the fact that they were successful and that pushed them to the next semester. Steven said:

I think the first couple semesters being easy made it easy to come back. I think if I

would have jumped into a hard math class I would probably – I don't think I would have come back. That was good. It was motivating. Having the first semester or two semesters being easy kind of made it sound like, "Oh yeah, it's not that bad as I think.

Daniel shared a similar experience in having success in his first semester and how that affected his state of mind.

I did really well that summer. I had an English class I think, and something else. I did really well and I was like, "You know what? I think this is the time I'm like I'm ready to do everything." Like, "Let's get it done." I completed that semester and I figured I can do this.

Daniel's previous college experience was not a very positive one. He had reservations that stemmed from his previous negative experience in college, so having success early on really motivated him to continue on to the next semester. Sunshine shared a similar experience with her English class.

During my first semester I only took one class, Introductory English, because it was my first time going back to college and I was working full time. It had been about 15 years since the last time I was in school. I always felt that I was not good at writing papers, so I thought that I may not do too well in the class. I was lucky to have a good teacher...and ended up with an A in the class.

Sunshine's situation also reflected her initial self-doubt in her abilities, but she was able to build up her confidence. She felt that if she could be successful in a course that was a challenge for her, she would be able to do well in any of her courses.

Graciela's confidence also was reinforced after her first semester. She stated:

It helped to take that first [semester] without loading up. I think it builds on itself every semester that I can finish, that I can complete, that I get a good grade. It builds on the confidence, like this is possible.

She discussed the idea of her academic journey building on the success of that first semester. As with other participants, success in the first semester was critical and provided the foundation to a successful academic career. They felt that if they could complete that semester, they had the ability to continue. Selena shared, “if I can make an A in that class, to me English, it was the worst. It’s like to get that A, I can’t stop. I’ve got to just keep doing it and keep doing it.” This motivation to continue aided in carrying the participants through to the subsequent semester.

Learning strategies. Having success early on was a critical piece to the narrative of persistence and helped launch the students into a mindset of motivation. In addition, the participants shared their experiences with developing learning strategies that aided in their continued success. Participants discussed the strategies that they developed to aid them in their courses. Katarina stated:

I would try to do things in a smarter way, so I could save time, study better, or find resources that would help me. I researched for these resources online. I mostly looked for videos on YouTube or articles that would simplify complicated content that I had difficulty understanding. I also utilized the math and science labs. Because I had problem solved the first semester, I just was working on perfecting the systems I had already put in place.

Her first semester she experienced some challenges, but was able to overcome and further refine her learning strategies to help her continue her success from semester to semester.

In David's return to college, he found ways that helped him understand material that he previously found daunting.

I always had problems with quadratic equations, but when we covered them everything seemed to click. I just applied math into a story format and everything made sense. Instead of trying to learn and recite what the professor was saying I needed to change the idea into a concept I understood, and it would click. Then by taking what I was learning in each different class, I saw how everything was connected. If I could write a paper explaining the process, then it would reinforce what I was trying to do. Along with understanding I could practice interpreting it to other people by having them read my story, which helped later in my writing class. I realized I did better teaching myself and having someone to run ideas with to either correct misinterpretations or reinforce other ways of seeing a problem.

In David's case, he previously had a challenge with some of his classes, but in his return to college found a learning strategy that helped him understand the concepts in his math course. David's prior college experience combined with his life experience allowed him to develop a learning strategy that would work for him.

One of the learning strategies that Steven developed was utilizing his time a little better. I had a 4.0 GPA in all of my classes and I did not struggle in any class because I spent any spare time I had studying. I felt very confident and knew my success would reflect the amount of time I put in. Just putting in the time and the hard work. If I just make a time of – on Saturdays four hours, Sundays six hours, during the week at least an hour every day, there's no way to not learn it.

In Steven's case he was really focused on trying to find any available time he had and focused on utilizing that time. Time management was something that Steven developed when he returned to college; he found that he needed to spend more time studying concepts. He refined his time management skills upon his return to school and realized that in order to be successful in his major, he needed to invest the time.

Developing learning strategies aided the participants in their academic success. Several of the participants had to find ways to take the content and make sense of the information. In their return to higher education, participants typically were able to develop learning strategies that fit their learning styles. They were able to utilize their previous higher education experiences and build on those experiences to further develop strategies to aid them in their learning. Whether it was streamlining their learning experience or coming to the realization that they needed to commit more time to their studies, these strategies helped them continue on within that semester and ultimately persist.

Ready to learn. All of the participants had previous experiences with post-secondary education and most of them shared the notion of not being ready at that time. Being ready to learn was a sub-theme that resonated with the participants. Sunshine shared, "I actually wanted to learn. I was interested in learning and was ready to learn, so that is the difference. I want to be here and I am motivated." In Sunshine's experience she was in a place where she was ready to learn and wanted to be in college. This motivated her to persist and continue from semester to semester. Katarina was also in a place where she was ready to learn in a new field. She shared, "I enjoy being in class and I am really interested in the things that I am learning here, [in my previous experience] I

thought I would be interested, but I wasn't so I didn't focus. Here I go into class and have a plan I am in a place to learn." David had a similar perspective:

I want to do more and I want to know more. I want to learn new things and try new things. Now it's something that I want to do and something that I'm passionate about, whereas before it was, you're supposed to go to college and get a degree and get a good job.

David was also in a place where he was ready to attempt college again and was ready to learn. In his return to college he found his passion, which allowed him to focus and be in a place where he was ready to be in the college environment. Daniel shared his experience in being ready to learn new things. "I was really focused on learning new programs, learning new things, learning different things that I hadn't learned before. It was hard, but it was doable. When I finished it I was like, okay, let's see what else happens." Daniel's interest in his field helped him be successful in his classes. For most of the participants, the change in their mindset allowed them to fully engage in the higher education experience and be successful in their courses. Being in a place where they were ready to learn, made a difference in their ability to persist.

Finding my Place in Higher Education

For adult students, returning to college after a stop-out can be a challenging experience. Adult students can find themselves in academic environments that are mostly comprised of traditional-aged students, which may be uncomfortable for adult students. The participants in the study felt that finding their place in the academic environment aided them in persisting.

Sense of belonging. Several participants discussed their sense of belonging and

how this impacted their persistence. Daniel shared how he felt like he had a sense of belonging to his program.

I created my own comfort zone. You're seeing the same people every day in the same little space, so you definitely get this sense of like, I can go up there and I could sit in somebody's room or sit in the lab and have a conversation with somebody else that's there, an instructor or one of the lab techs.

Daniel shared his experience on campus and how he felt comfortable and felt like he belonged on campus within his program. He felt that he had access to whatever he needed and was able to connect with other students in his program. He was connected to the campus, specifically through his program.

David's experience of belonging came from his experiences in the classroom with peers and faculty:

Everybody is helpful and everybody wants you to pass. It was a sense of everybody was together in this. I remember that I was nervous in my first class because I'm older. Once I got on the campus everyone is like oh, you're getting a degree? Cool. When you get in class, you realize she has a 9-5 job too or she's a mom or she's just starting college but she's nervous about what to do with herself. And you start talking about everything and everyone starts networking and trying to figure it out.

His sense of belonging came from his interactions in the classroom. As David mentioned, he was nervous about being an older student on campus; however, his experience with other students in the classroom allowed him to feel a sense of belonging because he was not the only adult student. There were other students within his

classroom that were like him. This experience provided him with validation that he belonged in this environment.

Sunshine's sense of belonging came from her experience in joining a club that focused on her major. She was pursuing a degree in psychology and joined the psychology club. In her experience, her interactions within the club connected her to the campus and developed her sense of belonging. She shared that prior to joining, "I was just coming and going. I belonged to the class, but not necessarily to the school." After joining the club she developed a sense of belonging. "Once I joined the psychology club, I was doing everything with them. I was hooked." Sunshine was able to make a connection once she joined the club and participated in events, she credited these interactions with her success, she said, "It just makes you feel more comfortable, maybe like part of the group by being in that club. It made me realize that I can actually be a psychologist. I wanted to do well." Experiences in the classroom or outside of the classroom allowed students to feel like they were a part of the campus experience and aided in reinforcing their connection to the campus and to their success. In Donaldson and Graham's (1999) model of college outcomes, they highlighted the connecting classroom as the cornerstone for the non-traditional student engagement experience. The findings from the study reinforce that for the Latino/a adult student, this was also the case.

Finding my way. Several of the participants discussed their challenges with navigating the academic environment, but as returning adults were determined to find a way. In Selena's experience, she was confronted with multiple obstacles when returning to college, but she was determined to find a way to enroll in higher education. She

discussed her challenges here:

When I registered for school I didn't have the counselors or advisors because I didn't know there was that type of help. I just researched a lot and went online and did the financial aid and paid whatever I had to pay and got in. I took a flex II summer and just said I'm not going to let nobody tell me no.

Selena was resilient and was focused on getting into school, she mentioned that she experienced numerous roadblocks upon her return, but was willing to do whatever she needed to do to get in to school.

Katarina also had a difficult time navigating her entrance into higher education, but was committed to overcoming the challenge because she was ready to return.

It was hard for me to get back in. I think when I went to [school] out of high school, my last name was different, when I came back, it was my married last name. I had a hard time getting in, I filled out the application to get in. They [staff] were having a hard time with getting that information and the old financial aid information. I don't know what was going on, but I was having issues and kept having to call.

Katarina also experienced a challenging admissions process, but her determination kept her focused on completing her process, so she could begin her semester. Steven also shared his frustrations with the initial admissions process. He shared,

the hardest thing, I think was getting started with school, like the registration.

You're trying to navigate through stuff, I had trouble setting up my schedule the first semester. I just felt like it was a lot of hassle. I couldn't figure stuff out, I came to the school like three times.

Steven shared in a similar experience, but was committed to starting his education so pushed through the challenges. Navigating the academic environment was a challenge for the participants, but they were able to persist. Some of the participants attributed their ability to overcome these obstacles to their life experiences and their ability to overcome other challenges in their lives.

Although most of the participants experienced administrative challenges at the onset of their educational journey, they were able to persist and enroll for their initial semester. They were later able to utilize their skill set to aid them in navigating the academic environment. Participants shared their ability to understand how to utilize resources to aid them in pursuit of their education.

Affirmation of academic abilities. In addition to navigating the academic environment, participants also shared how feeling affirmed by their professor helped motivate them to continue that semester and persist. The participants shared that the affirmation of their abilities created a connection to the classroom. Participants displayed self-doubt upon their return to college and questioned their abilities in this new academic environment. Receiving affirmation from their professors was imperative to their success. Most of the participants felt that receiving feedback from their professors affirmed their learning and their decision to be in college. Amanda shared her experience with receiving constructive criticism on assignments from her professors.

They were really good with feedback. So when I would write an essay this professor was like writing all over my essay like little notes and "Oh expand on this idea." He would write these really nice things at the end like, "Oh wow you're a great writer, you need to keep doing what you are doing" Like it was them

reinforcing that good feeling. When I first started getting those professors to actually give me really good feedback on my essays and the research papers and stuff that motivation is what really pushed me.

For Amanda, receiving positive affirmation from her professors on her academic work validated her return to college. After her first attempt at college, she was having doubts about her ability to be successful and her experiences with faculty affirmed her academic abilities. “When I had somebody who I feel is very educated, they're authority, they're high and they compliment my work I was like, "Wow," like you know that's acknowledgement that I've been craving and that's acknowledgment that pushed me forward, because I had somebody else believe in me.” The positive feedback that she received from her professors helped affirm her academic abilities and pushed her to persist to the next semester.

Selena shared in her experience of the positive affirmation she received from one of her faculty members. These interactions provided her with confidence and the motivation to continue with her classes.

She pulled me to the side one day after class and she was like, you know, we kind of talked about our backgrounds and where we came from. She said, “The way that you explain things and your experiences and stuff, you can be – you can really focus on maybe teaching or maybe going this route or kind of continuing your education. And I thought, I've never been told that because I've never been the brightest or I don't think that I'm like the smartest. I mean more street smart but coming to education it was like I didn't really think that I was the smartest or understood a lot of things. And she was like no, you are.

This positive affirmation shifted Selena's confidence in her abilities. Through this interaction Selena became aware of some of her strengths and used this positive affirmation to reinforce her commitment to her education. For Selena, having someone who believed in and recognized her abilities in the classroom was an experience that helped motivate her to persist.

David also received positive affirmation from his faculty and described how his professor helped guide him with regard to career options.

My speech teacher was like you seem to be really good at talking about research or researching so maybe you should consider this kind of job. Here let me show you what they do. And they would take the extra time to help you figure out where you're going or what you're doing.

For David the affirmation he received from his professor helped in expanding his thoughts on career options. He was able to see beyond the present and look to other possibilities available to him.

Positive affirmation helped in transforming the participants' perceptions of themselves and aided in building confidence to be able to see beyond that class. Most of the participants shared in receiving positive affirmation related to the quality of their work, their academic abilities and on future career goals. The participants realized that there were individuals that believed in their abilities to be something beyond what they saw in their present. These interactions were impactful and provided the participants with a positive outlook for their future. These experiences motivated the participants to be successful in their courses, but also motivated students to persist.

Aiming for a Better Life

Aiming for a better life was a theme that quickly emerged from the data elements. Most of the participants shared experiences of growing up in low-income households and experienced a difficult upbringing. These shared experiences helped motivate them to want better things for themselves and also for their families. The students were at a place where they were ready to make changes in their own lives and in turn affect the lives of others. They felt that it was their turn to focus on themselves, but through this journey would be able to positively motivate their families. The participants discussed their need to break the cycle of poverty, break the cycle of no college education and create a better life for themselves and their families.

My past is my motivation. Previous life experiences were motivating factors for students. Most of the participants shared in similar life experiences that helped drive them to higher education. The participants came from very humble backgrounds and used their lived experience to motivate them to be successful in school, in order to be successful in life. For Graciela she reflected on her past and related it to her motivation to continue in school.

I just don't want to be poor anymore. It was more, growing up that way I just didn't want that for my future. I didn't want to continually be stuck in the cycle. I just knew that the only way to be out of that would be school. I think I always knew that. It would mean a lot to me to have a degree. It would mean a lot to me to just not be poor anymore.

In Graciela's experience, she grew up in a household that experienced poverty and reflected on her experience to break the cycle of poverty. Attending college was her way

of coming into a better life and having better opportunities.

For Steven, he reflected on his previous life experience and how it motivates him everyday to do better and be better in his studies. He shared:

In my 20s I was in the military, I think that definitely made me a hard worker. I don't mind staying up all night at all because I've had to stay up in way worse places. That's the thing that I think has helped me. I don't think I would have finished school had I started straight out of high school. I felt like I was somebody that would not get stuff done, but then I was also young. I didn't really care about getting an education, so I know I wouldn't have done it. School right now is hard, but this is nothing compared to not going home at night.

Steven served time in the military and used that experience to help motivate himself to be better. He felt that his experience in the military was challenging, but uses that experience to remind him of the opportunities that he has before him and it drives him to do well in his courses. He also reflected on his childhood and how he utilizes his lived experience to reinforce education in his own children.

My dad was first generation, so he didn't really care about school. He wanted me to be like a worker and just get a job. So we would come home [from school] and change [our clothes] and he wouldn't even care about school. He was a mechanic and he would always have work lined up, so he would have me and my brothers doing work until dark. Like if I would have known, I would have gone and got my masters like at 22 or 23 [years of age]. I always tell my kids, if they don't go to college then I'm going to kick them out and I'm serious with them.

Steven now understands the value of an education and that having an education provides

different opportunities. He feels that if his father had steered him in a different direction, he could have already accomplished his goal. However, he draws on this experience to motivate himself as an adult student and utilizes his experience in his own parenting. Reflecting on his previous experiences, he wants to be able to instill in his children what he did not receive from his own parents, the importance of an education.

Amanda also utilized her previous life experience to help motivate her to continue in her studies. Amanda shared:

A lot of people in my family, they had problems with abusing medications, drugs, partying, it's just not the best influences around me. My thought was, I'm not going to allow myself to be a victim of my environment. I don't think I am in a good environment. It's literally that motivation, it's reminding you to fight the negative thoughts and keep pushing forward despite whatever environment that you might be in.

Amanda shared her family situation and utilized it to help her push for something better, she did not want her past to define her and felt that through education should could achieve a better life. Her past experiences, though, aided in keeping her focused on her studies.

Envisioning my future. For most of the students in the study, their education was the start of creating a better life for themselves and their families. The thought of having financial stability or upward mobility was a motivating factor to persist. As Selena stated:

Education is a foundation for a better life, financially, status wise, socially too.

The people you're around, are they going to motivate you? Are they the people

that just love staying where they're at and you tend to kind of fall into their idea of life? That's something that I just want to get out of. I want something different.

For Selena, she looked at her education to better her entire life, not only financially, but her status and her social life. Through education she wanted to gain skills that would help her out of her situation and into a better one. Graciela also shared her hopes for a better life through education. For Graciela, continuing her education and ultimately achieving her degree would not only provide for a better life for her, but also for her family. Graciela shared:

It would mean a lot to me to have a degree. It would mean a lot to me to just not be poor anymore, to have a good steady job where I could help my family or I could have a better life for myself. I have three nephews. I just want a better life for them. I don't want them to struggle.

Graciela shared the impact that her education would have on, not only herself, but on her family. Her commitment to her education would provide her with a better life, but also create a lasting effect on her extended family, specifically her nephews.

Katarina shared in a similar experience and is motivated to complete her education in order to improve her life. She states:

I want an improvement in the quality of life that I have, even though it's not a bad quality. I feel that I have it much better than others, but I want to be able to contribute to that. My husband is paying for everything right now, so to be able to contribute it would improve what we have and also not having stress all of the time. I want to be able to lift that burden off of him a little bit and feel like we

can actually enjoy things a bit.

Katarina also would like to improve her quality of life and expresses that through her education she would be able to contribute to her household. Completion of her education is motivating her so that she will have the ability to financially contribute and be able to enjoy life.

Upward mobility. For most of the participants, upward mobility was a motivating factor that aided them in continuing their education. The participants had a variety of majors, but felt that their education would allow for upward mobility within their field, while others hoped it would allow for employment in a completely different area. For Selena, she is aware of her potential, but needs her degree in order to have the ability for upward mobility. She shared:

I want to move up. I felt like it was more of, “I’m going to be stuck in the same position because now you need a degree on your belt to move up the ladder.” I didn’t want to be stuck because work-wise I was a really, really hard worker. I was very sharp, I can pick up on things really easy and I’m fast and just work hard. But I was never going to move up to manager or director or CEO without an education, so I had to push myself to want more instead of just settling.

Selena’s motivation comes from wanting to have the opportunity for upward mobility.

For Graciela, she was looking at her education as an opportunity to improve her finances by getting a better paying job.

I need to be making money, like yesterday, so [nursing] was the only degree that I saw. I’ll put in the time and I graduate with a bachelor’s and I’m guaranteed to have a good job that is going to make me good money.

Graciela selected her major with the intent of upward mobility and having the ability to have a good paying job where she could increase her income. Katarina also shared in her motivation to complete her studies in order to get a good paying job, she shared, “success is when I get a job that pays well.” In her previous experience, Katarina was working jobs with limited upward mobility, so she believed that completion of her degree would allow her to have options and move into higher paying jobs.

Steven’s field of study is completely different than his current job. He is looking to his education to provide him the skill set to move into a different field that has higher earning potential. He states:

I don't think working on cars pays good at all, and it's hard. You have to know everything and really work fast, which is fine, but I don't want to do that in my 40s, so that is why I am going to school to be an electrical engineer to make more money and be in an office versus being in the elements out there. That is my plan.

Steven is ready to move into a field that will allow him upward mobility into a higher paying job that does not require the amount of physical activity that he is currently experiencing.

What Matters to me

For the participants, finding purpose took various forms from empowerment and self-confidence to finding purpose in their field. Some participants found purpose in developing themselves or aiding in the development of others. Successful completion of a semester provided the participants with confidence, which empowered them to continue with their education. This confidence provided them with the ability to persist to the next

semester and envision a future that was beyond their present. Amanda shared:

It's a combination of thinking about the past, present and future that keeps me motivated to continue. A desire to live a unique life of my own that doesn't mimic my family's history, but alters it greatly. One day when I am 50, I will look back on myself today and thank me for pushing so hard and not giving up.

Amanda's success in courses empowered her to think past her present and envision a future of success. Success for her was having a life that was beyond that of her current family situation. She found purpose in pursuing her education and believed that through education she would be able to achieve her goals.

Selena shared a similar experience in trying to find purpose as an adult Latina whose children are grown. Selena shared:

In your whole life you have where you're learning and you're growing, as you get older. And then you have your adulthood where you're taking care of your children and then you have where your children are grown and then you have to find yourself again. This is the foundation, education, going back to school, trying to figure out what you want to do and who you are as a person to, you know, bet a better job.

With her children grown, Selena found that now was her time to focus on herself and find her passion. For many years she had dedicated her life to her children, but through education was able to explore in order to find a different purpose.

For Katarina she found purpose in the field that she was studying.

I see a purpose in this field. The subject was completely new for me and I learned all this crazy stuff that's happening in the environment that you're not aware of.

It was just very interesting for me to hear about this stuff and learn about it. Katarina's field of study focused on the environment and providing sustainable options for clean water. In her experience, she found that her field of study had purpose on a larger environment scale. Finding purpose in her field of study gave her a reason to continue her studies and motivated her on an individual level. She found that she was committed and motivated to continue because her field of study was needed and critical to the community.

Latina empowerment. Another sub-theme that was shared amongst the Latinas in the study was the notion of becoming self-sufficient and not having to rely on someone else to help sustain them. For Latinas, success in their academics provided confidence that they did not have before, which provided them with a motivation to continue moving forward in order to be able to achieve self-sufficiency. The Latinas in the study discussed a sense of empowerment to be self-sufficient and have the ability to stand on their own two feet. They no longer felt intimidated by their partners or family members because they developed confidence through their academic experience.

In Selena's experience her partner supported her going back to school and supported the family financially. Selena shared, "people around me will say "Girl, what are you doing that [school] for?" You got a man that takes care of you. You're good. I'm just like I don't want that though." For Selena, having someone financially support is not what she wants. She wants to have the ability to be self-sufficient and financially independent. She further explained:

He [partner] has a really good job and he makes a lot of money, but I feel like that's his. I mean it's not something that is joint to me, so I'm working hard and

working so many hours and trying to be independent, financially. Also, support my kids and not have to be asking. So, I mean that was another motivation for me to be like okay, what if I get a better education or a degree? I'm able to step up in my job and my career and not have to depend on anybody to support my kids, and me just in case something happens.

Selena was motivated to continue with her education in order to be able to support her children on her own. Although she had the support of her partner, she wanted to ensure financial stability for herself and her children.

Amanda shared a similar experience with her partner and was ready to be in a place where she did not have to rely on someone financially. Amanda shared: "Is this the guy that I'm happy with?" Somebody who is always trying to cheat off my work, who's being disrespectful to me at home and who always is throwing the "Oh I paid the bill," in my face. I thought I just need to get out of this, go back to school and get a good job, so I can take care of myself." For Amanda, her negative experience with a relationship motivated her to pursue her education. Having had that experience, Amanda knew she wanted more for her life and did not want to depend on someone to support her. Being able to leave the relationship and her success in college empowered Amanda to continue on with her education and motivated her to persist. Sunshine also discussed how her education helped reinforce her confidence. "I know education is very important and having a degree helps me to feel better about myself." Her accomplishment of completing the degree gave her a sense of accomplishment and confidence about herself. For the Latinas in the study, their success in education was a pathway to building their confidence and establishing their self-sufficiency.

Giving back to others. Giving back to others resonated with most of the participants. They found purpose in giving back to their families and to their communities. The males in the study tended to speak in terms of giving back to their immediate families, whereas the females more often spoke in a more communal form. For the participants it was their way of paying it forward so that others could achieve their goals or just to give back to the larger community. Katarina shared her commitment to giving back to the larger community. She stated,

I actually see a real need for what I'm doing now. I want to be able to know what is going on with water because everybody needs it and it is important. I figured that is something that I could get into because it's important. I just want to feel that I am doing something important and not something that's more destructive to the environment. There's a real need for what I'm going to be doing. There is a genuine need out there, like life or death sort of thing.

Katarina felt that through her field of study she had the opportunity to give back to the community on a larger scale. She perceived that the work that she was doing in her studies was important work that could impact her community and she saw it as her way of giving back to others. Selena also shared in a commitment to give back to others.

I want to be able to open my own business that can help adult students that are in school have some kind of comfortable café, something where they're able to go and [their] kids can have a playroom and the parents can have two hours to study. And everybody's like no, that's just not ideal. You're not going to make money that way. It's not about that. It's about being able to give back. Being able to do something for somebody else because I need that. I really needed a place to go

and this is my opportunity to give back.

Selena was also committed to giving back to others after her completion with her studies. She shared that she did not really have a space to study late in the evenings and this would allow others to have what she did not. Selena's commitment to other adult students is her way of giving back and helping others achieve their goals. Katarina also shared her commitment to giving back to her friends and family.

I want to be able to give to other people. I feel like people have given me a lot. People are constantly giving me gifts and paying for dinners and all this stuff. I want to be able to give them something or treat them without feeling like I don't have the money to be giving. That's one of the things; I want to be able to give to other people.

For Katarina being able to give to others after college would be a way of repaying them for their support throughout her college career. As she shared she does not have the means at this time, but would like to give back to thank them for their support during college. Amanda shared her commitment to her family as well:

I can't help myself and I can't help my family if I don't become successful in some sort of way. Even if that's just getting a really good job and I am able to support them in some way. Even if it's not daily support, but "hey, I know you're struggling, let me help you out because I'm in that position to do so."

Even though Amanda had very minimal support from her family, she is committed to giving back to her family after she completes her education. She wants to have the ability to provide and help her family during hard times. The participants shared in their commitment to giving back to others and sharing their success with their friends and

families. Participants were able to find further purpose for their education by being able to eventually give back to others.

Being an example to others. Several of the participants discussed the impact that their education had on others around them. They found purpose in being an example to others. Most of them were the first to attend college and felt that their success in college would resonate with their families and friends. It was important to the participants to continue in college and be successful in order to show others that it was possible. Seeing themselves as examples to others motivated the students to continue. For many of them they would be the first in their families to attend and complete college. They felt a sense of responsibility to show their families that a college degree was possible.

Amanda stated, “I want to do this, not only for me or my siblings, but for all the other little boys and girls who were in the same situation and think that it is impossible to achieve their dreams.” For Amanda, she wants to be an example for any individual that comes from a family background like hers. Amanda’s belief is that her success will allow others to think beyond their current situation and provide the motivation for them to pursue education. She also wanted to be a role model for her siblings. Amanda was the first in her family to graduate from high school and continue on to college so she was committed to provide her siblings with a story of success.

Graciela also shared in a similar experience and discussed the importance of attending and being successful in college. For Graciela, college had always been a dream for her, but she did not have any examples at home of a college bound student. Growing up Graciela looked to her teachers as examples of college educated individuals. Since

she did not have any family role models, Graciela wants to be that example for her nephews.

It might sound crappy, but I feel like I want to be the person to them that I never had growing up, that I always wish I would've had – I want to be able to tell them, this is how college works. This is what you need to do. Don't give up. There's hope.

Graciela shared how her nephews motivated her to be successful and said:

I need them to have an example that it's possible. You can come from a family, like ours, and you can be successful. You can be a minority—you can come from poverty. You can come from struggles and you can still be successful. You don't have to be white or you don't have to be given certain things. That is why I need to do what I need to do, to show them.

Graciela wants her nephews to see her as an example of someone who made it against all odds. She also wants to show her nephews that she came from the same background and was successful. She shared:

It's like seeing other plants grow from the same soil. You are rooted in the same thing, and if this little plant can grow from the soil, I can too. Versus seeing somebody else, you can always make excuses like, 'Well, yeah, they're like me. They might be Hispanic, but they had this different or they had a different upbringing.' If you're in the same family, no, you had the same kind of upbringing.

Graciela also wants her nephews to see her succeed. "I know it is not my masters yet, but at this point it's more than what anybody in my family has done, so even if it's just an

associate's degree, it's a big deal.”

Amanda also shared in a similar experience and shared her desire to be a role model to her siblings.

I do want to be that person that I didn't have to encourage me to go and do it.

If I can do this and I can graduate high school, I can get my certificate. If I can go to college I feel like I'm being a good example for them.

Selena also shared this commitment to her family and the notion of being a role model for them.

It's my kids and myself. That's who motivates me. If you see my kids, you'll see they're focused on school and so because of me or because of what I instill in them and what they have taken from it, it's rewarding. And so, I'm like I can't stop. I can't give up. If I give up, they're going to give up so, I've got to keep going.

Being examples within their families was a theme that resonated with a number of the participants. Since the students saw themselves as role models to their families, they also felt their failure in college could negatively affect their families. In their experiences, they were motivated to persist because they were providing that example to their families.

David also became an example for his co-workers. He shared his experience in inspiring his manager to return to school.

I have had co-workers who are like – ‘how are you doing all this? How are you working and going to school and learning all this stuff?’ You just do it and if you really want to do it, you're going to do it, nothing is going to stop you. One of my managers decided to go back to school because he saw me doing my thing.

David was able to motivate his peers to see that returning to school, as a working adult, was doable. David's co-workers saw him as a successful example of how a working adult managed their work and school life. Being role models to others motivated the participants to continue with their education. For many of them, they wanted to provide to their families what they never had, a model of a successful college student.

Finding passion and interest in the field. Motivation for some of the participants also came from finding their happiness and their passion for an area. Students seemed to be motivated to persist because they were in a different place when it came to their education and were ready to embrace school because they had found their passion and happiness.

For David, returning to college was challenging, but he embraced his experience because he felt he was in a different place. "I loved to learn new concepts and ideas. The money I was investing was to re-spark something I thought was long gone inside and since then I always remember I can push past and accomplish anything." David was re-committed to his education because he had found a subject area that ignited passion. He shared that studying psychology was exciting for him and learning all these new things made him happy.

Steven also discussed his choice of major and being happy with his choice. He shared, "sometimes I think about easier majors. I'm like, well, it could be so easy, but no. I wouldn't be happy. I know I want to do engineering for sure." Steven shared having doubts in his field due to the challenging nature of the courses, but indicated he would not be happy if he did not pursue his passion of engineering.

For Katarina, she was excited about the new journey she was taking. "I am

interested in what I'm learning and excited about what I'm doing. I am excited about the future and can't wait to get a job." Katarina found a passion for learning this new field. She further stated, "I don't want to just be in whatever to make money. There's very little that I'm interested in as far the stuff that I was seeing. I'm not motivated to work in a place that I'm not interested in, so it was important for me to find something that I liked." She found that this field was interesting and exciting and she saw the potential for a positive future.

Likewise Amanda shared in finding a field that she was interested in. "Psychology, that is where I have my passion at, so I was excited about those classes." Sunshine also was a psychology major and found her interest in that field. "I do like psychology. It seemed interesting and was interesting to me and I did enjoy it. Of all the classes I think psychology is the one that I enjoyed the best, so I decided to pursue that." Sunshine found that psychology was enjoyable and she liked "reading and learning the information," so she decided to pursue it as her major. She found her passion in the coursework and hoped to use her background in her career working with children. For most of the participants, motivation resulted from their interest and passion in the career field they were pursuing. They were excited and passionate about the material and found their happiness in being able to pursue something they were interested in. Overall, the participants shared in the theme of finding purpose in their life. Some participants found purpose for themselves and others found purpose through giving back through various means. Their education gave them the ability to find a bigger purpose, which also motivated them to persist.

Family encouragement. Most of the participants grew up in households where

higher education was not a high priority. Families were focused on living and surviving. However, as the participants returned to school, they found support from family members in indirect ways. Once these students returned to college they experienced encouragement from their families that aided them in their persistence. In Daniel's experience his family would connect with him and inquire about his classes.

They're supportive, but they're more of the hands-off supportive. They're not going to be like pushing me to do things, like checking in me like, hey did you do your homework? They're just of like, hey, how did your semester go? There was support of some sort, like either just mental and emotional support, or even like if they knew I was going to be spending hours on end working on a project. My brother would be like, "Hey, just come over work at my house and I'll make you dinner I'll take care of all that kind of stuff. You just work on your project." So it's kind of stuff like that that like – they provide quiet spaces and places to do stuff.

Daniel's family was supportive in an indirect way. They inquired about his semester and his classes and also provided him with support for him to focus on his studies. His family did not provide financial support or help with his studies, but their commitment to inquiring about his courses or providing meals allowed him to focus on his studies and contributed to his success in the classroom.

Likewise, David's family provided him with support by checking on him and also by giving him space to focus on his studies.

Every now and then my family will ask me how I'm doing. They can usually tell though. Like if I sound a little out of it they'll be like what happened? What's

wrong? It's like oh, it's just a rough week or rough semester. And they understand. There are some times when I'm just like in the zone and focused and like I won't call for a couple of weeks and they'll be like oh, are you okay? Still alive? Like yes. I'm just studying. And they're like okay; that's fine.

David's family provided indirect support and provided the space that he needed in order to be successful in his classes, which motivated him to complete and continue his studies.

Likewise, Selena had a similar experience with regard to family encouragement. In Selena's experience she has received both direct and indirect support from her family. Selena shared that she received encouragement and support from her children.

My daughter is in high school and she helps me. Writing is not my best [subject], so she'll help me try to understand certain prompts, so I am able to kind of connect with her that way. Sometimes I'll fall asleep when I'm reading a chapter in the book and she's like hey, wake up. Wake up. Or she'll say mom, take a 30-minute nap and I'll wake you up at this time. We are motivating each other, so I think that's what's been keeping me in class, school and keeping the grades that I have.

Selena's daughter provides her with encouragement and motivation to continue and be successful in her courses. Studying together and checking in on each other has helped reinforce Selena's educational journey. Selena also shared the indirect encouragement that she receives from her mother. "My mom's proud. She's like oh, my daughter is in college. She's telling all her friends and she's really proud. She says oh that's so good that you are in college." Selena did not receive encouragement for higher education early in life, however her mom's encouragement validates Selena's return to her education.

Hearing her mom's statements has motivated Selena to persist, so she can continue to make her mom proud by completing her degree.

Making Connections

Any student starting or returning to college finds that they need to find or develop the support mechanisms and connections to aid them in their success. From financing their education to academic support, this theme was important in the road to persist. In my own experience, as a Latina adult college student, I have developed my own support systems and connections and have found that this has allowed me to persist. Previous research on persistence notes that a connection to the college campus is an important aspect to retaining a student at the college, although for adult students the strongest connection may be in the classroom (Donaldson & Graham, 1999; Tinto, 1975; Wyatt, 2011). My findings suggest that creating connections and finding support are important factors that retain Latino/a adult students and aid in their persistence.

Affordability of the community college. Affordability was an emergent sub-theme for returning and continuing at the community college. Financing education can be a challenge for students, but particularly for adult Latino/a students who have responsibilities outside of college and often come from low-income households (Samuel & Scott, 2014). Several of the participants shared in their experience of coming from low-income households and of being employed in low-wage jobs. Several participants also had previous experience with higher education and shared their negative experiences with regard to financial debt after leaving those institutions. In Graciela's experience, she had started at a proprietary institution and had found a roadblock in financing her education:

I had to apply for a loan and when it came time for the loan to be applied to the following semester, I was short 600 dollars and did not have the money. I thought I would wait and see if I could come up with the money, but was not able to. I ended up using the rest of the loan money to help my family. It's always been a money issue why I didn't go to school.

Graciela, not only had a challenge financing her education, but in her experience also found it necessary to use her loan money to help support her family. Adult students have financial responsibilities outside of the classroom and Graciela's experience reflects her focus on helping her family rather than trying to find the additional funds to continue to pursue her education.

As Kinser and Dietchman's (2007) research noted, adults financial past could hinder students, however enrolling in college would now give them the potential to improve their situation. The affordability of the community college allowed the participants to pursue their education and also fulfill the responsibilities that they had outside of school. As Graciela shared, "the affordability versus anywhere else is what keeps me here. I am able to pay out of pocket for the most part. I'm trying not to get into any debt until I reach the university level. I also find that [community colleges] are easier to transfer from and they're affordable."

David found that he did not qualify for financial aid due to his income. He also was paying for previous school debt and other expenses so felt he did not have enough to finance his education, but found out that he would be able to afford his education at the community college.

I'm paying all these debts and all these bills but you say I have money for school.

They would always be like well if your FAFSA says you make this much then you can't get financial aid, so I just started saving little by little and I just paid my way through the semesters. I paid out of pocket myself. I paid for books and paid for school. I would take out \$100 from each paycheck and I'd say that's just for school. That doesn't get touched for anything. I put in extra overtime and all that overtime was for school only. School was expensive, but not like it was at the university.

Although David was not able to receive financial aid for his initial start, he found that the affordability of the community college allowed him to budget and finance his education. He was able to develop a plan that aided him in paying for his education. The affordability at the community college gave him the opportunity to restart his education.

Selena was able to continue at the community college because she received some financial aid. The affordability of the community college allows her to finance her education and also pay for her books. "It helps me pay for some of the classes and it covers all of it but you have more [money] after and that helps me get my books or my supplies of whatever I am needing for the class, so right now its helping." The affordability of the community college allows Selena to maximize her financial aid benefits and also have the funding to purchase books. In her experience if she did not have financial aid she would be unable to pay for her education. "If I ask him [her partner] to pay, he probably wouldn't. He wouldn't pay for it. And it's too much for me to pay for out of pocket." Selena does not have the support from her partner to pay for school, so affordability coupled with financial aid gives her the opportunity to fulfill her goal of completing a degree. Affordability was key in the return to college for some of

the participants. Affordable tuition allowed the students to be able to continue their educational journey and not encumber additional debt.

Faculty. Faculty were an important part of the community college experience of the adult Latino/a students in this study and having access to faculty was important to the participants' persistence. Accessibility to their faculty member helped reinforce their learning and provided them with the additional guidance.

Steven shared "I'll message my public speaking teacher, and in ten minutes she'll message me right back." In Steven's experience he felt like having access to his professor allowed him to get his questions answered and complete his assignments in a timely manner. Selena shared:

If you go and reach out to them, they're more willing to help you. [You] email them constantly and they see that and they are like "hey I have this extra research or I have this extra information if you need it." They will email certain things that they know that will help me out. That is what helps me, and their conference time, like after class time or [via] email.

Likewise David shared his experience with faculty and how they provided support to him throughout his class:

Everybody is really just like they take the time to help you out or especially my English teachers. They're like if you're having trouble you should read this or you should look at this. Or here's a good website if you don't understand this. And it was just kind of – they always wanted to give you something extra to make sure you understood what you were doing.

This type of support provided David with the additional resources that he needed to help

him be successful. He also shared that he previously had experienced difficulty with his English classes, but felt that the support he received from his professors at the community college helped him pass the class.

Daniel also felt that availability and accessibility to his faculty helped him, he shared:

They're always willing to lend a hand. Outside of classes if we ever needed to get ahold of them you could just e-mail them sometimes, but they're normally always there. They're normally always around, and that's what kind of helped out to, the convenience of having them around.

In Daniel's experience, having access to faculty before he even started the program was important in his continued success. He was interested in learning more about the program.

I reached out to the program coordinator and he was a faculty member here and I asked him, "do you have any time to talk about the program [because] I have some questions." He talked to me for like an hour and just helped me get a better understanding of the way the program worked and a way to navigate it. And just that right there I was like, "Man, these guys are – this guy is taking time out of his day. If this guy could take time out of his day for a random dude." I just said, "If all the other instructors are like this they're going to be cool too."

The ability to talk with his instructor prior to starting the program was an important shift in his educational experience. Daniel felt that if faculty were this accessible he would have the ability to be successful, since they were readily available.

Likewise for Katarina she had a similar experience with a faculty member.

Before I even started I met with him because I wanted to make sure I was getting into the right program. So I was asking him questions and stuff and he was more than willing to answer my questions before I even started with school.

Having accessibility to faculty at the beginning and through their program aided students in getting the attention that they needed in order to be successful and persist. Participants were able to make the connections that they needed in order to support their experience at the community college. The ability to have those one-on-one conversations with faculty connected the student to subject matter and aided them in their continued success.

Student services. Several participants discussed the importance of student services in their journey of persistence. They shared that these services provided them with support throughout their academic career. One of the institutional services that participants referred to was their academic advising experience. Participants shared the importance of their interactions with academic advisors and how their guidance ensured that they stayed on the right track. Daniel shared:

The veteran advisors are awesome. They helped me a lot. I wanted to make sure I wasn't wasting time and I was also trying to make sure I was getting paid the full amount [from his veteran benefits]. They would always make sure my classes were the right classes I needed to take and that I was following the right degree program.

As a veteran student, Daniel wanted to ensure that he was receiving his full educational benefits and also understood the restrictions of his benefits. His interactions with his advisor helped validate his academic track and also ensured that he fulfilled the requirements of his benefits. As a returning adult, he did not want to waste time in his

program and his academic advisor was able to confirm his degree plan.

Katarina also valued her experience with her academic advisor and felt that having this opportunity aided in her persistence.

I went and the advisor was really cool, told me exactly what I needed to know, tried to help me figure out where my path was, so to me that was a new experience. Everywhere else they kind of just let me do things on my own and I didn't know what I was supposed to do. She would actually say how are you doing, how are your classes going? In my previous college experiences, nobody had ever made me feel like they genuinely care about how your classes are going or your mental health.

Katarina found that the advisor's genuine interest in her progress was motivating. She felt that not only was her advisor interested in her academic progress, but also her personal health, which helped her feel like she mattered.

Other participants discussed the various tutoring labs and how this aided in their success in their courses, which aided in their persistence. Steven shared:

I spent any break at school in the math tutoring lab asking the tutors for any help I needed. I also went to the English tutoring lab to have my paper edited twice.

The following week I received the results and I earned an A in all of them.

Receiving good grades motivated him to continue utilizing the resources available.

Steven attributed his persistence to the assistance that he received from the tutoring labs.

Sunshine also shared how valuable the tutoring labs were to her success. When asked about whether she utilized tutoring labs on campus, Sunshine responded, "Totally, yeah. The math lab, I don't think I would have passed the class without it." Having access to

tutoring services helped the participants with their assignments in their courses, but it also helped reinforce their ability to be successful in college. As returning adults, these students had self-doubt in their academic abilities, but having access to tutoring and being successful aided in their ability to persist from semester to semester.

Looking into a Mirror

The theme of self-reflection was also represented in the data analysis. Participants in the study had a variety of experiences with regard to self-reflection and the motivations that came from within or developed from their personal experiences. For the participants they all shared in a type of self-motivation that aided them in continuing their education.

Internal motivation. Internal motivation was a sub-theme that resonated with all of the participants in the study. They shared in an experience where they felt that they had something within them that pushed them to persist. The participants had previous challenging life experiences that possibly aided in developing their resiliency in dealing with situations. They were able to pick themselves up and push through the challenging situation. These experiences helped reinforce their self-motivation to overcome and therefore the analysis revealed their commitment to push through and be successful.

Amanda stated:

I'm not where I want to be, but I'm not where I used to be. It is the persistence to succeed that has brought me this far and it's that same persistence that will push me even further. It's that thought in your head that nobody else is going to push me. Nobody is going to take care of me. Nobody is going to make my dreams come true. I have to push, I have to take the step forward and get it done myself.

Amanda was self-motivated to continue and push herself to be successful. She was committed to doing whatever she had to do in order to fulfill her dreams of education and success. Graciela shared in a similar experience and was motivated to continue because she needed to do it.

I just have to do it, I have this thing in me that I need to. I think a lot of it [motivation] comes from myself. The alternative is not something I think I can live with. What is the alternative to me quitting? Feeling really bad about never accomplishing my dream, regret, getting older; because I cannot live with the alternative, I live with having to do it.

Clearly, self-motivation and determination aided in Graciela's persistence. She was motivated to continue and complete her degree because her alternative was not something she could live with.

Steven shared in a similar experience and utilized his self-motivation to help him persist and do well academically.

Either you have to be smart, or you have to work hard. I don't think I'm somebody that's naturally smart, but for sure if I work hard, I do really good. I remember thinking about some of the things I was taught in the military like: never quit, never be afraid to fail, adapt and overcome. This motivated me.

In Steven's experience his work ethic and self-motivation was what he felt pushed him to do well. As he stated, he felt that he was not the smartest, but his hard work allowed him to achieve success in the classroom. Selena also discussed her self-motivation to get her to complete her goal.

Currently I'm all tired. I want to cry. I want to ball up in my room. I'm so tired

but I'm like okay, if I miss this it's a zero and it's going to put my grade point average very low and I'm just like I can't. So, just do it, Selena. Just do it. Just finish. Complete it. And that's what kind of motivates me, just my own self. Right now I have a 4.0 GPA and I am closer to my Associate degree and I did not come this far to allow any trials or hardships I am dealing with stop me from succeeding. I am motivated and will finish.

Selena shared how she is challenged sometimes, but is committed to overcome and motivate herself to persist and ultimately complete her degree. Selena's self-motivation is her driving force to get her to finish. She feels that she is so close to her goal and there is nothing that can stop her from moving forward.

Proving others wrong. A subtheme that emerged among a few of the participants was the notion of proving others wrong. Some of the participants felt that others questioned their return to college and their ability to be successful in college, which motivated them to persist. Selena reflected on previous situations where individuals have questioned her ability to be successful and she shared that proving others wrong helps to motivate her to do better. Selena shared her experience with others questioning her educational path.

I have this personality, of tell me not to do something and I'm going to do it. People will tell me, oh you need a break, just take off. You don't need to do [school], but they tell me that because I am going against the grain. I will make sure that even if I cry, get frustrated, I will get it done and succeed and show them, I am already this far along and still got my A. Like ha, there. Now tell me I can't do something. But the day that I graduate and walk the stage, that's going

to be more of a ha to everybody. That's me proving to you that I got this. The individuals that doubted and questioned her ability to be successful in college motivated Selena. Selena was out to prove that she could accomplish anything and prove her doubters wrong. Likewise Amanda shared in a very similar experience. She experienced similar doubt from individuals that she knew.

They said I wasn't going to do this and I was going to be all of this [troubled life] and I'm not. I'm up here now and they are hating on me. I'm not hating on you all, I'm not blaming you for anything. I kind of want to shove it [the degree] in their faces. I just want to prove my parents wrong.

Amanda also shared negative experiences that she encountered and has used these to help motivate her to continue. She also wants to prove to others that she can do it, regardless of her background.

Nobody in my family has gone to school and I'm considered like the smart person. Any time that I mess up on something they're constantly like, "Oh I thought you go to college" and "I thought you did this" and "I thought you were smart." And I'm just like, "Why are you attacking me?" I learned from a really young age that my parents weren't going to be there for me or be the most supporting and they just weren't really people that I could depend on, so because of that I learned that I had to depend on myself.

David shared that he is stubborn, but feels motivated when he can prove others wrong. "If someone tells me I can't do something, I'm just like I can prove you wrong and I'm going to prove you wrong." David had received some criticism on his choice of major, but was determined to be successful because he had a passion for the field and

wanted to show others that he could do it. These participants used the idea of proving others wrong as an additional motivator to get them through their courses. The participants experienced a sense of pride in their decision to return to college; failure in college would be a blow to their pride. These participants had strong convictions and utilized the negativity to push them to continue. The ability to show others that they could be successful reinforced that they made a good decision in returning to school.

Age as a motivator. Several of the participants shared that their age was a motivating factor for their persistence. For these participants returning to school later in life provided them with direction in their studies, but their age also pushed them to persist. Due to their age, participants discussed the importance of staying on track and being limited with the time that they had to complete their degree. Katarina shared:

I feel like, okay, I'm 36 years old and I feel like I can't spend a whole lot of time trying to keep going to school. I need to start actually having some income because I have school loans that I'm paying off, I just felt like its pressure. I'm 36, I don't have a lot of time left and I just need to go for it and do it. Mostly the factor for me right now is my age. I need to hurry up and get this stuff done because I need to start saving.

Katarina sees her age as a motivating factor. She feels that at her age she needs to complete her degree and start contributing to her household. David also shared in his experience of age as a motivating factor. In David's experience he felt that because of his age, he had no room to fail. "When you have limited funds and time to do everything, its kind of like you've got to get this right the first time. If you have to redo something, it puts everything behind and I don't have that kind of time." David is cognizant of his age

and how he is limited in time because he wants to start a career and begin earning money and saving for his retirement.

Graciela shared, “You can’t take a break or you can’t postpone this any longer. If you already feel you’re too old, if you wait another semester, if you wait another year, you’re just going to be older.” Graciela, like Katarina, sees her age as a motivator to continue. She recognizes that any deviation from her timeframe would set her back. Selena also recognized her time constraints and how any deviation would delay her completion. “I know I can’t wait another semester or I can’t push it back. It’s not like that for me. I push myself hard. I have timeframes, this is where I want to be at a certain age.” Selena has used her age as a way to motivate her, she has timeframes for her goals in order to complete. Her age has played a role in getting her to become focused on completion of her Associate’s degree. Steven recognized age as a motivating factor to persist from semester to semester. “Once you hit your 30s you don’t want to not have your education and for this major (engineering) I feel like I am behind, so I think age is probably the biggest factor with this major.” Steven recognizes that he is an older student in a challenging field, however his age also pushes him to continue so that he can begin his career in this field.

Pursuing an ideal self. Several of the participants were also motivated by the opportunities that they perceived their education would bring them and the perception of who they could be in the future. Previous research describes this notion as possible selves theory (Markus & Nurius, 1986). This theory posits that “possible selves derive from representations of the self in the past and they include representations of the self in the future” (Markus & Nurius, 1986). The researchers suggest that the future selves

represent specific “hopes, fears and fantasies” (Markus & Nurius, 1986). The participants in the study had an outlook for the future and described what their hopes were for the future.

They had developed an ideal sense of who they could be once they completed their education. Sunshine discussed, “when you apply for a job it looks better if you have an associate’s degree rather than no education at all because having a degree, you went through it and you stuck with it.” Sunshine also discussed how her education would affect her socially and how it reinforces her visualization of her ideal self. “I hang out at museums and the majority of people at museums are highly educated, so when they ask you what you do, I say I am going to school or I am working on this. It sounds so much better to say I am going to school than where I was working at. I know education is very important and having a degree helps me to feel better about myself.” In Sunshine’s experience her education was reinforcing her ideal self of an educated individual who could confidently interact with individuals in certain settings.

Selena also shared her vision of her ideal self. “You know on applications where they ask you what your highest education level is, and I can circle that. That’s my motivation. That’s my non-stopping point, so being from where I came from to where I’m at now, it’s just a whole different me.” Selena has a vision of her ideal self, as an educated individual who can show her accomplishment of coming from a challenging background to who she will be with her degree.

Amanda also shared her experience in visualizing her ideal self and how she uses her experience to motivate her to persist.

I remember opening up one of my psychology books and in the preface, it spoke

about all the great minds before us and I remember reading about how psychology is such an unknown subject that is still a huge mystery to most and how the person reading this could be the next person to make a huge discovery. It made me smile and I reread that line a few times and even marked that paragraph so I could look back at that. I told myself, I can and I will. That paragraph pushed me to not only complete my degree but to keep pushing further. It's a combination of thinking about my past, present and future that keeps me motivated to continue.

Amanda's ideal self provides her motivation to persist. She thinks about her future self in order to keep her moving forward and allows her to move past the challenging experiences that she may face in her present. For these participants visualizing their ideal self provides them with the person that they want to be. They want to be educated, to have the ability to show off their accomplishment, and have the ability to be successful in their field.

Future goals. Most of the participants discussed their future goals and how they were motivated because of what the future held. "I feel like I am very close to my goal and I have a lot of hope for the future, I am motivated to get it done." Katarina shared that she is close to completing her degree and the future outlook of her major motivates her to continue. Graciela shared in a similar experience, in that she is ready to complete her degree to move on to the next part of her life.

I'm trying to graduate in the spring with an associate's degree, so I'm trying to get an associate's and then get my basics for nursing. Those I should be done with and then probably another year and then I can start applying to nursing school.

Graciela's future goals of education are motivating her to complete her associate's degree

so she can move on to her passion, which is nursing school. Her future goal is a motivating factor that helps her push through her current courses.

Amanda also discussed how her future goals aided to push her through the challenging times, she shared:

I want to be something and when I'm like 50 I [can] look back at my 20s, and say yeah I did good. You know I was pushing myself. I was going to school and getting these degrees. I want to be a psychologist, I want to help people, I want to move out, I want to do all these things. It's constantly reminding me like when I'm getting stressed out and everything is crushing down on me, I tend to forget about myself and the things that I want and the things that will make me happy.

I'm trying to keep a regimen and remind myself of my worth and what I'm trying to accomplish. Every time I get low I ask myself, where do you want to be?

For Amanda her future goals are a motivating factor that aids her in focusing on the present. She visualizes her future success in order to push through from semester to semester. Selena also looked to her future goals as a way to motivate her to persist.

I think just setting my goals at a high point, I'm already successful and still have my 4.0, but have to continue keeping it there. Being able to say, these are my timeframes, this is where I want to be at, at a certain age that makes me focus.

The end goal of her career is a motivating factor for Selena. Doing well in her courses and keeping a good GPA will get her to end goal, so she is focused on completing her current goals in order to reach her future goal.

Likewise, Daniel developed future goals and was motivated by the ability to work in his field. Being in school helped him understand the industry standard for that field

and was motivated to complete his certificate and eventually received a bachelor's degree.

Well I have to get—getting just the certificate won't be good. Let me go get my degree. I was focused on doing well and and now I'm thinking about continuing and getting a bachelor's degree because [employers] want a bachelor's in communications and I want to be able to have that to be competitive to be the best.

In Daniel's experience, his goal of completing his associate's degree motivated him in the present because he realized he needed to be competitive in the industry. He is now focused on a goal of a bachelor's degree to increase his chances in his new career.

Chapter Summary

Chapter IV provides the findings and themes that emerged from the data analysis. The themes that emerged highlighted the Latino/a adult student experience and their ability to persist at a community college. The themes emphasized the importance of college resources, self-reflection, and creating connections in order to be successful in college. The participants faced many challenges, but were successful against many odds. The participants' resiliency and personal motivations aided in pushing them to persist. The students perceived their education to be a way to achieve their goals and motivated them to persist. Their experiences highlighted previous research, but also shed light on findings that were specific to this population. This chapter focused on the stories and experiences of the Latino/a adult student at the community college and how their journey into higher education began and continues.

Chapter V

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to focus on the meaning made by the participants with regard to their persistence at the community college. I wanted to gain insight into the experiences and motivations that aided in their persistence. This closing chapter presents a discussion of the key findings relative to past research, conclusions and recommendations for practitioners and for future research. The chapter also interprets study findings in relation to the conceptual framework that includes Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory and Yosso's (2015) community of cultural wealth. Some of the findings were closely aligned with Schlossberg's (1981) theory of transition and reflect the various factors that adults experience as they transition to and thru an event in their life. Yosso's theory of community cultural wealth was also reflected, but the findings were a bit more limited in their connection to that theoretical framework.

Key Findings

The research study was guided by the overarching research question: *looking through the lens of Latino/a adult students, what explains the phenomenon of their persistence at the community college?* The findings suggest that there were various factors that each of the participants experienced that aided in their persistence. The themes that emerged from the research were the following: the past will not define my future, moving into higher education, finding my place in higher education, aiming for a better life, what matters to me, making connections and looking into a mirror. The graphic below provides a visual of the themes and how I organized them.

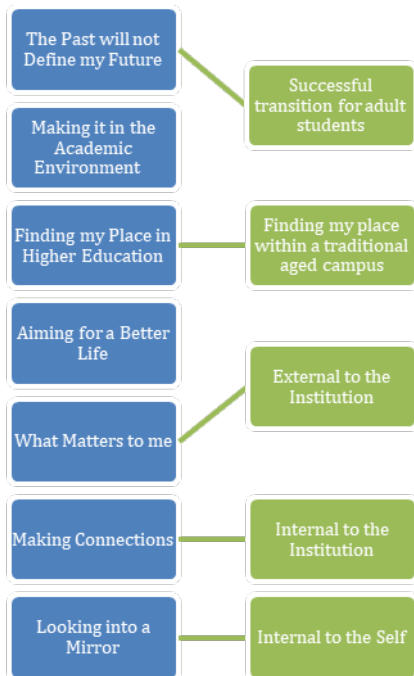


Figure 1: Organization of Themes

Successful Transitions

Research has focused on institutional factors, external factors and internal factors that aid in adult student persistence (Bean & Metzner, 1981; Donaldson & Graham, 1999; Tinto, 1975, 1982, 1993, 1997). However, the findings suggest that past experiences were also a factor that motivated the participants to persist. Latino/a adult students shared in their previous challenging life experiences and developed a sense of resiliency and motivation that aided them in their persistence. The data supported Yosso's (2005) idea of aspirational capital and highlighted the participants' ability to be resilient and utilize this as an asset to continue. Participants utilized their previous experiences and resiliency to push them through the challenging situations that they experienced in college. Not returning to their past situation resonated with most of the participants.

In addition to past experiences, some participants discussed the defining moment of their return to college and how this moment reinforced their commitment to their

education. One of the participants shared her experience of assessing her current situation and work environment and how through that moment she was able to evaluate her life and make the decision to return to college. The findings suggest that there exists a motivation for returning to college based on previous life experience that may not be fully captured in previous research. The participants made meaning of these defining moments and drew on them to continue.

Moving into higher education was a theme that also resonated across the participants, as they highlighted their successes in the first semester and how these successes positively influenced their continuation in higher education. The participants shared in their experiences with developing learning strategies and being in a place where they were ready to learn and ready to be in the academic environment. As Steven shared, “putting in the time and the hard work. If I just make time of – on Saturdays four hours, Sundays six hours, during the week at least an hour every day, there's no way to not learn it.” For most of the participants, they had previously attended higher education, but shared that they were not in the mindset to be in college. Sunshine shared, “I actually wanted to learn, which was different then my first experience.” Their ability to be successful in their transition was critical to the students’ success in college.

Adult Students in a Traditional-aged Campus

Latino/a adult students in this study felt out of place within the academic environment. Finding their place within higher education gave them the ability to adapt and persist. Previous research (Coleman, 1988; Hagedorn, 2005b; Saunders & Serna, 2004; Strayhorn, 2008) highlights the challenges that adult students have in adjusting to the college environment; however the current research findings suggest that creating a

sense of belonging, understanding how to navigate the academic environment and receiving affirmation and validation of their abilities (Rendón, 1994) aided participants in finding their place in the academic environment.

Participants shared their self-doubt upon returning to college. Returning adult students felt out of place within the academic environment (Hagedorn, 2005a) and perceived that academically they were not at the level that they needed to be (Rendón, 1994). As Selena shared, “coming here, it was like a whole bunch of young kids. It was discouraging a bit because I’m like okay, I could be some of these people’s moms. It was discouraging to see a bunch of young kids.” They questioned their ability to be successful and were intimidated by the environment that they were in. Being a returning adult student in a predominantly traditional-aged institution caused the participants to question their return to college.

Previous research (Rendón, 1994) discussed the doubts that Latino/a students have and how validation can aid in eliminating those barriers. Rendón and other researchers (Rendón & Garza, 1996; Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000; Terenzini, et al., 1994) argue that individuals who did not have a college background might have difficulties in integrating into college without assistance (Barnett, 2011). Reaching out to students in validating ways could assist students in connecting to the institution. Barnett (2011) suggested faculty engage students through “discussing personal goals, showing appreciation of personal and cultural history or taking extra time to help students learn class material” (p. 197). The findings confirmed that this type of validation was a critical component to the experiences of Latino/a adult students at the community college. In addition to validation, affirming students’ abilities was a finding from the research. Most

of the participants shared in their experience of faculty affirming their academic abilities, their major and their future career options. Most of the participants in the study, experienced positive feedback from their faculty, which affirmed their return to college. The data also supports Schlossberg's transition theory and the support that students require in order to successfully transition into academia. Faculty affirmation provided students with a supportive academic environment, which reinforced the students place in higher education. Likewise, Yosso's notion of social capital is supported by the data presented. Through affirmation and validation, students felt supported and connected to the faculty. The faculty became a part of the social capital that students had available to them at their institution. The research adds to the body of literature on Latino/a adult students by highlighting the importance of faculty affirmation.

Selena shared her ability to connect with a faculty member that showed interest in her abilities and shared a similar background. "She gave me her background and my eyes just kind of opened because she had the same background as me, so I just kind of kept wanting to take classes, especially with her." Validation was key to Selena's experience. The faculty member validated her experience and provided her with motivation to continue her academic journey. In Selena's words, "I could be a professor like her."

External to the Institution

Aiming for a better life and what matters to me were themes that emerged from the data. The participants had to find meaning in their return to college in order to be successful. Whether it was being an example for family members, for upward mobility or giving back to the community, the phenomenon of persistence was embodied through a personal reason; this was true for all participants.

Most of the participants discussed the notion of aiming for a better life and breaking the cycle of lacking a college education within the family unit. For the participants, completion of their education was tied to improving their life and the impact that education would have on their families. As one participant shared, “I just don’t want to be poor anymore.” Her experience with poverty and hardship motivated her to continue with completion as her end goal. Graciela was also the first in her family to attend college, so she was motivated to be an example for her nephews. This finding was consistent with previous research (Arbelo-Marrero & Milacci, 2016; Speight, Russian, Ross-Gordon, & Muñoz, 2011; Yosso, 2005; Zell, 2010;) that highlighted the importance of being an example to others, whether it was family or friends.

Several participants also found that finding purpose in their education helped in retaining them. Finding purpose in their educational journey supports Zell’s (2010) research that determined that Latino adult students must find “a deeper motivation to concretize a life purpose [which results in] psychological gains that keep them persevering” (p.176). All of the participants were looking to improve their lives and the lives of others with their college education. Participants discussed the impact of their education on their families, but also on the larger community. Katarina discussed how her environmental science major would impact society in their need for clean water. Finding purpose in her education motivated her to persist. These experiences also reflected Yosso’s (2005) notion of familial capital and the tie that Latino/a students may have to provide for their families or for their communities. This was a motivating factor for these students who were trying to not only improve their life, but also impact the lives of others.

Latinas, in particular, shared how their education empowered them to be self-sufficient and gave them a new sense of self. Several of the Latinas in the study discussed how their success in education had motivated them and empowered them in their personal lives. These individuals looked to their education as a way to become financially self-sufficient and not have to rely on their partner or others to support them. There have been limited findings reported (Sy & Romero, 2008) about becoming self-sufficient and Latina empowerment through education. Sy and Romero's (2008) study focused on self-sufficiency as a way to help family and was not seen as an individual goal. The findings in my research found that the participants saw self-sufficiency as a personal goal. One participant did discuss how this goal would ultimately help her family, but initially she saw it as an individual goal that would help her in her current situation.

Internal to the Institution

The theme of making connections was critical to the participants' success as it highlighted the importance of creating connections at the college campus. Having the ability to find resources and support systems within the college was essential to the success of the participants. In addition, affordability was a key factor in their continued enrollment. Previous research (Speight, et. al, 2011) found that the cost of attending school was perceived as a deterrent to persistence. In this study, the affordability of the community college provided the participants with the opportunity to attend college without incurring additional debt. Participants shared that the affordability at the community college provided an opportunity that they may not have had otherwise. The lower cost of tuition at the community college encouraged students to continue with their

studies. When asked what keeps you here, Graciela stated, “the affordability versus anywhere else. I’m able to pay out of pocket for the most part. I’m trying not to get into any debt until I reach the university level.”

Participants were able to persist due to the connections that they were able to form on campus. Previous research on adult student persistence highlights campus connections as a critical part of the adult student experience (Donaldson & Graham, 1999; Tinto, 1975; Wyatt, 2011). Donaldson and Graham’s (1999) research highlighted the connecting classroom as the center of social engagement on campus. The connecting classroom is a critical component to the adult experience because they are limited in their time at the institution. Therefore, the classroom is where adult students tend to engage. Most of the students in this study found that they were in a place where they were ready to learn and therefore were more engaged in the classroom.

The research findings suggest that the phenomenon of persistence for Latino/a adult students was reinforced through faculty connections. Faculty provided the connection in the classroom for most participants. The participants found that they were able to connect with their faculty members and that the faculty supported them. The findings substantiated previous research findings that connected faculty support to a student’s success (Capps, 2002; Exposito & Bernheimer, 2012; Rendón, 1994; Tinto, 1997, 1998;). Selena shared, “I am more engaged in the class. They [faculty] work with our age group more than with the younger ones. They have more understanding with us, but at the same time, they see that we are working to keep our grades up.” This finding reinforces Wyatt’s (2011) research, which focused on engagement occurring primarily in the classroom with faculty and other students, if adult students were interested in the

class. Most of the participants felt that they were able to connect with faculty because as adult students they were committed to their education and wanted to succeed.

Internal to the Self

Looking into a mirror was an important theme that resonated with the participants. Participants in the study shared their experiences of self-reflection and how this aided them in their persistence. The finding supports research that highlighted self-awareness through self-reflection (Villanueva, 2015). Self-reflection was important for the participants in understanding other motivations that they possessed that affected persisting. Participants channeled their internal self-motivation to aid them in their continued success. Upon reflecting on their experiences, some participants found that proving others wrong motivated them to achieve their goal. Several participants had received negative comments from individuals that doubted the participants and their ability to be successful in college. Doubt from others motivated the students to prove those doubters wrong and show them that they could succeed in college.

Motivation also came from the ideal self that the student envisioned they could become. The findings support Markus and Nurius' (1986) possible selves theory in relation to the future selves that these participants envisioned for themselves. The participants reflected on their past selves to motivate them and influence their future self. The hopes that they had for their future self also support Yosso's (2005) theory of community cultural wealth and the notion of aspirational capital. The findings highlighted the notion aiming for a better life and looking toward the future as a motivator. Regardless of their current situation, the participants looked to their future hopes and dreams as a motivation to persist.

Overall the themes that emerged provided perspective into the phenomenon of persistence for Latino/a adult students at community colleges. Some of the findings supported previous research on Latino/a adult students and their motivations to persist. The findings also suggested additional factors that should be explored in order to provide a more complete picture of motivators for this population. The previous experiences, connections and personal reflections of participants had an impact on their persistence at the community college. Participants shared their successes and challenges and how these experiences impacted their lives. These students were able to take their past, present and future and utilized all of these to motivate them to achieve their educational goals.

Connections with Conceptual Framework

The study focused on understanding persistence and how the participants were able to be successful at a community college. Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory posits that how a person responds to a transition is based on how their situation, self, support and strategies interact in order to support that transition. The interaction of these factors determines how an individual responds to the transition. The findings suggest that participants had a positive experience, in returning to school overall and the interaction of these factors aided in allowing them to successfully transition. Yosso's (2005) theory of community cultural wealth further provides additional assets that Latino/a students had that aided in their continued success. Latino/a adult students channeled these factors to help them in their transition to academia.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory

Schlossberg et. al (1995) describes *situation* as relating to how the individual transitioned to that particular event. Participants shared their experiences with making

the decision to return to school. With reference to beginning their college career, participants discussed the notion of being in the right place to make the decision to return to school. The change in situation for these individuals was seen as a positive change, which aided in creating a favorable transition. The combination of being ready to learn and experiencing a change in their situations allowed the students to return to college. Sunshine shared her separation with her employer as a changing situation that allowed her to return to school. She saw this as an opportunity rather than a deficiency and was able to capitalize on the situation. Steven also saw his situation as an opportunity to return to college. He was in a stage in life where he was ready to return to college because he was not happy in his career; this was his opportunity to find a career that he was interested in. Steven was ready to move out of his current profession and focus on finding a career that he was passionate about. Each participant shared in the experience of finding the right time to return to college. They were at a point in their lives where they were ready to return to college and their return to school was viewed as a positive experience.

Individual characteristics of the *self* also aided in the successful transition and experience for the participants. Goodman, et al. (2006) identified the following characteristics as relevant to how an individual manages change: personal/demographic, socioeconomic status, gender, age and stage of life, state of health, ethnicity/culture, psychological resources, ego development, outlook, commitment and values, and spirituality and resiliency. The participants discussed various aspects of the self that aided in their successful transition into higher education. Most of the participants had developed resiliency based on past challenging experiences. Resiliency was an asset for

the participants, as highlighted by Yosso (2005). Steven discussed his previous experience in the military and how his education experience was easy in comparison to the military. He stated: “I think for sure it was being in the military. I think anybody that's been in the military, like you cannot complain about sitting in a class and learning. At home you think about it – you're just sitting at your desk. You're just studying when you could be outside at night in way worse conditions.” Steven developed resiliency during his time in the military and used this as motivation to continue.

The participants also described the process of self-reflection and how that motivated them to continue. All of the participants spoke about their internal self-motivation that pushed them to persist. David shared how he feels committed and determined to complete his education. “I know I need to. I see it more as a necessity because I can't quit.” Within themselves the participants found their motivation to persist and be successful. Steven also shared, “I think being in the military makes you kind of push through whatever you feel like is hard. I think that's what makes it easy to be in school.”

Strategies, another facet of Schlossberg's theory, played an important part of the participants' experience. Strategies are important components of the transition because they aid an individual in coping with the change that they are experiencing. Latino/a adult students were returning to a challenging academic environment that they were unfamiliar with. They had developed strategies to help them navigate the academic environment and also learning strategies to aid them in the classroom. Navigational capital (Yosso, 2005) was critical in the success of these students. Selena stated:

I'm kind of more engaged and have a little more education in it [navigating

courses] so I'm able to pick better classes. When they give us a timeframe to schedule classes I'm more okay, so I want to put my government with my history class that way they can coincide with each other. What kind of professors are they? These are things that I go through as I am looking for my classes. Whereas before I had no clue.

Having the academic knowledge allowed Selena to have the ability to navigate through the academic environment. Having the ability to navigate through the academic environment reinforced her confidence and abilities.

Strategies were important in the student journey because it provided them with ways to cope with this part of their life and allowed them to successfully transition. Graciela shared, "I learned how to manage my time, I've learned how to be serious about getting things turned in on time, balancing it with work, so I've learned how to do those things." All of the participants in the study had multiple roles that they were trying to fulfill. Family, work, home life and other responsibilities were some of the roles that competed for the participants' time. The participants in the study were able to develop strategies to aid them in managing their multiple roles. Developing these strategies to balance school, work and life was key to ensuring success for the participants in the study. The findings support Zell's (2010) research that determined the success of adult students was tied to their ability to develop strategies that aided students in managing work, school, and life. The participants were also able to develop learning strategies that aided them in the classroom. Steven shared his experience with learning strategies.

I'll sit in a lecture, then study, then I'll go to YouTube and I'll watch an hour of tutorials. Even when I go to sleep, I'll go to sleep watching an instructor from

here. He has YouTube videos on the exact lectures, so I will watch that.

These strategies helped to reinforce their classroom experience and aided the participants in their own learning process.

Support systems were also essential to the participants and can come of the form of “intimate relationships, family units, networks of friends, and the institutions and/or communities of which the people are a part” (Goodman, et al., 2006, p. 75). Most of the participants in the study shared in support systems being a critical part of their experience, which reinforces Yosso’s (2005) notion of social capital. The findings suggest that participants found support from the institution, their families and their friends. Several of the participants shared that growing up, higher education was not a priority. However, when the participants returned to college as adults, they found that their family was supportive of their education. Participants also found support in their network of friends. David discussed how interest from his friends motivated him.

I guess mostly friends. A lot of my friends were like pushing me to continue and I guess when they saw like how excited I was they were like yeah, you should definitely do it. I was taking my classes and they'd [ask me] well what do you learn in that. And when I would explain it they would get like intrigued by it and I think because they were intrigued that made me focus to learn more so I can explain it better to them instead of just kind of throwing stuff out.

Support was critical to the participants’ success and without this support they may not have been able to successfully transition into higher education. Support also came in the form of support systems that the participants found within the institution. Participants discussed their experiences with their faculty and academic advisors and how those

interactions provided them with reassurance and support to continue on.

Yosso's Theory of Community Cultural Wealth

The conceptual framework also incorporated, Yosso's (2005) theory of community cultural wealth, which focuses on communities of color, the cultural wealth that they possess, and how that cultural wealth aids students in their academic journeys. Of the types of capital that Yosso discusses aspirational, navigational, and to an extent, familial capital were prevalent in the findings. Yosso (2005) describes aspirational capital as motivation based on the future. Students experienced personal and professional barriers, but their ability to channel their aspirational capital aided in their persistence.

Selena shared:

My mom was diagnosed with breast cancer and I kind of wanted to drop everything and move back with her. And she was like, "No mija, you've done this for so long, you need to stick with it." She wants to see me cross the stage. She's like, "You're the first one in our immediate family to graduate college," and she wants to see that.

Regardless of the challenges that they faced, the participants had hopes and dreams for the future and utilized this aspirational capital to help them continue. "If your big sister can do it [get a degree] that means that y'all can excel, y'all can finish with flying colors and do it. Part of that reason is because of them, you know and my family." Amanda utilized her aspirational capital to help her continue. She had high aspirations for herself and for her siblings. All the participants had an outlook for the future and utilized that to help them persist. Whether it was the potential of upward mobility or a desire of a better life, these sub-themes reinforced the theory. Most of the participants in the study came

from challenging backgrounds and had experienced challenging personal experiences in their lives, however they still had optimism for the future. Regardless of their previous experiences, the participants were excited for what the future held.

Use of navigational capital also emerged in the findings. “Navigational capital refers to skills of maneuvering through social institutions” (Yosso, 2005). Participants in the study utilized their resiliency to aid them in navigating higher education. Most of the participants in the study had experienced a challenging upbringing or a challenging situation that they were able to overcome. This developed their resiliency, which provided them with an asset that they were able to utilize to persist. Some of the participants utilized this asset to continue through the admissions process. Their experience with the process was a challenging one, but the resiliency that they had developed provided them with an asset to continue. Amanda was able to channel her navigational capital to push forward. She shared “I have to push, like I have to take the step forward and get it done myself. It's really just trying to break away from the environment that I feel like I'm stuck in and break out of it.” Amanda used her background and resiliency to help push her through her education.

Familial capital also resonated with the experiences of some of the participants; they shared their need to give back to the community. Yosso (2005) describes familial capital as a type of cultural wealth that refers to “a commitment to community well-being and expands the concept of family to include a more broad understanding of kinship” (Yosso, 2005). Yosso explains that this caring for the community is fostered and nurtured by families. The ties we have to our families aid in helping us learn the importance of maintaining connections with the community (Yosso, 2005).

Selena had created a connection to adult students, like her, who were struggling with finding locations to study. Stemming from her own experience, she wanted to give back and provide adult students with children a space to study. As a single parent, she found it difficult to find places that would keep her children busy, while she completed schoolwork. Her experience provided her with the idea to give back by creating these spaces for students with children. “I didn’t have that, so I want to be able to provide that for other students.” The idea of giving back to the community motivated Selena.

Recommendations for Practitioners

The research study was designed to gain a better understanding of how Latino/a adult students experienced persistence at the community college. The findings of this study support previous research, but also highlight some recommendations for practitioners who are looking to support Latino/a adult students in college. Through the interview process, participants shared both their positive experiences, as well as the challenges that they perceived could potentially create roadblocks for Latino/a adult students. These findings point to the need for stronger systemic supports for first generation adult student. Their experiences are used to provide recommendations that could be implemented to make the transition smoother for adult students.

Challenges with Administrative Processes

Participants shared how difficult the admissions process was. Their experience with the process revealed a complicated, confusing and lengthy process that could have been a barrier for these adult students. The participants’ resiliency and pure determination to return to school was the motivating factor that aided them in completing the admissions process and ultimately enrolling for classes at the college. Their experiences

with the process could reflect a perceived obstacle to the Latino/a adult student who may not have knowledge of higher education or someone to help them navigate the admissions process. Less persistent students might not even make it through this process, despite being capable of success. Graciela shared:

If anything it's been very problematic. The whole trying to sign up back to school was a challenge. There's not a whole lot of help. It took a long time to kind of get situated, just the whole enrolling just felt like a nightmare really.

Implementing a streamlined admissions process for working, adult students who are trying to enroll in school could possibly aid in alleviating the frustrations that student's felt through the process. Previous research by McGivney (2004) and Speight, et. al (2011) found factors supporting persistence to be tied to institutional factors, like streamlined admissions processes.

Support in Navigating Higher Education

For Latino/a adult students this is especially critical, since they may have minimal support and exposure on navigating the higher education admissions process. The findings in the study suggested that Latino/a adult students found that the admissions process to be challenging. Most of the participants in the study were the first individuals in their family to attend college; therefore their experience with navigating the higher education admissions process was a challenge. Putting resources, including people, in place to guide Latino/a adult students through the admissions process, especially those who are first-generation adult students would aid in their successful transition into higher education. The decision by Latino/a adult students to return to college is not an easy one, but once the decision has been made it would aid a student in having a streamlined

process with minimal challenges.

Availability of Student Services

Additionally, the participants were challenged with the limited availability of certain services outside of the traditional 8-5 schedule. Most institutions offer a variety of student services from advising, library services, tutoring labs, etc. to aid students with their studies and also with their completion. Participants talked about the challenges with gaining access to services after hours, like the library and tutoring services.

The math labs all close early. And I have classes so I can't go during those times or they aren't open on weekends, so it's hard to get in hours there. Or a lot of just the accommodations that are at this school, they just don't offer it for anybody like after hours or during the weekends.

Selena also shared her experience with having to find a location to study after hours. She shared that she often will go to another college that has a library that offers 24-hour availability in order to be able to accomplish her course responsibilities. Providing non-traditional hours for services can further aid the student in their successful completion of their courses, which could lead to their persistence in higher education.

Another participant discussed her difficulties in securing an appointment with her advisor. Appointments were offered during work hours and in order to attend appointments, she would need to take time off of work.

I have to go meet with an advisor, and the only block of time they have for changing your major, is Thursdays and – I think Tuesdays and Thursdays from 1:00 to 3:00 or something like that while I'm working. So, it requires me to take time off and plan and it's just difficult.

For adult students, like Graciela, having later hours or weekend hours, for offices offering key student services, would allow her to access services. For an adult student who is often working full-time, time off of work would equal lost wages that could cause financial strain. These hours were not conducive for an adult student who is working within these time frames. Practitioners of the field should look at expanding hours of operation for specific student services in order to address the needs and time constraints of the adult student who have limited hours due to work schedules.

Course Modality Options

Contrary to findings in previous research on adult students and their preferences for online coursework (Kasworm 2003; Speight, et al. 2011), participants in the study were more interested in more face-to-face options rather than online options. Previous research highlights the time constraints that adult students have and the flexibility that online options provide for the adult student (Kasworm, 2003). Several participants discussed their lack of interest in taking online courses and their preference for face-to-face courses that allowed for a richer experience in the classroom. Participants recommended that the institution offer more evening or Saturday courses to provide options to take a face-to-face course rather than an online course. As one student stated, “there was a class that I needed but they only offered it during the day and I couldn’t take it.” For adult students who are working full time and trying to complete their degree, attending class during the day may not be an option and therefore depending on class scheduling, they may have to take it online, forgo their program or stop out.

The recommendations above are directed to community college practitioners in order to better serve adult students. However, a more comprehensive approach to assess

student needs is needed in order to capture the true needs of the adult student. The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) has developed resources to help colleges and universities assess whether they are serving adult students to the best of their ability. The Institutional Self-Assessment Survey (ISAS) and Adult Learner Inventory (ALI) are instruments that provide the needs of the adult learner and also provide institutions with their strengths in serving this population and with their opportunities to improve (CAEL, 2015). Developing these types of assessments, specifically for community colleges, would provide practitioners with an assessment tool that can provide additional insight into adult students' needs and assess the gaps that institutions have in serving this population.

In order to continue to support adult students on their educational journey, it is imperative to provide options to accommodate their needs and preferences. Higher education administrators and practitioners can utilize these recommendations to aid in the persistence and completion of the Latino/a adult students. With more adult students attending community college, it is important to understand and cater to their needs in order to ensure success in higher education.

Recommendations for Future Research

This phenomenological study provided a glimpse into the experiences of persistence for Latino/a adult students and insight into the motivating factors that have aided in their continued enrollment. Participants shared their challenges and triumphs in their return to college and their stories led to additional questions into this population. The study focused on eight Latino/a adult students who shared their experiences on what has motivated them to persist. Future research could examine the differences in Latino

and Latina adult students and how their experiences may differ. The findings in the study suggested some differences between these two populations, but delving into those differences was not the focus of this study and would require different sampling strategies. Further research can explore the cultural aspects of returning to college for both Latinos and Latinas and explore the similarities and the differences in their experiences. Most of the Latinas in this study were caretakers for families, children, and partners. This was not the experience for the Latino students in the study. Latinas in the study experienced role strain due to their varying roles, but also due to what they felt was culturally expected of them (Goode, 1960; Markle, 2015). A closer examination of the cultural aspects of what Latinas experience would be helpful in gaining a better understanding of the challenges that these students have. Also, exploring the experiences of Latino students and the cultural aspects of financially providing for their families while completing their education would further the literature on Latino persistence.

Additionally, Latinas discussed their education as empowering and a way of becoming self-sufficient. Future research could examine the journey of selected Latinas and how their education has affected their lives. For Latinas in this study, they felt that through their education they were able to support themselves and not rely on others for financial support. Further exploration of gender and empowerment through education would expand the knowledge base on Latinas in higher education.

The literature on adult students would also benefit from exploring this population through a quantitative approach to determine the factors that aid Latino/a adult students at community colleges on a larger scale. A quantitative approach would allow for an increased number of participants and provide a broader look at factors that motivate

Latino/a adult students. This approach would also allow for representation of students from multiple community colleges in a region, state or across the nation. This study provides a framework and themes to develop an instrument that could be used in a quantitative study.

A few of the participants in the study shared their experiences as veteran adult students. The body of literature on veteran students in community college continues to grow, but research on Latino/a adult veteran students at community colleges may be a population that should be explored. Exploring the experiences of veteran Latino/a adult students may shed some light on the additional challenges that these students may experience that Latino/a adult students may not encounter. Examining this population could provide insights into how to help these students persist at the community college.

The veteran students in the study also discussed their veteran's benefits as a motivating factor. As previous research (Kasworm, 2003) has stated, adult students often have a difficult time trying to finance their education, for these students the ability to pay for their college through their veteran's benefits was a relief. Bergman, et. al (2014) and McGiveney's (2004) research, suggests that having financial support for their education contributes to persistence. With previous researchers highlighting the importance of funds to pay tuition and its relationship to persistence, research on veteran students and their persistence could explore the degree to which a relationship exists for this population. Research on veterans may also aid in providing practitioners with suggestions on how to better serve this population to ensure a smooth transition to utilize those benefits.

Concluding Thoughts

When I began this research I was interested in providing practitioners with insights into Latino/a adult students persistence and how to utilize the findings to best serve them. As a practitioner in the field, I was challenged with how limited the institution was in serving this population. I have worked in higher education for over 10 years and was interested in learning more about this population and how best to support them at a community college. However, through this research journey, I was able to really learn more about students and their own motivations to continue. I was impressed with the resiliency that these students possessed and how they were committed and motivated to make a change in their lives and also in the lives of their families. I was awed by their journeys and inspired by them to continue with mine. As a few students mentioned to me, “you are an example of what my future could be,” this reinforced my commitment to this research and also to fully tell their stories of persistence. I found that their stories motivated me to push forward and persist in my own academic journey.

This dissertation journey has allowed me to question and think about other aspects of the Latino/a community college student and look to continue my research with this population. The stories shared by the participants showed their resiliency and their commitment to achieve their goals at all costs. The participant’s experiences have opened my eyes to all the challenges that students bring to the classroom. I have become more aware of how I teach in the classroom, as well as how I work with students during the admissions process. I hope that my contribution to the literature on Latino/a adult students aids in providing researchers and practitioners with insights into how to better serve students and provide a platform for future research that highlights this population.

APPENDIX SECTION

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APPENDIX A: IRB CONSENT FORM

INFORMED CONSENT

Study Title: Understanding Persistence of the Latino/a Adult Student at the Community College

Principal Investigator:
Yolanda Reyes Guevara

Co-Investigator/Faculty Advisor:
Dr. Jovita Ross-Gordon

This consent form will give you the information you will need to understand why this research study is being done and why you are being invited to participate. It will also describe what you will need to do to participate as well as any known risks, inconveniences or discomforts that you may have while participating. We encourage you to ask questions at any time. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and it will be a record of your agreement to participate. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

You are invited to participate in a research study to learn more about Latino/a adult students at community colleges and their experiences with persistence from semester to semester. The information gathered will be used to aid in gaining an understanding of how students are successful in a community college. You are being asked to participate because you are a Latino/a adult student and are currently enrolled at a community college. Participants must fulfill the following criteria:

1. A student over the age of 25 years old
2. Self-identifies as Hispanic or Latino/a
3. Currently enrolled as a student at the institution
4. Enrolled for three consecutive semesters

PROCEDURES

If you agree to be in this study, you will participate in the following:

- Initial interview of approximately 60-minutes
- Follow up interview of approximately 45-minutes
- Complete a written reflection of one critical *incident* that highlights your experience with persistence at the community college and your success.

We will set up a time to meet at a location and time of your choosing. You will first complete a questionnaire that will provide demographic information and participate in two interviews one of approximately 60-minutes each and a follow-up interview of approximately 45-minutes. Between the first and the second interview, you will also be asked to write about a critical incident and reflect on an experience that highlights your persistence at the community college.

RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

The study will include collection of demographic information, although you may skip items if there are any you are uncomfortable answering. If at any time you feel uncomfortable responding to any interview questions, you may choose not to answer them.

The study will include collection of demographic information. Should some of the interview questions make you uncomfortable or upset, you are always free to decline to answer or to stop your participation at any time. Should you feel discomfort after participating and you are a Northwest Vista College student, you may contact the Student Wellness Center for counseling services at 210-486-4834 or 210-486-4419. They are located in Cypress Campus Center, Room 204 3535 N. Ellison Dr. San Antonio, TX 78251.

BENEFITS/ALTERNATIVES

There will be no presumed direct benefit to you from participating in this study, although you may find reflecting on your persistence as a student, thus far, to be a positive experience. However, the information that you provide will aid in providing insight into the successes and experiences of Latino/a adult community college students and can influence community college campuses to focus on understanding how to support these students. This study may also aid in gaining insight into how Latino/a adult students have persisted at community colleges and how future academic leaders can use this information to influence persistence at their institutions.

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY

Reasonable efforts will be made to keep the personal information in your research record private and confidential. Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. The members of the research team and the Texas State University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) may access the data. The ORC monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research participants.

Your name will not be used in any written reports or publications, which result from this research; rather a pseudonym, which you may choose if you like, will be used for any quoted material. Data will be kept for three years (per federal regulations) after the study is completed and then destroyed.

PAYMENT/COMPENSATION

You will not be paid for your participation in this study.

PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw from it at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

QUESTIONS

If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in this study, you may contact the Principal Investigator, Yolanda Reyes Guevara : yrg6@txstate.edu.

This project 2018474 was approved by the Northwest Vista College IRB on January 29, 2018 and by the Texas State IRB on February 20, 2018. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, or if you have complaints, concerns, or questions about the research, you may contact the NVC IRB Chair, Simon van Dijk, Ph.D., at (210) 486-4843 or svandijk@alamo.edu or can be directed to the Texas State University IRB Chair, Dr. Denise Gobert 512-245-8351 – (dgobert@txstate.edu) or to Monica Gonzales, IRB Regulatory Manager 512-245-2334 - (meg201@txstate.edu).

DOCUMENTATION OF CONSENT

I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of involvement and possible risks have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand I can withdraw at any time.

Printed Name
of Study Participant

Signature
of Study Participant

Date

Participant Signature
Authorizes the use of audio
recording

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

APPENDIX B: PRE-INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Participant Pseudonym: _____

Age: _____

Gender: _____

Enrollment Status: full-time or part-time

APPENDIX C: SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS–FIRST INTERVIEW

- 1) Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?
- 2) What are some of the other responsibilities that you currently have going on outside of school?
 - a. So you have a lot going on outside of school. How did you decide to begin going to college at this time and why was now a good time to start?
- 3) Have you attended college in the past? What happened that got in the way of your continuing school at that time?
- 4) You are now in your third semester here. To what would you attribute your access as a student so far? Possible probes:
 - a. Can you tell me what you think helped your return after your first semester?
 - b. What has motivated you to continue attending college?
 - c. What factors contributed to your successful return for the fall academic term?
 - d. What external influences from outside of the college can you identify that helped you in your continued enrollment at the college?
 - i. Can you tell me a little more about how they helped you?
 - e. Were there influences from within the institution (i.e. college resources, staff, or programs) that helped you in your continued enrollment at the college?
 - i. Can you tell me a little about what those influences were and how did they help you?
- 5) How do you think your own motivations and efforts have impacted your success as a student? Can you give me any examples?
- 6) Have you experienced any difficulties with continuing in school?
 - a. How have you been able to overcome them?
 - b. Did you have a difficult time re-enrolling for the fall 2017 semester or was it easy for you to re-enroll?
 - c. Did you find it challenging or easy to return to school this fall for your second year?
- 7) How was your experience as you continued from one semester to the next semester?
- 8) At what point in your academic career did you come to the realization that you could be successful and continue your education?
 - a. What were you feeling at the time?
 - b. How did you know that you were persisting?
- 9) As a student at this institution, when did you begin to develop a sense of belonging?
 - a. What did you experience that helped develop a sense of belonging?
 - b. If you do not feel a sense of belonging, what do you believe has kept you at this institution?
- 10) What interactions with faculty have you experienced that have influenced your continuing at Northwest Vista College?

- a. Have you had the opportunity to meet with your faculty members outside of class?
- b. What was that experience like and how do you think it impacted your persistence?

APPENDIX D: SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS—SECOND INTERVIEW

During the follow-up interview I will clarify any items that I may have questions on from the first interview to ensure that I truly capture the participant's experiences.

Thank you for taking time to meet with me again, before we begin the second interview I would like to get clarification on some areas we discussed earlier where I need to get some additional information. I would also like to utilize this time to provide you with some of my initial findings, based on interviews with you and other students.

- 1) In general, do the initial interpretations of the research data that I have shared reflect your experience with persistence at the community college?
- 2) When you started college did you believe that you would be successful in continuing your academic career from the fall to the fall 2017?
 - a. Or did you have some doubts about your abilities to be successful?
- 3) Reflecting on your time as a student, do you think you have developed your skills as a college student beyond what they were from the first semester that you were here?
- 4) Can you discuss a time in the past few semesters when you felt connected to the institution?
(Depending on response) Tell me more about the context of that experience. Who was involved? What occurred that made you feel connected?
- 5) If you receive financial aid, how do you think having that support has impacted continuing with your studies?
- 6) If you did not receive financial aid, how would you pay for your classes?

APPENDIX E: RECRUITMENT EMAIL MESSAGE TEMPLATE

To:
From: Yolanda Reyes Guevara, MPA
BCC:
Subject: Research Participation Invitation: Understanding Persistence of the Latino/a Adult Student at the Community College

This email message is an approved request for participation in research that has been approved or declared exempt by the Northwest Vista College Institutional Review Board (IRB).

This research study will examine the experiences of adult Latino/a students at community colleges and how they persisted for three consecutive semesters. This study will look at the phenomenon of persistence and how these individuals were able to be successful from semester to semester. There will be no presumed direct benefit to you from participating in this study, although you may find reflecting on your persistence as a student, thus far, to be a positive experience.

You are invited to participate in the study because you:

- Are an adult student (25 years or older)
- Have self-identified as a Hispanic/Latino/a
- Are currently enrolled
- Have been enrolled for three consecutive semesters

Reasonable efforts will be made to keep the personal information in your research record private and confidential. Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential. If you decide to participate, you will be assigned a pseudonym to retain confidentiality in this study.

If you choose to participate, there will be one interview of approximately 60 minutes and a follow-up interview of approximately 45 minutes that will be requested at a time a location of your choosing. You will be asked to provide a written reflection on an event that happened during your educational journey that relates to your successful persistence. Participation in this study is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time. There are no incentives to participate, but your participation can provide educators with insight into the experiences of adult Latino/a students and their success at community colleges.

To participate in this research or ask questions about this research please contact me at Yolanda Reyes Guevara, 210-363-8146 or yrg6@txstate.edu.

This project [insert IRB Reference Number or Exemption Number] was approved by the Northwest Vista College IRB on [insert IRB approval date or date of Exemption] and by the Texas State IRB on [insert IRB approval date or date of Exemption]. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, or if you have complaints, concerns, or questions about the research, you may contact the NVC IRB Chair, Simon van Dijk,

Ph.D., at (210) 486-4843 or svandijk@alamo.edu or can be directed to the Texas State University IRB Chair, Dr. Denise Gobert 512-245-8351 – (dgobert@txstate.edu) or to Monica Gonzales, IRB Regulatory Manager 512-245-2334 - (meg201@txstate.edu).

APPENDIX F: CRITICAL INCIDENT REFLECTION PROMPT

Please take some time to write your experiences with regard to the following prompts:

Take some time to think about a time during your first semester, where you faced a difficult situation that had you question your ability to continue at this institution or your interest in doing so. Write about that situation and discuss how you felt at the time. How were you able to overcome that feeling? What happened after the incident that helped you realize your potential as a student? What were some of the resources that you utilized to help you through that particular moment in your academic career?

In addition, think about a time in your second semester when you realized that you were capable of succeeding in college--you had returned for the following fall semester! How did you experience the phenomenon of persistence? What were your thoughts on your success? How did you feel?

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