LATINO MALE DROPOUTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR K-12 SCHOOL EXPERIENCES

by

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ABSTRACT

The Latino male high school dropout rate is one of the most pressing and least researched aspects of the dropout crisis in the United States. Dropping out of high school prior to graduation probably has one of the most negative impacts on the work prospects of these young men as well as the future of their families and the well-being of their communities. Although there are many studies that address Latino high school dropout rates, there is limited data focusing on male Latino perceptions of ways their schooling experiences may influence their academic decisions. This study examines Latino male dropouts' perceptions of their K-12 school experiences and explores how these experiences might have an effect on their decision to drop out of school.

The results of this study indicate that the participants perceived a sense of not belonging and discrimination in school.   They also perceived that teachers had lower expectations of them and other minority students, and that were not afforded the same educational opportunities as their White counterparts. Because the parents of the participants are also high school dropouts, the participants felt that they did not have the academic resources at home to assist them with homework.

While all participants feel that having a high school diploma is essential for a better life, not only for themselves, but also for their families, they indicated that high school was a miserable place to be. Consequently, they corroborate that their perceptions of their school experiences did in fact contribute to their decision to leave before graduating.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Latino male high school dropout rate is one of the most pressing and least researched aspects of the dropout crisis in the United States. Dropping out of high school prior to graduation probably has one of the most negative impacts on the work prospects of these young men as well as the future of their families and the well-being of their communities. Although there are many studies that address Latino high school dropout rates, there is limited data on Latino perceptions of the way their schooling experiences influence their academic decisions. This study examines Latino male dropouts' perceptions of their K-12 school experiences and explores how these experiences affect their decision to drop out of school.

Statement of the Problem

According to the National Dropout Prevention Center, there is no single risk factor that can be used to predict who is at risk of dropping out (Excelencia in Education, 2007). Dropping out appears to be a function of multiple factors. The same demographic factors associated with academic risk correlate with the characteristics of students who drop out of school. These include factors such as: low-income status, minority, male, single parent family, limited English ability, learning or emotional disability, moving frequently, and being overage for their grade level (Hammond, Linton, Smink, & Drew, 2007).

The UCLA Chicano Research Center reported (2006), that of every one hundred Latinos who enter elementary school, forty-six females and forty-nine males exit prior to high school graduation. Nearly a decade after the Hispanic Dropout Projects' report 1994 Latino students graduate at rates consistently lower than other ethnic groups in the U.S. (Hupfeld, 2007).

While the dropout numbers for the Latino students in secondary and post-secondary education are of grave concern; the most critical component of the dropout crisis is among Mexican-American males (Bonn, Garcia & Soza, 2007). Latino male achievement consistently lags behind their Latina counterparts and other ethnic minority groups. Excelencia in Education, *Latino Males in Higher Education* (2007) reported that Latino males are more likely to drop out of high school than males from other ethnic groups. In 2004, the male dropout rates were; 29% Latinos, 7% Whites, 14% African American. Approximately 25% of Latino males 25 and over have less than a 9th grade education compared to only 7% for all males and only 57% of Latino males 25 and over have a high school diploma compared with 90% of white males and 83% of all non-Hispanics.

Scholars maintain that students hold attitudes and display behaviors when culturally biased schooling experiences repeatedly disadvantage their opportunities for academic achievement (Gay, 2000; Hollins, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 1992; Sheets, 2005). They suggest that this occurs because there is a mismatch between the school structure and students' social, cultural, or economic background. For example, scripted mandated instructional and management programs found in schools serving poor and ethnic minority student populations contribute to widening the achievement gap which results in

higher-dropout rates among these students (Brown, 2007). Education in a democracy involves attending to sociological, psychological, economic, and political dimensions with respect to their role in promoting (or undermining) justice and educational equity. The hierarchy of bureaucracy and the power of the status quo are such that, in our country, poor children and communities are treated differently compared to those children and communities from upper class backgrounds (Orfield, 2005). Social change and educational change, therefore, must go hand in hand.

In a study conducted by Ogbu (2003) African American and Latino students reported feeling disparaged, misrepresented, fearful and socially distant from their White counterparts. Ogbu also observed that these students tended to internalize the beliefs of others by questioning their own intelligences, and even often acted as if they were less intelligent than their white peers. The racial inequity and unequal treatment of African American and Latino students present in U.S. public schools often leads to student resistance resulting in disciplinary actions which reduces opportunity for academic engagement (Hagan, Shedd & Payne 2005; Sheets, 2005). The growing diversity of the student population as well as higher dropout rates of ethnic minority students emphasizes the importance of addressing how differences in schooling and students' home and community experiences affect student achievement (Maxwell, 2006; Sheets, 2005). As these students grow and progress through the education system there is increasing evidence of the inequity in their world. A painful reminder of injustice is the inappropriate use of the words "grow and progress" to describe this journey for marginalized students. Many of the children experience neither growth nor progress. Rather, schooling for them becomes a passive act of just "showing up," wishing that

they were not there and sometimes choosing to disappear either figuratively or literally. There are many reasons for this state of dissatisfaction and disengagement including an irrelevant curriculum built for members of the dominant culture as well as poor instruction effected by pressures of high stakes testing with the concomitant consequence of unfair tracking or inappropriate placement of students in special education classes (Orfield & Wald, 2001).

The importance of examining students' perceptions of the school environment can be considered. How individuals perceive their environment may be more important than objective reality since perceptions are likely to influence responses to the environment (Hagan, 2005). For example, Sheets (2005) found that Latino students who perceived unequal and unfair treatment in disciplinary actions directed towards them often increased non-attendance which resulted in loss of academic achievement.

Although Latino males may experience inequitable schooling factors common to other ethnic minority males, they also face additional issues such as, language, immigration, and lower socio-economic status, (Huber, Huidor, Malagon, Sanchez, & Solorzano, 2006). They also appear to undergo pressure to contribute to their families not only financially, but also emotionally (Greene, 2002). One of the most enduring cultural values among Latino families in the United States is that of familismo. This involves a strong identification and attachment to immediate and extended family. This value is embodied with strong feelings of loyalty and responsibility (Suarez & Orozco, 1995). It is important that educators become aware of differences in the economic, social, political and cultural experiences of Latino children to minimize the dropout probability of these students. This qualitative study will examine Latino dropouts'

perceptions of their school experiences. Their voice will offer meaningful insight to instruct educators on how to improve persistency rates for Latino high school students.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual parameters of this study are based on (a) the Drop Out Crisis Theory which purports that the drop out statistics among Latino males has the power to undermine this large segment of the Latino community to fewer life opportunities (Greene, 2007; Soza, 2007 & Yzaguirre, 2007), and (b) research examining the ways mainstream educational policies and culturally biased schooling practices adversely affect Latino males (American Psychological Association, 2008, Brown, 2007; Fine & Burns, 2003; Gay, 2000; Hollins, 1996; Sheets, 2005). Each is discussed:

Soza (2007) theorizes that the systemic under- education for Latino males is not only becoming normative, but has also reached crisis status for this population. The high dropout rate for this particular group seems to indicate discord between the needs of Latino males and the ways in which schools and teachers view and treat them.   This cultural conflict is resulting in fewer Latino males graduating from high school. In 2004, just as in 1994, the dropout rate for Latino males is higher than all other major ethnic groups in the United States (Alexander, Entwisle & Kabbani, 2001). There has been no change since 1972 (Hupfeld, 2007).

According to Greene (2002), Latino males are not educationally positioning themselves to address the needs of their communities. Dropping out of school severely limits the chance of future success for Latino males. It may deepen and continues the cycle of poverty into future generations. For example, A high school diploma is the

minimum qualification for full participation in the U.S. economy.   A worker without a diploma can only find the most menial of occupations.   The occupations that allowed workers to make a living wage without a high school diploma have diminished.   High school dropouts are seriously at risk.   These students are four times more likely than high school graduates to end up on welfare (Fry, 2003).   Unemployment for workers over the age of nineteen is twice as high for dropouts than for graduates (Brown, 2007). Most dropouts enter the workforce in low-skilled jobs such as construction, agriculture, and manufacturing (Greene, 2002).

Yzaguirre (2007) maintains that the dropout crisis has the potential to condemn a large segment of the Latino community into a permanent underclass. Receiving a good education is the lifeline by which many have lifted themselves out of poverty.   He contends that this underclass may exhibit all of the pathologies bound to urban decay: a culture where going to jail is simply a rite of passage or a badge of honor, a mass of out of wedlock births, a disintegration of the family unit, functional illiteracy, limited job skills, and loss of pride and most importantly loss of hope. Among those incarcerated, sixty-three percent are Mexican-American males between the ages of 18 and 34 (Greene, 2002).

Under-education has become an entrenched aspect of the Latino male in the United States. Schools are not meeting the needs of a significant number of this particular group of students.   This long-standing lack of service to Latino males represents an entrenched aspect of the educational culture.   Although this should be understood as an important issue of school under performance, more often than not, the high rate of academic under performance is viewed as a phenomenon among Latino males (Brown, 2007).

To better understand the persistent drop out crisis among Latino males, these occurrences must be situated within the context of the larger academic crisis of underfunded, culturally unresponsive public schools. Many Latinos attend high-poverty, low performing schools, which are often characterized by limited resources, culturally biased curriculum, and under-qualified teachers (Valenzuela, 1999). Public schools, designed for mainstream students, are not structured to address the diversity factors experienced by Latino students (Hollins, 1996; Sheets, 2005). Culturally relevant curriculum these disadvantaged schools often have inadequate bilingual language programs (Rodriguez, 2007).

Culturally relevant teaching is a term coined by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) and elaborated by Geneva Gay (2000) to describe a pedagogy that empowers students not only intellectually, but also socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to convey knowledge, skills and attitudes. Geneva Gay (2000) stresses that culturally relevant pedagogy is imperative because it uses the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning more relevant. It teaches to and through strengths of these students. It is culturally validating and affirming.

Valenzuela (1999) has concluded that school environments that degrade or deny students' cultural identities and language alienate students and make them closed to learning even in the face of obvious academic talent. She contends that subtractive experiences plague the education of Latino students. The failure of students to find positive social relationships in schools and the lack of a climate of caring and support

appear to be related to increased dropout rates among Latino students and other ethnic minorities (Rumberger & Thomas, 2000).

Noting differences in dropout rates among schools, researchers have investigated the characteristics of schools and their programs that appear to be linked with early leaving, schools in which some students have limited opportunities for academic success tend to have higher dropout rates. Students who experience difficulty meeting the academic demands of the school tend to drop out rather than face the frustration of their constant failure to achieve good grades (Alexander, Entwisle & Kabbani, 2001). The major theoretical framework that is considered central to this study includes achievement, persistence and support as Latinos and other minorities advanced through the high school educational pipeline.

Purpose

This study will explore Latino males' perceptions of their K-12 school experiences and will examine the extent that these experiences have had to influence decisions to leave high school prematurely.

Research Question

The research question guiding this study is: How did these Latino Males' Perceptions of their K-12 School Experiences Affect Their Decision to Drop out of School?

Significance of the Study

Prior research has given us the data and factors concerning the Latino dropout rates, however, minimal research examines the specific perceptions of Latino males K-12

school experiences and how those perceptions influence their decision to leave school. Knowledge gained about these students may provide insights to anyone involved in the education system. Through the voices of these students, those involved, whether directly or indirectly, in their education can begin to understand how they view themselves and others in the process of their education. For example, teachers may be able to implement strategies that will help them to find ways to reach and teach Latino males. Educators must first reach, or connect with students in order to be able to teach them. Without that connection, teaching does not take place. Administrators and legislatures, who are directly responsible for implementing federal and local programs such as No Child Left Behind, may also gain valuable insight that will help them to implement policies that will have a positive impact on the schooling of this particular group of students. Curriculum directors may also gain valuable information that will guide them to design and implement curriculum that facilitates a cultural connection with these and other minority students in order to minimize the dropout rate for Latino males and other minority groups.

Limitations of the Study

Although, the following are not considered limitations in a qualitative research study, quantitative researchers may find the following aspects of this study to be just that. There were several factors that could not be controlled although the study has been carefully designed. These are related to sample size, sample selection, data collection methods, and the researcher effects. The data collected from this study was provided by a small sample size. A common criticism of qualitative methodology questions the value of its dependence on small samples which is believed to render it incapable of generalizing

conclusions (Hamel, 1993; Yin, 1994). However, these researchers forcefully argue for the value of every single study providing that the parameters are guided by the goals of the study, and that they have met the established objectives. Exploratory and descriptive, as is the case with this study, case studies examine the development and characteristics of phenomena often with the goal of developing hypotheses of cause and effect relationships (Yin, 2003). Yin (1989) maintains that general applicability will result from the set of methodological qualities of the study, and the energy with which the study is constructed.

In a non-qualitative research study, some may find the criterion used in the selection of participants to limit the study. The exclusion of Latina students may limit the scope of the dropout problem for Latinos. The study was conducted solely in West Texas with Latino males who have dropped out of school within the last one to seven years. Nevertheless, Patton (1990) states that the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth, and that information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research. What has then been designed for this study is precisely an "information-rich" group of participants to directly address the main research question.

The quantitative researcher may also argue that the sources of data collection may also limit this study. The majority of the data came from self-reports. This type of data may be subject to errors in recall of certain events and activities and may contain incorrect over and under-reporting (Denzin, 1970). Although a standard protocol guided the structured and open-ended interviews, the participants might have withheld, exaggerated, or even forgotten some information. In order to counterbalance these possibilities the researcher utilized Denzin (1970) idea of the data triangulation which

entails gathering data through several sampling strategies, so that slices of data at different times and social situations, as well as on a variety of people, are gathered. In this study data from interviews were combined with information from focus groups, school documents and archival data of dropout rates for this area.

Final point of methodological consideration is that according to Merriam (1998) the analysis of data may be subjected to the researcher's personal biases because the researcher is the primary tool for data collection. To overcome this potential limitation, the researcher used several strategies to solidify trustworthiness. These include audio-taped interviews, the recording of field notes immediately after the contact and consistency checks were used. Additionally, the study established coding schemes, data display matrices, negative evidence, and testing findings for conformability prior to drawing conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

Summary

This chapter discusses the research problem, the purpose, the conceptual framework guiding the study and the general research questions. The chapter concludes with the significance and limitations of the study.

Research and scholarship framing the conceptual framework of the study are discussed in Chapter 2. The methodologies used to select participants and collect the data needed to analyze the research questions are detailed in Chapter 3. The results of the data analysis are presented in Chapter 4. And a summary of the findings, conclusions drawn from the results and recommendations for future research are presented in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The review of the literature is organized into the following sections: The first is the general overview of why many researchers feel that there is a high school dropout crisis among Latino males in the United States. Every year thousands of high school students drop out of school and one of the most pressing and least discussed aspects of the drop out crisis is that of Latino males

In a separate section of the chapter, a discussion is conducted as to the other elements which some have argued further contribute to the Latino dropout crisis. For example, one of the major barriers for these students may be those within the schools, such as the influence of mainstream educational policies and schooling practices that adversely affect Latino males (American Psychological Association, 2008; Brown, 2007). Another significant factor is that of parental and community involvement. All children bring "context" with them to school and in that personal socio-cultural context, are their values, aspirations, language, cultural traditions and customs (Olivera, 2002).

Lastly, it is important to include within the general scope of the study a section that deals with examining Latino males' perceptions of the school environment and their experiences within this milieu. Examining students' perceptions of their educational experiences provides a unique and authentic view of how they interpret their social world (Mendes, 2003).

The Dropout Crisis

Historically, only forty-nine percent of Latino males graduate from high school (NCES, 2004, Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, 2006). Under further scrutiny, state graduation rates of Latino males are startling. New York, the home of the largest school system in the United States, ranks last in Latino male graduation rates with only 29% receiving their diploma. California, Florida, and Texas house a huge Latino population, and barely breach the midpoint averaging 51.6% of their total male population.

Table 1.1   Latino Graduation Rates

State	Hispanic Male Graduation Rate	Average Graduation Rate
National	49%	70%
Louisiana	74%	63%
Texas	55%	69%
California	51%	65%
Kansas	50%	76%
Washington	50%	69%
Florida	49%	61%
Illinois	49%	73%
Connecticut	48%	82%
New Mexico	48%	59%
Colorado	46%	72%
Pennsylvania	45%	81%
Massachusetts	38%	72%
New York	29%	58%

There are multiple factors that affect the academic success and failure of Latino males. Researchers have found that Latino males are more likely to have low reading achievement (NCES, 2004), and are more likely to be retained at various grade levels. (Heubert & Hauser, 1999). These obstacles increase their chances of academic failure.

Literacy encompasses every subject area; therefore, the inability to read has an impact on every area of the curriculum, and adds to students' frustration with school. Retention at any grade also affects students' self-efficacy which then influences how they perceive the learning environment. The perception of failure then leads to economic, societal, and a personal disconnect to the American dream.

The lack of educational success paints a bleak future of Latino males. Those jobs that once allowed workers to make good money without a high school diploma have diminished. Therefore, high school dropouts are seriously at risk for becoming unproductive members of the US society. These students are four times more likely than high school graduates to end up on welfare. Unemployment for workers over the age of nineteen is twice as high for dropouts than for graduates (Rumberger, 2001).

The problem is that educators have long known that academic motivation among adolescents begins to decline beginning in the 5th or 6th grade and spirals downward into the high school years, (Rumberger, 2001). Although most self-motivated students plow through and graduate from high school, one-quarter of teenagers still fail to graduate from high school despite decades of reform efforts, (Rumberger, 2001).

Every year, thousands of young people make the decision to exit from their high school educational pathway. One of the most pressing and perhaps least discussed issues of the dropout crisis in our country today, is the Latino male dropout rate. The potential economic and social costs for these dropouts are staggering. High school dropouts are more likely to require government assistance, go to prison, experience chronic poverty, and they are more likely to pass these struggles on to their children (Soza, 2007).

Although the dropout numbers for the entire Latina/o community, both within secondary and post-secondary education, are of great concern, the most severe component of this crisis is among Latino males. Latino males' achievement consistently lags behind that of their Latina counterparts and other groups. A 2007 study from Excelencia in Education, *Latino Males in Higher Education* reports that Latino males are more likely to drop out of high school than any other male. In 2004, 29% of Latino males dropped out compared to 7% of white males and 14% of African American males. Approximately 25% of Latino males 25 and over have less than a 9th grade education compared with 7% for all males, and finally, only 57% of Latino males 25 and over have a high school diploma compared with 90% of white males and 83% of all non-Latinos (Gandara, 2010).

Soza (2007), found that of every one hundred Latino female and one hundred Latino male students who enter elementary school, fifty-three females and fifty-six males exit prior to completing school. It would appear that Latino students are still moving through the academic pipeline at rates consistently lower than other ethnic groups in the United States. In 2004, twenty-nine percent of Latino males dropped out compared to seven percent of white males and fourteen percent of African American males. Further statistics indicate that Latino males who are twenty-five years of age and over have less than a 9th grade education, compared to seven percent of all other males; and approximately fifty-seven percent of Latino males in this same age range have a high school diploma compared with ninety percent of white males and eighty-three percent of all non-Hispanics.

According to Soza (2007), under education is becoming the norm for the Latino male in the United States. Additionally, the dropout rate among this particular group seems to indicate some discord between the needs of Latino males and the ways in which schools and teachers view and treat these young men. The Latino educational pipeline does not ensure a smooth flow of students from one end to another, but rather a broken trickle of less and less Latino males graduating from high school. In 2004 just as in 1994, the dropout rate for Latino males is still higher than all other major ethnic groups in the United States. In fact, there has been little change since 1972.

In 2002, twenty-eight percent of Latino males ages 16 to 24 years old were high school dropouts compared to eighteen percent of Latino females. So what happens to these students? Most enter the workforce in low-skilled jobs such as construction, agriculture, and manufacturing. Approximately twenty-one percent end up in federal, state and local prisons. Among those incarcerated, sixty-three percent are Latino males between the ages of 18 and 34 (Greene, 2002).

At this time there is no foolproof way of identifying students who will drop out of school. According to the National Dropout Prevention Center, there is no single risk factor that can be used to predict who is at risk of dropping out. Dropping out appears to be a function of multiple variables. The same demographic factors correlated with academic risk are the same that correlate with the characteristics of those students who drop out of school (Yzaguirre, 2007). These include being from a low-income family, being a minority, being male, being from a single parent family, having limited English ability, having a learning or emotional disability, moving frequently, and being overage for their grade level (Hammond, et.al. 2007).

These sobering statistics have astonishing implications for the United States and its ability to compete in the global market. For educators these statistics represent millions of individual students lost to uncertain futures.

How can administrators and educators begin to turn the tide?

Yzaguirre (2007) and, Greene (2002) state that decreasing our dropout rates will only happen student by student.   Students drop out for reasons as individual as the students themselves, therefore, dropout prevention strategies are going to have to focus on students as individuals. These strategies will need to engage students in schools and teach them the skills they need to cope with difficult times in classrooms and in their lives (Hupfeld, 2007).

Research strongly indicates that poor grades, poor attendance, and disengagement from school become particularly threatening to the completion of high school. By late junior high or early high school, researchers have identified four important categories that begin to emerge as indicators that a student will not complete high school (Olatokunbo S. Fashola, Robert E. Slavin, 2009).

- Life events- dropout is prompted by something that happens to the student outside of school, for example, teen pregnancy, high mobility rates, where the student's family is constantly moving or even the illness of a parent.

- Fade outs- dropout is prompted by frustration and boredom with school although the student has not repeated or failed any grades.

- Push outs- dropouts are strongly or explicitly encouraged to withdraw or transfer away because they are perceived to be behavioral problems, or detrimental to the success of the school (high-stakes testing failures).

Thus there is truly no single reason why students drop out of high school. The decision to drop out is often complex and relates to each individual student, their family, school and community. The decision is personal, it reflects their unique life circumstances, and is part of a slow process of disengagement from school (Bridgeland, Dilulio and Morison, 2006).

Schooling, Policies and Practices

Recent political and public commentary, lamenting the decreasing academic performance of U.S. students when compared to other countries, have called for the reform of current educational practices in order to prepare students for an increasingly competitive global economy (Levin & Fullan, 2008). This call for reform to the U.S. educational system and to ensure educational excellence is quite evident in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act of 2001.

Scholars agree that if we are to be responsive to the needs of Latino male students, we must examine current educational methods used to address their academic needs. As noted above, there is no shortage of empirical evidence highlighting the difficulties that minority students encounter within the educational system in the United States. Racial and ethnic minority students often face poorer educational outcomes in a variety of areas than do their mainstream counterparts. This is usually the case, especially, in those areas of our country that are close the Mexican border.

The Texas portion of the U.S.-Mexico border region includes more than half of the entire bi-national border and some of the poorest counties in the state and the nation. Approximately 400,000 border residents live in communities that are predominately Latino and which often lack some of the most basic living necessities. Thus, the percentage of Latino students enrolled in several schools with greater degrees of poverty is higher than any other group. More Latinos also attend schools that are segregated. While poverty and segregation pose clear challenges for students struggling to achieve a high-quality education, many Latinos also face the added challenge of language barriers, and the understanding necessary to navigate through the American educational system. Fears of discrimination and persecution are also challenges for these Latino students (Valenzuela, 1999). Stereotyping of Latinos and other minorities often results from, and leads to prejudice and bigotry. Prejudice and bigotry leads to discrimination. Language, particularly slang, is sometimes used to dehumanize members of certain groups of people, and this dehumanization is an originator of discrimination, isolation and sometimes violence.

Researchers insist that time for movement, hands-on activities, incorporation of technology, competition, supportive school environments, and attention given to students' cultural background are essential for improving the educational outcomes of Latino male students (Fletcher, 2006, Hupfeld,2007, Maxwell, 2006)). Educational policy affecting Latino males, improving educational outcomes and closing the achievement gap for Latinos have long been goals for education researchers, practitioners, and those interested in promoting access and equity for underserved populations.   In 2007, only 13 percent of Latinos aged 25 and over had earned a

bachelor's degree or higher in comparison to 32 percent of Whites and 19 percent of

Blacks (NCES, 2007). This is particularly disturbing given the fact that Latinos are the

second largest racial and ethnic group in the United States. Increasing the educational

attainment for the Latino population is essential to ensure a healthy workforce, a strong

economy, and a citizenry that is both productive and informed.

Early Policies

Between the 1960s to the mid-1980s, the center of gravity in federal efforts to

improve the education of ELLs rested on ensuring that these students had equal access to

educational opportunities, and in building the capacity of state and local agencies to put

in place effective programs for a steadily growing ELL student population. A long civil

rights crusade by minority advocates resulted in these needs being codified in key

legislation, including the Civil Rights Act and the Elementary and Secondary Education

Act of 1964, the Bilingual Education Act of 1968, the Equal Educational Opportunity Act

of 1974 and the Emergency Immigrant Education Act of 1984 (August & Hakuta, 1997).

This legislation also reflected policymaker's awareness that local educators often lacked

the capacity and expertise to meet the needs of a changing school population without

federal help (August & Hakuta, 1997).

By the mid-1980s the strongest voices for school reform were animated by a

different set of priorities such as school productivity and accountability for student

performance. In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education released *A*

Nation At Risk and school reform advocates in many states began calling for higher

curriculum standards, more ambitious instructional frameworks, and new student

assessments tied to the new more rigorous standards (August & Hakuta, 1997). Early promoters of performance-based reform included business elites, public officials and education experts.

The 1980s and 1990s were a period of tremendous ferment in American public education. Few reforms have had as much impact on classroom practice as the federal push to encourage states to establish curriculum standards in core subjects and to hold teachers and local school administrators accountable for student performance on state-administered tests (Valenzuela, 2005). Educators have focused extreme attention on this movement's implications for classroom teaching and learning. However, less attention has been focused on the implications for Latinos, English-language learners (ELLs), and other student subpopulations (Velasco, 2005). Regardless of how appropriate accountability assumptions may be for the typical classroom, they generally do not work well for the ELL classroom. The gap between the educational needs of ELLs (especially those in secondary schools) and professional knowledge about how to meet these students' needs is wide.

In 1994, during the Clinton Legacy, Clinton convinced congress to require all schools who were receiving federal funds under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to implement comprehensive accountability system as mandated by each state. These program changes under Title I broke with past practices by requiring states to replace minimum standards for poor and academically disadvantaged children with more challenging standards for all students (Citizens Commission on Civil Rights, 1999). The new accountability system was to be based on state-established content standards for reading and math and on assessments aligned with those standards. The new law

required states to hold all students to the same performance standards and to hold schools and districts accountable for student performance. Consequently, most states developed performance-based accountability systems for a wider number of core subjects and for all public schools. Some states, such as Texas, went a step further and attached high stakes to performance-based assessments, for example to rely on test scores to assess teacher and principal performance or to determine student promotion and graduation (McNeil, 2005).

In 2001, in the NCLB Era, Congress reauthorized Title I legislation when it passed No Child Left Behind Act. Congress mandated annual testing of every child. The new law contained a requirement that states hold schools and districts accountable for student performance, including specifically, minority and economically disadvantaged students and those with limited proficiency in English (Haney, 2001). *So where was NCLB born?* According to Valenzuela (2005), the so called "Texas Miracle", an approach to education that was showing unbelievable results, particularly in Houston where the dropout rates plunged and test scores soared. Houston Superintendent Rod Paige was given credit for the schools' success, by making principals and administrators accountable for how well the students in the district did. Once President George Bush was elected in 2000, Paige was named as the secretary of education, and Houston became the model for the president's "No Child Left Behind" education reform act. As it turned out some of the miraculous claims which Houston made were wrong. Education combined with the NCLB, has shifted what was once an intrastate debate over educational accountability to a national-level issue.

Proponents of NCLB accountability claim that it promoted equity by making schools teach poor and minority children who have been historically neglected by public school system (Scheurich & Skrla, 2001). Opponents argue that the Texas system of educational accountability failed and will continue to fail Latinos and other minority youth and their communities.

While NCLB is focused on closing the academic achievement gap between advantaged and less advantaged students, the performance of non-white students on standardized tests stands in stark contrast to the performance of the white student population. Opponents feel that policies that support high-stakes testing are harmful to all children, especially children from poor, minority, or non-English-speaking families. According to Heubert and Hauser (1999) state policies that attach high-stakes consequences to children's test scores are inherently invalid, undemocratic and unjust. High stakes tests serve to degrade educational aims, limit and constrict the curriculum, constrain teachers, stress students, and curtail access to postsecondary education. Relying on the data of student achievement test scores can serve to undermine both learning and equality of educational opportunities for far too many students.

Generally the pressure to raise scores may be felt more intensely in the lowest-scoring schools, which normally have high populations of low-income and minority students. Students at these schools may be more likely to suffer from overzealous efforts to raise scores. Teachers at these schools report greater frequency of test preparation than teachers in higher-performing schools. This is likely to lead to superficial appearance that the gap between minority and majority students is narrowing when no change has actually occurred (Haney, 2001).

How does the enactment of this legislation, undermine the quality of schooling and contribute to massive dropouts? How can this policy be carried out by teachers? How is it that this system is tolerated by children and their parents? Most importantly, how did this policy become the model for other states, and become the basis for the entire nation (McNeil, 2005)?

The Texas system became the model for the nation because the system was promoted as an accountability system, although it has had negative effects on the quality of public education, especially for Latino and African American youth. The system is really an extreme form of centralization. It is a system of centralized controls governing nearly all aspects of public schooling in Texas (Haney, 2000). Under this closed system, what counts as learning and what matters as educational content are not left to individual teachers, to school faculties, local communities or even the local school boards, rather the decisions are made centrally, and at the top of the bureaucracy, or by legislators . The lower levels of the bureaucracy, where the children and teachers are not invited to participate and create variations or improvements on this system or to offer alternatives to it (Amrein & Berliner, 2002).

Official education policy in Texas is claimed by its advocates to be improving the overall quality of education. Proponents also claim that under the current system, the achievement gap that separates Anglo students from Latino and African American students is closing, therefore, making school more equitable (McNeil, 2005). Sadly, most of the claims have been shown to be false (Haney, 2001). The irony of this education policy, based on high-stakes testing, is that there is growing evidence that its'

enforcement is driving down the quality of public education and driving significant numbers of student out of school (McNeil & Valenzuela, 2001).

The original intent of the Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA) of 1965 as initiated by the Johnson administration's War on Poverty was to try to provide equal access to educational opportunity through compensatory programs such as Title I. Since that time, the original legislation has undergone many revisions and the U.S. government has assumed increasing symbolic and material control of our public school system, despite the fact that public education was constitutionally relegated to local entities (McNeil & Valenzuela, 2001).

With specific demand for testing and English language requirement, NCLB affects the public education of English as Second Language Latino students who are members of a broad category of peoples who are Spanish speaking and living in the U.S. One pertinent issue which must be addressed is that test data is used in inappropriate ways to stigmatize and label children and schools as failing without full and accurate consideration to mitigating factors that cause some students to do poorly on standardized tests (Abedi and Gandara, 2006). An additional problem with standardized testing is that often the curriculum and tests are not well aligned. Some students have even reported that they were tested on content knowledge before they have had classes or instruction in those particular curricular areas such as mathematics (Carlson, 2004).

Summary of Educational Policy

The Texas accountability system has successfully rooted an excessive form of centralization and has imposed on children and schooling a radical form of

standardization. The image that has been portrayed is of a system that has improved educational quality for Texas schools and made schools more equitable. Rising test scores for the state on all three ethnic groups is what the state proclaims as its evidence (McNeil, 2005). However, misuse of educational data based on assessment that discounts Latinos and other minority ethnic groups in the name of objective and scientific testing has harmful consequences for these groups who are often overlooked and then punished for not being able to perform well on these tests. The primary aim of assessment is to foster learning of academic content for all students. Unless what schools assess and how schools assess match what is taught and how it is taught, the results are meaningless. The use of data for these purposes sets Latino children up for failure when they are permanently tracked as ESL students by the education system. There is potential for harm when decisions affecting students' futures are being made based on results of assessment made with tools that are not appropriate for the purpose (Valenzuela, 2005). Data is then used to manipulate public opinion, to implement educational policies, and make it exceedingly difficult for schools not meeting yearly performance targets to obtain adequate funding to improve teaching conditions (Goodman, Shannon, Goodman & Rapoport, 2006).

Consequently, it is essential to consider the use of testing, and apply a critical analysis to tests results when dealing with different communities that are punished based on the results and, most definitely often left behind (Rodriguez, 2007).

Parental and Community Involvement

Research studies suggest that the role of the family is significant in influencing the school performance of children. A major finding within this research indicates that parents who are involved in school activities are more likely to have children who perform well academically (Baker & Stevenson, 1986). There is also considerable evidence that parental involvement leads to improvements in student achievement, improved school attendance, and reduced dropout rates (Epstein 1987).

The Latino population is currently the largest ethnic minority group in the United States (U.S. Department of the Census, 2010). It represents 16.7 of the U.S. population, with a population estimate of 52 million people (U.S. Department of the Census, 2010). Researchers who study Latino families have also suggested that the role of the family is significant in influencing the school performance of children (Collins, Maccoby, Steinberg, Hetherrington, Bornstein, 2000). Statistics shows that Latino families support, encourage, and assist their children through school in many ways (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004).

Despite the support of families, there are barriers that Latino families have difficulty overcoming. Quezada, Díaz, Sanchez (2003) described some of these barriers, with language as the most challenging. Latino parents are likely to feel that no one in the school will listen to them if they cannot communicate effectively in English. Their feelings of self-worth are often diminished because they do not understand documents that are sent home and cannot help their children with homework. Holman (1997) calls

this the 'the intimidation factor' wherein the parent may feel inept, and thus reluctant to become engaged.

Latino parents need to be made aware of what the school means by parental involvement and what the school expects from them. According to Cotton and Wikelund (2001), parental involvement includes: attending school functions, responding to school obligations, helping children improve their school work, providing encouragement, arranging for appropriate study time and space, modeling desired behavior, monitoring homework, and actively tutoring children at home. Latino parents, however, may interpret involvement as interfering with schoolwork (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004). Latino parents are not very familiar with the concept of working together with school systems. Parents have a very high regard for educators and feel that they are better left alone to do their job. Parents feel that interfering with school activities would be harmful to their children (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004). Parents who cannot speak English or who believe that they have no right to interfere with a school's practices may completely avoid any contact with the school or teachers (Tett & St. Clair, 1997).

Latino parents seem to maintain strong support for their children's educational goals (Ceballo, 2004), although they feel ill-equipped, uncomfortable, or lacking confidence in their ability to help their children with their school work (Okagaki & Frensch, 1998). Latino parents value education, yet they face multiple challenges that prevent them from participating fully in their children's education. For example, unfamiliarity with the school system affects parents' involvement with it. They may also believe that their own lack of education precludes them from being involved. Participation and strong parent-teacher relationships are further compromised when parents feel that the only contact

they receive from the school is over something negative. Latino parents may not realize that they have the right to ask about their child's education. To make matters more complicated, many Latino parents face significant economic challenges that adversely affect their ability to get involved. Some parents work two or three jobs, which conflict with school meetings and other educationally related activities. Recent immigrant parents confront special challenges that can affect their children's ability to succeed in school (e.g., work hourly wage jobs, temporary work, and unemployment). In addition, the school personnel's negative or condescending attitudes, lack of transportation, and lack of childcare also hinder parental involvement (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004).

David Valladolid, who heads the California based *Parent Institute for Quality Education,* believes that any educational system will lose students if parents are not involved (Olivera, 2002). Mr. Valladolid assents that all of the reform measures of the last twenty years will not work unless we involve the student's family and extended family members. Students bring a suitcase with them to school and in these suitcases are their values, aspirations, language, cultural traditions and customs. But in the classroom, the children confront a different reality and they are asked to choose between two cultures.

Mr. Valladolid (2002) believes that when family members are involved, it prepares the children for school and they are better able to deal with conflicts. The key is for parents to promote the children's self-esteem in a learning environment at home, so that their love for learning is stimulated. The expectation of family involvement is shared by others.

It is important to note here that the lack of Latino parent involvement may not necessarily be because of a lack of interest. The activities carried out by the schools to promote parental involvement are not addressing the needs of all of the parents. For the most part, these activities are appealing to middle class parents. Most Latino parents feel alienated from schools and as a result, they have low attendance at parent meetings, tend to withdraw from participating in parent-teacher conferences and avoid communication with teachers and school administrators. Schools that want to involve these parents must be sensitive to the situation and experiences of these Latino parents. Others barriers to Latino parent involvement have to do with hard physical jobs, sometimes multiple jobs, and long hours of work. These barriers limit the time, energy and resources of parents to support children at home and to attend school meetings.

In sum, Latino access to and success in school is intertwined with parental involvement, student achievement, and school outreach to Latino educational needs.

Student perceptions

There is no shortage of empirical evidence highlighting the difficulties that minority students encounter within the educational system in the United States (McNeil, 2005, Landsman & Lewis, 2006, Ladson-Billings, 1995). As described above, racial and ethnic minority students often face poorer educational outcomes in a variety of areas than do their mainstream counterparts. Prolonged lack of success and access to equitable learning environments contribute to perceptions that further alienate Latino males.

Students hold attitudes and behaviors grounded in personal observations and culturally-based experiences that are rarely addressed. Some researchers (Holman, 1997,

Mendes, 2003, Garza, 2009) suggest that this occurs because there is a mismatch between the school structure and students' social, cultural, or economic background. School processes such as scripted mandated instructional and management programs in serving poor students and those of color contribute to widening the achievement gap because they are not able to connect to the curriculum (Brown, 2007). Further, education researchers suggest that racial inequity and unequal treatment of African American and Latino students still exists in American schools and that this inequity in the form of overcrowding, unsanitary and often understaffed environment, and a lack of basic tools and textbooks for teaching (Kozol,1991), leads to these students' refusal to learn, reducing their propensity for academic engagement (Hagan, 2005, Brown, 2007, Ridnouer, 2006)).

In a study conducted by Ogbu (2003) African American and Latino students reported feeling disparaged, misrepresented, fearful and socially distant from their White counterparts. Ogbu observed that these students tended to internalize the beliefs of others by questioning their own intelligences, and often acted as if they were less intelligent than their white peers. It is not uncommon for students of color to believe that accepting the school curriculum, language, and pedagogy could result in rejecting their collective identity.

The growing diversity of the student population emphasizes the importance of addressing differences in the sociocultural perceptions students bring to school(Maxwell, 2006). Affective features of student experiences represent personal orientations grounded in family, school, and community norms that ultimately influence behaviors in school. According to Rodriguez (2008) student perceptions of teachers' behaviors that

convey a caring attitude tend to vary, according to students' experiences and expectations. Other research suggests that students tend to value teacher behaviors that demonstrate caring. For example, some have suggested that empathic listening is a form of caring. Students also agree that a teacher who genuinely cares provides encouragement and cultivates a climate of trust treating students with respect (Garza, 2009). A teacher who puts his/her caring for the student first cultivates a learning climate that inspires them to be their best in school. Conveying a positive tone that allows the teacher to convey caring for students, but more importantly, it helps to preserve the students' dignity (Valverde, 2006).

Following this logic, behaviors that may impede meaningful relationships between student and teacher may be counterproductive to student success. Negative incidents can often result in instructional disengagement because, students know who they can and can't learn from (Ridnouer, 2006). In a study conducted by Sheets (1996), for example, students saw school as a place that was centered on the needs of the teacher rather than the student. Students felt that they had no rights. They felt that when it came to discipline issues, the teacher was always right and they were wrong. Sheet argued that these students felt that they were not provided with opportunities to be heard and that they were therefore treated unfairly. Students asserted that the teachers just didn't care. Students in this particular study also felt that there were inconsistencies in the application of rules. They believed teachers treated students more harshly than others. Students of color believe that there were no set rules and guidelines in classrooms. They believed that some teachers change rules at will. These students had a strong belief that disciplinary actions were influenced by the students' culture, ethnicity and linguistic

characteristics. Some students of color also felt that teachers purposefully pushed them to the edge so that they would get in trouble. Latino students felt disrespected and disliked, as did the Filipino Americans. These students reported that they experienced embarrassment and a loss of dignity toward themselves and their families. While teachers and students of European descent in the Sheets (1996) study believed that the racist attitudes of teachers affected disciplinary actions, they felt it was an unintentional and unconscious outcome. The teachers and students of color in this study believed quite the opposite. They felt that the racism was intentional, deliberate, and conscious.

Although a study by Wayman (2002) indicates that perceptions of teacher ethnic bias were not rampant, such perceptions appear to be more common among dropouts, Latino adolescents, and males. To address these perceptions, Sheets and Gay (1996), believe that the creation of learning communities in the classroom would promote socially just and caring environments in which students' and teachers' voices, experiences, and perspectives are recognized, respected, and incorporated benefits everyone involved. These authors argue that teachers would teach better, and students would learn more in a caring and nurturing environment. Moreover tensions between teachers and students decreases and students feel like they are valued, honored, and embraced. Students who perceive a caring learning community reciprocate with kindness. Rather than having classrooms that are battlegrounds with students and teacher playing the power struggle game, they will become cooperative learning communities where everyone benefits.

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environments in which students' and teachers' voices, experiences, and perspectives are recognized, respected, and incorporated benefits everyone involved.

In conclusion, the importance of examining students' perceptions of the school environment should not be underestimated. How an individual perceives his or her environment may be more important than "objective reality" in that one's perceptions will influence how one responds to the environment. Therefore, if certain groups of students perceive unequal or unfair treatment then that perception is for them a reality. This has important implications if schools are going to be able to develop measures to ensure that every student, regardless of race or ethnic groups, perceives they have access to equal educational opportunities. Examining students' perceptions of various aspects of their educational experiences also provides a unique and clear view of how these young people interpret certain aspects of their social world (Mendes, 2003).

Summary

The previous review of the literature has demonstrated that there are many factors (e.g. language proficiency, pregnancy, family and social issues as well as school climate and curriculum) that contribute to the dropout rate among Latinos, especially males. Figure 1 presents an organization framework that illustrates how these factors work together to create an educational projection for Latino males.

In order to make certain that the responses for preventing and recovering dropouts work, some common assumptions must be avoided. One assumption that is normally made is that Latino males are entirely to blame for their educational under-performance. Schools attempt to change the characteristics of a student so that they fit into school

programs created for homogeneous populations. Many students, especially the culturally diverse, are not able to assimilate into this educational context. Therefore, an important notion to consider is to initiate positive relationships among students, school and home.

Figure1. Framework for Understanding Latino Male Dropout
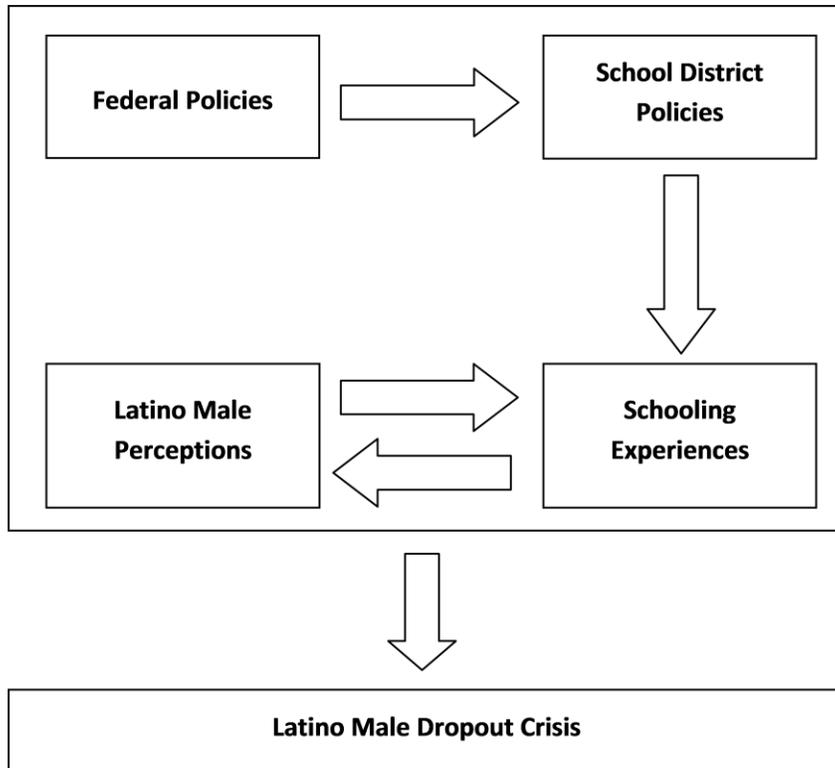
Responses to the drop out crisis among Latino males have focused on the concept of "one size fits all" with little sensitivity to the needs of culturally diverse students. These responses are usually designed according to non-middle class values and orientations, and with the assumption that all students are motivated by the same things. Intervention measures need to be initiated at the elementary level as this is where students' perceptions of school start to form. The purposes of this study is to determine whether or not the perceptions of the K-12 experiences of the Latino male participant in

my study contributed to their decision to drop out of school and to perhaps, given the data gleaned from the study, impact the manner in which Latino males are educated.

Given the findings of past research, the research question examined in this study is: To explore Latino male dropouts' perceptions of their K-12 school experiences and the extent to which, if at all, that those experiences may have influenced their decision to prematurely attrition from school.

A qualitative research design was chosen for this study because qualitative methods are useful in studying the variations of complex human behavior in context. It is also advantageous for gathering and analyzing exploratory data. Chapter 3 discusses the methodology used for this study and the results of the data collection and analysis will be discussed in Chapter 4. Interpretations of the findings and suggested recommendations for further research are found in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methodology utilized in this study. The chapter describes the proposed research methodology used in six sections: (a) the paradigm and the rationale for it, (b) the study design, (c) the setting for the study, (d) participants, and selection criteria (e) data sources, and data collection, (g) contextual information of the researcher and participants, (h) and analysis and interpretation of the data, as well as, the triangulation process to ensure trustworthiness.

As previously mentioned in the first chapter, the purpose of the study is to explore Latino male dropouts' perceptions of their K-12 school experiences and the extent to which, if at all, that these experiences may have influenced their decision to drop out of school. The research question guiding the study is: How did the participants' perceptions of their K-12 School experiences affect their decision to drop out of school?

Paradigm Rationale

Qualitative research is described as an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that help us to understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible (Merriam, 1998). My study examined the perceptions of K-12 school experiences of Latino male dropouts and the extent to which, if at all, these experiences may have contributed to their decision to leave school. Since my study targets the perceptions of young Latino males who have dropped out of school a qualitative research design is best suited for my particular study. The qualitative research design is appropriate because qualitative research, unlike, quantitative research,

aims to generate insight and understanding rather than establishing truths (Creswell, 1998).

The researcher then attempts to make meaning of their environment through various specific concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, with descriptions of people and things. Overall, qualitative research is in search for the meaning of an individual's reality within their current environment, in this study, their school environment (Hamel, 1993). Emotions, symbols, motivations, values, beliefs, and behavioral routines can be observable behaviors that may help educators glean crucial understanding of the Latino male dropout population. McMillan and Schumacher (1993) defined qualitative research as, "primarily an inductive process of organizing data into categories and identifying patterns (relationships) among categories." This definition signifies that the data and meaning become apparent by nature from the research context.

According to Sherman and Webb (1988), qualitative research "implies a direct concern with experience as it is 'lived' or 'felt' or 'undergone''. This applies to my study because the participants have lived certain experiences in school that have led to the formation of certain perceptions regarding their school experiences. Whether we feel that these experiences are real, has no bearing on this study, because these young men have undergone some things in school that have led them to have certain definite feelings about the entire K-12 school experience.

Study Design

The methodology used for this study is a descriptive case study. In education, a descriptive case study presents a detailed account of the phenomenon under study, a historical cast study that chronicles a sequence of events. Lijphart (1971) calls

descriptive case studies "atheoretical." He states that they are wholly descriptive and move in a theoretical vacuum; they are not guided by any established or hypothesized generalizations and are not motivated by a yearning to formulate general hypotheses. Descriptive case studies are useful in presenting basic information, as in this case, about areas of education where little research has been conducted. Descriptive means that the end product of a case study is a rich, thick description of the phenomenon under study (Wilson, 1979). This approach is appropriate for this investigation as it will help the researcher examine a specific instance but will also help to illuminate a general problem. Bromley (1986) writes that case studies by definition "get as close to the subject of interest as they possibly can, partly by direct observation in natural settings, partly by their access to subjective factors (thoughts, feelings, and desires), whereas experiments and surveys often use convenient derivative date, e.g. test results, official records; case studies tend to spread the net for evidence widely, while experiments and surveys usually have a more narrow focus" (p. 23).

This is one of the reasons that I have chosen to do a descriptive case study. Through this process, I was able to draw closer to the participants and obtain a deeper insight into their perceptions, feelings and emotions concerning their school experiences. Merriam (1998) also defines a qualitative case study as an individual case that contains thorough and holistic narrative and analysis. Examining the perceptions of the school experiences through a qualitative case study portrayed the experiences of the participants of this study.

Data Sources

Interviews

In all forms of qualitative research, some and sometimes all of the data is collected through interviews. The most common form of interview, as is the case with my current study, is the person-to-person meeting in which one person obtains information from another. Interviews are particularly useful for getting the story behind participants' experiences. The interviewer is able to pursue in-depth information around the topic being studied, and to further investigate participant's responses (McNamara, 1999). Group or collective formats can also be used to elicit data (Fontana & Frey, 1994). Dexter (1970) describes the person-to-person and group interviews as conversations, but conversation with a purpose. The main purpose of the interview is to obtain a special kind of information. In my study the purpose of the interview was to elicit information concerning the participants' perceptions of their school experiences. I wanted to find out as Patton (1990, p. 278) puts it, "what is in and on someone else's mind". Patton (1990) further states that we interview people to find out from them the things that we cannot observe. For example, we cannot observe feelings, thoughts or intentions. We also are not able to observe behaviors that took place at a previous time or the situations that took place in the past. Obviously, this researcher was not in school with the participants in my study and so I don't know how they behaved, or whether they showed up for school, or how they were treated by teachers, peers and administrators, and so the interviews were a way for me to access that information from them. I also needed to be able to replicate the events in the participants' school life through their recounts of those experiences.

According to Merriam (1998), there are three major types of interviews. The first is what is termed a structured interview whereby the interviewer asks specific questions in an order that is predetermined. This was the case for the first interview that I conducted with participants. It was necessary for me to ask specific questions so that I could find out about their school experiences and what their perceptions were regarding those experiences. The second type of interview is more of an unstructured, open-ended or conversational format. This was the case for the second interview that I did with participants. The reason that I chose this particular format for the second interview was to give the participants some freedom in discussing their past experiences in school. I did not want to lead the interview, but rather, I wanted to allow each participant some time for reflection in recounting what they experienced in school. The third type is more of a semi-structured interview type. I did not use this format at all in my study.

Seidman (1998) states that conducting interviews is a fundamental way to obtain information about one's experience and the meaning he or she makes out of these experiences. Through the interview process I was able to understand and make meaning of how the perceptions of these participants affected some of the decisions that they made regarding school. Seidman (1998) also suggest that researchers conduct three interviews; the first interview in my study was the structured interview with specific questions about their school experience that I needed answered for the purpose of establishing some foundation for the study. The second interview was much unstructured and more of a conversational, informal format. This provided participants with the opportunity to tell me about themselves and their families and to add to talk freely about how they felt about school. Interviews were conducted at various places. Three of the participants chose to

meet me at various restaurants for their interviews. The other participant met me at his uncle's home for his interviews.

The focus group grew out of what Merton, Fiske, and Kendall (1956) referred to as a focused interview," a discussion group that concentrates on a particular topic or topics. According to Lederman (1989) the method rests on five essential functions: (1) that people are a valuable source of information; (2) that people can report on and about themselves, and that they are articulate enough to verbalize their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors; (3) that the facilitator who "focuses" the interview can help people retrieve forgotten information; (4) that the dynamics in the group can be used to generate genuine information; and (5) that interviewing a group is better than interviewing an individual. I felt that this was necessary for my study because I wanted the four participants to interact with each other and be more open about their school experiences than they might have been in the individual interviews. The focus group setting was my own home where the four participants were invited to dinner.

Documents and records

Participants were also asked to provide me with school records, such as report cards, attendance, state test score, and other pertinent records. Merriam (1998) maintains that the purpose of gathering documents and records is to examine the phenomenon and participants in detail. School documents and records were collected in order to verify or collaborate some of the information given by the participants in the interviews and focus group. For this study, I collected documents such as TAAS scores, attendance, and grade and health reports located in participants permanent school file. I also collected AEIS reports from The Texas Education Agency (TEA) public school records website for the

two school districts from where my participants dropped out of school. The purpose for this was to see if the participants' accounts of grades and attendance and health issues coincided with the schools' documentation of such records. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) records and documents provide four advantages in the collection of data. The first advantage is that these records are always available. Secondly, documents and records contain solid information and the information pertaining to participants' grades, testing scores, attendance, and other information were essential for validating the data. The state accountability reports for the various school districts was also an important component for my study because I was able to look at the dropout rates for Latino males as well as the scores in the various subject areas for this particular group of students. Third, documents and records are a major source of information. The school permanent files and the state accountability reports provided much needed information pertaining to participants and their individual school districts. Fourth, documents and records often contain information that requires accountability, which is what these records provided for my study.

Data Collection

Data for my study came from the following sources: two participant interviews (which were audio recorded) with the researcher. The first interview was a structured interview with specific questions designed by the researcher. The second interview was an unstructured interview which took an open-ended format; both interviews were 30 to 40 minutes long. Each participant also agreed to participate in a semi-structured focus group. The focus group, which was also audio-recorded, lasted approximately 35 minutes, and it involved all participants and the researcher. Finally, participants were

asked to provide the researcher with their school permanent records, including report cards. As a precautionary measure the researcher also looked at the Texas Education Agency testing and accountability reports for the two school districts where participants attended school. I felt that the information from these documents might further support the information gleaned from the interviews, and student school documents, in order to further provide corroborating evidence of their recounts of school experiences. These documents were accessed from the Texas Education Agency website. The researcher's journal was a useful source because it provided the researcher a way to retrace the different stages of the journey taken in this study.

Participants

The participants for this study were four Latino male high school dropouts between the ages of seventeen and twenty-five. The most appropriate sampling strategy for this study is purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain some insight, and therefore a sample, from which the most can be learned must be selected (Patton, 1990). I selected four participants because I felt that it would be a manageable number and I felt that having fewer participants would give me the opportunity to get to know these young men and would give me better insight into their school experiences and perceptions. The following was the selection criteria used:

- adult male

- of Latino/Hispanic ethnicity

- dropped out of school within the last one to seven years.

Participants were initially recruited through announcements at local churches known to have a high Latino/Hispanic population, and through the assistance of personnel in local schools. By way of these contacts, the recruitment letter was given or sent to potential participants. Once contact was made with potential respondents, the snowball method, in which participants suggested others whom they believed fit the criteria and might also participate in the study, was also used to contact those participants. Consequently, once the first and second participants were identified and chosen, they were provided with additional copies of the recruitment letter to give out to those whom they felt fit the criteria for participation in this study.

Data Collection Process

I began the process of collecting data immediately after the defense of my dissertation proposal in early July of 2012 and was finalized by the third week of September 2012. This process began with the selection of the four Latino male dropouts who were to participate in my study.   The first interview, which was a structured one with specific questions, was scheduled and conducted within the first and second week in July.   At this initial interview, I asked participants to get in contact with their individual schools in order to request their permanent record files. At this time, I also began gathering TEA accountability records for each of the pertinent school districts so that I could start looking at that information. The second interview, a less informal and more conversational one that included some participant contextual information was scheduled with each participant during the first week of August 2012, but was not completely finished until the third week of August.   The focus group was scheduled for the first week of September and was concluded at that time.   I transcribed the interviews and

focus group interview immediately after each interview, so that information was still fresh in my mind.

Data Analysis

According to Merriam (1998), data analysis is the process of making sense of the data that is collected. This process involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what participants have said, what the researcher has observed or read, essentially it is the process of making meaning. Data analysis is complicated process in that it requires the researcher to move back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, and between description and interpretation (Merriam, 1998). Moving beyond the basic description to the next level of analysis is challenging because this where the researcher begins to construct categories or themes that capture some of the recurring patterns that cuts across "the preponderance" of the data (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984). Because the analysis of the data can be overwhelming, I began to analyze the data throughout the entire process of the study. I felt that this was important because, I began to see some emergent patterns throughout all of the interviews and also in the documents and records. According to Stake (1995), a case study requires that the researcher understand behavior, issues, and contexts with regard to one particular case. Therefore, the researcher tries to find the pattern or the significance through direct interpretation or just asking ourselves, "what did that mean?" For more important segments or passages of text, it takes more time in looking at data over and over again, reflecting, triangulating, and being skeptical about first impressions and simple meanings.

The purpose of data analysis, according to Merriam (1998), is to communicate understanding from the information gleaned from interviews, observations and records

and documents. This is precisely the purpose of the data gathered from my study; I want the reader to be able to hear the voices of the participants through the analysis of the data in my study.   Yin (1994), calls the organization of the materials of a case study, the case study data base.   Patton (1990) distinguishes record from the final case study.   He contends that the case record pulls together and organizes the tremendous amount of case data into a comprehensive primary resource package, while the case record includes all the main information that will be used in conducting the case analysis and case study. The case study database is the data of the study organized so that the researcher is able to locate specific data during the intensive analysis.

Transcribing

In order for the analysis of data to take place, first came the overwhelming task of transcribing the interviews and observation notes. Transcribing is described as a representational process (Bucholtz, 2000) that encompasses what is represented in the transcript (e.g., talk, time, nonverbal actions, speaker/hearer relationships, physical orientation, multiple languages, translations); who is representing whom, in what ways, for what purpose, and with what outcome; and how analysts position themselves and their participants in their representations of form, content, and action. (Green et al., 1997, p. 173). I chose to transcribe the interviews as soon as possible after the interview, because it was important to me to have the information fresh in my mind while I transcribed the audio recordings and field notes. I wanted to make sure that I transcribed exactly what was said and what took place during the interviews.

Developing categories

As I listened and then read the transcribed interviews and field notes, I began to make notes on emerging categories. Rossman and Rallis (2003) talk about two analytical strategies; the first is termed categorical analysis the second is holistic analysis. Categorical analysis is used by the researcher to sort and code the data into assigned categories. Holistic analysis focuses more on a particular situation, program, and one's experience, and on the description and narration of the data. I used a combination of both categorical and holistic for my study because I first had to analyze the information obtained from the informal observations, and interviews and records and documents using categorical strategies. Once that was done, I had used the holistic strategies to describe and narrate the information that came from the categories or predominant themes that were extracted from the observations and interviews. They also suggest several other strategies that are useful in establishing categories and themes. They further explain that categories can be established through a simple word or phrase that describes some parts of the data. Establishing the themes requires a little more understanding of the categories that are developed. I used the open-coding method for my study.

Open-coding

The audio-taped interviews were transcribed, coded and organized into themes, categories and patterns that emerged from generated materials in this study. Using the constant comparative method, which is defined as by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as a process whereby the data evolves gradually into a core of emerging theory; this core is considered the theoretical framework that guides the further collection of data.

I coded the data by using various colored highlighters to highlight numbered lines of text that reflected an emergent theme from the transcribed text. I also made notations along the margins to make sure that I did not forget where pertinent pieces of information were located within the text. I also circled key words and phrases that reflected specific themes or categories within the written text. Then I also did some axial coding.

Axial coding

Next I used axial coding to develop subcategories. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), subcategories are linked to a category in a set of relationships denoting causal conditions, phenomena, and context. I derived the subcategories from the main categories to narrow down the more predominant themes in my study. This led me to do some selective coding.

Selective coding

Strauss and Corbin (1990) define selective coding as the process of selecting the core category, and systematically relating them to other categories. It involves validating those relationships, filling in, and refining and developing those categories. Categories are integrated together and a grounded theory is developed. I did this by relating the primary categories to the other less dominant categories and combining them to develop a connection between the two. This process helped me to develop commonality between the various categories.

Trustworthiness

In any qualitative research study, the importance of establishing the trustworthiness of data is crucial to the credibility of the study. A criticism of qualitative research is that data interpretation contains the researchers' personal biases, and that research results

cannot be generalize to other settings. In order to dismiss these limitations of the

qualitative inquiry method, Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that qualitative researchers

must establish trustworthiness so as to convince readers that the findings of a study are

significant. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend the following strategies for establishing

trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. These are

the strategies that I used to establish trustworthiness.

Credibility

Credibility exists when a study presents recognizable descriptions or interpretations

of human experience for people with shared experiences (Sandelowski, 1986). Lincoln

and Guba (1985) describe this in two ways: first to carry out the study in such a way that

the probability that the findings will be found to be credible is enhanced, and secondly, to

allow the respondents the opportunity to look at and evaluate the findings of the study.

Put in simpler terms, credibility is about whether the description and interpretation that

the researcher has written are aligned with what the participants mean. Lincoln and Guba

(1985) provide six strategies that naturalistic researchers can use to achieve credibility.

Prolonged engagement. prolonged engagement is the investment of sufficient time to

achieve certain purposes such as learning the culture, and testing for misinformation that

can be introduced by distortion from either the researcher or the participants, and of

course, building trust. I have spent approximately three months on collection of the data;

interviews, informal observations and records and documents.

Persistent observation. the purpose of persistent observation is to identify the

characteristics and elements in the situation that are most relevant to the problem or issue

that is being studied and focusing on them in detail. Observations for my study, as I

stated before, were very informal and conducted during interviews and focus groups. These observations helped to get a sense of the participants' feelings regarding their school experiences. I looked for certain behaviors during the times that I interacted with them while doing the interviews, and as we discussed their grades, attendance issues and other information found in their school files.

Triangulation. Triangulation is another way of ensuring credibility and transferability. Patton (1990) notes that triangulation is a process by which the researcher can guard against the accusation that the findings of the study are simply an artifact of a single method, a single source, or even the researchers' bias. Denzin (1978) developed four types of triangulation: data sources, methods, investigator and theory. For my study I used data sources triangulation. I assessed the information from interviews, informal observations, focus group, and records and document analysis.

Peer debriefing. Peer debriefing allows a peer to review and assess transcripts, emerging categories from those transcripts, and the final report. In addition, a peer acts as a sort of critical detective or auditor. This peer may detect whether or not a researcher has over-emphasized a point, or missed a rival legitimate hypothesis, under-emphasized a point, and in general does a careful reading of the data and the final report. Many writers have suggested that peer debriefing enhances the trustworthiness and credibility of a qualitative research project (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Creswell 1998). I enlisted the aid of my sisters to serve as peer de-briefers. We discussed the information during the analysis of the data and again once the findings were written. Their feedback helped me to ensure that the information was accurate and that it was not based on what I wanted to read into the information in the interviews.

Transferability

Transferability occurs when the findings of the study fit into contexts outside the study situation and when the audience views the findings as meaningful and applicable in terms of their own experiences (Sandelowski, 1986). Lincoln and Guba (1985) say that transferability, in qualitative research, refers to the usefulness of using the study process and its results in the context of another time and place. They also suggest providing thick description that brings readers to the context and they can decide how they would apply the findings in their own situations. I attempted to do that in my transcriptions of the accounts of the participants in the study. I want the reader to be able to live the experiences of these young men.

Dependability

Dependability attempts to account for changing conditions in the phenomenon chosen for study as well as changes in the design created by increasingly refined understanding of the setting (Marshall and Rossman, 1995). Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain that dependability is about determining whether the findings would be the same if the study were to be repeated with the same participants and context. Consequently, dependability refers to consistency and whether a similar finding would achieve the same result in a similar context. In order to ensure dependability, I made sure that there was an audit trail or documentation to support the findings.

Confirmability

A confirmability audit supplements the final construct of the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that an inquiry audit cannot be conducted without an abundance of records based on the information from the study. An audit trail from interview

transcripts, observations and observer comments, field notes and records and documents was recorded for my study.

Setting of the Study

Participants for the study were from the West Texas Area. Three of the participants were from a major school district in the Hub of West Texas that was established in 1907. Accredited by the Texas Education Agency, this school district is the largest school district that serves the Hub of West Texas. The district covers 85.5 square miles (220 km^2) and contains nearly 900 acres (3.6 km^2) of school properties that are owned by the local taxpayers. Those properties include 61 campuses including 37 elementary schools (Grades Pre-K - 5), 4 early childhood schools, 11 middle schools (Grades 6-8), 4 high schools (Grades 9-12), 2 special purpose, and three alternative campuses.

Facilities include a state of the art Advanced Technology Center for the teaching of computer operations and programming. The ATC also instructs students in iron and wood construction, and automobile technology.

The mission of the school district guarantees that every student experiences maximum academic and personal success by capitalizing on the unique educational, medical, agricultural, technological, cultural, and human resources of the community. The school serves approximately 28,905 students.   The current dropout rate for the district is 2.8% (Lubbock Independent School District (LISD) website, 2012).

The fourth participant attended school at a district approximately forty-seven miles from the above mentioned school district. This school district is located in the county seat of Hale County. The city is located on Interstate 27 and U.S. Highway 87. Its population is just over 22,000. Predominant race is White (52%) and the predominant

language is English (59%). There are a total of eighteen schools in the district of which

11 are traditional and 7 are alternative campuses. Twelve of the eighteen are Title I

schools. The total student population is 5,876. The student population in the one high

school in the district is 1,407. The high school serves grades 9-12. The current dropout

rate is 7.5% (Plainview ISD website, 2012).

Methodology of Pilot Study/Summary of Pilot Findings

There were a total of six participants in the pilot study, three men and three

women. All participants were Latino and all had dropped out of school within a period of

ten to twenty years prior to the pilot study. All participants were English language

learners.   None knew English when they started school.

School environment perceptions. Overall, school was not a pleasant place for any of the

participants. All of them indicated that they felt isolated and they reported feeling that

they were deprived of equal educational opportunities. Similarly, none of the participants

reported feeling validated or welcomed in school. One of the participants stated, " I felt

like I didn't belong and that somehow being Latino and not speaking English made me

less of a person than the White students and teachers;" (participant 1, interview 1). Most

felt like outsiders from the time they entered school until the time they left. Participants

painfully recalled instances where they were made to feel that they were worthless

because of their culture and language. Another participant stated, "We weren't even

allowed to speak our own language and the white kids laughed at us when we spoke

Spanish because they knew that we were going to get in trouble for doing so." Others

recalled instances of being hit on the head and/or hands with a wooden ruler because they

didn't understand the directions being given. Most participants stated that they hated

going to school, and indicated that they often faked being sick in order to stay home. All participants felt that their parents were supportive and wanted them to complete high school, but some indicated that they just could not take the constant humiliation at school. While three of the participants did complete high school, either through a regular high school program or an alternative graduation program, participant interviews reveal that there is no difference in how any of them perceived the school environment. The three participants who did graduate related that the motivating factor for graduating from high school was to "prove that they could."

Language and literacy instruction perceptions. There was a great deal of similarity in the participants' perceived literacy and language instruction. None of the participants spoke English when they started elementary school and stated that they had an especially difficult time functioning in the primary grades. While they were eventually able to acquire the social language (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) and were able to understand basic instructions, all felt that they were at a disadvantage because they were not able to acquire the academic language (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) that they needed in order to be academically successful in school. They felt as if they were always lagging behind their white counterparts and felt as if they were playing a constant game of catch up. The only problem with playing catch up was that they were not receiving any added instruction to help them. All said that they were not good readers, and that reading comprehension was extremely difficult for them. This is also reflected in their permanent school files where I found that most did well on the vocabulary part of standardized reading tests, but did poorly on the comprehension part. Their reading grades also reflected that they struggled with the reading context.

Participants found no interest in the reading materials because they found no connection between what they were reading and their own culture and life experiences. One of the male participants stated, "All the stories were about Spot and a perfect little family that had it all, we were poor and had very little, we didn't even have a dog, and we had a lot more than two kids in our family." They could not relate to story lines or characters because all materials were written with the white student in mind. They felt that all reading material was culturally biased. Participants did not recall any specific strategies that teachers used to teach them how to read. The most common comment was the message that you either pick it up or you failed or the "sink or swim" approach. The findings of the pilot study suggest that the language difficulties of these Latino students should be explored since most come from homes in which Spanish is the dominant language. We also have to recognize cultural differences among students. The findings of the study also suggest that the participants' self-efficacy may have played a part in their decision to drop out of or complete high school, and that perhaps in addition to providing these students with a positive outlook of their culture and language, we should also put some effort into empowering them by promoting their self-efficacy. Since self-efficacy can play a major role in how individuals approach goals, tasks and challenges (Bandura, 1977), it is reasonable to argue that the predicament in which Latino males are placed, can be attributed to the cumulative effects of school practices that limit Latino male learning opportunities, impact on their sense of belonging in the school environments, and low achievement trends. Thus, the current study is designed to collect more information that might shed light on this issue.

Context of Researcher

My name is Gloria Diana Calderon and I was born in a little town South of Laredo, Texas named San Ygnacio.   I am one of twelve children.   We moved to Lubbock when I was nine years old and so Lubbock has been home for much of my life.   I thank God every day that I was born into such a nurturing family.   My parents were both born in Texas, but my maternal grandmother was born in Mexico.   I had seven brothers (I lost my oldest brother in 2001) and five sisters.   My father, who is 89 years old is still living and active, my mother is deceased. Both my parents were fully dedicated to their children.   We had enormous amounts of love and constant support from our parents and therefore, we didn't realize that we didn't have as many material things as others.

Then as if being blessed with great parents and siblings wasn't enough, God blessed me with a wonderful, nurturing and caring husband.   I have been married to this wonderful man for almost 23 years.   He is also very encouraging and supportive. I couldn't do what I am doing today without his constant support and love.

I begin my career as an educator as a paraprofessional and then, through the encouragement of some of the teachers I worked with, returned to school and got my Bachelor's degree.   However, I didn't feel that I was doing enough to make a difference in the lives of some of my Hispanic students and so I returned to school and received a Master's degree with a counseling certification.   I felt at the time that I could make more of a difference and serve as a role model if I were able to counsel some of the students that were falling through the cracks.   I really enjoyed this experience, but felt that there was something lacking.   I still felt that I could offer minority students more if I were able to make some of the decisions that directly influenced the teaching of these students;

therefore I decided to return to school once again.   My intent, upon my return, was to work on a second master's degree in Educational Leadership and become a principal. However, after a couple of semesters, I was once again encouraged by some of my professors to go further and pursue a doctoral degree.   After much consideration, I decided that this would probably be a more effective way to reach out to the population of students who are dropping out of public schools.   I love to teach, and what better way to help public school students then to educate those who are going to be teaching them. I love teaching at the university level and because I have more than 30 years of experience in public education, I am able to bring my own classroom experiences into my teaching. My reason for pursuing a doctoral degree has been to inspire those who think that they can't achieve, achieve. I want to be able to make a difference in the lives of those who are struggling in school by teaching those who are going to teach them.

The following section presents contextual background information on each of the four participants in order for the reader to gain a better understanding of who these young men are.

Introduction to Participants

Claudio

Claudio is 21 years old who dropped out at sixteen years old; however, his physical stature makes him look more like a 13- or 14-year old (researcher's journal, I-pg.1). The fact that he is very much into the saggy, baggy clothing makes him look rather boyish.

Claudio, a native of West Texas, is the oldest of three children and thus set an example for his younger siblings. Indeed, his younger sister, who is eighteen years old, also dropped out school at the end of 2012 school year.   His younger brother is sixteen

years old and has plans to complete high school during the 2013-2014 school year. Claudio is from a single parent home. After his parents divorced when he was in middle school, his mother became the sole provider in the home. His mother continues to works two jobs. Consequently, his mother is hardly home, and when she is home, she is resting. Since Claudio has trouble keeping a job, it is his responsibility to get his siblings to school and wherever else they need to be. He is also the one who drives his uncle to doctor's appointments, and runs the common errands for the family. When Claudio is not running errands, he stays at home and likes to spend time on the computer in his room. Claudio stated in interview 2, pg. 2 lines 5-6, that his uncle, a retired priest, has been the father figure in his life since his father left. Claudio has had the home support and encouragement to get an education, however, neither parent graduated from high school. (I-1, pg. 2, line 7).

Jessie

At seventeen years of age, Jessie was my youngest participant. Jessie is a very pleasant young man. He is a little stocky, but he is very clean cut and well dressed. I assumed that he would be a typical teenager with the baggy, saggy clothing, so I was quite surprised at his appearance (researcher's journal, pg. 5, I -1). He appears to be rather mature for his age. His attire and demeanor portray a more mature person than a seventeen year old (researcher's journal, pg. 5, I-1) His eagerness to participate in this study was also quite surprising.

Jessie, the youngest of three children, dropped out of school in April of 2012. He was more talkative than I expected, at first glance, appears to be rather timid (researcher's journal, pg.5, I-1). Jessie has never had a father figure in his life. His father left the

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family home when Jessie was a toddler, thus he reports no recollection of his dad. Like Claudio, Jessie was born in West Texas and has lived here his entire life.

His brother and sister are both out of the house and have their own families. He and his mother live in an apartment. Due to a back injury, his mother is not currently working. Jessie indicated that his mother has always struggled to support the family. There have been times when his mother has worked as many as three jobs in order to support them. His brother and sister helped when they were at home, but do little for them now that they have their own families. (I-1, pg. 1, lines 10-20).

Jessie enjoys sports, but was never active in sports in high school. Jessie says that he left school because; it was a constant struggle for his mother. There have been times when they have not had money for rent, gas, or even clothes (I-1 pg. 1, lines 16).

Although, his mother fully supports the idea of Jessie returning to school in order to get his diploma, she has never had the opportunity to finish school. (I-2, lines 7-9, Focus group pg., 4, line 15).

Jessie has aspirations of a better life for himself and his mother. He has that the realization that returning to school is the key to a better life, and he hopes to be able to return to school very soon. The focal point for Jessie at the present time is to make something good happen for his mom, since he feels that her life has been a constant struggle. His mother was not well at the time of the interviews and since they have no mode of transportation, he does not want his mother to have to worry about finding him a way to get around (I-1, pg. 1 lines 1-12).

Alejandro

Alejandro was one of my oldest participants. Although he is twenty-five years of age, he looks quite a bit younger. Alejandro dropped out of school in 2005, and barely made the cutoff for participation in this study. He is married and has four children, two boys and two girls. His siblings include three brothers and one sister. Alejandro is the second to the oldest child in his family. Unlike the first two participants, Alejandro grew up with both parents in the home. The West Texas area has been his home for his entire life. He is also a West Texas native and has lived here his entire life (I-1, pg. 1 lines 1-10).

Alejandro has been married for seven years. His children are all in school. He says that he is quite overprotective of his children and wants them to have a more productive life than he has had. His family is very important to him. He stated that he tries to spend as much time with his children as possible. Alejandro recalls that he was constantly in trouble while in high school and is quite regretful of his past mistakes (Focus group, pg. 6, line 12). Within the past seven years, Alejandro has served time in prison for a felony drug. He is adamant that his children will not face the same struggles that he has faced, and that they will have a much better life than he has had. He says that he is genuinely sorry for his past mistakes and that he regrets the misery that he put his parents through. His parents were both in the home, however, Alejandro says that his dad was always busy working two jobs, and so the bulk of the responsibility of taking care of the children fell on his mom, who also worked (Focus group, pg. 6, line 20).

Alejandro currently works as a welder in a manufacturing company. His job is very physical, while he wishes that he had put more into school, he honestly feels that teachers and administrators did not really care whether Latinos or African-American students excelled in school (I-2, pg. 7 line 8). Despite his very negative school experience, he is hopeful that schools are a lot different now and that his children will be given the same opportunities as every other student to succeed and excel. He feels strongly that everyone should be given a fair chance in life and that everyone deserves the same opportunities regardless of their cultural differences (I-1, pg. 1 lines 11-13).

He, like the other participants in this study, has always had the support and encouragement of his parents to try to move forward and get an education, however, like the other participant parents, his parents had to quit school in order to work and help out their families (I-1, pg. 2 lines 15-17).

Rogelio

Rogelio like Alejandro is 25 years old. He has very fair skin and hazel eyes; therefore, he does not look Latino at all.

He dropped out of school in 2005. He has been married for seven years and has two children, one boy and one girl. Rogelio was recruited for this study through the snowball method. Alejandro, one of the other participants is Rogelio's brother-in-law. He and Alejandro are married to sisters (I-1, pg. 1 lines 1-5).

He was born in Lubbock but relocated, first to South Texas for a few years, and then to a nearby West Texas town. It is from there in Plainview that he dropped out. Rogelio also grew up with both parents in the home. He is the second to the youngest sibling; his

siblings include three older sisters and a younger brother. Again, his mother was the one with the bulk of the responsibility of caring for the children (I-1, pg. 2, lines 3-4). His dad worked in construction and, therefore, was always away at the job. His mother was also employed; therefore the older sisters were the caregivers until the mother got home from work. Although Rogelio's aspirations to play sports were short-lived due to an eye injury; his children, however, are both active in T-Ball and YFL (youth football league)

Rogelio recalled that although there were and still are many Latinos in his former school district, there was too much discrimination against Latinos, African-Americans, and as he put it, "poor white kids". Although, he looks White, he says that the fact that he spoke Spanish made life in school tough for him. Rogelio works with his brother-in-law Alejandro. (I-2, pg. 1 lines 10-12). Although he enjoys his job, he wishes that he could make a better living. He contends that he was smart enough and could have probably graduated from high school, if he had just stayed. Future consequences for dropping out of school were not the most important consideration for Rogelio when he made the decision to leave school. Like Alejandro, Rogelio has also been in trouble with the law (Focus group, pg. 3, lines 8-9).

He says that his dropping out of school was not due to a lack of support from his parents, but school was just a good environment for him. Due to hardships within their families, Rogelio's' parents did not graduate from high school either (Focus group, pg. 4, lines 9-11).

I have had a chance to visit with Rogelio since the completion of the study, and he reports that he is doing well and even considering attending classes to get his GED.

Conclusion

This chapter described the methodology used in other studies of Latino male student perceptions, although not necessarily perceptions related to dropping out of school, it has explained the tools used in the current study and the rationale for using them. The pilot study discussed herein offered a chance to utilize the structured interview questions, the unstructured interview, informal observations and focus group of six Latino participants in the pilot study, and it helped me to gain information regarding the perceptions, of the K-12 educational experiences of Latino male dropouts and why the dropout rates among this particular ethnic group has become such a crisis. The contextual information has been provided as background for the reader to be better able to view the study and findings from the perspective of the researcher.

The findings resulting from the data analysis are presented in Chapter IV. The interpretations and recommendations which developed from this research study are discussed in Chapter V.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

This study investigated four Latino male school dropouts' perceptions of their K-12 school experiences. . The following pseudonyms have been given to the participants to protect their identity and privacy. Claudio is the first participant to commit to take part in the study. He has been out of school for almost five years. Jessie, the second participant, has been out of school for a year, and Rogelio and Alejandro, the third and fourth participants have both been out of school for seven years. Two of the participants have been out of school for seven years, one for one year; the fourth participant dropped out almost five years ago. With regard to these dropouts' experiences the study sought to answer the following research question:

- How did these Latino male dropouts' perceptions of their K-12 school experiences influence their decision to drop out of school?

The first section of the chapter provides the emergent themes gleaned from the two interviews and the focus group in which each participant took part. Information from school records depicting their grades, attendance and test scores, although pertinent to and referred to in this chapter, will be found in tables included in the appendix. The last section of the chapter includes a discussion of the findings based on specific characteristics or themes that have emerged as the most predominant in terms of the perceptions of each participant.

Emergent and Other Themes

Primary themes

Alienation from School

The most apparent theme seems to be that participants felt alienated from the school environment that seemed to stem from his belief that teachers did not care about his welfare. This is supported by various statements made by the participants. For example, Claudio stated, "I hated everything about high school" (I-2 pg. 2 line 15). He also talked about not getting the attention he needed to be able to succeed "I was getting any help, and so I quit going to school" (I-2 pg. 1 lines 14-15) Table 2-2 which depicts attendance percentages also supports the fact that he hated high school and that he rarely attended classes.

Jessie also makes reference to the teachers' non-caring attitude. Jessie suggested that he felt most teachers made the assumption that Latinos are not going to attend college, and so they do not want to waste their time working with them. He substantiated his thoughts with statements such as, "The teachers didn't care about the Mexican or Blacks, because they think we are not smart enough to go to college" (I-2, pg.1lines 16-17). Jessie made a very good observation when he posed the following question to the group, "Did you all ever notice that most of the students in AP (advanced placement) classes are white?" (Focus Group- pg. 3 line 20) He also stated that most teachers would rather not waste their time with students who are less successful and require additional assistance with academics and/or state assessments. He stated "There wasn't really anyone to help me much, even at tutorials" (I-2 pg. 1 lines 22-23). He also seemed resentful that during

the three times that he dropped out, no one from the school district was concerned enough to inquire about his absences. Jessie's excessive absences during high school also confirm that school was not a pleasant place for Jessie. He states, "Did you know that no one ever called to see why I wasn't at school" (I-2, pg. 2 lines 1-2).

Alejandro also hated school and could not wait for the time when he was able to drop out of school. He commented, "I hated school so bad and I could not stand to be there, I could not wait for a chance to just leave, no one cared anyway" (I-2 pg. 1 lines 14-15). He purposely created discipline problems for himself in order to go to the Alternative Educational Placement because he felt that he was more likely to get the help he needed with academics. He felt that teachers did not care. He states, "The teachers didn't care if I was learning or not" (I-2 pg. 1 lines 17-18). He, like Claudio, Jessie and Rogelio was consistently absent from school. His high school experiences were similar to the other participants' in that they were mostly negative. He commented, "High school was bad, I hated it" (I-2 pg. 2 line 5).

Rogelio recounted the ways white teachers made it exceedingly difficult to remain in school which he believed was intentional, they, administrators and teachers, "just wanted to find ways to get rid of the minority students" (Focus group pg. 2 line 10). He clearly hated school and his attendance records reflect the fact that Rogelio did not want to be there. Rogelio found school to be a horrible place to be. He felt a sense of inequality which is described next. According to Rogelio, "I would get up pretend to get ready for school, however, when my parents left for work, I would either go back to bed or go run around with my friends, who were not in school" (Focus group pg.2 line 14). High school was a very unpleasant experience for Rogelio and his fellow participants.

Perceptions of Racial Discrimination

A second dominant theme relates to discrimination based on their race. All of the participants described incidents of inequality and injustice they experienced. Rogelio and Alejandro, while at times, they felt, unwarranted often drew negative attention from teachers to themselves. Rogelio comments, "I was sent to the principal all the time, even for little things, while others mostly the white kids got away with lots more" (Focus group pg. 4, line 2). They were given little to no help with academics. Rogelio states, "nobody was there to help me with stuff I didn't understand" (I-2 lines, pg. 2, 10-12). Alejandro echoes the sentiment with the following, "If I asked for help, the teacher would tell me, well you should have been paying attention, and then you would know" (I-2 pg. 2 lines 11-13). Jessie and Claudio felt they were simply ignored. Jessie said, "It was almost like I was invisible, as long as I didn't bother anyone, they didn't care" (I-2 pg. 3 lines 10-12). Claudio states, " I don't think my math teacher even knew that I existed" (I-2 pg. 3 line 10).Their accounts are consistent with past research that documents the large numbers of shy Latino children who do not pose disciplinary problems, are simply forgotten and ignored (Garza, 2009). These participants felt strongly about the fact that they were not afforded the same educational opportunities as their white counterparts. Jessie articulated strong pronouncements about many teachers holding lower expectations of minorities and their lack of encouragement to continue their education even if they graduate from high school. He states, "They thought that I was too dumb to go to college, 'cause no one ever talked to me about going to college" (Focus group pg. 3 line 10). Both Rogelio and Alejandro felt that punishment for discipline issues was at times harsher for minorities that for Whites. Rogelio commented,

"the only reason that I was always in trouble is because I was outspoken, and no one wanted to hear about the fact that Mexicans and Blacks are treated differently" (Focus group pg. 3 line 15). Rogelio also recollected that class placement was based solely on your culture and your language. He remembers being placed in an ESL class although he was fluent in the English language. He also recalls that he and other minorities were always placed in low achieving groups without regard to their educational needs. Rogelio comments, "I was never given any kind of test to see where I needed to be placed; I was "Mejicano" and so I was placed in the lowest group" (Focus group pg. 3 line 12).

Not Meeting Needs Instructionally

A third theme is that in middle school and specifically in high school these participants were mismatched instructionally. Comments made in the interviews and focus group substantiates this theme. Participants stated that teachers made no effort to differentiate instruction in order to accommodate diverse learning styles. Rogelio said, "all the teachers did was talk, they never explained things in different ways, if you got it fine, if not, well too bad" (Focus group, pg. 4 line 13). Claudio states, "no one cared if I was learning, as long as I didn't cause problems" (I-2, pg. 2 line 10). Likewise, Jessie states, "the teacher just explained things one way and if you didn't get it, then you had to figure it out for yourself" (I-2, pg. 3 line 5). Alejandro says, "I felt dumb and stupid, because the teacher would teach the lesson one way, and I wasn't getting it" (I-2, pg. 3 line 12).

Lack of Cultural Capital

Because the parents of the participants are all high school dropouts themselves, there was a lack of cultural capital for the participants. Bourdieu (1986) explains school success by the amount and type of cultural capital inherited from the family milieu rather than by measures of individual talent or achievement. For him, ability is socially constructed and is the result of individuals having access to large amounts of cultural capital. Ability is itself the product of an investment of time and cultural capital. Cultural capital encompasses a broad array of linguistic competencies, manners, preferences, and orientations, which Bourdieu (1986, p. 248) terms "subtle modalities in the relationship to culture and language." Although the parents were perfectly willing to help with homework, they lacked understanding of the content being taught and were not able to offer any assistance. The following are quotes from each of the participants indicating that they had no academic resources at home. Claudio states, "When I got to middle school the work got harder, my mom tried to help me, but she didn't understand the work herself, she dropped out of school too, you know" (I-1 pg. 3 lines 7-8) . Jessie, stated, "The reason my mom didn't understand and couldn't help me with homework was because she didn't finish high school either, and she didn't understand the stuff either" (I-1, pg. 3 lines 11-12). Rogelio says, "My parents could not help me with homework, because they didn't understand the math and English, they didn't finish high school either" (I-2, pg. 4 lines 8-9). Finally, Alejandro makes a similar statement saying, "neither one of my parents graduated from high school, so they couldn't really help us kids with homework when we were in middle school and high school" (Focus group, pg. 6, lines 10-11).

Low Expectations

One of the most important themes is that most of the participants' felt that their teachers held low expectations of them, and that the general assumption is that Latinos just do not continue their education beyond high school. Some of the statements made by the participants are: Alejandro makes the following statement, "The teachers in high school only work with those kids that do good on their own, cause they make them look that they are great teachers, but those of us that have a little trouble are ignored and don't get any help, cause they don't think that we are smart enough to make" (Focus group, pgs. 5-6, lines, 24-26,). Jessie asked his fellow participants the following question during the focus group interview, "How many Blacks and Latinos were in AP classes at your school, mine had two or three, because most white teachers think that we are not going to college and so they don't prepare us for it", (Focus group pg. 6 lines 17-18). Rogelio also stated, "My school didn't have very many Mexicans in AP classes either, I think that the teachers at my school thought we could handle the work" (Focus group, pg. 6 lines 19-20). Claudio said, "It was the same at my school, I guess we all looked dumb" (Focus group pg. 6, lines 22-23).

Positive Elementary Experiences

Yet another prevalent theme among these participants is that elementary school was a positive and caring environment. Claudio recalls, "My favorite thing about elementary was that we got to use things like blocks, and other things to help us count" (I-1 pg. 1 lines 19-20). Rogelio states, "My elementary science and math teachers really cared if we learned, we used blocks and shapes and other things to help us figure out answers" (I-

1 pg. 1 lines 22-23). Jessie agrees with the both Claudio and Rogelio by making the following statement, "The elementary teachers were more fun, they made sure that we understood what they were teaching, my teachers also let us use blocks and stuff to help us figure out problems", (I-1 pg. 1 lines 19-21). Alejandro remembers, "My math teacher had flash cards to help us with our math, and she also let us work in pairs so that we could help each other, elementary was really the best part of school" (I-1 pg. 1 lines 24-25). School records of attendance, grades and state exam scores collaborated the fact that these participants perceived elementary as a positive experience. The difference between their perceptions of their elementary and middle and high school experiences may very well be that they perceived elementary teachers as having a caring attitude and that they wanted all students to excel, and perhaps more importantly is the fact that all four participants did in fact excel academically.

Regretting the Leaving

Finally participants have a sense of regret at not having completed high school. All four participants expressed feelings of regret with the following statements: Claudio made the following statement, "I wish that I had finished school just because it's been hard to get a job even McDonald's wants you to have a high school diploma" (Focus group pg. 7 lines 13-14). Jessie agrees he said, "I have had a hard time finding a job too, I want to go back to school and do better" (Focus group pg. 7, lines 12-14). Alejandro feels the same he stated, "If I had graduated I would have a better job and my whole family would be better off" (Focus group pg. 7 lines 18-20). Finally, Rogelio shared, "I know that things would be better for me now if I had finished school, and maybe I wouldn't of gone to prison" (Focus group pg. 7 line 22-24).

Discussion

The research question guiding the study explored Latino males dropouts perceptions of their school experiences and examined the extent, if at all, that these experiences may have influenced their decision to drop out of high school.

The most important theme that emerged from this study is that the participants' perceptions of their K-12 experiences did in fact contribute to their decision to leave school. All of the participants expressed feelings of alienation from school especially in the upper grades and more specifically in high school. They felt that the teachers and administrators did not care about them. The information gleaned from the interviews shows that all participants made some reference to the fact that high school was not a pleasant experience for them. Claudio, Rogelio, Alejandro and Jessie all made statements about the fact that they were not afforded the same educational opportunities as their white counterparts. They also made comments regarding the fact that teachers were not too concerned with whether they graduated or dropped out. In other words, they were not a priority to the school staff. They all state that they left school because they were tired of trying and failing. Further, information from the interviews and the focus group shed light on another related subtheme; all four young men felt that they were discriminated against because of their cultural and linguistic differences. There was a lack of responsiveness to their specific learning needs and were often placed in classrooms that did not correspond to their needs.

The participants school records further support the fact that all of these students were failing high school. Their attendance records also indicate that none of them were

attending school very much. While one could argue that the reason these young men did not do well in high school was a result of their poor attendance, statements made by each of the participants would indicate that they were not motivated enough to be at school.

Another important theme related to the perceptions of these Latino male dropouts is a sense of regret in that that they all feel that their lives would be much better had they stayed and completed school.   Jessie and Claudio are not currently employed and realize that their lives would be much better if they had some sort of income.   Rogelio and Alejandro are employed in a manufacturing company, but they also know that having a high school diploma could have opened many more opportunities for them. They talked about wanting better lives for their children and they have made statements indicating that they would encourage other young Latino males to stay in school.   Rogelio and Alejandro have both spent time in prison and feel that staying in school could have possibly kept them out of trouble.

A common characteristic that doubles as a theme is that all of these participants had trouble with both math and English. They spoke and understood the English language, which would lead us to make the assumption that language was not a barrier to their learning. Rather, they likely struggled with academic language expectations that schools demand.

Participants, as stated in the interviews and supported by school records, did well in both subjects in elementary and even in middle school, however the higher level math and English were problematic for all of them.   School records indicate that these students made good grades on both subjects in grades 3 to 7.   However, grades in both English

and math began to make a steady decline beginning as early as the 8th grade. This pattern is consistent with their performance on state exams given at these grade levels for these two subject areas. If they were not grasping the material taught, at this level, for these subjects, then it would make it almost impossible to pass the required state exams, one of the requirements for graduation.

Common primary themes

Some of the most common characteristics according to data collected:

- All participants indicated that their parents encouraged them to stay in school; however, none of the parents are high school graduates. All four participants made reference to this in all of the interviews.

- The participants all said that they enjoyed their elementary school experience; they enjoyed working with manipulatives and doing hands-on activities. They also excelled academically.

- All participants indicated that they spoke English and Spanish at home and that they were fluent in English when they started school, therefore, basic language skills do not appear to be a deterrent factor to their academic success. All participants indicated that they were fluent in English and that they understood the language well enough to understand teacher instructions. Question 3 of the first interview asks "Did you know how to speak English when you started school? To which all answered yes.

- High school was also a bad experience for all participants; they seem to lose their place in that particular setting. This is supported by their accounts of their experiences as well as attendance, grades and other school records and documents. This is well documented with citations from interviews in the previous section under primary themes.

- The final common characteristic among the participants is that, although, none of the parents graduated from high school, they encouraged their sons to stay in school and get their high school diplomas. Participants made reference to their parents had not graduated from high school, but that they were supportive. In interview 2 pg. 3 lines 5-6, Claudio makes the following statement, "My mom would like for me to get a high school diploma, and maybe later on I'll try to get my GED". Likewise Jessie states, "My mom always tells me that I would be better off if I went back to school" (Focus group pg. 7 lines 27-28). Rogelio says, "My parents would tell me that I needed to get a diploma, because it would be hard to get a good job without a good education" (I-2 pg. 3, 13-14). Alejandro said, "Yeah, my parents told me the same thing, and now I know how important it is" (Focus group pg. 7 lines 31-32)

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the results of the interviews, focus group discussions conducted with the participants. Along with these participants' school records and documents in order to examine the participants' perceptions of their school experiences in order to explore whether their perceptions about their school experiences were a factor in their decision to drop out of school.

The first part of the chapter presented the data from interviews and focus group in narrative form, data from school records, found in tables in the appendix depicting grades, attendance and test scores included in this section. This was followed by a discussion on common characteristics among the participants, along with emergent themes that were directly related to the research question that guided this study. This research has sought to examine factors that may lead to the formation of the participants' perceptions regarding school, and how these perceptions influenced their decision to leave school before obtaining their high school diplomas. Based on the data and provided by participants in interviews, focus group discussion and records and documents to substantiate self-reports, the following are the most predominant themes of this study: A sense of alienation from the school environment; a feeling of discrimination based on culture and language; an instructional mismatch and lack of differentiation in instruction; a negative learning environment; a lack of cultural capital for participants, parents lacked contextual knowledge of materials being taught; teachers' perceptions of Latinos, lack of preparation for higher education; and finally, positive elementary school experiences, caring about learning.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of the study was to explore Latino male dropouts' perceptions of their K-12 school experiences. Understanding the phenomena surrounding the perceptions of these participants and whether or not their perceptions affected their decisions to drop out of school is important for the following reasons: for the purposes of developing programs and strategies to help the school retention rates; to help them to make better informed decisions regarding the education of Latino males; and finally, to provide a basis for future research that will explore this phenomena in greater detail and in a broader sense.

This qualitative study included four Latino males from the West Texas area. The participants varied in ages from seventeen to twenty-five and although the composition of the family structure, and ages varied, there were common characteristics and experiences that provided a link between the participants.

Discussion

The fact that each participant perceived some sort of discrimination in school resonated throughout the study. I feel that it is important that teachers and administrators are made aware of how minority students feel about school, teachers and administrators. We have to remember that it is difficult to separate language and culture (August & Hakuta, 1997). One of the respondents spoke about the fact that he was placed in an ESL class, although he knew the English language. Others made comments about the fact that teachers did not care if the minority students were learning and excelling as long as they

were quiet and remained out of the way, in essence what this amounted to is that these students were not only out of sight, but also out of mind.   For Rogelio and Alejandro, and other minority students this meant assignments in alternative placements such as AEP (alternative education placement) or even the youth center. While it sad to image that this is still going on, participants of this study seem to feel that we have not made much progress in eliminating discriminatory practices in the school setting (Landsman & Lewis, 2006). It was quite disheartening to hear their stories and it is essential that we realize that the perceptions that they formed about school and their experiences are a reality for them and for so many of our minority youth.   This reminds me somewhat of the children's book "Dear Mrs. La Rue" where after numerous incidents of what Mrs. La Rue recognized as bad behavior on the part of her dog Ike, she decides to send him to obedience school. Ike like most of my participants did not see obedience school as a good place, but rather a prison. Most of my participants perceived school as something bad, especially in the upper grades. For them, as for Ike, school was almost prison like, and not a good place to be.   Although, obedience school was not as bad as Ike perceived it, for him, as for the young males in this study, school was not an inviting, safe environment. Ike, after ten days of trying to convince Mrs. La Rue of what a horrible place obedience school is, makes a daring escape to live a life of hardship and danger. The participants in my study also decided to escape the place that they perceived as a prison by dropping out and in essence have had to face their own hardships, such as poverty, and dangers, for example, at least for a couple of them incarceration.

    As researchers, we do a disservice to Latino and other minority populations by not acknowledging that discrimination, unpleasant as it may be to discuss, has been part of

many of our experiences. The participants in the study all stated that when they dropped

out of school, there was never any sort of inquiry from the schools to try to find out what

had happened to them or to try to get them back to school.   This was probably due to the

fact that, as stated by Jessie, "When I dropped out and my mom checked me out of

school, she was told to say that she was going to homeschool me, so that way she and I

would not get in trouble" (I-2 pg. 4 lines 17-18). Naturally, this skews the dropout rates

reported to the Texas Education Agency and other education agencies across the country

(Rumberger & Thomas, 2000). Most parents feel that the school is doing them a favor by

giving them this option, however, truth be known, schools are merely protecting

themselves.

 Another perception that was apparent throughout the interviews and focus group

was the fact that these young Latino males felt alienated.   They did not feel welcomed,

and had no sense of belonging. It is apparent then, based on the perceptions of the

participants that the high schools that they attended failed to provide a safe and caring

environment for them.

They perceived their high school teachers as uncaring, and not really concerned with

whether or not these participants were learning the material.   They felt that that their

teachers only cared about the students that did well on their own. The participants'

perceptions seem to indicate that these teachers wanted to get rid of any or all students

that were not academically successful.   None of these students felt motivated. The

teachers taught the lessons and then moved on, if you understood, great and if not, you

just dealt with it.   For these participants, school was a lonely place to be.   The

participants felt alone, frustrated and unwanted. Two of the most important problems for

these young men were doing the work, and absenteeism. These participants all described school as a negative experience for them.

Other apparent themes have to do with a mismatch of instruction. Participants reported that most of the teachers in high school made no effort to differentiate instruction to accommodate the students' various learning styles. It is important that we educate current and future teachers about the importance of differentiated instruction. The time has come to realize that there is no "one size fits all" when it comes to educating our children.

Other underlying themes included what can be termed as a lack of cultural capital. Cultural capital in this study refers to the fact that these participants all have parents that are themselves high school dropouts, therefore, to make the assumption that all students can go home and capitalize on the knowledge of the parents to assist them with homework, is ludicrous. Although all participants reported that the parents were supportive, and encouraged them to succeed, they did not have the conceptual knowledge needed in certain subject areas to be able to assist their students with their homework.

Another important theme that emerged was that in general teachers held low expectations of these students. Jessie commented that very rarely did you find Latinos or African Americans in Advanced Placement (AP) classes. He also stated that higher education was not a subject that was often brought up for discussion with them. It is evident that generally speaking, Latinos and African Americans are not expected to continue their education beyond high school.

Implications

The findings of this study suggest that there are certain aspects of our educational system that are not meeting the needs of Latino males. As educators, it is imperative that we recognize the cultural differences that exist within our classrooms, and that we find teaching strategies which address not only the academic needs, but also the physiological needs of each student. Their perceptions of school seem to have played a major role in their decisions to leave school. Perceptions can play a major role in how individuals approach goals, tasks, and challenges (Bandura, 1977), therefore it reasonable to argue that the perceptions formed by these participants can be attributed to the cumulative effects of school practices that limit Latino male learning opportunities, the impact on their sense of belonging in the school context, and teachers' low expectations.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research has served to further our knowledge regarding the factors affecting the dropout crisis among Latino males in the West Texas area. Leaving school before graduation has a negative impact, not only on the dropout, but on society as whole. The following are the recommendations for future research that will address and impact dropout rates of Latino males in the future.

A close look at what really goes on in schools and classrooms reveals that instead of an atmosphere of high expectations and conviction that all students can and should achieve, many of our schools perpetuate deeply rooted cultural beliefs, that language is a barrier; that education is not the main focus of the Latino parent; and that Latinos are less intelligent than other ethnic minorities (Holman, 1997). These beliefs only serve to create barriers to student access to and success.

Schools and school personnel have the power of being the most influential factors affecting the perceptions that students form about school. Schools have to be safe environments and students must perceive them as such. This safe environment includes teachers and administrators that have and display a genuine caring attitude toward all students. As evident from the interview narratives, participants in this study definitely felt disconnected from their teachers. Consequently, it is important for school personnel to create a culture that supports an equitable outcome for all students.

Moreover, it is important to remember that caring about students is the most important job that a teacher and school personnel have. Not just caring on the surface but genuine caring. We have to remember that teachers are there to serve all students; we are hired to provide the service of teaching all students, regardless of race, or social status, to the very best of our abilities (Sheets, 1996). The following quote by Dr. Leo Buscaglia (1924-1998), says it all: "Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around." For the students in my study, their perceptions of their high school teachers' attitudes was definitely not positive ones and the attitudes of these teachers were probably determinant factors in their decision to leave school.

The implementation of a culturally responsive curriculum with activities that support relationships between students and students and students and school personnel is essential. Often there is a lack of cultural sensitivity among school personnel (Sheets, 1996).

Future research in this area must focus on the expansion of professional development programs that address a culturally responsive curriculum as well as an understanding of the cultures of the diverse group of students in the classroom. It is important that schools learn to dispel cultural myths and believe in and build trust among the students.

Parents are an essential part of student learning and student motivation. An alienation of parents often alienates students and vice-versa. There is a considerable amount of evidence that involving parents in the education of their children leads to improvements in student achievement, school attendance and the reduction of dropout rates. Latino parents are not familiar with the concept of teaming up with the school. They prefer to leave the education of their students in the hands of the professional.

Research in parental involvement should be concentrated in the direction of seeking and finding strategies that will encourage Latino parents to partner up with the school in order for their children to get an equitable and rigorous education.

Teacher expectations, for Latino males, are often lower than for other ethnic males. This is often due to stereotyping of these students. Many times there is a lack of rigor and relevance as well as expectations for these students. Access to rigorous curriculum and scaffolding, out of school learning experiences and focusing on strengths, rather than their weaknesses and empowering these students helps Latino males to excel academically. Another important aspect in educating Latino males is that teachers must provide and utilize culturally diverse teaching materials. They must also learn to adapt those materials to fit the needs of these students (Rodriguez, 2007)

There are some inconsistencies in selecting appropriate strategies that value the experiences and the knowledge that these students, as well as all students, bring to school, accordingly, it is important for teachers to provide consistent, appropriate, and strategic teaching models and strategies for all students, but especially for Latino males (Brown, 2007).

Instead of the usual "one-size fits all" school, there is a need for school districts to develop options for students, including a curriculum that connects what they are learning in the classroom with real life experiences (Valverde, 2006).

Research in the area of low expectations needs to focus on developing professional development that sensitizes teachers to possible unconscious biases and raise their awareness of the damaging effects of holding differential expectations for students.

Civic responsibility, and community engagement is tremendously important and the schools and the communities have to connect. If the schools and the communities get on the same page about saving the children in the community, we may very well begin to see an increase in the high school graduation rates of Latino males and other minorities (Gandara, 2010). We must have an extended support network for those who are at risk of dropping out so that we can all work toward getting them back on track and on the path to graduation.

With respect to school policies, is that schools and communities cannot adequately address the dropout problem without an accurate account of it. There are too many ways in which graduation and dropout rates can be calculated and all this does is hide the problem (McNeil, 2005). More work is needed in order to build the data systems that will allow states to collect and publish information on graduation and dropout rates and to

monitor the progress of each state over time. Addressing the high school dropout rate crisis should be a top national priority not only for educators, but also for, policymakers and other leaders from various sectors (Fry, 2003).

A problematic area for Latino male students and for other minority students seems to be in high stakes testing. Standardized test administrations in Texas began with the Perot reforms of the 1980's and 1990's, when such tests became increasingly tied to "high stakes" for children and school personnel (Carlson, 2004). What this has created is classroom practices in which test-prep activities are seizing the better part of the school curriculum. Traditionally the high stakes testing system reduces the quality and quantity of the curriculum. The pressure to raise scores on these tests leads teachers to spend class time drilling students on practice exam materials. Drilling time expels too much time from real teaching and learning. Put plainly, teachers are basically teaching to the test. This type of teaching does not encourage students to think or to problem solve. Also, for most minority students these tests have no connection to their culture or life experiences. They are basically learning the format of the test and how to bubble in answers. Research studies indicate that students who see no connection between their life experiences and culture to the curriculum are more likely to become disengaged from the school environment (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

In conclusion, high stakes testing tied to graduation requirements is a ticket to nowhere for the young men in this study and other minority students. Schools are failing our minority students. Students who are never successful on these tests just give up and a great number of them become dropouts, as is the case for the participants of this study (McNeil & Valenzuela, 2001).

There is a need for additional independent research that examines the effects of high stakes testing on the curriculum in various school subjects, and on students' capacities to learn. Drilling is not teaching. The effects on children from this accountability system need to be investigated if we are to guarantee that our public schools serve all children well.

Conclusion

The academic success of underserved students depends on their experiences within the education system. These experiences are influenced by the degrees to which their own culture and language are acknowledged and integrated into the school program, how engaged they become and are encouraged to become, and how well educators support them in instruction, guidance, and assessment (Hollins, 2008).

Educators, based on their own beliefs about race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic background, form their own perceptions about students' ability to learn, interest in learning, and chances for success in school. Students who do not conform to the ideals of educators and society are considered outsiders and even outcasts. Educators act on those judgments by opening and closing doors to academic success through the way they interact with and support students, the opportunities they provide for students to learn and excel, the guidance they give, and the way they interact with students' families (Brown, 2007).

It is vital that all students perceive their school environment as being a positive one where they can form meaningful relationships and where their self-efficacy improves as they develop into confident learners through their educational experiences. If this is not

accomplished early on, students tend to disconnect from their school environment as did the participants of this study (Bridgeland & Morison, 2006).

Although ethnic identity may be influenced by and reflect the languages, customs, cultural values, and experiences deriving from youths' homes and communities, there is evidence that school settings can play important roles in their ethnic identity development. Researchers have found that ethnic minority adolescents frequently report experiences related to race and ethnicity within their school settings (Fisher et. al., 2000).

In particular, the secondary school context provides classroom and social structures that can result in heightened social racial salience and awareness of racial group differences, including stereotypes. Teacher and class curricula often highlight social comparison more than in elementary grades, resulting in more focus to group differences in achievement and performance (Altschul, Oyserman, & Bybee, 2006).

When students feel that they are in a safe environment with a sense of belonging and connectedness, they are more likely to become engaged in school, and become contributing members of the school community (Hollins, 2008).

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Appendix A

Structured Interview Questions

1. Do you remember how old you were when you started school?

2. What language was spoken at your home?

3. Did you know how to speak English when you started school, then?

4. Were you able to understand what the teacher was saying and when they were giving instructions in the early elementary school grades?.

5. What was your favorite thing about school in elementary?

6. How about in Jr. High?

7. How about high school?

8. Did you have a favorite teacher?

9. Why were these people your favorites?

10. Were you involved in sports or extracurricular activities in school?

11. What kinds of grades did you make in elementary, Jr. High and high school?

12. Which grade was the toughest for you? Why?

13. Which subject was the toughest for you and why?

14. Did you take homework home? If so, who (if anyone) helped you with your work?

Appendix B

Focus Group Discussion Questions

1. Now that you have concluded the two interviews, how do you feel about recalling your school experiences? Was it pleasant, unpleasant or sort of neutral?

2. If you could go back to school, what would you do different if anything?

3. What about your school experiences have impacted your life the most?

4. If given the chance would you return to school or at least work on your GED? Why or why not?

5. Do you feel that you were given sufficient opportunities and encouragement to stay in school?

6. Why didn't you complete your high school degree? What impacted your decision to leave school the most?

7. What advice or encouragement would you offer to other young men such as yourself who are considering dropping out of school?

APPENDIX C

Table 2.1 Claudio's Audit Trail

Number	Interview I, II or Focus Group or Tables and Researcher's Journal
1	RJ pg. 1
2	I pg. 2 line 7
3	II pg. 2 line 15
4	II pg.1 lines 14-15
5	Table 2-2 Appendix
6	II pg. 3 line 10
7	II pg. 2 line 10
8	I pg. 3 lines 7-8
9	FG pg. 6 lines 22-23
10	I pg. 1 lines 19-20
11	FG pg. 7 lines 13-14
12	II pg. 3 lines 5-6

APPENDIX D

Table 2.2 Jessie's Audit Trail

Number	Interview I, II, Focus Group or Tables
1	RJ pg. 5 I-pg.1
2	I pg.1 lines 10-20
3	I pg. 1 line 16
4	II pg. 1 lines 7-9
5	FG pg. 4 line 15
6	I pg. 1 lines 1-12
7	II pg. 1 lines 16-17
8	FG pg. 3 line 20
9	II pg. 1 lines 22-23
10	II pg.2 lines 1-2
11	II pg. 3 lines 10-12
12	FG pg. 3 line 10
13	II pg. 3 line 15
14	I pg. 3 lines 11-12
15	FG pg. 6 lines 17-18
16	I pg. 1 lines 19-21
17	FG pg. 7 lines 12-13
18	FG pg. 7 lines 27-28

APPENDIX E

Table 2.3 Alejandro's Audit Trail

Number	Interview I, II, Focus Group or Tables
1	I pg.1 lines 1-10
2	FG pg. 6 line 12
3	FG pg. 6 line 20
4	II pg. 7 line 8
5	I pg. 1 lines 11-13
6	I pg. 2 lines 15-17
7	II pg. 1 lines 14-15
8	II pg. 1 lines 17-18
9	II pg. 2 line 5
10	II pg. 2 lines 11-13
11	II pg. 3 line 12
12	FG pg. 6 lines 10-11
13	FG pgs. 5-6 lines 24-25
14	I pg. 1 lines 24-25
15	FG pg.7 lines 18-20
16	FG pg. 7 lines 31-32

APPENDIX F

Table 2.4 Rogelio's Audit Trail

Number	Interview I, II, Focus Group or Tables
1	I pg.1 lines 1-5
2	I pg. 2 lines 3-4
3	II pg. 1 lines 10-12
4	FG pg. 3 lines 8-9
5	FG pg. 4 lines 9-11
6	FG pg. 2 lines 1-10
7	FG pg. 2 line 14
8	FG pg. 4 line 2
9	II pg. 2 lines 10-12
10	FG pg. 3 line 15
11	FG pg. 3 line 12
12	FG pg. 4 line 13
13	II pg. 4 lines 8-9
14	FG pg. 6 lines 19-20
15	I pg. 1 lines 22-23
16	FG pg. 7 lines 22-24
17	II pg. 3 lines 13-14

APPENDIX G

Table 3.1

Claudio's GPA=Grade Point Average (anything below 70 is considered failing)

Grade Level	Grade Point Avg. (GPA) Range
K-2nd grades	93-95
3rd -5th grades	92-95
6th-8th grades	87-90
9th-12th grades	63-67

Table 3.2 Claudio's Attendance Percentage by Grade Level

Grade Level	Average Attendance Range
K-2nd grades	100% (The first 3 yrs. he was never absent)
3rd -5th grades	90-93%
6th-8th grades	80-87%
9th-12th grades	50-55%

Table 3.3 Claudio's State Exam Scores by Grade Level

	Reading	Math	Writing	ELA	Science	Soc.Stu.
9 -2005-06	1982-N	1928-N	Not tested	Not tested	Not tested	Not tested
10 -2006-07	Not tested	2008-N	Not tested	1966 –N	2110-Y	2210-Y
11 or Exit 2007-08 2008-09	Not tested	1997-N	Not tested	2002-N retest Oct. 2007=2017	2127-Y	2238-Y

Appendix H

Table 4.1

Jessie's GPA=Grade Point Average (note: anything below 70 is considered failing)

Grade Level	Grade Point Avg. (GPA) Range
K-2nd grades	90-94
3rd-5th grades	90-93
6th-8th grades	85-88
9th-12th grades	60-65

Table 4.2 Jessie's Attendance Percentage by Grade Level

Grade Level	Average Attendance Range
K-2nd grades	94-98%
3rd-5th grades	90-92%
6th-8th grades	85-87%
9th-12th grades	60-62%

Table 4.3 Jessie's State Exam scores by grade level

	Reading	Math	Writing	ELA	Science	Soc.Stu.
9-2009-10	2000-N	2040-N	Not tested	Not tested	Not tested	Not tested
10 2010-11	Not tested	2044-N	Not tested	2051-N	2193-Y	2302-N
11 or Exit 2011-12	Did not take					

APPENDIX I

Table 5.1

Alejandro's GPA-Grade Point Average (anything below 70 is considered failing)

Grade Level	Grade Point Avg. (GPA) Range
K-2nd grades	89-90
3rd -5th grades	83-85
6th-8th grades	83-85
9th-12th grades	Below 60

Table 5.2 Alejandro's Attendance Percentage by Grade Level

Grade Level	Average Attendance Range
K-2nd grades	94-98%
3rd -5th grades	90-92%
6th-8th grades	85-87%
9th-12th grades	60-62%

Table 5.3 Alejandro's State Exam Score by Grade Level

	Reading	Math	Writing	ELA	Science	Soc.Stu.
9 -2001-02	1440-N	1335-N	Not tested	Not tested	Not tested	Not tested
10-2002-03	Not tested	1995-N	Not tested	2004-N	2100-Y	2484-Y
11 or Exit 2003-2004 2004-2005	Not tested	2072-N Retest Oct. 1999 N	Not tested	2088-N Retest Oct. 2050 N	2068-Y	2100-y

APPENDIX J

Table 6.1

Rogelio's GPA=Grade Point Average (note: anything below 70 is considered failing)

Grade Level	Grade Point Avg. (GPA) Range
K-2nd grades	85-91
3rd -5th grades	83-87
6th-8th grades	81-79
9th-12th grades	Below 60

Table 6.2 Rogelio's Attendance Percentage by Grade Level

Grade Level	Average Attendance
K-2nd grades	89-90%
3rd -5th grades	90-94%
6th-8th grades	85-87%
9th-12th grades	55-50%

Table 6.3 Rogelio's State Exam Scores by Grade Level

	Reading	Math	Writing	ELA	Science	Soc.Stu.
9 -2002	1455-N	1340-N	Not tested	Not tested	Not tested	Not tested
10-2003	Not tested	1994-N	Not tested	2020-N	2316-Y	2143-Y
11 or Exit 2004 2005		1939-N Retest 2111-N		2010-N Retest 2140-N	2305-Y	2300-Y