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Navigating University of Denver as a Latinx Male-Identifying Undergraduate Student

Quisi Rodriguez-Oregel

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Students of color continuously persist at a lower rate than their white counterparts in higher education. Particularly for Latinx males, the number is lower than Latinx women. Universities have incorporated Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) strategies to focus on their diverse student population and address issues of race, ethnicity, class, and gender. Despite these efforts, low retention rates for Latinx males persist. This study explores how Latinx male undergraduate students navigate a predominantly white institution as well as explore some of the challenges of DEI efforts at that institution. I conducted participant observations at the University of Denver (DU) and interviewed Latinx male students and staff engaged in DEI at DU. My findings showed that students struggled to feel like they belonged due to low representation, racism, and lack of resources. Despite that, they created safe spaces and support groups that helped them persist. Challenges to DEI included lack of communication and collaboration between students, staff, and departments because of the siloed environment at DU.

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Students of color continuously persist at a lower rate than their white counterparts in higher education. Particularly for Latinx males, the number is lower than Latinx women. Universities have incorporated Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) strategies to focus on their diverse student population and address issues of race, ethnicity, class, and gender. Despite these efforts, low retention rates for Latinx males persist. This study explores how Latinx male undergraduate students navigate a predominantly white institution as well as explore some of the challenges of DEI efforts at that institution. I conducted participant observations at the University of Denver (DU) and interviewed Latinx male students and staff engaged in DEI at DU. My findings showed that students struggled to feel like they belonged due to low representation, racism, and lack of resources. Despite that, they created safe spaces and support groups that helped them persist. Challenges to DEI included lack of communication and collaboration between students, staff, and departments because of the siloed environment at DU.

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As a Latinx, family has also been very important, and we move forward together. I am fortunate to have a family that is helpful, uplifting, and motivating. I'm especially grateful for my twin sister for pushing me to finish when I felt overwhelmed. My family has been my biggest cheerleaders and has helped me realize that I hope to be a role model for all those who come behind me. As a quote says, "if you are more fortunate than others, build a longer table, not a taller fence." I hope that with my research I can support students in my community in higher education.

Thank you to my friends, you helped me navigate a PWI like DU and it would not have been the same without you all. You will always be an important part of this process and my life.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Historically, Hispanic/Latinx people have had a lower educational attainment than white people in the U.S. This is in part due to various factors like immigration status, income inequality, educational access, family expectations, and few mentors to guide them to college (Marshall et al. 2021 and Gonzales 2021b). Both Latinx males and women are less likely to obtain a college degree compared to their white counterparts. According to the Education Trust which conducted an analysis of the U.S. Bureau's 2018 Community Survey, on average nationwide, "slightly more than a quarter (26.6%) of Latinas have a college degree" (Marshall et al. 2021). On the other hand, in nearly two thirds of the states that they examined, "fewer than 1 in 5 Latinos are college educated" (Marshall et al. 2021). In support of this, NBC noted, "in 2010, more Latina women held advanced degrees than Latino men, and in 2021 they continue to outpace their male counterparts" (Tran 2023). In Colorado, the number of Latinx males who earn degrees has not improved much over the last decade, despite institutions enrolling more Latinx students (Gonzales 2021b). For example, the number of Latinx males enrolled at Metropolitan State University of Denver (MSU) went from 13% (2,800) of their student population to 28.3% (5,231) between 2008 and 2017 (Hernandez 2019). Despite MSU's increased Latinx population, it "has the lowest graduation rate for Hispanic men"

(Gonzales 2021a). Unfortunately, this happens across Colorado, Hispanic men graduate at levels far below their peers (Gonzales 2021a).

Even though institutions are now enrolling more Latinx students, this does not fix the issue of educational attainment. To help Latinx students, institutions around the country have developed systems that support students "before they stumble, rewarding professors for doing more to connect with students, and creating communities that embrace students on campus" (Gonzales 2021). To reach students who need support some schools have expanded staff outreach to those students, increased financial support, and provided clubs and extracurriculars (Gonzales 2021). A gap that has been identified is the lack of Latinx male mentors. As Gonzales (2021) shows, despite some of the efforts done to help Latinx male students the gap persists. This may in part be due to systemic reasons like campus culture, climate and policies which impact their experiences as well as the length of time to graduation (Communications 2021). Spaces on campus for cultural expression and development like campus cultural centers "have been viewed as influential elements in Latino/a student success" (Montelongo 2019, 13). It is important to have spaces like the Latino cultural center as a part of the campus climate since it can impact the college success of Latinos at all levels (Montelongo 2019, 19). Campus climate can impact institutional efforts to increase diversity. A "hostile climate taints interactions between students of color and their peers, negatively influencing the quality, frequency, and outcomes associated with that interaction" (Griffin et al. 2012, 537). Those interactions can then "inhibit students' engagement with the campus community, leading to negative implications for student development and retention" (Griffin et al.

2012, 537-8). Lacking cultural centers and having a hostile campus climate can all negatively impact Latinx students' experiences and success.

Some of the policies that have helped Latinos in higher education are through Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives. DEI "encompasses the policies and practices designed to ensure that every member of the institution (including students, faculty, staff) have equal opportunities for success and inclusion, no matter their background" (PeopleAdmin 2023). Even though higher education institutions have begun to incorporate and focus on DEI, the students whom it is supposed to serve often times can become "victim to institutions' laissez-faire approach to DEI, and increasingly balance their coursework with participation in DEI efforts that amplify their voice on campus, but ultimately those efforts serve as a tax that takes time away from their studies" (Washington 2024). Even though institutions are embracing DEI rhetoric, paradoxically they have also "deployed multiple strategies of resistance to implementing practices that could dismantle systemic inequalities" (MacKenzie 2023). Which is why it is important for institutions to reflect on how their policies and actions are impacting minoritized groups on their campus. Mendoza Diaz et al. (2021) analyzed student data of 19 institutions and focused on the time Latinos/Hispanics take to graduate in engineering and computer science. Findings "suggest that underrepresented groups, including Latinos/Hispanics have an over-all significant disadvantage compared to white, Asian, and International students" (Mendoza Diaz et al. 2021, 1020). Mendoza Diaz et al. (2021) also found that data lacked true representation of Latinxs in Engineering which in itself presents another challenged faced by Latinx students. In an interview Mendoza Diaz

stated that "the data institutions collect should drive their research which consequently should drive the policies they enact that impact Latinos" (Communications 2021).

My exploratory research examined how Latinx male identifying undergraduate students navigate a PWI like the University of Denver. Additionally, I examined DEI staff's perceptions of current DEI initiatives and challenges they faced to advance their work. I conducted participant observations in places like the Cultural Center, Identity-based organization meetings, and DEI meetings across different academic units within DU. Given my primary interest is the lived experience of male Latinx undergraduate students, I conducted semi-structured interviews. I interviewed five Latinx students who were not freshmen and were in different majors. The interviews began with general information like their names, major, year, extracurricular activities, race/ ethnicity, and family's nationality, and then transitioned with open-ended questions. The interview guides with all the questions I asked are included in the annex. Some general topics I asked about included their experiences at DU, support they received or may have needed, and if they have faced or witnessed racism at DU. In addition to that, I interviewed four staff that engage with DEI work at different schools. The goal of those interviews was to gain a better understanding of the efforts DU is taking to become a more diverse and inclusive space and staff's suggestions to make those initiatives successful. With the data collected, I conducted thematic analysis, which gave me a better understanding of their experiences.

Some of the study findings included the difficulties working in DEI, the scarcity of departmental resources, and the difficulties in negotiating safe spaces as students of

color. Faculty and students discussed challenges with DEI efforts at DU. Some of these challenges included the lack of communication between the institution, staff, and students. This made it difficult for students to know what efforts were taking place and impacted students' perceptions of DEI. Staff and students described tensions between each other which also made it difficult to work together. Students and staff had different ways of approaching systemic issues which caused the tensions. At the same time, students found it important to have more professors and staff of color. The support that professors and staff of color provided helped students persist at DU. Students also identified how some departmental resources they received, such as the Daniels School of Business career fair, were either not beneficial for them as students of color or they did not trust them. As a result, students created their own informal resources or found resources that provided academic, emotional, and social support. Lastly, students described their experience at DU as one fraught with microaggressions and exclusion. Nonetheless, they found safe spaces where they were able to connect with other students of color and feel like they belonged in those spaces. Through students' interviews, I identified supports and barriers during their experience at DU.

The initial findings of this study showed that students at DU had various types of support systems in place. In addition to support systems, students mentioned that family members were also motivators for them to continue their education. This concurs with literature on the persistence of students of color in higher education. Something the literature did not mention but staff did in my interviews is the intellectual, emotional, and physical labor that it can take to take on these various roles. My findings show that for

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these students, support systems were important. Students disclosed the different types of social networks they created to succeed in college. Professors of color would be able to mentor and provide guidance on issues like how to navigate your career as a professional of color. Besides professors, they brought up programs targeting minorities, identity-based organizations, and staff as other forms of support. These support systems helped them feel like they belonged on campus and provided academic, emotional, and mental support.

My findings also show the urgency of conducting more studies focused on Latinx males' nuanced experiences in higher education. While only one student mentioned that they had to balance work and school, other literature brings up alternative barriers that they may face, like familial obligations/expectations and financial pressure which was not explored in this study. One other instance in which students brought up gender was when they were discussing microaggressions. While one student was alone on the elevator, they mentioned that they noticed a white girl clutch her purse. Another student mentioned that a white woman would go out of her way to sit away from him. While they did not go into depth on their gender, this is a topic worth exploring since there is not much literature discussing the correlation between Latinx males and the microaggressions they face.

When talking about DEI, staff mentioned many of the issues the literature also reported. Both students and staff mentioned the performative aspect of DEI. Along with that, students and staff mentioned the lack of communication between DU and school units, which means these two groups may not know about efforts being made to support

DEI. My findings did not present any implementation strategies of DEI policies which may be due to faculty wanting DU to implement institutional accountability and trust.

Finally, I wanted to provide reasonable recommendations to different groups of people. My recommendations were aimed for activists/ community members, DU administrators and PWI institutions, the Latine Student Alliance (LSA), and anthropologists. I suggest that they allocate more financial resources to the student programs focused on minority students like 1GenU and the First@DU programs. An issue that both DU and other PWI institutions need to figure out is how to make sure to not increase the workload on professors and staff of color working on initiatives targeting students of color. The student identity-based organization, LSA, can focus on more outreach opportunities since they help students feel connected on campus. At LSA, students can see other students who look like them and share their culture. Lastly, anthropologists interested in the topic of Latinx students' experiences at a PWI and DEI can further explore how microaggressions can be gendered. Moreover, anthropologists can examine DEI staff's gendered experiences at a PWI. This research has the potential to advance knowledge in the fields of education, sociology, anthropology, and critical race studies while also informing institutional policies and practices in higher education.

Positionality and Trustworthiness

I identify as a Latinx female and entered college as a first-generation student. I attended a public charter high school on the West Coast. For college, I attended a predominantly white Institution in the Midwest. During my own collegiate career, I was involved with a Latinx student organization. Sharing identity characteristics with study

participants helped me access my participants and build rapport. For this study, I drew on my experiences as a Latinx first-generation student. My lived experiences make me culturally competent to understand the experiences of the participants of the study. Being culturally competent allowed me to conduct this type of research where I could analyze the data through a lens of cultural understanding. As a low-income, first-generation Latinx college student I have personally experienced how systemic barriers can affect the attainment in higher education. My advocacy and research interests are informed by my lived experience in response to the fact that while the Latinx population is one of the fastest-growing populations in the US, we are underrepresented amongst bachelor's degree-earners. At the same time, given that I am female, participants may have felt more comfortable being vulnerable and describing some of their struggles. However, since I am female, they may not have gone into detail on their gendered encounters since they may have felt like I would not understand.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

While this study does not look at what brings students to college rather it looks at students' experiences during college, it is important to give some background of how they get to college. When looking at race/ethnicity and gender, there are wide disparities in who goes to college. It has been known since 2009 that young males in every level of education are struggling to keep up to their female counterparts (Saenz and Ponjuan 2009, 54-55). Overall Latinx females "have consistently reported higher degree aspirations… than their male counterparts, and the gap between them appears to be widening" (Saenz and Ponjuan 2009, 72). Given the stratification of higher education, over 75% of Latinx students begin their journey in community college (Felix and Ramirez 2020, 6). Latinx students are most likely to be first-generation, as well as come from lower socioeconomic groups than their counterparts, which previous researchers have found decreases the probability of these students attending and completing postsecondary ew). At the turn of the century, Rodriguez et al. (2000, 522) said that efforts in higher education "should be concentrated in the following areas: financial aid, academic support systems, social/cultural support systems, and campus environment."

The term Latinx is a gender-neutral alternative to Latino, Latina, and Latin@. Latine and Latinx are terms that are used to be inclusive of our queer, genderqueer, and non-conforming members of our community. The US Census defines Latino as a person from Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican. South or Central American or other Spanish culture

or origin regardless of race (United States Census Bureau 2024). Although I am looking at male-identifying students I wanted to be inclusive of our people. I will use this term to move beyond gender binaries and towards the inclusion and intersection of identities of Latin American descendants.

Early Life Experiences/ Mentors

Education can "play a critical role in either reproducing or disrupting class, race and gender inequality" (Espinoza 2012, 38). Academic preparation has consistently been shown to predict enrollment and retention in college (Perna and Jones 2013). Stanton-Salazar and Spina (2003) also mention that for adolescents to successfully meet developmental challenges in today's world, they require resourceful relationships. A popular but wrong conception is that "Latino parents do not value and do not show concern for their children's education" (Arellano 1996, 492). They may often convey their support for education differently than mainstream Anglo parents (Arellano 1996, 492). Latino men have often acknowledged that their mothers are validating agents and share wisdom, affirmations, and emotional encouragement (Vasquez et al. 2021, 1). For many youths, "older siblings, extended family members, peers, neighbors, and key adults in the community all play a very important role in helping to determine their overall well-being and future life chances" (Stanton-Salazar and Spina 2003, 231-32). Espinoza (2011) also notes that educators, counselors, academic outreach professionals have the "potential to transmit to working-class students the necessary forms of social and academic capital that they would otherwise be lacking to effectively navigate the education system" (54). One of the factors that can lead to success is parental support and

encouragement. Other factors can include an optimistic outlook, drive to succeed, ethnicity (as a source of strength, pride, and support), and role models and mentors (Arellano 1996, 485). For Latinos/as and other groups likely to be first-generation college goers, relationships with school-based non-familial agents may be particularly important to the college planning process (Espinoza 2011; Radford 2013).

Support Systems

The previous section went over different support systems that have led to students getting into higher education and included the role of mentors. This section focuses on higher education and Latinx students' support systems in this environment. The college campus can provide a safe environment for Latinx students in which peers and faculty mentors can help shape their academic and personal trajectories (Huerta and Fishman 2014, 93; Pérez II and Saenz 2017, 172). The level of "support that Latino male students received often reflected how valued they felt by others including peers, family, romantic partners, and other college faculty and staff" (Huerta and Fishman 2014, 93). Saenz and Ponjuan (2009) point out that "Figueroa (2002) found that Latino males in college are more prone to achieve academically and graduate when they uncover responsive social networks within the college environment that are nurturing and help them persevere in spite of feeling unwelcome and alienated" (73). Institutional agents (Stanton-Salazar 2003) "play a critical role in supporting Latina/o/x transfer students, both at the community college and four-year institution" (Vasquez et al. 2021, 4). Institutional support structures that have been reported to increase students' sense of belonging include "scholarship programs, social identity-based centers, student organizations, residence hall

communities, faculty relationships, academic support services, and high-impact educational experiences" (Means and Pyne 2017, 920).

Higher Education and Gender

The purpose of this section is not to focus on one sex or the exclusion of the other, but to not neglect the unique challenges faced by both female-and male-identifying Latinx students. Gender and racial beliefs intersect to differently shape Latinx females' and males' attitudes, behaviors, and college choices. For Latinx female students, connections to family enhance educational success, but family obligations can sometimes conflict with school demands, placing Latinas in a cultural bind (Sy and Romero 2008). For Latinx females who are career-oriented, they can often be seen as selfish and greedy to the rest of the family who do not share the female's same career aspirations or value of educational attainment (Espinoza 2010; Tienda and ETS Policy Information Center 2009). In Ovink's study (2014) they identified that female Latinxs college education is essential for independence and for male Latinxs it related the necessity of higher earnings through college completion almost exclusively to the need to provide for their future families. Only a handful of studies have been published about male-identifying Latinx students in higher education within the last decade (Pérez II and Taylor 2016, 1). "Part of the challenge is that there is a scarcity of research that focuses specifically on the Latino male college experience, and most of what we know about Latino males in college is indirectly ascertained from the important scholarship that examines the Latina educational condition in postsecondary education" (Saenz and Ponjuan 2009, 72). The stories of male-identifying Latinx students must be examined to better understand the trajectories

leading to college completion (Huerta and Fishman 2014, 86). In response to socioeconomic pressures and cultural expectations, Latinx males are more likely to join the workforce or military, leaving their educational aspirations unfilled (Pérez II 2017, 4).

Higher Education and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

As Martinez-Acosta and Favero (2018, A254) mention, "to truly change the environment of academia, we must acknowledge that it has existed for many years predominantly as a culture of white men who came from privilege." Universities in the United States were rooted in the education of white males. Diversity efforts by higher education institutions began before Civil Rights. In 1947, a landmark desegregation case involving Chicanos on the West Coast, *Mendez v. Westminster,* provided an important precedent for the historic *Brown* case seven years later (Smith 2020). The historic *Brown v. Board of Education* case marked the time where it was unconstitutional to separate children in schools on the basis of race and "served as a catalyst for the expanding civil rights movement during the decade of the 1950s" (National Archives n.d.). The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and various executive orders for affirmative action "focused on ensuring access to higher education for historically underrepresented minorities as well as white women in fields in which they were underrepresented" (Smith 2020, 55). Affirmative action was not "framed as a method to hire or admit people, but rather as a way to hold institutions accountable and to minimize discriminatory practices against protected classes from whom discrimination was documented" (Smith 2020, 55). Other legal and policy initiatives like the 1965 Higher Education Act, the 1972 Basic

Educational Opportunity Grants (now known as the Pell Grant), and the Disabilities Act

of 1990 provided the framework and pressure for diversity efforts early on (Smith 2020).

The last 50 years in higher education have seen significant changes in access to

previously underrepresented student groups. Not only have we seen changes in federal

laws, but there have also been changes on campus policies and demographics. These

changes have resulted in increased access for women, people of color, and students of

limited financial means (Manning 2012). With all these changes, "the promotion of

diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) on college campuses has become a central concern

(Greene and Paul 2021, 1). With increased diversity on campuses, Denson, and Chang

(2009) advocated that students who have more cross-cultural interactions on campus

positively affect educational outcomes. Diversifying people in an institution "can lead to

greater turnover if the culture of the institution or the unit does not serve to validate and

support them" (Smith 2020, 69). The wider discussion of inclusive excellence across the

academy is one that suggests the need to change the landscape and to change the

status-quo (Martinez-Acosta and Favero 2018). Diversity discourse is often noted as

performative (Ahmed, 2012) and lacking action-oriented language when responding to

racial incidents. Higher education faculty, staff, and administrators perform their life's

work in extremely ambiguous, complex, and politically charged settings (Manning 2012).

Which is why institutions need to have DEI efforts that are "proportionate to other goals

of higher education and be designed to achieve legitimate goals" (Greene and Paul 2021,

14). Additionally, institutions need to have administrators and departments "start by

setting goals with specific outcomes that demonstrate diversity and inclusion is a priority

and provide mentorship to faculty, staff, and students on how to develop a more inclusive environment" (Martinez-Acosta and Favero 2018, A254). Having grown in prominence over the past several decades, diversity plans operate as a tool for DEI organizational change. However, "the examination of diversity plans at land-grant institutions and community colleges, has shown how they advance color evasive language, present a deficit framework around students, and include a significant level of heterogeneity" (Casellas Connors and McCoy 2022, 591). Diversity work "requires that time, energy, and labor be given to diversity, as well as "expanding one's means of circulating information; for practitioners, diversity work is often about developing diverse communication strategies" (Ahmed 2012, 30). As Ahmed (2012, 174) states, "diversity work does not simply generate knowledge about institutions...it generates knowledge of institutions in the process of attempting to transform them."

Implementation of DEI Policy

Political realities, bureaucratic structures, and academic norms are all factors that influence higher education institutions' commitment to implementing and sustaining DEI practices. Although we have seen many institutions initiate DEI practices, "commitment to diversity does not automatically translate to nor serve as a commitment to equality or equity" (Sawyer and Waite 2021, 9). To implement these systemic changes there needs to be "calls on current faculty members, students, and administrators to shift, assess their values, have an openness to new ideas, and act in different ways" (Guo and Jamal 2007, 42). Additionally, implementers need to "build their equity-minded competence and awareness of social contextual factors not only to understand the root causes of policy

problems but also to compensate for policy design flaws and to respond to equity-oriented change" (Felix 2021, 7). The diversity of teacher/faculty force is a "central component of any policy initiative intended to provide a high-quality education to all students (Turner 2021, 16). As higher education institutions take on "this form of critical self-scrutiny, eliminating current approaches, taking transformative steps, and new tools will need to be employed" (Sawyer and Waite 2021, 8). New tools like the development of a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Institutionalization (DEII) measurement can help measure DEI policy implementation.

Cumming et. al. (2023, 33) created DEII which designed the assessment with the "institution as the unit of measurement in order to facilitate the reporting of institutional initiatives by those with expertise about the initiatives within the institution, rather than relying solely on aggregating differing perspectives and opinions about initiatives." This provides data that is not only individual opinions and their individual perspectives on institutional initiatives. They included the following themes in their assessment: Institutional Environment, Faculty and Staff Hiring, Faculty and Staff Retention, Student Admissions, Student Retention and Completion, and Curriculum (Cumming et. al. 2023). Besides the DEII assessment, including a model that creates change in the self, classroom, institution, and community can help with implementation of DEI. The anti-racist model discussed by Guo and Jamal (2007) encompasses four learning objectives for both faculty and students: (1) integrating multiple centers of knowledge, (2) recognition and respect for difference, (3) effecting social and educational change: equity, access, and social justice, and (4) teaching community empowerment. This approach "requires

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consideration of how policies and programs that address issues of equity can be formulated and implemented to respond to educational inequity" (Guo and Jamal 2007, 42). As Tienda (2013, 474) mentions, "it is not unreasonable, then, to ask university administrators whether their verbal commitment to diversity is attracting and retaining students from underrepresented groups, and their success in closing racial disparities in completion rates."

Conceptual Framework

Theories and frameworks can be oppressive, but they can also be liberating particularly if written to center the experiences of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and authored by those with lived experiences in those communities. A theoretical framework that I have used for this project is Critical Race Theory (CRT). In the mid-1970s, Critical Race Theory (CRT) developed in the United States out of Critical Legal Studies. It was used in legal scholarship to analyze race and racism from a legal point of view. CRT is the view that race, instead of being biologically grounded and natural, is socially constructed and that race, as a socially constructed concept, functions to maintain the interests of the white population that constructed it (Zuberi 2011, 5). It highlights issues such as alienation, rejection, inequality, and culture of prejudice. Although CRT draws from diverse disciplines and theorists and practitioners have diverse approaches and emphases, they share common ground on five components. The five major elements of CRT consist of: first is the notion that racism is ordinary and not aberrational, meaning many instances of racist behavior like microaggressions are part of people of colors' everyday experience. The second is the idea of interest convergence

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which acknowledges that racism is embedded within systems and institutions like the legal system and tend to serve the interests of the dominant white groups (George 2021). Third, is the social construction of race which "recognizes that science refutes the idea of biological racial differences" hence race is a social construction in which people have conceived a set of imagined behaviors (positive or negative) to nondominant groups (George 2021). Fourth, is the idea of storytelling and counter-storytelling which consists of the voices of those without racial and social privilege and embraces the lived experience of people of color (George 2021). Fifth is the notion that whites have been recipients of civil rights legislation (Zuberi 2011, 5). The five major components of CRT can be used to analyze the different forms of social inequalities reinforced through the institution of higher education. Critical Race Theory has been used to further analyze and critique educational research and practice. CRT generates truths about colonization in larger social and structural contexts, facilitating change. CRT helped me analyze the obstacles that impact the life and success of Latinx males in higher education. CRT allowed me to provide crucial knowledge to white people by helping them grasp what it is like to be nonwhite.

The goal of CRT is to work toward liberating people of color whose voice and experiences of oppression are often ignored in U.S. society. It constructs an alternative reality by naming one's reality through storytelling and Counter storytelling, thus it provides a voice for people of color. Counter storytelling serves to "help us understand what life is like for others and invite the reader into a new and unfamiliar world" (Delgado and Stefanic 2001, 41). CRT scholarship challenges liberalist claims of

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objectivity and color blindness of the law and argues that "these principles actually normalize and perpetuate racism by ignoring the structural inequalities that permeate social institutions" (Abrams and Moio 2009, 246). CRT theorists use multiple approaches and methods to understand how the system of white supremacy is sustained in society (Brown 2017). Its general mission seeks to "analyze, deconstruct, and transform for the better the relationship among race, racism, and power" (Abrams and Moio 2009, 250). It allows for the examination of various elements to be questioned and explored for significance in studying emerging issues that Latinx students may face in higher education.

Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit/ LatCRT) is similar to CRT. This theory emerged from Critical Race Theory and is an extension of CRT but has a greater focus on the unique experiences of the challenges and obstacles facing the Latino/a community (Davila and Aviles de Bradley 2010). This theory is more customized to Latinx issues, but it is fairly new and emerged during the late 1980s and early 1990s. LatCrit is "concerned with a progressive sense of a coalitional Latina/Latino pan-ethnicity and addresses issues often ignored by critical race theorists" (Solorzano and Bernal 2001, 311). The primary issues include immigration status, language, ethnicity, and culture while targeting perplexed and oppressive structures and practices that are common to the Latinx community (Trucios-Haynes 2000). LatCrit's goals are to (1) develop a critical, activist, and inter-disciplinary discourse on law and policy towards Latinas/os, and (2) to foster both the development of coalition theory and practice as well as the accessibility of this knowledge to agents of social and legal transformation (LatCrit). LatCrit is said to

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provide the required insight into the history of students of color as holders and creators of knowledge.

Since LatCrit is a framework that outlines the social construction of race as central to how people of color are constrained and oppressed in society, it was a useful tool when looking at Latinx students in higher education. LatCrit shows Latinxs' multidimensional identities and "can address the intersectionality of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression" (Solorzano and Bernal 2001, 312). LatCrit lends attention to the experiences of Chicanos, Latinos, Asians, Native Americans/First Nations, as well as women of color (Dey 2021). It helps recognize that all communities of color are affected by racism in diverse ways. LatCrit theorists face the challenge of recognizing that not all Latinas/os are the same (Trucios-Haynes 2000, 38). LatCrit attempts to "link theory with practice, scholarship with teaching, and the academy with the community" (Solorzano and Bernal 2001, 312). We can see through their main goals that the focus is to advocate social justice for marginalized communities and seek to help those who are victimized in society. When looking at why Latinx students may not persist at the same rate as their white counterparts, LatCrit is another useful lens to use.

Solorzano and Delgado Bernal's (2001) examination of the 1968 East Los Angeles School walkouts and UCLA Chicana and Chicano studies protests provides a fitting example of using both Critical Race Theory and Latino Critical Race theory. It shows how both theories can help historically conceptualize instances of transformational resistance. Additionally, they present oral history data and a CRT and LatCrit framework counterstory. As CRT demonstrates, the historical dimension of the social constructs

affects the lived experiences and opportunities available to those who "fit the description." Solorzano (1998) also used Critical Race Theory to examine the experiences of Chicana/o graduate students with racial and gender microaggressions and their impacts on career paths of these scholars. Solorzano listened to the voices of discrimination victims and was able to reveal that despite these sometimes subtle microaggressions, these violent acts against scholars can have significant impacts on the educational experiences for these students in higher education.

Both CRT and LatCrit serve as frameworks that assist with the understanding of areas related to racial inequity. Both CRT and LatCrit theory challenge dominant discourse on race and racism. CRT allows researchers to examine how multiple forms of oppression can intersect within the lives of people of color and how they can manifest daily. The current experiences of people of color can be made clearer by understanding them within the context of the injustices historically faced by this group. It challenges the traditional claims institutions make toward objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race, neutrality, and equal opportunity. CRT challenges the way we examine race and racism and recognizes the experiential knowledge of people of color. It frames what we do, why we do it, and how we do it. LatCrit examines experiences unique to the Latinx community. LatCrit helps me situate my research within a paradigm that speaks to Latinx students' experiences in a specific way. LatCrit can be seen as complementary to critical race theory. CRT and LatCrit are meant to engender active participation by challenging, transforming, and revolutionizing institutions and systems to ensure they are equitable

and racially just. It was written by BIPOC scholars with lived experiences with an authentic commitment to the communities they live and work with.

Since CRT emphasizes an understanding of how race and racism intersect with social structures and power dynamics, this theory has gained attention in ethnographic research. However, like any theoretical framework, CRT has its limitations when applied to ethnographic research. Since CRT prioritizes context-specific understandings of race and racism, the research tends to have a limited generalizability of findings. While it is important to understand specific communities, these findings may not always apply to other settings. There is also the risk of confirmation bias when applying CRT in ethnographic research. Researchers may interpret data in ways that align with CRT principles, potentially overlooking contradictory evidence or alternative explanations. Researchers need to approach research with a critical and reflexive mindset, engaging with CRTs insights while also keeping its limitations in mind.

Institutional Context

The University of Denver was selected as the site due to its ranking for its Hispanic student population. For the academic year 2020-2021 DU had 5,699 undergraduate students. Of those 5,699 students, 2,594 were men and 5,305 were women (Univstats). According to DU's Student Composition Dashboard, in 2018 10% (265) of the undergraduate student population was Latino (Student Composition). The Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ODEI) alongside Human Resources and Inclusive Communities and Student Affairs and Inclusion Excellence launched the DEI Action plan in "August 2020 after campus-wide consultation and feedback" (DEI Action Plan). There

have not been updates on the action plan since Fall of 2021. The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Units include the Division of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) which is committed to providing leadership, guidance, and resources to support DU, Student Affairs and Inclusive Excellence (SAIE) which is committed to providing students with the support and skills needed to become empowered citizens that positively impact the communities they are a part of and Human Resources and Inclusive Communities (HRIC) which is committed to upholding DU's reputation as a global leader in academics and research that serves the public good. DU's DEI work engages in five areas of impact with specific action items that include:

1. Improve how we talk about, understand, and measure DEI at DU

    a. Action item: Articulate, educate, and train DU's unifying philosophy of diversity, equity, and inclusion informed by the key terminology of minoritized and intersectionality

    b. Action item: host regular chancellor and leadership engagement tours to meet with faculty, staff, students, and alumni.

2. Give DEI power, authority, and accountability

    a. Action item: establish a DEI steering committee that includes the chancellor, provost, and unit-level DEI leadership

    b. Action item: conduct a comprehensive review of DEI campus climate workgroups, studies, reports, and student demands followed by regular updates

c. Action item: initiate campus-wide division-level diversity, equity, and inclusion leadership, planning, and support

3. Invest in and provided training for students, staff, and faculty

    a. Action item: identify and address institutional barriers at DU to close the opportunity gap between minoritized students and non-minoritized students

    b. Action item: advance faculty diversity and retention

    c. Action item: institute baseline, mandatory training and continued professional development for administration, faculty, staff, and students

4. Build support specifically for the Black community

    a. Action item: support and provided resources to address the lived experiences of Black community members at DU

5. Launch university-wide programming to explore a more equitable future

    a. Action item: facilitate substantive discussions throughout the year on exploring the term antiracism

The most recent DEI plan update on the DEI website is the Fall 2021 Update which includes the following actions taken between March 2021 and November 2021:

1. Improve how we talk about, understand, and measure DEI at DU

    a. Action that was taken: outlined shared definitions for justice

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b. Action that was taken: honored Native students and Native

community members by collaborating on a socially distanced New

Beginnings Pow Wow and Community Feed

c. Action that was taken: launched a new Latinx Center website

2. Give DEI power, authority, and accountability

a. Action that was taken: expanding the scope of DEI at DU from

the Office of DEI to a divisional approach where DEI works across

the entire university might be better organized and executed

collaboratively

b. Action that was taken: continue to support DEI fellows

3. Invest in and provided training for students, staff, and faculty

a. Action that was taken: supported undergraduate DEI training

b. Action that was taken: evaluating employee DEI training

c. Action that was taken: continue to support the work of diversity

recruitment

4. Build support specifically for the Black community

a. Action that was taken: collaborated with Black student

organizations and celebrated Juneteenth

b. Action that was taken: provided mental health support by

establishing Emotional Emancipation Circles

c. Action that was taken: strengthened Black community groups

d. Action that was taken: connected and collaborated with the

Denver community

5. Launch university-wide programming to explore a more equitable future

a. Action that was taken: funded more proposals through an

anti-racism grant initiative

DEI for students includes active student groups on campus that build a community around a shared identity. The Cultural Center's mission is to "create an environment where students of color, students of marginalized faiths, and LGBTQ+ students can critically engage" (Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion). The Center also provides a physical safe haven for respite and dialogue for students with the previously mentioned identities as they navigate DU. Student groups include African Students United, Asian Student Alliance (ASA), Black Graduate Student Alliance, Black Student Alliance (BSA), Catholic Student Fellowship, Chabad, Chinese Students, and Scholars Association, Hillel, International Student Organization, Invisible Illness Club, Latinx Student Alliance (LSA), Middle Eastern Cultural Association, Muslim Student Association (MSA), Native Student Alliance (NSA), Queer Student Alliance (QSA), and the South Asian Student Association.

In addition to the student groups available, DU has student support services like First@DU. First@DU provides support for minority students and first-generation college students. They have activities to enforce the idea of community, offer mentorship, host academic success workshops, and promote leadership development. As part of the Student Affairs and Inclusive Excellence (SAIE) office, they have four student cohort

programs all dedicated to helping underrepresented students. One of the programs is Equity in Stem (E-STEM) which focuses on serving undergraduate students who have been historically underrepresented in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields. Another program, 1GenU (previously known as Access and Transitions), focuses on assisting first-generation students and their families navigating the college experience while providing mentorship and academic resources.

The College of Arts Humanities and Social Sciences (CAHSS) at DU has a DEI Strategic plan as well. The College is "working to facilitate a long-term cultural shift where faculty, staff, and students of historically underrepresented and minoritized groups can fully participate and thrive" (College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences). CAHSS has various strategic plans that focus on Faculty and Staff which include Competency and Capacity Development and Recruitment, Hiring, and Retention. CAHSS also has a section that focuses on students which includes Recruitment, Experience, and Retention and Academic Curriculum and Co-Curricular activities (College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences). CAHSS also has a DEI committee with around six committee members from different departments.

The Josef Korbel School of International Studies (Korbel) has a DEI office at their school. The program manager of the DEI office at Korbel is Kristen Noble. Kristen supports student organizations like the Korbel Graduate Students of Color (KGSC), the Korbel Undergraduate Students of Color student organization, and the Korbel DEI Student Subcommittee. At the time of the study the Korbel DEI Student Subcommittee group worked on giving students an update on the DEI work that Korbel is doing as well

as provided space for students to talk about any frustrations and suggestions for Korbel to better serve their students of color. While Korbel's website does not have a DEI plan outlined on their website, they do include a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion page that mentions student resources and resources for faculty and staff. Under the Student Resources section, they include Student Assistance Fund, Conversation Partner Program, Global Friends Program, and DU Health Center (Josef Korbel School of International Studies). Under the Resources for Faculty and Staff they include Faculty and Staff Affinity Groups, Mental Health Resources, Teaching Resources, Family Resources, Additional Faculty Resources, and Anti-Racist Resources (Josef Korbel School of International Studies). The resources for Faculty and Staff are longer than the resources mentioned for students. Also, they do not mention they are part of the Action Book Club, found under DU's unifying philosophy of diversity, equity, and inclusion (University of Denver). Korbel also does not mention on their website the DEI Student subcommittee, nor that Kristen Nobel is the program manager of DEI at Korbel.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I highlighted a need for support of Latinx males in higher education. Most of this body of literature has shown that there is a need to learn about Latinx males in higher education. There are many challenges Latinx students face in higher education. Students may need mentors to gain social and cultural capital needed to succeed in college. It is important to research Latinx males' experiences in higher education to get a better understanding of how we can better serve this population. Furthermore, I discussed the conceptual frameworks I will be using. Critical Race Theory

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as well as LatCrit which center marginalized communities and their narratives. I then provided the context in which this study takes place. DU has a DEI action plan that has not been updated on their website since Fall of 2021. Offices like the Cultural Center and First@DU provide services targeted at marginalized communities on campus.

Chapter Three: Methods

This exploratory research project focused on how Latinx male-identifying undergraduate students navigate a PWI like DU. It also explored what challenges DEI staff faced at DU. The study focused on the following research question: What shapes the experiences of Latinx male-identifying undergraduate students at DU? I explored my overarching research question with the following questions:

   i. What are the ways Latinx students navigate a predominantly white institution (PWI) like DU and find support?

ii. Based on experience and knowledge of key informants, what are the DEI efforts that have been successful? What challenges have occurred with DEI efforts?

With those academic goals in mind, the applied aim of my research was to gather Latinx male-identifying students' experiences and DEI staff's perspectives on the DEI work DU are engaging in and provide DU with data and suggestions for ways to improve DEI work according to their perspectives. I will refer to the Latinx male-identifying student participants as simply students and the DEI staff and faculty as DEI staff for simplicity. I employed a qualitative research design by conducting semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interviews allowed me to further explore students and DEI staff's experiences at DU. Through the interviews I was allowed to analyze the unique experiences of the participants by asking open-ended questions. In this chapter I

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address the methodology used and how it was beneficial to my study. I conclude this chapter with the research ethics and limitations.

Participants

I began my research study by conducting semi-structured interviews with students and DEI staff. I was able to have a one-on-one interview with each participant. It was important for me that participants belonged to a particular group to identify their shared experiences which I examined. For all student participants I sought out people who identified as Latinx males who were current undergraduate students who were not freshmen and above 18 years old.

Student participants consisted of five Latinx male-undergraduate students who attended DU at the time of the study. Participants were recruited from the cultural affinity group LSA announcement or by word of mouth. Only one student was a senior. The rest of the students were sophomores. Two out of the five students were not from Colorado. All students mentioned that they had associated with different ethnic groups throughout their K-12 education. Two students were accounting majors while another was a Political Science and Social Legal Studies major. The other student was in STEM. Two students identified as Mexican American and two other students identified as Latino. The other student identified himself as Mestizo. Students are addressed in this study with pseudonyms that each student chose which include the names: Jaime, Hector, Pablo, Mateo, and Daniel.

For DEI participants, I sought out people who had a current position related to DEI or had recently engaged with a DEI role at the time of the study. DEI staff

participants consisted of four DEI officers of different ethnic backgrounds. Only one

participant identified as white. The DEI staff all worked in different areas of campus

which gave me a better understanding of what type of DEI work occurred at different

schools. All DEI staff had been working at DU between two and 10 years. They are

addressed in this study with pseudonyms given to the DEI staff such as: Abigail,

Elizabeth, Sebastian, and Claire.

Data Collection

For students, I promoted interviews through cultural student groups like the Latine

Student Alliance and the Cultural Center. Additionally, I sent out emails and a flyer

through these groups seeking participants (see Appendix A and Appendix B). It was

essential that I used a qualitative approach to gain in-depth detail of the participants'

individual experiences. The interviews also allowed me to further identify support and

barriers in places that impacted the experiences of the participants pursuing higher

education. In addition to interviews, I took field notes at the Cultural Center and at

different identity-based organization meetings.

After emailing and connecting with students, they were invited to an interview at

the time and date that was convenient to the student. I conducted interviews in-person and

via Zoom for students. I chose Zoom because it was the primary platform used by the

university, participants were familiar with the software, and it provided the option of

convenience for the participants. Our email exchanges determined whether the interviews

would be done in-person in a communal area around campus or via Zoom. The goal of

the study was to conduct interviews around the beginning of Fall Quarter 2022.

Before the interview began, students were sent a consent form (Appendix C) ensuring their identity would be kept confidential throughout the process. For interviews done in-person, participants gave permission to be recorded from my audio recorder to ensure accuracy. For interviews done over Zoom, participants gave permission for the interviews to be recorded through Zoom to ensure accuracy. Additionally, participants were informed that all their responses from the interview would not include any identifying information. From there, I conducted one to two hours of semi-structured interviews. I took notes during the interviews and asked follow-up questions as needed. The follow-up questions allowed me to further explore and learn about the experiences of the participants. The primary list of questions for students included questions regarding their college experiences (see Appendix D). The interviewee and I were not strictly bound to the interview questions as it was a semi-structured interview. Once the interviews with students were completed, the participants were compensated with a $25 Amazon gift card.

I collected data through participant observations of students at places like the Cultural Center and student organization meetings of places like LSA and NSA.The majority of my field notes took place at the Cultural Center since students would go there daily after classes were done and I was able to observe the activities students were engaging in. While my field notes were not systemic, I noted the number of students at the location I was at, topics of the discussion, and I was able to get a sense of what activities people were engaging in. I typically spent two hours, two times a week at the Cultural Center during the Spring Quarter of 2022. During my participant observations at

the cultural center, students discussed a variety of topics. This place was where student leaders met up and talked about events they were organizing. It was also a place where students could discuss their anger over microaggressions and stereotyping that they experienced. While they could discuss heavy topics, it was also a place that could be fun. Staff that worked at the center would sometimes buy food for students and would interact with each other. The cultural center provided an opportunity for students to share information on events, opportunities, and resources that could be used. During the various visits at the Cultural Center, I was included in many of the discussions and invited to events. I felt like I was a part of this community because the students and staff were so friendly and inclusive.

During my participant observations at student organizations, I could see how students work with other students of color and created community. LSA meetings would often have ethnic food as well as games or PowerPoints that talked about Latinx culture. They were informative but also fun for students. They also discussed opportunities around campus or issues that affected students of color. While some meetings for LSA did have a Latinx focus, they also had collaborations with other identity-based organizations. Other organizations like the Asian Student Alliance (ASA), Black Student Alliance (BSA), Native Student Alliance (NSA), and 1GENU came to support LSA's first meeting and had collaborations set up with each other. I was also able to go to NSA's first meeting and ASA, LSA, and Queer Student Alliance (QSA) showed up to support them. In these meetings all students were friendly, and it was a very collaborative environment. Students from different organizations would talk to each other about working with each other and

opportunities for collaboration. These meetings showed me how collaborative,

supportive, and in communication these organizations are with each other, united with the

goal to provide a space for marginalized students on campus.

I reached out to DEI staff through emails and from personal connections I had. I

also identified potential interviewees through DU's DEI webpage under Our Staff as well

as the Campus Partners Tab. For DEI staff, I sought people who were currently or had

been involved in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives around campus. After

emailing and connecting with DEI staff, they were invited to an interview at the

convenient date for the participant (Appendix E). I conducted interviews in-person and

via Zoom for DEI staff. The goal of the study was to conduct interviews from Summer

2022 to Fall Quarter 2022.

Before the interview began, DEI staff were sent a consent form (Appendix F)

ensuring their identity would be kept confidential throughout the process. For interviews

done in-person, participants gave permission to be recorded from my audio recorder to

ensure accuracy. For interviews done over Zoom, participants gave permission for the

interviews to be recorded through Zoom to ensure accuracy. Additionally, participants

were informed that all their responses from the interview would not include any

identifying information. From there, I conducted one to two hours of semi-structured

interviews. The interviewee and I were not strictly bound to the interview questions as it

was a semi-structured interview (Appendix G). Each DEI staff interview began with

information on their work regarding DEI. As with the interviews with students, the DEI

staff interviews were not bound by the interview questions, and I asked follow-up

questions as needed. Once the interviews with faculty and staff were completed, the participants were compensated with a $10 Starbucks gift card.

Some of my field notes included attending DEI meetings held by different schools on campus and informal meetings with DEI staff. I had the opportunity to learn more about four specific academic units at DU. These academic units were the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, Korbel, Sturm Law, and the School of Social Work. One of the meetings I attended discussed BIPOC support at that school. This meeting was more of a conversation, an interactive exchange where students from a Grad BIPOC organization could work with the Dean and DEI officer of that school to discuss change. This meeting was an emotional experience since a student was crying about how isolating it can feel. I felt like this school was discussing issues I had seen another school talk about. This was frustrating for me to witness since I saw that BIPOC at different schools were struggling with similar issues these students brought up. Despite schools having similar issues, there was not any communication between these schools and student groups to work together. Lastly, what I chose to keep in mind during interviews was that in a DEI meeting they mentioned how the DEI office is not as effective as it could be because there is a lot of gatekeeping put behind the scenes.

I also attended the Korbel DEI Student Subcommittee meetings regularly. At one meeting, students brought a speaker. Something they discussed is that the DEI committee for staff is tough work that can be exhausting because change is slow. They mentioned that it is understandable that students are mad, but it is also important to have some grace at how complex some systems are. There have been small initiatives like putting up flyers

to get Pioneers off the ID cards, or flyers with a link to anonymously submit a form if a professor says something that is problematic which then gets sent to the DEI officer at Korbel. While there are these small initiatives, DEI staff mentioned that there is no formalized system to do any policies at this school. DEI staff at Korbel also mentioned that while they do have the student subcommittee and the faculty DEI subcommittee, the school does not listen to them, so they are not utilizing them. Also, they mentioned that the student subcommittee may play on their illusion of student voices while having students do administrative tasks. Since I could attend Korbel DEI subcommittee meetings regularly, I learned more about the issues at this school. Although I looked at Korbel more deeply, many of the other schools I was able to learn about had similar issues of retention, lack of representation, lack of accountability, lack of accountability to enforce things, as well as no measurement for progress.

Data Analysis

After the interviews were conducted, I analyzed them through a thematic analysis approach. Thematic analysis is an "analytical method used to search through qualitative data with the aim of finding recurrent patterns that can be grouped into themes through the use of discursive interpretation" (LeCompte and Schensul 2010). As part of data analysis, I reviewed all the data using technologies such as Zoom transcriptions and Trint.com. Once the recordings were all transcribed, I used Trint.com to perform the coding process. Since there were notes taken during the interview, I was able to review the audio of the interview to facilitate the development of themes that would then be analyzed. The use of Trint in this process helped me analyze what themes came out of the

interviews. The data analysis process also allowed me to make sure I maintained accurate notes and quotes from the raw data.

Research Ethics

The research I conducted received IRB approval (IRBNet 1909423-3). IRB allowed me to ensure that my methods of contacting individuals, promoting my study, and interviews themselves would not harm my participants. All participants were clear on the participation process and confirmed their willingness to participate by signing the IRB form.

Limitations

I recognize the limitations when conducting any research study. This study is constricted by geography and social identity. The scope of my project is particularly concentrated, as I am focusing on male-identifying undergraduate students at the University of Denver campus. Most participants will have engaged with the Cultural Center in the Community Commons building and the 1GenU program, so I limited my interactions with individuals who are often in those spaces. Perhaps the findings would be different if the study were conducted in other areas of campus where students may not have access to those spaces.

Student interviewees were all Latinx male-identifying which may mean there may not have been discussions of the intersectionality of gender identity. Only first-generation students were involved in this study which meant the perspectives of second or third generation Latinx college students were not included which could have provided an interesting perspective. A potential barrier was that my informants may not have felt

comfortable speaking to me as a female Latinx graduate student about their struggles at DU. My personal identification as a Latinx female may have also created a bias in my perspective that can be a limitation. Participants may have also perceived me differently because of my gender. Additionally, even though I do not personally identify as a Latinx male, I serve as a third person in the experiences of the participants of this study.

Chapter Four: Findings

The themes that emerged were based on interview data gathered from all participants. The intent here was to try to come to an understanding of what Latinx undergraduate males' lived experiences were at a predominantly white institution like DU. Additionally, I wanted to get a better understanding of what the DEI efforts were and some challenges that faculty and staff who engage with DEI work faced. I tried to adhere to the students, faculty, and staff's voices as clearly as possible.

As Latinx male-identifying undergraduate students at a predominantly white institution, they faced various obstacles. Many often felt excluded and experienced microaggressions and racist incidents. Although they may not have seen many students who looked like them, they worked hard to create support systems. The various forms of support they created include social, emotional, and academic. Support systems were important since they showed them that they had earned their right to be at this institution. Support systems found in the cultural affinity groups and 1GenU (First@DU) helped them find a safe space where they could be themselves and exchange information to protect themselves from microaggressions and harm.

The faculty and staff knew that there had been plenty of progress made in DEI at DU, but students did not know much about it because there was a lack of communication

and involvement of students. The faculty and staff commented that some structures in place, like the way DU's communication was set up and how fragmented offices were, made it difficult for them to work with others and create effective change. Students also had different approaches to improving DEI work which added another challenge. To help work through these challenges, faculty and staff mentioned allocating financial resources as well as resources for accountability, recruitment programs and services, and faculty/staff retention. Focusing on increasing recruitment or retention could help support those already working on DEI initiatives on campus.

The following subsections describe in greater detail five issues that interviewees discussed. First, faculty and students discussed challenges with DEI efforts at DU. Some of these challenges included the lack of communication between the institution, staff, and students. This made it difficult for students to know what efforts were taking place and impacted students' perceptions of DEI. Second, Staff and students described tensions between each other which also made it difficult to work together. Third, students found it important to have more professors and staff of color despite tensions between them. That support that professors and staff of color provided helped students persist at DU. Fourth, students then identified how some departmental resources they received were either not beneficial or they did not trust them. This meant that students created their own informal resources or found resources that provided academic, emotional, and social support. Lastly, students described their experience at DU as one fraught with microaggressions and exclusion. Nonetheless, they found safe spaces where they were able to connect with

other students of color and feel like they belonged in those spaces. This chapter outlines the connections I made between students' and staffs' interviews.

Institutional DEI Efforts

Students, faculty, and staff described distinct aspects of the DEI work DU partakes in. I begin with using staff's description of the environment at DU that DEI takes place in. Students gave their perspectives on DEI efforts and what their feelings were on the efforts being done. Students, Faculty, and Staff believed that a challenge to DEI efforts was the lack of communication. Additionally, faculty/staff provided some suggestions to improve these efforts.

Faculty and Staff that engage in DEI work expressed their view on its progress. Elizabeth, a DEI Officer, starts off by saying that "I would say that when we think about the institutional level, we have a lot of work to do. And so, I would say that it has grown to incorporate more spaces for inclusivity, but that we've barely scratched the surface." But Elizabeth also acknowledged that "I mean, we're moving in the right direction, and I know that. And I've seen I mean, like even the DEI work that I was doing five years ago at DU, it was so different." Elizabeth had engaged with DEI work at the contract level since 2020 but volunteered with DEI initiatives at DU since 2017. While talking with her, it was clear that she knew about many changes that occurred and students, faculty, and staff that were part of different initiatives. She admits that "we made so much progress and I know that it's just really difficult because we still have such a long way to go. And we're still having instances of harm and we're still, you know, having unsafe spaces and

so it's definitely a journey." As someone who had spent a few years working on DEI initiatives, Elizabeth noted that this type of work had been continuously changing.

Other faculty and staff that have engaged with DEI work gave similar feedback to Elizabeth. Abigail, a DEI officer who was also a part of the faculty, stated that "I think that we, we have a lot of good efforts going on and it's really now like how can we possibly make these things become to fruition." Claire, a DEI staff, said that "I would say that [DU has] changed throughout its approach toward diversity, equity, and inclusion throughout the span that I have been affiliated with DU since 2010, right. It's gone through multiple restructurings of that and so I think its approach has been different in terms of trying to figure out the ways in which to engage our different units across campus, different constituents across campus, while also bringing in outside support and what that looks like through partnerships." Claire added that she had seen "DEI really build, attempt to build these different pockets of support infrastructure such as IRISE, the Latinx center, now Native and Indigenous initiatives." Sebastian, who is currently a faculty member but has engaged with DEI states that "I think we've made some tremendous gains." An example that he gave is when he talked about how "we were one of the first colleges, universities in the country to begin to encourage as part of the faculty hiring process, embedding DEI questions into the process, making that part of the evaluative framework, and again some do that better than others." As we can see, all the faculty and staff acknowledged that there had been a lot of progress and change but also acknowledged that there was still a lot of ways to go in terms of the work that DU needed

to do. Although they did not go into specific details, most described DEI efforts as continuously changing.

Students also discussed some of their perspectives on DU's DEI efforts. All five students I talked to said they could not tell me about any specific DEI initiatives. When I asked Hector, a second-year student, if he had heard of any DEI efforts, he told me that "not too much of, like, I'm definitely familiar with hearing about it and things like that, but I like, I know there's [DEI] efforts. Right but I think...I think a lot of times it's just kind of a check off a box." He recognized that "there's definitely efforts there but at the same time it might not be as genuine." Which shows that while he may know in general that there are DEI efforts, the quality of these efforts is not "genuine" for him. Jaime, a fourth-year transfer student, also stated that "they (DU) don't let no people be aware of it (DEI efforts). Or broadcast it well enough to let people know." This was interesting to learn about and shows that for some students there is a lack of communication or inclusion of them in DEI efforts.

When an active member of campus discussed DEI initiatives, he brought up similar comments to other students. Pablo, a second-year student, who was involved in various student organizations and programs stated that "I can't help but feel like I've been like a part of, like, these diverse stuff throughout the last year. And I really couldn't tell you what some of their efforts are." In contrast to the staff's perspective on DEI initiatives, students did not know much so they were not able to describe DEI efforts in detail besides mentioning that it did not seem genuine. This highlights how DU needs to

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make a better effort to engage either by communicating or by including students when it comes to the DEI efforts they engage in.

Additionally, when talking about DEI and DU's efforts, many of the students expressed their sentiments on the institution. Daniel, a second-year student, talked about how he distrusts DU to handle any microaggressions or racist incidents. He stated that "you can have an organization that says they deal with this kind of stuff, make sure you're protected, but that protection isn't really guaranteed." This is mentioned by Elizabeth, a DEI officer, when she mentions that DU still has unsafe spaces. Furthermore, Daniel stated that "I personally see it as running to a first aid kit, like in a field full of thorns you know. What is the point?" Daniel also said that "I don't really hope that they would like, do something, I don't expect them to, maybe because I don't think they'd do it efficiently." From our interview, I gathered that for Daniel, maybe because he did not believe DU handles incidents for students of color efficiently, he felt like this was an unsafe space.

Other students also mentioned their expectations and opinions on DEI at DU. Like Daniel, Jaime also talked about DU's response to a report on an incident. He stated that "it seems like from in this university, there's still a lot of racism and nothing ever really comes out of its own reports or anything like that. They just released a statement and then [say to] support your local diversity and then the same thing happens." Mateo, a second-year student, stated that "I just feel like the school doesn't do nearly enough in showing our place and that outside of our academics that we have, there's more to us than just what we do in school. That we are [more than] just some statistic." Similarly, Hector

a second-year stated that he would like more "recognition and acknowledgment at an institutional level…because…if the institution isn't recognizing even the small things like Hispanic Heritage Month, Black History Month things like that, if we're not recognizing those and how could we expect…the different departments to recognize it or even like the professors to recognize it." He added that "but I think, you know, there's a lot that could be done, but I think for now that's, that's one way to start. More, more action being done." As Pablo said, "if our diversity was really that good, we wouldn't have to push the agenda that hey, we do have a community somewhere, you just have to go out and find it." Students' viewpoints on the DEI work at DU lets us know where DU needs to work on. Similar to staff's thoughts, students also felt like there was more to be done in the DEI DU engages in. As shown with my conversation with students, many of them, even those who were involved on-campus, were not able to tell me in detail about DU's DEI initiatives.

When it comes to DEI efforts at DU, a challenge that was brought up by DEI staff includes DU's communication style. Claire stated that "I think one of the challenges that we have, even at the institution in general, is the way we communicate…there's no centralized communication and we work on like, you know, we as like different units, different departments." DU's form of communication made it "difficult and challenging to convey, right, like positive things that are happening across DU." It also "[made] it challenging to talk about, you know, an incident that occurred across DU. Where like, how do we streamline our communication in terms of addressing, right, incidences or addressing concerns or issues." Claire also mentioned that "I think that that's how DU is

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attempting to incorporate that DEI, I think it's really challenging to do that when you don't have a multitude of like permanent positions pushing DEI efforts across the institution." So "it's trying to figure out how to do that within a structure that is already siloed, that is already prioritized and exclusive in some respect."

Other staff and students touched on a different challenge that DEI faces. Elizabeth stated that "I mean I think the biggest challenge is that everyone's so siloed. Where we have so much turnover in the DEI space, we have so much like so many open positions right now. So, I think one challenge is silos." Elizabeth also mentioned permanent positions and the challenges that come with having a siloed environment. She says, "one challenge is lack of capacity could be that they don't have enough staff or people are overworked, and it could be that folks don't know who's doing what, where." Sebastian also stated that "I could certainly say and we're still kind of trying to figure that out, is we've been very decentralized or fragmented when it comes to diversity, equity and inclusion." The lack of collaboration across campus was evident to students as well. As Hector stated "I think it's, uh. it's pretty secluded for the most part, like we're…pretty like cut away for the most part. There's not there's not a ton there's not a ton of things going on around campus, um, that are, like, diverse." The environment in which DEI takes place at DU is one that is fragmented and siloed which as staff discussed, created a barrier for change.

When describing DU's DEI efforts something that came up throughout my conversations was the Pioneer moniker. This was another topic that I was not expecting to come up as often as it did during my conversations with students and staff. Abigail

brought up the topic of the Pioneer moniker when she talked about DU's DEI efforts. While she acknowledged that DU had made progress, she also stated that one of the biggest issues is "I'm sure you are aware, is the use of the pioneer moniker. As long as that exists, um, we're going to struggle." For Abigail this was because "for those of us who've been fighting, that's low hanging fruit that something we just think we're done. And the pushback that we're getting, the cuts, the constant message that we're getting, that it's not going anywhere, is very disheartening." Sebastian also brought up the Pioneer moniker when talking about DU's DEI efforts. He stated that "I do think one of the biggest disappointments in my time at DU has been around the pioneer moniker." For him this was because "as long as that moniker continues to exist and we refuse to accept its connotations and the trauma and the violence, the historical trauma and the historical violence that it continues to perpetuate, it undermines all of our DEI work." For faculty working in DEI, the Pioneer moniker could show that DU is not reflecting the values they say they hold.

Similar to the faculty's opinions of the Pioneer moniker, students brought up this issue as well. Mateo brought this topic up when describing DU's DEI efforts. Mateo brought up that for him, "DU is very performative in its actions. I mean they don't even want to change the name of a fucking mascot. Which has to, I mean we, these people annihilated an entire group of people that were massacred." For him, the Pioneer moniker was proof that DU is performative when it comes to its DEI efforts. In addition to the challenges brought on by a siloed environment, the Pioneer moniker symbolized an

obstacle for DEI efforts. As Mateo shows, students of color can look at the Pioneer and see it as something that stands for violence towards a marginalized group.

One suggestion for DEI work at DU is that there needs to be more resources allocated to this type of work. Sebastian stated that DU is "kind of going through the pains and the struggle of, you know, what that means, trying to be a division that meets the needs of many minoritized groups." So, we need to be able to "have an understanding of, you know, what offices are already in place, what offices need to be put into place, where the resources lie." Furthermore, he specified that "and so I think that's where right now, there's…little to no accountability. But, you know, that's where the kind of resources need to come in." Abigail also brought up resources. She stated that "I think the biggest the biggest recommendation I would have been to put some resources, some real resources into the efforts that are being made out of ODEI." She elaborated and stated that "I think they need to put some money behind, serious money, you know, not this little token money, but some serious money behind those efforts and they need to get rid of the pioneer moniker." Elizabeth also stated that "but I would say that there is a lack of understanding of what goes into creating spaces and there's a lack of, of prioritization of how we have to put our money where our mouth is." For these faculty members, to create effective change in DEI, they needed more resources.

The number of resources that DU puts into DEI also shows the effort that they are willing to put. Elizabeth stated that "there's a huge disconnect between saying like we value DEI at DU and then actually working towards that goal like hiring recruitment programs and services, staff retention, faculty retention to name just a few." Along similar

lines, Sebastian stated that "I think just you, you kind of see that a lack of resources more generally, the lack of commitment, the more performative aspects." Which is why he also recommended thinking about "how do we reallocate those resources in both more efficient…Like understanding we need certain institutional and systemic interventions; we need certain institutional and systemic structures they need to be much more closely connected." Allocating resources, which includes fiscal resources, resources for accountability, for recruitment programs and services, and for Faculty/Staff retention were recommendations staff and faculty gave.

DEI work at DU is complex and there is no straightforward way to define the DEI efforts taken. DEI staff like Elizabeth, Abigail, Claire, and Sebastian recognize that this type of work has continuously been changing but that there was still a lot of work to be done. However, students may not know about the progress of DEI efforts due to lack of communication. This can make students feel like this is an unsafe campus for them and like there needs to be more done. Staff also mentioned that some challenges they faced at the institutional level included the lack of communication, how fragmented everything is, and the Pioneer moniker. A suggestion faculty/staff brought up included providing more resources for these efforts.

Perception of Students and DEI

When talking about their work on DEI and students, faculty and staff described some challenges they were facing from their perspectives. A challenge they were facing was the different ideas students had on how to address issues with DEI. Although faculty and staff agreed that students' experiences can be improved, the relationship with students

could be tense. Learning about faculty and staff's views on students and DEI can give us a better understanding of the campus environment for students as well as address some additional challenges that have occurred with DEI efforts at DU.

Abigail, a DEI Officer, has worked in many DEI efforts. During the interview she described some challenges that people like her faced when working in the field of DEI at DU. She mentioned how there were not enough faculty and staff of color and then talked about the student experience. She acknowledged that there is a lot of work to do but this work is "about making sure or trying to do my best to help make sure that the experience our students are having...is reflective of the values that we say we uphold." She also touched on the relationship that students and faculty have and stated that to move forward with progress, there needs to be "some kind of solution focus, which at least my experience with the students in our program, they're not remotely interested in that. They want yeah, they're not they're not that interested in trying to come to the table and figure it out." She further elaborated and expressed that she "feels like this generation, is more of 'this is stopping me from moving forward, so it is your responsibility to fix it.'" When she was growing up and faced barriers, her approach to her problems was quite different to her perception of current students' attitudes. Having these two different approaches between students and faculty is what Abigail found hard to balance and a challenge to the DEI work she engages in.

Another faculty also discussed a challenge with DEI work on campus. Sebastian has been engaged with DEI work at DU for the last 10 years. He commented on the slow change with DEI work at DU and higher education institutions in general. Regarding

students and DEI, he stated, "some of the things they are asking for we should have done yesterday. Many of the things they're asking for, we're in the process of trying to figure it out." This shows that there may not be clear communication between students and the institution. Additionally, he stated that students rightfully are allowed to feel like this is hard since "you invest a lot in this university. You're sold a bill of goods, right, about what this university, I would say, aspires to be but we sell it as our actual reality." That is why Sebastian recommended that "with the students [it] is letting them know that that they are neither alone nor the first ones to go through this" that can help students feel better about the challenges with DEI. Sebastian acknowledged that there was a disconnect between the institution and the students which made things challenging for students but also alludes that their feelings were justified based on the current situation.

Elizabeth was a DEI Officer that engaged with DEI work at DU at the contract level for a few years. When talking about what has been successful in terms of DEI work and recommendations for improvements, Elizabeth mentioned students. She started off by stating "I would say the only one other thing that I haven't chatted about is that our students are really amazing." While she also recognized the work the faculty of color and staff of color groups have done, she brought up students' success too. Part of her recommendation was that "when students advocate and they draw in the attention of other peers like lots of students can be in together, can get a lot done." She drew my attention to the power and success students have. Students can be a force to be reckoned with when they unite. She additionally stated that with staff, they "don't really have a strong voice like we don't really think no one really cares, what we push forward. Um, and so I think

that when students convene, that can be very successful." Elizabeth did mention that she

thought that most of the great initiatives that happened on campus were generated by

student groups and "when they find the right faculty and staff to support them…that's

when we have some really cool initiatives and work being put forth." For Elizabeth,

students play a significant role in DEI work demonstrating that for them, students have a

strong voice on campus when they get together.

All faculty and staff discussed working with students to create effective change.

Both Abigail and Sebastian said that students' experiences can be improved. From these

interviews, it seems like they were telling me that faculty/staff and students need to work

together to improve the experience of students of color. During our interview, Elizabeth

pointed out some successful initiatives done by students and faculty/staff. Unfortunately,

it seems like students and faculty/staff often have different approaches which led to the

frustration of students that some of the faculty touch on.

Conversations with groups like the Korbel DEI Subcommittee, which incorporates

students and Faculty and Staff to work together, touched on similar tensions that some of

the faculty mentioned in our conversations. The students involved in the Korbel DEI

Subcommittee were called student representatives and considered a paid position. The

student representatives took trends and stories to the committee of Faculty and Staff so

that students represented students. Student representatives facilitated meetings called DEI

sub-committee meetings in which students (undergraduate and graduate) at Korbel could

attend and discuss some issues related to DEI at Korbel. This student sub-committee was

created to protect student representatives. Although it took a long time for Korbel to get

to a place where they could incorporate this system, as I've noted in some fieldnotes, these structures are constantly changing and at the time I was participating in these meetings, the year before had been different. I was not a part of the meetings with Faculty and Staff since I was not a student representative but the subcommittee meetings I attended talked about how at times the tensions between students' concerns and Faculty and Staff perspectives and actions. Despite this tension, this showed the attempt of students and Faculty/Staff to work together to bring change related to DEI at DU.

On one occasion, tensions between students and staff were palpable during a DEI meeting between a Dean, staff, and a student Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) organization on campus. There were about 14 people at this meeting and were all female presenting. The topic of this meeting was BIPOC support. Previously there had been a meeting between the Dean and the student organization's executive members regarding BIPOC support. According to the executive members, that meeting had ended with tensions where students and the administration were not able to have a conductive conversation over the concerns BIPOC students had mentioned. Additionally, the student executives had not felt safe and felt like they would be targeted by the administration at that school. To prevent harm, students requested that the follow-up meeting be open to other student organization members, in which I was invited to attend.

At the beginning of this meeting the Dean mentioned how they wanted this meeting to be collaborative in which they would hear what the problems were and together work through solutions with an advocacy orientation. The Dean then talked about how they wanted to work with students over a concern they had brought up which

was financial aid. The Dean wanted to demystify where the money came from for financial aid. The Dean also mentioned that students had a louder voice than faculty. Students then talked about their experiences and how it had been hard for them to do advocacy work on top of classes, work, and life outside of school. Overall, I thought this meeting was emotional, since some students ended up crying when discussing their experiences as students of color at DU. This speaks to what the staff mentioned. Students had power, and there can be tensions between the students and faculty.

This section brings together faculty and staff's perception of students in relation to DEI work. Abigail mentioned that a challenge for those who work in DEI included the different approaches students have. While Sebastian said that he understood where students came from, he also showed that there was miscommunication between students and the institution. Elizabeth painted a different picture by discussing students' power and how change could happen when faculty and students worked together. My fieldwork with the Korbel DEI subcommittee showed me that like Abigail had suggested, there are tensions between faculty and students working in DEI. Students from this subcommittee felt that faculty actions were not addressing their concerns. Despite this challenge, the Korbel DEI Representatives are an attempt for students and faculty/staff to work together and work through disagreements. Faculty/staff believed they had different approaches to students when it comes to the DEI work they are engaging in. Although they may have different ideas for solutions, as Elizabeth mentioned, when faculty and students work together, they can make an impact. This gives us a better understanding of the relationship between students and faculty/staff that engage in DEI work.

"That's What Keeps Me Going"

Students and staff talked about what motivated them to continue persisting at DU. Students talked about how they would like to see more faculty and staff of color while staff of color talked about their motivators and struggles. Focusing on what faculty/staff said keeps them going helps us gain a better understanding of their experiences at DU. This also helps us get a better understanding of the circumstances in which they are doing DEI work.

Abigail mentioned how she has spent a long time engaging with DEI work at DU. As a faculty of color who engaged in DEI Abigail provided insight on what it is like to take on a role that involves their own identity. Sometimes it gets overwhelming, but she continues to engage in this type of work because "I cannot be one of the only, one of the few and not be involved I, I, I'm used to that have always been in predominantly white professional and educational spaces." Additionally, she mentioned "and so for me, I know that there are other people like me in these spaces, and what motivates me is to be there for them the way others were there for me, because I know what it's like to be in their shoes. I know what it's like to be the one and only. I know what it's like to be one of the few. Um, and you, you meet someone that looks like you to, to tell you that you can do it, that you can make it, that it's, that it's attainable. As Abigail mentioned, what motivated her is to be there for students because she has been through what students of color are going through. Abigail wanted to be an example for students so that they can see that there are others that look like them who have made it through some educational challenges and barriers.

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As a student, Pablo echoed what Abigail discussed is needed, more faculty and staff of color. He stated, "I mean if we had more professors or like, um, advisors of color to like help guide us like through this and say, hey, these people do want to talk to you." Pablo mentioned how having other professors or staff of color would be beneficial for students of color. This is most likely because Professors and staff of color could understand some of the barriers students face at a PWI. As Pablo mentioned, professors and staff of color can help guide them through barriers and aid them in making connections that will benefit them. Faculty and staff of color can be examples for students to see that they can also do it. This shows how Abigail's motivation to continue is something students need for support. Students need the support and empathy that Abigail can provide as a faculty of color. As I have noticed in my field notes taken at the Cultural Center, many students talk about how professors and faculty of color believe in them which helps them in their educational and personal goals. Having this support is what helps students thrive in a PWI.

As a faculty of color, Sebastian showed us what he believes his role was for students of color. Sebastian saw his role as a connector for students, as someone that could "connect them to the resources to do that, to the organizations, to the support like IRISE or research grant or things like that" which is something Pablo stated he would like to see more of. As someone who connected with students, he tried to let them "know that they are neither alone nor the first ones to go through this." However, sometimes his role as a connector meant that he was overwhelmed at times and needed a break.

Sebastian went into more detail about what it is like as a faculty and staff of color to be a support for students. He stated "I think there are definitely moments of discouragement. There are definitely moments where you want to check out. And I think the other thing I would say there is I think that's where it's really critical to have a well, it's important to have a critical mass of others who can, who can fill in the gaps, right." Sebastian brings up an additional new piece that can further help faculty and staff stay motivated which is leaning on others for support. Most of the faculty, staff, and students are personally invested in distinct types of work. Sebastian defined these diverse types of works as "emotional labor, right? It's intellectual labor, its certainly unpaid labor, right? Like to the emotional or the intellectual, even the physical toll it takes, right, is not… is not the same for those who are minoritized." While Sebastian may have the same desire as Abigail to be there for students of color, this type of labor can take a toll on them. He called attention to the importance for staff and faculty of color to take time to take care of themselves. Sebastian shows us one of the struggles that faculty and staff may have as people of color. He highlights the importance of having more people of color at DU to help share the load of the unpaid labor many of them take part in.

Besides Pablo's mention of the importance of getting support from faculty and staff of color, he and Mateo reveal other motivators. Mateo stated that he does belong to a place like DU because he feels like he owes it to his ancestors, and to "[his] grandparents who never got to go to college, to show them that like I am not just some statistic." Mateo brings up family as one of the reasons why he continues his education at DU. Along those same lines Pablo also mentioned that community motivated him to keep going. Pablo said

"I guess eventually I found my community. Eventually I found my group within academics. And that's honestly like what's been keeping me going. It's probably the people that I met here." Both Mateo and Pablo mentioned the importance of community as a motivator. With Mateo we can see that besides community being a motivator they are also along with that a support system. While Mateo did not specify who his community consists of, he did mention he found his group within academics as well in our talk. He stated that it was his FSEM (First-Year Seminar) Professor that believed in him that helped him succeed. We can gather that his group within academics can include other students of color, as well as professors or advisors.

Students, faculty, and staff discussed some reasons why they continued to persist at DU. Abigail presented one motivation, which is being there for students of color. As someone who has gone through similar situations, Abigail could be empathetic to the students' experiences. While faculty and staff of color mentioned their reasons for continuing this type of work, Sebastian mentioned that this type of emotional unpaid labor can take a toll on them. With students, we can see that they would like to have more Professors and staff of color to receive the type of support they need as students of color at a PWI. Although students did not explicitly mention that Professors of color motivate them to continue, Pablo's excerpt corroborates Abigail's motivation. For students like Pablo and Mateo what they stated was their motivation was community and family. Students discussed that the people and support systems they have help motivate them to persevere.

Navigating a System Not Made for Us: Student Resources

Students mentioned the topic of resources they found and do not find at DU. I asked various questions that related to the resources they had of academic/ departmental resources as well as other types of resources. They discuss some of their perspectives on resources available to them as well as specific resources that have been beneficial for them to navigate DU. Students had different experiences and perspectives on resources, but it can give us a better idea of how students engaged with and thought about certain resources on campus.

Daniel, a second year STEM major, talked about resources but also brought up racist incidents. When talking about a racist incident that occurred with one of his friends, he mentioned "I feel like if you're trying to see… an on-campus community or on campus like, organization that can help me with that kind of aggression. I really wouldn't because the last thing I would want is just an email addressing it." What Daniel felt is that he "wouldn't trust them (DU) to actually respond to the situation effectively." Although Daniel does not report racist incidents he does "tell people whenever [he] sees them, like, 'hey, you gotta be careful because this shit happened.'" As Daniel stated, "I personally take myself notes and tell my people to watch out, you know." If students do not have a formal institutional place that they can trust to help them with microaggressions or racist incidents, they create a network where information is key.

As I have seen in the Cultural Center, that place can also be a location for information exchange. Daniel finds his support "in [his] group of friends that are like [him]" which is why it is important to have more students of color at DU. As Daniel

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shows, if students do not trust the institution's channels set in place for microaggressions and racist incidents they make their own. Students create their own resources to try and get through these challenges, but this also means that their solutions lack the institutional consequences that can be implemented at a larger scale to prevent further instances of racism.

Students also distinguished a difference between resources and support from their departments as a student versus as a student of color. When asked whether Daniel felt supported by his department, he mentioned that as a student of color he did not feel supported. As a student in STEM he said, "I feel like in the classroom, my professors aren't going to, I'm assuming my professors won't look, my professors won't look at me with the race. They'll look at me as a student." So, that means that "all the support that they can offer me is as a student... I don't look for my department for help that way (as a student of color)." This goes along the lines of what Hector, a second year in Marketing, mentioned at his school, Daniels Business School. Hector emphasizes that "I feel support as a student. I think, um, as far as like looking out for their students and the kind of resources Daniels provides, I think they do a great job… I think as a student definitely, but I think like as a minority not so much." Both students from different departments noted that their departments do not support them as students of color.

Pablo, a second year and a Marketing major like Hector, mentioned how some resources available at Daniels are not supportive for them as students of color. Pablo affirms that Daniels "sets us up for like, um, certain opportunities. But I feel like, I don't know, they're approachable for white students. They're not approachable for me." He then

elaborates and says that "it's just different. Like, I feel like I can easily go up to someone in... Access and Transitions (now known as 1GenU) for help because that's what they do. I feel like if I were go to like someone in, in, in Daniels, I don't know if they would know how to help me, it's just different." As Pablo has mentioned, although there may be certain on-campus resources due to your major, they may not necessarily be helpful for students of color. This is why many students also mentioned other types of support.

Resources that most students mentioned are a part of the First@DU Cohort Programs or affiliated with the Cultural Center. The offices for these programs' staff were at the Cultural Center. Some of the programs students mentioned are Volunteers in Partnership (VIP), 1GenU, Equity in Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics (E-STEM), and Excelling Leaders Institute (ELI). As Hector mentioned VIP, and 1GenU (previously known as Access and Transitions) provide "social and I think like emotional support because yeah, I think nobody outside of here kind of asks like if I'm doing okay and things like that. Which goes a long way, you know." Additionally, they also provided academic support because "we hold each other accountable. But yeah, it's like a like a little family." For Hector most of the support he received came from VIP and 1GenU. Jaime, a senior in accounting, mentioned that the staff at 1GenU, "they just do something. They come out and they say hi to us. They ask how we are doing and all that so that builds that relationship." For students of color, these programs have filled the gap their departmental resources have left.

Having support from programs a part of First@DU provided resources but also motivation for students. As Mateo stated, "it's because of the resources I have and the

people that I've met that I can still go here. If it wasn't for Access and Transitions (1GenU), I would not be going to the University of Denver." Pablo elaborated on the importance of 1GenU by saying that "it feels like [the cultural center] that's really, like our only space." This shows that 1GenU is a vital resource that students utilize and feel like it is a space for them. Pablo recommended that "we need more spaces like that, and we need more staff like the ones in Access and Transitions (1GenU) or the cultural center in within our respective majors." Although 1GenU is a great resource, as Pablo mentioned, it would also be helpful to have that support in their majors.

On one occasion I was at the Cultural Center when one of the staff members of the First@DU office bought all the students there food from Ginza. The staff took orders from students who were at the center then placed the order. While asking students to look over the menu, the staff member checked in with students by asking them how they were doing or how a class was going. There were about 20 students so the order took a while but during that waiting time the staff member organized which students would accompany them to get the food and everyone was excited. Through the excitement, students began talking amongst each other, and homework was set aside. During that period, I met new students who said they would not mind sharing their food with me. Other students came by the center and mentioned that there was a DU Programming Board (DUPB) event where they were handing out free stuff outside by the Green Lawn and a group of us ended up going together then walked back to the center. When the food from Ginza came, students were excited once again. Many of them expressed their thanks to the staff member and one student even hugged the staff member. The staff member said of course,

and that they hoped the students enjoyed the food. Students enjoyed the food, made jokes and talked amongst each other. Through this activity, I saw how the staff members at the First@DU office cared for students and fostered an environment where students could feel safe, like a little family. I was able to see and experience for myself how students felt connected to each other and the staff at First@DU. This was a space that they could call theirs, where they had someone that cared for them and provided academic and emotional support.

Besides the Access and Transitions center being discussed, students also mentioned student organizations in which they can find support. Cultural affinity groups that students discussed as a form of support are groups like the Latine Student Alliance (LSA). Some students also mentioned other cultural affinity groups like: Black Student Alliance (BSA), Asian Student Alliance (ASA), and Native Student Alliance (NSA). For Daniel, becoming a part of LSA took some time, but "I find myself to be very comfortable now. I really do like LSA… I actually want to run for office." The reason is "because in that room, we all see each other as people rather than the boundaries that, you know, society has kind of put up to divide people. It just feels comfortable to need that you know. Hispanic will go there." Jaime, who also had a position in LSA, mentioned that LSA provided "a surrounding that, you know, you look around people of similar background or they might have similar experiences with you and other students. So that's one way a lot of them connect." Additionally, they (LSA) "try to bring a little bit representation of your background to campus which is nice and then lets people know that you're here, that you are people, like you are here too." Since Jaime saw the importance

of LSA, he recommended that DU "provides them more benefits when they make these up in any groups or budgets for like LSA." Having a cultural affinity group on campus helps students feel seen and that they have a community of people who look like them.

Jaime is not the only one that believed LSA has made an impact. Pablo also mentioned the importance of LSA. He said LSA is important "because when you, when you're sitting in class and you look around and you're the only Latino male in there, it can feel really a lot bigger." In contrast, "when you go to these meetings, you know, you feel like at home you feel like there's a place for you in this campus." For the other cultural student affinity groups, Pablo mentioned "while I do not, like, fall into those categories, they still, like, are welcoming. To like all students of color. We all like work together just to make sure, like, we have that safe space." Mateo also highlighted that being a part of other cultural affinity groups and having them on campus shows that "like we're all fighters at the end of the day, we can still cement our place here where it's like we're still we're… navigating a system that was not meant for us." As I've seen in various cultural affinity student organization meetings I have been to, they were spaces where students could create community, feel like they belong, and it was a safe space where they connected with others.

Other additional resources that students would have liked to see are outside of academics which would help them build a community here at DU. Two students mentioned how they would also like support outside of academics. This includes more multicultural events, or as Daniel recommended, "maybe another multicultural frat." As Daniel discussed, "I feel like people, especially people of color on this campus, see life on

campus as simply just to do work and while that's a good mindset, academic, scholarly work, right, you…need some room for a little bit of fun, you know? I want to see that for people of color." Mateo also agreed and discussed Multicultural Greek Councils (MGCs), by recommending that, "I would the honest to God more funding for our MGCs and our affinity groups." While students are here at DU for their education, as the literature has mentioned, cultural organizations including Multicultural Greek Council can help students create a network of support (Mendoza et al. 2011, 76).

Students discussed several types of resources that are lacking or beneficial. Resources to deal with racism and microaggressions are not trusted by some. That means they may utilize their own connections like friends. When talking about departmental support, they mentioned they may receive academic support, but there is no support for them as students and professionals of color. A place where they were able to find support is through 1GenU, The Cultural Center's affinity groups also provided students with social support. Lastly, some mentioned that they would like to see more social support through MGCs for students of color. As the students have discussed, feeling like they are a part of a community on campus has helped them overcome some difficult experiences. They have built trusting relationships with other students, teachers, and staff at the Cultural Center and First@DU. These connections have helped validate their college career and struggles at a PWI.

Students' Experiences

A question I asked students is to tell me about their college experience. This question and others give us a better understanding of how they describe their experience

at DU. Students discussed their experience navigating a historically white institution and touched on feelings of exclusion, microaggressions, and belonging.

Daniel talked about what he first felt when he got to campus when I asked about his college experience. Daniel mentioned that he felt excluded, and it was hard because "I felt like I... I did not have enough people who are like me around me, you know? I really do like I like having my Hispanic friends." As Daniel stated, "you cannot really say that they just don't like you just because you're like Hispanic, right. You like to not think that at least that's just my experience. I can only speak upon my experience in that situation." Although Daniel stated that he is speaking about his experience, various other students described similar feelings. Pablo stated that "I'm still dealing with like stuff today or just like, look around see people who aren't like me." As well as Jaime who is a transfer student, stated, "it's hard to make friends to get to know people or feel connected to the school in any way." Jaime also stated that "I also know there were not really any Hispanics in my classes either. There will be one or two, especially in my field. There's not in my class, I am one out of two Hispanics as a whole class and the core under me [its] the same thing." Both Daniel and Jaime who are in different fields, discussed how they did not see many students who looked like them in their classes and around campus.

In addition to Jaime's experience in his classes, he joined LSA and stated that "I joined the Latin Students Alliance and then I kinda got to see more of like the discrimination towards those affinity groups." He stated that he got to see how this was a "not so welcoming [campus environment]. And I've heard from other people, they've had similar experiences and stuff." Like Jaime, Mateo mentioned that academically "I find

myself in the majority of cases being one of the only people of color in the room, especially last year, I'd say like this year it's actually been I've seen like two or three students." Mateo was in a different field than both Daniel and Jaime. Many students described their college experience as a place where they must navigate being one of the few Latinx students in a classroom and environment and at times it can feel like they were being excluded from their peers.

In addition to being one of the few students of color in a classroom, they mentioned microaggressions as a part of their experience. Jaime mentioned that "as [sad] as it is, I would say yes. You're just going to have to face that (racist) experience at least once in your school career." He elaborated and said, "everyone has had some sort of a racism against them within their school career here." Jaime and others talked about microaggressions and would include that I have gone through some microaggressions and have had similar experiences. This helped me get descriptions of their experiences related to microaggressions. I believe that as a student of color with a similar background, it helped them feel comfortable and that I would understand what they meant when discussing the racists encounters they had.

Daniel gave a specific example of microaggressions he had heard about and says, "there's a lot of issues that have been going around about people being racially discriminated, you know, explicitly and without really any reason, you know, like a like a Black kid being dismissed from a frat party and being called the N-word on the way out, right." Hearing about those incidents "makes [him] approach white people and be like, 'Oh caution.'" Similarly, Jaime said "there's like the racism that's all around like the

university, how they're still keeping the pioneers even though the racist history behind with the Native Americans and also that…[in] Daniels there's not that many of us." Here I see that minoritized students experienced hostile and discriminatory experiences at DU. As Daniel had mentioned, hearing about those incidents made him approach white students with caution. Unfortunately, as I have experienced with other students of color, these incidents can negatively affect their sense of safety. While these incidents can form a bond between the students of color, I believe it also makes it harder for students to feel like they belong on campus. In my opinion, the policies and practices that are in place feel like they are not teaching the community about cultural competence if students are experiencing hostility.

Mateo explained an incident that occurred to him. He says that "it's like they will like be sitting next to me or something and then move when there's no one else but us at Starbucks." This makes him feel like "it's a bit demeaning, you know? And it's like, I don't want to be, like, soft about it because it's like, that's the oh, I got like, I'm not a victim, you know? It's like then like, ideally, I'm still not, but it's like, did I do something like, you know, I don't fucking smell, you know?" Here Mateo also brought up an interesting concept of not being a "victim." Since he was the only one that elaborated on multiple incidents he experienced, it is difficult to say if other Latinx males would also not want to be seen as a "victim" and if this is related to masculinity. Mateo gave us a glimpse of the impact of microaggression. As we can see it can make you feel less than on a campus where students may already feel excluded.

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Mateo mentioned not wanting to be "soft" and a "victim" that can relate to masculinity, but Daniel also talked about gender. Mateo stated that one of the only bad instances for him was when "I feel like sometimes I will, I'll stand next to maybe like a white woman. And she will look at me and then there will be no one else in there and then will go out of her way to go sit away from me." From that incident he said "I'm not sure what I did to deserve that, but like, that was obviously fucking weird. I don't say anything about it, but I mean, I guess like the worst instances is that like I feel like a lot of the time I'm not seen." When talking about microaggressions Daniel also mentioned that "the white girl on the elevator might clutch her bag or might be weird just because you're in there, you know?" And he also mentioned that "that happens a lot I've realize, you know, it happens too often for me to want to actually pursue a friendship at that point, you know?" These two instances show that this may also be a part of their experience as a male presenting student of color in a predominantly white institution. Experiences where their identity of being a Latinx male may be associated with a specific stereotype.

Taking field notes at the Cultural Center where 1GenU is located helped me gain a better understanding of what students meant when they talked about this place as a safe. When I asked Hector if he had experienced overt racism, he mentioned that "you know, it also kind of depends on because I think since I'm here so much at Access and Transitions I see a lot of people who are, you know, like myself." But he also mentioned that "it depends on like outside of here, maybe in my classes or just walking around. I will see like, you know, a lot of like white people and things like that and… it definitely depends on where you are and, yeah. Kind of about, like, about microaggressions." Pablo also

mentioned how it can be difficult to know how to respond to microaggressions but that it was important to stand up for each other. He stated "I do need to do better at actually speaking my truth as well. But it's like I said, you know, we're at a PWI, we are outnumbered sometimes, and we have to pick and choose our battles." But things change "when it's something that is overt racism, it's something that we like have to make that change then we will…be loud about it and call people out about it." He also states that "if it's if it's stuff like vandalism against Native Americans tipi then that's when that warrants like retaliation." Although they did not explicitly state it, through my fieldwork I was able to see how many of the students felt like they had a place to go to if they were experiencing microaggressions.

From my observations at 1GenU, this is a place where many other cultural affinity groups got to interact with each other outside of their organization meetings. 1GenU was a safe space where different affinity groups could socialize and create relationships with each other. Pablo, who is not Native American, mentioned that if there was an incident against Native Americans, they would support them. I believe the Cultural Center has been a place where diverse groups of students have been able to exchange information as well as band together as students of color in a predominantly white institution.

Another question I asked is if they felt like they belonged on campus. This of course includes more than just a straightforward answer. Most of the students answered something along the lines of "it depends." Daniel said "I feel like I do. Last year I really didn't because I was like, okay, I am not doing so hot on my classes like I expected to, I have to work all this fuck all these hours to pay off my own tuition, I'm barely on campus,

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I'm barely making friends" and he also experienced imposter syndrome. This year he said, "I would say I do belong here because I worked here. The amount of money that I pay compared to some kids whose parents pay for them is really still nothing. Like, I'm doing it." For Daniel feeling like he belongs has been something he eventually grew to feel on campus and may also relate to his financial contributions.

Besides the financial contribution Daniel made to campus he also stated that "while it may be PWI, I feel like I've earned my right to be here. You know, the friends I have or the friends I have, and that's what matters." His feeling of belonging was attached to his work productivity and his friends/connections on campus. This shows that something that helps students feel like they belong on campus is the connections they make. Hector responded to this question by stating, "Oh, absolutely. I don't think any of us students of color should be asking ourselves "oh do I?" We don't need to." He also acknowledged that "it's hard, like, obviously we go through different struggles as students of color than you know the white students would. But I think we've earned our right to be here." Similarly, Mateo stated that "Do I belong? Yes. I very much belong. Nothing can change my mind on that. It is because of the friends that I've made, the connections that I have established, that I was able to see that I do belong here. Yeah, like it is a majority white campus." When talking about belonging these students bring up connections, they have made that help them feel like they belong at DU.

Like Hector, Mateo also acknowledged that "me and hundreds of other students here are navigating a system that was not meant for us. We, we have it harder. Yeah. Quite frankly, we have it harder. We have earned our right that we deserve to be here." On the

other hand, Jaime states that "there are some days where you feel like, okay, this is where I belong." Along those same lines Pablo stated that he would say he belongs to an extent. He stated that "I talked about the stuff with like in Daniels and like the stuff in my classes, those are the points where I don't, I don't feel welcomed at DU." When he would be at "an LSA meeting… when I'm spending time in the cultural center, when I'm going to other affinity group meetings, that's where, where everybody knows me feels like everybody knows my name, that's where I feel comfortable at and that's where I do feel like I do have a place." Some of the students highlighted affinity groups and the relationships they built as reasons to why they felt like they belong. Although students of color mention experiencing microaggressions or being one of the few or only students of color in their class, most eventually feel like they belonged or had a place where they felt like they belonged.

As a Latinx male at a PWI, their experiences are multi-dimensional. They often did not see people who looked like them in classrooms and around campus. Most experienced some form of microaggression which can reinforce the feeling of exclusion. Although they may not find many students who look like them in their classrooms, they were able to find a safe space at the Cultural Center or affinity groups. They saw other students who looked like them and connected with other students of color. As students mentioned, places like the Cultural Center help them feel like they belonged to an extent on this campus.

Conclusion

From the nine interviews emerged five themes that consisted of students'

experiences and DEI challenges. The first concept that I discussed was institutional DEI

efforts. Staff and students discussed challenges to DEI that included lack of

communication, the siloed/ fragmented environment at DU and the pioneer moniker.

While staff acknowledged that there had been progress, they suggested that DU provide

more resources and create institutional interventions. This showed how DEI at DU is

complex and that there is no straightforward way to define the DEI efforts. The second

topic Perceptions of Students and DEI brought together staff's views of students in

relation to DEI work. Staff mention that they have different approaches to DEI from

students which impacts their relationship and presented as another challenge to DEI work.

Students and staff may at times not share similar viewpoints but staff expressed when

they work together they are able to make an impact. The third discussion point mentioned

what keeps staff and students motivated to continue at DU as well as some of their

struggles. Students mentioned how having staff of color helped them persevere at DU. A

staff member brought up how important it was for staff of color to lean on each other for

support. The fourth point, Navigating a System Not Made For Us, raised the issue of trust

in institutional resources, departmental resources, and additional support systems.

Students differentiated between departmental academic resources and support as students

of color, which many mentioned the latter is lacking in their departments. Lastly, the

section of Students' Experiences discussed how students can feel excluded due to

microaggressions but through spaces and other students of color, they are able to feel like

they belong to an extent.

Chapter Five: Discussion

In this chapter, I will dive into discussing the results and contributions to literature, and conceptual framework. The data collected from the nine semi-structured interviews revealed both supports and barriers that Latinx males encountered during their pursuit and attainment of higher education. Overall, these findings show that resourceful relationships and social networks are important for students' success. My findings also showed that it is necessary to explore how microaggressions can be gendered. When talking about DEI I found that performative aspects for this type of work were common which is why staff mentioned the need for accountability. The current findings contribute to the literature by shedding light on the nuances of being a Latinx male, first-generation student pursuing higher education at a predominantly white institution.

Early Life Experiences/ Mentors

Educators and academic outreach professors can transmit to first-generation students the necessary forms of social and academic capital. While interviews did not discuss their early life experiences with educators, they did mention the need for more mentors that looked like them. A student discussed how he felt that they needed more Professors of color to guide them through their college experience which shows that even if they use resourceful relationships to enroll into college, they need continuous support and mentors A staff member also mentioned that he saw himself as a connector to students, showing that as a staff of color, he saw his role as more than a professor.

Another student mentioned that family is a motivator for him to continue his education. In support of the literature, these students highlighted the importance of resourceful relationships which can include mentors, professors, or even family members.

The literature talks about how mentors are helpful for students, but it is also important to discuss the emotional labor that it takes on staff of color to be mentors to students of color. Sebastian touched on this when he said that as a staff of color he does several types of labor. Their work includes emotional, intellectual, and physical labor, much of which is unpaid for minoritized staff. This can make staff want to check out because this labor takes a toll on them. Which is why Sebastian said it was important to have a "critical mass of others" who can fill in the gaps when they need a break. Sebastian's interview highlights what it can be like for mentors and staff of color to be the support and connector for students of color. If DU is committed to offering mentorship for students, they need to offer support for the mentors too and make sure that staff are not overworked.

Support Systems

Saenz and Ponjuan (2009) point out that students are more prone to graduate if they uncover responsive social networks within their college environment. As the interviews with students showed, social networks came from various places on campus but were vital for their success. A student mentioned that he felt like he could easily go up to someone in 1GenU for help and another added that it felt like they had a little family at 1GenU. 1GenU gave students a place where they could be held academically accountable but also have relationships with the staff. The staff helped make 1GenU feel like they had

a family on campus, and they could rely on help. In Mateo's case, it was because of the people that he met at DU that he said he still went to DU showing how important social networks were for these Latinx students. Mateo also mentioned that having his FSEM (first-year seminar) professor that believed in him helped him create an impactful support system. Another participant, Daniel, mentioned that he felt like he had a better sense of community once he joined LSA.

Most students mentioned that their support systems included professors, staff, programs targeting minorities, and identity-based organizations. This implies that at DU, these institutional support structures like 1GenU, the Cultural Center, and Identity-based groups have helped students feel like they belong by creating impactful support systems that help them as Means and Pyne (2017) have stated. As we have seen with most of the students' testimonies, 1GenU is doing what it was meant to do quite successfully. 1GenU has been able to support students of color and make them feel like they have someone who supports them academically, mentally, and emotionally. Keeping 1GenU allocated on the first floor of the Community Commons building continues to show students of color that they are seen and important to DU. Providing more resources and support for 1GenU can also help them support more students of color that may need it.

Higher Education and Gender

While many of the students did not mention specific gendered challenges, they face in higher education, they mentioned how they have not had anyone interested in their college experience as a Latinx males. Although this was an exploratory study that had a small sample, this brings up the issue that Saenz and Ponjuan (2009) and Huerta and

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Fisherman (2014) state, there is a scarcity of research that focuses on the Latino male

college experience. When talking about microaggressions, both Daniel and Mateo

mentioned white women. Daniel mentioned that if he was alone on the elevator with a

white woman, she would clutch her bag while Mateo said that a white woman would get

away from him if she was alone. Since Daniel and Mateo were both male presenting,

white women may have reacted a certain way based on the stereotype that Latinx men are

violent. For Mateo, that type of behavior was demeaning. Daniel added that he did not

know what he did to deserve that type of behavior. These instances show that although

Daniel, Mateo, and I may experience microaggressions, these microaggressions can be

portrayed differently based on students' gender appearance. This shows why it is

important to look at Latinx males' experiences in higher education since they may be

impacted differently based on their gender.

While only one student mentioned the pressure of balancing work and school,

further studies can focus on the socioeconomic pressures that Latino males face in

college. As Pérez II (2017) mentions, Latinx males are more likely to join the workforce

due to socioeconomic pressures and cultural expectations which means this topic is worth

investigating. Additionally, further research can explore microaggressions and gender

with Latino males in college. As Saenz and Ponjuan (2009) mention, Latinx males are

"vanishing" from the American higher education pipeline. We should focus on why

Latinx males are not enrolling in colleges compared to Latinx women. As an educational

institution, this data can give DU a better understanding of what Latinx students'

obligations consist of which can inform how they can better support and retain Latinx males.

Higher Education and DEI

In the discussion with staff about DEI, we see how many of the issues they brought up are issues that the literature has discussed about higher education and DEI. As Martinez-Acosta and Favelo (2018) mentioned, my interviews with staff showed that many acknowledged the institutional environment and its history. Acknowledging DU's background allowed staff to reflect on the changes made regarding DEI. While they acknowledged that DU has made progress, they also mentioned that DU still has a long way to go, it needs to be continuously changing. Martinez-Acosta and Favelo (2018) mention that we need to acknowledge an institution's history to change its environment. Despite staff acknowledging how much DU has changed with its DEI initiatives, they also mentioned what DU does not acknowledge. Both students and staff brought up that by keeping the Pioneer moniker, it shows that DU is not reflective nor ashamed of their past, which includes the annihilation of indigenous peoples on the land DU now stands on.

Both students and staff touched on what Ahmed (2012) discusses, which is that diversity is often noted as performative which shows that this is a bigger issue not only occurring at DU. Specifically at DU, the pioneer moniker is a visual reminder of the performative aspect of DEI. Staff and students mention that the moniker does not only show them that DU is performative, but it is also an obstacle to DEI. As Ahmed (2012) states, staff also discussed that diversity work requires time and energy. They highlighted

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the need to have more help and need communication strategies since everything is siloed. Sebastian described the lack of communication between students and the administration. Students like Hector, Jaime, and Pablo agreed with Sebastian and mentioned that it was hard for students to know about specifics on DEI because of the lack of communication.

Implementation of DEI policy

While my findings did not specifically discuss the DEII assessment Cumming et. al. (2023) created or Guo and Jamal's (2007) anti-racist model, staff discussed many of the topics brought up. Cumming et. al (2023) created the DEII assessment which offers a framework for discussing the institutionalization of DEI. The DEII assessment provides individual perspectives on institutional initiatives on the following themes: Institutional Environment, Faculty and Staff Hiring, Faculty and Staff Retention, Student Admissions, Student Retention and Completion, and Curriculum. Topics that both Cummings et. al. (2023) and staff discussed include faculty and staff hiring, faculty and staff retention. These themes used in the DEII assessment were solutions that staff discussed. Guo and Jamal (2007) provide some models that focus on the individual, classroom, institution, and community. The anti-racist model requires consideration of how policies and programs address inequity by including faculty, students, and the community. What the interviews with staff revealed is that staff seem to want to push the conversation of DEI to include the institution. Staff want accountability, systemic and institutional interventions which as Guo and Jamal (2007) and Cumming et. al. (2023) brings up new tools that need to be implemented to further DEI work in institutions.

The literature discusses important steps and tools to successfully implement DEI initiatives on campus but as the interviews with students have shown, it is just as important to communicate with students what is being done at the institutional level. As Guo and Jamal (2007) state, there needs to be a call for faculty, staff, administrators, and students for change. This should include communicating with students about initiatives as well as institutional DEI changes occurring. Students could not tell me any specifics about DU's DEI initiatives. This lack of communication with students impacted students' experience at DU by making them feel like they could not trust DU to act on certain issues. Additionally, students felt like DU needed to do more in their DEI work. It is difficult for an institution to take transformative steps when part of their population (students) does not feel included in DEI work.

Applying Critical Race Theory and Latino/a Critical Race Theory to the Study

Due to Eurocentrism and white privilege appearing to be the norm, many people believe that education in the U.S. is unbiased. As we have seen with students' experiences, they have encountered discriminatory experiences in higher education. During our interview most of the students mentioned something along the lines of me probably having experienced or understood what they were talking about when discussing microaggression. Through instances of microaggressions we see that the reproduction of racism occurs without much disruption because of the power leaders in institutions have. Students like Daniel mentioned that when they face racism and microaggressions, they do not feel like DU would do anything about it. Another student, Jaime, mentions that there is racism everywhere at DU, which is why they know that nothing comes out of reports.

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Therefore, certain places at DU feel like they are unsafe for students who are nonwhite. In these instances of harm based on their identity, we see that even in education, racism is prevalent like CRT's second tenant states. On the other hand, staff like Elizabeth state that students have power and a strong voice on campus. In contrast, Sebastian mentions that there must be more accountability with DEI initiatives for change to happen. These contrasting perspectives show that the relations of power at DU differ based on where you are. The narrative from students who are nonwhite at DU shows that many of them do not feel like they have power on campus when dealing with racism and microaggressions.

LatCRT holds students of color as possessors and creators of knowledge. While students' experiences can be fraught with microaggressions, we can see through their interactions with each other at the Cultural Center that they are holders and creators of knowledge. They exchanged information with each other that could impact their academic, physical, and mental wellbeing. As Daniel mentioned, he made a list of what people to watch out for and made sure to tell those he trusted that information. Mateo and Daniel also mentioned that white women treat them differently, we can gather that is because they present as brown men. These were instances where our experiences with microaggressions differed. Institutions like DU claim that they are objective and neutral, but these students' experiences show that there are instances where they feel excluded based on their race and sex. Students of color need resources that effectively deal with racism and microaggressions. Students need resources that specifically cater to them as students of color because they are facing barriers and encounters where they are treated differently based on their race and sex.

Conclusion

Overall, my findings do support much of the research done on minorities in higher education. Literature on Early Life Experiences/ Mentors helped show the importance of resourceful relationships. Literature on Support systems and students' interviews discussed the importance of creating support systems on campus for help and the toll that it can take staff to be mentors. While students did not touch on their gendered experiences in higher education, the literature presented the importance of conducting more studies focused on the Latino male college experience. The discussion on the implementation of DEI revolved around two tools, the DEII assessment and the anti-racist model but noted that it was important to communicate to students the changes that occur. This study can provide insights into how structural inequalities and institutional practices impact the educational experiences and outcomes of students of color. My research has the potential to advance knowledge in the fields of education, sociology, anthropology, and critical race studies while also informing institutional policies and practices aimed at promoting DEI in higher education.

Chapter Six: Conclusion and Recommendations

This section includes a summary of my findings and recommendations. The intention of my exploratory study was to examine Latinx male-identifying students' college experiences as well as DEI at DU. The research identified supports and barriers that impacted students' experiences at DU. Additionally, I also identified challenges staff face with DEI work at DU. Lastly, I include recommendations for activists, DU administrators/ PWI institutions, the Latinx Student Alliance (LSA) at DU, and anthropologists. These recommendations are based on a small size and while we cannot assume the study is generalizable of every students' experience, it nonetheless reflects the experiences of these students.

Conclusion

U.S. demographic data continues to show through population statistics that Latinxs will be a majority. Research has also shown that many educational institutions are not fair and equitable. With DEI becoming increasingly a part of the conversation for many colleges and universities it is important for institutions to find ways in which they effectively cater to their minoritized students. The intention of this research was to examine male-identifying undergraduate Latinx students' experiences at DU and staff's perceptions of DEI efforts. The question I asked was: What shapes the experiences of Latinx male-identifying undergraduate students at DU? To explore this question, I asked (1) What are the ways Latinx students navigate a predominantly white institution like DU

and find support? (2) Based on experience and knowledge of key informants, what DEI efforts have been successful? What challenges have occurred with DEI efforts?

To answer my research questions, I conducted interviews of undergraduate Latinx male-identifying students and DEI staff. I used literature to help guide me through issues on the topics of higher education, gender in higher education, and DEI in higher education. Additionally, I took field notes during DEI meetings, the Cultural Center, and Identity-Based Student Organizations' meetings. All of this helped me gain a better understanding of DEI at DU and Latinx students' experiences. The themes that emerged from this data have provided insight as to what factors have made Latinx undergraduate students continue their education.

Results indicated that for Latinx students, they often struggled with feeling like they belonged on campus. Most of them often faced microaggressions, noticed they were often one of the only students of color in their classes, and had difficulty finding departmental support for them as students of color. Students mentioned that they felt excluded because in classes and around campus, they are usually one of the few if any students of color. Not only was it difficult to find other students who looked like them, they also experienced microaggressions by the students around them. Since most did not trust that the institution would hold those who harmed them accountable, they created their own networks. In these networks they could warn each other about people who were racist or engaged in harmful behavior towards them as students of color. Sadly, most participants mentioned that I would most likely empathize with them when they talked about microaggressions because it was so common for any student of color to experience

that. Lastly students discussed how many of their departments did not give them support as students of color. While yes, departments provided academic support, they stated that they needed support as students of color. Students mentioned they felt like they were not receiving enough valuable information and resources as students of color when it came to professional and career development.

Despite these struggles, students found safe spaces, created informal resources, and created emotional, academic, and social support. Students discussed how they navigated a system not made for them. A space where they felt like "a little family" is at the Cultural Center, engaging with 1GenU. 1GenU provided academic support, but students also mentioned that the staff constantly made sure they were also doing okay emotionally. The Cultural Center and identity-based student organizations like LSA gave students social support and the opportunity to connect with other students of color. Building a support systems in which they found different types of support allowed them to feel like they had earned the right to be at DU. These findings show that Latinx students' experiences are complex which makes them feel like they belong to an extent at DU.

The second part of my study asked: Based on experience and knowledge of key informants, what are the DEI efforts that have been successful? What challenges have occurred with DEI efforts? This was answered by interviewing staff engaged with DEI work at DU. While most staff did not go into depth on what has been successful with DEI efforts, some mentioned that there has been progress with DEI efforts. An example of the progress with DEI comes from a staff mentioning that there are many more staff of color.

Additionally, staff mentioned how progress can be seen with IRISE, the Latinx Center, and the Native and Indigenous initiatives. Another staff member adds that DU was also one of the first universities around the country to begin to incorporate DEI questions in the faculty hiring process. Despite these successes they also added that there is still plenty of work that DU needs to continue to do in terms of DEI.

Staff mentioned working with students, lack of communication, and how siloed everything is as challenges they faced in this line of work. When talking about DEI, staff discussed working with students. One staff member mentioned that there is friction between students and staff because they have different approaches to solving DEI issues. In contrast to that another staff member mentioned that when students and faculty work together, good things happen but did not mention any tensions. This staff member mentioned that what has been successful is students working with faculty and staff on initiatives. This shows that the relationship between staff and students is nuanced and depends on where you are on campus. Both students and staff brought up that there is a lack of communication across the institution, showing that this is a big issue. Along with that, staff mentioned that everything at DU is siloed and fragmented, which is also in part due to the lack of communication. Lastly, both students and staff mentioned how the Pioneer moniker undermines all the work of those who engage in DEI work and represents the historical trauma and violence that DU has engaged in.

My findings showed that mentors and resourceful relationships are important for the success of students of color which concurs what the literature has mentioned about early life experiences and mentors. While students did not mention much of their early

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life experiences in their interviews, like the literature says, they reported that community gives them the motivation to pursue their education. Mentors in the educational setting are vital for first-generation students since they can transmit necessary forms of social and academic capital at their institution. These resourceful relationships that they cultivate give students the tools to successfully navigate higher education.

My findings also showed how essential it was for Latinx students to have support systems since they can help them feel like they belong at an institution. Students' support systems can include a wide range. These support systems can include family members, romantic patterns, faculty/staff, student organizations, and academic support services. Students at DU mentioned they found academic support through organizations like 1GenU. They also found support through identity-based organizations like LSA and the Cultural Center. Like literature on persistence for students of color shows, when students feel like they belong they are more likely to be motivated to persist and graduate.

Although my findings did not explicitly mention how gender played a role in their experiences, the little they touched on gave us a glimpse of how their experiences can differ. In the literature, perceptions of Latinx women pursuing higher education were different than Latinx males. For Latinx women, they may seem to be selfish and familial demands may interfere with educational demands. Additionally, Latinx women may decide to pursue higher education to become independent from their family. In contrast, the literature mentioned that Latinx males may pursue higher education to provide for their future families. This literature also identified a major problem which is that most

research focuses on Latinx women in higher education so there needs to be more studies that focus on the Latinx male students' experience.

When talking about DEI, my findings highlighted the importance of recognizing and situating DEI in the history of the institution. Due to legal and policy initiatives there was pressure to create diversity in higher education around the 1960s forward. We have also seen in recent times changes in campus policies and demographics that have resulted in more women, people of color, and students of limited financial means. This has created a dilemma for institutions in which they are serving a population they had not been constructed for, which was white males. For institutions, it then becomes critical that institutions engage in effective DEI initiatives with clear goals to prevent turnover. Institutions need to guide their faculty, staff, and students on how they can become a more inclusive environment.

In the context of DEI my findings alluded to this urgency of pushing the institution to take transformative steps through new tools and ways of thinking. The DEII assessment created by Cummings et.al. (2023) was an example that demonstrates how institutions can gather data on institutional DEI initiatives. The anti-racist model discussed by Guo and Jamal (2007) provided details on what institutions should aim for when implementing DEI. This includes making sure that there is change in the self, classroom, institution, and community. Both methods require institutions to consider how their own policies and programs address or do not address issues of equity. Most importantly this literature highlights the gap between policies and implementation.

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There are many questions to be answered. This research has provided a few insights into the experiences of Latinx undergraduate students at a PWI, the University of Denver. The urgency for additional research is based on the growing Latinx population. These important insights on students' experiences and DEI staffs' challenges could be integrated into research discussing Latinx males at a PWI and DEI studies. Future research should include a larger pool of DEI staff and students of color.

Recommendations

In order for Latinx students to successfully complete their bachelor's degree at DU, it is important to have the various systems involved at the institution aware and able to meet the needs of students of color. The traditional school system is not built to be understanding and supporting students of color. The following recommendations are aimed for: (a) activists (Students and Community members), (b) DU administrators and PWI institutions (c) Latine Student Alliance (d) anthropologists.

A recommendation is for any student or community activists. This is for those who are interested in this topic and interested in raising awareness of this issue. DEI work can be performative as staff and faculty mention. A way that community members and those who want to help with this issue is by making sure that institutions are held accountable for the actions they said they would take. This can also help institutions go from DEI discourse to practice. As the anti-racist model showed, a key component of this is teaching community empowerment. Communities can have the power to challenge inequities by actively engaging in and advocating change to these institutions. Not only can community activists hold institutions like DU accountable, but they can also cultivate

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ways for elevating students' voices and connections. By working with students at the institution, the surrounding community can connect with them and may help them increase their sense of belonging at DU and Denver.

Another recommendation is for DU administrators and other PWI institutions. DU administrators can work towards creating change at DU by allocating more resources for 1GenU. These resources can be financial and can also include increasing the number of staff who work at 1GenU so they can reach more students. As the interviews have shown, students feel supported by the First@DU programs. DU can work on making these programs stronger by allocating more funding and staff. Financial support is just as important to students as mentorship. It is important to note that DU needs to find ways to offer the needed mentorship without increasing the workload for Latinx professors. As a staff of color mentioned, there are various forms of labor, and it is important that they do not burn out. DU needs to figure out how to best prevent staff burnout from happening to staff of color.

My other recommendation is for the Latine Student Alliance (LSA). When students found someone in LSA, they felt more comfortable going to an LSA meeting. I recommend LSA do more outreach so that students who may not be aware of LSA can engage with members. This would mean doing more outreach outside of the Cultural Center since not every Latinx student engages with the cultural center. As students discussed, LSA has been a place where many of them are able to find "people who are like them" and who understand their background. At a PWI, LSA is vital for helping students make connections, exchange information, and help people feel like they belong.

My last recommendation is for anthropologists interested in understanding this topic. Through my experience I found that these undergraduate students were experiencing gendered microaggressions different from me, a Latinx woman. Although Solórzano (1998) examines race and gender microaggressions of doctoral Chicanas/os/xs more research needs to be done. Solórzano (1998) briefly used some gendered microaggressions and focused on Chicanas experience when it came to this theme. Based on this, I would recommend anthropologists to also consider whether staff engaging in DEI have had gendered experiences as well. Also, this study does not follow undergraduate students long enough. It would be interesting to see what a researcher finds when they follow students through their first year at DU or maybe the first couple of years at DU. These are suggestions that could give better insights into their experiences over a longer time at DU. Lastly, my strategy on student recruitment efforts was mainly by using the Latine Student Alliance (LSA) meetings and events. While this may be a reasonable sample strategy, it shaped my results and in the future it may be useful to incorporate other strategies in which students may not have support from student groups like LSA.

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Appendices

Appendix A Student Recruitment Email

The University of Denver's Department of Anthropology is conducting a research study

on: Navigating the University of Denver as a Latinx male-identifying student. The study

will take place at the University of Denver.

If you are an undergraduate Latinx male-identifying student currently attending the

University of Denver, you may qualify for a research study examining the experiences of

Latinx students. Eligible participants will be asked to participate in a 30-minute interview.

Every participant receives a $25 amazon gift card for completing the study.

For more information, please email Quisi Rodriguez-Oregel at

q.rodriguez-oregel@du.edu or call (424)354-6683

Principal Investigtor: Quisi Rodriguez-Oregel

Faculty Sponsor: Alejandro Ceron Valdes, Associate Professor, Department of

Anthropology

Appendix B Student Recruitment Email

Dear [insert name],

My name is Quisi Rodriguez-Oregel and I am a student from the Department of Anthropology at the University of Denver. I am asking to talk to you about participating in my research study. This is a study about Latinx male-identifying undergraduate students' experiences at the University of Denver. You're eligible to be in this study because you are a Latinx male-identifying undergraduate student who is between a sophomore and senior. I obtained your contact information from the Access and Transitions Office.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be interviewed for 30-45 minutes. I would like to audio record your interview and then I'll use that information to create themes that come up with Latinx students' experiences at DU. After participating in this study you will be given a $25 Amazon gift card. This project is funded by the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences Endowment Fund.

Remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in this study or not. If you'd like to participate, or if you have any questions about this study, please email me at q.rodriguez-oregel@du.edu.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Quisi Rodriguez-Oregel

Faculty Sponsor:

Alejandro Ceron Valdes, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology

(alejandro.CeronValdes@du.edu)

Appendix C Student Consent Form

Consent to Participate in Research

Study Title: Navigating the University of Denver as a Latinx Male-Identifying Undergraduate Student

IRBNet #: 1909423-1

Principal Investigator: Quisi Rodriguez-Oregel, Masters of Anthropology Student

Faculty Sponsor: Alejandro Ceron Valdes, Associate Professor, Cultural Anthropology

Study Site: University of Denver

Sponsor/Funding source: College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences Endowment Fund

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Your participation in this research study is voluntary and you do not have to participate. This document contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate. Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate.

The purpose of this form is to provide you information that may affect your decision as to whether or not you may want to participate in this research study. The person performing

the research will describe the study to you and answer all of your questions. Please read the information below and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether or not to give your permission to take part. If you decide to be involved in this study, this form will be used to record your permission.

Purpose

If you participate in this research study, you will be invited to a 30–45-minute interview. The interview includes questions about your experiences at DU. The purpose of interviews with undergraduate Latinx male-identifying students is to get a better understanding of their experiences at DU. There are no known risks in this research, but some individuals may experience discomfort due to their personal experiences at DU. The findings from this project will provide information on how Latinx students navigate a PWI like DU and can help us better understand ways that institutions can better support Latinx undergraduate students in higher education.

This research project aims to better understand the experiences of Latinx male-identifying undergraduate students at DU. I will also look at the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) efforts that DU engages in. At the end of the study, I will make suggestions to DU on ways to improve DEI initiatives from students and faculty/staff/personnel's perspectives. In order to get a better understanding of Latinx male-identifying students' experiences at DU, I will conduct a 30–45-minute interview with a student. A question that you will be asked in the interview will be: Has there been a time when you have

faced or witnessed overt racism or systemic racism while at DU? Did anyone advocate on your (or the person's) behalf or address it? Participants may refuse to answer any of the questions at any time.

<u>Risks or Discomforts</u>

Potential risks, stress and/or discomforts of participation may include feelings of guilt or embarrassment. Interview questions may bring up uncomfortable memories or emotions due to the experiences participants may have experienced in the past.

Participants may be in psychological/emotional risk by participating in this study. On campus and off campus resources that participants can reach out to alleviate their mental health concerns include:

<u>Health and Counseling Center (HCC)</u> -Offers individual, group, couples, crisis, and drop-in counseling services with a trained professional. Services are confidential and fee-based and available to all students.

24-Hour Hotline (303)871-2205

Email: info@hcc.du.edu

Daniel L. Ritchie Center 3521, 2201 E. Asbury Ave. Denver, CO 80208

The Cultural Center -Connects the DU community with resources, events, and

information on a diverse range of resources related to Religious and Spiritual Life.

Phone: (303)871-4724

Email: cmeinfo@du.edu

The Cultural Center 1927 S. York St. Denver, CO 80210

Student Outreach & Support (S0S) -Connects students in need of resources to appropriate

campus or community services.

Email: care@du.edu

Driscoll Center South, 2055 E. Evans Ave Denver, CO 80208

Denver Health Medical Center

777 Bannock Street Denver, CO 80204

SANE Program (303)602-3007

Counties served: Denver, Adams, Arapahoe, and Jefferson Counties

The Center for Trauma & Resilience- Culturally and linguistically responsive crisis

intervention services available. The center provides 24-hour hotlines, advocacy, crisis

counseling, support groups for trauma, recovery process, therapist referral directory.

24-Hour hotline: (303)894-8000

(303)718-8289 (Spanish available 24/7)

<u>Benefits</u>

The benefits which may reasonably be expected to result from this study are learning

about ways in which undergraduate Latinx male-identifying students navigate DU. We

cannot and do not guarantee or promise that you will receive any benefits from this study.

Participating in this study can further help DU learn about the experiences of Latinx

students and recommendations provided at the end of this study can help make DU a

more inclusive space for undergraduate Latinx students. This suggestion can add to the

much-needed literature on Latinx males' experiences in higher education.

<u>Source of Funding</u>

The study is receiving funding for participant's gift and equipment from the University of

Denver's College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences Endowment Fund.

<u>Confidentiality of Information</u>

Data collected will be confidential and will be only accessed by the investigator. Data will

be stored in OneDrive only accessible to the investigator. Identifiers like name, age,

ethnicity/race, major, school, and school year along with a pseudonym name will be

collected. The link between your identifiers and the research data will be destroyed after

the records retention period required by state and/or federal law.

Limits to confidentiality

All of the information you provide will be confidential. However, if we learn that you intend to harm yourself or others, including, but not limited to child or elder abuse/neglect, suicide ideation, or threats against others, we must report that to the authorities as required by law.

With your permission, I would like to audiotape this interview so that I can make an accurate transcript. Once I have made the transcript, I will erase the recordings. Participant's name, age, ethnicity/race, major, school, and school year along with the pseudonym name participant has chosen will only be known by the investigator and will only be stored on a file on DU's OneDrive. Because of the nature of the data, it may be possible to deduce your identity; however, there will be no attempt to do so and your data will be reported in a way that will not identify you.

Use of your information for future research

Your information collected for this project will NOT be used or shared for future research, even if we remove the identifiable information like your name or date of birth.

Incentives to participate

If you chose to participate in this study, you will receive a $25 Amazon gift card at the end of the completion of the interview.

Consent to video / audio recording / photography solely for purposes of this research

This study involves video/audio recording, and/or photography. If you do not agree to be recorded, you (CAN STILL) take part in the study.

_____ YES, I agree to be video/audio recorded/photographed.

_____ NO, I do not agree to be video/audio recorded/photographed.

Consent for Accessing Education Records

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____ **NO**, I do not give permission to the researcher to access my education records for this research project.

<u>Questions</u>

For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study you may contact Quisi

Rodriguez-Oregel, Masters of Anthropology Student, q.rodriguez-oregel@du.edu

(424)354-6683. You may also contact Alejandro Ceron Valdes, Associate Professor at the

Department of Anthropology, alejandro.CeronValdes@du.edu.

If you are not satisfied with how this study is being conducted, or if you have any

concerns, complaints, or general questions about the research or your rights as a

participant, please contact the University of Denver (DU) Institutional Review Board to

speak to someone independent of the research team at 303-871-2121 or email at

IRBAdmin@du.edu.

Signing the consent form

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form, and I am aware that I am being asked

to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have

had them answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. I will be given a copy of this

form**.**

Printed name of subject   **Signature of subject**   **Date**

Appendix D Student Interview Guide

1. How long have you been at DU?

2. What is your major?

3. Tell me about yourself (Probe on family's economic background, where are they from)

4. What race do you self-identify as?

5. While growing up did you socialize with other races? Why do you think that is the case?

6. Tell me about your college experience.

7. Has there been a time when you needed support on campus? Could you find it? (Probe barriers they may have encountered)

8. Are there any cultural affiliation groups you are involved in on campus?

9. What kind of support do they provide?

10. Do you feel supported by your department? If yes, in what ways did they support you? If not, what support did you need?

11. How would you describe DU's diversity? (probe on PWI, how does it feel to be in a PWI?)

12. Do you know about DU's DEI efforts? (If yes, probe on their opinion of it, do they think DU is doing a good job?)

13. Has there been a time when you faced or witnessed overt racism or systemic racism while at DU? Did anyone advocate on your (or the person's) behalf or address it?

14. Do you think your DU experience would be different if you were of a different race? If yes, why?

15. Do you feel like you belong at DU? (Probe on what makes them feel like they do and what doesn't)

16. Are there any changes you would like to see at DU for students of color?

Appendix E Staff Recruitment Email

Dear [insert name],

My name is Quisi Rodriguez-Oregel and I am a student from the Department of Anthropology at the University of Denver. I am asking to talk to you about participating in my research study. This is a study about Latinx male-identifying undergraduate students' experiences at the University of Denver as well as DEI initiatives at DU. You're eligible to be in this study because you are faculty/staff/personnel who engages in DEI work at DU. I obtained your contact information from DU's Directory.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be interviewed for 30-45 minutes. I would like to audio record your interview and then I'll use that information to create themes that come up with DEI work at DU. After participating in this study, you will be given a $10 Starbucks gift card. This project is funded by the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences Endowment Fund.

Remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in this study or not. If you'd like to participate, or if you have any questions about this study, please email me at q.rodriguez-oregel@du.edu.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Quisi Rodriguez-Oregel

Faculty Sponsor:

Alejandro Ceron Valdes, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology

(alejandro.CeronValdes@du.edu)

Appendix F Staff Consent Form

Consent to Participate in Research

Study Title: Navigating the University of Denver as a Latinx Male-Identifying Undergraduate Student

RBNet #: 1909423-1

Principal Investigator: Quisi Rodriguez-Oregel, Masters of Anthropology Student

Faculty Sponsor: Alejandro Ceron Valdes, Associate Professor, Cultural Anthropology

Study Site: University of Denver

Sponsor/Funding source: College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences Endowment Fund

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Your participation in this research study is voluntary and you do not have to participate. This document contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate. Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate.

The purpose of this form is to provide you information that may affect your decision as to whether or not you may want to participate in this research study. The person performing the research will describe the study to you and answer all of your questions. Please read

the information below and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether or not to give your permission to take part. If you decide to be involved in this study, this form will be used to record your permission.

<u>Purpose</u>

If you participate in this research study, you will be invited to a 30–45-minute interview. The interview includes questions about your experiences at DU related to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). The purpose of interviews with faculty/staff/ personnel is to get a better understanding of DEI work at DU. There are no known risks in this research, but some individuals may experience discomfort due to their experiences at DU. The findings from this project will provide information on what it is like to do DEI work at a PWI like DU and can help us better understand ways that institutions can better support students, faculty, staff, and personnel of color in higher education.

This research project aims to better understand the experiences of Latinx male-identifying undergraduate students at DU. I will also look at the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) efforts that DU engages in. At the end of the study, I will make suggestions to DU on ways to improve DEI initiatives from students and faculty/staff/personnel's perspectives. In order to get a better understanding of faculty/staff/personnels' experiences at DU, I will conduct a 30–45-minute interview with a faculty/staff/personnel that engages with DEI work. A question that you will be asked in the interview will be:

Have you ever observed any challenges related to DEI work at DU? How did that make you feel? Participants may refuse to answer any of the questions at any time.

Risks or Discomforts

Potential risks, stress and/or discomforts of participation may include feelings of guilt or embarrassment. Interview questions may bring up uncomfortable memories or emotions due to the experiences participants may have experienced in the past.

Participants may be in psychological/emotional risk by participating in this study. On campus and off campus resources that participants can reach out to alleviate their mental health concerns include:

Health and Counseling Center (HCC) -Offers individual, group, couples, crisis, and drop-in counseling services with a trained professional. Services are confidential and fee-based and available to all students.

24-Hour Hotline (303)871-2205

Email: info@hcc.du.edu

Daniel L. Ritchie Center 3521, 2201 E. Asbury Ave. Denver, CO 80208

The Cultural Center -Connects the DU community with resources, events, and information on a diverse range of resources related to Religious and Spiritual Life.

Phone: (303)871-4724

Email: cmeinfo@du.edu

The Cultural Center 1927 S. York St. Denver, CO 80210

Student Outreach & Support (S0S) -Connects students in need of resources to appropriate campus or community services.

Email: care@du.edu

Driscoll Center South, 2055 E. Evans Ave Denver, CO 80208

Denver Health Medical Center

777 Bannock Street Denver, CO 80204

SANE Program (303)602-3007

Counties served: Denver, Adams, Arapahoe, and Jefferson Counties

The Center for Trauma & Resilience- Culturally and linguistically responsive crisis intervention services available. The center provides 24-hour hotlines, advocacy, crisis counseling, support groups for trauma, recovery process, therapist referral directory.

24-Hour hotline: (303)894-8000

(303)718-8289 (Spanish available 24/7)

Benefits

The benefits which may reasonably be expected to result from this study are learning about ways in which undergraduate Latinx male-identifying students navigate DU. We cannot and do not guarantee or promise that you will receive any benefits from this study.

Participating in this study can further help DU learn about the experiences of Latinx students and recommendations provided at the end of this study can help make DU a more inclusive space for undergraduate Latinx students. This suggestion can add to the much-needed literature on Latinx males' experiences in higher education.

Source of Funding

The study is receiving funding for participant's gift and equipment from the University of Denver's College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences Endowment Fund.

Confidentiality of Information

Data collected will be confidential and will be only accessed by the investigator. Data will be stored in OneDrive only accessible to the investigator. Identifiers like name, age, ethnicity/race, major, school, and school year along with a pseudonym name will be collected. The link between your identifiers and the research data will be destroyed after the records retention period required by state and/or federal law.

Limits to confidentiality

All of the information you provide will be confidential. However, if we learn that you intend to harm yourself or others, including, but not limited to child or elder abuse/neglect, suicide ideation, or threats against others, we must report that to the authorities as required by law.

With your permission, I would like to audiotape this interview so that I can make an accurate transcript. Once I have made the transcript, I will erase the recordings. Participant's name, age, ethnicity/race, major, school, and school year along with the pseudonym name participant has chosen will only be known by the investigator and will only be stored on a file on DU's OneDrive. Because of the nature of the data, it may be possible to deduce your identity; however, there will be no attempt to do so and your data will be reported in a way that will not identify you.

Use of your information for future research

Your information collected for this project will NOT be used or shared for future research, even if we remove the identifiable information like your name or date of birth.

Incentives to participate

If you chose to participate in this study, you will receive a $10 Starbucks gift card at the end of the completion of the interview.

Consent to video / audio recording / photography solely for purposes of this research

This study involves video/audio recording, and/or photography. If you do not agree to be recorded, you (CAN STILL) take part in the study.

_____   YES, I agree to be video/audio recorded/photographed.

_____   NO, I do not agree to be video/audio recorded/photographed.

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form**.**

_____   _____   _____

Printed name of subject   **Signature of subject**   **Date**

Appendix G Staff Interview Guide

1. What is your job title? Can you describe some job responsibilities? (Probe how long they have been working at DU)

2. How long have you engaged with DEI work at DU?

3. Does DEI mean something to you? If so, how?

4. How would you describe the way in which DU incorporates DEI?

5. In terms of DEI work at DU, what do you think has been successful?

6. Have you ever observed any challenges related to DEI work at DU? How did that make you feel?

7. Based on your experience and knowledge, what do you think has been successful? Do you have any recommendations for improvements?

8. How do you self-identify your race/ ethnicity?