

Interactional Diversity Amongst Latinos in Higher Education

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Enrique Camacho  
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This Capstone Project was approved by:

Advisor: \_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Richard Mason

Seminar Instructor: \_\_\_\_\_  
Liesl Hohenshell, Ph.D.

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## Abstract

Higher education is evolving and becoming a diverse arena for different races and ethnicities. The issue explored in this study consisted of interactions among Latinos in higher education. Latinos were the ideal subjects for this study because of the diversity within the group. For example, within the Latino culture there are people from the Caribbean, Central America, South America, Mexico, Portugal and Spain. Diversity is studied from the perspective within the Latino culture because Latinos have numerous subcultures. For example, the Latino population can be classified as Spaniard, Portuguese, Mexican, Chicano, Nuyorican, South American, Caribbean Islander and many other subcultures as well. This was a qualitative study focused on six interviews conducted to determine the level of interaction each participant maintained within their culture and outside their culture. The interviews revealed that all of the students frequently interacted within their own culture and a majority of the students interacted with students outside their culture. It was concluded that students that frequently interacted within and outside their culture had a better overall university experience than students who primarily interacted within their culture and rarely interacted outside of their culture.

## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

Gurin, Dey, Hurtado and Gurin (2002) define interactional diversity as a concept, “that involves both the *frequency* and the *quality* of intergroup interaction as keys to meaningful diversity experiences during college” (p. 333). This study focused on the interactional diversity among Latinos in higher education to uncover how this group interacts with other racial groups. The Latino group is ideal to study because they are an ethnic group that is diverse in origins, culture, and traditions. According to Muthuswamy, Levine & Gazel (2006) interracial diversity can be defined through three different means which are: classroom, informal and structural diversity. All three parts of diversity are important; however, the focus of this study was on students' interactions within and outside their respective cultures in a university environment. Another aspect of interactional diversity among the Latino population studied was the manner in which students categorize themselves. According to Muthuswamy, Levine and Gazel (2006), that diversity has become a popular term among universities and through this term diversity ambiguity has been created. Ambiguity makes it difficult for scholars to accurately assess the impact of a diverse environment. Muthuswamy et al. (2006) add the concept that ambiguity produces challenges to evaluate the significance of a diverse environment. However, this study attempts to embrace the ambiguity and define the ambiguity of diversity through questioning students about their perceptions of their cultural identity.

Learning how students categorize themselves helps to suggest diversity classifications for this study. For example, a Puerto Rican student who considers him or herself black will have a different perspective from Puerto Ricans who consider themselves Puerto Rican. The ambiguity discussed by Muthuswamy et al. (2006) was enhanced through interviewing six university students of Latino

background. The students categorized their own race or ethnicity through interviews. The students were directly questioned as to how they identify themselves. The interview questions asked students a series of nine questions (see Appendix A) including how they related to their friends from the different races, how diverse their friends are, and how they feel about their college experience and their interaction with these students. The goal was to determine if they learned anything from these interactions and the difference it has made in their higher educational experience.

Previous studies revealed that with increased interactional diversity there is increased student learning and success (Castillo, Conoley & Choi-Pearson, 2006; Denson & Chang, 2009; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado & Gurin, 2002; Valentine, Prentice & Torres, 2012). Musil (1996) argued that “America’s Corporations have embraced the value of diversity, and higher education is following suit as it recognizes its unique responsibility to educate students for a diverse world” (Musil, 1996, p. 222). Institutions of higher education have increasingly seen the importance of diversity. Generally, people attend universities to qualify for better careers and to increase their skills. Interactional diversity enhances both of those important areas of higher education; it also has the potential to create a better learning environment for students. In order to create an understanding of the importance of interactional diversity, Latino students were chosen for this study.

The importance of learning about the variations in diverse interactions was revealed through Valentine, Prentice, and Torres (2012). The authors stated that college students obtain numerous benefits from cross-racial interactions such as, increased self-confidence, openness to different ways of thinking, willingness to challenge one’s own beliefs, improved critical thinking skills and intellectual development to name a few. Castillo, Conoley and Choi-Pearson (2006), Denson and Chang (2009) and Valentine et al. describe the benefits of interactional diversity as



different races interact at an intellectual level in a university setting their educational and social experiences improve.

Centered at a university in the Midwest region of the United States, this study focused on how Latinos interact on the college campus. This study targeted the Latino population because they are a culturally diverse group. For example, Latinos are defined as people that have ethnicity in Central America, South America, Mexico, Caribbean and Spain. In addition to the array of Latino cultures, they offer a unique perspective because of their interactions with people outside of their culture. In the higher education experience, focusing on the Latino experiences provides better understanding of how the students succeed in an interracial environment because the Latino culture has numerous subcultures.

This study was conducted in the fall semester of 2012 when students returned from summer break, and included interviews with six students, three males and three females all from Latino backgrounds. This study probed to uncover different concepts about the students. The purpose of questioning Latinos students was to uncover the background of the students, their motive for being in college, the future plans of the students and which race or ethnicity they interacted with on a regular basis. The students who participated in this study attended the university and the researcher had the best opportunity to obtain interview subjects from this location. Additionally, there was a diverse population amongst Latino students attending the university.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Literature Review**

In this review of the literature, I discuss the various ways diversity has been defined. The general definition of diversity can be understood through a study conducted by Hurtado (2001). Hurtado states that through the education of diversity, which consists of gender and race/ethnic representation, institutions of higher education will discover diverse democracy. The study conducted by Hurtado (2001) agrees with findings by Halualani (2010). The authors stated the general definition of diversity consists of representation of gender and ethnicity. Halualani and Hurtado said that diversity is the representation of race and ethnicity. Hurtado discusses the concept of diverse democracy which the importance of interactions that occur under conditions of equal status in higher education.

The concept of diverse democracy runs parallel to the concept of interactional diversity discussed by Gurin et al. (2002), which is explored in this review. First, the concept of diversity is discussed in general. Then I discuss three perspectives of interactional diversity, classroom diversity, informal interactional diversity, and structural diversity. I also convey the reasons behind the positive social, academic and professional outcomes for interactional diversity for an institution of higher education. Next, I examine interactional diversity and the Latino culture. The significance to discussing Latino culture and interactional diversity is due to the fact Latinos in higher education are the focus of the study conducted. Because Latinos maintain numerous subcultures, the Latino culture to be an ideal medium to be studied. For example, according to Grasmuck and Kim (2010), Latino people identify themselves in different ways. Grasmuck and Kim explain that students strive to obtain a racial identity to find a place to belong in college to feel a stronger level of comfort in order to adapt to the university environment. The concept of

self-identification amongst the Latino race and the numerous ethnicities within the Latino races such as, Puerto Rican, Mexican, Dominican, and Venezuelan, makes the Latino culture ideal for the study of diversity.

## **Diversity**

Diversity has become an important part of the American system of higher education. According to Haring-Smith (2012) one must not confuse that socioeconomic status and race are parallel concepts. Rather Haring-Smith creates a distinct separation that diversity is completely related to race and ethnicity. Haring-Smith goes further to state that diversity in higher education or obtaining a stronger variety of different races and ethnicities at American institutions of higher education will create an environment of excellence. Haring-Smith stated, “as the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) so often points out, diversity should be talked about as 'inclusive excellence,' for only when a campus is truly inclusive can it make a claim to excellence” (p. 6). Haring-Smith also suggests that the United States has made strong advances within the concept of diversity in higher education, “over the past forty years, our freshman classes have changed from over 90 percent white to about 73 percent white” (p. 6). Also, according to Meacham (1996) from the State University of New York at Buffalo, diversity in terms of students of color or non-white students in the United States has increased more in the 1980s than any other decade. In turn, Meacham also claims that because of the increase in immigrants and increase of minority persons, there has been an increase in minority attendance in higher education since the 1980s. Indeed, “from 1990 to 1999, enrollment had increased more than 68% for Latino students” (Castillo, Conoley & Choi-Pearson, 2006, p. 267). Meacham and Haring-Smith tell that diversity has been not only an important concept for higher education, but also that the population has been improving over a large amount of time. The purpose of this

study was to create an analysis to realize the importance that students' interactions play with people outside of their race.

The basic idea of diversity consists of the classification of different races and ethnicities according to Halualani (2010). Halualani explains further her basic definition of diversity to include sex, generation, sexual orientation, socioeconomic class and language to name a few. However, according to Meacham (1996), diversity has obtained a deeper meaning, as “the term diversity refers to all those dimensions of difference that provide the foundation for the construction of the meaning of our lives” (p. 113). Phinney, Dennis and Gutierrez (2005); state that an essential component of diversity is the formation of personal identity. Consistent with Phinney et al. the ideology for Latino students of personal identity comes from understanding their value systems or the concepts of their lives the students find most important. Phinney et al. also state one of the most important cultural value systems to Latino students is family. Though family is considered an important characteristic of the cultural value system for Latino college students, the main focus of this study is discovering the manner in which the student perceives their own identity. Phinney et al. conclude that Latino students who discover their personal identity are more successful in college due to their self-confidence and ability to understand themselves. Once their perception of self-identity is discovered, it allows each student to participate in interactional diversity which again Phinney et al. state creates a higher level of success for Latino students in college.

The knowledge of race and ethnicity play a vital part in the institution of higher education. Denson and Chang (2009) performed a longitudinal study with first-year full-time college students who took a survey on their knowledge of diversity and culture. They then re-visited the same students after their fourth year, conducted the same survey, and looked at their

experiences with diversity on their college campus. Denson and Chang also looked at their educational benefits and comparing which students had a greater benefit because of their educational experience. Denson and Chang included 21,651 students at 272 different institutions of higher education to conduct their study. Their research revealed that weak diversity-related programs and policies had a negative effect in the institutions of higher education. One conclusion from this study is that a more extensive knowledge of race education gives a better opportunity for stronger educational benefits. These benefits include higher retention rates and stronger motivation for students to achieve the goals they set for themselves with the university. Therefore, diversity has become important to the learning process for students in higher education.

Even though Denson and Chang (2009) conclude that diversity in higher education is an important characteristic to student success, there is still debate within the topic of diversity. Diversity is not always the most popular subject for professionals in higher education. For example, “the issue of race on college campuses has been one of the most profound and controversial topics in higher education” (Astin, 1993, p. 44). Much research has focused on outcomes associated with diversity, and social practices have been adopted to facilitate diversity. According to Muthuswamy, Levine and Gazel (2006),

Despite the popular usage of the term diversity, there is considerable ambiguity that surrounds the definition and operationalization of this concept in research and practice this ambiguity makes it difficult for scholars and practitioners to create, sustain, or accurately assess the consequences of a diverse environment. (p. 107)

Muthuswamy et al. presented an in depth perspective on diversity in higher education. They

clarify the different points of view to diversity, which allows for a more informative view of the concept of diversity. Three different aspects to diversity are used and each of the three types of diversity provides an understanding of how diversity is maintained at a university system.

*Classroom Diversity* focuses on the classroom the students attend; *Structural Diversity* focuses on the difference of admittance between minority students and majority students; and *Informal Interactional Diversity* focuses on the interactions students make on a daily basis outside the classroom among different races and ethnicities. The authors portray the characteristics of diversity in a way that separates the academic portion of diversity in higher education from the non-academic portion. The non-academic portion of higher education includes admission, retention and social characteristics of diversity in higher education.

### **Interactional Diversity**

Interactional diversity is an important characteristic of diversity. Muthuswamy et al. (2006) define interactional diversity as the manner in which people from different cultural and racial backgrounds interact with each other. Interactional diversity allows for a better understanding of diversity through experiences created amongst different races and ethnicities. Muthuswamy et al. confirm that through experiences amongst different races a better understanding of diversity is created. Furthermore, the study Muthuswamy et al. conducted indicates that participation among different races and ethnicities gives a college student a stronger educational experience both academically and socially. Castillo, Conoley and Choi-Pearson (2006) as well as Muthuswamy et al. agree that when students perceive their identity as Latino their perception of the university increases in a positive scheme and their level of success in college increases. Castillo et al. measure success in college by graduation rates and grade point averages. Therefore, Muthuswamy et al. and Castillo et al. argue that interactional is an

important characteristic of diversity through generating stronger student success in college.

Due to the rise of minority students entering higher education, as Meacham (1996) stated previously, diversity is a vital topic to improving student achievement in higher education. Though diversity is an important topic to higher education understanding diversity can be difficult to achieve. According to Hall, Cabrera and Milem (2010), diversity is a concept that has been difficult to achieve within institutes of higher education. The authors state that the complexity of higher education is a topic institutions have taken seriously through research. For example, universities have shown signs of positive accomplishments for students when diversity is achieved. Muthuswamy et al. (2006) used a program called Multi-Racial Living Unity Experience (MRULE) to gauge the importance of diversity on a college campus. The MRULE programs consisted of students of different racial backgrounds coming together once a month at Michigan State University to discuss racial concepts and attitudes at their university. The program was successful because of the change in student attitudes, behaviors, and knowledge of the students about race and ethnic concepts. The study, however, did not prove or disprove the level of academic or professional success among the participants of the students in the MRULE program. The lack of proving or disproving the level of academic or professional success of an interactional diversity program has been a difficulty. According to Terenzini, Cabrera, Colbeck, Bjorklund and Parente (2001), institutions of higher education have had difficulties achieving a positive situation for diversity since 1965. Grasmuck and Kim (2010) agree with Terenzini et al. (2001) stating that since the 1960s there has been an increase in minorities entering institutions of higher education. Grasmuck and Kim (2010) then state that exploring the interactions of people of different races and ethnicities has caused a higher level of complexity for measuring student success in a university environment.

The institution of higher education considers learning occurs not only inside of the classroom, but also outside the classroom. Interactional diversity is a term that institutions of higher education have taken seriously because there are correlations between students interacting among different cultures and higher achievements in higher education. Ancis, Sedlacek and Mohr (2000) state, “actively supportive, nondiscriminatory campus environments are associated with greater satisfaction in college, better adjustment, and better persistence through graduation” (p. 184). Terenzini, et al. (2001) agree with Ancis et al. and explain that “educators and others have advanced educational arguments supporting affirmative action, claiming that a diverse student body is more educationally effective than a more homogeneous one” (p. 510). Ancis et al. and Terenzini et al. maintain that admitting minority students is important to a university for interactional diversity because without affirmative action, interactional diversity could not exist. Gurin, Nagda and Lopez (2004) explain the importance of interactional diversity once the students are admitted. Gurin et al. state:

For diverse students to learn from each other and become culturally competent citizens and leaders of a diverse democracy, institutions of higher education have to go beyond simply increasing enrollment of students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds.

These institutions must also attend to both the quality of campus racial climate and actual interactions among diverse students (p. 23).

Gurin et al. mention two concepts: the quality of a campus racial climate and interactions among diverse student populations. Referencing the improvement of the campus racial climate, Hurtado (1992) tells of the continued lack of university commitment to affirmative action and lack of creating a positive racial campus climate. Hurtado also states the importance of creating a positive racial environment for the enhancement of interactional diversity. In



addition Hurtado explains “institutions may foster racial tension when they support priorities that work against promoting a better climate” (p. 561). The racial tension Hurtado speaks of is the negative interactional diversity that occurs in a university environment. All authors cited explain the importance of interactional diversity through accepting minority students to university system and the interactions members of different races have during their tenure at a university.

Students in higher education are impacted in a positive manner through interactional diversity within their academic, social, and professional lives. Valentine, Prentice and Torres (2012) explain the reason these areas of a student’s life are impacted by interactional diversity is due to the students gaining an open-mind to different perspectives on the world. Valentine et al. continue to say that students with an open-mind are more likely to empathize with members of a different culture and gain the ability to think in an abstract way. The ability to think in an abstract manner is learned through open-minded thinking by learning about attitudes of their race. The attitudes of their race cause a natural self-reflection and when a student embraces them the attitude allows abstract thinking. Valentine et al. finish their thought about open-minded thinking stating that abstract thinkers tend to have better problem solving and reasoning skills. Students who learn to work with people from different cultures and races value the different perspectives without judging them as incorrect. Musil (1996) aligns with the ideas of Valentine et al. puts the ideas of Valentine et al. in terms of specific communication methods in which people of different races interact on a college campus. Musil discusses that today’s society have become more globalized with technological advances, easier methods of transportation and communication. This means students will need to have an ability to meld with many cultures and races with much more ease.

Muthuswamy et al. (2006) agree that interactional diversity is the manner in which

students of different races and cultures interact. The authors expand on their exploration of the interaction of students of different races by classifying students of color and non-minority into three perspectives: classroom diversity, structural diversity and informal interactional diversity. Muthuswamy et al. explain that *classroom diversity* refers to knowledge regarding race and ethnic relation issues linked to diversity issues is included and discussed as a part of the classroom curriculum. Muthuswamy et al. define *structural diversity* in terms of numbers denoting the amount that students of color are accepted and retained in universities. Though it is important to emphasize the amount of students of color admitted to a university, the numerical concept does not alone guarantee interaction between a diverse populations at university. Therefore, Muthuswamy et al. defines *informal interactional diversity* as the “extent to which campuses provide opportunities for students to informally interact with one another across racial and ethnic lines” (p.107).

The first concept of diversity the authors introduce is *classroom diversity*. This diversity is an important aspect to understanding interactional diversity at an academic level. Classroom diversity includes curriculum put forth by the institutions of higher education such as Race and Ethnic studies, Chicano studies and African American studies. These examples of classes are only a few that are offered to students around the country. These classes provide academic material to explore numerous races and cultures. These classroom curriculums educate college students about the different customs and cultural behaviors of people around the world that enter the United States. Some universities offer majors and minors in diversity subjects. For example, the University of Wisconsin-Madison (2012) offers programs in Latin and Caribbean Studies according to their website.

The second concept of diversity is called *structural diversity*. Structural diversity can be viewed as a diversity agenda that different universities maintain throughout the country. For example, according to the Stanford University website ([www.stanford.edu](http://www.stanford.edu)), Stanford University in California publicizes and encourages people of color such as Hispanic, African-American, Native American and Asian Islander to apply for admissions to their graduate programs. These diversity agendas occur on a regular basis. Universities have put more emphasis on the importance of enrolling more people of minority background. This second type of diversity has proved an important part of interactional diversity, because admitting a higher volume of different races and ethnicities creates a diverse environment, which may indicate the institution values a diverse population. With a greater number of diversity within the student body, there may be further opportunities in institutions of higher education for students to increase the amount of positive interactions amongst different races and ethnicities.

The third concept of diversity is called *informal interaction*. Informal interaction is more focused on the way students interact with each other on a day-to-day basis. Universities provide numerous tools and resources for students to obtain diversity in this manner. For example, numerous universities throughout the country have a common area where all the students have the ability to gather and participate in activities such as bowling, movies, or study. These types of places where activities take place are examples of the concept of informal interaction within the concept of diversity.

According to the research by Muthuswamy et al. (2006) all three concepts of diversity are important; however, the authors found there are more positive benefits when interactional diversity meets classroom diversity. Researchers believe the informal interactional diversity is a

way for students from different races and ethnicities to come together in a non-pressured way, which allows for a more comfortable interaction. This casual interaction that occurs amongst students causes a more natural interaction. The normal interactions allow students to look past the culture, race or ethnicity and focus on the person in front of them. Pairing informal interactional diversity and classroom diversity is necessary because classroom diversity is the prime manner in which informal interactional diversity occurs. Classroom diversity provides a student an ample opportunity to informally interact with students of different races and ethnicities. For example, consider a hypothetical situation where a university student chooses a major area of study and thousands of students join a given major program area of study. Different programs have required coursework that each student must complete. The required classes cause different races and ethnicities to interact in a natural manner. The relationship between informal interaction diversity and classroom diversity creates a natural relation among the students.

### **Positive academic, social and professional outcomes of interactional diversity.**

Research confirms that interracial interactions are a common base for success in higher education. Interactional diversity brings forth a philosophy of open-minded learning for students in higher education. Learning comes from a perspective of academic, social and professional ways provided by the university system. According to Denson and Chang (2009):

There is also strong evidence that interaction diversity, or the frequency of cross-racial interaction that occurs during the normal course of undergraduate life, contributes to students' learning and educational experience. Interaction diversity has been shown to be positively associated with outcomes such as

in-group attitudes; cultural knowledge and understanding and leadership skills; cognitive and affective development; student learning and personal development; learning and democracy outcomes; civic, job-related, and learning outcomes; critical thinking skills academic self-confidence and social agency; action-oriented democratic outcomes intellectual and social self-confidence and student-retention and student satisfaction with overall college (p. 325).

The first outcome discussed in this section of the literature review is the positive academic influence interactional diversity has on the university system. As shown by Denson and Chang (2009), interactional diversity has shown a positive influence on student learning. This influence on student learning starts in the classroom. Students initially go to college to receive an education for numerous reasons and interactional diversity plays a positive role in regards to student learning. Previously, universities had curriculum surrounding the idea of diversity and educated students on how to maintain an open-mind to these different races and cultures they encounter, especially as there are rising numbers of minority students in higher education.

The second outcome is the social outcome to interactional diversity. The social aspect within the university system is a concept that is lost in translation. Socially speaking, students maintain a strong learning experience from the university atmosphere. Denson and Chang (2009) state that interactional diversity positively effects personal development. Personal development relates to the social growth students obtain through the college experience. For example, when students live in dorm halls they interact with

all types of students from various backgrounds. This type of learning is very influential because these students must live with each other and learn to get along as they pursue their goal to achieve higher education.

The third, professional outcome, maintains a high level of importance. According to Musil (1996) the professional world and the world of higher education have a symbiotic relationship. She further explains the importance of diversity as a focal point to corporations in the United States. Musil discusses the importance of diversity within major companies and the realization that universities should focus on the same. She explains that companies such as Merrill Lynch have said their goal is to have diversity become as common as playgrounds in the United States. She asserts that diversity on college campuses should align with the same goals as corporations in America. However, Musil illustrates that it is actually more important for the university system to take diversity seriously because they have a higher self-interest. In other words she believes that higher education will become a better organization if diversity is a focal point for the university system. She describes the impact interactional diversity maintains for students. She states that interactional diversity creates an open-minded way of thinking for students that embrace the concept of interactional diversity and allows them to engage in stronger critical thinking skills.

As shown by numerous studies such as Terenzini et al. (2001), Hurtado and Carter (1997), and Hausmann, Schofield and Woods (2007), there is a direct correlation between academic, social and professional success and the level of interactional diversity that occurs amongst students in higher education. Interactional diversity has brought forth positive social, professional and academic outcomes to a university system. Also,

as Museus and Truong (2009) explain, decreasing interactional diversity creates a decrease in achievement as well,

The literature is clear and consistent in indicating that campus climates play a major role in shaping the experiences and outcomes of college students of color. Dissatisfaction with campus racial climates and experiences with racial prejudice and discrimination on college campuses have all been associated with a decreased sense of belonging, lower levels of institutional attachment, and a decreased likelihood of persistence among racial/ethnic minority students (p. 18).

The studies illustrated that interactional diversity is vital to a student's well-being at a university. Not only does interactional diversity work in a positive way, but if ignored, interactional diversity can cause problems for an institution of higher education. The lack of interactional diversity according to the author would cause a lower sense of belonging, less feeling of attachment to the university and less probability of minority groups to demonstrate persistence in a college setting. Contrary to the negative, the ability to interact allows each student to open their mind to different ideas and structures of their world.

### **Latino culture and interactional diversity.**

Latino students are an expanding population in the institution of higher education according to Castillo, Conoley and Choi-Pearson (2006). Along with an increasing minority population in higher education, comes a growing culture and a variety of subcultures. The importance of the Latino culture and interactional diversity was investigated by Hurtado and Carter (1997), "we hypothesized that Latino students' perceptions of a hostile climate directly affect the students' sense of belonging in their colleges" (p. 330). Hurtado and Carter explain

further, “the results indicate a strong relationship between students' sense of belonging in college and reports of frequent discussions of course content with other students outside class” (p. 334). Hurtado and Carter indicate that Latino interactions amongst each other provides a better sense of belonging in a university system, and in turn, provides a better university experience. Hurtado and Carter divide the Hispanic culture among Chicano, Mexican-American students, and Latinos from other areas of the Latin countries. The sense of belonging of these different subcultures within a diversity concept shows the importance diversity has on an institution of higher education. The importance of the sense of belonging of diversity can be found through Castillo et al. The authors state that through an interactionist theory, Latino students perform better academically and socially in a university setting when non-cognitive factors are involved which are social, environmental and interpersonal. Furthermore, within the interactionist theory Latino students had an increased involvement in the university system. The increased involvement occurred when the university encouraged Latino students to be involved in various campus activities that permit Latino students to engage in interactional diversity.

### **Summary**

The interactional diversity concept examined showed a range from the definition of diversity to a specific group and the manner in which interactional diversity impacts an institution of higher education as stated by Muthuswamy et al. (2006). The review of literature maintained a central theme that interactional diversity has a direct positive influence on a student in higher education's social, professional and academic success (Castillo et. al., 2006; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Muthuswamy et al., 2006; Phinney et al., 2005). All authors agree that interactional diversity has proven to be an influential part of higher education. The authors also believe that institutions are participating proactively to achieve a higher level of diversity.



Denson and Chang (2009) state that students have shown massive signs of success when diversity is practiced. Denson and Chang provided evidence that interactional diversity provides higher academic and social skills. Along with academic, social skills and abilities, Museus and Truong (2009) give evidence to the importance of interactional diversity after graduation. Museus and Truong argue that a university benefits from the presence of interactional diversity within college campuses. Musil (1996) tells of the positive impact that interactional diversity maintains after college. Musil explained the importance of learning interactional diversity in a college environment because of the role interactional diversity plays in the professional realm of life. Musil shows the importance interactional diversity has on the careers of college students after graduation. All authors give their viewpoint or the higher level of importance placed on interactional diversity. Each of the authors brings a different perspective to interactional diversity. Interactional diversity has an important impact on all students from their learning experience at the university level to the career a student chooses after graduation.

The specific minority group addressed in this study was the Latino culture. Through the findings of Phinney et al. (2005) and Castillo, Conoley and Choi-Pearson (2006), interactions encountered revealed a positive impact on their success as college students. Furthermore, the studies conducted by Phinney et al. and Castillo et al. relate to Latino college students finding their cultural identification and once that identification is realized interaction with students outside their culture provides a higher success rate of graduation and overall educational experience. Museus and Truong (2009) argue that other races and ethnicities also achieved the success earned by Latinos through interactional diversity. Latinos were chosen in this study for researching interactional diversity because within themselves they are a multiracial due to the subcultures they

possess. Also, Latinos have the highest increase in college enrollment of all minorities. The realization of the importance for interactional diversity in higher education has been seen the authors in the review of literature. This realization created the motivation for this study.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Research Design**

In this study I sought to determine if students who interact among diverse populations have a more positive educational experience in regards to student social experience and retention. The study investigated how Latinos interact in a higher education environment in a social, classroom and informal settings.

The location for this study was at a university in the mid-western United States. The study was conducted in a qualitative manner with six interviews. This researcher was the sole interviewer. This study was conducted during the fall semester 2012. Interviews took place during October and November of 2012. Each interview lasted no longer than ten minutes and the interviews were conducted at a Midwestern university. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured way. There were nine questions that were used for each student, though, at times the nine questions utilized would lead to new questions. The interview questions were used as a medium to uncover the main concept of the educational experience the students obtained while interacting with students of a different race or ethnicity. The questions focused on the positive or negative experience students acquire while in college interacting with people different from themselves.

Interviews were audio-recorded through an iPhone recording application. The information from the interviews was transferred to tables in order to analyze the data. All answers were categorized as a result of the interview questions. Patterns were marked by the answers compiled in the table. All interviews were stored on a password-protected computer.

Interview analysis was organized into tables to better describe each of the student's identity and their level of interactional diversity at the university.

## **Research Participants**

The study utilized three different means of obtaining participants. First, meetings were attended that contained a Latino emphasis. Second, I utilized gatekeepers within the organizations (i.e. President, Vice President, etc.) to recruit participants. Lastly, I knew contacts due to the fact that there are a limited number of Latinos in higher education. These known contacts included but were not limited to brothers, sisters, wife or other family and friends. I recognized the potential bias from participants I already knew but I knew it was necessary due to low number of Hispanics attending institutions of higher education. Through the methods I chose to obtain interview subjects, I was able to interview three female participants which were attained through gatekeepers and the three male students were known contacts from a common student organization.

Participants consisted of three Latino males and three Latina females, who all reside in different areas of the United States and attended the university that served as a context for this study. Five out of the six acknowledged Mexican heritage. The one participant that was not of Mexican heritage claimed Puerto Rican heritage.

## **Procedure for Data Collection**

The instrument developed for the study was a series of nine questions directed towards discovering the patterns of interactions with people outside and inside the students' culture. Since this was a qualitative study, the questions were not always followed verbatim. The reasons the questions were not always followed verbatim was due to the fact that at times the conversation would bring new information so the conversation would continue to uncover new information that would lead to new findings of their interactional diversity.

The design of the interview questions and the procedure for data collection were similar to a component of the study conducted by Grasmuck and Kim (2010). However, their investigation was much more in depth, as they tested the impact of a program through statistical analysis of survey results. Grasmuck and Kim created a questionnaire to measure participation with students outside of their culture. The way in which this study was conducted used a similar qualitative method. The difference between this study and the study performed by Grasmuck and Kim was for Grasmuck and Kim the analysis of the study was configured into tables. Some of the items on the questionnaire conducted by Grasmuck and Kim were similar to the questions created for the interview in this study.

### **Analysis of Interviews**

The analysis was created through discovering patterns of interactions within the students' culture and outside the students' culture. From the interviews, tables were able to show the results of the students' identity and the manner in which they interacted with students within and outside their culture. The analysis of interviews was shaped in a way that describes the frequency of interactions in academic and social settings. The four categories discussed in the tables were frequent, sometimes, rarely and never. Once the participants identified the level of interactions within and without their cultures, they were categorized into tables. The reported findings were consistent patterns for all participants involved.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Results**

This research sought to answer two main questions, 1) how do Latinos in higher education interact with people outside their culture? 2) How do they perceive these interactions influenced their higher education experience? As explained in the methods section there were nine questions asked of each interviewee. These questions also sought to uncover the importance of interactional diversity each student perceived; however, throughout the interviews additional findings emerged. This research attempts to understand students' cultural interactions and relationships and the importance these brought to their experience in the higher education environment. For example, I found that family was a consistent motivating factor for being in school and staying in school since family was mentioned by each interviewee. Once in school, the interactions each student had inside and outside their culture played vital roles in their educational experience. The students who interacted outside of their culture seemed to speak more about their educational experience. Whereas the students who did not interact as much outside of their culture did not have as much to speak in reference to their educational experience. The students who did interact as much outside of their culture were more apt to stay at the university because they felt they had a second home.

The interviews suggested Hispanics in higher education tend to maintain similar trends within interactions inside and outside their respective cultures. The interviews conducted showed five major perspectives of interactional diversity, 1) the background of the participants, 2) the participants' cultural identification, 3) the interactions participants maintained inside and outside their culture, 4) benefits to the interactions and the interactions the participants maintain with people inside and outside their culture, and 5) the idea of success the participants possess.

The first perspective is the background of each participant. The background analysis gives information concerning the experiences of the participants. For example, five out of the six participants had been in college less than two years, which means their perception was from that of an inexperienced college student. The place of birth and residence is important because it is the basis of the research, which is the cultural self-identification and the interactions conducted outside of that cultural self-identification. Also, one concept arose from the interviews as far as self-identification was the importance of family to each of the participants. Since all participants believed family and being a role model was the most important aspect to higher education, this factor has been added to the first analytical perspective.

The second perspective from the interviews is cultural identification. Cultural identification is foundation of this study. The reason cultural identification is the second analytical perspective is because to understand cultural identification you must first understand the background of each participant. The cultural identification will give basis to the identity of each participant and allow the participants to explain not only their interaction with people outside of their culture, but also the impact those interactions have on their educational experience.

The third perspective is the interactions the participants have inside and outside their culture. The importance to the interactions the participants sustain is the central theme to the investigation. The explained interactions gave shape to the study to portray the comfort level and confidence the students have in higher education. In addition to explaining their level of interactions within an academic setting, the students explained their level of activity outside their academic activities such as social activities, extracurricular university activities and service activities.

The fourth perspective is the benefits of cultural interactions. Four out of the six students who participated in interactions outside their culture frequently stated the benefits they gained from interactional diversity. They stated they were able to understand culture in the United States much easier, which allowed for an easier higher education experience. Also, the students that frequently participated in interactions outside their culture were made aware that their critical thinking and social skills improved more frequently when they interacted outside their culture. The Chicano student who rarely participated outside of his culture stated he benefited from the classroom part of interactional diversity because he was able to discover his identity through his Chicano studies class. There were benefits to the students whether they participated frequently or rarely when interactional diversity was practiced.

The fifth perspective is the perceived success the students believe higher education will grant them through the diverse interactions. Each of the participants stated the importance of higher education to improve their lives and the students were active in non-academic university activities. The high level of activity for the participants illustrates how much they are invested in their interactions among college students and faculty. However, the fifth perspective also identifies the importance in interaction amongst different races, cultures and ethnicities to the students' higher educational experience.

### **Background of Participants**

This section describes the background of each of the participants in terms of their gender, age, level of education, country of origin, and cultural identity (Table 1). There were three male participants and three female participants. The female participants were younger in general; whereas the male participants generally had more experience at the university. Age and education level are important to note because the majority of these findings reflect perceptions of



first and second-year college students, who may not have had enough time to build strong relationships at the university.

The ages of the participants ranged from 18 to 23 years old. The ages of the male participants ranged from 20 to 23 years old. The ages of the female participants ranged from 18 to 20 years old. The female participants were younger in general and gave a newer perspective; whereas the male participants gave a perspective with more experience at the university.

Five of the six participants identified as Mexican or Mexican-American whereas one of the participants identified as Puerto Rican. It was interesting to note none of the participants identified as American; especially, considering the Puerto Rican participant and the Mexican-American participant were both born in the United States, however, they were not raised in an American culture. For example, the Puerto Rican participant felt Puerto Rico was her own country, even though Puerto Rico is a commonwealth of the United States and as such a part of the United States. However she did not feel that she identified as an American, but rather a Puerto Rican or Latina girl. Furthermore, it is interesting to note the Mexican-American identified himself as a Chicano due to the fact that he learned the term Chicano in his diversity class at the university. The reason the student identified himself as Chicano is significant because he believed he was not completely Mexican or American, but rather he considered himself to be a mixture of both. This caused an interesting examination of his interactions with other cultures. The four other participants who identified themselves as Mexican also had minute differences amongst them. Two of the male participants and one of the female participants stated with conviction they were Mexican when asked to identify themselves even though they had been in the United States since they were about five years old. They had spent a majority of their life in the United States but felt more cultural identification towards their

Mexican heritage. The final participant identified as Mexican but did not have as much conviction to the response of self-cultural identification. The difference with this participant is she arrived in the United States when she was 14 years old, which is much older than the other participants who were born in Mexico.

One might deduce from these findings that the younger a person is who arrives from another country, the stronger they identify to their place of birth whereas a person who came to the United States at an older age identifies with the United States more. Also, though more research is needed, the five students who arrived to the United States at an older age seem to have a greater motivation and appreciation for their college education. This appreciation and motivation was brought because they seem to appreciate their opportunities in an American institution of higher education more than the two who arrived in the United States when they were younger. The only participant who does not follow this pattern is the participant who was born and raised in Puerto Rico; she seemed to have a stronger attachment to Puerto Rico than the United States.

### **Cultural Identification**

The participants were divided into three different groups Mexican, Puerto Rican or Chicano. Four out of the six students identified as Mexican as seen in Table 1.

Table 1

*Background of Participants*

Participant	Age	Education Level	Birth Country	Cultural Identity
Female 1	18	Freshmen in College	Mexico	Mexican
Female 2	18	Freshmen in College	Puerto Rico	Puerto Rican or Latina girl
Female 3	20	Sophomore in College	Mexico	Mexican
Male 1	20	Sophomore in College	Mexico	Mexican
Male 2	21	Junior in College	Mexico	Mexican
Male 3	23	Junior in College	Elkhorn Wisconsin	Chicano

The numbers of participants are as such: four identified as Mexican, one participant identified as Chicano and one participant identified as Puerto Rican or a Latina girl. Each of the participants, when asked, clearly identified themselves except for one female participant who stated she was not clear on the question because she could identify herself as a Latino but when the question was clarified to specifically identify herself she stated she was Mexican.

**Interactions**

Participants reported various levels of interaction outside their culture. Though, all of the participants had a consistent level of interaction within their culture. All participants spent the

majority of their time with groups and activities inside their own culture. Though four of the participants ventured more to different groups of people all of the participants reported frequent interactions within their own culture.

The analysis was conducted by first identifying the manner in which the participants recognized their culture, and then identifying the level of participation each student maintained with people inside and outside their culture. The students categorized themselves in the interview as either Mexican, Chicano or Puerto Rican. The levels of interaction were analyzed through deduction from the interviews and classified as frequent participation outside their culture, sometimes participated outside their culture, rarely participated outside their culture, or not at all participating outside their culture. Table 2 displays the amount of interactions with people outside the participants' culture and Table 3 shows the participants' level of involvement with people in their culture.

Table 2

*Interactions Outside the Culture*

Participant	Cultural Identity	Interactions Outside the Culture	Learning
Female 1	Mexican	Rarely	Less Motivation for College
Female 2	Puerto Rican or Latina Girl	Frequently	Higher Critical Thinking Skills
Female 3	Mexican	Frequently	Better Professional Experience
Male 1	Mexican	Frequently	Better Experiences for Life
Male 2	Mexican	Frequently	Better Experiences for Life
Male 3	Chicano	Rarely	Less Motivation for College

Table 3

*Interactions Inside the Culture*

Participant	Cultural Identity	Interactions Within Culture	Learning
Female 1	Mexican	Frequently	Family atmosphere
Female 2	Puerto Rican or Latina Girl	Frequently	Higher comfort level in college
Female 3	Mexican	Frequently	Family atmosphere
Male 1	Mexican	Frequently	Family atmosphere
Male 2	Mexican	Frequently	Family atmosphere
Male 3	Chicano	Frequently	Higher comfort level in college

As shown in Table 2, when it comes to the students interacting with people outside of their culture the students' level of involvement varied amongst those interactions. Table 3 shows that all participants had a frequent amount of interaction with students of their own culture. All students stated they felt more comfortable spending more time in environments with a majority of other Latino students. In fact, all students belonged to the major club at the university created for Latinos called Latinos Unidos. The interaction aided in their ability to find success in higher education because they felt they had a second family and family was consistently the most important concept to the motivation of higher education for the students. The interactions showed within their culture to be a positive encouragement for the students in a higher education

setting; whereas the interaction outside of their culture seemed to portray less of a motivating factor for their higher education experience. This result was uncovered due to the fact that through the interviews each of the participants stated that their comfort level within their culture provided a stronger base and motivation for their higher education.

The learning concept referred to in Table 3 and Table 4 were the concepts the students learned from interaction outside and interaction inside their culture at the university. The students described their learning from interactions inside their culture as concepts such as their family atmosphere and their comfort level in college. The family atmosphere concept they learned by interacting mainly by participating with interactions inside their culture. The family atmosphere concept allowed them to learn that similar people to them attended the campus which assisted them in regards to staying in college to finish. The students also mentioned the concept of their comfort level in college. The students were mentioned comfort level as an important learning concept stated that through interactional diversity the more comfortable they were in college the more likely they were to stay and graduate.

Four concepts of learning were discussed in Table 4. The students talked about their level of learning outside their culture in regards to critical thinking skills, motivation for college and life experiences. One student discussed she obtained higher critical thinking skills. The student who was of Puerto Rican descent stated she gained higher critical thinking skills because she was able to think easier in two languages. Due to the fact that Spanish was her first language she obtained a higher level of critical thinking skills through the ability to interact outside her culture in regards to languages. The second concept discussed was motivation for college. Two students learned they had less motivation for college due to their lack of interaction outside their culture. The concept of less motivation consisted of two students talking about their desire to

interact among other cultures more often because they saw the benefit to interacting outside their culture but due to shyness and time constraints were not able. Their motivation declined because they wanted to make more time for interactions outside their culture to create a better experience for them at the university. The third concept discussed was better life experiences. Two of the Mexican male students stated they had better life experiences. Better life experiences were referred to as experiences that the students felt they were learning concepts such as understanding. For example, one of the Mexican male students talked about a time he learned patience because he had a disagreement with a student outside of his culture and learned to be more patient to understand the students' perspective instead of creating a worse conflict. The fourth concept consisted of better professional experiences. Better professional experiences was discussed by the Mexican female that frequently participated outside her culture. She gave an example of an internship she earned. She stated being from Mexico understanding business in the United States was a different and difficult experience. She stated she understood professionalism better through interacting outside her culture at the University. She was able to perform her duty as an intern with better preparation.

All participants used family as a reason to continue in their higher education and all agreed that the Latino culture provides strong family values. The family values each shared caused a level of comfort with people with their culture and because of the importance of family values the students stated a higher motivation to stay within their culture to provide a support system to finish college. Each of the participants maintained a stronger motivation to stay in school when remaining in their culture for social and informal interactions. However, all students, including the students that reported they rarely interacted outside their culture stated in the interview they could see a benefit to interacting outside their culture.



## **Benefits of Interactions**

There were numerous ways students stated they benefit from interactions within and outside of their culture. Both categories of students provided benefits when they became involved with interactional diversity. Whether frequently interaction as per the tables or rare interactions per the tables, students were able to realize benefits to interacting with students outside their culture.

The four students who participated outside their culture frequently discussed higher critical thinking skills, better professional experiences and better life experiences. For example, one of the Mexican female participants stated she was able to understand and perform better than her counter parts due to her level of various interactions performed outside her culture. The Puerto Rican girl added she felt she was improving her critical thinking skills through interacting with people outside her culture. For example, she stated her experience tutoring Spanish to students at the university forced her to think critically in English and then communicate with her students.

The next topic one of the students discussed was better professional experiences. The professional experiences the students endured came from such situations as internships or other career related experiences the university provides. The Mexican female who frequently participated outside of her culture discussed the advantages in terms of professional experience. She mentioned interacting with people outside of her culture was a benefit to her because she was able to act appropriately in unfamiliar situations. For example, she stated that she received an opportunity for an internship and was able to feel comfortable in social situations with the people she worked alongside.

The last concept two of the students mentioned was the impact on life experiences. Both Mexican male students who participated frequently outside their culture shared that they had a similar learning experience interacting with students outside their culture. Each student stated they obtained better life experiences as explained by the Mexican male student. For example, one of the Mexican male students explained that interacting with people outside his culture through student organizations allowed him to realize that he had the ability to finish college. He stated he has seen people from different cultures, such as Asian or Caucasian, whose parents had gone to college and given those students a strong support system to finish college. The Mexican male student believed he could give the same experience to his children. The students who frequently participated outside their culture maintained different yet significant learning experiences. One of the students who rarely participated outside his culture did explain an important experience he had with classroom diversity.

Classroom diversity was explained only as a benefit to the Chicano male student participant. The Chicano male student discussed diversity in curriculum, or classroom diversity. He stated that in his Chicano studies class at the university he was able to discover his identity because he was born in Elkhorn, Wisconsin and maintained values of a child raised in a Midwestern city in the United States; however, he was raised with various Mexican culture concepts. Those concepts the Chicano student discussed included the ability to speak Spanish, eat authentic food and listen to music to name a few concepts from which he identified by his Mexican culture. His Chicano curriculum taught him that recognizing both his American and Mexican cultures classified him as a Chicano person. He saw a benefit to learning about his Chicano heritage in order to give him a sense of identity. Because of classroom diversity, the Chicano student was able to find his identity which he struggled to

discover because he felt he had cultural values from both his Mexican and American identities. This self-discovery allowed him to strengthen his ability to interact with people inside and outside his culture. While he rarely interacted with people outside of his culture, he was able to say he felt more open-minded to different cultures in regards to interactions outside his culture. He also felt more confident with interactions within his culture. Though, the Chicano student struggled more in college because he did not interact with students outside his culture, he was able to interact through a classroom setting. The classroom diversity concept allowed him to discover his own identity in his journey towards higher interactions outside his culture.

### **Perception of Success in Higher Education**

The students had a streamlined concept of success in higher education. All students mentioned the concept of career advancement and financial gain from higher education. The other concept they discussed was how their family and siblings perceived them as college students. All of the success was measured in terms of career success and the positive perception to younger generations. The concepts of interactional diversity within students' perceptions were those of support and motivation. The data supported that motivation and success created in higher education was attained through interactions within their culture but interactions outside their culture created a better learning experience. Also, each of the students found benefits to their critical thinking skills and more importantly their level of open-minded thinking increased the more interaction they obtained from interacting outside their culture. The four students that participated frequently outside of their culture found that their learning and interaction came from informal interactional diversity. For this reason all four students, especially the Puerto Rican student, continued to put herself in a situation of informal interactional diversity. For

example, the Puerto Rican student stated she continuously volunteered to tutor Spanish for students in Spanish classes because it allowed her to informally interact with students outside her culture and she loved it because she loves her language and sharing it with other people. Also, the four students that participated with people outside their culture stated one of the main concepts they learned was patience. The reason they learned patience was due to the fact that people outside their culture had different ways of socializing such as being less friendly in some cases as one of the female Mexican participants said. She stated that time was needed to grow accustomed to the fact that not all people were friendly like in Mexico and she realized it was not about her but it was just the way of life. Patience was one of the main concepts learned by a lot of the Latino students that frequently participated outside of their culture. Also, the female Mexican and the male Chicano student rarely found themselves interacting with people outside their culture in a classroom setting. Yet, all students stated that a majority of their interactions with people outside their culture came from the classroom setting. The interactions made by the students in the classroom setting taught each participant of the level of hard work Americans maintained. Each participant believed if they worked hard they could achieve the American dream. All participants wanted to have a good career and be successful in the United States and through the classroom setting they learned that the United States is a competitive place and to achieve their goals they needed to work equally as hard as Americans. All participants also felt that the classroom is the place they needed to work hard in order to learn how to function in American society.

The four participants that frequently participated in interactional diversity were focused and maintained a direction for their career goals. Each of the four participants had a declared major and had a plan for their future. Each of their interactions outside of their culture had a

purpose. Again, the Puerto Rican female continuously put herself in situations where it was necessary to interact with people outside of her culture; however, she loved to be Puerto Rican. One of the Mexican females that frequently participated outside her culture also frequently taught Spanish as a volunteer at the local high school and, therefore, exuded a higher level of confidence with her interactions outside her culture. The volunteering, she said, was for the purpose of gaining good career when she was done with college. She also put herself in situations where interactional diversity was a necessity to achieve the goals she had set for herself. The two participants that rarely interacted with people outside their culture did not have a declared major and were not sure as to what their plans for their career or their future would hold.

The four students that frequently participated outside of their culture believed they were achieving a higher level of success. They believed it assisted with their improving academics. They did not share their GPA with me; however, they did state they would be on track to graduate with a GPA in which they could be proud. Also, along with their GPA they were achieving a higher level of learning. The higher level of learning discussed as higher critical thinking skills, motivation for college, better professional experience, better life experience, family atmosphere and comfort level in college was based on the fact that the students who were more involved with interactions outside their culture discussed that they felt they obtained a higher level of learning. They attributed their higher level of learning to the success they were obtaining from interactional diversity. Again, the example of patience they learned and also the lesson they believed they learned about hard work in the United States all attributed to their level of high success in higher education. The two participants that did not frequently participate in

interactional diversity did not talk about their level of success in higher education, but rather focused on simply finishing their degree to please their family.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion**

The results showed similarities amongst answers when interactions within one's culture were present. Conversely, slight differences were present in interactions outside the student's culture. The first topic discussed in the conclusion section is the students' cultural identification. The students described the fashion in which they categorized themselves culturally. The next section discussed is the perceived success the students maintained due to interactional diversity inside and outside their culture. The students described the success they obtained from interactional diversity. The third topic discussed is the limitations of the study. The third topic explains that the study had limitations that constrained the studies ability to relate aspects to interactional diversity. The fourth topic discussed was the knowledge gained from the study. This section reports the information obtained from the study and benefits interactional diversity gives to an institute of higher education.

#### **Cultural Identification**

The results of the study align with the concepts of the three types of diversity. Each of the participants identified a majority of their interactions outside of their culture are within an informal manner and the reasons interactional diversity enhanced their student learning. The students felt as though they were able to learn at a higher level and in most cases teach others about their culture. For example, the participant who identified as Chicano found working together with people outside his culture in the classroom setting allowed him to identify himself as a Chicano as opposed to Mexican. All participants followed the pattern that classroom diversity provided them a better learning experience at the university.

Informal interactional diversity was present for each participant and each participant varied in the amount of activities. Four of the six participants were very involved with informal interactional diversity through university clubs and organizations; those four students felt they were content with their learning experience in higher education. The other two students that did not have high levels of informal interactional diversity were still motivated, but were not receiving the same level of learning with their higher educational experience. For example, one of the students who was not highly involved with informal interactional diversity and of Mexican descent stated she felt more comfortable with people of her own race because she could joke with them; however, she was aware of the benefits of informal interactional diversity and felt her learning was at a higher level when she was involved with interactions with people of a different culture. The Puerto Rican participant stated she is a Spanish tutor and she felt proud to teach her language to people outside her culture and this caused her to learn of other cultures.

The students that did participate frequently with students outside their culture were able to align with the concepts of the previous researchers. Previous researchers (Castillo, Conoley & Choi-Pearson, 2006; Denson & Chang, 2009; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado & Gurin, 2002; Valentine, Prentice & Torres, 2012) stated the higher success rate in higher education occurred with people that interact more often with people outside their culture. Each of the students that frequently interacted with people outside their culture were confident, had direction for their career goals and stated they were confident in their academic performance. The students that rarely participated with people outside their culture lacked direction and motivation for finishing college for reasons to enhance their careers. The students that rarely participated in interactions with people outside their culture lacked a sense of direction with career goals and seemed to



want to finish their education for family and other motivations as opposed to finishing for themselves.

Classroom diversity was only seen as important by one of the students. The student found classroom diversity important because it assisted with his self-identification. He rarely participated in interaction with people outside his culture; however, he found an importance to taking a Chicano studies class to learn about his heritage and he found his own identity through classroom diversity. The student was appreciative that the university mandated a class that required diversity. There were other possibilities such as African American Studies or Asian American studies but he was attracted to his Chicano Studies class because he is of Hispanic heritage and he was particularly excited that the class allowed him to realize his own identity.

### **Results of Perceived Success in Higher Education**

All students perceived success in higher education leading to a solid career or financial comfort. Each of the students had an observed benefit to interactional diversity within their educational experience and believed that interactional diversity would help them in their success in higher education. For example, one of the Mexican participants who was born in Mexico City and has been in the United States for the last eleven years stated he found interacting with other cultures and races important to networking. He believed networking is one of the most important ways to obtain a good career and his college education would provide networking opportunities. As stated by Denson and Chang (2006), interactions amongst diverse population create a more open-minded learning experience for students. An interesting finding is that each of the students agreed with Denson and Chang as to the benefits of interactional diversity within their educational experience; but, not all frequently practiced interactional diversity. Those students that did practice repeated interactional diversity did have more experiences that led to a higher

level of learning for their educational experience. To summarize, the students that practiced interactional diversity were more successful in regards to the students' perceived notion of success in higher education compared to the students that practiced interactional diversity outside of their culture less often.

### **Limitations and Recommendations**

The study examined three ways diversity impacts the institution of higher education. The study examined the definition of diversity, the success interactional diversity brings to students and the way students perceive success in higher education. Findings supported all three ways diversity impacts universities; however, limitations were present. There were four ways in which the study was limited. The four ways the study was limited was the amount of participants, more diversity amongst participants, length of the interviews and the design and analysis did not allow more specific information about academic achievement or number of students graduated.

Only six participants were involved in the study, which makes it difficult to create solid assertions to the answers of the study. The small number of participants resulted in a small number of opinions. More students participating in the study would bring different perspectives to the study and either new information could be learned or the study would have obtained stronger validity for information discovered.

Four out of the six participants identified as Mexican and one of the students identified as Chicano which is a type of Mexican culture. The study would be more productive if participants were spread out over more of the possible identities in the Latino community. Obtaining different cultures in the study would give different perspectives to the learning that occurs through interactional diversity in a university environment. A more diverse population for the study would bring a different perspective to diversity and interactional diversity.

The design and analysis of this study did not allow for academic achievement or graduation to be considered. This study attempted to obtain information about academic success. The students continuously said that graduation and obtaining a good career was one of the most important concepts to success. A longitudinal study where the students would disclose their grades at graduation would give more information on the influence interactional diversity maintained on their grades and ability to graduate.

The last limitation to the study was the length of time used to conduct the 10 minute interviews. If the interview could be lengthened and more information could be provided, there would be a higher level of data collection, which could lead to new discoveries. New conclusions could have been made with more time for the interviews. The interview questions served the purpose to uncover interactional diversity experiences from the students.

### **Knowledge Gained**

Diversity gives students a wider spectrum of student learning in higher education. As the numbers of different races and cultures continue to increase, the manner in which people interact and learn in the same environment will prove to be important. Studying diversity in education will give students a more well-rounded education and in turn gives the potential for increased graduation rates and advanced degrees. These increased graduation rates and advanced degrees will provide better worker preparation for the workforce. This study aligned with other researchers such as (Castillo, Conoley & Choi-Pearson, 2006; Denson & Chang, 2009; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado & Gurin, 2002; Valentine, Prentice & Torres, 2012) who argued that interactional diversity enhances the learning environment and overall culture of an institute of higher education.

As a result, understanding interactional diversity and its benefits to higher education provides students an overall better educational experience.

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## Appendix A

### *Interview Questions*

- 1) *How old are you?*
- 2) *Where was your place of birth?*
- 3) *How do you identify yourself culturally?*
- 4) *What is the importance of higher education to you and your family?*
- 5) *What social events or groups do you attend at the University?*
- 6) *What types of interaction do you have with people outside your culture within a classroom or other university academic environment (i.e. group projects, on-campus jobs, etc.)*
- 7) *What benefits do you perceive in interactions outside the culture with which you identify?*
- 8) *What do you consider success in higher education to be?*
- 9) *What social events or groups do you attend outside the ones you consistently attend if any? If you do not then why?*