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# A Phenomenological Exploration of the Non-Academic Factors that Cuban Female Non-Native English Speakers Perceived to have been Principal Influences on their Successful Attainment of a Baccalaureate Degree in the U.S.

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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF THE NON-ACADEMIC FACTORS

THAT CUBAN FEMALE NON-NATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKERS PERCEIVED TO

HAVE BEEN PRINCIPAL INFLUENCES ON THEIR SUCCESSFUL ATTAINMENT

OF A BACCALAUREATE DEGREE IN THE U.S.

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by

Nelson Magaña

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To: Dean Michael R. Heithaus
    College of Arts, Sciences and Education

This dissertation, written by Nelson Magaña, and entitled A Phenomenological Exploration of the Non-Academic Factors That Cuban Female Non-Native English Speakers Perceived to have been Principal Influences on Their Successful Attainment of a Baccalaureate Degree in the U.S., having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this dissertation and recommend that it be approved.

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Guillermo J. Grenier

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Date of Defense: February 28, 2018

The dissertation of Nelson Magaña is approved.

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Dean Michael R. Heithaus
College of Arts, Sciences and Education

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Andrés G. Gil
Vice President for Research and Economic Development
And Dean of the University Graduate School

Florida International University, 2018

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my family, starting with my mother and father who had to endure emigration and eviction from countries they called home. Without their unwavering support and commitment to the transformative power of education, I most certainly would not have journeyed along the path that I have. That journey, of course, put me on a path to the incredibly supportive family I now share my life with. What a journey that has been. This dissertation is dedicated to you, Glenda and Mauricio and Kahlo and Grady.

And to my loving son, Mauricio: You have helped me complete the circle. And here we are. And where *you* go is entirely open. And what a privilege that is. I hope to be there observing and smiling and allowing for decades to come because, after all, I am Mauricio's father.

And to my wife: so many years of dealing with me. Thank you for the incredible support along the way. Everything I know is informed by the life we live and the conversations we have – not possible without you. You taught me to drink, and if that's not a great Irish legacy, I don't know what is.

I also dedicated this dissertation to the many immigrants everywhere in the world – those peoples not wanted by some and blamed by many. You carry sadness and hope and resilience and joy. Your journeys are my inspiration. I am reminded every day, especially in the world we live in today, that education and hope will always trump ignorance and hate.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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FACTORS THAT CUBAN FEMALE NON-NATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKERS

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by

Nelson Magaña

Florida International University, 2018

Professor Tonette S. Rocco, Major Professor

Cubans arrive in the U.S. with more formal education than other Latino
immigrants, and they arrive to communities with long standing networks of support.
Though their baccalaureate degree attainment is better than their non-Cuban Latina
counterparts, Cuban women still lag behind White, non-Latina women.  The qualitative
study aims to explore the principal influences and non-academic factors that 15 adult
Cuban non-native English-speaking women in South Florida attribute to the successful
attainment of their baccalaureate degree.

There are many differences among the various immigrant Latino communities in
the U.S., and Cuban women are largely absent from the research.  Nearly 75% of Cuban
women who start Miami Dade College with English as a second language course-work
drop out within one year of matriculation.  Understanding the principal influences and
non-academic factors related to the baccalaureate attainment rate of this group may assist
educators and administrators in providing the support these women need to enhance their
degree completion.  The literature says that the baccalaureate degree attainment of

Latinos is influenced by age-at-the-time-of-immigration, country of origin, and gender, yet little research was found on the degree attainment specifically of female Cubans who entered the U.S. having already completed most of their education in Cuba.

My dissertation explores the journey of 15 Cuban women who arrived in the U.S. as teens during the 1990s and had to learn English as a second language at an urban community college prior to completing a baccalaureate degree. The purpose of the research is to describe the principal influences and non-academic factors that these women attribute to their baccalaureate degree attainment.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

This phenomenological study describes the principal influences and non-academic factors that 15 adult, non-native English-speaking Cuban women attributed to their baccalaureate degree attainment. Chapter 1 presents the background to the problem, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, and research questions. The conceptual framework, significance of the study, delimitations of the study, definition of terms, summary and organization of the study are also addressed.

### Background to the Problem

Hispanics or Latinos are defined as "persons who trace their origin or descent to Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Central and South America, and other Spanish cultures." (Office of Management and Budget, 1997, p. 58787).  Latinos represent the fastest growing sector of the U.S. population and are projected to make up nearly 25% of our population by the year 2050 (U.S. Census, 2000).  The same rate of growth, however, is not equally evident in the baccalaureate degree attainment of Latinos (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2009; Sanchez, 2000; Vernez & Mizell, 2002).

While the proportion of Latinos age 18-24 enrolled in college in the U.S. increased from 22.4% in 1997, to 26.6% in 2007, the number of baccalaureate degrees conferred did not increase at a comparable rate (Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac, 2009-10).  The gap in baccalaureate degree attainment of Latinos compared to non-Latino Whites relative to the total population increased by nearly 3% between 1997 and 2007 (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2007).  In 1997, Latinos earned 5.3% of all baccalaureates while representing 10.9% of the total U.S. population; in 2007 Latinos

earned 7.5% of all baccalaureates while representing 15.1% of the total population. In other words, of the 1,524,092 baccalaureates conferred in 2007, fewer than 115,000 were conferred to Latinos, while Whites earned nearly 1.1 million of those degrees.

Because of the low baccalaureate attainment rate of Latinos, much research has been devoted to identifying the obstacles to their successful degree completion (Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Fry, 2002; Vernez & Mizell, 2002). Most of the research, however, references Latinos under one umbrella, and this fails to recognize the large variety of ethnic groups with diverse histories that the Latino or Hispanic ethnonym contains (Garcia & Bayer, 2005; Mendez, Astiz, & Beltran, 2000). The research on Latino college success also references Latinos without considering their sex, age-at-the-time-of-immigration, or country of origin - all factors that greatly affect educational outcomes (Vernez & Mizell, 2002). A failure to consider these factors further contributes to the lack of specificity regarding issues that affect the baccalaureate attainment of Latinos in the U.S.

Latinas, females within this group, are significantly less likely to pursue the baccalaureate degree than their male counterparts (Vernez & Abrahamse, 1996), yet there is a dearth of literature that looks at the outcomes of Latinas in particular (Rodriguez, Guido-DeBrito, & Torres, 2000). Garcia and Bayer (2005) suggest that gender identity and social structure account for some of the disparity in the outcomes of Latinas. Women are expected to stay at home and therefore neglect their education.

In Latin American societies these *machisitic* notions relegate women to the "home sphere". As such, female children are taught the skills necessary to perform social functions that focus on familial needs, while

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male children learn the skills necessary and instrumental for survival outside the home (Garcia & Bayer, 2005, p.519).

The age at which a Latina immigrant arrives in the U.S. also has a substantial influence on her educational achievement and outcomes because Latinas whose principal education took place in their country of origin reflect the educational system of that country, whereas Latinas who were educated in the U.S. reflect the American educational system (Vernez & Mizell, 2002). Latinas who enter the country in their adolescence pursue the baccalaureate degree in very small numbers (Erisman & Looney, 2007; Vernez & Mizell, 2002), while those adolescents who complete all their secondary education in the U.S. and graduate are as likely to pursue postsecondary education and succeed as native-born Americans (Vernez & Mizell, 2002).

The national picture of a Latino(a) is modeled after Latinos of Mexican heritage because Latinos of Mexican heritage make up nearly 65% of the Latino population in the U.S. (U.S. Census, 2012). The single picture of Latinos does not adequately describe the nuanced Latino experience in the U.S. and thus fails to adequately describe the nuanced educational challenges as well. The composition of Latinos in South Florida, for example, is unique. Cuban Latinos in Miami-Dade County represent 52% of the Latino population, though nationally Cubans make up less than 4% of the Latino population (U.S. Census, 2012). Moreover, "Cubans in Miami have had a qualitatively different experience from that of other Latino immigrants" (Grenier & Perez, 2003, p. 31). Mexican Latinos in South Florida represent 3% of the population, while "other" Latinos represent 39% (U.S. Census, 2012).

Cuban women in South Florida fill college campuses across the various municipalities. Miami Dade College, the nation's largest community college with seven campuses, has some campuses that have more than 70% of their student-body made up of women (Miami Dade College Fact Book, 2012).  A large number of these women were born in Cuba and need to learn English because they arrived in the U.S. after completing most of their secondary education in Cuba.  These adult Cuban women who enroll at Miami Dade College and need to learn English, however, drop out at a rate of almost 75% within a year of starting school, and fewer than 13% of those who stay go on to complete an Associate's degree within five years (Bashford, 2011, p. 1).   A small number will eventually earn a baccalaureate degree.  Consequently, "Cuban females generally continue to have low incomes long after they arrive" (Grenier & Perez, 2003, p. 51).

The baccalaureate degree represents an increase in lifetime earnings estimated at more than $1 million (Day & Newburger, 2002), and it represents greater social status (Torche, 2011).  It is "a piece of paper that means this person is somebody" (Erisman & Looney, 2007, p.17).  For Hialeah, the second largest city in Miami Dade County and fifth largest in Florida, with a baccalaureate attainment rate less than 17%, achieving the national average attainment rate would have an impact worth billions of dollars of earned income over the course of a generation (Carnevale & Fry, 2000).

An increase in the baccalaureate attainment rate of Cuban women in South Florida would impact thousands of people, entire communities, and subsequent generations.  South Florida could make great gains by increasing the attainment rate of baccalaureate degrees among Cuban Latinas considering their low completion rate

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relative to their high initial college participation.  The challenge in higher education is not getting Cuban Latinas *to* college, but rather getting them to graduate with a baccalaureate degree *from* college.

## Statement of the Problem

Degree completion in the U.S. is increasingly more difficult, with fewer than 50% of students graduating from a 4-year public university within six years of initial matriculation and fewer than 35% of students graduating from a 2-year public institution within six year of initial matriculation (National Student Clearinghouse, 2013).  The hurdles of degree attainment are compounded for immigrants who need to learn a new language as well as learn how to navigate a foreign culture in tandem with pursuing their education.  Even though the proportion of Latinos on college campuses in the U.S. is increasing (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017), Latinos fail to attain baccalaureate degrees in numbers that reflect their initial college enrollment (Fry, 2002).

Baccalaureate degree attainment is less than 16% for foreign born Latinos compared to nearly 37% for White, non-Hispanics (Ryan & Siebens, 2012). Complicating these data is the fact that Latinos are of varied backgrounds whose nuances are not well understood.  Their college enrollment and success rates vary greatly among the various countries of origin represented in the U.S. (Vernez & Mizell, 2002).  Table 1 summarizes the differences in education and geographical distribution among various Latino populations in the U.S.

While Cubans make up an overwhelming proportion of Latinos in South Florida, there is a scarcity of research on their college degree completion (Torres, 2004).  Cubans arrived in the U.S. legally in a community with strong networks of support, and they

Table 1

*Latinos in the U.S.: By the Numbers*

| Country/Region of Origin | Percent of All Latinos | Average Level of Education of Foreign Born | States Impacted % of Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Mexico | 63.0% | 10th Grade | CA / 36% |
| Cuba | 3.5% | HS Graduate | FL / 70% |
| Puerto Rico | 9.2% | NA | NY / 23% |
| Other | 6.8% | 12 Grade – No Diploma | CA / 17% |

*Source:* U.S. Bureau of the Census' 2010 Current Population Survey

arrived with more initial education than Mexican or Puerto Rican Latinos (Torres, 2004; Grenier & Perez, 2003; Ryan & Siebens, 2012). Their legal status gives them immediate access to federal aid - a head start not afforded most other Latino immigrants. What further distinguishes the population of Cubans in South Florida is the disproportionately high percentage of Cuban women who fill South Florida's college campuses. Much has been theorized about the lack of success and degree attainment of Latinas, but little has been written about the successes (Zalaquett, 1997). The picture of Cuban successes is even less clear.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the phenomenological study was to identify and describe the principal influences and non-academic factors that 15 adult, Cuban non-native English speaking female participants attributed to their successful attainment of a baccalaureate degree to help educators identify and deliver appropriate and timely support within the college environment in Miami.

## Research Questions Guiding the Study

The primary research question guiding this study was: What were the principal non-academic factors that the 15 adult Cuban women attributed to their baccalaureate degree attainment? Secondary research questions are:

1. What family support was available to Cuban women degree completers?

2. What support from their college did these Cuban women attribute to their degree completion?

3. What barriers did these Cuban women overcome to complete their degrees?

4. What were the competing priorities in the lives of these Cuban women that they had to negotiate?

## Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for my study emerged from the retention literature of the 1970s. The early work on retention was grounded in French sociologist Emile Durkheim's (1951) theories on suicide. Durkheim suggested that an individual's decision to kill herself - to drop out of life, essentially - was largely related to the degree to which that individual had sufficient social and moral support and integration.

William Spady (1970) and Vincent Tinto (1975) were the first to propose the now widely accepted notion that a student's decision to drop out of school was largely related to the interaction between the social and academic systems of an institution. Social integration, they noted, was a key factor in fostering a sense of belonging - belonging in *life* for Durkheim and belonging in *school* for Spady and Tinto. Tinto (1975) suggested

that an institution sufficiently committed to a student can compensate for a lack of commitment on behalf of the student.

While much work has been devoted since the 1970s to identify the influence of social and academic interactions at various types of institutions and for various types of students, many voices within many settings remain unheard.  Tinto (2006) acknowledged that the early retention studies did not sufficiently consider the non-traditional students currently filling college campuses.  Colleges now have larger cohorts of minority students (Fry, 2010).  Colleges now have older students staying in school for longer periods of time who navigate in and out of school as their lives change.  Two-year colleges now enroll nearly half of the country's student population (Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac, 2005; Sandy, Gonzalez, & Hilmer, 2006), yet 2-year colleges are scarcely represented in retention studies (Pascarella, 2006).  The present study looked at non-native English speaking adult Cuban women who studied and succeeded at a South Florida community college.  The study identified and described the non-academic factors that 15 adult Cuban non-native English-speaking women attributed to their retention and success while at college.

<div align="center">**Significance of the Study**</div>

Cubans continue to represent the largest number of Latinos currently immigrating to South Florida where they arrive legally to a community that has built a 50-year-old network of support with easy access to employment and education (Grenier & Perez, 2003; Portes & Stepick, 1993).  The study will contribute to the field of Adult Education and Higher Education by richly describing the experience of 15 adult Cuban women degree completers who started at a community college in South Florida and attained a

baccalaureate degree at a South Florida University. These stories provide examples for others who may be uncertain they can overcome barriers to their success. My study will assist educators in identifying and providing the support and resources that adult Cuban women could benefit from in order to improve their rate of degree completion.

Persistence and retention theory tells us that a key component that contributes to high retention is the interaction between a student and her institution, both academically and socially. The research, however, has mainly focused on traditional-aged students at 4-year institutions from predominantly non-Latino White backgrounds or Latinos lumped together under a term that fails to recognize their nuanced experiences. My study identified the non-academic factors in and outside of the institution that adult Cuban women in South Florida who attended a 2-year institution in particular attributed to their success. Their voice had been largely absent in the literature.

The manner in which Tinto's social and academic interactions occur varies greatly by the type of institution attended by the student and age of the student, while the student's initial college participation and educational level vary greatly by gender, age-at-the-time-of-immigration, and country of origin.

If Miami is indeed the northern most Cuban city in the U.S., as is jokingly said in South Florida, then Cuban women should attain baccalaureate degrees at a significantly higher rate than they currently do. We have read about the characteristics of Latinas who do not succeed in college. Our understanding is less clear of Cubanas who do succeed.

### Delimitations of the Study

This study explored the experiences of 15 Cuban women who arrived in the U.S. as young adults and lived in South Florida where Cubans are a majority and Spanish is

common.  It did not describe the experience of men, and it did not describe the experience of Cuban women in a community where Cubans are a minority.  Furthermore, the dissertation examined the experiences of Cuban women who started their post-secondary education at a community college rather than a university.

The socio-economic status (SES), ethnicity, and education of the families of the adult Cuban women were also not addressed in this study beyond what is anecdotally reported by the participants and described within the context of their interviews.

## Definition of Terms

In the document readers will see the term Latino and Hispanic used to refer to the same collective group of people whose origin or ancestry is from the Americas or Caribbean countries whose native tongue is Spanish.  These terms are used interchangeably throughout the literature, and they are quoted as such.  It is not within the scope of this paper to argue the meaning and merit of Latino or Hispanic.

*Adult.*  Merriam and Brockett (1997) refer to an adult as someone "whose age, social roles, or self-perception define them as adults" (p. 8).

*Chicano/a.*  The term Chicano was first used by persons of Mexican ancestry to refer to each other.  It is derived from the language of the Meshica people, known to us as the Aztecs. *Shicano* is an abbreviated form of Meshicano, whose pronunciation would later be changed to Chicano (Gutierrez, 2011).

*English as a second language (ESL).*  English as a second language, also referred to as English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), refers to specialized English language instruction for nonnative speakers (Carrasquillo, 1994).

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*English for academic purposes (EAP).* The EAP classes at Miami Dade College are for English language learners interested in earning a degree or certificate in college. The EAP program consists of six levels, with four skill area courses in each level taught during the day and evening.

*Ethnicity*. Ethnicity and race invoke strong emotional reactions in people and their meaning and value are highly debated. For the purpose of this paper, ethnicity was used following the Merriam-Webster (n.d.) definition that relates ethnicity with large groups of people who have the same customs, religion, origin, etc.

*Hispanic.* The term Hispanic was coined in the U.S. as a way to group people with Spanish as their common ancestral language (Castellanos & Jones, 2003). This term was used throughout this study as it was used by its participants or within the literature.

*Latino/a.* The term Latino was introduced in the U.S. in 1987 as a way to include everyone whose ancestry is from Latin America regardless of native language or heritage (Castellanos & Jones, 2003). This term includes countries such as Brazil who speak Portuguese and the Quechua people (among other indigenous peoples) who may or may not speak Spanish. The term Latinas refers to females within this group.

*Non-academic factors*. For the purpose of this paper, non-academic factors refers to factors outside the cognitive domain; e.g., placement test scores and grade point average (GPA). Non-academic factors can be found in a university (social involvement support, advisers, mentors, work-study programs, and other such forms of intentional institutional commitment), and they can be found completely outside of the university, such as family and community support, employment, etc. (Lotkowski, Robbins, & Noeth,

2004).  Non-academic factors that are not considered in this research are those

psychological factors associated with coping mechanisms, grit, and self-determination.

*Phenomenology.*  Phenomenological research "focuses on the subjective

experience of the individual [and] seeks to understand the essence or structure" of that

experience (Merriam, 2002, p. 93).

*Stop-out.*  Stop-out refers to students who take extended breaks from school, but

intend on returning.  These are students who do not enroll continually for the fall/spring

combination of semesters (Grosset, 1993).

### Summary and Organization of the Study

Latinos differ greatly by country of origin.  The differences between them are

more pronounced when factoring in recency of immigration.  Whereas those who arrived

as young children tend to perform well in school, those who arrive as teenagers face a

difficult road academically. Learning a language and situating oneself in a new world

pose immense challenges over and above the difficulty of adolescence itself.

Most Cuban Latinos live in one geographical area where they have become a

majority, exercising a great influence on local politics and the local economy (Grenier &

Perez, 2003).  Cuban Latinos in Miami are presidents of banks and colleges, and they

have a half-century foothold in a community that is barely one hundred years old.

Housing, employment, and social capital are abundantly available to Cubans in Miami.

As such, Cuban women, who are disproportionately represented at Miami Dade College

(MDC Annual Credit Student Enrollment Profile, 2009), should attain baccalaureate

degrees in much higher numbers than they currently do.  The baccalaureate serves as the

great emancipator of families and communities, and that 120-credit investment by a

higher percentage of South Florida's Cuban women represents the difference between living in a poor community and one of affluence.

Chapter 1 provided an introduction to the study highlighting the reasons why it is important to disaggregate research that references Latinos as one group and considers age and gender as important factors. It identifies Cuban women as a large cohort that significantly impacts South Florida with the potential to be a great catalyst for upward mobility. Chapter 2 reviews the relevant literature that supports the study. Chapter 3 provides details of the phenomenological study that will be used to collect and analyze the various stories. Chapter 4 presents the findings. Chapter 5 discusses the implications for the practice of teaching adult Cuban women and makes recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER II

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The dissertation looked at the non-academic factors that 15 Cuban women identified as principal influences on the completion of their baccalaureate degree after having taken English for Academic Purposes (EAP) classes at Miami Dade College. The study controlled for two characteristics that were intentionally selected in the participants chosen: (a) the age of the women at the time of their immigration, and (b) the country of origin of the women who participated in the study. The study looked at the non-academic factors identified by these participants as contributing to their retention, progression and baccalaureate degree completion. This chapter is divided into the following sections: (a) the value of the baccalaureate degree, (b) the factors associated with the retention and persistence of different types of college students in the U.S., and (c) the characteristics of Cuban immigrants in the U.S. compared to other Latino immigrants.

### On The Value of the Baccalaureate

The U.S. is currently experiencing the highest college attainment rate in its history. Approximately 26% of the population over 25 years of age holds at least a baccalaureate degree (Day & Newburger, 2002; Torche, 2011). The younger population with more formal schooling is replacing the older population. While an education has always been seen as a sound investment for individuals and society, the great increase in the cost of college merits a fresh look at whether a college education is still a worthy expense. The following represents a select sample of more recent research on the subject.

Day and Newburger (2002), in a U.S. Census report, compared the average lifetime salaries of workers with various levels of educational attainment -- what they call

"synthetic work-life earnings" (p. 1).  In 1975 the average lifetime earnings of someone

with a baccalaureate degree was 1.5 times that of someone with only a high school

diploma, while in 1999 the average earnings increased to 1.8 times that of someone with

only a high school diploma.  The greatest gains in wages occur when going from a high

school diploma to a bachelor's degree.  While all increases in levels of education show

gains in wages, the attainment of a baccalaureate degree represents an increase of nearly

$1 million dollars over an average working adult life, versus $400,000 for an associate's

degree and $400,000 when going from a bachelor's degree to a master's degree (p.4).

Day and Newburger (2002) further look at the value of the baccalaureate degree

for Latinos and Blacks.  "Though on average, work-life earning are lower for Blacks and

Hispanics than White non-Hispanics of the same educational attainment level, the

educational investment still pays off" (p. 7).

Baum, Ma & Payea (2013) present an updated and exhaustive report and literature

review that highlights the numerous benefits of a baccalaureate degree.  Baccalaureate

completers have lower levels of obesity, smoke significantly less, spend more time on

their children's activities, vote at significantly higher rates, and had an unemployment

rate in 2012 that was 7.1% lower than high school graduates without a baccalaureate

degree (p. 5).  College-educated adults are more likely to have health insurance, and are

thus more likely to be health literate.

Baum et al. (2013) emphasize that the baccalaureate is especially valuable for

women.  Full-time working women with a bachelor's degree in 2011 earned 70% more

than full time working women who only had a high school diploma.  This gap in earning

potential of the baccalaureate degree versus a high school diploma has increased by

nearly 30% since 1971 for women, while increasing 44% for men. Clearly, "both individuals and society as a whole benefit from increased levels of education" (p. 5).

Ross and Mirowsky (1999) conducted a quantitative analysis to measure the association between education and health by looking at the effects of: 1) years of schooling, 2) credential earned, and 3) degree of selectivity of the college or university attended. They use a national survey of nearly 2,600 individuals, with an oversample of elderly folks to gather a better picture of overall health. The results point to a significant association between health and number of years in school up to 16 years, while they show little association related to the attainment of an actual degree and little association related to the level of selectivity of the institution attended. They conclude, "The more years of schooling a person has, the better his or her health" (p. 457).

Torche (2011), using results from five longitudinal data sets, confirms that the baccalaureate degree remains the great social mobility equalizer in economic attainment. "The intergenerational socioeconomic association…virtually disappears among those with a terminal bachelor's degree. The chances of achieving economic success are independent of social background among those who attain a [baccalaureate]" (p. 798). The baccalaureate degree is the credential that best levels the economic playing field. While people without a college degree and people with advanced, professional degrees benefit from coming from families of means, people who attain the baccalaureate do just as well regardless of their or their family's initial social standing.

The baccalaureate also serves as a strong buffer during periods of recession. Erisman and Looney (2007), in a report that pulls data from the U.S. Census and National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), note that the unemployment rate in 2005 was 3%

better for baccalaureate completers than high school graduates without a degree and over 6% better than for those without a high school diploma.

It is clear that a baccalaureate degree remains a valuable investment for individuals and society. The baccalaureate helps Whites, Blacks and Latinos, and it especially helps level the playing field for women.

## On Retention and Persistence

Vincent Tinto's work on student retention and persistence provides the framework that informs this research study. Though Tinto was not the first to look at dropouts (his original model acknowledged the work of William Spady in 1970, and Spady in turn acknowledged work prior to his own research), Tinto's work in 1975 is widely recognized as the first to propose a model and framework that suggested dropping out was a result of an *interaction* between the institution and the individual. Most of the research on dropouts prior to Tinto's model was descriptive and devoid of any explanatory conceptual framework (Pantages & Creedon, 1978; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1977).

Tinto's model of retention synthesized the work of French sociologist Emile Durkheim's theories on suicide (1951) with theories of economics that look at decisions primarily as value judgments – whether it is more worthwhile to be in school or out of school (Tinto, 1975). While Durkheim suggested that suicide, or dropping out of life, is largely related to the degree to which an individual has sufficient social support and moral integration, Tinto proposed that dropping out of college was also largely due to ineffective integration - a lack of integration with the institution and a lack of social integration while *at* the institution.

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…the lack of consistent and rewarding interactions with others in the

college (e.g. friendship support) and the holding of value patterns that are

dissimilar from those of the general social collectivity of the college.

Presumably, lack of integration into the social system of the college will

result in low commitment to the institution and increase the probability

that individuals will drop out (1975, p. 37).

William Spady (1970), who also cited Emile Durkheim as a principal influence on

his work, recognized the "interaction between student attributes (i.e., dispositions,

interest, attitudes, and skills) and the influences, expectations, and demands imposed by

various sources in the university environment" as principal factors that should inform

future dropout research (p. 64). While William Spady laid the groundwork for Tinto's

theories, Tinto formulated a model and conceptual framework that would subsequently

ignite the field of dropout prevention.

The work of Tinto and Spady in the 1970s kicked off decades of extensive

research on retention, estimated at between 6,000 and 7,000 studies (Pascarella, 2006),

with much of the early work devoted to testing or validating Tinto's model (Bean, 1980;

Terenzini & Pascarella, 1980) or later providing a more nuanced look at the subject

(Bennett & Okinaka, 1990; Endo & Harpel, 1982; Nora, 1987; Pascarella et al., 1996).

Tinto's theory on the significance of interactions between the social and academic

systems of the institution has been largely validated as a principal influence on a

student's decision to leave school. Exactly how those interactions occur and what they

look like for different types of students at different types of institutions, however, became

the subject of much subsequent work. The early research "did not, in its initial

formulation, speak to the experience of students in other types of institutions…and of students of different gender, race, ethnicity, income, and orientation" (Tinto, 2006, p. 3).

Terenzini and Pascarella (1977), in a multivariate analysis at one large institution, observed the "possibility that frequent interaction with faculty members may represent a principal vehicle for the socialization of students into both the social and academic realms of an institution" (p. 41). Endo & Harpel (1982) supported this observation in their study that analyzed data from a questionnaire that was "conceptually designed to be combined into scales which would measure one expectation variable, four student-faculty interaction variables, and nine outcome variables" (p. 122). Their results indicated that the frequency of *informal* student-faculty interactions had the most impact on students' social and academic success. Indeed, whether the interaction was formal or informal, "faculty may be strong models for intellectual growth (p. 133).

The early retention research of the 1970s and 1980s culminated into two seminal texts by Astin (1993) and Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) that synthesize twenty years of research on the effects colleges have on students' lives. Astin most notably observed student maturation that is consistent with the goals of a liberal education as demonstrated by "students' commitment to developing a meaningful philosophy of life, coupled with their decreased interest in being very well off financially" (p. 146). Pascarella and Terenzini, like Astin, also emphasize the greater value placed by college students on a liberal education as demonstrated by "gains in their aesthetic, cultural, and intellectual sophistication, gains that are complemented by increased interests and activities in such areas as art, classical music, reading…the humanities and performing arts" (p. 559).

The early retention research also argued for a more inclusive approach going forward that spoke to the changing landscape in higher education. Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) recognized that their studies of predictive behaviors largely depend on and reflect the type of students being studied - the characteristics of specific students - and the characteristics of specific institutions (p. 73). As Olivas (1983) noted, "The fertile void in the literature on Hispanic students is a handicap in our understanding of the condition of Hispanic education" (p. 136).

**On the Relationship between the Ethnicity of Minorities and Retention**

Starting in the 1980s, some research on retention and persistence turned to non-majority student populations. Bennett and Okinaka (1990) looked at retention and persistence among Blacks, Hispanics and Asians at a 4-year university. They found notable differences among Black and Asian persisters versus White persisters, while White and Hispanic persisters exhibited similar associations between alienation and retention. In contrast to Whites and Hispanics, "Blacks and Asians in their fourth year on campus, the persisters, feel less satisfied and more socially alienated than do the Black and Asian students who have left the university" (p. 33). This research does provide more specificity regarding Black students. However, the study only sampled 72 Hispanic students and grouped them all into one broad category.

Amaury Nora, along with other colleagues (Nora, 1987; Nora & Anderson, 2003; Nora & Cabrera, 1994, 1996; Nora, Cabrera, Hagedorn, & Pascarella, 1996; Nora & Crisp, 2009; Nora & Oliva, 2004), has conducted extensive research on minority student success and retention, much of it emphasizing Latinos. Nora (1987) looks at institutional and educational goal commitments in an early test of Tinto's model of retention as it

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relates to 157 students sampled from a population of nearly 4,000 Chicano community college students in Texas. He looks at the role of significant others on the persistence of Hispanics in a 1994 conference paper, and Nora later (2004) looks at the role of policy and practice on Latino student success. His work, though using sound research methods, generalizes Latinos as one group or emphasizes Chicanos. Nora's work also mostly focuses on 4-year universities. Nora's research does not speak to the experience of the hundreds of thousands of Cuban Latinos who live in South Florida.

Sylvia Hurtado, alone and with various colleagues, also has an extensive body of research on the success and retention of Latinos (Hurtado, 1994; Hurtado, Carter & Spuler, 1996; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, & Allen, 1999; Hurtado & Kamimura, 2004, Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005). Like Amaury Nora, all of her work also references Latinos as one group without accounting for the regional differences of Latinos in the U.S. and without consideration of the differences that Latinos from different countries bring. We gain little insight that is applicable to South Florida's Cuban Latinos.

More recently, the value of mentoring has been noted as playing a significant role on the academic success of communities of color. Strayhorn and Terrel (2007) observed a positive relationship between mentoring and African American students' stated satisfaction with college. Similarly, Bordes and Arredondo (2005) found a positive relationship between first year Latino students and their comfort level in their university environment. The mentoring literature, however, is largely based on experiences at universities with faculty serving in formal mentoring capacities.

Clewell and Ficklen (1986) produced a comprehensive snapshot of successful programs geared toward the retention of minorities at 4-year majority White institutions.

Their nearly 200-page report, however, mostly looks at programs for Black students, with a brief mention of programs aimed at Latinos, defined as mostly Chicanos. The report also culls its data from Boston College, California State University at Fresno, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and Purdue. These schools clearly do not represent the experience of South Florida Cuban Latinos, and they do not present an applicable model for community colleges.

While the decades following Tinto's original model and theories on student departure produced a meaningful body of research sensitive to the peculiarities of non-White students, the research continued to reference Latinos as one homogenous group through the 2000s-2010s (Alberta, Castellanos, Lopez & Rosales, 2005; Hernandez, 2000; Hernandez & Lopez, 2004; Longerbeam, Sedlacek & Alatorre, 2004; Torres, 2006). The research also looked almost exclusively at 4-year universities (Pascarella, 2006). As Kasworm's (2010) case study participants observe, the university structures and functions seem intended for younger students (p. 157). South Florida's adult Cuban non-native English speakers enrolled in college are not observed in the literature regarding the retention of Latinos or in the literature regarding retention at 4-year universities.

**On the Relationship between Community Colleges and Retention**

Whereas 4-year universities traditionally were where most college-bound students opted to attend in the past, community college enrollment has been increasing at twice their rate for the last 50 years (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Sandy, Gonzalez, & Hilmer, 2006). Community colleges now account for the largest, single piece of the higher education pie (Tinto, 2004). We also know that the process of retention is different at

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community colleges than at 4-year universities (Borglum & Kubala, 2000; Pascarella, Smart, & Ethington, 1986).

Bean and Metzner (1985) were one of the first to produce a comprehensive reassessment of the attrition process for non-traditional students and looked at the outcomes at various types of institutions. They conclude that environmental factors – non-academic factors - such as the number of hours an individual is required to be at work or responsibilities at the family level play a more important role in the retention of non-traditional students than in the retention of traditional students. An academically good non-traditional student, for example, might drop out of school if she has a change in her work schedule or if she is unable to pay for school. "Environmental support compensates for weak academic support, but academic support will not compensate for weak environmental support" (p. 492).

Bean and Metzner (1985), however, define non-traditional students by many factors unrelated to institution type alone and look at data sets from multiple institution types. We are left unsure of the significance of any one factor. As they acknowledge:

> A model that tries to capture the general differences between traditional
> and non-traditional students will miss many of the details of the attrition
> process for non-traditional students and thus may fail to account for much
> of the variance found in specific non-traditional subpopulations (Bean &
> Metzer, 1985, p. 530).

Tinto (1997) observed that, given the challenging lives of commuter students, there is a greater importance on student engagement in the classroom at 2-year colleges. Likewise, Kasworm (2005) suggests that adults, who tend to be more highly represented

at community colleges, become engaged *inside* the classroom rather than outside the classroom, as traditional-aged students do in their residential life experience.  "This metaphor of the connected classroom represented the social and psychological space for learning through connecting one's adult life to one's academic studies and adult student lives" (Kasworm, 2005, p. 4).  Because of the myriad obligations that students at 2-year colleges tend to have – most of whom would be defined as adults by Merriam and Brockett (1997) by virtue of their roles - in-class social integration "may be the only viable path to greater student involvement" (Tinto, 1997, p. 614).  Moreover, those adults negotiating school *and* a family are also left to negotiate the conflict inherent in their family's support *and* their family's need for that parent to simply be home; Those two feelings are not mutually exclusive (Rizer, 2005).

Neither Kasworm nor Tinto, however, study a specific subset of adult Latinos in the community college classroom or adult second-language learners (from any country) in the community college classroom.  They, too, look at an overarching student population bound by institution or age, rather than by the specifics of a more narrowly defined set of characteristics within that institution.

Borglum & Kubala (2000) and Sorey & Duggan (2008) arrive at opposite conclusions regarding the correlation between academic and social integration and persistence in a community college.  Borglum & Kubala looked at a population of over 24 thousand students at Valencia Community College in Florida and found no correlation with withdrawal rates, while Sorey & Duggan studied a random sample of 350 students from Tidewater Community College and found social integration to be a principal predictor of retention.  Their opposite conclusions regarding the impact of social

integration on student retention demonstrates the importance of the specific

characteristics of students in a research study.  Since community colleges tend to attract

their students from the community where they are located (American Association of

Community Colleges, 2014), it stands to reason that findings from community colleges in

different regions of the country with different populations will yield noticeably different

results.  Neither study made mention of the ethnicity and/or nationality of the students

being studied, though they were case studies of a single institution.

Pascarella, Smart, & Ethington (1986) conducted a long-term study of persistence

at community colleges, where they define persistence as the attainment of a baccalaureate

degree over the course of nine years.  They followed a sample of 825 students in and out

of various institutions and mostly validate Tinto's model of retention within the 2-year

college.  They provide further insight into the differences in men and women, with

women benefiting significantly from leadership opportunities in college while men

strongly benefit from relationships with faculty or college administrators.  They only,

however, code students as "minority" or White/Caucasian, providing little specificity as

to the variances among students of different countries of origin.

Cate Almon (2015) specifically looks at the success and challenges of English

Language Learners (ELL) at a community college, but does so with a small cross section

of students that includes students of various backgrounds with varied native languages in

a community that offered them little support.

Most other studies on the retention of students at community colleges speak to the

effects of: (1) the age of students with no regard to their background characteristics

(Greer, 1980; Lanni, 1997), (2) the ethnicity of students with no regard to country of

origin (for Latinos) or age (Mohammadi, 1994; Zhao, 1999), or (3) community colleges in general, without specifying any student demographics at all (Cofer & Somers, 2001; Wortman & Napoli, 1996). While this research adds to our existing body of knowledge on retention, it does not provide enough specificity considering there is tremendous variety of students who attend community colleges (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014). Non-native English speakers from Cuba attending college in South Florida remain unheard in this body of work.

**On the Relationship between Non-Academic Factors and Retention**

The increase in participation of non-traditional and underrepresented populations in post-secondary education and post-secondary education research broadened the scope of our understanding of the impact of non-academic factors on retention - what Tinto described as the impact of social systems, though Tinto more narrowly defined and situated those systems within a traditional institution for traditional populations. Non-academic factors are increasingly more important to non-traditional student populations (Jeffreys, 2007), and they can be found in and out of the institution. Furthermore, Lotkowski, Robbins, and Noeth (2004) conclude that students perform best when academic factors and nonacademic factors coalesce in an integrated manner.

Bean and Metzner (1985) looked at non-academic factors outside of the institution that affect student outcomes and concluded that work-life and family-life play a significant role in the retention of non-traditional students. They do not, however, describe how these factors interact and affect student success among more narrowly defined underserved populations.

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Regarding work, Canabal (1998) suggests that grades may not be impacted by work-life, though time to degree attainment is. Choi (2018) provides a more nuanced and updated assessment of the impact of employment and suggests that work intensity is what impacts student outcomes, rather than work alone. The right job might indeed help, though his research focuses on the impact on students attending 4-year institutions.

The effect of family background, parental support, and the support of friends as important predictors of post-secondary achievement is widely evident in post-secondary education research on multiple populations at many types of institutions (Tobey, 1996; Ransdell, 2001; Ceja, 2004; Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez & Rosales, 2005). Family and friends matter. The research, however, does not capture the voice of Cuban women in South Florida and their experience learning English and successfully completing a baccalaureate degree.

### On the Education of Adults in Particular

The aging American population, coupled with changes in demographic distribution in the U.S., have caused an increase in the participation of adults in educational pursuits (Burns & Gabrich, 2001;). Moreover, for the past 30 years, the increase in the educational pursuit of adults has been significantly higher for adult women than for adult men (Cross, 1980). In 2007, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that 38% of all college students were nontraditional. It thus behooves us to think about adults separately from college students, though they are frequently found in the same higher education settings.

Adults face significant challenges in pursuing greater education. They juggle competing priorities with a significantly reduced amount of time available for school.

Though adult students with family obligations will struggle with these competing demands, this struggle can also serve as an asset through the increased inspiration and social support the family can provide (Burns & Gabrich, 2001; Rizer, 2005; Ross-Gordon, 2011). The pressure of family, however, is particularly difficult for women, who tend to carry a greater load with these responsibilities (Tittle & Denker, 1977).

Kasworm (2005) recognized that social connections for adults attending college must happen in class due to the great demands of time on adult students. Kasworm validates the importance of social systems as a significant non-academic factor that impacts the success of students, but locates this opportunity for adult students in the classroom because of the great demands of time on adults. Adults, after all, will be hard pressed to join student organizations and attend college activities after class if they have families and responsibilities waiting at home.

The impact of non-academic factors is further validated in Park and Choi's (2009) research on the success of adults participating in distance education courses. Even with the flexibility afforded by distance programs, families can both inhibit and enhance success. Non-academic factors influence the success of adult students in various settings. Shields (1994) focused on a group of adult students at a midwestern, urban commuter institution. Outside social support and number of hours worked were significantly important. Communication with faculty advisors and professional advisors was also described as impactful for adult students' success.

Adult students in various settings all benefit from non-cognitive, non-academic factors. The voice that remains absent in the literature is that of the adult Cubans –

Cuban women, more specifically - in South Florida, where they are a majority and enjoy a great deal of social capital and wealth.

## On Latinos in the U.S.

*"Latino history has become a confused and painful algebra of race, culture, and conquest… whoever owns the beginning has dignity, whoever owns the beginning, owns the world"* (Shorris, 1992, p. 5).

By 2020, it is projected that more than 20% of all children under the age of 18 in the U.S. will be Latino, and Latinos will account for 51 percent of the population growth through 2050 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003).  While the research suggests that Latinos are enrolling in college in higher numbers than Whites, they tend to enroll in community colleges that traditionally have had lower completion rates than universities; they tend to study part-time; and they tend to choose academic pathways that offer fewer opportunities of obtaining a baccalaureate degree (Fry, 2002).  Unlike Asians, who tend to outperform the White population and display an immigrant advantage, being an immigrant does not improve Latino outcomes (Fry, 2002)

Latinos in the U.S. have been studied and grouped into one category by virtue of a common native tongue and a common colonizer (Llagas & Snyder, 2003).  This is like categorizing Australians, Jamaicans, and Americans into one group – each has a common language, and each was colonized by a common country.  Though commonalities do exist among the various Latino communities living in the U.S., as commonalities exist among Jamaicans and Australians, the differences are great.  "How is group-identity possible when each individual is an amalgam of unique characteristics and each community and culture is a mix" (Espinoza, 1994).

Latinos of different nationalities live in different pockets of the country. Latinos

belong to different social classes and are recognized differently by the U.S. government

in terms of their immigration status. Latinos have different histories, and may have

ancestry from Europe, Asia, Africa, and a multitude of native peoples (Chilman, 1993).

Distinguishing between Hispanics from different countries of origin is

important because the educational attainment of immigrants differs

significantly between countries of origin and because parental education is

a key determinant of the eventual educational attainment of the children of

immigrants in the United States (Vernez & Mizell, 2002, p. 10).

Mexican Latinos account for 63% of the Latino population in the U.S., while

Puerto Rican Latinos account for approximately 9% of the U.S. Latino population, and

that includes Puerto Ricans who live on the island of Puerto Rico. Cubans make up the

third largest single Latino group in the U.S. at nearly 4% of the total U.S. Latino

population (U.S.Census, 2012). Most of the higher education research that references

Latinos as one group is largely based on the experience of Mexican Latinos because of

their overwhelming representation (Torres, 2004). The data are clear, however, that there

is a large disparity in the background characteristics and educational attainment of

Latinos of various nationalities (Fry, 2005; Vernez & Mizell, 2002).

Mexican Latinos have the lowest educational attainment rates and highest dropout

rates of all Latinos in the U.S. (Donato & Wojtkiewicz, 1995; Fry, 2005; Vernez &

Mizell, 2002). Cuban Latinos, on the other hand, arrive with higher levels of education,

and they enroll in college at higher rates than do Mexican or Puerto Rican Latinos (Fry,

2005; Vernez & Mizell, 2002). Cubans also enjoy a legal status unlike that of other

Latino immigrants (Portes & Stepick, 1993). Cubans in Miami "created a powerful ethnic enclave [that] exhibits relatively high levels of economic and political influence at both the local and national levels" (Grenier & Perez, 2003, p. 34). It stands to reason that Cubans are at a greater advantage to succeed.

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**Factors that Affect the Educational Attainment of U.S. Latinos**

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The terms Hispanic and Latino tend to connote a single group of people, though U.S. Hispanics come from varied cultural, social, and socio-economic backgrounds (Torres, 2004; Vernez & Mizell, 2002). It is critically important to identify the many factors that affect the educational attainment of Latinos in the U.S. These factors affect Latinos of different origins in significantly different ways.

**The Impact of Recency of Immigration.**

A key factor that affects the educational attainment of Latinos that is largely overlooked in the higher education research is their age at the time of immigration. The educational performance of American born Latinos and those who arrived at a very young age reflects the U.S. educational system, while foreign born Latinos who came to the U.S. in their teens reflect the educational system of their country of origin (Vernez & Mizell, 2002; Fry, 2005). Immigrants who arrive as children or are born here have educational levels that compare favorably with those of their native-born peers, while those who enter the U.S. between the ages of 13 and 19 have poor academic achievement (Erisman & Looney, 2007; Vernez & Mizell, 2002).

The process of immigration is typically initiated by adults since children cannot relocate without adult input or supervision. Those immigrants who arrive as adolescents and complete all of their secondary education in the U.S. are as likely to pursue

postsecondary education and succeed as native-born Americans (Vernez & Mizell, 2002). The picture changes dramatically for those who enter the U.S. in the middle and upper adolescent years (Erisman & Looney, 2007). "For these young immigrants, the challenge of making the transition to adulthood and, at the same time, learning a new language and culture may make the prospect of college seem unrealistic" (Erisman & Looney, 2007, p.19).

It is, thus, necessary to consider the age of immigration of foreign born Latino research participants as well as their nationality. Where a person was born and how old she was at the time of immigration can have a huge impact on her future college success in the U.S.

**The Impact of Gender on Degree Attainment**

The research also suggests that gender has a big impact on the baccalaureate attainment of Latinos in the U.S. Immigrant women are just as likely to succeed in college as immigrant men with one notable exception. Latinas pursue the baccalaureate degree in significantly lower numbers than their Latino counterparts (Vernez & Abrahamse, 1996). Latinas represent the least formally educated female ethnic population in the U.S and. lag behind their non-Latina counterparts in most measures of educational achievement (Gonzalez, Stoner & Jovel, 2001).

**The Impact of the Geographical Distribution of U.S. Latinos**

Compounding all these factors is the fact that the geographical distribution of Latinos in the U.S. is vastly different, with an overwhelming majority of Cuban Latinos residing in South Florida, Mexican Latinos in California and Texas, and Puerto Ricans in New York and central Florida (Ryan & Siebens, 2012). "Since states are primarily

responsible for education policies and financing, this variation in the location of Hispanics from different countries of origin affects states in significantly different ways, with some states hardly impacted and a few states strongly impacted" (Vernez & Mizell, 2002, p. 11).

**South Florida Latinos**

Seventy percent - roughly 1.2 million - of the U.S. Cuban Latino population live in Florida, with a majority of those living in South Florida (U.S. Census, 2012). Cubans continue to represent the largest number of Latinos currently immigrating to South Florida. Since the 1990s and well into the 21st century, "about 20,000 Cubans arrived each year through a legal and orderly process" (Grenier & Perez, 2003, p. 26). They arrive legally to a community that has built a 50-year-old network of support with easy access to employment and education (Portes & Stepick, 1993). Cubans also arrive with the highest level of education of any Latino immigrant group (Fry, 2002). Their aggregate numbers play a huge role in Miami-Dade County, one of the largest metropolitan regions in the country. This pattern in South Florida is in stark contrast to the rest of the U.S. where Mexican Latinos account for 63% of the total Latino population, while Cubans account for less than 4% (U.S. Census, 2012). Table 2 compares Cuban women to the national Latino model.

<div align="center"><b>Cubanas in South Florida</b></div>

Cuban women are significantly different from Latino women of other national origins in education and income. Cuban women's initial education level and literacy, along with their legal status, suggests they have a distinct advantage in attaining a college degree. Though Cuban women do fare better than their Mexican counterparts do, the

head start they arrive with does not translate to a large percentage of baccalaureate degrees when age-at-the-time-of-immigration is taken into account (U.S. Census, 2000). Because of the large number of Cuban women on the college campuses of South Florida, it is important to understand the characteristics of Cuban women who have successfully completed a baccalaureate degree. Much has been theorized about the lack of success and degree attainment of Latinas, but little has been written about their successes (Zalaquett, 1997).

Veronica Owles (2009) and Cherly Benz (1996) published dissertations that most closely address Cuban women in higher education, though each has a different intended purpose or looks at students' development while still enrolled *in* classes. Owles writes about the identity formation of Cuban women at FIU, and Benz looks at the coping strategies of non-native English speakers at Miami Dade College in three separate classes after having finished their ESL coursework. No research was found during the literature review that looked at the non-academic factors that non-native English-speaking female Cuban baccalaureate completers attributed to their persistence and degree attainment.

## Summary

Because adult college students do not respond to the same support systems that traditional-aged students respond to (Donaldson & Graham, 1999; Kasworm, 2010), and there is a growing number of adults participating in higher education in various types of institutions, we must analyze the behavior of adult students in these settings to identify the factors that they attribute to their persistence.

We currently have bits of research that point to the need to better understand our underrepresented communities. The research, however, does an inadequate job at identifying the specific factors associated with specific populations of Latinos in specific areas of the country. We have a vague understanding of Mexican Latinos in the U.S.; we have a poor understanding of Cubanas in South Florida. "An overview of U.S. immigration or of the Latino population is likely to note that the Cuban experience has been different, that Cubans represent a distinct group that should be viewed separately" (Grenier & Perez, 2003, p. 34).

The following search terms (in different combinations) were used for this literature review using the FIU databases and Google Scholar: retention, community college retention, persistence of community college students, persistence of Latinos (and Hispanics), Cuban student retention, Miami college students, South Florida college students, retention of Latino students, Latinos (and Hispanics) in higher education, and Cubans in higher education. I also looked at dissertations at FIU not found in the databases going back several years, and I checked dissertations from other South Florida universities.

## CHAPTER III

## METHODS

This chapter begins with an overview of the purpose of the study as detailed in Chapter 1. The phenomenological framework is then discussed, followed by my autobiography and assumptions as they relate to the study. The chapter concludes with a description of the procedures I used for the study and includes a description of the participants, research setting, and procedures for collecting and analyzing the data.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and describe the principal non-academic factors that 15 adult Cuban non-native English-speaking women attributed to the successful attainment of their baccalaureate degree.

### Research Questions

This phenomenological study addressed the following primary research question: What are the principal non-academic factors that the 15 adult Cuban women attributed to their baccalaureate degree attainment? The following represent subsidiary questions that also informed the study:

1. What family support was available to Cuban women degree completers?

2. What support from their college did these Cuban women attribute to their degree completion?

3. What barriers did these Cuban women overcome to complete their degrees?

4. What were the competing priorities in the lives of these Cuban women that they had to negotiate?

**On Phenomenology as a Research Design**

The phenomenological framework is an appropriate approach to understand Cubanas' perception of their college success because truth is relative to the meaning of the experience as lived by the individual (Creswell, 2007).   The "reality of an object, then, is inextricably related to one's consciousness of it" (p. 53).  The findings are situated within the context of these women's lives and experiences.  Aptly, phenomenology rejects the subject-object dichotomy; that is, "the reality of an object is only perceived within the meaning of the experience of an individual" (p. 53).

> Phenomenology is always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings.  And since to *know* the world is profoundly to *be* in the world in a certain way, the act of researching – questioning – theorizing is the intentional act of attaching ourselves to the world…to *become* the world (van Manen, 1990, p. 5).

Furthermore, phenomenology allows for the interaction between "the experiencing person and the connections between human consciousness and the objects that exist in the material world" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 43).  As the researcher, I interpreted these interactions in search of the essential meaning relative to the lived experiences of the participants as they consciously described and defined the essence of their experience.  I described the principal factors that these women attributed to their success, factors that emerged through the interaction between the participants' consciousness and the lives they live.  The focus was "thus on neither the human subject nor the human world but on the essence of the meaning of this interaction" (Merriam, 2002, p. 93).  How did the participants experience a non-academic factor such as mentoring, for example, and how

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was this articulated?  Hence, focus was on the interaction of the phenomenon and consciousness of the experience (van Manen, 1990).

**Bracketing**

There is much subjectivity in phenomenological research.  There is an attachment *to* the world in order to *understand* the world (Van Manen, 1990), and there is interpretation and qualifications of the world (Moustakas, 1994).  The researcher engages in an inseparable relationship with the subject and object of the experience (Creswell, 2007).  As such, the bracketing process asks that we recognize and suspend our judgments to allow us to revisit the phenomenon "freshly, naively, in a wide open sense, from the vantage point of a pure or transcendental ego" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33).  To bracket my assumptions, I wrote a brief autobiography followed by a list of assumptions related to this study.

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**Researcher's Autobiography**

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My interest in the degree attainment of adult Cuban women immigrants stems from 25 years of professional work in higher education - experience spent as an administrator in student affairs with broad campus and college oversight of recruitment and retention efforts and managing an academic lab that supports students' developmental English and math courses and English as a second language courses.  I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge my own experience and identity as an immigrant as a contributing factor in my interest in the search for a deeper understanding of the principal factors that my research participants identified as positively affecting their successful degree attainment.

**My Career**

In 25 years of working in higher education in South Florida, I have seen thousands of English as a second language female students from Cuba with every reason and opportunity to succeed, stop out or drop out of school and stop out of an opportunity to attain a baccalaureate degree, a credential that is known to improve the quality of life and capacity for income of those who attain it (Day & Newburger, 2002). Likewise, among those thousands of Cuban women starting English as a second language courses, there are always some who succeed in attaining their baccalaureate degree and transforming their lives. The factors that contribute to the success of these few have gone largely unexplored. Like much of the research on the outcomes of Latinos, the focus at Miami Dade College has primarily been from the perspective of failures rather than successes. This information is simply not collected and analyzed.

Miami Dade College, like most colleges, looks at retention as a semester over semester or year over year measure, and baccalaureate degree attainment has not been studied because our core student population transfers after the Associate in Arts (AA) degree to complete their baccalaureate elsewhere. Since the funding of public colleges in Florida is largely dependent on enrollment, once students are in the door, we do not track them through their baccalaureate completion. Our student-tracking changed three years ago, however, when Miami Dade College received a large grant whose goal is to increase the degree attainment of our students.

To gain a better understanding of our school's baseline completion rate, we had to research data in ways we rarely emphasized. The research team I was on looked at our incoming 2005 cohort of students and separated them according to their academic entry

point. We identified three academic entry points - on-ramps, as we call them. Our students start college either college-ready, as identified by placement test scores, needing developmental course work, or needing to learn English prior to starting their program of study (English for Academic Purposes - EAP).

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) represents one of the largest single-entry points of our students at Miami Dade College. We have nearly 15,000 students at any given time studying English as a second language with the declared intention of completing an AA degree, a large majority who are Cuban women. Fewer than 15% of these EAP students ever complete their AA degree within six years (Bashford, 2011). If EAP students began in either of the lowest two levels, their chance of completing a degree drops to less than 5%. Of that small number that does complete their AA degree, a fraction goes on to complete their baccalaureate degree. Yet some do, and those few sparked my curiosity: What do these students feel helped them or drove them to attain a degree? Why do some immigrants make it, while others do not? Herein lays my charge.

**My Immigrant Life**

"...every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after" (Dewey, 1938, p. 27).

I was born in Santiago, Chile three years prior to what would become one of the deadliest coups in South America. My mother and father are both Chilean, with my mother contributing first generation German and first generation native heritage to my gene pool along with my father's watered-down Spanish and native blood. I was born into a middle-class home in Chile when those were scarce.

Specific events politically and socially in Chile and the U.S. during my childhood created a "readiness to learn" that precipitated my maturation (Knowles, 1980, p. 51). These events immersed me in a life that the average child is not ready to comprehend and should not be asked to deal with. Emigration, immigration and eviction prompted me to become an adult at a younger age than I would have otherwise. I matured rapidly.

My family fled Pinochet's dictatorship in the early 70s. We came to the U.S. seeking the freedom that would evade my country for almost two decades. That was emigration.

In the U.S., my parents began a new life. My mother began working in the public-school system with the hope of one day becoming a school teacher like she had aspired to in Chile. My father went into the airline and cargo industry as had been his profession back home. For seven years life was good, and we surged ahead making the strides typical of upwardly mobile immigrants. Along the way, we maintained legal status working with lawyers to make our stay permanent. This was our immigration.

Our life would be forever changed when the last step of our soon-to-be permanent legal status required that we meet with the general consul of the U.S., and that meeting needed to take place in Chile. Our lawyer assumed this would be a formality since we had always maintained legal status, we came from a country with a dictatorship, my father's business employed nearly 10 people, my mother worked for 5 years for the school system as a paraprofessional, and my brother and I were immersed in American life in public schools. "Imagine this trip as a vacation where one parent takes the older child to meet his family and enjoy a vacation in your homeland," the lawyer said. "In 2 weeks you are back with your visa." The general consul, however, said "No!" My father

and brother were forced to stay in Chile, and my mother and I, all of 9 years old, had 6 months to leave the country or face deportation. In the process, we had to liquidate all assets - a home, cars, a business…we had to liquidate a life. The financial and emotional toll was unquantifiable. That was eviction.

Two years living in Chile passed. After two additional failed attempts at a legal return to the U.S., my brother packed his bags for college studies in Germany. Soon after my brother left to Germany, our lawyer got our family a third interview with the *new* U.S. consul. My father donned his best brown suit and took me for what he assumed would be another routine rejection. We walked out with a "Yes" in less than 30 minutes. Less than a year later my divided family returned to the U.S., once again having to liquidate a life, albeit voluntarily this time. My brother, already enrolled in a German university, did not join us. This was emigration and immigration yet again. As a twelve year-old who had rediscovered his language, his homeland, and his culture, leaving was extremely difficult. Leaving meant leaving newly minted best friends and a newly born first crush.

My high school in Hialeah had little academic rigor. The community expected (and likely expects) little more than mechanics and shop keepers of its residents, and those were mainly the elective options at the school. As recent immigrants, my parents did not understand the school system or attempt to find a better alternative. We hardly realized Hialeah High School was a poor option. I was thus stuck in an unchallenging school with underachieving classmates. Nevertheless, I got good grades with hope of becoming a lawyer following in JFK's Harvard footsteps.

As graduation neared, I learned quickly the realities of college in the U.S. To go to Harvard, I would need money and an academic preparation that was impossible to receive in a school whose counselors I never met with few courses to prepare students for SAT scores north of decent. I did not score near 1400 on the SAT, and I did not have $30,000 a year. Moreover, my parents were too busy starting a life for the third time and too inexperienced in college preparation to guide me to any alternatives. In hindsight, my grades afforded me many options that went forever unexplored. It was time for a career change. I would become a teacher.

I left my country of birth as a 4 year-old child fleeing political persecution. I was evicted from what I believed to be my homeland at the age of 10, and by no choice of mine I returned to the U.S. two years after that aware that just two years prior my family had been unwanted. Exiles and evictions happened three times over a 10-year period. These transitions created hostilities, deep resentments, and anxieties and a deep recognition of the differences among classes and nationalities. Some seemingly had it easier than others. And yet, my family emerged. Our resolve - my parents' resolve - never wavered.

It took many years and eventually a divorce from my father, but my mother completed her long sought-after bachelor's degree to teach in the public-school system. Her degree paved the way to purchasing a home and having the stability necessary for a family to "make it" in U.S. life. My mother attended a non-selective institution in Miami at an unglamorous outreach center funded by student loans. My mother had every reason, at the age of 40, to not go back to school. And yet she did. My mother was a single, immigrant, non-native speaker who arrived in the U.S. as an adult and found the

wherewithal to complete a post-secondary education. With the gift of hindsight and a profession in higher education, I appreciate what a feat this was.

Both of my parents never considered *not* pushing me to achieve everything I possibly could achieve in school with the explicit knowledge that an education follows you for life and is the catalyst for upward mobility. My parents' resolve never allowed me to consider an alternative to an education.

I have always felt a strong drive to achieve and make a difference, and I sometimes see others with such a drive. It is thus a mystery to me why those who seemingly have a clearer path to achieving these outcomes turn their back on attaining an education. I have spent a lifetime contemplating the factors that contributed to my achievement and drive and looking for those factors in the students at Miami Dade College. The factors that helped me succeed are likely unique to my circumstance, and this has led me seek out the factors that might influence the success of the students I have seen through the years, namely the success of Cuban women, given their overwhelming representation in EAP classes at Miami Dade College. It is the factors that contributed to the attainment of a baccalaureate degree in Cuban women that I chose to explore. Critical to this process was maintaining a detailed journal that allowed me to document and challenge any assumptions and biases I may have brought to the process.

**Assumptions**

The following highlights my assumptions as I enter this study:

1. Cuban women who have recently arrived in the U.S. are largely supported by families and thus have time to attend school.

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2. Cubans in Miami arrived legally to a largely Cuban community led by Cuban-Americans, and this affords them many advantages over other immigrant communities.

3. Students who start college intend on completing a degree.

4. Cubans' legal status gives them access to many free or very inexpensive opportunities for upward mobility.

5. The bar of academic achievement is very low in Miami.

6. The 2-year English as a second language program at Miami Dade College provides a solid foundation for completing a baccalaureate degree.

7. A lifetime of Communism has influenced the drive and hunger of Cubans for upward mobility.

**Sampling**

The participants in this study were initially found using criterion sampling. The criteria were Cuban women who: (a) arrived in the U.S. between the ages of 14 and 20 during the 1990s, (b) arrived in the U.S. with limited English proficiency, (c) studied English as a second language at Miami Dade College, (d) completed their baccalaureate degree outside of Miami Dade College within eight years of initial college enrollment, and (e) lived in South Florida rather than in other parts of the U.S. because South Florida represents a unique community highly supportive of Cuban immigrants that is not replicated anywhere in the country. South Florida, in fact, represents the epicenter of opportunity for Cuban immigrants where they have the most support and make up a majority of the population.

Table 2

| Pseudonym | Age | Field of Study / Employment |
|-----------|-----|------------------------------|
| Katie | 39 | Librarian |
| Nora | 47 | Economics |
| Lottie | 40 | Art |
| Sonia | 35 | Social Work |
| Mindy | 35 | Post-Doc |
| Margaret | 47 | Counseling |
| Hilary | 34 | Higher Ed. |
| Laura | 44 | Instructor |
| Cynthia | 46 | Librarian |
| Becky | 41 | Higher Ed. |
| Anita | 38 | Instructor |
| Hannah | 43 | Higher Ed. |
| Veronica | 41 | Social Services |
| Cara | 35 | Psychology |
| Marva | 34 | Accounting |

Participants' mean age was nearly 39.9 years old.  On average, participants took

5.5 years to complete their baccalaureate degree, including the time they needed to learn

English as a second language.  All but two participants studied full-time almost

exclusively, and no participant took time off after commencing their studies.  Participants

have lived in the U.S. an average of 24 years.  Table 2 provides an at-a-glance view of

the participants of this study, using pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality.

Snowball sampling helped identify other participants as needed.  Snowball

sampling is a method where current participants help identify others who meet the

desired characteristics (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006). Criterion sampling uses a systematic analysis of all possible participants with the goal of finding the "cases [the researcher] could learn the most from" (Patton, 2002, p. 233). Moreover, there was a benefit to using "exemplary cases," rather than participants who merely meet the minimum criteria, as an added way of gleaning richer information. The exemplary cases are the ones that stand out in the course of my career at the college and are the ones that sparked my initial interest in the topic. The exemplary cases were also the ones who were most able to richly describe their experiences.

Phenomenological research studies focus on data-rich understandings of the essence of the lived experience of participants (Creswell, 2007). As such, the number of participants is typically 25 or fewer (Miller & Salkind, 2002), though the numbers suggested can vary from as few as 6 to 10 (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009) to 12 (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). The present study had 15 participants, which represents the average of the sample size ranges suggested by the research cited above.

Working at an institution of higher education in South Florida affords me the opportunity to work with many educated female Cuban colleagues, some of whom have walked the very path described in this study. I solicited help from my colleagues and other professional contacts at the various colleges in South Florida to help identify exemplary participants who were best suited to describe and share their experiences. Participants received no compensation for their participation.

## Data Collection

The principal manner in which data were gathered for this phenomenological study was through interviews. Interviews are appropriate when the researcher is looking for the

experience of other people and their understanding of that experience (Seidman, 1998).

Interviewing encourages people to reconstruct their experience and behavior actively

within the context of their lives, and it "provides a way for researchers to understand the

meaning of that behavior" (Seidman, 1998, p. 4). Interviewing allows for the analysis of

the participants' reflections within a particular context. Interviewing thus emerged as the

most appropriate method to analyze the non-academic factors that my participants

perceived to have been principal influences related to their success while in college

because "it is a powerful way to gain insight into educational issues through

understanding the experience of the individuals whose lives constitute education" (p. 7).

**Interview Protocol**

The interviews consisted of individual open-ended discussions lasting

approximately one hour and a half each focused around the main questions of the

research along with subsidiary questions designed to "ensure that [I] get depth, detail,

vividness, richness, and nuance" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 129). "The goal [was] to have

the participant reconstruct his or her experience within the topic under study" (Seidman,

1998, p. 9).

As a way to strengthen the reliability and validity of my interviews, I used my

peer writing group and dissertation committee to obtain feedback on my interview

protocol prior to my interviews and to provide feedback after my initial interpretations.

**Interview Administration**

The interviews took place at a time and place convenient for the participants. All

interviews were recorded with a digital recorder and a smart phone as a back-up. The

principal questions helped focus the conversation when the open-ended nature of the

interview steered the participants too far from the theme of the interview protocol.

Follow-up questions were asked to clarify meaning both during and post interview.  The

transcriptions were done by a professional transcriptionist, and I verified the accuracy of

the transcription by listening to all the recordings and making corrections as necessary.

**Journaling and Field Notes**

The interviews also included annotated field notes in a journal that allowed me to

describe the setting and note other relevant information in as much detail as possible to

enhance the accuracy of my observations (Patton, 2002).  Field notes also allowed me to

illustrate the emphasis the participants placed on the various factors they describe, and

provided another tool for continuous member checking.

## Data Management

Data management refers to the collection, protection, and manipulation of the data

gathered for the study (Patton, 2002).  All interviews and transcriptions were digitized

and stored in the cloud on Dropbox and Google Drive in an appropriately structured

hierarchy of folders.  Both of these online storage services allowed for password

protection and were easily accessible on multiple devices.  All field notes were scanned

and stored in the same manner.  I also kept a copy of everything on a portable hard drive

that was routinely backed up.  All hard copies are stored in a locked file in my home

office.  All records were kept and managed in accordance with FIU IRB guidelines and

received approval.  All records will be destroyed after three years.

## Data Analysis

Data analysis involves making meaning of the data gathered in search of a deeper

understanding of the phenomenon in order to make a broad interpretation of the

experiences described (Creswell, 2007).  The analysis aims for a unified description that represents the entire group (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994).  Data analysis requires breaking data into small units of information, searching for patterns, synthesizing and analyzing the results, and deciding what is revealed and what to reveal (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006).  In order to aid in this process, I used ATLAS.ti, a software package that aids in analyzing qualitative data, and Microsoft Excel.

Data were collected and analyzed using Creswell's (2007) simplified version of Moustaka's (1994) Modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method of Analysis of Phenomenological Data.  Creswell's (2007) simplified version involves:

1. A deep analysis and description of my own experience in order to help identify my bias with the purpose of suspending my judgments to allow for the participants' story to fully emerge;

2. Identifying and listing all "significant, relevant, nonrepetative and nonoverlapping statements…the invariant horizons or meaning units" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 122),

3. Clustering these meaning units into themes;

4. Synthesizing the themes to create a "textural description" that uses verbatim statements to strengthen the analysis and explain what the participants experienced with the phenomenon;

5. Using "structural descriptions" that reflect upon context and environment to describe how the phenomenon happened;

6. and, constructing a "composite textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience" that synthesizes all the structural-textural descriptions

of the participants to create a "universal description of the experience representing the group as a whole" (p. 122).

Creswell (2009) suggests reading through all the data as a first step to form a "general sense of the information and to reflect on its overall meaning" (p. 185). Creswell (2009) further suggests summarizing field notes and asking for participant feedback – member checking – throughout the entire process.

The next phase of the analysis involved forming codes that aided in the grouping of the data into relevant categories. Bogden and Biklen (2006) suggest a list of initial codes as themes to look for in qualitative studies that might help filter the data: settings and context codes, perspectives held by subjects, subjects' ways of thinking about people and objects, process codes, activity codes, strategy codes relationship and social structure codes, and preassigned coding schemes. Creswell (2007) adds that the use of tables will be a helpful way of visualizing and presenting this information. Indeed, tables helped in the coding process.

Related codes became the basis of a smaller number of categories or themes that were supported by the feedback of the various participants (Creswell, 2009). As another form of member checking, these themes were also shared with the participants to ensure accuracy (Flick, 2007a). These themes provided the structure for the narrative that emerged and was shared.

The final step of the analysis involved interpreting the data. Creswell (2009) suggests that the interpretation of the data will provide an opportunity to revisit the literature and concepts that inspired this study in order to glean new insights. The interpretation of the data will uncover opportunities for further study.

**Integrity Measures**

Phenomenological research is highly interpretive, and the findings need to reflect a rigorous validation process to ensure its trustworthiness (Merriam and Associates, 2002). Stake (as cited in Merriam & Associates, 2002) observes that the results of a qualitative study "faces hazardous passage from the writer to the reader. The writer needs ways of safeguarding the trip" (p. 24). The following represents the measures I will employ to secure more authentic and trustworthy findings.

**Member Checking**

Member checking involves asking the study participants to comment on preliminary interpretations of the raw data (Merriam & Associates, 2002; Creswell, 2007). As I transcribed the interviews and identified the themes, I asked my participants to comment on whether the initial interpretations indeed represented their understanding.

My study asked for the participants to identify the principal factors they feel helped them persist in college and attain their degree. Identifying these principal factors required much reflection on the part of the study participants, as the questions asked them to ponder events that may have happened many years prior. Therefore, I allowed for the participants to follow-up with me via email or phone, as insight sometimes emerged subsequent to the interviews.

**Peer Review**

Peer review involves using professional or research colleagues to read and comment on one's findings "so that the account will resonate with people other than the researcher" (Creswell, 2009, p. 196). My study benefited from my dissertation peer

group and my established committee. Their feedback further validated my interpretation of the data.

**Audit Trail**

An audit trail describes methods, procedures, rationale and decision making throughout the study (Merriam, 2002). An audit trail represents the breadcrumbs that will lead the reader to the results of the findings. The audit trail depends on maintaining a journal with detailed entries that document the researcher's "reflections, questions, and decisions on the problems, issues, ideas you encounter in collecting data" (p. 27). The journal with my detailed reflections was essential, because I have strong personal and professional feelings on the subject that I must recognize to ensure I did not impose my assumptions onto the interpretations and findings of the study. The journal showed a "disciplined and systematic effort to set aside prejudgments regarding the phenomenon being investigated in order to launch the study as far as possible free of preconceptions, beliefs, and knowledge…from prior experience and professional studies" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 22).

<div align="center">Summary</div>

Chapter III described the phenomenological research framework and included my autobiography and detailed assumptions related to the topic of the study. The chapter included a description of the sampling strategy that was used, data collection method employed, and interview protocol that was followed. This chapter concludes with the steps taken to strengthen the quality and trustworthiness of the findings.

CHAPTER IV

**FINDINGS**

Chapter IV presents the findings of the phenomenological study of the factors

perceived to have been principal influences on the attainment of a baccalaureate degree

by adult Cuban women who had to study English as a second language prior to starting

and completing a baccalaureate degree in South Florida.  Data were collected and

analyzed using Creswell's (2007) simplified version of Moustaka's (1994) Modification

of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method of Analysis of Phenomenological Data.  The

following themes emerged from the inductive analysis of data: (a) the people in her

village, and (b) all work and no play.

Each of the themes and their related sub-themes are presented in this chapter with

narrative excerpts in the form of direct quotations from participants' interviews to

illustrate how the themes emerged and to support the findings presented.  When direct

quotations are used, pseudonyms and transcription line numbers are provided (e.g.,

Cynthia, lines 32-33).  An ellipsis is used when words are omitted from a quote.

**The People in Her Village**

"*The people in her village"* describes the influence of the many people the

participants credited with playing a key role in their degree attainment.  There is a

popular saying that is often attributed to the African continent that states that it takes a

village to raise a child.  The proverb recognizes the importance of members of a

community (on the well-being of children, in the case of the proverb) and reflects a

sentiment echoed as a significant factor that led to the academic success and subsequent

degree attainment of the participants of the current study.

Most of the participants were expressly humbled and appreciative as they reflected on their arduous journey and the support-champions who aided in their pathway to success. "When you leave your country, you have to accept the idea that you have to start from zero…and adapt to the new lows" (Cynthia, lines: 90-92). It became clear after the first interview that tissues were a must, as tears were never far during their recollection.

Participants all showed great pride in sharing their stories, and each was awed by hearing her own story play out in the interviews. "[My mom] wouldn't understand…you can imagine having parents that don't really speak the language. So now that I think about that…I am very proud of myself…" (Katie, lines: 335-345). The journey from immigrant to graduate was not unlike the journey from infancy to adulthood – a journey from vulnerability to invincibility.

The scope of participants' learning also included learning about the American way of life along the way.

I remember my first day. You know the seal of the [high] school that is on the floor…I had no idea how things were here, and I just was walking by it, and I stepped on it. There was a group of kids [standing] around it and they started…screaming at me…I had no idea what they were saying to me. I felt so bad and so scared. I had no idea what I had done wrong…you're not supposed to step on it I later learned. And I'm talking about years later because…I never asked. I was embarrassed to ask what I did wrong (Katie, lines: 63-69).

In hindsight, as participants heard themselves narrate their own stories, they recognized the tremendous journey they had completed and were extremely generous by allowing me into the intimacy of their lives.

**Guidance and Support from Explicit and Implicit Mentors**

Participants identified meaningful relationships and people as playing a key role in the progressive outcomes of their educational journey. These student champions and boosters embodied the most basic definition of mentoring, according to Merriam-Webster (n.d.) by serving as experienced and trusted advisors. Some of the relationships were from members of the college community and staff and were explicit in nature. Explicit mentors' jobs clearly defined their roles as advisory in nature (i.e., faculty, advisors, etc.). Many of these relationships, however, were implicit mentoring relationships that were only recognized as such in hindsight. Implicit mentors offered guidance, but did so through an informal relationship rather than one dictated by their job title.

> In the past, I would always visit my counselor, Marina. She was a good guidance to me. The guidance…helped. She opened herself to me. She was very approachable. She was very kind and nice, and I would go see Marina…a lot more than [I would] my professor (Katie, lines: 351-353).

Participants identified the commitment and passion of these staff members as a strong component of their support network and a principal reason for their success. "People saw potential in me. They offered me opportunities and pushed me hard" (Marva, lines: 128-129). These college professionals were valuable resources of information, and they served as academic boosters and mentors. Margaret recalls the words of encouragement from her college champions and mentors: "He used to speak

English with me and say, 'You are going to make it. You need to do it. Do…make an effort.' It helped me a lot" (239-240). Hannah adds,

> People who used to work for the college…had a lot of passion for what they do. They had a lot of involvement and engagement with students. They were very close to students. I remember Rene, my first boss in Testing and Gloria in Student Life. Back then…There were a lot of activities and people were very involved. My boss, Rene, was a very influential person…They were, in a way, my mentors. They saw my potential. (Hannah, lines: 150-159)

These mentors offered support that participants did not even recognize as needing or asking for. Those who attended smaller campuses interacted frequently with staff. "Damaris Gutierrez came and told me, 'Margaret, do you want to be a student assistant?' She explained…and that was the way I started at Miami Dade College" (Margaret, lines: 65-69). Becky echoed these serendipitous and opportune encounters as significant interactions and relationships that greatly helped.

> Silvia was sitting there. I had an appointment with somebody else. 'The person who was going to help you is not here, but I can help you. You look nice. Don't you want a job here? We are looking for a student assistant' (Becky, lines: 207-210).

Relationships with key staff members opened doors and provided opportunities to explore college and learning in ways that were unfamiliar, but highly beneficial. Nora was unfamiliar with the financial aid process, and she would never have dreamed of traveling abroad having immigrated so recently had she not met her college booster who worked in the financial aid office.

I remember a lady working at the financial aid office. She was very helpful

because I knew nothing about filling out an application for financial aid…or

being…and she helped me so much that I still remember her face…always willing

to help. I remember once I told her that I wanted to go to Spain for the program

they have to study [abroad]. She mentioned that probably financial aid was going

to be able to pay for it, and that's exactly how I got to go. I mean I was in Spain

in 1992! I'm very thankful that she was there (Nora, lines: 260-271).

**Guidance and Support from a Learning Community**

Adult learners and immigrants, in particular, engage in college activities in much

smaller numbers because they often have families to tend to or jobs to go to in order to

make ends meet as they transition to their new world and start again from the beginning.

In spite of this struggle, the participants all mentioned the tremendous benefit of meeting

peers and forming study groups. "When you have friends going through the same

process, it helps with their experience" (Veronica, lines: 311-312).

Language insecurity, a new country and general shyness made Katie rely greatly

on her peers for assistance. Katie was too shy to ask questions or speak with professors.

Katie was very much on her own and with her friends.

I made friends. I think when you have friends in school… you study with them,

you create these groups of support. They helped me. …when you have the need

you just stick to each other and I remember that the friends that I had back then,

which I-- some of them still keep. It was just natural for us after school go

to…one of our houses and continue… studying together and completing our

assignments and things like that. [We] would lay in bed and just bring everything

out…the work and asking questions to each other like that helped me…That was

the greatest help (Katie, lines: 299-310).

Lottie and Sonia would echo those words nearly verbatim. "I think having a

group of friends that were on the same page…culturally as well. There were Cubans like

me…at the university…it felt completely familiar" (234-236).        Sonia added,

"…when you see other people, other students…they started to say [how] I'm almost

there…hearing their experience, you know (Sonia, lines: 173-175).

The positive pressure of studying with friends, sharing among a community of

immigrants from the exact same background and learning the language together served as

a tremendous motivation to continue learning. Diana would eventually begin dating a

local veteran who had returned from active duty at the time and had enrolled at school as

well. Diana's support network would expand, as would Diana's motivation to continue

trudging forward.

He was older than me – around 29 [at the time] …we spent the weekends

studying at FIU. We went to FIU and locked ourselves in the study rooms – no

noise. We would study the whole weekend there. That kind of support…the

social…they were my friends at school (Lottie, lines: 238-242).

Anita was fortunate (and open) to friends from other cultures, and that offered the

traditional support that friends offer, coupled with the added benefit of having to speak in

English, the only language they shared.

That helped a lot. The population from the campus…you have much variety so

one of my best friends was from Bulgaria, for example. I had another friend from

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Haiti…We were all non-traditional students, and we kind of helped each other

(Anita, lines: 170-173).

Friends offered the support that immigrant parents without language were unable to provide. Complicating the struggle of the participants, the parents of the participants were in their own struggles on arrival to secure employment and provide opportunities for their children – opportunities also greatly hindered by a lack of language and cultural wherewithal.

[My mom] couldn't really give me any support. She couldn't sit down with me and…help with my homework. I couldn't count on that…It was my friends. I couldn't tell her or explain to her many of the things I was learning because it had to do with the language, the culture. She had no idea how things worked in this country. My mom didn't know that I had to complete an admissions application and pay…and wait for financial aid to be processed. She had no idea. I don't remember ever saying to my mom [that] I went through this process…She knew that I was doing what I was supposed to. (Katie, lines: 335-346).

Friends supplemented and complemented support when parental assistance was insufficient or lacking. Moreover, friends who were a few levels ahead served as inspiration. Seeing the progress of others on the same journey was motivating. Participants' friends could serve as role models. "…they were much more advanced than me. Their support was very important also" (Margaret, lines: 217-219).

**Guidance and Support from Family**

The participants arrived at a robust South Florida community of prior Cuban immigrants and family. Coupled with immediate legal status, the participants' social

capital afforded them a great deal of support.  All participants arrived to supportive

environments and mentioned their families as a principal factor in their educational

success.

>…if the family, the [people] that you have next to you…it plays a big role, an
>
>important role.  You may think something, but if the [people] next to you say
>
>'no', then you change your mind.  So it's kind of altogether (Cynthia, lines: 246-
>
>248).

All participants mentioned their families as a principal factor in their educational

success.  The scope and breadth of influence of the participants' families cuts in two

distinct directions: (a) family as a tangible contribution of time, capital, and/or a helping

hand and (b) family as an inspiration and motivation to get ahead.  The significance of

the type of family support that participants described varied by participant, as noted in the

emphasis placed by each during her recollection.

**Family as a helping hand and real capital.**  Participants credited their families

in their success by offering childcare, for those participants who needed it, and financial

support.  Without the burden of full time work, school was a more realistic possibility.

As Hilary's family put it, "If you focus on work, you will not pay attention to school"

(123).  This support meant more time to focus on school.  Veronica concurred, "My

mother herself decided to help me so she stayed at home with my daughter while I went

to school…I separated from my ex-husband because he didn't want me to go to school"

(83-84).

Mindy's parents offered job at "my parent's beauty salon, so it was pretty

accommodating with the hours" (94).  Becky's family provided a comfortable job that

allowed her the flexibility and time to study. "My brother's god mother, she used to work there. She retired and then I got the job. I would do all the paperwork…I would do my own schedule…go when I wanted" (231-236). Upon marriage, Becky's in-laws continued providing an invaluable lifeline. "I would pass by [my husband's family's] house or we would go to my parent's house and eat. It was not like we had to do everything by ourselves" (Becky, lines: 302-303).

Cuban families who supported the arrival of their loved ones pooled their resources to offer space – space to sleep and the space (metaphorical as well) to study in order to get ahead. A bedroom and a home meant less urgency to work full time. "I would say I was lucky in the sense that I had my family. I had my mother and I had my father together and working and supporting me. I…the job that I got as a student assistant was just for…me" (Becky, lines: 179-181).

Laura's parents insisted she focus on school. "They told me, 'If you are going to work, do not work full time…the most important things is for you to…study'" (Laura, lines: 321-322). Laura's soon-to-be husband would offer the same support (and spoke no Spanish!!).

Anita arrived to extensive family in Miami, and she was very practical in her approach and interactions with them. They were family, but they were also her lab – her opportunity to speak English in a safe environment. "…I told them to not speak Spanish with me, just try to speak English because…you are not going to speak Spanish with me!" (Anita, lines: 257-259).

Sonia also benefited from family as English practice and family as childcare. Her kids were one of the few people she could speak English with comfortably. "They

wanted to speak only English," (Sonia, line: 168). Her ex-husband cared for her kids while she focused on school and advanced towards graduation.

Hilary's parents, though divorced soon upon arrival in the U.S., remained living together (to this day) as a way to provide the supportive environment necessary for Hilary to succeed. Though Census indicators confirm that all the participants and their families had incomes that would label them as poor or living with an income well below the national average, the participants' families showed great generosity in allowing their daughters, sisters and wives the time and space to focus on school without the explicit burden of earning money for the family.

**Family as an inspiration to get ahead.** The influence of family was not restricted to life in Miami. Participants recognized their family's influence as one that often began in Cuba and extended beyond encouragement. "My godmother was coming [to Miami] too. She told me, 'Why don't we go to Berlitz school?' …Saturdays, we used to go…" (Becky, lines: 55-56).

In all cases, participants gained great inspiration from their families and the goals they would collectively achieve. "First, I [studied] part-time because I was working and studying and the kids and my husband…at the time, he had two jobs…it's not only my...[it's] my trophy! (Cynthia, lines: 65-68). Veronica greatly credits her daughter as valuable inspiration in those moments when it seemed overwhelming.

> …I guess always having in my mind that I was doing the right thing for my daughter who was the one that needed me most at that time. We as adults, we can take care of ourselves, but she needed me. So even though it was time

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consuming, I knew it was the best for her and for us in this country (Veronica, lines: 71-74).

Sonia confirmed also receiving great inspiration from her children. While she started school upon completing her high school, a marriage and lack of clear focus made her progress slow. It was not until she had children that she "[had] to finish my AA or AS or something – for them and for me, you know" (Sonia, lines: 43-45).

Cara's family served as an inspiration and a reality check. "First, I wanted to…be a lawyer, but I think that the fact that I wanted to start a family was…heavier…I wanted to have children…It had to be quick because I couldn't spend four [more] years" (237-241).

Katie faced great financial struggle upon arrival. "I was really alone with my mom and my brother…[we] moved to an efficiency – one bedroom. I would help my mom with whatever [financial aid] was extra" (Katie, lines: 188-190). Despite the challenges and "struggling very very much", Katie was always encouraged and supported to continue studying full time.

Hilary felt immense pride in seeing the support come around full circle. With her head held high, Hilary recounted,

I wanted to be what I am right now, in order to provide…to provide my family what they gave me for ten years. That's what's happening now. I no longer live with them. They now live with me – both of them (263-266).

Nora was both motivated and encouraged greatly by her family. Their collective struggle, however, was real and the family needed all hands-on deck. While Nora's

family wanted her to only attend school, a new (and expensive) life and modest family income dictated otherwise. The struggle was a strong motivator.

> They tried to encourage me when I was feeling down or when I wanted to go back. They never thought that I was going to have to work full time, but life here was so different that what we had imagined…we had to…I had to work full time in order to help them (Nora, lines: 153-161).

### All Work and No Play – And More Work After That

All work and no play – and more work after that describes the impact that employment played on the participants' college success. One of the great differentiators among Cubans and other Latino immigrants in the U.S. is the legal status afforded to Cubans upon arrival in the U.S. Entry-level *legal* employment was available for Cuban immigrants much more readily than for other Latino immigrants. As such, participants benefited greatly from participation in the work force, albeit in varied capacities and at various stages of their educational journey. Participants' employment consisted of on-campus work as part of a greater financial aid package or entry-level work off-campus.

Work also hindered, however, participants' ability to feel like a college student and participate in on-campus activities. To these adult students, college was simply utilitarian. On-campus social engagement was limited to student-employment, at best.

> It was difficult for me to handle so many things at the same time, to be on time for classes. I was tired from working late the day before. It was hard to do things besides working and studying…Go to school and go to work (Nora, lines: 298-301).

Cara echoed this disconnection and frustration.

I didn't feel like I was being a part of them, of the college. I couldn't go to the

activities that were programmed for students because I had to finish class and then

go to work. I felt like a visitor. I didn't feel part of the community (Cara, lines:

156-159).

The disconnection with college-life created by employment is not to discredit,

however, the value of that employment. Adult students engage quite differently with

higher education because of their competing priorities. On-campus employment, in

particular, provided participants with a continued connection to the institution and their

peers.

On-campus work instilled drive and served as a vehicle for further language

learning. Moreover, this employment and social mobility, no matter how seemingly

small, provided motivation and reward. Supervisors became academic champions and

mentors and served as valuable social capital.

**Work as a Motivation Tool**

As newly arrived immigrants, work served as an introduction to capitalism and

the American way of life. "You have to learn a lot of new things: how to write a check,

how to go to the bank, how to deal with bills. We didn't have that experience, at least in

Cuba" (Cynthia, lines: 226-228).

Work also provided a tangible reward by showing the benefit of hard work as an

instrument of upward mobility. Work allowed participants to "integrate myself into

what, you know, working was in the United States" (Laura, lines: 157-158). Work

provided the foundation to get ahead for participants.

Okay, the first thing is to…see the language…like something you can apply [to] your profession - something that you have in your mind. First you have to have in your mind that you want to do something in the future. Otherwise, there is no point (Cynthia, lines: 170-172).

Serving as the de facto tutor for students who did not learn as quickly kept Lottie engaged when she felt that she was wasting her time. Having come from a rigorous secondary school in Cuba to physician parents meant that Lottie was quite accustomed to rigorous coursework. Lottie had high expectations, and her parents insisted and expected as much. In terms of rigor, College was a bit of a letdown for Lottie. An astute professor saw Lottie's desire to do more. "I was an assistant for the whole class. I would prepare things for the whole class, and that helped me a lot" (283-284).

Anita understood quickly that upward mobility was greatly dependent on her ability to learn English quickly. "So I said regardless if I want to just get a different type of job, I need to improve my English…it was not rocket science" (117-118).

A positive experience at work served as a seed to a possible career and as a motivation to strive for more. Work was the catalyst for Cynthia to be "inspired because I started working in libraries. My dream [became] to put together the science that I had learned with the libraries" (270-271). Hannah shared a similar experience of finding her passion through her initial part-time employment opportunities.

Those feelings and emotions of the people that I used to work with were contagious, you know, at some point that I discovered my passion to work with students, educate college students and so on. I stayed and [eventually became] an adjunct faculty (Hannah, lines: 181-183-).

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Similarly, Laura used her experience with part-time employment as a springboard to her career. Laura adds,

> Well, work was an inspiration like I told you in the beginning because I started as
> a tutor…that tutoring job was definitely a catch. I was in love with the job. I
> really…found my passion. Teaching was what I wanted to do (Laura, lines: 342-
> 345.
>
> A bad job *also* served as motivation. "[It] inspired me to really fight for what I

wanted and really…build a future. I had to work at [a] pharmacy and go to school. I felt

that I…wanted… something else that had nothing to do with that…sector" (Cara, lines:

229-232). Katie echoed those sentiments. "I did that once. Didn't like it too much. So

then I didn't do it again, but I had the chance…at least I got to see how it was" (273-275).

**Work as a Resource**

Participants described employment, both on-campus and off-campus, as

extremely valuable. The modest income allowed Becky "to pay for my stuff if I wanted

to go out" (183). These temporary (usually) employment opportunities were sometimes

part of the participants' financial aid package or they were simply opportunities to

supplement the income of the participants' collective families. "[My] education was

always progress, and that represented better jobs and a better salary…[I] could start

applying whatever I knew and was studying" (Cynthia, lines: 116-118).

Flexible employment schedules were incredibly helpful by offering modest

financial support, while keeping school as the participants' top priority. Participants'

families and the extended community often offered this great resource. "It was part-time,

and it wasn't much either.  Like I would do my own schedule.  I would go when I wanted.  It was very easy and very nice" (Becky, lines:  238-239).

On-campus employment as part of a work-study financial aid award offered the added benefit of being exposed to other students, college staff, and campus resources. On-campus employment helped participants reinforce the behaviors and activities of successful students, and these employment opportunities provided additional context for social integration and language acquisition.

The fact that I was working in the information center and they were doing

advisement. I got to help students with advisement questions and that really

helped me a lot in the sense that I'm…I knew what to do…If I had any problem

or…I knew what classes I had to take…I had access to information that not a lot

of students have (Cara, lines:  136-141).

Those who needed the finances to supplement their family's income felt immense pride at being a contributor for their household.  "I was lucky to find a job in the same campus.  [It] allowed me to make some income to help support my family while going to school.  I loved this kind of flexibility" (Marva, lines:  47-49).

Flexible work schedules allowed participants to continue to benefit from supplemental income after transferring to their university without losing focus on school.

I started a new job at a bank close to my house.  I was working and going to

school full time, which means my schedule was more challenging than before.

Fortunately, my employer was flexible and helped me work around my classes…I

made school my number one priority at the time (Marva, lines:  110-113).

The participants' financial struggles were real and often a distraction to their learning and their continued motivation. "I only had money to pay for classes. I didn't have money for the books. I was upset" (Margaret, lines: 166-167). The support and benefit of easy (and legal) employment cannot be understated. The part-time positions of all participants served as safety blankets that provided enough of a lifeline to facilitate continued enrollment and subsequently college success and degree completion.

**Work as a Real-World Lab**

All participants struggled with language. Adults are more self-conscious than children. As an immigrant community, Miami offers the comfort of a shared accent that helps. "It's a little easier to be brave and start talking. It took me a while to…I'm not as [bold] to jump into something" (Mindy, lines: 118-119). Developing trust was an essential process. "There was something in me that prevented me from talking much. I had fear in my mind. I was not able to talk very much, but I believe that it was more a mental thing that prevented me" (Nora, lines: 79-82).

Practicing their communication skills was not natural for participants, but those in the workforce were forced to practice, and that in turn improved their confidence. "I started working at Marshall's and that helped me because I used to practice with customers…I used to put things around the store, so people would ask me where can I find this and that" (Hannah, lines: 74-76).

Outside of forced practice, South Florida life is quite possible speaking Spanish alone. Work provided greater context for practicing English when participants' lives did not provide for those opportunities. This practice in turn instilled confidence. Becky

mentioned gaining confidence through work.  "It introduced me to like how to deal with people and helping people…dealing with students and asking questions" (215-216).

Work was often infinitely more valuable than the speech labs with headphones. "When I got my other job at the video store…I would speak to all my clients in English…I would tell them about the movies in English" (Laura, lines:  158-160).  Work meant more hours speaking English for the participants who otherwise had no other opportunity to speak English.  "I developed my skills over the phone.  I believe that was a tremendous exercise.  Working [was] very important" (Margaret, lines:  226-228).

Employment served as an introduction to the American labor system, a financial resource, and a real-world lab that served to reinforce the participants' English communication skills when no other opportunities existed.

> I applied for the student assistant [job] and the lab monitor at the time didn't speak Spanish, so I had to practice…I had the opportunity to have extra practice with the language…I didn't communicate with any English speaker at the time, because it was just my family and they were all Cubans…I didn't practice with anybody out of the classroom (Veronica, lines:  135-142).

The immigration journeys of the participants were depictions of rapid change and growth – painful often and always full of optimism.  Living arrangements, relationships, and employment changed frequently, but these changes also provided motivation for improvement and opportunities to practice and strengthen the participants' language skills.  Working hard and changing jobs also meant using language in different ways.  As participants skills improved, so too did their opportunities.

I became an assistant to a priest in a catholic church.  And then I worked for some

lawyers helping with office-related work.  I had two jobs, with lawyers and the

church…secretary type of jobs.  That helped me because I had the opportunity to

practice, to write in English.  That helped me a lot (Hannah, lines:  115-120).

**Summary**

This chapter presented the finding of this phenomenological study on the non-

academic factors that adult Cuban women perceive to have been principal influences on

their successful attainment of a baccalaureate degree after having had to learn English as

a second language.  Two themes emerged from this data analysis: (a) the people in her

village, to describe the many people the participants credited with playing a key role in

their degree attainment and (b) all work and no play – and more work after that – to

describe the impact that employment played in providing an avenue to practice their

language acquisition in the real world.  A summary of the themes and sub-themes is

presented in Table 3.  Chapter 5 will answer the research questions of this study, discuss

the implications of this study, and provide recommendations for further research.

Table 3

*Summary of Themes*

| Main Themes | Description and Sub-Themes |
| --- | --- |
| The People in Her Village | Participants all enthusiastically recalled the numerous people who provided support in their home lives and support that allowed them to succeed academically - from family who took them in upon arrival to study partners to significant others that provided the space necessary to learn. <br><br> • *Sub-theme 1:* Participants mentioned key people who served in explicit and implicit mentoring roles by pushing them, supporting them, and guiding them. <br> • *Sub-theme 2:* Participants formed networks of friends and peers, sometimes to study, but always to provide guidance and share in the common experience of acculturation. <br> • *Sub-theme 3:* Family provided the foundation for learning to commence, and it often provided explicitly more. |
| All Work and No Play | Work served multiple roles for participants: a strong motivation, a vehicle that allowed them to survive, as a place to learn about the country, and as an authentic "lab" where classroom skills were strengthened. <br><br> • *Sub-theme 1:* Because of a positive experience or a negative one, employment served as a principal motivator for participants, and it served as a lesson in capitalism 101. <br> • *Sub-theme 2:* Participants earned their first paychecks through employment and had access to other resources that proved highly influential. <br> • *Sub-theme 3:* Participants greatly credit their employment as a place for authentic English language practice where they felt safe and greatly improved their language skills. |

CHAPTER V

**DISCUSSION**

This chapter is divided into three sections that form the discussion based on the results of the findings of this study.  The first section provides answers to the research questions based on the findings of this study.  The second section addresses implications and recommendations for further research.  The chapter concludes with a summary section.

**Responses to the Research Questions**

Responses to the research questions of this study are presented in this section. The primary research question guiding this study was:  What are the principal non-academic factors that 15 adult Cuban women who had to study English as a second language (ESL) prior to the completion of their baccalaureate degree attribute to their degree attainment?  The following secondary research questions also guided the study:

1.      What family support was available to Cuban women degree completers?

2.      What support from their college did these Cuban women attribute to their degree completion?

3.      What barriers did these Cuban women overcome to complete their degrees?

4.      What were the competing priorities in the lives of these Cuban women that they had to negotiate?

The responses to each of the subsidiary research questions are discussed first to provide a framework to understand the primary research questions.  Participants in this study were adult Cuban women who had to study English as a second language at a

community college in South Florida prior to completing a baccalaureate degree at a local South Florida university.

**Response to Subsidiary Questions 1:  What family support was available to Cuban women degree-completers?**

The findings from this study revealed that the support of family was robust and critical in the journey from immigration to baccalaureate degree completion for all the participants.  Participants frequently became teary eyed recalling the sacrifices their families made, and their journeys imposed.  Each immigration story was different; Some journeys also included interim residencies in third countries prior to coming to the U.S. Each journey was both painful *and* signified a new beginning. Each journey offered hope.

Without exception, all participants credited the support and love of their families as a principal non-academic factor that they attributed to their ability to maintain focus and succeed at the enterprise of school, starting from the process of learning English all the way to completing a baccalaureate degree.  This finding supports the literature on the influence of non-academic factors on the success of non-traditional populations (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Ransdell, 2001; Ceja, 2004; Lotkowski, Robbins & Noeth, 2004; Jeffreys, 2007).  While family provided tangible support and resources, family also served as added pressure that functioned both as motivation and as an additional stressor. This finding supports the research on the effects of family as both a stressor and support system for adult students (Burns & Gabrich, 2001; Rizer, 2005; Ross-Gordon, 2011). Always present during the college journey that was filled with moments of hope were the realities of starting anew as immigrants in a host nation, albeit a largely welcoming one for Cubans arriving in South Florida.

All participants had immediate and extended family in South Florida upon arrival. None of the participants described suffering food or housing insecurity. For those participants (Anita, Becky, Laura, Mindy, Hannah) who arrived to family with an established home, their families provided a strong sense of stability and continuity. Immigration and the rapid transition to adulthood for participants never prompted a necessary transition to living alone or having to be self-sufficient.

All participants received a hand from family or held onto a family member's hand on their journey to college success. Participants (Cynthia, Ana, Laura, Veronica, Mindy) described a level of support that would typically be very expensive or reserved for the highly privileged at residential colleges: fully flexible part time entry-level employment, meals provided by stay-at-home parents or extended family, and child care for those who needed it provided by the same extended family or parents. School was very much a family affair for these very nontraditional students, often into their late twenties, well past the age when traditional American college students step out on their own. This finding further supports the literature on the impact of non-academic factors for adult students.

Participants all described a strong commitment to family. For some participants (Cara, Veronica, Cynthia, and Hilary), that commitment meant that the need and desire to finish school, as well as the choice of career, were also family decisions. What to study was as important as the length of time required of that very decision. While a personal passion and drive was clear, so too was the fact that participants' career choice impacted many and was a collective sacrifice. The decision, therefore, was a shared one. Providing for children or parents was a motivator for success *and* efficiency.

**Response to Subsidiary Questions 2: What support from their college did these Cuban women attribute to their degree completion?**

There was no single department or college service that stood out as a principal factor cited by the participants as greatly contributing to the participants' college success outside of the federal work-study program for those participants who enjoyed on-campus employment via work-study. Adult college students interact and engage in the college community differently from traditional-aged students (Kasworm, 2003b). Adults' more complicated lives makes out-of-classroom engagement too demanding of a compromise for those negotiating a new country, a new language, a new job and family. Kasworm (2003a, 2003b) suggests adults' engagement should be focused in the classroom and centered on the adult students' lives rather than on the typical co-curricular activities of traditional-aged students.

Work-study (and a comfortable job in general) was cited as greatly influential by participants (Marva, Katie, Margaret, Becky, Veronica), if not only for the income or the work experience, but also for the opportunity to begin to feel American and for the opportunity to meet others and practice speaking English. This finding supports Choi's (2018) recent research that suggests that a job of appropriate intensity can be beneficial to the success of certain student populations. When it comes to work, fit is essential. A job to these participants meant feeling a bit like a normal adult. On-campus employment, in particular, offered the flexibility to focus on school while also connecting participants to "the people in her village" by being at school for extended time. Participating in on-campus employment and being on campus allowed participants to build the social capital they lacked due to their limited time in the country.

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Forming a network of people at school – of student success champions - was cited by all participants as a principal non-academic factor that greatly contributed to the participants' success while at school. This success network included meeting and forming relationships with explicit and implicit mentors and college boosters for Katie, Marva, Hannah, Margaret, Ana and Nora. The champions and mentors offered the participants jobs when they did not even realize that was an option; the champions and mentors opened doors to travel abroad, career counseling, encouragement and guidance - and sometimes friendship. These mentors were a gateway and thesaurus for the complicated culture that is American higher education. This finding supports the literature on the beneficial effects of mentoring in higher education (Terenzini & Pascarella, 1977; Endo & Harpel, 1982) and mentoring with non-traditional populations, in particular (Bordes & Arredondo, 2005).

The network of success champions formed at school also included making friends and connecting with this learning community via study groups on campus or at each other's homes. For participants Veronica, Katie, Diana, Anita and Margaret, this network of support was critical to their success. Their friends added to the participants' social capital and meant navigating the unknown of American higher education accompanied by a peer traveling a similar journey.

The absence of one particular *service*, however, should not discredit the role of the college. The college, after all, served as the principal gathering place for a large part of "the village". The college provided the rules of engagement, framework and location. The college served as the place where good things happened and where good people met. Social systems, in Tinto (1975) language, emerged. The people and relationships, in turn,

were credited as principal factors that led to the success of all the participants during their time at school.

**Response to Subsidiary Questions 3:  What barriers did these Cuban women overcome to complete their degrees?**

All participants overcame difficulties along their journey toward a baccalaureate degree.  The participants' lives on arrival were in great flux, if only by virtue of their displacement and immigration.  Participants Katie, Veronica, Becky, and Hilary all weathered divorces shortly upon arrival – their own divorces or that of their parents, with whom they lived.  Becoming educated Cuban women was a struggle for some of the Cuban men in their lives, and that education opened the door to a new life for these women to step into.

Income and employment for the participants and their families were also struggles, though struggles that were collectively embraced and struggles that did not disrupt college participation.  Finances were tight, but American life was more prosperous than Cuban life.  The American struggle, in context, was full of opportunity and reward.  The taste of prosperity and education was the impetus to forge ahead for the participants, as effort showed a direct impact on prosperity in the U.S., unlike in Cuba. The participants and their families were reaping the initial rewards of learning English and attaining entry-level employment.  As typically happens with immigrants, the first few years saw great economic strides for participants and their families, and some participants were contributors to that effort via their own employment, albeit employment that complemented and supported college without displacing the desire to succeed in college.

The greatest obstacle all participants cited was learning to speak English as adults and conquering the fear that comes with it.  Language acquisition is a much greater challenge as we get older.  Participants Katie, Veronica, Cynthia, and Laura began at the lowest level of English.  By their own admission, they spoke zero English, and they were not particularly enthusiastic about learning to speak it.  All participants felt embarrassed about speaking.  All participants shared moments of shame and being shamed due to their accents and/or lack of knowledge.  All participants struggled greatly to overcome the language barrier and the fear of ridicule and shame.  All participants, however, overcame their fears enough to master language well enough to complete their baccalaureate degrees.  Despite their accomplishments, however, most participants still harbor feelings of language insecurity and were apologetic about their accents when they were being recorded.

**Response to Subsidiary Questions 4:  What were the competing priorities in the lives of these Cuban women that they had to negotiate?**

All participants endured some level of hardship as a consequence of their relocation, even while enjoying the support of immediate and extended family and the comfort of arriving at a community that was largely welcoming and supportive.  In the best of circumstances, immigration was still difficult and painful.  These hardships presented a very real need for income that tugged at the desire and ability to simply be a student. Those participants who would soon go on to have children (Veronica, Cara, and Cynthia) and those participants with parents struggling financially (Marva, Hilary, Katie) had to reconcile their inability to provide for their families in the way they would like.

Their families were sources of motivation and sources of stress that tugged at their heart and time (Burns & Gabrich, 2001; Rizer, 2005; Ross-Gordon, 2011).

Several participants had family units rearranged as they settled into their American life. Hilary's parents divorced, though they opted to remain living together, as Hilary explained, to minimize disruption. Veronica weathered a divorce along her journey to complete school because her husband's support of her education would soon wane. Katie, Marva, and Nora frequently moved during their first few years in the U.S., as employment prospects for their families opened the door to better living opportunities. All participants' families changed and adapted to their new life and freedoms.

**Response to the Primary Research Question: What were the principal non-academic factors that the 15 adult Cuban women attributed to their baccalaureate degree attainment?**

The findings of this study revealed that the principal non-academic factors adult Cuban women attributed to their success in completing their baccalaureate degree were the support they received from people in the participants' social network – their social systems, in Tinto (1975) terms – and an accommodating job. The relationships with the people cited by participants as being meaningful were formed and found on campus and off campus, as were the jobs they mentioned.

The people in the participants' network were college employees and professors who engaged the participants in a mentoring capacity, friends and classmates as peers to learn from and learn with, and immediate and extended family members that served as motivation to continue school and offered tangible support and assistance along their

journey to completion.  These relationships constituted the participants' village of support.

Informal relationships with professors and staff members in a mentoring capacity was quite impactful for all participants.  What would likely seem insignificant to the college employees and faculty members mentioned in hindsight was extremely valuable to these adult learners.  The value of these informal relationships with faculty and college staff supports Terenzini and Pascarella's (1977) and Endo and Harpel's (1982) observations that developing informal relationships with faculty is critical to student success.  Their observations, however, did not capture the voices of students of color, of second language learners, of adult students, or of students attending a minority serving community college in a minority majority major urban community.  Their observations also reference informal relationships with faculty only and fail to acknowledge other college personnel who are also positioned to make a meaningful difference in students' lives, especially at 2-year institutions.

None of the participants engaged in significant on-campus college life as those more traditional students with fewer commitments were doing – those who tended to be younger and native English speakers.  The participants' lives were complicated.  They were all adults by virtue of age, context or self-perception (Merriam and Brockett, 1997).  As such, their idle time on campus was scarce.

All the participants, nevertheless, still made friends and developed a network of peers whom they greatly credited with their success. These relationships, however, were mostly forged and nurtured inside the classroom, supporting Tinto's (1997) observations of commuter students at 2-year colleges and Kasworm's (2005) observations of adult

students attending college.  Both noted the significance of the classroom in building these relationships for non-traditional students at commuter institutions.

All participants enjoyed a healthy amount of support from direct and extended family.  The support ranged from financial assistance to housing to childcare.  School was truly a collective experience, with a commitment from the family as important as the commitment from the participants.

A comfortable, flexible job was also noted as extremely helpful.  The right job offered modest financial assistance without detracting from the participants' commitment to pursue their education.  The right job also served to reinforce and contextualize the learning that was taking place in the classroom, and it served to further develop participants' network of support.  The modest, entry-level jobs described by participants allowed participants to practice their English, learn about the U.S., and strengthen career competencies that would go on to inform their future academic pathways.

Legal entry-level employment options for participants were available thanks to the established "ethnic enclave" that resulted from prior waves of immigration from Cuba's elite, who paved the way for a fair amount of economic and political influence in South Florida (Grenier & Perez, 2003).  The presidents of FIU and MDC at the time of the participants' arrival in the U.S. and while they were studying were both Cuban, after all.

The participants all began their ESL coursework at different levels of English, with a couple of participants beginning with what they described as "zero" English.  Some of the participants went so far as to confess feeling loathing and contempt for learning English at the onset of their studies.  A perceived forced relocation was

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something huge to reconcile, let alone the need to learn a language and pursue a career. In the case of those students with a less than exemplary academic background, the non-academic support they describe lifted and propelled them, supporting Bean and Metzner's (1985) assessment of non-traditional students and how environmental factors can impact their success over and above academic readiness. While the non-academic factors cited by participants were largely formed at the institution, they were not relegated to or aided by any one particular office or role *at* the institution. The institution simply provided the space and allowed the "people in her village" to coalesce.

## Implications for Students and Institutions

The findings from this study have implications for adult Cuban women who must study English as a second language with the intended goal of completing a baccalaureate degree. The findings from this study also have implications for institutions of higher education who are challenged by the needs of an increasingly diverse student body and its need to attain a college credential.

### Implications for Students

Because the participants of this study were so greatly influenced by their immediate and extended families and were more successful when the commitment to college completion was a collective one, other students can use this insight to ensure and secure a commitment from their families and support networks as well. Those participants who enjoyed the support of a spouse or significant other credited that support as a principal factor associated with their success. Students and the families of students who understand well the sacrifice and ultimate reward of completing a baccalaureate degree and receiving an explicit commitment of tangible support from their families will

lay a solid foundation from which to embark on a successful college journey. Support

from a spouse, for those with a significant other, also proved to be greatly beneficial

(Nora, 1987).

Students with children, while struggling harder due to this competing priority, can

glean inspiration and focus from their children as well. The immense rewards, after all,

will be shared by the students *and* their children, since the baccalaureate degree is the

great equalizer for women (Baum et al., 2013). Moreover, these future baccalaureate

completers will enjoy health and family benefits over and above income as well (p. 5).

All participants with children credited their children with influencing their goals, focus,

and time to completion. Their urgency was collective, and the outcomes were shared.

Adult Cuban women second language learners may also use the finding of this

study as a reason to frequently engage their faculty and key college personnel in and out

of the classroom. Developing and nurturing these frequent interactions with college

faculty and staff who stand to function as de facto boosters and mentors will greatly

impact students' social and academic success (Endo & Harpel, 1982). Students can

intentionally make it a point to visit their professors, advisors or staff-champions outside

of their class times. These interactions will reinforce competencies, and the contact will

foster a mentoring relationship that will provide psychosocial support.

Cuban students in South Florida enjoy unusual power for an immigrant

community in the U.S. Cubans are represented legally in overwhelming numbers.

Making connections and finding similarities with peers within this "ethnic enclave"

(Grenier & Perez, 2003) is much easier than for immigrants of other nationalities –

immigrants who often live in the shadows of the law. Moreover, professors (and bankers

and college presidents) look like their students, and research suggests that too influences student success (Egalite & Kisida, 2017).

New students may use the finding of this study as a reason to purposefully build friendships to capitalize on the benefits of a support network of peers. Friendships are not only a luxury, but they serve as a key support system for success. Cultural connections for Cuban women abound, and these relationships foster the social integration that has been repeatedly proven to be a principal predictor of retention (Sorey & Duggan, 2008).

The participants of this study also greatly benefited from employment, namely the right type of flexible employment. This is an important finding that supports more recent research on the effects of work and work intensity on student outcomes (Choi, 2018). For those with economic need, a comfortable and flexible job provided supplemental support. Part time work provided participants enough of an economic lifeline to attend classes, while also providing a means to get by and learn about the American way of life. For most participants, work also provided a vehicle to practice English, since life is South Florida is absolutely possible with minimal or no English. Finding the conditions to practice English, in fact, can be a challenge depending on the neighborhood you live in.

Participants benefited from a good job, and they were inspired to improve their condition by a bad one. Participants used entry-level employment as a springboard to a career or career inspiration. On-campus employment was particularly beneficial to those who participated, as the participants were surrounded by faculty and staff who were available to assist, and they were encouraged or required to practice their English in a safe learning-centered environment.

**Implications for Institutions of Higher Education**

The findings from this study also have implication for institutions of higher education. Institutions of higher education have traditionally been rigid and intolerant. Student support services consist of offering support systems as an invitation for students to voluntarily participate, often hidden behind very intimidating doors – reactive to students who dare enter instead of proactive and intrusive. These university structures and functions largely target young students – those referred to as traditional students (Kasworm, 2010).

Institutions of higher education mostly focus on serving college-ready students rather than looking for ways to be student-ready organizations – organizations that understand that students come from varying backgrounds with diverse life experience and academic preparation. Student-ready organizations would understand and embrace the fact that it is incumbent upon the *organization* to find ways to prepare for students' success (Brown-McNair, Albertine, Asha-Cooper, McDonald & Major, 2016).

Adult Cuban women need targeted and intentional, *mandatory* interventions that bring these impactful non-academic factors to the participants and their families. Colleges can design their ESL programs and competencies in a way that provides as many of these services and touch-points under the requirements of class and program participation. Voluntary participation in programming tailored to young students will see minimal participation from non-traditional students. Adults' complicated lives will make participation difficult and/or awkward.

Colleges can build non-academic interventions and programming into the ESL curriculum that includes 15-20 hours per semester of participation using an existing

college "vehicle" such as a required lab or required competency-based service-learning requirement – contextualized interventions and curriculum designed by faculty and the various members of retention and success offices that traditionally handle mentoring, social engagement and job placement. This participation can supplant 15 hours of required lab that usually takes the form of isolated computer work, with little real-world relevance or application. Participation, after all, will involve context rich language practice as an additional benefit of campus involvement and social engagement. The 15-20-hour format would include:

1. An orientation: This is a two-and-a-half-hour night event that brings together students and their families, faculty/staff mentors and student mentors. The orientation would include;

   a. Round table activity facilitated and anchored by one employee mentor at each table: introductions, contract commitments, family pledges, expectation, goal setting, and academic roadmap creation

   b. Mix and mingle with age-appropriate social engagement activity so each participant has an opportunity to meet other students

   c. Dinner: 45 minutes

   d. Oral pledge: Participants and families

2. Campus service: This consists of 15 hours of service (work experience) on campus over the course of the semester. This will serve to reinforce contextualized English practice, employability skills, campus engagement and relationship building

3. Peer mentoring:  Peers and participants will be required to complete appropriate tasks in small-group settings as in-class activities or as part of participants' lab work.

4. Closing event:  A celebration of accomplishment that once more invites families to collectively recognize participants' achievement

The seminal research and researchers (Tinto; Terenzini & Pascarella; Astin, etc.) of retention in higher education posited that relationships and engagement at the institution matter and play a key role in student success.  Further research on adults by Kasworm (2003, 2005) and Tinto (2006) qualify these findings and situate this institutional social engagement as mostly rooted in the classroom, while Bean and Metzner (1985), Ransdell (2001), Ceja (2004), and Jeffreys (2007) describe non-academic factors outside of the institution as particularly beneficial to adults.  Legal immigration by Cubans and their language-learning in a community where Cubans hold power add additional challenges and offer additional opportunities not addressed in the existing retention literature.

This study provides a voice where there had not been one – a voice at the crossroads of some of the insight gathered over the years, but situated in a community of immigrants with legal status, power, and a strong social enclave.  Creating a more intentional and intrusive alignment of the principal influences the participants cited as being substantive is absolutely possible: engaging with peers, finding a comfortable and legal, flexible job, and benefiting from the support of a robust community of immediate and extended family.  This study allowed participants to tell their story of success and accomplishment.

## Limitations of the Study

Student success is impacted by multiple factors. The cognitive domain is but one, though sometimes not the most important one for adult students. This study accounted for non-cognitive environmental factors, though it did not consider psychological factors in the participants such as participants' perseverance or ability to cope with stress. No assessment or acknowledgment of such was considered. Another limitation to consider is the length of time since the participants graduated. As years pass, memory fades and future research might focus on current graduates to gauge a more detailed description of participants' experience.

## Recommendation for Future Research

Future research on the influence of non-academic factors on the baccalaureate attainment of Adult Cuban women can build upon the findings of this study or use the findings to raise related questions. Case studies and phenomenological studies at other institutions in other communities might expound on these findings. Some recommendations are discussed below.

This study focused on women because of their overwhelming representation in college-level ESL classrooms in South Florida. The rationale was that impacting women would affect a greater number of students. Are the factors that women identified as being of principal value the same factors Cuban men would identify? Would adult Cuban men identify mentoring relationships as valuable? Since Latino men, in particular, are expected to carry a greater burden on earning and income (Garcia & Bayer, 2005), would that increased pressure change the value of the various environmental factors women cited as being of principal influence?

Future research may also explore other minority majority Latino communities in the U.S.  Demographics in the U.S. is rapidly changing, and other cities are experiencing shifts in ethnic representation and their representation in positions of power.  In Florida alone, there are various cities with majority Latino communities.  What are the outcomes of Puerto Ricans in Central Florida?  Are Puerto Rican women who do not speak English learning English and attending college in large numbers? Would programs that intentionally coalesce the environmental factors cited by this study's participants play a significant role in their degree-attainment as well?

This study emphasized those students who were successful.  Are there large numbers of students who similarly experienced some of these non-academic factors, but were unsuccessful in their college completion?  While the participants all started at various English levels down to level one, there was no assessment of participants' grit or any other such non-cognitive measure of perseverance.  Psychological factors were not considered.  Are there other unique characteristics involved that were not explored?  Does the process of identifying successful students alone create an inherent bias in this area?  Further exploration that includes unsuccessful students might be beneficial.  Did the unsuccessful students also enjoy strong family support?  Did they too have accommodating jobs?  What types of relationships with peers and staff did these participants enjoy while enrolled at school?

Future research may also explore other adult English language learners in college, regardless of community demographics.  Is the multiplicative effect of a flexible part time job and a supportive mentoring program beneficial enough to raise outcomes regardless

of an expanded social network or enclave?  Are friendships, independent of nationality and/or ethnicity highly beneficial as well?

## Summary

Chapter 5 concluded the study with responses to the research questions, implications for teaching and learning, and recommendations for further research. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore students' experiences with the non-academic factors they perceived to have been a principal influence on their baccalaureate degree attainment.  This study shed light on the effect of a strong social network of peers and college faculty and staff on the success of adult Cuban women.  In many cases, the influence of minor interactions with faculty – interactions that would hardly be remembered by the faculty or staff a semester removed – made a lasting impact on the student's ability and willingness to persevere.  Participants also credited the collective commitment of their families to their own personal goals as being highly influential.  Indeed, it was a group effort with a team of support helping at just the right moments.  Those whose families provided a comfortable and flexible job were quick to praise that support as well.  A comfortable job or work-experience, in fact, was credited with providing great inspiration for everyone.  The great African proverb held true in that indeed it took a village, but this village helped nurture a college graduate.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol

**Background Information**

- Tell me a little bit about yourself.

    1. What brought you to Miami and how old were you when you arrived?

    2. Did you have family here in Miami already?

    3. Did your family help during your transition to living in Miami?

- Tell me about your experience at school in Cuba.

    1. Did you intend to go to college when you lived in Cuba?

**School in Miami**

- Tell me about your experience in school in South Florida.

    1. What school did you attend and what memories do you have from high school?

    2. Did you speak any English when you arrived?

    3. How was your English when you left high school?

- Tell me about your experience at Miami Dade College learning English.

    1. Tell me about your schedule. Did you study full time? Did you go to school in the morning?

    2. What were your intentions when you started Miami Dade College? What was your purpose for learning English?

    3. Tell me about the ESL program or programs you participated in while at Miami Dade College.

    4. Do you feel you learned the necessary English to start non-ESL college classes?

    5. How long did it take you to finish ESL studies at Miami Dade College?

- Tell me about your experience at Miami Dade College taking non-ESL classes.

    1. How was the transition for you?

    2. Did you continue immediately?

    3. Did you study full time or part time?

    4. Had anything in your life outside of school changed at this point? Were you working, for example, or living in a different house?

    5. How long did it take you to finish your associate of arts degree?

    6. Did you feel ready and prepared to continue your academic career once you finished your AA?

- Tell me about your college experience after completing your AA.

    1. Where did you go to complete your bachelor's degree?

    2. Did you start immediately after finishing Miami Dade College?

    3. Tell me about the transition experience.

    4. Did you study full time or part time?

    5. Had anything in your life outside of school changed at this point? Were you working, for example, or living in a different house?

    6. How long did it take you to finish your bachelor's degree?

**Factors That Contributed to Completion**

- I want you to focus on your time at Miami Dade College. Think about your time learning English and the transition to college-level coursework. Talk to me about some of the things that you feel helped you succeed in school.

    1. Tell me about the things that you feel helped you *outside* of the classroom?

    2. Did you participate in activities outside of the classroom?

3. Did you make friends and interact with them often?

4. Are there people at Miami Dade College who stand out as having helped you in any particular way?

5. What was particularly difficult about going to school? What helped you to overcome that difficulty?

6. Talk to me about life at your transfer institution. What are the things that you remember that helped you the most?

**Closing Questions**

• What would you list as the top three non-academic factors that you feel most contributed to you completing your bachelor's degree?

• Did the factors that helped you succeed at Miami Dade College change as you transitioned from Miami Dade College to your transfer institution?

• Is there anything that I did not ask that you feel I should know that greatly contributed to the completion of your bachelor's degree?

Consent to Participate in a Research Study



**ADULT CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY**

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF THE NON-ACADEMIC FACTORS THAT CUBAN FEMALE NON-NATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKERS PERCEIVED TO HAVE BEEN PRINCIPAL INFLUENCES ON THEIR SUCCESSFUL ATTAINMENT OF A BACCALAUREATE DEGREE

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**
You are being asked to be in a research study. The purpose of this study is to identify the types of support outside of the classroom that adult students like you feel helped them obtain their bachelor's degree.

**NUMBER OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS**
If you decide to be in this study, you will be one of 15 people in this research study.

**DURATION OF THE STUDY**
Your participation will require no more than 2 hours of your time.

**PROCEDURES**
If you agree to be in the study, you will need to:
1. Meet with me for an interview that should last no more than 1.5 hours. I will ask you a series of questions about your time in college, and I'll record your answers with a digital recorder.
2. Review the transcription of your interview and my notes to make sure I captured what you were saying accurately.

**RISKS AND/OR DISCOMFORTS**
There is no risk or discomfort associated with this study.

**BENEFITS**

Your answers will benefit colleges that are looking for ways to increase the number of adults like you completing a bachelor's degree. Your answers will help colleges determine what programs should be developed and funded to increase student success.

**ALTERNATIVES**

There are no known alternatives available to you other than not taking part in this study. However, any significant new findings developed during the course of the research which may relate to your willingness to continue participation will be provided to you.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

The records of this study will be kept private and will be protected to the fullest extent provided by law. Any information or document that is published will not include your personal information that might identify you individually, such as your first and last name. Only I will have access to these digital records, and the University will also be able to access the records for auditing purposes.

**COMPENSATION & COSTS**

You will not receive payment for your participation in this study. You will also not be responsible for any costs to participate in this study.

**RIGHT TO DECLINE OR WITHDRAW**

Your participation in this study is totally voluntary. If at any time you change your mind about participation, you are free to withdraw your consent with no penalty or consequence. The investigator reserves the right to remove you without your consent if he feels it is in the best interest of the study.

**RESEARCHER CONTACT INFORMATION**

If you have any questions about the purpose, procedures, or any other issues relating to this research study you may contact Nelson Magaña at 305-389-9662. You can also email Nelson Magaña at nelsonrmagana@gmail.com.

**IRB CONTACT INFORMATION**

If you would like to talk with someone about your rights of being a subject in this research study or about ethical issues with this research study, you may contact the FIU Office of Research Integrity by phone at 305-348-2494 or by email at ori@fiu.edu.

**PARTICIPANT AGREEMENT**

I have read the information in this consent form and agree to participate in this study. I have had a chance to ask any questions I have about this study, and they have been answered for me. I understand that I will be given a copy of this form for my records.

_____    _____

Signature of Participant                                                          Date

_____

Printed Name of Participant

_____    _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent                             Date

VITA

NELSON MAGAÑA

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| 1991 | A.A., Elementary Education<br>Miami Dade College<br>Miami, Florida |
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| 1992 | A.S., Photographic Technology<br>Miami Dade College<br>Miami, Florida |
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