

## DEFINING A LEADER: The Leadership Identity Development of Latino Men

### Abstract

Research on college student leadership is evolving, with more scholars studying the influence of social identities on the development of student leaders. The evolving literature includes research on how race influences the leadership identity development of college students, which can support their retention and graduation from postsecondary institutions. Gaps exist in the literature on how the definitions of leaders and leadership influences leadership identity development for many social identities in numerous institutional contexts, including for Latino men. Using a case study methodology, we studied the how definitions of leaders and leadership influenced the leadership identity development of Latino men and how that influenced their placement in the LID model (Komives et al., 2005). Thirteen Latino men in the Southeastern U.S. were interviewed. Participants' definitions and perspectives of leaders and leadership placed them all in the Leader Identified stage of the LID model. Implications for leadership educators regarding practice and research are provided.

### Introduction

Latino men have persisted and graduated from higher education institutions at rates comparatively lower than their White peers (Harper & Quaye, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Sáenz et al., 2016), motivating some scholars to identify these low rates as a crisis (Sáenz & Ponjuán, 2009a, 2009b). Institutions of higher education are looking for methods to retain and increase the likelihood of graduation of students from historically underrepresented populations, including Latino men (Harper & Quaye, 2009; Sáenz et al., 2016). Research in higher education consistently indicates involvement in formal leadership positions increases the likelihood students, including Latino men, will stay and graduate from postsecondary institutions (Astin, 1993; Dugan & Komives, 2007; Guardia & Evans, 2008; Harper & Quaye, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

If this research is correct, better understanding the ways Latino men develop their identities as leaders and engage in leadership positions on college campuses can potentially increase the retention rates and likelihood of Latino men to graduate from higher education institutions.

There are few works discussing the leadership development of Latinos/as (Bordas, 2012, 2013), including in the higher education setting (Acosta & Guthrie, 2020; Guardia & Evans, 2008; Guardia & Salinas, 2018; Lozano, 2015a; Torres, 2018). Leadership educators may use the Leadership Identity Development (LID) model (Komives et al., 2005, 2006) as a way to enhance the leader identity development of Latino men, potentially increasing their academic gains, persistence, and graduation rates. One approach to supporting Latino men's leader identity

development is to better understand this student population's definitions of leaders and leadership. Better understanding how Latino men define leaders and leadership can enable leadership educators to optimize the leadership opportunities Latino men participate in, maximizing their leadership development. Though student leadership has been discussed in the literature (Ewing et al., 2009), little is known about how the definition of leaders and leadership influence college student leadership and leadership identity development, as these perceptions have not been explored extensively as a part of understanding Latino men's leadership identity development in the campus environment.

This research study analyzes and builds upon the LID model (Komives et al., 2005, 2006) by using it as a means to investigate how Latino men's definition of leaders and leadership informed their leadership identity development. Using the LID model as the guiding framework, the research questions for this study were 1) How do participants define leaders and leadership, based on their experiences and perspectives? and 2) How do participants' perspectives on leaders and leadership influence their placement in the LID model?

## Background Information

Recently, scholarship has indicated social identities such as race influence how college students engage in and make sense of leadership experiences, campus organizations, and leadership identity development (Acosta & Guthrie, 2020; Dugan et al., 2012; Guthrie et al., 2013; Kodama & Dugan, 2013; Lozano, 2015a; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Rosch et al., 2015). With no known literature discussing the influence of the definitions of leaders and leadership on leadership identity development for Latino men, this investigation filled a crucial literature gap, already identified as meriting further inquiry (Acosta & Guthrie, 2020; Lozano, 2015a; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Rosch et al., 2015; Sáenz et al., 2016).

Contemporary research on leadership and social

identities indicates dynamics related to social identities influence how students in higher education institutions engage in formal and informal leadership positions, campus organizations, and leadership identity development (Dugan et al., 2012; Kodama & Dugan, 2013; Lozano, 2015a; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Renn & Ozaki, 2010; Rosch et al., 2015). Research on college student leadership and social identities show how important social identities are in trying to understand college students' participation in leadership experiences and campus organizations (Guardia & Evans, 2008; Kodama & Dugan, 2013; Komives et al., 2009; Lozano, 2015a; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Renn & Ozaki, 2010). This research also demonstrates how influential these involvements can be in the identity development of students and call for more research analyzing these connections. No articles focus on the links between definitions of leaders and leadership and leadership identity development for Latino men.

### **Leadership and Leadership Identity Development.**

The actual definition of leadership continues to be debated. Kellerman (2012) stated there are over 1,500 definitions and 40 models of leadership. Some scholars have stated leadership is socially constructed, thus, it holds different meanings to different people (Guthrie et al., 2013), making it hard to define. Social construction means that over time, societal understandings of a complex idea, in this case leadership, is jointly created from shared assumptions and centers on the idea meanings are developed with others rather than separately within each individual. As a result, one person's definition of leadership will be different from others based on how, through social interaction, they have constructed its meaning. As Guthrie and Jenkins (2018) note, "Individuals may define [leadership] differently based on personal identities, experiences, traits, behaviors, or worldviews" (p. 4). Therefore, individuals' personal definition of leadership hinges on their experiences through the multiple identities they hold. To date, no research has examined how undergraduate Latino men have socially constructed a broad definition of either leadership or leaders and

how those socially constructed definitions influence their leadership identity development.

In trying to understand the definition of leadership and a leader, Arminio et al.'s (2000) study where they asked students of color if they considered themselves leaders is helpful. Most participants did not consider themselves "leaders," and some resented it as a descriptor, as they felt it separated them from others in their racial group, although Arminio et al. (2000) did not expand on why these students felt this way. This resentment may be based on the students' definition of leadership and a leader and a possible cultural disconnect to how they perform leadership.

The most prominent literature detailing how a leadership identity is developed is Komives et al.'s (2005) work on the LID model. The LID model had numerous categories emerge: Developmental Influences; Developing Self; Group Influences; Changing View of Self with Others; Broadening View of Leadership; and Leadership Identity. These categories reflect all of the different ways a leader can learn and grow through the leadership identity development process. The Leadership Identity category was the central category of the LID model and developed in six stages: Awareness, Exploration/Engagement, Leader Identified, Leadership Differentiated, Generativity, and Integration/Synthesis.

Komives et al. (2009) outlined a few potential shortcomings associated with the LID model and indicated students of color might experience the LID model differently than their White peers. Additionally, the researchers found students of color at Stage 3 of the Leadership Identity category are more likely to describe collectivist ways of leading than other study participants. Komives et al. (2009) end their study by calling for more research on the intersections of race, culture, and leadership identity.

Other scholars have studied the LID model for its connections to social identities. In 2005, Renn and Bilodeau studied the leadership identity development of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans

(LGBT) student leaders using the LID model in its early stages. Renn and Bilodeau (2005) found the context of involvement with LGBT student activities provided rich opportunities for development at each of the six stages of the Leadership Identity category of the LID model. Also of note was that involvement in leadership and activism specific to LGBT identity promoted development of leadership identity.

While a few scholars have tackled how the LID model is connected to Latinx students, most research has centered on Latina students. Beatty (2015) analyzed the LID model and found it ignored a few key elements in how Latinas grew as leaders. Onorato and Musoba (2015) conducted a study to determine the applicability of the LID model to Latina leaders at an HSI. The researchers found "the LID model is incomplete, as it does not include an understanding of the influences of gender, ethnicity, and culture on leadership identity development" (p. 29).

**Latinos/as and Leadership.** It is also important to examine literature connecting Latinos/as and leadership. Bordas (2013) detailed what elements unique to the Latino/a culture influence the community's leadership practices. Though not specific to college students, she identified values from the Latino/a culture she believes are embodied by all Latino/a leaders. They include "treating people like familia [family], being generous, having respeto [respect] for everyone regardless of status or position, always keeping one's word, and being of service" (p. 110). Beyond providing the elements of leadership unique to the Latino/a culture, Bordas (2013) also highlighted the importance of connecting Latino/a leadership to social activism and building coalitions for the advancement of the Latino/a population. She also encouraged focusing Latino/a leadership on the positivity found in the celebration of life, faith, and diversity. She calls on future Latino/a leaders and their allies to collaborate together to build a more humanistic world.

Studies focusing specifically on Latinx college students with regards to leadership are a recent

emerging body of knowledge, with Lozano (2015b) building on and referencing Bordas' (2013) work when she conducted a study to better understand the leadership development of Latino/a students at a large, public, research university in the Midwest. The participants appreciated different leadership styles, but they viewed leadership as being holistic and action-oriented (Lozano, 2015b). Participants also saw themselves as role models and focused their leadership energy outwardly more than inwardly, focusing on collaboration, community, and empowerment. The view of leadership Lozano (2015b) found is very similar to how Bordas (2013) described the social activism and unique elements of Latino/a leadership. Like Arminio et al. (2000) and Bordas (2013), Lozano (2015b) notes how Latino/a students in her study resist the hierarchical structures many traditional leadership programs and models utilize, preferring to be flatter and community-oriented in their approach. These studies and others (Acosta & Guthrie, 2020; Beatty, 2015; Lozano, 2015a; Suarez, 2015) call on higher education scholars and practitioners to reinsert Latino/a student experiences into all aspects of higher education, including scholarship, leadership development practices, and in the training and consciousness of the faculty and staff who work with these students.

## Methodology

This study employed an instrumental case study (Creswell, 2013; Johnson, & Christensen, 2008) at one Predominantly White Institution in the southeastern U.S., Southeastern University (SU), to gain a better understanding of how the definitions of leaders and leadership influenced the leadership identity development of Latino men. This methodology was most appropriate because the bounded system investigated was Latino men's leadership, and the context in which the case study occurred was a PWI in the southeastern U.S. This system was studied at a single institution to gather and analyze information related to Latino male leadership identity development, which was appropriate given

the bounded nature of case study methods (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). SU is a large, four-year, public, very high research activity doctoral university in the southeastern U.S. (Carnegie, n.d.), with an approximate total undergraduate enrollment at SU identifying as Hispanic/Latino at 21%. Hispanic/Latino men accounted for about 9.1%, a significant percentage of the undergraduate student population.

Guest et al. (2006) argue that for qualitative research, the appropriate number of interviews to be conducted should not be fixed; instead, the researcher should conduct the interviews necessary to reach saturation. However, Guest et al. (2006) do suggest a reasonable target, say 12, is sufficient. This study selected a sample of 13 Latino men. This sample represented ten different countries of origin connected to the Hispanic/Latino community, ten juniors and seniors, and included individuals ages 18-24. The sample also constituted a diverse cross section of educational pathways, majors, and other social identities. This sample size and composition allowed the researchers to reach saturation and ensured there was enough data to identify relevant codes and themes and to appropriately answer the research questions of this study.

A typical case sample (Miles et al., 2014) was chosen and identified as a Latino man involved in a formal or informal leadership position in a student organization within SU's Division of Student Affairs, which is consistent with research conducted on college student leadership and involvement (Komives et al., 2005). Participants were recruited through asking higher education professionals in various campus offices at SU to share the study information with Latino men, and then snowball sampling was used, as research participants identified other individuals who could contribute to this research study (Johnson & Christensen, 2008; Miles et al., 2014).

Each participant engaged in two semi-structured interviews, with the first focusing on the student's life story up to that point to get a better understanding of what influenced him and his cognitive and racial/

ethnic identity development. The second centered on the participant's campus involvement and leadership experiences, personal definition of leadership, and how his racial/ethnic identity influenced his leadership identity development. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

Between the first and second interview, data analysis began using the constant comparative method (Johnson & Christensen, 2008; Merriam, 2009), which allowed identification of categories and possible themes, and determination of whether asking different follow-up questions was needed. At least two weeks were scheduled between each interview to allow for reflection, revisit notes, check for potential thematic connections with other participants, and prepare for the second interview. A researcher's journal for reflection, analysis, and to minimize bias during the research process was also kept (Ortlipp, 2008).

Initially, provisional coding was used (Miles et al., 2014), with the predetermined codes being Ferdman and Gallegos's (2001) Latino orientations. Next, descriptive coding, creating and identifying codes in the data, including leadership, leadership identity, and student organization involvement, occurred. Once the codes and categories were generated, they were revisited and refined in the analysis by engaging in axial coding (Miles et al., 2014), pinpointing trends and patterns emerging, which were then used to narrow coding categories. This process continued until participants' definitions of leaders and leadership influenced leadership identity development for Latino men in this case were identified, constructed, and described.

## Findings

A holistic view of the participants' perspectives on leaders and leadership by asking during both interviews for their definitions of a leader and leadership was captured. It was also asked for the participants' reactions when they are called leaders.

Participants' definitions of leader and leadership allowed a better understanding of how they developed their leader identities and what stage they were at in the LID model.

**Definition of a Leader.** Participants were asked for their definition of a leader in both interviews to see what, if any, changes would occur. Overwhelmingly, participants' definition of a leader did not change between the two interviews. The themes emerging from participants' definition of a leader included creating and supporting the work of a group towards a vision or goal, having an influence between leaders and followers, and having self-confidence.

*Creating or Supporting a Vision or Goal.* The most common theme in the participants' definition of a leader was a leader created or supported the work of a team toward a vision or a goal. As Ivan shared, "I feel like being a leader is being confident in a goal or a vision, enough that you can run it yourself." Carlos sums up the broader definition of how a leader supports a vision:

So a leader is someone who takes initiative, has a vision, and understands how to enroll others in that vision and who can connect with people on a genuine level in a way that would have them want to be a part of his vision, or her vision.

Three participants linked the definition of a leader who supports a group's work toward a goal with another important characteristic of a leader. Alfredo connects to and expands on Carlos's broad definition of a leader to include how a leader individually grows and then works with others to accomplish the vision or goal:

I think it should be an individual that first understands what they are doing, they understand the bigger picture of whatever goal they're envisioning, or whatever task they're going after, and making sure that they can lead by example . . . it's more about making sure that you can encourage, and help people reach their goal at a personal

and at an overall, at a larger scale.

Though there are subtle differences between them, participants' definitions have similar expressions of the importance of a leader to help create and support the work of a group towards a vision or a goal. This demonstrates how they think of leaders as people working collectively rather than singularly. This definition of a leader working with a group both aligns with how participants see themselves as leaders and with literature about how Latino/a leaders work (Bordas, 2012, 2013; Lozano, 2015a). The participants' definition of a leader also aligns with the description of the Leader Identified stage of the LID model (Komives et al., 2005), since the participants see themselves as positional leaders. Participants' definition also affirms Komives et al.'s (2009) assertion that students of color see leaders and engage in leadership experiences with a collectivist mindset.

**Influence Between Leaders and Followers.** Another commonality in participants' definition of a leader was a leader and followers have some level of influence over each other. Ignacio shares:

A leader is someone who in a historical sense has influence over people, but a leader can be a follower, because a leader needs to know when he or she must be present in the group in order to help that group achieve a common goal.

Ignacio's response illustrates leaders' influence over others without necessarily being a follower. Alkaios's definition of a leader explains the way a leader can be both a leader and a follower:

My definition of a leader is somebody that has influence, can maintain influence over, of other people, but at the same time is willing to follow and, and be led to do something. They're able to take both parts of being a follower and a leader.

Both Ignacio and Alkaios realized how

important influence is to the work and definition of a leader. They recognized, when thinking of leadership as a social construction, without having followers to influence, one cannot be a leader. As a result, influencing others was identified as an important part of the definition of a leader. The participants' views on the influences of leaders and followers connects with the Group Influences category of the LID model (Komives et al., 2005), particularly when referencing how students interact in groups. For these participants, participation with the group means a positional leader engages in an influential relationship with followers.

**Self-Confidence.** Another theme in participants' definition of a leader was having self-confidence. Alkaios shares, "a leader is someone that's confident in themselves and knows how to carry themselves." Ivan expands on the theme of self-confidence Alkaios touches on in his definition of a leader:

For me, it means knowing enough about yourself that you can start guiding others with confidence . . . to me a leader is someone who knows themselves enough . . . and can clearly define themselves well enough that they can start to delegate and lead others with confidence.

For Alkaios, Ivan, and a few other participants, having self-confidence as a leader allows that person to display strong leadership abilities and achieve results. They can use that self-confidence in the work they do and their interactions with others. Self-confidence helps build a person's sense of self and identity as a leader. It also directly correlates and aligns with the Building Self-Confidence aspect of the Developing Self category of the LID model (Komives et al., 2005), as

engaging in leadership experiences built the participants' self-confidence.

In coupling these themes together, the participants' overall definition of a leader is someone who self-confidently influences and follows others to create or support the work of a group toward a vision or goal. This new definition of a leader best exemplifies participants' views of themselves as leaders and of leaders in general.

**Definition of Leadership.** Like the definition of a leader, participants were asked in both their first and second interviews for their definition of leadership to determine if there was any change. As with the definition of a leader, for the most part, participants' definition of leadership did not change from the first interview to the second. Participants' definition of leadership related to three themes: a connection with people or influence over people or a group; personal qualities or characteristics; and the role or title of a leader.

*A Connection with or Influence over People or a Group.* Eight participants defined leadership in a way best described as a connection with or influence over people or a group. Alkaios defines it as "when you have the ability to show others how to do something, or show others a path and have others follow you, having other people follow you." Alfredo expands on this idea by talking about the influence a leader can have: "What I would think is that leadership is kind of just the overall sense of taking, not taking order, but having almost like the power at something to where you can influence others."

Similar to Alfredo, Ignacio discusses how leadership is interconnected with influencing people to a goal:

Leadership is just doing what it is you need to do for achieving that common goal. Leadership can be influencing people to help you with that goal or leadership can also be stepping back because you realize that you're not suited in this group, or in this

situation to continue on in achieving that goal.

Ivan builds off of Ignacio's response and describes leadership as getting people to come together and utilizing their strengths to get things done:

Leadership to me, would probably be being able to guide others with the proper intelligence . . . being able to know when to give them a push in the right way, or when to let them go another way . . . it's learning everyone's personal strengths and weaknesses and letting them go in their own direction at certain times, to benefit from what they're good at.

These varied statements indicate participants define leadership within a social context, with the focus on connecting with or having influence over people, particularly in a team or group. This makes leadership a more relational process for them, which affirms previous research on college student leadership, particularly as connected to race (Bordas, 2012, 2013; Dugan & Komives, 2007; Komives et al., 2013; Lozano, 2015a). As with the definition of a leader, this description of leadership as an influence relationship also connects to the Engaging in Groups part of the Group Influences category within the LID model (Komives et al., 2005), which further demonstrates the model's applicability to the participants.

*Personal Qualities or Characteristics.* Six participants' definition of leadership included having to do with personal qualities or characteristics. Henry gives a description of leadership qualities in broad terms, saying "leadership almost seems like a characteristic to me. What kind of leadership qualities does this person have?" Ignacio goes a little further and starts describing leadership with a few examples:

Leadership is the ability to observe and understand a situation where you feel your abilities, your expertise, and so everything that you bring to the table could help achieve a common goal within the group, whether it be politically, in a band, or in university housing, etc.

Camilo extends Henry and Ignacio's definitions by

identifying some of the necessary characteristics of demonstrating one's leadership abilities:

Being strong, but being able to take charge, but also help others. Just having the ability to learn quickly from whatever situation they're put in . . . following through, responsibility, accountability, but also, being able to interact with people in a way that they understand what you're saying but don't resent you for it or they're willing to learn and be active in their actions towards the goal.

As seen in these comments, some participants felt leadership is something one does, and as a result, they are skills or attributes people have. These definitions continue to show leadership as a relational process, however, in these definitions, leadership comes from within the individual rather than as a connection or influence outward with others. This description matches what Komives et al. (2005) discuss as the Establishing Self Efficacy component of the Developing Self category of the LID model.

*Positional Leader.* Three participants tied their definition of leadership to a positional leader. Ken stated, "Leadership is just the act or process of being a leader." Alkaios shared a similar sentiment, saying, "I guess leadership would just be being a leader. Being a leader, you display leadership." Peter echoed Ken and Alkaios, sharing, "Goes back to being a leader, but leadership is being in the actual role itself. Having the role of the leader, I guess the title, would be the leadership." This pattern of responses affirms how participants think of themselves, as well leaders and leadership generally, as interconnected with a position or title. For them, one cannot engage in the process of leadership without having a formal role, title, or position, which is a close match to the description of the Leader Identified stage of the LID model (Komives et al., 2005), as in this stage, leadership is done by formally identified positional leaders.

Based on the themes of the definitions given by the participants, a broad definition of leadership is a relational process by a formal or positional leader using their skills or attributes to connect with or exert influence over others. With the participants' definition of

leadership more developed, it is helpful to understand how participants reacted to being called a leader to give a richer picture of their perspectives on leadership and provides leadership educators with perspectives to keep in mind when working with a similar student population on their campuses.

**Reactions to Being Called a Leader.** Participants were asked to share their reactions to being called a leader, how they viewed themselves as a leader, and how their reactions and perspectives on leaders and leadership connected to their Latino culture. This information helped provide additional context to their definitions of a leader and leadership, as well as better place them in the LID model. Their responses were connected to feeling a sense of responsibility or being humbled, in some way feeling uncomfortable or not liking it, or not having any reaction at all.

*Feeling a Sense of Responsibility or Being Humbled.* The most common reaction to being called a leader was feeling some sense of responsibility or being humbled by the designation. Omar said his feelings about being a leader were of humility and its responsibility:

I think humility is a good way of putting it. I think that's very important, for people to stay humble. But when I'm called a leader, I tend to embrace it. . . not take leadership as an honor but a responsibility.

Similar to Omar, Carlos discusses how the mixture of humility and responsibility generate his reaction to being called a leader:

If people designate me as a leader, I feel a responsibility to make whatever we're working towards happen. And then if people were to tell me in conversation that they feel that I'm a leader, I just find it to be very humbling . . . I think being a leader is a very, very positive thing to be, because you can lead people and still not be a leader . . . you can lead others without being a leader.

Seven participants reacted to being called a leader with some sense of responsibility and

humility. These reactions reflected some of the feelings talked about when discussing how their culture influenced their leader identity. Participants shared their desire to be a role model, to connect with others, or to take pride in representing their culture, all of which are done from a place of humility and a sense of responsibility. These sentiments about being a leader align with literature on the connection between the Latino/a culture and leadership (Bordas, 2012, 2013). Thus, it is not surprising many of those participants expressed similar feelings when being called a leader. Leadership educators can work on designing leadership experiences which enhance Latino men's ability to serve as role models to others, which contributes to their positive leadership development.

*Uncomfortable with Leader Designation.* Four participants shared their reaction to being referenced as a leader as being uncomfortable or not liking the reference at all. Julian shared why he did not like being called a leader:

I actually don't like it when people call me a leader . . . when it comes time for people to call me a leader, I don't want them to see me like that. I want them to see me as like, I'm your friend. I'm not here to rule over your life. I'm just a person in charge of something.

Much like what Julian shared, Ken also indicated he did not necessarily see himself fitting into the idea he had of a leader as someone with a position in charge of others:

At first it was really strange because, I mean, I've been a leader and I can call myself a leader, but to be sort of acknowledged and considered a leader, at first is very much, it's a strange feeling . . . I

guess like a confirmation that you actually are a leader to enough of a degree that people consider you one.

Unlike Julian and Ken, who expressed not being comfortable with being called a leader due to awkwardness in how that label made them see themselves, Alfredo attributed his discomfort with being called a leader to his personality and the way he grew up:

I've had a problem with it just because it's something that I was really never used to and I would consider myself a very humble person in terms of I don't really like attention like that . . . I was grown up to be more respectful . . . growing up with that mentality I just always grew up to be humble and be respectful, and really earn the things that you wanted to. So being called a leader is something that although I respect it, sometimes I don't really know how to take it.

These sentiments are not surprising. As discussed earlier, the participants view leadership as connected to a position, and, as a result, some participants are not comfortable with that view of themselves. In line with how Bordas (2012, 2013) describes Latinos/as as a collective, "we" culture, the participants see themselves as leaders in a more collaborative and connected way, not as authoritarian or hierarchical. When creating or facilitating leadership opportunities, leadership educators should recognize some Latino men may be somewhat uncomfortable with taking on the mantle of "leadership" in favor of engaging in a more collaborative leadership experience.

*No Reaction at All.* A few participants shared they did not have a reaction when called a leader. Peter shared, "I guess I don't really react that much to it." Similarly, Luis said, "generally, I just kind of laugh, and say thank you and leave it at that. And then I usually try to compliment them in return." Henry also communicated his feelings: "I mean, I don't

have, like, any initial reaction . . . to me, like, being a leader doesn't mean I know everything, you know?" Alkaios sums up why he does not have any real reaction to being called a leader:

If somebody is calling you a leader you obviously did something to prove that you are a leader, and so, you should, like, there's no reason to react in any kind of way, you just kind of, appreciate it . . . if they say it in a way that you can thank them, then you thank them.

As these responses show, some individuals had no reaction to being called a leader, in contrast to the majority of participants who were either humbled or uncomfortable. There was not much information given by the participants to provide more context as to why they did not have a reaction to being called a leader. Based on the conversations with these participants, this reaction fit with their particular personalities; therefore, leadership educators can assess with individual Latino men if their student has little or no reaction to being referred to as a leader.

## Discussion

Collectively, the definitions the participants gave for a leader and leadership along with their reactions to being called a leader provide a glimpse into the perspectives they have about themselves as leaders and the outlooks they have about leadership. They see themselves as individuals with personal attributes who in their formal leadership roles work with or influence followers to accomplish a goal or vision. They have a great sense of humility and responsibility with regard to being leaders, with some not being comfortable or liking the designation of being a leader. Although the participants discuss working towards a collective goal, which literature indicates aligns with how many Latinos view leadership (Bordas, 2012, 2013), their definitions of leader and leadership differ from other research on Latino's views on leadership. Perspectives on leaders and

leadership from a communities of color approach often consider leaders and leadership in an informal manner, where anyone can participate in leadership activities and the title of a leader is eschewed (Arminio et al., 2000). The participants in this study define leaders and leadership as inseparably connected to a formal leadership position, meaning one cannot be a leader or engage in leadership without a formal title. These perspectives will be helpful in moving forward when considering how the LID model (Komives et al., 2005) is applicable to them.

**Placement of Participants in the LID Model.** The participants in this study were all in the Leader Identified stage of the LID model. When describing the Leader Identified stage of a Leader Identity, Komives et al. (2005) wrote, "participants perceived that groups were comprised of leaders and followers and believed the leaders did leadership ... in this leader-centric stage, one was a leader only if one held a leadership position" (p. 606).

All of the participants associated their definitions of a leader and leadership or their view of themselves or others as a leader to something done by a person with a position title who also has followers. For example, it was not until Ivan became Co-President of the Peruvian Student Association that he started realizing leadership was "something I can do, something I think I'm good at, I'm comfortable doing." Peter shared the organization he felt most pride in and learned the most was "Alpha Phi Omega . . . it's also the one where I've had the most leadership experience. I've held three different titles on their executive board." Omar shared in high school and in college, once he started attaining elected leadership positions in the organizations he was involved in, it changed how he saw himself as a leader:

People would always tell me that I was a leader, but I started feeling it more. I guess I was like, "Well, I guess I have the charisma. I guess I have the qualities my classmates or others are looking for in someone to look up to and give the responsibility of leading them too."

An overwhelming number of the participants' responses about their view of themselves as a leader and their involvement in leadership positions mirrored Ivan, Peter, and Omar's feelings. Their leader identity was in part constructed by the positions they held and how they worked with or managed other people in those organizations via that role. While many participants spoke abstractly during their definitions of a leader or leadership about influence or how a leader can also be a follower, when they described their own identity as a leader, it was always within the construct of a title or position in authority over others. This could be due to the fact many participants indicated they had no more than four semesters of enrollment at SU, resulting in not having had a lot of time or experience to grow their identities as leaders. The participants' definitions of leader and leadership, as well as their views of themselves as leaders, indicate the LID model (Komives et al., 2005) is applicable to the participants and clearly notes their placement in the model. Leadership educators can use these connections as a reference point for building and implementing leadership and involvement initiatives and programs with this student population.

## Implications for Future Practice

The findings from this research projected provided numerous implications for educators who develop, implement, and assess leadership programs, both in curricular and co-curricular formats. Broadly, higher education institutions can support the leadership development of Latino men in a variety of ways.

**Faculty and Staff Mentoring.** Some participants expressed SU offered support by providing mentors to the students, which they felt helped their leadership identity development; others indicated SU allowed them to practice their leadership skills. Connecting Latino men to mentors is supported by the LID model (Komives et al., 2005), as mentorship can positively impact the Developing Self and Broadening View of Leadership categories. Whenever possible, leadership educators should prioritize cultivating faculty and staff who can serve as mentors to this student population. Designing

opportunities for individuals at the institution who can provide this type of support encourages Latino men's academic and psychosocial growth (Sáenz & Ponjuán, 2009a, 2009b, 2011; Sáenz et al., 2016). It will also provide mentors to Latino men to help them be successful, a point mentioned by several participants.

Leadership educators should also work to provide training to faculty and staff in how to interact with, advise, and supervise Latino men. Professional development workshops teaching faculty and staff best practices in working with Latino men can be offered. Research indicates institutionally-sponsored institutional trainings, seminars, and workshops focused on working with Latino men can increase diversity awareness and highlight to the campus community the emphasis the institution has on Latino men's success (Harper & Quaye, 2009; Sáenz & Ponjuán, 2009a, 2009b, 2011; Sáenz et al., 2016; Smith, 2009; Valverde, 2007). Presenting sessions during new faculty and staff orientation and providing ongoing professional development sessions centered on working with Latino men builds connections with academic affairs and affords faculty and staff the opportunities to expand their knowledge of Latino men.

**Connecting with Others.** Several participants mentioned one of their primary motivations for getting involved in student organizations at SU was to connect to other individuals who identified with their culture, whether that was based on their country or countries of origin or the broader Hispanic/Latino/a population. This study reaffirms literature indicating students of color get involved on college campuses, particularly with identity-based student organizations, to connect with others from a similar background, as it assists them with their success at higher education institutions (Arminio et al., 2000; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Lozano, 2015a; Maramba & Velasquez, 2012).

It is therefore necessary for leadership educators to not only continue to provide opportunities for students from similar backgrounds to socially interact, but to expand those efforts and make it easier for students to connect with peers from similar cultures and backgrounds. As some participants shared, it will be easier for Latino men

to be successful in their higher education endeavors if they know and interact with others from a similar background.

**Marketing.** Another significant way participants expressed their leadership identity development could be enhanced was sharing the multitude of involvement opportunities the institution had with students. Omar stated SU needed to do better at “communicating ways to get involved.” Camilo expanded on this idea, saying he felt “the leadership opportunities that students receive are a huge, huge help to helping them become better people, but, the thing is, a lot of people really don’t know that much about them,” so he suggested “reaching people that wouldn’t necessarily step up naturally - like the shy people.” This exemplifies how some participants felt SU needed to advertise and encourage involvement more with students.

Leadership educators should review and update their marketing materials and strategies to ensure they are reaching Latino men in the most effective manners possible. One area for potential increase is outreach efforts via social media. The current generation of students, particularly students of color, are highly connected on various social media platforms, and using these platforms to promote in- and out- of class engagement has proven to have a positive effect on in-class performance and out-of-class development (Morgan Acosta, 2014). Social media has been shown to encourage students’ leadership development as well (Ahlquist & Endersby, 2017). Having a more robust marketing plan of involvement opportunities allows for leadership educators to ensure as many Latino men as possible know what opportunities for involvement and leadership exist and how to utilize them.

**Involvement Opportunities.** To gain a perspective on how leadership educators can better work with Latino men, participants were asked how SU helped them develop as leaders. The most frequent response was SU gave the participants opportunities to be a leader. Ignacio shared he felt like “because

there’s a lot to do, I’ve been able to get my feet in a lot of different organizations, which I’m really glad that I’ve done and I learned a lot more about people.” Ken echoed Ignacio’s comments, saying “they give you a lot of opportunities to be a leader and to learn how to be a leader . . . I think it’s really easy and inviting to get involved in a lot of things here.” Omar agrees, sharing “SU has most definitely given me a million doors to leadership . . . and I’ve learned to garner the ones I’m interested in and have had the opportunity to pursue leadership in any way I wanted to.” By providing numerous opportunities and pathways to involvement and making Latino students feel like they can participate, participants felt SU had given them the experience necessary to pursue their leadership development and engage with students in their respective ethnic groups.

As other literature has found (Harper & Quaye, 2009; Lozano, 2015a; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Renn & Ozaki, 2010), there are numerous benefits for students, particularly of color, when they are involved in leadership experiences. Being involved has helped students better develop a sense of self, supported racial and ethnic identity development, improved inter- and intrapersonal skills, and helped students clarify their values (Arminio et al., 2000; Harper & Quaye, 2007, 2009; Komives et al., 2005, 2006, 2009; Torres, 2003, 2004). Students of color involved in leadership experiences also learn how to work with others on a team, work toward a common vision or goal, and how to serve their communities (Bordas, 2012, 2013). Leadership education practitioners must ensure when working with Latino men on campus they are sensitive to and positively influencing their development.

Leadership education programs should provide as many ways as possible for students to be involved and engaged on campus. This can be done via extracurricular activities, such as undergraduate research projects with faculty, professional internships coordinated from the campus career center or from a private entity, or through community service projects. Participants in this study represented a wide

array of involvement; having a variety of leadership and engagement opportunities will allow leadership educators to support Latino men in learning more about leadership, leaders, working with others, and how they believe their cultural heritage influences how they see themselves as leaders. This suggestion is in line with other literature, finding involvement in student clubs and organizations, particularly for students of color, has numerous positive benefits and supports their retention and graduation (Astin, 1984, 1993; Harper & Quaye, 2009; Lozano, 2015a; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

## Implications for Future Research

There are many areas of research which can improve leadership educators' knowledge about Latino/a students. The literature on college student leadership continues to grow as it relates to students of color (Renn, 2007; Renn & Ozaki, 2010), particularly Latino/a students (Acosta & Guthrie, 2020; Lozano, 2015a; Onorato, 2010; Onorato & Musoba, 2015). The findings from this research study indicate future research on understanding leadership development needs to include exploring and defining leadership, student involvement and leadership programs, and leadership identity development.

How the Latino/a population, particularly at higher education institutions, define, understand, and engage in leadership must be explored. While there have been some attempts to better understand and describe Latino/a leadership (Bordas, 2012, 2013; Lozano, 2015a), more research is needed to increase the understanding of how Latino/a individuals engage each part of the leadership process. Calls for future research on Latino/a leadership has also been emphasized by other scholars (Acosta & Guthrie, 2020; Bordas, 2012, 2013; Dugan & Komives, 2007; Guardia & Salinas, 2018; Komives et al., 2009; Lozano, 2015a; Torres, 2018).

Future higher education scholars should continue to grow the literature on the benefits of college

student involvement and engagement in leadership programs, particularly for Latino men. This research study affirms many contributions to the literature on the numerous benefits of getting involved, especially for students from an underrepresented or historically marginalized population (Astin, 1984, 1993; Harper & Quaye, 2007, 2009; Lozano, 2015a; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Renn, 2007; Renn & Ozaki, 2010). Further research discovering and affirming the importance of involvement and engagement in leadership programs for Latino men can provide higher education administrators with information needed to develop institutional and departmental policies and programs known to lead to increased success for this student population (Ortiz, 2004; Sáenz et al., 2016; Valverde, 2007).

A final suggestion is to continue to discover how Latino men develop their identities as leaders. This research project was a case study with limiting factors. One way to expand the knowledge in this area of the literature is to change any one or several considerations in a future case study, such as institutional type, institutional size, and geographic location. Future researchers should also consider using different qualitative methodological approaches (grounded theory, phenomenology, ethnography). Additionally, this inquiry was not a longitudinal study. Future research on Latino men should include longitudinal studies to better understand and determine effects over time. Any of these changes might further illuminate how Latino men's leadership identity develops.

## Limitations

There were a few limitations associated with this study. First, making generalizable assertions of the findings from the sample to the larger Latinx population must be done with restraint (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, as this research was a case study, the findings are connected to the context of this particular case and would likely be different if the case parameters were changed (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). Finally, as

the researcher was the data collection instrument, there was conscious and unconscious biases that may have affected the study (Creswell, 2013, 2014; Merriam, 2009). These limitations, however, did not lessen the strengths of the study.

## **Conclusion**

Being involved in leadership opportunities supports the leadership identity development of Latino men, which can lead to their increased retention and graduation from postsecondary institutions. One way for leadership educators to best facilitate Latino men's leadership identity development is by understanding how they define leader and leadership. In this study, participants' definitions of a leader and leadership were always connected to a title or position, and all participants were in the Leader Identified stage of the LID model (Komives et al., 2005). Further researching ways to understand the leadership identity development of Latino men as well as their definitions of leader and leadership will support their growth.

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