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Latina Principals in Southern California: A Phenomenological Look into their Journey Towards Leadership

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LATINA PRINCIPALS IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL LOOK INTO THEIR JOURNEY TOWARDS
LEADERSHIP

by

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ABSTRACT

California is home to almost 15 million Latinos, however, according to the 2015 State of Higher Education Report for California, only 12% of the Latino population between the ages of 25 and 64 has a baccalaureate degree or higher, compared with 42% of the White population. Latina students have some of the lowest levels of educational attainment at every point in their K-12 journey and in general, very low occupational attainment. Given these troubling findings, this research sought to understand and tell the stories of Latinas in k-12 leadership positions in Southern California. In this study, Latinas describe how they successfully navigated through and were able to overcome many disparities to become effective educational leaders.

The research questions that guided this study were: (a) How do Latina school principals describe their lived experiences as an academically successful Latina student in grades K-12? (b) How do Latina school principals describe their lived experiences during and after college as related to their development as leaders? (c) In what ways does the organizational culture of the K-12 setting influence or is influenced by a Latina leader? Using phenomenological research methods, in depth individual interviews with 10 Latina leaders examined how and in what ways participants prior experiences impact and manifest in their leadership practice.

Some literature describe a *hybrid space*, which is the ethnic and mainstream culture that many Latinas must negotiate. However, results from this study support the addition of a third *organizational culture*, one that develops as a result of having authority within an educational institution. Thus this study posits that Latina leaders

negotiate three cultures while leading: ethnic, mainstream and organizational culture. This research also found that some barriers in the United States that Latinas describe might also positively contribute to their development as leaders.

The significance of this study is the possibility that the personal and professional experiences, as told in the stories that Latina educators shared, may enhance our understanding of this at-risk population, aiming to contribute positive counter-stories as exemplars and models for Latina youth living in the U.S.

DEDICATION

For all Latinas trying to make the world a better place.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

California is home to almost 15 million Latinos, yet, according to the 2015 State

of Higher Education Report for California, only 12% of the Latino population between

the ages of 25 and 64 has a baccalaureate degree or higher, compared with 42% of the

White population (The State of Higher Education in California, 2015). According to the

Pew Hispanic Center, as of 2011, only 51% of Latino/a students admitted into 4-year

universities finish their degrees (Pew Hispanic Center, 2011). Educational attainment for

this large population, which is becoming a minority majority in California, is in a dire

condition, because the strongest and most consistent predictor of social mobility in the

United States is educational attainment (Chapa & De La Rosa, 2004). For students of

color, and more specifically for Latinas, there is a significant disparity in K- 12

educational achievement compared to that of their White counterparts (Burciaga, Perez-

Huber, & Solorzano, 2010). The academic achievement gap between Latina students and

other females of color is also significant. Latina students have the lowest levels of

educational attainment at every point in their academic journey (Burciaga et al., 2010).

And if they make it to a university, their college experience is fraught with

dissatisfaction, cultural incongruence, and disenchantment with pursuing further

education (Aguilar, MacGillivray, & Walker, 2003; Villalpando, 2003, 2004). Upon

entering the workforce, Latinas also have the lowest levels of occupational achievement

(Vasquez, 1997). Given the large amounts of research that have produced these findings,

how do some Latinas manage to attain degrees and continue to become leaders of professional organizations?

There are studies that have looked at psychological and sociological factors that account for Latinas' perseverance toward degree completion. These factors include self-efficacy; support from peers, family, and faculty; in some cases school programs (Mahan et al., 1996) and congruence between personal goals and those of the institution (Maristela & Zell, 2010). However, if Latinas' experience in higher education is a lonely one due to their being an anomaly within their population (a simultaneous anomaly: only college student in the family to attend college and only Latina in a classroom), how does this experience influence their leadership? How do some Latinas metabolize this experience into strength and resilience? Does their only-ness continue into the workplace, where Latinas are still a minute percentage of the educated workforce, and, if so, how are these feelings negotiated within daily leadership practice?

Background

Careers and Identity

As educated Latinas slowly enter the professional world, the cultural isolation continues (Flores, 2011). In the professional realm, Latinas are still a cultural minority. Especially in professions that require graduate degrees or higher, the numbers of Latinas employed in these positions are few. In addition, they are also often a minority in their household because other family members who mostly perform manual labor misunderstand the different demands of a salaried career. There is a dearth of literature that has examined Latinas in careers or in leadership positions, and an absence of any

literature that described familial differences and the types of tensions they might create for families. Chicana feminist theory describes the tension between the two cultures Latinas must hold within their daily interactions as hybrid or third spaces (Anzaldua, 1987). However, this theory is formulated in a way that suggests being a Latina is a deficit and does not account for these spaces as a possible place of strength in the exercising of leadership capacities.

Anzaldua (1987), a well-respected Latina scholar and Chicana feminist, describes the conflict and tension generated by the polarities experienced when Latinas are torn between the needs of their ethnic culture and the demands of an American work organization as the dual nature of identity (Anzaldua, 1987, p. 85). This means learning two ways of thinking, speaking (including language), and behaving, one for home and one for work. The space between this duality has been described as "belonging" and "not belonging" by Elenes (1997). The descriptors of this dual space create a sense of isolation, yet some Latinas are able to gain strength or to more easily maneuver through these spaces.

In addition to the duality mentioned by Elenes (1997), Pesquera and Segura (1993) describe the Latina viewpoint from a triple lens of oppression, which places race/ethnicity, class, and gender as well as the unique experiences that arise out of this specific social location and identities as central factors in the development of Mexican-American women in the United States. This means that as Latinas acculturate in the United States, they are also pressured to remain true to their ethnic culture and expectations. Within this context, the issue of dual or multiple identities is particularly

salient. Chicana feminists point out that a necessary survival skill when living between two cultures is learning how to maintain the ethnic or cultural identity while learning to adapt to the dominant culture.

Anzaldua (1987) adds to the discourse of *only, separate from*, and she was the first person to suggest that in the process of straddling two cultures, a third identity, a hybrid, is created. Anzaldua (1987) sees the result of this juggling or straddling of cultures as assisting in the formation of an alternative identity that learns to develop a tolerance for the inconsistencies, ambiguity, and contradictions that Latinas encounter in daily life (Vera & De Los Santos, 2005). The description of a hybrid identity or ability to adapt is interesting as it can contribute to what leadership scholars describe as positive leadership behaviors, specifically for K-12 principals who must adapt their leadership to the situational needs of a school (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005).

However, the "triple oppression" (race, gender, class) Latinas face encourages passivity (Barragan, 1980; Melville, 1980; Mirande & Enriquez, 1979), which is something that Latinas are already culturally assimilated to exhibit. Some research has associated Hispanic women with superlative femininity and passivity (Canul, 2003). Layers of stereotypes, marginalization, and tokenism greatly impact Hispanic women in educated professions. Some of the stereotypes include "baby machine, poor and uneducated" (Canul, 2003, p. 174). In addition, the notion that Latinas are silent has been prevalent in Hispanic culture (Jenkins, 2009). Latinas are not to be heard, and their voices become second to those of their husbands and sons (Moraga & Anzaldua, 1983).

Although the research described here is prevalent, it does not capture every experience and can be faulted somewhat for over-generalizing and promoting stereotypes. The experience of Latinas who are in K-12 leadership positions must be deconstructed and understood. I am curious to learn if they ever find themselves negotiating these stereotypes within the prominent Eurocentric ethnic culture of their organizations.

The Latina educational trajectory story is bleak, but the literature on the Latina experience is starting to include an examination of "trenzas de identidades multiples/braids of multiple identities" (Godinez, 2006) which help Latina scholars analyze oppression and resistance as well as expose a positive transformation in educational contexts. These trenzas/braids represent intersections of language, immigrant status, gender, accent, culture, phenotype, surname, and markers of identities that are used by the dominant culture but are in the process of emerging into something beautiful and strong for Latinas (Espino, Muñoz, & Kiyama, 2010). For Latinas, these intersecting braids allow them to simultaneously live in multiple worlds, analyze these worlds from multiple perspectives, and initiate their agency and resistance (González, 2006).

Latina Leadership

Consistently standing at the crossroads and trying to balance different cultures can be challenging, exhausting, and sometimes isolating (Bernal, 2001). Bordas (2013) captures the complex development of Latinas by describing it as duality, hybrid space, triple lens of oppression, and braids of identity and makes sense of these identity themes in the context of offering the potential to develop adaptability and flexibility. Latinas must be flexible enough to constantly switch between different cultural codes of conduct

and languages. Rodriguez (2000) discusses the issue of multiple identities, the constant crossing between cultures, as an ordinary occurrence for Latinas. This crossing of cultures is sometimes literal, especially in cities that border Mexico, and other times it is in relation to situations or circumstances, for example, entering an academic space as a minority Latina woman. What is not clear is whether this flexibility and adaptability facilitate or hinder Latina leadership practice?

For a Latina to be able to navigate within the majority culture, she has to make compatible her own cultural values with the majority values to survive. This constant navigation requires high levels of ethnic identity and high levels of acculturation. The authors described high levels of ethnic identity as a strong awareness and active participation of cultural practices (Méndez-Morse, 2004). Latinas in leadership positions constantly navigate through these cultures to survive and thrive. How does this happen, and what can we learn from Latinas that could possibly be replicated by others in similar contexts?

The voice of Latina female educational administrators is beginning to emerge in recent dissertation studies (Muñiz, 2013; Santiago, 2009). These studies have revealed that Latinas possessing a firm belief in the competence of self and of children and one's self-identified pedagogical abilities to improve education are contributing factors enabling Latinas who are seeking leadership roles (Méndez-Morse, 1999). These recent dissertations fail, however, to address ethnic culture or the negotiations of identities with which these administrators have to contend.

There is limited knowledge of how Latinas are similar to or different from White or other minority female education leaders. Much of the research that exists on minority female educational leaders is based on the African-American experience (Ramsey, 2013). In addition, research has shown that there is a lack of mentors, sponsors, and recruitment of Latinas to these positions, even though school districts could benefit from leaders who are representative of their communities' population (Ortiz, 2001). Bordas (2001) asserts that the Latino vision of society is one that drives a collective community-centered view and that Latina leadership is highly distinctive from a more individualistic style, specifically because Latina women are socialized such that group needs take precedence over individual needs (Arellano & Padilla, 1996; Torres & Solberg, 2001).

Another quality that successful Latinas have had to develop as a result of their journey is resiliency. Resilience refers to the ability to overcome adversity and return to a baseline level of functioning; thriving goes a step further and denotes a capacity to move beyond and have a better experience after the difficulty (Carver, 1998). Thriving refers to one's ability to flourish in response to adversity (Carver, 1998). Likely, Latinas who are in leadership roles have learned to thrive. The immense qualities of character that Latinas have developed as a result of their ethnic community suggest qualities in which Latinas may well be able to exercise successful leadership in their organizations.

Purpose of the Study

Because Latinos and Latinas are a growing population in the United States yet have one of the lowest educational attainment rates, understanding success stories can potentially influence in significant ways the number and type of resources to support

these communities. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the estimated Hispanic population in the United States in 2011 reached 52 million, one of the largest minority populations (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Although, as described in the previous section, the educational attainment of this population is drastically behind that of other ethnic groups in the United States, there is a small percentage of Latina college graduates who are becoming school leaders, and that percentage is rising.

This study focuses specifically on Mexican-American school principals who have baccalaureate degree attainment and an administrative credential and who are in a significant leadership role in K-12 educational organizations. National data show that Latina principals are not fairly represented within this profession (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). In addition, national statistics (Battle, 2009) indicate that Latinas/os are among the most marginalized ethnic group serving as principals in the public education system. In general, there are fewer Latina school leaders, unequal distribution across grade levels, and an assumption that they best serve a certain type of community. Thus, there is a need to study this population of women to hear their stories and to examine how they may contribute to our overall understanding of the lived experience of successful Latinas in K-12 settings.

Latinas who are seeking to become college students are constrained by a complex interplay of institutional and individual factors. Latina youth, especially of Mexican origin, have been found to be especially at risk of academic underachievement and have high dropout rates (Alva & Padilla, 1995; Okagaki, 2001). Latina students who manage to become a part of the 6.2% of the college population report feelings of alienation in the

university (Vasquez, 1997). The student population and the academic culture are vastly different from their prior experience in their community, and these students are trying to make sense of their new environment. Many Latinos in the United States grow up in Mexican neighborhoods, where they are considered the majority population—entering a college campus forces Latino students to immediately feel like a cultural minority, often a new experience for them. Due to socioeconomic environmental factors, most Latina college students graduate from low-achieving high schools. This fact may contribute to feelings of being ill prepared and fuels self-doubt in their college experience. The university becomes a place of cultural shock, discomfort, and isolation (Vasquez, 1997).

Given the large amount of barriers the research describes, what lived experience can successful Latinas share in order to shed light about their successful journey through these difficult constraints? And, how do these experiences support or challenge Latina leaders in their current professional roles?

Research Questions

The research questions below were developed in part from themes that have arisen from the literature review. However, the nature of phenomenological research is to understand personal stories first and to be open to learning from what emerges, rather than looking specifically for predetermined themes (Moustakas, 1994). The research questions that will guide my study are:

- How do Latina school principals describe their lived experiences as an academically successful student in K-12 grade?

- How do Latina school principals describe their lived experiences during and after college as related to their development as leaders?

- What factors influence Latina leadership in the K-12 sector?

    o In what ways do prior educational experiences influence Latina leadership?

    o In what ways does the organizational culture of the K-12 setting influence Latina leadership?

- In what ways does the Latina leader influence the organizational culture of the K-12 setting?

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Overview

The literature reviewed covers distinct areas of study that serve as a rationale and means for the exploration of the Latina leader perspective, a generally absent perspective in the current leadership literature. The first section examines Latina leadership development in general and then gets specific by focusing on Latina school principals. The second section describes the theories used to understand Latina leadership. Chicana Feminist Theory is an important framework to understand the history of leadership for Chicanas because the women interviewed in this study are all Mexican-American principals. Critical Race Theory and then specifically LatCrit theory is studied in relation to Latina principals. The third section explores resilience. The numbers associated with academic success for the Latina community are still fairly small and it is important to explore counter-stories—stories of Latinas who have persisted in their leadership roles. And lastly, organizational culture theory, helps us understand the organizational culture that Latina principals must navigate at the school they lead. Although these various bodies of literature are distinct, they also are interwoven due to the complex nature of the lived experiences of Latina educational leaders. Given the literature on the educational journey of Latinas and Latina leadership, these areas are prevalent themes relevant to the divergent path of the Latina leaders in this study.

Latina Leadership

The search for specific literature on Latina educational leadership yielded scant results. Nonetheless, the literature did cite examples for increasing the participation of the Latina educator perspective and offered critique of its current insubstantial status. Lopez (2000) discusses re-framing low participation of Latina educational leaders to look beneath what is immediately visible by asking similar questions as those posed by Hoy and Miskel (1996): Whose voices are being silenced and why? What structures are responsible for exclusion, repression, and inequality in organizations and societies?

There is very sparse research related to Latinas in any position of power or authority, yet the phenomenon of Latina leadership is beginning to be studied. "The relationship of Hispanic women leadership to women leaders in the United States has been neglected and left out of the social sciences and feminist scholarship research" (Lopez, 2000, p. 55). The existing research on the Latina population focuses on the obstacles Latinas face in their economic and professional development. These obstacles include sex and ethnic discrimination, low levels of educational attainment, low earning levels, and traditional sex-role socialization. This dire narrative does not look to understand the counter story of current Latina leaders.

Lopez (2000) describes the multiple factors and conflicts that influence career choices of Latinas and the issues that affect Latina leaders as such: risk is feared and security is highly valued. Strong belief of working hard equating to getting ahead; first-born Latinas experience hesitancy about pursuing a professional career; reluctant to separate from family and to relocate for a career. Latinas experience psychological

conflict as they make sense of being successful in careers versus successful in their ethnic culture; Cultural values suggest that power is unfeminine. Finally, Latinas may find it difficult to distinguish between gender-based or race-related discrimination in the workplace because they bear a double stigma—female and ethnic minority (Lopez, 2000).

Lopez's (2000) continued description of her studies discusses that the majority of Latinas in leadership literature were first-borns who had assumed much of the responsibility in the family and consequently, rarely, unconsciously delegate responsibilities. Latinas were found to be hesitant about promoting themselves, especially in job interviews and toward powerful decision makers in the organization. These propensities are attributed to the understanding that Latinas typically move up the career ladder in isolation. Latinas learn to navigate the organization with their particular role, yet when exposed to a new piece of the organization, they tend to keep their distance until they feel they understand it. Essentially, Latina leaders teach themselves how to navigate through mainstream avenues of success.

Dominant scholarship does not provide suitable understanding of Latina women, either in feminist or in leadership studies (including the work cited above by Lopez in 2000). Much of it intensifies the stereotypical viewpoints of Latinas and their culture. The dearth of literature continues whilst examining the role of Latina leaders in educational administration.

Latina School Administrators

The United States is experiencing major demographic changes and is currently more diverse than ever before (Singer, 2002). This has an immense impact on our schools (Fry & Gonzales, 2008). In consideration of these demographic changes, how is the hiring of Latina administrators keeping up with the student population? According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2015) there are 115,540 K-12 principals in the United States and 6% are identified as Hispanic.

The infrequent study of the Latina viewpoint continues in the literature related to principal leadership. Ornelas (1991) found irregular data comparing Anglo and Latina women administrators in terms of leadership. Ornelas discusses and warns

> the experiences of each group are sufficiently unique to warrant separate consideration. Furthermore, the terms race or ethnic minority, as used in the research literature, have been virtually synonymous with Black administrators. Only infrequently does it address Hispanic administrators. (Yeakey, Johnson, & Adkinson, as cited in Ornelas, 1991, p. 9).

Brunner and Grogan (2007) stated that "no attention has been paid to creating a profile of women of color" (p. 109) in school leadership. Ortiz (2001) also noted the lack of research on Latina school administrators. Meñdez-Morse (1999) echoed the (in)visibility regarding the lack of administrators' studies, data, or information about Latina principals and their absence from academic literature. Rivers-Wrushen and Sherman (2008) elaborated on the insufficiency of literature for women of color in leadership positions in general. While a few studies on minority women leaders' lived experiences exist, these limited number of studies focus on African-American women

leaders. In reference to Latina leadership, a few dissertation studies exist but self-reports on Hispanic women are virtually non-existing.

The literature and research that I found of the Latina principal-ship were mostly dissertations studies. Byrd's (1999) literature review found that Latina principals are generally found leading schools with large minority populations or with large concentrations of low socioeconomic students. Both Ornelas (1991) and Byrd (1999) discuss the difficulties of leading these schools, specifically due to the educational issues and inequities that exist in a public school setting of poverty, but they also discuss, albeit on a surface level, the issues that arise when a leader is an ethnic minority and has the authority over a teaching staff that is a mainstream ethnic majority. This is an interesting point that warrants more research, what may be the difficulties that arise for a leader that is seen as a minority by her followers?

In the discussion of variables relevant to upward mobility of Anglo and Latina female administrators, Ornelas (1991) noted that Latina administrators made three significant belief changes. Firstly, they changed their perceptions about the cultural role of women. Although the conflict between ethnic culture and mainstream culture is still relevant, there was a marked sense of understanding that choosing one over the other does not vilify them. Second, their views about the organization shifted as they moved from the instruction of children to the instruction of adults, meaning they were able to hold the idea of learning organizations and were able to make changes between human development. Lastly, their understanding of how they obtained and held their administrative positions no longer was clouded in affirmative action reasoning, meaning,

there was internal self doubt of their own capacity and whether or not they were hired simply because of their ethnicity.

As principals, Latinas have led schools successfully and often were hired to bring about stability in minority-populated schools (Gonzalez & Ortiz, 2009; Ortiz, 2001). Gonzalez and Ortiz (2009) found that the Latina principals in their study improved overall student test scores, lowered disciplinary issues, and increased parent involvement. However, this literature on Latina principals fails to examine their perceptions of how their knowledge and familiarity of ethnic and mainstream cultures help lead their organizations successfully.

Yosso's (2006) book, *Critical Race Counterstories along the Chicana/Chicano Educational Pipeline*, highlights the positive contributions Latina leaders offer. Yosso describes a social theory model "of community cultural wealth" and organizes a list of capital attributes that are a skill-set found among successful Latina leaders. The Community Cultural Wealth Model (Yosso, 2005) is defined as follows:

- Aspiration Capital—the ability to maintain hopes for the future even in the face of barriers (real or perceived).

- Linguistic Capital—intellectual and social skills learned through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style.

- Navigation Capital—skills of maneuvering through differing social institutions and/or cultures.

- Social Capital—networks of people and community resources, again tied to navigating multiple cultures.

- Familial Capital—culture nurtured among *familia* that carry a sense of community, historical memory, and cultural intuition.

- Resistance Capital—resistance to oppression in communities of color and refers to the knowledge and skills cultivated through behavior that challenges inequality.

Although there are six forms of capital in this model, they are not mutually exclusive and can build upon each other (Yosso, 2005).

Latina school administrators have gained experience and knowledge in navigating through barriers by changing, adapting, or accepting different "identities to conform to expectations and to play the games of race and gender successfully" (Trujillo-Ball, 2003, p. 192).

The Mexican American Female and Chicana Feminism

Given that the literature on Latina leadership in education was scarce, I decided to take a step back and look at the literature associated with Latinas and their experience in the United States in general. This led me to literature associated with Chicana Feminism, their literature, their theories and their history.

Mexican-American women facing dual discrimination (ethnic and gender) have developed their own specific feminist theory: the Chicana feminist movement. The Chicana feminist movement came from the Chicano movement of the 1960s (Cotera, 1980). It proved to be the venue for Mexican American females to address the feminists' issues that affected the Chicana specifically (Cotera, 1980; Garcia, 1991). Like other minority feminists, this movement struggled to gain social equality and end sexist and

racist oppression (Cotera, 1980). The Chicana feminists wanted to improve their status socially, racially, and sexually so they could thrive in both the American and Mexican cultures. The Chicana is not only a minority female but also a Mexican American female with historically assigned attributes by her family or culture that she must navigate and sometimes defy in order have mainstream success. This defiance can make her seem disrespectful to her ethnic culture. Although there are those in her family, culture, or community who may see her as a *vendida* (sellout), the *falsa* (phony) (Cotera, 1980) the struggle for equality is seen as necessary. "The Chicana must demand that dignity and respect within the womens' rights movement which allows her to practice feminism within the context of her own culture . . . her approaches to feminism must be drawn from her own world" (Cotera, 1980, p. 283).

Mexican American women have often been identified with certain characteristics. These assumptions have been perpetuated by historical texts, film, and literature (Lux & Vigil, 1979; Weber, 2003). These traits include but are not limited to attributes of submissive, sexual, subordinate, and traditional (Cabello-Argandona, Gomez-Quinones, & Duran, 1975). In educational leadership, these stereotypes and assumptions may become a barrier for Latinas who aspire to leadership positions. Latinas tend to lead schools and districts that are heavily populated with minority students (Marcano, 1997; Ortiz, 2001). This becomes the only place where Latinas are seen as valuable and needed in leadership positions. This has been described as the adobe ceiling, perpetuating job segregation and can limit opportunities for leadership in education by Latinas. Many feel that they have been patronized by being placed mainly in Latino communities rather than

in the non-minority, white school districts (Marcano, 1997). This pacification becomes another hurdle for Latinas to overcome.

Another perspective of Latina principals that supports their success is the idea that Latina leadership is necessary for Latino communities. Research shows that Latino students need to observe and interact with leaders who are representative of their own cultural groups. Diversity in leadership provides role models for minority children (Sanchez, Thornton, & Usinger, 2008). Latina principals, through their personal, professional, cultural, and social accomplishments, create a bond that encourages Latino students to meet academic, social, and cultural challenges that lead to personal change (Mendez-Morse, 2004). Latina principals should reflect the increasing make-up of the Latino student population, and provide all children the opportunity to experience gender and racial differences in school leadership positions (Ferrandino, 2001; Mendez-Morse, 2004).

Due to the concepts that have currently appeared in the review of literature, I found it imperative to pursue the avenue of social justice and the issues that arise for Latinas in the United States. As stated at the beginning of this section, examining the broader perspective is important in order to be able to hone in to this particular population and their experience. The next section will examine Critical Race Theory and the American education system.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) and U.S. Education

As stated multiple times, the perspectives of Latina principals in U.S. public schools have been underreported in the literature. Their exclusion, like those of other

excluded groups, is an example of the systematic racism in school systems (Stovall, 2006). Critical Race Theory promotes the voices and narratives of peoples of color (Stovall, 2006).

CRT is used to examine the racism and oppressive systems in place in U.S. public schools for people of color. Kohli (2009) explained that the framework for CRT was developed in the 1970s in the legal profession "to highlight race, racism, and its intersections with other forms of oppression" (p. 237). Legal scholars such as Bell, Crenshaw, and Delgado created a framework based on their experiences in the American judicial system (cited in Kohli, 2009). The analytical lens that CRT provides is the awareness that racism permeates throughout the American society and the power structures that exist are based on white privilege. CRT is not only about race, but also about sex, class, national origin and sexual orientation and how the combination of these roles affects a person in various settings. CRT brings to light the struggles that people of color have encountered in American institutions of power due to racism and discrimination (Stovall, 2006). A tenet of CRT is storytelling, or counter- storytelling, which is what this study is attempting to do, to offer voice to those who are often silenced, but to also to add successful leadership stories from a Latina perspective.

The use of CRT has continued to gain momentum in educational research as researchers seek to understand how race and racism affects students and communities of color (Irizarry & Donaldson, 2012). In particular, CRT examines the dynamics of power structures in an organization. Rodriguez-Valls (2009) explained that social justice agenda is necessary in order to combat racism in schools. These are salient points in this

study, to understand how Latina principals are able to navigate and even thrive in public school environment as students—and return to these types of schools and lead them.

The next section will hone in on Latina/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) as it was created as a fragment from CRT in order to specifically include the experiences of Latinos within this theoretical framework.

<div align="center">**Latina/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit)**</div>

Latina/o Critical Race Theory, or LatCrit, is an emerging subset of CRT. This emerged alongside the demographic shifts occurring in the U.S. and the exponential growth of the Latino population across the nation (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013; Wainer, 2006). Solorzano and Bernal (2001) clearly explained the need for a LatCrit framework in education by providing five themes: (a) the centrality of race and racism and inter-sectionality with other forms of subordination, (b) the challenge to dominant ideology, (c) the commitment to social justice, (d) the centrality of experiential knowledge, and (e) the inter-disciplinary perspective. CRT allows for the capacity to study critically how oppression intersects within the lives of people of color, and in particular, LatCrit "examines experiences unique to the Latina/o community" (Perez-Huber, 2010, p. 77). These unique experiences include, but are not limited to, language and immigration status.

LatCrit theory began from a series of debates in the late 1980s around Critical Race Theory and the race debate in the United States that seemed to be exclusive to Black and White. LatCrit scholars consider themselves a "close cousin" to critical race theory and believe that they have a strong relationship with the theory that is posited

within these areas (Lopez, 1997; Trucos-Haynes, 2000). However, LatCrit aims to study experiences that are particular to the Latino/a community. LatCrit theorists aim to center Latinas/os' multiple internal diversities and to situate Latinas/os in larger inter-group frameworks, both domestically and globally, to promote social justice awareness and activism. LatCrit can be used to expose the ways Latinas/os experience race, class, gender, and sexuality, while simultaneously recognizing the Latina/o experience with issues such as immigration status, language, ethnicity, and culture. Thus, LatCrit enables researchers to better articulate the experiences of Latinas/os specifically, through a more focused examination of the unique forms of oppression this group encounters (Perez-Huber, 2010; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001).

Issues of racism against Latina/os are not new in education. Eight years prior to the historic *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) case that ended legal segregation in American public schools, the *Meñdez v. Westminster* (1946) court case addressed the segregation of a group of 5,000 Mexican and Mexican American students. Parents fought the segregation in Orange County, California, and were successful in abolishing segregation for students of Mexican descent in California. This set a powerful precedent for the Brown case.

While legal segregation is no longer legal, Latina/o students are subjected to racism and discrimination in their neighborhood schools. Wainer (2006) conducted a case study that found that Latino students felt overtly unwelcomed in schools by school personnel at all levels. Vela-Gude et al. (2009) found that Latino students perceived school officials as unwelcome and that they had low expectations for their achievement

outcomes. Research suggests that the "struggle for equity in education for Latinas/os has not ended" (Davila & de Bradley, 2010, p. 40).

Dotson-Blake, Foster, and Gressard (2009) explained that the discourse on the "role of culture and race in education continues to be conceptualized primarily in terms of Black and White concerns" (p. 230). LatCrit provides a framework that illustrates how the racial and ethnic discourse can transition from a binary discourse to one that includes the struggles of Latina/os in the United States (Davila & de Bradley, 2010; Perez Huber, 2010).

LatCrit is an essential tool and strategy for this study as it encourages the participation of the marginalized voice and offers a lens of critical perspective for Latinas (Bernal, 2002). LatCrit places the center of this analysis in a narrative design and encourages educational researchers to analyze the lived experiences of Latinas from a strength-based perspective, which is in direct opposition to the dire narrative that exists in the current literature about Latinas. Bernal (2002) makes a strong case for this type of counter-story, of both telling and understanding the lived experience through a lens of strength.

Given the research that discusses the entire trajectory for Latinas in the United States—from legally segregated schools, to poor learning outcomes and conditions, to low academic achievement and low occupational attainment, how do some Latinas navigate this reality and become school principals?

Resilience

The Latino/a is still one of the lowest-performing subgroups in education (Center on Education Policy, 2015). Latinos/as are also one of the poorest ethnic minority groups in the United States. However, there are students who maneuver through the complex education system and break generational poverty cycles. Resilience theory is focused more on the strengths of an individual rather than deficits and understanding success in spite of prior negative experiences. Academic resilience and academic success can occur despite stressful conditions (Alva, 1991; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1997). Researchers have discussed the multidimensionality of resilience and describe it as a process (Olsson, Bond, Burns, Vella-Brodrick, & Sawyer, 2003) of prevailing over negative effects of traumatic exposure, coping successfully with these experiences, and conscientiously avoiding the negative trajectories most associated with those risks (Garmezy, Maste, & Tellegen, 1984; Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Masten & Powell, 2003; Rutter, 1985; Werner & Smith, 1992). This research on resilience points out that a minority student attending an ill-equipped inner-city school or living in poverty, or English not being the native tongue, if resilient can be successful.

Akin to critical race research, the concept of resiliency began to be studied as a field of research in psychology and was later brought into educational research. Resilience is defined as an "interactive and systemic phenomenon, the product of a complex relationship of inner strengths and outer help throughout a person's life span (Butler, 1997, p. 26). To put it simply, resilience can be seen as the "in spite of" response to adverse situations (Wolin & Wolin, 1993). Resilience research can be seen as a form

of resistance and/or persevering (Cammarota, 2004; Gayles, 2005; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001; Valenzuela, 1993, Yosso, 2002). Gayles (2005) describes this idea as "rather than focus on self-defeating behavior and cultural strategies that reproduce and entrench social stratification, these studies situate academic achievement as a transformative act" (p. 251).

Resilience theory has been studied with four different categories: risk factors, vulnerability areas, compensatory strategies, and protective factors (Garmezy, 1991; Morales, 2008). Risk factors encompass the circumstances over which the participants have no control such as inferior schools, culture of violence, and/or lack of parental involvement (Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White, & Salovey, 2012). For example, in 2003, 40% of Latino/a parents did not possess a high school diploma in comparison to 4% of White parents (Gandara & Contreras, 2009). Gandara and Contreras also found

> Latino mothers have much less education than other mothers from all other major groups . . . thus the lower educational background of Latino youngsters' parents appears to be a significant factor in these children's early low academic performance, and continues to affect their achievement throughout their later education. (p. 19)

As a result of lower education levels and their lack of knowledge about schooling, Latino/a parents may not be as involved in the overall educational experiences of their daughters (Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Gandara & Contreras, 2009). Parents with higher levels of education are able to provide more guidance and support to their daughters as they progress in their educational paths. This familial circumstance is outside of the control of the Latina student. This becomes a risk factor identified in resilience theory.

The next category noted in resilience theory is vulnerability. Vulnerability is composed of the participant's gender and the assumptions ascribed to that role of gender within the Latino culture. In the case of the participants of this study, their vulnerability comes from both their gender and their ethnic culture. Both gender and ethnicity places them in an oppressed space in public education.

The third and fourth categories included in resilience theory are compensatory strategies and protective factors. Compensatory strategies are the personal methods Latinas develop and later utilize to conquer their vulnerabilities. These coping mechanisms allow Latinas to maneuver through environments they are not familiar with or have not established cultural capital (Reyes et al., 2012). Protective factors are the intrinsic and fundamental strengths Latinas possess that allow them to mitigate the potential risk factors they may be facing. Some of these traits are the belief of a strong work ethic and/or having experience with a culture of care in their life.

The resiliency process is the result of the relationships, connectivity, and link of all four of these dynamics as described above: risk factors, vulnerability areas, compensatory strategies, and protective factors (Garmezy, 1991; Morales, 2008). This process is vital for the academic success of first-generation Latinas and their role in becoming educational leaders (Reyes et al., 2012).

This literature review has described the trajectory of the Latina experience in the United States. Coupled alongside the theories that have emerged in academia to understand and even advocate for social justice for under represented groups such as Latinas. Given that this study is specifically about Latina leaders, I wanted look at their

leadership in relation to the organizational culture they lead and that has continuously failed many other Latino students.

Organizational Culture

An important piece in leading an organization is the culture of the organization. As Latina leaders continue to emerge, how does a Latina leader influence this culture? Schein (1985) describes organizational culture as a system that shares assumptions, values, and beliefs. Every organization has a unique culture, and it plays a role in the execution of its intended task. The role of authority in the creation of organizational culture is an important one (Schein, 1983). The authority sets the tone and helps to build and create the organizational culture. Heifeitz (1994) states that the leader helps to construct relationships with organizational members to raise and process tough questions and adaptive challenges. According to LatCrit and Chicana feminist theory, Latinas contend with a continuous negotiation of two cultures: ethnic and dominant. What does this mean for a Latina school principal that now steps into leading an organizational culture? Does she now contend with a third cultural lens (ethnic culture, dominant culture, organizational culture)?

There are organizational culture researchers who argue that the culture of an organization maintains a social structure (Feldman, 1991; Martin, 1992; Meyerson, 1991) that influences leadership. Considering that Latinas are an educated workforce minority, how does this re-creation of social structure within organizations affect Latina leadership? If a school organizational culture mirrors mainstream society culture, yet the

power and authority is given to an ethnic minority that does not mirror mainstream culture, what are the possible ramifications?

Organizations are cultural constructions (Hubbard, Mehan, & Stein, 2006). There are three dimensions of organizational culture: the first is how commonplace habits aid in the capacity of organizational decision-making. The second dimension connects the strife that may appear when values, beliefs, expectations, assumptions are misunderstood or taken for granted. The third dimension concerns the political forces that shape organizations and their culture (Hubbard et al., 2006). This literature is significant to this study in a number of ways connected to the three points above. First, if organizations are cultural constructions, there is a possible dissonance for an ethnic majority staff to now adhere to leadership from an ethnic minority principal. This point has potential to disrupt the third dimension described above as political forces given there is a power differential for an ethnic minority and ethnic majority. Secondly, as stated above, there may be a strife with values and beliefs—given that cultural backgrounds are different, how does this affect or add onto this potential strife?

For this study, the organizational culture is an elementary school led by a Latina principal. As mentioned above, the first dimension within this organizational framework is the unspoken or nebulous rules that exist at a school site.

Summary

This chapter discusses the pertinent literature and theoretical framework for this study. It begins with Critical Race Theory, which strives for social justice and understanding of voices that have traditionally been silenced, and captures two different

frameworks from the Latina perspective that grew out of CRT: LatCrit and Chicana

Feminist Theory. Both of these schools of thought were created due to the need for

creating a larger dialogue outside of the Black and White issues that prevail in

discussions of racism in American society. These distinctive, Latino/a based theories

(LatCrit and Chicana Feminist Theory) discuss the need to fully understand the lived

experiences of Latino/as in the United States. Given that Latina leadership is still an

anomaly, resilience literature also plays a part in helping to understand how some Latinas

navigate these experiences towards success. Resilience theory is a helpful lens in which

to examine Latinas who have become successful leaders. Together, this literature helps to

inform an analysis of the lived experiences of the Latina leaders interviewed in this study.

The next chapter will discuss the research methodology at length.

Phenomenological research methods were used for this study and the following section

will include the reasons why this methodology was selected and why it was appropriate.

It will also include a thorough explanation of each specific interview in which data was

collected, and also how data was transcribed and examined.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to understand the leadership development of first

generation Mexican-American (referred interchangeably in this study as Latina) women

who are in leadership positions in the K-12 public education system in southern

California. This study explored how Latina school principals made meaning of their own

experiences while progressing towards a leadership role. To date, there is very little

knowledge of Latina principals (Smulyan, 2000). This study fills a gap in the body of

literature specifically in regards to Latinas in educational leadership and women in

leadership more generally. The accounts and stories of successful Latinas can bring new

understandings and build new theories previously described in leadership studies but

primarily absent a close analysis of Latinas (Banks, 2000). An understanding of the lived

experience of successful Latina leaders can begin to offer hope and inspiration to other

aspiring Latina leaders (Gupton & Slick, 1996; Howard, 2001; Smulyan, 2000).

This study lends itself to phenomenological research methods for several reasons.

Phenomenology studies lived experiences and the ways one understands how these

experiences develop one's worldview. The emphasis of this study is on the personal

perspective and interpretation of the Latina participants' experiences. Schwandt (2000)

states that phenomenological research looks at everyday inter-subjective worlds and how

these worlds are constituted from the interviewee's perspective. This study sought to

explore and understand how scholars' ascribed aspects of Latina otherness such as

duality, triple lens of oppression, hybrid space, etc. (Anzaldua, 1987; Delgado & Bernal,

2001) were described by the participants and if or how these experiences manifested in their development as leaders and in their actual current practice. Because this study is about successful Latina principals and is rooted in the belief that culture, resilience, and organizational culture are influential in molding a person's life perspectives, qualitative research methodology, and specifically phenomenological research methods are appropriate for this study.

Research Design

Qualitative Methodology

The research method of this study was qualitative. A qualitative approach allows for rich potentiality of inquiry that will provide a clearer and more complex understanding of people's expressed experiences that may contribute to the topic of study (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996; Merriam, 1998; Suter, 2006). The next section will describe phenomenological research methods at length, including a historical overview, followed by an explanation of how educational leadership can be viewed through the lens of phenomenology. Last, I describe data collection, procedures and a detailed view of the interviews themselves.

The Phenomenological Perspective

A phenomenological approach (Moustakas, 1994) allowed gainful insight into Latina leadership development. In addition to what leaders do, phenomenology asks who leaders are by examining their beliefs, values, feelings, motives, intentions, illusions, and imagination from their perspective. It gathers stories by asking such questions as: What does it mean to exist and to live in a state or condition of leading in the educational

process? How does an educational leader structure the meaning of being a leader in their consciousness (Mitchell, 1990, pp. 52-53)?

Phenomenology provides an opportunity to delve into an individual's perspective regarding not only of traits and behavior they understand to guide their leadership, but also the subjective, intuitive, personal, and symbolical dimensions of educational leadership. A Sufi teaching might describe the perspective thus: "you think that because you understand one you must understand two because one and one makes two, but you must also understand and" (cited in Covey, 1994, p. 121). The "and" of the space between the two numbers must also be understood. Phenomenology is a holistic approach to studying the human experience as lived (Giorgi, 1985). Its underlying philosophy is that only the individual can describe the richness and depth of meaning of his or her own experience (De Castro, 2011). It is not only a research method but also a philosophy. It is holistic by nature, expressing the richness and depth of the lived experience. The subjective descriptions of the lived phenomena constitute the data, which the researcher interprets at various levels (Giorgi, 1985).

Historical overview. Phenomenology is the study of human experience and of the way objects (things, ideas, imagination, or memories) appear to us in and through our experiences. In its classical form, phenomenology insists that parts can only be understood against the background of wholes (horizon) and that what is absent can occur only in relationship to what is present. Further, the object (identity) we behold can be viewed (intended) from multiple perspectives (manifolds of sides, aspects, and profiles) and still remain the same object. When two or more persons (subjects) are viewing

(intending) the same object, the dimension of inter-subjectivity is introduced and manifolds are multiplied.

The German mathematician and philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) wrote the first statement of phenomenology and questions "theories of knowledge, realizing that how one perceives objects—whether persons, trees, principles, angels, or social processes—is understood by examining the consciousness which a subject has of them" (cited in Chamberlin, 1974, pp. 125-126). His objective was to establish phenomenology as an eidetic science. Eidetic science, in Husserl's words, means to place before its own eyes "certain pure conscious events, to bring these to complete clearness and subject them to analysis and the apprehension of their essence" (Husserl, 1962, p. 163). To contemplate the object in question, one must first leave the natural attitude in order to enter the phenomenological attitude. The natural attitude is "the focus we have when we are involved in our original, world-directed stance, when we intend things, situations, facts, and any other kinds of objects" (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 42) in a matter of fact way. Conversely, the phenomenological attitude is "the focus we have when we reflect upon the natural attitude and all the intentionalities that occur within it" (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 42). To enter into the phenomenological attitude, we bracket the world and all things in it by suspending our beliefs, judgments, propositions, assumptions, and biases. It is to become a scientist who looks with curiosity at an object through the lens of a microscope in order to decipher and describe its multiple dimensions.

Phenomenology views the self—the subject involved in the study of a phenomenon—as being composed of two egos. We are more than biological,

psychological, and subjective beings, or empirical egos. We are also rational, moral, and emotional beings or transcendental egos. As such, we are agents of truth and meaning. Sokolowski (2000) explained that each of us is a center of disclosure to which the world and everything in it manifest themselves. In other words, we are the perceptual and cognitive "owners" of the world as we form judgments and verifications. Such activities cannot be adequately treated from a merely empirical point of view. The life of reason is not enclosed in the solitude or privacy of a "sphere of consciousness." It is a public thing that is expressed in manifest conduct and achievements.

In sum, phenomenology acts as a lens from which to view the world, life experiences, knowledge, biases, and assumptions within some context and with certain "disengagement and reflective apprehension" (Chamberlin, 1974, p. 127) in order to see what was previously hidden or unclear. To see through this special lens it is necessary to remove our daily wear lenses by consciously setting aside our common sense, ordinary assumptions, and general knowledge about the object of study. We are then ready to look at and describe the object from multiple angles and having done that, analyze the underlying assumptions we have previously used to describe the object. These are the assumptions we had temporarily put aside or bracketed. This method of examination offers the possibility of examining "all of the intangibles of educational leadership which are not easily detected or empirically verifiable" (Mitchell, 1990) through a seldom used lens.

Educational leadership research through the lens of phenomenology. The aim of all scientific research is to uncover previously hidden features, aspects, qualities,

or meanings of the object in question. The aim of educational leadership research is the same. Traditional educational leadership research has generally described what educational leaders do—the observable manifestations of leadership. Fewer studies have examined and described the underlying meanings, values, beliefs, presuppositions, assumptions, judgments, and biases influencing the practices of educational leaders—the unseen aspects of leadership. Chamberlin (1974) posited:

> Educators are less in need of a universal, empirically verifiable definition of education than they are of help in reflecting on their experiences of education and their intuition of the meaning which education already has for them and for companion participants. (p. 133)

Phenomenology offers a way to study the period of time during which educational leaders pause to formulate or reflect upon their response to a given situation by asking the practitioners themselves to elucidate what it means to be an educational leader in the context and process of education. Covey (1994) and Gardner (1995) each wrote about this invisible pause before acting. Both Covey (1994) and Gardner (1995) concluded that the substance of leadership was comprised of more than personality traits and skills. This connects to phenomenology as it describes underlying, non-observable behaviors.

Phenomenology proposed an alternative research method for describing with greater clarity the substance of leadership. The phenomenology method seeks to keep the objective and subjective world together. It considers evidence from any source of knowledge; empirical data, subjective feelings and attitudes, dreams, illusions, irrational views, and logic (Mitchell, 1990). In looking at educational leadership beyond innate, natural traits and discrete, independent behavioral skills, phenomenology seeks to uncover and interpret the "tacit meanings of ideals, symbols, rituals, legends, myths,

history, and heroic images of the leaders cultural context (Willer, as cited in Mitchell, 1990, p. 42). These are the seldom-examined elements and plots of the educational leader's story. Uncovering tacit meanings of educational leadership through purposeful reflection and interpretation may provide insights as to what is necessary for successful school change efforts in a multicultural American society.

In this study, Latina school principals were invited to tell their leadership stories through a series of interviews in an effort to discover not only their self-ascribed meanings for educational leadership, but also what it means to be a Latina in this role and how their past experience of Latina student emerges in their leadership. The activity of pausing to reflect on the meaning of their leadership practice through open-ended questions was an example of hermeneutics, a method of phenomenology which analyzes the basic assumptions, presuppositions, prejudices, and pre-critical understandings of any body of knowledge or of any concept (Mitchell, 1990). Chamberlin (1974) described why this type of reflection might be of particular importance for educators in the following passage: Phenomenology provides direction for an activity of reflection rather than a product or a stance.

Phases of phenomenological research. The phases of phenomenological research also take into consideration the researcher's own experience with the phenomenon in question, and as a Latina K-12 administrator, I have a personal interest in this research. Thus, my own life experience and perceptions (which would be difficult to completely bracket and keep out of the study) have a legitimated and clearly defined role

to play in the study, which I will explain further in the next section. The self-inquiry and self-analysis aspect of phenomenological research is traditionally called epoché.

Epoché. One of the core processes of phenomenology is epoché. Epoché is a Greek term that describes the theoretical moment when all judgments about the existence of the external world are suspended. "One's own consciousness is subject to immanent critique so that when such belief is recovered, it will have a firmer grounding in consciousness" (Christensen & Brumfield, 2010, p. 136). Edmund Husserl popularized the term within research methodologies, specifically phenomenology. Husserl believed that through phenomenological epoché, one is able to suspend judgment regarding the general philosophical belief in the existence of the external world and thus examine phenomena as they are originally given to consciousness (Husserl & Welton, 1999). "In the epoché, the everyday understandings, judgments, and knowings are set aside, and phenomena are revisited, freshly, naively, in a wide-open sense, from the vantage point of a pure transcendental ego" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33). Epoché involves blocking biases and assumptions in order to explain a phenomenon in terms of its own inherent system of meaning, by bracketing which involves systemic steps to "set aside" various assumptions and beliefs about a phenomenon in order to examine how the phenomenon presents itself in the world of the participant (Moustakas, 1994).

In this study, I am deeply connected to this topic and fit all the research participant criteria. Responsible investigation required that I set aside all of my presuppositions, biases, prejudgments, and predilections by entering the interviews and the analysis of data with as much of an open mind as possible, as though hearing it for the

first time. The epoché phase of my study helped me understand my bias in a way that allowed me to suspend and study from a researcher lens. The epoché phase which includes descriptive reflection and writing about my own experience, specific to the connection to this study, allowed me to tell my story, so as to both examine it as researcher and to simultaneously suspend any judgment as I interviewed others. Within qualitative research, epoché has been interpreted as accentuating a specific time when significant life events occur in the life experiences of a researcher, but any impact from the memory needs to be put aside during data collection (Bednall, 2006). The self-examination that occurred during the epoché phase allowed space for me to identify any preconceptions that without being identified could unknowingly creep into my analysis of others' experiences. This allowed me to be attentive to the data and to see these experiences in a new light, not in comparison to the meanings I have already made. In instances where I suspected I was allowing prior knowledge, beliefs, or feelings to surface, I attempted to make sense of why it surfaced and whether or not it hindered my role as a researcher in a reflective journal.

Data Collection Procedures

In this section I will discuss how data were collected, how participants were selected, and the number of interviews with each participant. I will describe the phenomenological aspects of the interviews. This description is followed by data analysis. Finally, this section will conclude by looking at the concreteness of the data collection.

Selection of Research Participants

Hycner (1999, p. 156) states, "the phenomenon dictates the method including even the type of participants" that are selected for the study. The sample size in qualitative study typically is small since the purpose of selecting a case, or cases, is to develop a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Gall et al., 1996). The selection of sampling reflected purposeful sampling strategy, which concentrates on selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study of the phenomenon (Gall et al., 1996; Merriam, 1998; Seidman, 2006). Purposeful sampling is not designed to achieve population validity. The intent is to achieve an in-depth understanding of selected individuals, not to select a sample that would represent accurately a defined population (Gall et al., 1996). Through purposeful sampling (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Glesne & Peshkin, 1999), 10 Latina K-12 school principals agreed to participate in this study. The school administrators received an email invitation (Appendix A) outlining the criteria for participants. All participants were first-generation American citizens and the first in their families to graduate from college; all held post-graduate degrees and were also bilingual (Spanish and English languages). The selection criteria were essential to begin purposeful sampling, also referred to as criterion-based selection (Merriam, 1998). The established criteria for purposeful sampling directly reflected the purpose of the study and guided in the identification of the information-rich cases (Merriam, 1998).

The Setting: Southern California K-12 Public Schools

The 10 Latina elementary school principals were drawn from several southern California school districts (Table 2).

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant Name	Years as Teacher	Years at Principal
Marina	9	14
Idania	12	8
Mary	10	24
Azucena	7	8
Miroslava	9	4
Montserrat	20	2
Noemi	7	10
Brisa	10	7
Claudia	8	4
Monica	7	11

Table 2

Ethnic Composition of Student Bodies

Participant Name	Latino Student Population Percentage
Marina	71.6%
Idania	93%
Mary	96.4%
Azucena	82.2%
Miroslava	73%
Montserrat	69%
Noemi	91%
Brisa	88%
Claudia	93%
Monica	95%

*Note that all participants exercised their leadership in schools with high Latino student populations.

All participants received an initial email seeking their participation interest with an explanation and the purpose of my study, the time requirements for their participation and the confidentiality guidelines. After agreeing to participate, I telephoned each participant to verify that they met all requirements and once again described my research,

answered questions, and reviewed any additional protocols. We then were able to secure the first interview date and location.

Before our first interview, participants were asked to sign the consent form agreeing to participate in the study, and every participant was given a copy of the signed consent form. With the consent of the participant, I audiotaped every interview. This allowed the spoken word to be transformed into a written text for further study (Seidman, 1998).

Time Frame

Each of the ten participants agreed to be interviewed three times. The interviews took place in the time span of January 2016 through March 2016. The average time of each interview was 60 minutes. The purpose of the interview was to have each participant reconstruct her educational and academic experiences, put them in the context of her professional life, and reflect on the meaning of these experiences and how and if they emerge in leading a public school. The length of each interview was discussed with each participant before the interviews took place.

The three interviews were scheduled 2 weeks apart to allow enough time for participants to think about what was discussed at the previous interview, but not too much time between interviews that could possibly have led to a loss of connection between the participant and myself as researcher. In addition, conducting the three interviews, over a period of 8 weeks, allowed me the opportunity to create and establish a positive relationship with all participants.

The final interview with each participant was used to member check and ensure they agreed with and understood the themes that I had identified; it was also used to seek input and feedback on anything that might have been missed from their interview. A significant piece of our final time together was to read through the vignettes I had written from the snippets of stories I had now heard from all ten participants. Because they were short, I invited each participant to read all ten vignettes and to share their experience reading the. There were tears of connection, joy, and a significant collectivity that occurred via these vignettes. They also all agreed that I represented them accurately and gave permission to tell their stories. These vignettes can be read in the end of chapter four.

 Although I developed an interview protocol that outlined the questions participants were asked—for the sake of consistency—I also held open the interview space in order to allow time and opportunity for a conversation. Allowing the essence of life experiences to emerge from the participant is at the center of phenomenological research (Moustakas, 1994). The interview questions were "directed to the participants' experiences, feelings, beliefs and convictions about the theme in question" (Welman & Kruger, 1999, p. 196).

According to Bailey (1996) the informal interview is a "conscious attempt by the researcher to find out more information about the setting of the person" (p. 72), or how a person situates themselves within their own context, hence the openness of the dialogue. Kvale (1996) discusses data gathering during the qualitative interview as "literally an inter view, an interchange of views between two persons conversing about a theme of

mutual interests" where the researcher strives to "understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold meaning of peoples' experiences" (pp. 1-2). At the root of phenomenology then is "to understand the phenomena in their own terms—to provide a description of human experience as it is experienced by the person herself" (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 96).

The Merit and Appropriateness of an Interview Guide

Although interview questions were created, the conversational space must be left very open-ended. In phenomenological research, the questions should have both social meaning and personal significance, leading to an in-depth discussion as to how these personal experiences have contributed to participants' leadership development and leadership practice. However, in order to maintain the integrity of individual experiences, it is important to create a space that allows experiences and perceptions to be described at length in accordance with the views of the interviewee hence, the tension between a consistent interview and the space for individuality described above. The interview guide was designed with two different styles described by Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003): an informal conversational interview and a standardized open-ended interview. The interview was standardized, meaning all participants were asked the same questions, yet all questions were open-ended, so as to get to the potential breadth and depth of their experiences. And although the questions were open-ended, I also incorporated informal conversational interview methods when the answers provided needed further explanation (McNamara, 1999). Cresswell (2007) critiques both kinds of interview designs because

they can be difficult to code in the data reduction stage; however, he also adds that both designs reduce researcher bias due to the depth of the responses.

Interviews

The overall data collection consisted of three in-depth phenomenological interviews with each participant that combined open-ended questions with in-depth interviewing (specific questions and probes). In-depth phenomenological interviews combine life history and focused questions geared toward the phenomenon observed. Seidman (1998) explains that "the goal is to have the participant reconstruct his or her experience within the topic under study" (p. 15). In this study, I facilitated the reflection process through a series of three interviews (see Appendix B) for a total of thirty interviews. A description of how each of the three interviews was used to elicit personal narratives from each participant follows.

Interview 1. This study utilized in-depth, phenomenological based interviews, a method of interviewing described by Irving Seidman (2006). The method combines life-history interviewing and focused, in-depth interviewing through primarily open-ended questions. The interviewers' major task is to build upon and explore the participants' responses to those questions so that the participants can reconstruct their experience within the topic under study. The first interview established the context of the participants' experience. The second interview allowed the participants to reconstruct the details of their experience within the context in which they occurred. And the third encouraged the participants to reflect on the meaning their experience held for them as well as to member check.

To establish rapport with the educational leader, as well as to begin the task of identifying the essence of leadership, in general, this study began by asking educational leaders to describe their educational, biographical, and career histories. They were then asked to relate the story of their leadership development beginning with being a young Latina student. Open-ended questions such as the following were asked: Tell me about examples in your life as K-12 student that are pertinent to you still. A second set of questions was asked to draw out a cultural perspective. Open ended questions such as the following were asked: Tell me about your experience as a Latina student in the K-12 structure. Describe your earliest memory of any cultural-difference awareness in your leadership development. All participants shared common stories about the issues of language and translation as their families began to navigate American systems, and how having the responsibility to translate for adults was a big responsibility for them as children.

The purpose of having participants reflect upon early experiences was twofold: (a) to have them reconstruct a range of constitutive events in their past family, school, and work experience that place their role of educational leader in the context of their lives (Seidman, 2006); and (b) to identify habits of leadership emergence. These habits of leadership were "the motivators of conscious behaviors that operate on a level of experience which precedes any sort of deliberate, critical positing of distinct objects of reflection or consciousness" (Kestenbaum, 1977, p. 72). Having to be the "voice" for the family placed value on communication, language, and status within this particular example and theme.

Interview 2. The second interview focused on the recent and present life story of participants connected to their experience as a Latina student in higher education. The particular participants I included had post-graduate experience. It was important to understand this particular experience because the literature is sparse on highly educated Latinas. The degrees mostly in question in current literature are bachelors' degrees, or the first rung of college experience. All of these participants have graduate degrees and also different credentials qualifying them to be school administrators. This offers at least four different higher education experiences and circumstances (Bachelors, Administrative Credential Tier 1, Administrative Credential Tier 2, and Masters degrees and higher). This is also important because the higher the education experience, the smaller the Latina population. For example, one interesting point that emerged from the second set of interviews is that all participants have BCLAD teaching credentials, meaning they are qualified to teach in bilingual settings in the state of California. However, participants expressed tension, or being uncomfortable with their own academic Spanish and worried that they were now responsible to be academically qualified in a language in which they had little formal experience.

Interview 3. In the third interview, participants were asked to reflect on the meaning of their experiences as Latina educational leaders. Seidman (2006) explained what is meant by the question of meaning. The question of "meaning" is not one of satisfaction or reward, rather it addresses the intellectual and emotional connections between participants' work and life. This interview was also used for member checking and discussion about emerging themes across participants. The remaining part of the

third interview addressed the details of the participants' lives as educational leaders in relation to organizational culture. Questions such as the following were asked: How does mainstream culture emerge in the organizational culture of your school? How does being a Latina principal influence your leadership? One theme that emerged from this question was the responsibility these Latina principals felt they had in becoming cultural brokers, or teachers of teachers about the student culture.

Throughout the interviews, spontaneous accounts of experiences were accepted even if not directly related to the question at hand. To elicit cultural features of their leadership, participants were asked questions about the influence of Latina culture, if any, on their educational leadership story.

In sum, the three in-depth interviews were meant to capture the essence of the Latinas' leadership development experiences and reflections on the meaning they gave to their journey towards leading organizations and how they navigated a system that normally does not create successful Latinas.

Procedures and Data Analysis

The data collected from each interview were professionally transcribed and then organized by the researcher. Seidman (2006) suggested that even though there is no right way to organize the research process and the materials it generated, every moment spent on proper organization saved hours of frustration. I set up a system for filing copies of consent forms, transcripts of interviews, and notes of decisions made during the process. Seidman (2006) recommended that before generating any analysis of the transcripts, all interviews needed to be completed. This prevented imposing meaning from each

individual interview. After reviewing and transcribing each interview, as necessary, a list

of some follow-up questions was generated from the interview to use during the next

interview with that particular participant.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed through four coding processes (Saldaña, 2009). The first

coding examined the interviews and observed racial and race identity issues. The second

coding focused on how the principals experienced being a student in both K-12 and

college settings. The third coding included the development of leadership and voice as

described in the interviews. The fourth coding included a constant comparative analysis

of the Latina leadership development as influencing the role principal.

Through the coding process, thick descriptions emerged (Holloway, 1997;

Lincoln & Guba, 1985) from the cultural and social relationships that Latinas

experienced throughout their journey towards leadership. In looking for themes within a

narrative and across narratives, the researcher entered into the phenomenological analysis

of the narratives. Karlsson (1993) described the role of the researcher thus:

> The meaning-structure of a phenomenon is the invariant "thread" which runs
> through all diverse manifestations of a phenomenon. To discover these structures
> one must reflect. . . . The subject describes something that is merely lived
> through, whereas the researcher attempts to bring the subject's phenomenal level
> to a phenomenological level. That is, . . . the search for meaning-structure of the
> experience. The difference between the subject's living through of the
> phenomenon and the phenomenological analysis is the difference between pre-
> reflective life-world experience and the researcher's reflection upon this
> experience, which brings out the meaning-structure of the experience. (p. 93)

One example to illustrate this was the dialogue I engaged with one participant about the

translation she was responsible for at a young age for her family. She described having

to translate legal documents, rental contracts, even tax information when she was an elementary school student. She made a few mistakes that had a high cost to her family and to this day, she won't do any of that work; she is glad that she is able to pay someone else to read tax information—and although this is true, she also discussed that she hadn't explicitly made the connection of her past responsibility and how she currently copes with it. She also stated that as both a teacher and a principal she dislikes the strategy of having children translate for parents and that through this interview she understood how her own experience was tied to this.

To determine common themes, interview transcripts were read systematically. Each participant's response to one question was read. After reading the 10 responses to each question, each person's responses were summarized in list form using key words and phrases. Each participant's set of data was then compared to the others' data sets. Recurring words and phrases pointed to emerging themes.

Breaking down recurring words and phrases and conceptualizing their meanings meant taking apart a sentence or a paragraph, and giving each discrete incident, idea, or event, a name, something that stood for or represented a phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This was accomplished through asking questions such as, What is this? What does it represent? Incidents were compared so that similar phenomena would be given the same name.

The use of various charts, graphs, and matrices (Miles & Huberman, 1984) to organize excerpts from the transcripts to the categories (coding), or crafting a profile or

vignette (Seidman, 2006) of a participant's experiences were effective ways of sharing, analyzing, and interpreting the data.

As categories emerged, I began to search for common themes and patterns among the excerpts within those categories. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), the process of grouping concepts that seemed to pertain to the same phenomena was called categorizing categories. I then began labeling the passages that were marked as interesting (Seidman, 2006). Labeling took place when the researcher considered some of the following questions:

- What was the subject of the marked passages?
- Were there words or a phrase that seemed to describe them?
- Was there a word within the passage itself that suggested a category into which the passage might fit?

Guba and Lincoln (1981) have four suggested guidelines for developing categories and organization. First, the number of participants who mentioned something or the frequency with which something came up in the data indicated an important dimension. Second, the audience determined what was important; that is, some categories appeared to various audiences as more or less credible. Third, some categories stood out because of their uniqueness and were retained. Fourth, certain categories revealed areas of inquiry not otherwise recognized or provided a unique leverage on an otherwise common problem. An example of a fourth category was that all participants now lead schools where the majority of the student population is Latino. The question

that arose for me, as researcher, as a second research project: Is this leadership truly a choice or are these the schools that will hire Latinas?

Transcripts of the completed interviews were made available via email attachments to each of the participants. They were invited to review their transcripts to expand, clarify, and/or retract their statements (see Appendix C). None of the participants requested changes or additions. Participants had the opportunity to review and approve their own words from the interview transcripts. Since the participant had the right to know what and in what form the materials from the interviews would be shared with the public, she could decide to ask me not to use certain parts of the materials (Seidman, 2006). All participants agreed to keep everything as is. Narratives were then analyzed to determine themes describing race and racial identity, experience as a student, and leadership development.

Interpretation of the data was not just letting the categorized thematic excerpts or profiles speak for themselves. It went beyond this initial step to a more comprehensive one. It was important to ask what had been learned from the total process. Some questions taken from Seidman (2006) to assist in formulating the interpretation of the data were:

- What connective themes were there among the experiences of the participants interviewed?

- How do I understand and explain these connections?

- What do I understand now that I did not understand before the interviews?

- What surprises have there been?

- What confirmed previous instincts?

- How were interviews consistent with the literature? How inconsistent? How did they go beyond?

The last question used in the interpretation of data was as follows: What meaning, or what was learned from this work? The answer to this question led to topics or themes that required further research, or resulted in proposing connections among events, structures, roles, and social forces in peoples' lives (Seidman, 2006).

Phenomenological Reduction and Structural Synthesis

The two final phases of phenomenological research methods include *phenomenological reduction* and *structural synthesis*. This occurred after all interviews had been completed. In the reduction phase after the third interview with each participant, I analyzed and organized data across all of the interviews and identified the themes that have emerged that described the textures of the participants' experience (Creswell, 2007, p. 150).

Phenomenological reduction required multiple acts of looking and describing. Moustakas (1994) describes this in the following manner:

> Each looking opens new awarenesses that connect with one another, new perspectives that relate to each other, new folds of the manifold features that exist in every phenomenon and that we explicate as we look again and again and again—keeping our eyes turned to the center of the experience and studying what is just before us, exactly as it appears. (p. 92)

Moustakas characterizes this "looking" according to a process of horizontalization, which occurred when I reviewed the interview transcripts across the various participants in search of significant statements, phrases, quotations, or words that illuminated how

participants experienced this phenomenon (Creswell, 2013) based on my research questions. Next, I also formed clusters of meaning by grouping statements into themes and removing overlapping and repetitive statements (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Then, the content of the participants' experience was written through a textual description. The interview data analysis was lengthy after interviews 1 and 2 as I searched for themes that emerged. During interview 3, I asked participants to engage in ensuring the thematic accuracy. After this, I looked across all the interviews yet again, for phenomenological reduction and structural synthesis.

Creswell (2013) stated that phenomenological data analysis includes the methodology of reduction, the analysis of themes that emerged from interviews, and a search for all possibilities and meanings. During the phenomenological reduction phase, I bracketed data from the interviews using the steps outlined by Denzin (2002):

- Locate within the personal experience or self-story key phrases and statements that speak directly to the phenomenon in question.

- Interpret the meanings of these phrases, as an informed reader.

- Obtain the subject's interpretations of these phrases, if possible.

- Inspect these meanings for what they reveal about the essential recurring features of the phenomenon being studied.

- Offer a tentative statement, or definition, of the phenomenon in terms of the essential recurring features identified.

Structural synthesis imaginatively explains the possible meanings and divergent perspectives of the experiences the participants share. For example, the third

conversation encompassed a discussion of the validity of the themes that have surfaced, but there was also a mutual exploration of what those themes construct by using different lenses; for example, as one participant said, "As a college student I felt alienated by race, but looking back as an adult, a different point of view would be my socio-economic background had more of an impact." This was an important statement because the participant was able to articulate her lived experience under the lens of both race and socio-economic status.

Qualitative Research Validity

All research is concerned with producing valid and reliable knowledge in an ethical manner. Interviews are a form of measurement and, as such, must meet the same standards of validity and reliability that apply to other data-collection measures in educational research.

Messick (1989) maintained that "validity is an integrated evaluative judgment of the degree to which empirical evidence and theoretical rationales support the adequacy and appropriateness of inferences and actions based on test scores or other modes of assessments" (p. 13).

Merriam (1998) defined both internal and external validity in qualitative research. Internal validity deals with the questions of how research findings match reality. How congruent are the findings with reality? External validity is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations.

Because the data collection consisted of interviews, and the interview structure made sense to both the participants, and myself then, according to Seidman (1998) it has

gone a long way toward validity. The other ways I ensured for validity and reliability are as follows:

- *Member checks*. I requested that each administrator interviewed review their transcribed interviews to make comments, request clarifications, make changes, or delete any part of the transcription that they did not agree in order to check validity. Sharing data and tentative interpretations of their narratives back to the participants and asking for their opinion was practiced throughout this study.

- *Researcher's bias*. Clarifying any assumptions, worldviews, and theoretical orientation at the onset of the study aids validity and reliability, as does the constant use of journal and the epoché phase in phenomenology.

- *Long-term observation*. Each interview was scheduled within 2 weeks of the prior interview and all interview transcriptions were completed before the next interview took place. This organization of time and data aided the study and its tightness.

In learning about the validity and reliability of phenomenological research methods, I came to understand how rebellious the core theorists were in regards to this piece in their research methodology. By definition and design, phenomenology as a research method has difficulties in its reliability due to its immense connection to the human experience. Seamon (2000) describes the aim of phenomenology as seeking to discover the underlying commonalities that mark the essential core of the phenomenon. According to Von Eckartsberg (1998), the intention of phenomenology is to examine

human experience as it occurs. Both Seamon and vonEckhartsberg agree that, overall, phenomenology is a social and psychosocial study of the phenomena that occur from the perspectives of people involved. According to Giorgi (1975), phenomenologists must describe phenomena as accurately as possible.

The reliability and validity comes within the second and third interaction with the interviewees, where they were able to experience, read, and discuss the themes that emerge from their interviews. Polkinghorne (1983) offers four categories to help evaluate the accuracy and trustworthiness of phenomenological studies: vividness, accuracy, richness, and elegance. However, these four categories are subjective to the opinion of the reader. Rawat (2000) believes that the way to ensure validity is to look at each phenomenological step—is the sampling logical and purposefully drawn? Did the researcher exercise epoché? How logical were themes extrapolated from interview data?

Limitations and Significance of the Study

The following is an explanation of the limitations in this study. Specifically, I will discuss the issues of: sample size, homogeneity, and subjectivity.

Sample Size and Homogeneity

This is a particularly small sample size of 10 Latina leaders within a very specific and small population and geographical location. The participants were not randomly selected. Because of the size of this study, I do not think it lends itself to a generalization across the population; however, I do feel that this study can begin a discussion about this phenomenon of cultural negotiation (Vera & de los Santos, 2005) and hybrid space (Anzaldua, 1987) in leadership roles for Latinas.

One of the criticisms of qualitative research methods is the issue of generalizability—meaning to what extent the research findings are able to be generalized from the study sample to the entire population. According to Adelman, Kemmis and Jenkins (1980), knowledge generated by qualitative research is significant and can be generalizable in similar populations. Although this notion is adamantly challenged by others, phenomenologists Thomas and Pollio (2002) have stated that phenomenological research methods are generalizable to the extent that the reader connects with the stories as they read. And because phenomenology aims to understand the essence of lived stories, essences are generalizable to human experience but not to a larger population.

Subjectivity and Personal Limitations

Because I also represent the small and specific population this study addresses, it is important that I consider my participation as a researcher. This is one of the main reasons why I considered phenomenological research methods. These methods allowed me, as the researcher, to address the social connection I have to the research, and also allowed me to connect with the subjects in this study. In effect, the phenomenological researcher is a meaning maker. However, due to the intimate connection I have to this topic, I had to be mindful of my own subjectivity in this study. In exploring subjectivity in phenomenology, Giorgi (1994) stated, "Nothing can be accomplished without subjectivity, so its elimination is not the solution. Rather how the subject is present is what matters, and objectivity itself is an achievement of subjectivity" (p. 205). Hence, the awareness and mindfulness of the potential subjective and the epoché phase of this study both help to get to the core of the phenomenon of this study. Colaizzi (1973) has

argued that researcher self-reflection is an important first step in guarding against subjectivity; again, I have engaged in self-reflection before entering the interview phase. And Gadamer (1975) has stated that being open to the other while recognizing biases helps with subjectivity in conducting research.

Summary

In addition to describing the research participants and research sites, this chapter described the research approach of phenomenology at length, offering both a historical perspective and also the traits of phenomenological data analysis. Leadership studied through the lens of phenomenology examined aspects of leadership beyond observable traits and skills. Phenomenologists examined subjective feelings and attitudes, dreams, illusions, irrational views, and even the meanings of ideals, symbols, rituals, legends, myths, history, and heroic images of a leader's cultural context. The unit of analysis common to both research perspectives was the personal narrative or story. Three in-depth phenomenological interviews (Seidman, 2006) were described as the method of inquiry for drawing out the leadership stories of ten Latina school principals. Their stories became the data source for analysis. Chapter four reports the results of this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Introduction

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2015), Latino students make up about 22% of all student enrollments in the United States. Given the size of this population, the continued population growth trend, and the current low academic achievement for Latino students, the critical issues pertaining to this populace must be understood and addressed. This study offers a counter-story to the prominent narrative of continuous low academic achievement and low occupational attainment for Latinas in the United States, and presents successful Latinas that could help with understanding this population.

Across the United States, the leadership at public schools does not reflect the student population it serves. Only 4.5% of all U.S. public school principals are Latina/os (Battle, 2009). Examining the experiences of women, particularly Latina women, adds a divergent lens to the traditional theories of leadership. Investigating and analyzing the accounts and success stories of Latinas in leadership may expand our understanding of leadership in general (Banks, 2000). This study also adds to our knowledge of Latinas in education.

The purpose of this chapter is to present the qualitative data findings collected to understand the experiences of Latina principals' leadership development, as they moved from student to leader of public K-12 schools. This chapter will also describe how their

experiences as Latina students in the United States influenced their leadership as Latina school principals.

Overview

The organization of this chapter begins with a brief introduction to all 10 participants. The introduction includes the years of experience as a public school principal, the type of school they lead, how they began their career in education and a concise statement about their background. The chapter is then organized by the three main research questions that guided the study: How do Latina school principals describe their lived experiences as an academically successful Latina student in grades K-12? How do Latina school principals describe their lived experiences during and after college as related to their development as leaders? In what ways does the organizational culture of the K-12 setting influence a Latina leader? Within each of the three research questions, there were three emerging themes. Personal narrative and direct interview quotes by each participant will be included throughout this chapter. The final section of this chapter concludes with a series of short narratives from stories shared by each participant. I wanted to honor each participant and tell one of their vignettes in story form.

The Participants

Ten Latinas, specifically Mexican-American elementary school principals from southern California agreed to participate in this study. The schools they lead are within 25 miles from the international border to Mexico. Most of these principals are serving schools with majority Latino students. All of them were raised within the same vicinity to the international border to Mexico. All of them speak Spanish fluently. Nine out of 10

participants were born in the United States; the 10th was born in Mexico but immigrated to the United States and lived as an "illegal" since the age of 7. She became a U.S. citizen at the age of 32. All of them are first generation college graduates. All participants attended local universities. Each participant chose her own pseudonym. Each participant's background story is presented next.

Marina

Marina has been a principal for 14 years across a span of three schools, all with primarily Latino student population in southern California. All three schools were under Program Improvement according to No Child Left Behind policies. Marina was born and raised in southern California. She is a first generation college graduate and speaks fluent Spanish. She has a Bilingual Cross-cultural Language and Academic Development (BCLAD) credential and began her public education career as a teacher in bilingual settings.

As a student, Marina experienced many schools across San Diego due to an unstable upbringing. "My mom was too young to have children and when schools would begin to ask questions about us, she would move." In early adolescence, Marina ran away to her grandparents' home and stayed with them until she graduated from college. Marina considers herself raised by her grandparents. Her mother was a rebellious teenage single mom. She remembers her grandmother's warning as she enrolled in college: "¡Nomas ni leas el Doestevsky! ¡Tiene muchas ideas que no son buenas para chicas bonitas!" (Don't even start reading Doestevsky, he has impressionable and negative ideas about young beautiful women!")

Idania

Idania has been principal for 8 years at two different charter school settings in southern California. Both charter schools served primarily underserved communities of both Latino students and Special Education pupils. Idania was born in El Paso, Texas, but was raised in southern California. She is a first generation college student and speaks fluent Spanish. She entered the education profession with a BCLAD credential and worked as a bilingual teacher in kindergarten.

Idania was raised by her mother as her father left the family when she was very young. Her mother passed away when Idania was a teenager and her father gained custody of both her and her brother. Idania sought to be emancipated and managed to do so, along with her brother. Idania and her brother have a very strong relationship due to this experience of being responsible for themselves in their youth. She does not remember when she didn't work and has been responsible for maintaining her living from a very young age. "I didn't want to hustle my whole life and was always told I was smart, and since I was responsible for paying my own way I went to the local community college and swore that I would transfer to a university as soon as I could." She still lived with her brother but managed to transfer to UC San Diego for a degree in sociology. Idania's brother did not go to college.

Mary

Mary has been a principal for 24 years in southern California. All of her schools have primarily served Latino students and/or English Learners. Mary was born and raised in southern California and speaks fluent Spanish. Both of her parents were farm

workers who ensured that all three children attended parochial school. Mary remembers

a close-knit nuclear family, surrounded by extended family members, who saw them as

the "rich ones." She is a first generation college graduate and attended the local

university and continued to live at home until marriage. Mary and her siblings are the

only college graduates of her extended family.

Azucena

Azucena has been principal for 8 years at a very large elementary school that

serves over 80% Latino students and English language learners. She was born and raised

in a southern California farming town and was always anxious to leave. She had been

"plotting her escape" ever since she knew she'd go to college and that the closest one was

2 hours away. She began her career as an early childhood teacher as she worked on her

BA at San Diego State University. She then received a BCLAD and taught in bilingual

settings. She is a first generation college graduate. Her father worked in the fields and

her mother was a cashier at the local market. Her brother did not attend college.

Miroslava

Miroslava has been a principal for 4 years and is one of the youngest principals

interviewed. The school she leads is extremely ethnically diverse and impoverished. She

was born and raised in southern California and is fluent in Spanish. She attended San

Diego State University and has a BCLAD credential. She began her career in bilingual

classroom settings. Her parents worked at local factories and continue to do so. Both she

and her sister are first generation college graduates and entered the same profession.

They have been instrumental for each other in their career development. Her parents are

very proud and have very high expectations: "My mom still comments on how I dress if she sees me after work. She says I need to look like a professional at all times."

Monstserrat

Monstserrat has been principal for 2 years at a very small, but diverse elementary school. She is a first generation college graduate and speaks fluent Spanish. She has a BCLAD and has been a bilingual teacher for over 20 years. She was born and raised in southern California and attended a local university. Because she is unwed, she continues to live with her mother and now supports that household.

Noemi

Noemi has been principal for 10 years at one school. This elementary school has over 80% Latino students. She began her career at this school as a classroom aide and then as a bilingual teacher. Noemi was born and raised in southern California and attended a local university. She was the first in her family to go to college and was discouraged to go to her dream school because it meant moving from family "I didn't get to leave San Diego but at least I was influential enough to support my sister in moving away to college!"

Brisa

Brisa has been a principal for 7 years in southern California. She has served at two schools, both with many diverse needs, including issues of poverty and language acquisition. She was born and raised in southern California and is a first generation college graduate. She is an only child and continues to live at home and is the caregiver

to her aging mother. "I'm always working, either taking care of children at school or taking care of my mom at home—I wouldn't change it, but I'm tired."

Claudia

Claudia has been principal for 4 years at a dual language school in southern California. This school primarily teaches in Spanish in order for children to acquire a second language. She was born in Mexico, but raised in southern California. Her youth and college years were fraught with fear because she was not an American citizen. She is a first generation college graduate and the only sibling to have gone to college. "I have lost track of how many immigration lawyers we hired as a family during all those years."

Monica

Monica has been principal for 11 years at the same small elementary school that serves a majority of Latino students. She was born and raised in southern California and speaks Spanish fluently. Monica attended a local university and continues to live with her mother and sister because she is unwed. She is a first generation college graduate and was able to support her siblings to also attend college. "My mom is very important to me; she was so young when she had me that we both kind of raised each other. Then she got married again and had more children and I helped raise my sisters since I am 15 years older than them."

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Interviews and Themes

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First Interview

The first interview was intended to establish the context of the participants' experience (Seidman, 2006) and dialogue centered around the first research question:

How do Latina school principals describe their lived experiences as an academically successful student in K-12 grade? Participants were invited to step out of current roles and to share prior educational experiences and memories. Stories relayed varied from pre-school to high school. They thoroughly discussed pertinent and significant memories that they believe continue to influence them. There were three themes that strongly emerged from their stories and are also linked to the review of literature. The first theme, the role of language in the Latina experience, has been thoroughly discussed by both Yosso (2005) and LatCrit (Latina Critical Race Theory). Yosso describes it as an asset, linguistic capital; LatCrit describes it as another factor of significant difference for a Latina experience and one of the main reasons for bridging from Critical Race Theory to LatCrit (language and immigration are the main factors). The Latina principals in this study discussed the importance of language, the fluidity in their bilingualism, and the role and responsibility of translation for their families. The second theme has also been thoroughly studied in the literature, *familiasmo*, meaning the importance of the families' role in the life of a Latina. Many of the Latina principals in this study discussed the complete lack of support, bordering on intragroup marginalization. I was unable to find literature that described this experience. The third theme that emerged is the internal conflict these women felt between being Mexican or being American and the pull that exists between the two cultural worlds. This was described thoroughly by Anzaldúa (1987) as straddling two cultures and in LatCrit as a metaphor of constantly crossing bridges. These are their abridged stories organized by theme and participant.

Theme: Language. The importance and role of language was a significant topic discussed throughout all interviews. The participants had many stories to share related to the fluidity of their Spanish vs. English speaking world and the responsibility of maneuvering both languages for entire families. A few of the participants expressed the connection this experience as related to their current young students. Just as these Latina principals carried the role and responsibility as translators, now they witness their young students in the same situation and in the same role. This mirrored and shared experience has caused some of the participants to question how much responsibility this carries whilst simultaneously understanding that this translator role has helped build some of their leadership skills. There seemed to be some tension in relation to understanding that this was both a skill set developed from very young, but also an understanding and belief system about children gaining an adult like role. Below is some of their testimony that describes this theme. One participant, Montserrat, had an epiphany about her role as translator in her family and how "it switched the tables, the child knowing more than the parent" the ability to communicate in this country could potentially shift power between adults and children.

Marina.

> I have been trying to remember my own experience in being a language learner because I know my first language was Spanish, but I honestly don't remember. I think it came very easy for me and I quickly took on the role of translating for my grandparents. My grandmother would call on me to help her with household kind of things, like calling the electric company and she would dial the number and then tell me what she needed. For many years I got the same reaction on the phone "How old are you?"—I guess you could tell my age from the sound of my voice. But once I would explain that I was translating for my grandmother, the people on the other end would easily accept that a young child was making financial transactions on behalf of their family.

Idania.

My mom never began with me simply translating, but she would involve me when she was three layers in and could no longer understand—the horrible part is that at that point she was frustrated so I had to learn how to temper the emotion and what she was trying to communicate. I got so good at it, at diffusing a situation and of compromising to problem solve, but I remember being in my early teens and I must have rolled my eyes so much once I knew my mom was involving me—it was like, here we go again!

Mary.

My family spoke some English but it was limited to their job environment. It was really important for them, for us, all of us, to learn and speak English well. To the point that when I had my own children, my mom speaks to them in her broken English, instead of the Spanish I want them to learn. Back then it was a strong sense of pride that we all spoke English well.

Azucena.

Whenever I knew I had to translate, I would cringe! I remember my mom wanting me to fully translate everything she was saying and she would be pissed! And I'm like, um, no, I can't say that, and actually, I don't even know how to translate that insult into English. She was always feisty.

Miroslava.

Speaking English well was a must for us. Especially since we often crossed the border and a mere "US Citizen" determined whether or not you'd get harassed. Translating for your family members at the border crossing, now that's a whole other layer of stress—and not necessarily my stress, but they were, they were scared that what I was saying was inaccurate. I remember trying to communicate with agents and having my tio [uncle] in the background saying "¡dile, dile!" (say it, say it!).

Montserrat.

I still feel bad at how much fun my cousin and I made of my mom when she would try to speak English. She was always asking us how to say things and then we would laugh at her attempts. I often had to rescue her out of situations, inappropriate ones too, all because of a simple misuse or mispronunciation— she would kill me if I told you but it had to do with a racy song and she didn't know what she was saying. It sort of switched the tables on her, the child knowing more than the parent. Oh, I never thought about it that way . . . .

Noemi.

I am the go-to person, still, to translate for family members. My grandfather or uncles would come over with letters, to read or to write. They depended on me to help them out of some very adult situations. I remember sometimes asking my teachers for advice. Mr. Hudson, my sixth grade teacher, became someone I trusted for sound, practical advice. I remember his surprised look when I first began to ask him these kinds of things, he didn't say anything, but I think he got it, he got what I was doing. My grandfather had been working on a chicken farm in Jamul and had an industrial accident, there were lots of papers to read and things to fill out for him, and I was in sixth grade, so it was mostly Mr. Hudson who helped me with those documents.

Brisa.

I sat and have sat and probably will be sitting, in many boring bureaucratic offices helping to translate for my mom. I've always been made to go to adult errands, even if it meant missing school, so that they could communicate. Even now, when things have changed somewhat and there are more people that speak Spanish, say at like social security—my mom still insists that I come with her.

Claudia.

I have a lot of cousins that were also born and raised in the US, so the translation and communication thing didn't fall directly on my shoulders. But we definitely created a link, a sort of support group—of calling each other and saying—"hey, how do you say this?" or "where do you find this information" remember this was before Google! I sometimes look at my students and think, oh man, no way would I rely on this age group to do that kind of work!

Monica.

My grandmother always asked me to translate, but she would ask for some crazy and random translation. My favorites were her letters to the president. She would be really upset at something that would be local, like the crosswalk being broken, the need for a stop sign on x street and she would say "¡Escribeme una carta al presidente!" [Write me a letter to the president!] and it would be like dictation, and we'd go back and forth as she would say it in Spanish and then I would write it in English and then she would ask, what have you written and I quickly had to translate my English into Spanish. She really thought she was going straight to the top with her concerns. I don't even know where she got the address to the White House, but she had it.

Second theme: Family. Family and stories of parents or grandparents were prevalent among the participants and their comments indicated that the role families and culture of families played in their development was critical. While there is much literature that discusses the tight knit community within Mexican families, the women in this study discussed the role of family in a slightly different way. From their perspective their was a lack of family support towards education. Not in a malicious way, but in a non-knowing, unconscious way. Participants were able to discuss some of these examples and expressed that only now as adults are they able to see these experiences as a lack of awareness of American school systems.

Marina.

The only sane part of my family were my grandparents. Everyone else is some sort of crazy. I hardly see anyone now that my grandparents are gone, and I almost feel like they spent their lives raising their kids' kids. They also had some misperceived notions as to why their own children led tumultuous lives. They loved and they believed, but I saw many of them take advantage of their kindness. They even took me in when I got pregnant at sixteen. They supported me through my teenage pregnancy, but didn't know how to support me in going back to school, or understanding that there was life after having children.

Idania.

My mom died when we were young teenagers and my father had another family. It's always been my brother and I, we had to move in for a little bit with my father and then we both emancipated ourselves and rented a studio—it was on my boyfriend's parents' property. I don't know what family support feels like and all this about how Mexican families are tight and how that's one of the strongest values? I see nothing of it. As a matter of fact, I'm a whitey, or an oreo—brown on the outside and white on the inside. I see some ignorant views on being smart and frankly I don't need to be a part of them, so I'm pretty removed from family. And guess what, I'm not the anomaly, I see it all the time with my students, relying on themselves.

Mary.

My parents were very supportive; they worked so hard to send us to parochial school. There was a type of honor and pride that came from seeing us in our Catholic uniforms. I know how much that cost them, and also how much they viewed this as a necessary sacrifice. At this school parents had to volunteer and mine always did the menial work, not the president or the bookkeeper, but the cook, or the one that helped clean or lock up the campus, but they were always there. This did cause a weird divide in our family, since we were the only ones that could afford to do so. My cousins all went to public school and there was this idea that somehow we were richer, we were the wealthy ones of the family and it was said unkindly.

Azucena. My mom and dad were as supportive as they could be within their own context. Since they didn't go to school here, their view on "engagement" was different. I guess I'm speaking to this as a current administrator and understanding the role culture has on parent engagement. So they would come to events and check my report card, but when it got time to take tests, or to pay for certain things, they didn't understand it, nor did they have checkbooks or bank accounts. So there was a disconnect there. There's still a bit of misunderstanding, they don't know that I have a masters or what that really means, there's been an acceptance of my independence but nothing that they are proud about because they don't understand it. This has created a strange dynamic with my extended family as well.

Miroslava.

My mom is still involved in my life! And I guess if you were to ask teenage me I'd be annoyed, but now that I'm a wife and mother, I can appreciate it. The level of trust she had in me, just to say, mom I need to take a test all day on Saturday and I need $90 dollars for it. She would make it all work. She is so proud of my graduation, of all my graduations, that she has my diplomas displayed in her living room, she claims them as her own. It used to bother me, but now I understand. And with all this pride, she still stays very curious about what I do, and she offers advice like how I should dress or carry myself, or whatever her perception is of someone who is a "professional."

Montserrat.

My mom is extremely religious and was very involved in making sure I was being a dignified girl—almost oppressively so. I think I might have been one of the only teenagers whose mom still walked her to school. She would feign it as her morning exercise, but I knew it was to keep close to me. Even when I tried to hide things from her, like meeting notices, the neighbor, who was super involved at the school, would invite her, then I'd get in trouble for not telling her, so I gave

her all the flyers. She would say to me "no entiendo nada que dice la directora, pero que me vea la cara" [I don't understand anything the principal says but I want her to see my face present].

Noemi.

My family always encouraged me to go to school and would remind me that they are here for a better life for their kids. They weren't volunteers, or anything like that, but I always had a hot meal waiting for me when I got home and I was always encouraged to do homework immediately afterward. My mom would say that just because "no te puedo ayudar, pero yo te conosco y se cuando no estas estudiando" [I can't help you, but I know you and I know when you are not studying].

Brisa.

My father died when I was very young and he had children from a prior marriage. My mom raised all of us, so her contribution was making sure the bills were paid. And she would say that—mi trabjo es mi trabajo, su trabajo es estudiar [my work is my work and your work is to study]. I understand now what a huge kindness that is, to be alone in raising your own child, but also raising children that belong to another marriage. I don't think she was ever able to go to many school events, but I didn't feel bad, I knew she was tired and that she cared. I try not to judge the students whose parents I don't see because of that.

Claudia.

My parents are both really hard-working, they still do hard labor here in the United States. And I have to tell you, most of my childhood was spent indoors. I don't know how many times I'd hear "When we get our green cards we can go." We lived in fear and hiding. I mean, I wasn't afraid as a child, so maybe I shouldn't have said that, but now as an adult I see how we kind of kept to ourselves a lot. So my parents would be very accepting of whatever the school said and simply trusted the school to do their job, mostly because they didn't want to be discovered.

Monica.

My mom was always working, I was a total self advocate and would bug her and remind her about things like parent conferences—she always went to the things I asked her to go to. She supported me like that, in doing what I specifically asked her to do, and I knew that was my role, in making sure she knew it was important and then she would make the time.

Third theme: Mexican vs. American. The tension between ethnic culture and majority culture, or Mexican and American, was often brought to the surface during our dialogue. There was and still is a clear divide and almost a decision of choosing one or the other. Below are excerpts from these interviews.

Marina.

So not only do I have to maneuver between Mexican and American values, but even within being Mexican, I'm so white, my light skin and my green eyes, I'm also a little bit of an anomaly in the category I classify myself. So I'm always slightly off from the group, different.

Idania.

I have always dated white men, so to my father that is a personal statement against my own race–seriously he has said that. He even said that I was a fad like JLo, and that was the only reason white men would like me back. Growing up with that kind of divide in my head of who I could like and couldn't like and who I needed to be with is strange, like an immediate border between you and another person.

Mary.

The first time I experienced this tension of being Mexican or being American was when I was distinctly asked to pick a side. I was trying to find a club to belong to, mostly for my college application, and there was one that I was curious about, MECHA, their meeting was more of a protest than anything else and I remember standing there a little dumbfounded and one of the participants got right up in my face and said "pick a side!" Honestly, I don't remember what the heated discussion was even about, but I just said "Mexican" thinking that would honor my parents the most.

Azucena.

My community is all Mexican, my TV was in Spanish, my world was Mexican. The American part would creep in different ways and there was an immediate warning from my parents "no somos gringos" [we are not white]. It would surprise me at how it would be almost arbitrary of some sort of ask from me. I often wondered why we didn't just live in Mexico.

Miroslava.

The worst part was TV! My mom would want to watch her telenovelas [soap operas] and I wanted to keep up with my peers with shows like "Who's the Boss," and then I felt totally not able to be a part of the cafeteria talk! Being Mexican or being American was very real, and came from different ends of the being spectrum.

Montserrat.

Food choice would be a Mexican vs. American thing for my family, like somehow preferring a burger and fries meant a rejection of culture. I don't know how many times I heard "tenemos frijoles en la casa" [we have beans at home] when I'd ask if we could go to McDonalds. It's a joke now, by the way, I see that everywhere, almost like all of our Mexican families colluded in saying this to their children.

Noemi.

Oh my favorite example of this is "Roseanne," the TV show, do you remember? She was obnoxious and crude, and I thought funny, and her kids were kind of bratty and my mom would say that's why I was starting to rebel, that I wanted to be white like Roseanne's children. So she would turn off the TV if that show was on. Roseanne was barred in my house. Ha, wasn't that her last name, Barr?

Brisa.

I'm still facing this choice, of American or Mexican, in dumb things too, I'm either too white for one crowd or too Mexican for another. I wish that wouldn't be a "thing" or a choice. I can be a mesh of all things, and throw in a little Catholic too. Now that I work in education, I don't like the distinction of being studious being synonymous with being white, it's a horrible cultural outlook and dynamic.

Claudia.

Oh my god, TV! So much TV was not allowed at home cause they were too white and rude—you name all the popular shoes in the late eighties and it was probably on the list—"The Simpsons" was huge and I wasn't allowed to watch it, cause the kids were rude. The funny thing is that drove me to watch very adult like shows at a young age, like "Moonlighting" cause my parents couldn't understand what they were saying, but didn't hear children back-talking to their parents.

*Monica***.**

I wasn't allowed to do anything my friends were doing. No roller skating, or going to the movies, or any normal teenager thing. And when I'd ask why? "Cause you're not white"—it was like, just cause they allow their kids to go to the movies unaccompanied it meant they don't care for their children.

Second Interview

The second interview was designed to prompt the participants to "reconstruct the details of their experience within the context in which it occurs" (Seidman, 2006, p. 11). The second interview dialogue centered on the research question: How do Latina school principals describe their lived experiences during and after college as related to their development as leaders? As First Generation College graduates, entering the University became their first experience outside their own Latino community, because of this shift, I wanted to spend the time in attempting to understand this shift and its potential implications. Three specific themes emerged, and the struggle between Mexican and American identity intensified. The first theme is the role of their family and going to college and the definite tension related in the participants' stories between leaving and staying home. The second theme that emerged was the feeling of being ill prepared for the rigor of the university, and they question their own capacity and the value of their high school diploma. And lastly, the bilingual credential they sought in order to begin their teaching career. Many participants expressed their fear of not having the academic Spanish necessary to teach, yet the state of California deemed them worthy of a Bilingual Credential.

First theme: Family. As families expressed their interest and support in the importance of gaining an education and a better life in this country, once it came to

making the decision to actually go to college, this became difficult for these women.

Families did not understand the difference between community college and university, or

the decision to move away to another university when there was one locally, or living in

dorms when you could live at home. Especially for women, the role of culture and

marriage played a huge part in the arguments held by these Latinas and their families

about where to attend college.

Marina.

I was living with my grandparents, and they are lovely, but I was on my own as far as school was concerned. They were surprised that I could still go, even with a young child. They often discouraged me to go to class when the baby was sick, or if it was raining outside because I took public transit. I know that throughout my daughter's life I was a student, and perhaps not the best mother, but I also know that in the long run I was able to provide for her in different ways.

Idania.

I avoided talking to my father, or any family members—they knew my brother and I had left home, but I think my father painted a bad picture of us, and skewed how they viewed us. The shock and surprise that they experience when they find out what I do, or that I went to a university, it just says a lot about the types of expectations they have. I did this by myself, well, with my brother's support, but not with any family; if anything, their negative attitudes got in my way.

Mary.

Because my parents invested so much in my education, they knew the end result was college, but I don't think they knew what that meant. There was a local community college and also a local university, but they didn't know the difference. When I was accepted at the university I had a cousin also attending the community college and my mom would ask why I wasn't going to school with him, and how much cheaper it was to go there. There was a lot of teaching I had to do, especially as the oldest of all of my siblings.

Azucena.

I was so ready to leave the house and go to school. I was working a part time job, mostly because I needed a checking account for all those senior expenses, and would buy little things for the dorm, a set of sheets, a lamp, things of that nature.

And my parents would see it and I would say, I'm moving out in August. I don't think they believed me. And come August, I packed my car and moved into the dorms. My parents were still close, about an hour drive, but it felt like a million miles.

Miroslava.

So this was the funny part, because I don't know how many times I heard my mom talking about how I was going to be the first one to go to college, that I would be the first one to be a professional—but once she understood that meant I would move away she started to backtrack, started to say that I could have both and stay close by. I did go to school and did move away, but just about an hour? 45 minutes, something like that. I think she was one of the few moms that came to see me weekly—by then I welcomed it, she would bring home cooked meals and would bring clean sheets.

Montserrat.

I took a really long route to graduate from college, I went to the local community college, actually, I went there thinking I might get an AA, but I liked going to school and I was good at it, so I transferred to state. I lived at home and continue to do so. The option of moving out wasn't an option, and still, even in my full adult self, it's a controversial topic because I am unmarried, yes that's still a thing for my mom.

Noemi.

This still stings, I worked so hard to get into my dream school, but it meant moving away and I was not allowed to do so, I had to go from a UC choice to a

state school where I could live at home and drive to daily. I think I complained so much about it that my younger sister was allowed to move out for college.

Brisa.

My university was such a huge controversy, there was so much negotiation, so I had to stay local, but I could live there for one year and then I had to move back home. I don't know how many times we would go back and forth with this. Suffice it to say, I went to a good school but not the one I wanted.

Claudia.

My immigration status always got in the way. This complicated everything and our immigration case was starting to wrap up. I had to register as an international student and take out significant loans but I still stayed local. I lived at home and

commuted, but I was just happy to have the option of going to college. This is an issue that I am deeply concerned about due to this very stressful experience.

Monica.

I moved out of home but it was still a local school, I wasn't allowed to leave so my choice was made by proximity. I could get home in about 40 minutes. College and home was very hard for me, because I still had to contribute to the household budget, but no longer live there. I felt like I was either working or taking out loans in order to do both. There was some relief not living at home and being able to send money.

Second theme: Preparation and ability. Feeling prepared and capable to be a student at the university affected the principals' perception of self. They discussed having academic difficulty for the first time in their education. All participants were put on academic probation at the university and were fearful of being kicked out. There were different ways they coped through this difficulty, for example, Brisa explains that "I started combining my general-ed with my major early on, I knew I could rock those classes, it would help even out my GPA." The value of a meaningful diploma from high school, one that truly prepared them for their university experience, was discussed, as well as feeling disappointed in their high school education as they now had a different lens as to what was helpful and what wasn't in their academic journey.   This particular experience propelled a sense of purpose related to improving education for students of color to better prepare them to compete at the university level. Participants expressed not wanting to recreate the conditions that led to their academic probation or feelings of incompetence at the university.

Marina.

I went to a few different high schools and that caused me to not be very prepared for college. I had to teach myself how to study and how to write academically. I

took a remedial writing course a few times because I had so much work to do and kept struggling through it.

Idania.

Community college was a joke, it was so easy and it made me get a little cocky as to what I could do once I got to the UC, and boy did UC kick my butt. I walked in there like I was going to own the place and I almost got kicked out in the first quarter. I'm still mad at both my high school and community college for providing me with a horrible education. And I'm mindful of that now, of how meaningful is this piece of paper and is it equal to the one being received at a more affluent high school?

Mary.

I was really alone at the university. I had never been this far away from the world I knew and I was always questioning what I was doing there. I mean, I knew I was smart, but I didn't know if others thought I was smart. I was hardly ever called on, nor did I volunteer any opinions or thoughts. I remember receiving a paper from a professor that said "please speak up in class there are good things in here" and that helped, but there was no reaching out to students, it was very different for me.

Azucena.

I was so driven, and well, I'm still a very driven person, that I didn't have time to notice my feelings. I was working over forty hours a week to be able to support myself and going to school full time. I didn't have the normal college experience, or join a fraternity, wait it's sorority for women, so nope, no time for that, or drunken nights, or anything like that, I've always been too busy trying to make sure I'd get through this with everything I needed. I guess that's the difference, then, that I had to work extra hard for that diploma and to support myself at the same time.

Miroslava.

The university made me feel small, in everything, it was so big and much more demanding than my high school. And it is so different than any schooling I've

had. And I didn't look like anybody, and it just silenced me a bit. I got really good at studying, but it was a culture shock. I even tried to go to counseling once, I felt so different there, I only went to one session cause I got frustrated with that counselor. To this day, I still have arguments with him, I wish he would have said other things instead of validating my outsider concerns.

Montserrat.

I gave myself the time to grow into my studies, because I was able to stay home during these years, so I didn't have to work. So it was a slow process for me, a constant part time status. It allowed me to sort of transition slowly and with comfort, but I was never able to fully connect.

Noemi.

State was weird for me, I didn't like it, it was another world even if it was super close to home. It became a chore, something to get done, just couldn't be myself there. I didn't look like anyone, I didn't sound like anyone, we had different environments, it was very obvious, even to them. I heard a few comments they would make about me.

Brisa.

I remember being in biology and hearing other students say how they already did that lab and how easy it was, and then there's me, I studied all day Sunday (and I mean over 10 hours) and I was still getting a D. My high school didn't even have a lab. I just kept noticing how the chips were stacked against me and how much harder I had to work.

Claudia.

I was put on academic probation my first semester. That was really difficult. I had never received anything lower than a B in school and I wasn't slacking off, I was studying really hard, and that's how behind I was. At one point I was the only one showing up for the chemistry section with the graduate student, and still getting a C. I had to get really inventive with how I was going to maneuver through this. I was strategic about what to take and mixed in classes I enjoyed with the harder science and math courses necessary in order to "fix" the GPA. I think if I would have continued like the rest of the freshmen who took all their requirements up front I would have gotten kicked out.

Monica.

I was put on academic probation my first semester and then had to leave at the end of the school year. This was a shock to me because I was always a straight A

student. I went back to community college and then was able to transfer back to another local university.

Third theme: Teaching credentials. All participants have a BCLAD credential, which deems them capable of teaching in bilingual settings, yet many of them spoke about this being a determinant because of who they were and not necessarily what they wanted to do. Meaning, they wanted to teach, but were not actively pursuing being a bilingual teacher. The decision to become a bilingual teacher as expressed by some participants, was for employment opportunities more so than a passion to become bilingual educators. Many of them discussed their informal Spanish skills as a concern for the responsibility of teaching academic Spanish to students. Most of the participants did not have formal Spanish education, they were bilingual because they spoke fluent Spanish at home, but it was informal, everyday Spanish, not academic, which was in direct opposition to what they were now responsible to teach others. A few participants discussed that it was different to now pursue a language they had hardly used before in academic settings. There was also Proposition 227 in California in the late nineties that eliminated all bilingual settings; this affected their employment and their self-efficacy.

Marina.

I wasn't sure what I was going to do when I graduated from college so I got my teaching credential. I got a BCLAD in order to be a bilingual teacher but I wasn't sure if that's really what I wanted to do. My Spanish wasn't even that good. And then Prop 227 happened and I was surprised I even got a job. There was so much controversy over teaching students in their native tongue.

Idania.

So what I didn't know was what I was going to do after the BA—now what? No one talks about that. Well, into my lap fell a teaching credential program that would hire you as a teacher at the same time as granting you a BCLAD credential. I needed a job with benefits and this was it. I hated it for a few years and even

left the profession, began a second career and then came back to it. I just wasn't sure if I was able to make a difference and questioned my ability. Now as a leader, I am aware of how I can contribute in a positive way.

Mary.

I always looked up to my teachers and wanted to be one, so I worked to get my teaching credential after my degree. An advisor suggested a BCLAD so I could use my bilingual skills and be a more desired candidate. My family was always such a supporter of learning and speaking English well that I didn't think I would pass the Spanish writing exam; to my surprise I did, but the whole time I taught bilingual I had my trusty English-Spanish dictionary handy.

Azucena.

I didn't know what I was going to be or what I was going to do with my degree. We never really talked about that, about a career—I think it's cause we don't know what we don't know, I didn't grow up around "careers. Well one of my college jobs was at the preschool and I was good at it, so I decided to go with teaching and get my BCLAD to be more hire-able.

Miroslava.

I always wanted to be a teacher, it's what I felt I could do well, I wanted to work at schools like where I went to school because I never had a Mexican teacher. I thought I could show kids that they can go to college and have a career.

Montserrat.

I went into this college journey not knowing where I'd end up. And I guess I loved school so much that I stayed there. I started off being a teacher's aide and she is the one that suggested I become a teacher because I was good with our students. She also suggested I get a BCLAD so I would get a job quicker, I told her I could order tacos but not teach Spanish! But it turns out, I could pass the exam.

Noemi.

Ok, so this job—I didn't know I wanted this job, or that I would like it. I just knew I needed a career after graduation. I got my bachelors and was able to get a job at a school site. The principal liked my work and recommended me to be an intern to earn my BCLAD and then she hired me. It was a huge snowball.

Brisa.

I feel super guilty that I have a BCLAD but I don't use it. I had to be so meticulous about my informal Spanish and how I taught students. I was glad to have a job but felt a great deal of responsibility on ensuring that the Spanish I was teaching was accurate.

Claudia.

In all my years of trying to hide my "Mexicannness" I lost a lot of my language, so now going back into a classroom setting where I was supposed to teach Spanish? Yikes, I felt stupid, and a bit of a fraud to my own culture.

Monica.

I swore I wanted to write and be a writer, but I needed a job, and I spoke Spanish and had a degree, what else does one do? That sounds horrible, I know, I promise I really love it now!

Third Interview

In the third and final interview, we discussed the participants' current role as principal, centered on the third research question: In what ways does the organizational culture of the K-12 setting influence a Latina leader? The participants were asked to reflect on themselves and their current occupational setting. There were three significant themes that emerged from this reflection. First, their role in teaching about culture and affecting the overall issue of institutional racism. Participants described situations as principals where they specifically intervened on behalf of Latino students in order to form an understanding between a White teacher and their Latino students (and vice versa). One participant described having to often intervene between African-American students and Latino students due to the Spanish word "negrito" when referring to Black people. This term is specific to color, just like saying Black, but because of it's close proximity to the American racist term this involves conflict between two communities.

As Noemi describes "I have a Black school supervisor who has helped me engage in this dialogue with the community".   Second, the need for schools to create an organizational culture of shared leadership, for many different reasons in order to collectively impact the academic achievement of students, and to set the conditions for collective responsibility for all children. And lastly, Latina principals lead schools where students mirror their own upbringing and ethnic culture, there is question of whether or not this is advantageous to their leadership or their students.

First theme: A teacher of culture. As principals discussed their role, the importance of being a teacher to their teachers about culture became evident. The Latina principals interviewed felt strongly that they had to ensure there was a cultural understanding between the ethnic cultures of student and teachers, and also the mainstream culture of society and finally the inherent culture of the organization they are leading. They described several "cultures" at play: ethnic majority, ethnic minority, mainstream, and organizational. As principals, they believed that they must be mindful of all cultures at play and help engineer conditions for new learning among their faculty.

Marina.

A really important piece of how I see myself as principal is a broker of culture; of building a bridge between students and their teachers of understanding each other. Especially because so many of our students are Latinos and the majority of teachers are white.

Idania.

I've had to take a very clear role of teaching teachers the differences their culture has to the culture we are teaching. Many times we hire new teachers that have had no prior experiences that would mirror our students, and there is a layer of judgment that I need to intervene on, but with the lens on teaching them.

Mary.

I know that I have a lot of teaching to do, and it has more to do with teachers than with students, especially in the field of language acquisition. If you are an English native, you have a very different understanding of language. For example, saying, "does that word look right?" when questioning spelling, that's not a realistic strategy for an English learner.

Azucena.

I've been in many situations where I have to stop what was on the agenda to address some stereotypical statements, made from well meaning and caring teachers, but without cultural sensitivity. One of the statements I hear often, and usually from new teachers who haven't heard my lecture about it, is the disbelief of "families don't buy pencils or school supplies but they have the latest $100 sneakers!" I stop everything when I hear comments like these to teach about how parents in poverty know they are being judged by how they dress their children, so it's almost an overcompensation. And it's not about creating pity, it's about understanding the communities we chose to work for.

Miroslava.

One of the hardest parts for me to lead, but also one I do with pleasure, is to help our cultures understand one another. My school is extremely diverse and it upsets me to see the tension that exists between the communities. I am always attempting to engineer learning opportunities for all to understand each other as immigrants to this country.

Montserrat.

I have had to teach things about our culture that I never thought I would. My biggest pet peeve is when teachers get mad at students for not calling them by their name and instead saying "teacher." I have explained and will continue to explain that they are simply translating from Spanish where the one of the most respected professions is teaching and that they are calling you "professor" or "Maestro." It is of upmost respect, so the passive aggressive response from a teacher to respond to this by saying "student" is disrespectful.

Noemi.

I have a vice principal who is older than me and who is also white. And when community members, or even people from our district offices want to address the principal and we are standing side by side, they address her. I feel like one of the most important things I could do is break that stereotype.

Brisa.

I see myself in my students all the time. I hear it in their Spanglish and in their slang and in their choice of games and snacks. I've had events at professional development sessions where I introduce these to teachers, so they could get to know their students a little more.

Claudia.

One of the funniest things that has happened is the home remedies that some teachers are shocked to see—and I say, yes, I also went to school with a garlic clove in my ear.

Monica.

One of the first things I did as principal was to organize a bus tour of the neighborhood. All my teachers drive to work and then drive home and don't know or understand the community, so I took them and was their tour guide. We got to see where students play, where the local clinic was, where the hubs for the community were, but also got a real eyeful as to the reality of our students' lives.

Second theme: Shared leadership. As principal participants discussed their leadership role, all of them discussed the importance of shared leadership. Principals felt strongly about building a team and leading through a collective. Other studies on Latina leadership have described these types of leadership belief systems and styles (Bordas, 2009).

Marina.

I like to empower others, to tap into what their purpose is, to why they chose to work at this school—that's how I try to run my site but embracing the shared responsibility we all have to our students.

Idania.

I'm a very good listener, and observer, I like to understand things and to try and harness support from groups before leading forward.

Mary.

I know that my teachers work with English Learners because they want to, and sometimes when we see the academic results and they are low, it's because we don't know how, so that's how I see my work, in trying to figure out the how alongside them.

Azucena.

I like to go big. I have big ideas that sometimes have never been done, but I also like to vet it, to see how teachers feel about the idea—to get multiple perspectives on it. What I have found is that the more I share this ideation the better the idea gets.

Miroslava.

I like to do things with a team. I have teams and groups for almost everything, and it's voluntary, I don't think it works as effectively if you force people to be on your team. It did start out a little slim, but now that teachers know that this is their voice and their leadership, there is active participation.

Montserrat.

I give it all up, all control is shared, I'm not there trying to be the best principal for the school, I want to be the best co-teacher for students. There's no ego there.

Noemi.

I worked as a teacher for some leaders that wouldn't ask my opinion, which made me never share it. I have these sorts of dialogues with my teachers and they were, at first, shocked that a principal was asking about how they felt or what they knew about certain topics without making assumptions.

Brisa.

The work of leading an urban school is difficult and cannot be accomplished alone. It is imperative that the leader build teams and shares both leadership and that there is a collective sense of responsibility.

Claudia.

I just went to a workshop that discussed how the most important job a principal has, or any leader has, is building teams. And how important shared leadership is across any organization. This is how I lead, I don't make isolated decisions, I consult, I ask questions, I stay curious.

Monica.

I treat my teachers as professionals; I know how hard they worked to get their degree and their credential. I don't take it for granted. This makes them feel respected and they actively participate in the operations of the school day.

Third theme: Population similarity. Principals expressed an interest and a desire towards working with and for populations that mirror their own background. Whether it's a background of poverty or ethnic culture, their schools and their experiences are quite similar. However, one question emerged from this testimony that warrants further research. Is this truly a choice? A preference? Or are these schools the ones that will hire them? I did not want to ask that question because as researcher I felt that it was a different inquiry all together.

Marina.

I had the opportunity to work as a principal at a very affluent school, and even with this light complexion and green eyes, I kept being called Maria. I couldn't believe it. My name is so far off and I wondered how this affected the perception of my leadership ability.

Idania.

I've only ever worked with populations that I connect with, whether they are poor or of color, it's my personal preference. I want to make a real difference and be a role model for communities.

Mary.

I am very passionate about language acquisition and the role of language development in children who speak other languages and recent immigrants. I've dedicated my entire career to this and wouldn't change it.

Azucena.

I love that I can connect with the families I work with, there is an ease for me to speak to them, they are my aunts and uncles and I get them, and they get me.

Miroslava.

I have only worked at schools with large populations of Latino students. It is my preference; it is who I feel comfortable teaching.

Montserrat.

I love that the community feels comfortable with me, and I in turn feel comfortable with them. Sometimes I think this is where I still get some of my culture, since I don't really get it anymore.

Noemi.

I have only worked at schools with low socio-economic students and prefer it that way. I feel connected to this work and I feel like I can offer a real change.

Brisa.

Because I have a BCLAD, and began as a bilingual teacher, by that credential I have been placed where students speak Spanish. Sometimes I wonder if I would be as successful somewhere else as I have been here.

Claudia.

I love where I work. I think it is a truly beautiful location full of diverse thoughts and cultures and religions. I like to be within this melting pot where we co create beautiful outcomes for students. I see the real work for our future in settings like these.

Monica.

I worked at a high performing school for one year and I remember thinking, wow, no child gives me a hug, and in my prior schools I was practically mobbed daily. One of my colleagues said "they don't need you that way" so I decided to go back, where kids needed me that way.

This chapter described using direct narrative, the themes and answers from each Latina principal. Throughout our interviews, these Latina leaders would share some nuggets of personal stories that I was interested in and was able to look into a little more deeply. In attempting to capture the essence of their story, I decided to write short vignettes with what they described. During the third interview, I shared all vignettes with

all participants. They expressed joy, but they also expressed a connection to each other.

Below are the vignettes that emerged from their stories.

Vignettes

I had the honor of listening to many different stories from amazing Latina leaders

and wanted to capture a little bit of their personality in the form of vignettes. I took the

liberty of taking their testimony and shifting it into more of a story form, specifically

short vignettes. At our third, and final interview, I shared these stories with all

participants and they approved and appreciated the efforts to re-tell their stories. I

believe that these are stories that have contributed to their leadership development. The

following are the vignettes.

Tap Shoes

My grandmother loved to walk to the local thrift store on Sundays and I always

felt lucky if I got to tag along. This particular time, my mom suggested that I buy my

back to school shoes there. It was the first time I was handed money and going shopping

to choose by myself (I knew my grandma wouldn't oppose anything I selected). I was

eight years old.

The thrift store was huge, with cement floors, and long hanging racks and big

bins. My grandma would search through the racks, hoping to find things she was able to

re-sell at the local swap meet. She taught me to look for the word "Paris" on any of the

tags.

My favorite thing about shopping with my grandma was that she let me walk off whilst she was neck deep in clothing. "I have to go find some shoes!" "Alright!" she would say.

I skipped through the aisles and got to the shoe bins and there they were, beautifully black and shiny shoes with a ribbon tie. I went straight for them and just begged pretty please, fit!

I put them on and they were magical, they sparkled in every which way- I hopped and skipped and tied the beautiful ribbon- they were magical.

I found my grandmother walking towards the cash register "Oh good, did you find some? It's time to go." I nodded happily and put my magical shoes on the conveyer belt, paid for them and went home.

The next day I was getting ready to go to school and the shoes were the first things I put on. My mom nodded and smiled in approval.

As we exited our apartment and walked down the hallway my mom says, "What's that noise?" I smiled and said, "That's not noise! That's magic!" She grabbed my calf and raised my foot. "You can't wear these to school, these are tap shoes." She sounded frustrated. We didn't have any other shoes and we're already on our way so we continued. I was worried that my teacher would be as upset as my mom.

Today was my first day in second grade. I shyly walked into the classroom and was relieved that it had carpet. I found my name on the desk and sat down. I was so glad that my magic shoes weren't noisy, and they still looked beautiful; I remember looking down at how shiny they were and loving that I could tie a bow with the ribbon.

Then it was recess. Recess meant walking in a straight line outside, and I could hear them, I could hear me. Clink, clink, clink. They no longer sounded magical, more like tin cans being thrown into the garbage. My teacher noticed. She took me aside and said that I couldn't wear those shoes anymore.

When I got home I told my mom that I couldn't wear the shoes. She said she didn't have money to buy new ones and then she said something mean about my grandma. She took my shoes off and grabbed a pair of pliers. I watched her destroy my shoes, no longer with sparks on the bottom, but with a few holes. These would do for a few weeks.

I continued to wear the shoes until mom could afford some new ones, but now I had to always make sure that no one could see the bottoms or that I wouldn't hop in puddles because there were a couple of holes in them, small ones, but large enough to notice them.

Dance Class

My mom's part time job wasn't going to be able to continue to fund our family. She knew she needed a craft and was happy to find free community classes at the local rec center. Luckily for me, there were free (to some) dance classes happening next door at the same time so I wouldn't need to stay home alone.

Mom would drop me off in her leotard and I was excited to have my first dance lesson. It became very evident who were the free kids and who paid. I practiced the dance moves barefoot, while others had beautiful, silky shoes, mostly pink, with skirts around their white or pink leotards. Mine was black and too big for me. Mom was next

door learning how to decorate cakes. All the other parents were there watching and cheering for their children.

Because I didn't know anyone and they were so different than me I became very involved in whoever was dancing or practicing with the teacher. I knew all the steps, every one for each routine. I practiced along her instruction in the corner, by myself. Sometimes I could hear the kids laughing at me, but they got used to me doing that too.

I learned jazz and tap and ballet (and wished so much to have some point shoes like the teenage girls that would show up once a week). I would go home and dance for my grandfather as he ate dinner and he would tell me how much I'm improving week by week, so "Keep practicing!"

By this time I had a little bit of an audience. The laughing became smiles and the teacher began to include me in dance routines that weren't meant for my age group. I began to help others, especially the new students or the younger students.

Then it happened, the big show that would highlight all of our dance routines. I remember "All That Jazz" and "Babyface" and "The Nutcracker." I knew the lyrics and the moves and was so excited to be a part of this. Then I received the dreaded sheet, with the costume costs and everything I would need to be a part of any of the routines. Me, with my old black leotard and no dance shoes. I didn't even ask my mom. I knew I wouldn't be able to be a part of it. And for the first time that week, I didn't even want to go to dance class. I walked in and sat down on the bleachers. My teacher asked me to come see her and I refused, shook my head, and stayed up there the whole time, truly

containing myself—from my want of dance and sing and my want of cry that I couldn't be a part of it.

One of the older ballerinas, Lillian, that I admired so much, one of the ones with the pointy shoes, came up to say hello and I almost burst in tears. She hugged me and told me that if I wanted to talk she would stop her dancing to do so. I didn't interrupt her, but to this day I remember her face and her kind expression of care.

I stopped dancing for grandpa, I stopped singing and practicing my steps whilst walking to school. I didn't want to go back. Mom kept asking me what was wrong, but I didn't want to tell her, didn't want to burden her more.

The following week when I arrived at dance class again, there was Lillian at the door waiting for me. She had two grocery store bags with her and she said "I brought these for you," and there were silky skirts, and sparkly accessories, and dance shoes that were too small for her. I remember there was a big black hat, all in black sequins. She said it was perfect for "Babyface" and that I might even get the lead.

I did get the lead and my whole family went to the show. I remember I was able to wear lipstick and mascara and I made a big thank you drawing for Lillian. She told me that if I kept dancing I could someday have her point shoes.

*Pennysave*r Mice

When my dad left my mom and my brother and I, we had to move to a one-room studio. I was too sad to care or think about the conditions of the place, but I remember mom always being upset about it.

I remember mice and spiders. And they would make my mom scream, and then curse, and then cry.

I was in third grade when I read about snakes, and how people who had snakes as pets would feed them live mice. This is how I got my grand idea!

We lived on top of a Chinese food restaurant and a liquor store and they always had boxes out back. I grabbed a bunch of different sized boxes and begin to poke holes in the largest one. I created different traps to catch these mice and then I would sell them.

My mom bought our new furniture in the *Pennysaver* and I looked to see how I could sell mice in it. They did have a section for pets and I thought my ad should be close to that section. I called the number and told the lady on the other line that I wanted to sell the mice I was catching in their pet section. She laughed and exclaimed "No one wants mice for a pet!" and I told her it was to feed them to pet snakes. Her only other response was "How old are you?" After I told her how old I was I think I amused her so much she ran the ad without charging me; she told me she would give me a deal until I had my business up and running.

At this point I had three mice and an ad in the *Pennysaver*. Every time the phone would ring I would jump and wait for it to be my first customer. Three days later, it was hard to keep the mice hidden from my mom, but then it happened. The first phone call. He said he was interested and wanted all three. I gave him my address and told him the price. He said he'd be over in thirty minutes.

This went on for about a year and funded anything that I knew mom would say no to because we didn't have the money—candy, book fairs at school, cute pencils, etc. To

this day I can't believe nothing happened to me—no mice bites and no dodgy strangers coming to our apartment to buy mice. I thank my lucky stars. And no, my mom never found out.

Cooking for 10 by 10

When my sister turned five my mom could no longer stay home. I understand now that this is the age that welfare recipients begin to receive less monthly money. I was in third grade and was now responsible for watching my sister.

I remember having to promptly leave my elementary school in order to make it to my sister's bus stop. For some reason, kindergarten for her was at a different school. It was on my way home, but they wouldn't release her until someone picked her up. I remember the bus driver being surprised by my age but then getting used to it.

My mom would get home three hours after we would get home, right at 6 p.m. She told me she was going to start teaching me how to make dinner and that it would be my responsibility from now on. I remember starting with simple dishes, quesadillas, burritos from weekend leftovers- and the hardest one, rice. I remember having one pot that my rice would always come out perfect, but if I made it in any other pot, it would be sticky.

By the time I was in fifth grade I was making dinner every night. My sister and I were now at the same school; we would meet by the flagpole and walk home. We lived behind a grocery store, so on the way home I would pick up the ingredients for dinner and have it ready for our family of three.

At this point, my mom would give me a weekly allowance and our food stamps. I remember not thinking much about the food stamps until a friend walked home with me and went with me to the store. She pointed and heckled and said "You're on food stamps??!!" I didn't know what it meant, but I knew I should be embarrassed—I always raced away from school so she wouldn't walk home with us.

I was responsible for the weekly food budget and for making dinner, and I sometimes would walk through the aisles we never walked through, like the pasta aisle, so full of ingredients that I wasn't familiar with. I saw this box with these tubes in them and it said "manicotti." I wrote it down. I bought my ingredients for enchiladas and left. Next to the grocery store was our public library. I ran in with a backpack full of ingredients and found the recipe books. I looked up manicotti and found instructions on how to cook them. I copied all the instructions in my notebook. I was determined to make manicotti.

The next day I bought all the ingredients in the recipe. I spent a lot of money on something called ricotta cheese and I began to worry about the weekly money. The house smelled beautiful and exotic to me. I kept opening up the oven door and being so excited to see the bubbling cheese. I had tried ricotta cheese raw and didn't like it, but it smelled good while cooking so I was hopeful.

I made a salad with the leftover ingredients from the enchilada toppings and proudly took out my manicotti baking dish. Everyone was oooohing and aaahing and we enjoyed every bite.

This dish began a series of practices for me. I would find a product at the grocery store I never heard of, would go next door to look it up, write down the recipe, and then budget for the ingredients. I calculated that these new recipe "splurges" would allow for one new recipe a week with exotic ingredients, which would equal one quesadilla and bean dinner to keep the cost equal.

To this day manicotti is still delicious for me, and the second most exotic flavor in my mouth? Barbecue sauce.

Quince

I was both dreading and excited for the quinceanera age group. I had gone to many of my cousins' quinces and now my friends would be planning theirs. My mom had warned me that I wasn't getting one—too expensive, and all the guests do is criticize you for your fashion choices!

The entire school day was taken up by looking at bridal magazines, talking about the waltz, who would be in whose party. I was also warned about that—can't be a "dama" in anyone's quince, it's too expensive to buy a bridesmaid dress for a fifteen-year-old party!

So I did what teenagers learn to do—I loathed the quince parties, refused to go to any, boycotted the whole thing. Pretended to be against this cultural practice of debutante—of saying "My daughter is a virgin and available" while inside longing to have a big beautiful waltz with my boy crush in a fancy dress.

All this rebellious talk got me invited to NO Parties. So I made it worse. Now I wasn't in the loop of any of the talk in ninth grade. Couldn't laugh at their references of what happened during the weekend and wasn't a part of any of the preparation.

I hated the ninth grade. All this pressure to be Mexican by my family but financially couldn't be Mexican and participate in any of these coming of age practices.

Applying for College

I was always told about college, or university—same thing right? It was always something I was bound to do, supposed to do. And that's all I knew. Luckily, my class was full of kids who knew how to actually get there. There was lots of looking over shoulders, pretending to know what they were talking about, and then researching what they meant—what was a PSAT? or an ACT? Oh, you're stressed about application deadlines? That means I need to get on it quickly!

Where do I even apply? I've heard of Berkeley, Stanford, but I know those were hard—didn't want to go to SDSU, too close to home, and I needed to leave. My counselor said to apply to the UC schools or CSU, that there were other options outside of San Diego. I also decided to look up where my favorite poet went to school, I'd apply there too.

Now everyone is talking about SAT scores and GPA—what the hell is GPA? I always got good grades. I saw a box on the UC applications that had SAT and GPA correlations; my 3.9 didn't require much on SAT so I only took that damn test once. I heard others taking it multiple times, but I couldn't afford it. I had hustled as much as I could to buy that money order. I had ironed lots of shirts for my uncle for that money.

What's the next step? FAFSA? What the hell is that? How much is college? Oh dang, how the hell was I going to do that? As I was pondering my realization that this college thing might be out of reach, I was walking into my physics class. Mr. Cook says to me "You look down, what's going on?" "I don't know how I am going to pay for college." "Listen, in this country, everyone is always in debt over something or other, a house, a car, whatever, might as well be about your education."

From that point on he gave me every single scholarship application he would come across, especially those for females or females of color in physics—which was so not my interest. He helped me read the FAFSA, get my documents in place, and apply to everything I could muster.

He was the first person I told about Berkeley. He was my cheerleader and still said I would make a good physicist and I would get hired in a "jiffy!"

Border

The border isn't the border, it's el otro lado, or the other side. The other side of what? It depends on which side you are on—you're always referring to the other. That's how it feels to grow up Mexican in the United States, always the other side of something, sometimes it's clear and sometimes it isn't.

I don't know how many times I spent in the back of the car crossing the border, from one side to the other. Completely fluid. The biggest worry was my parents' jalopy overheating and us having to push it across the border—yes, literally push the dang car— that's actually why I always lease a car now. I don't ever want to push one again.

My students, when they'd say they didn't finish their homework because they had to go to Tijuana, I'd say, hey, I remember that, you have plenty of time in the back seat waiting for that line to cross. After that they never turned in anything late. Gave them high fives for making the best out of that long wait.

When I was a senior in high school we had to move to Mexico. I did the commute every day, back and forth from Mexico to the US. That taught me so many things, the first one is how Americanized I was—even in my Spanish. And then there were the traditional roles—most of my neighbors were shocked that I was close to 18 and still going to school. All the other girls in my neighborhood were already married at that age or were in charge of the household, but they definitely were not at school.

Being legal in Mexico and not being of age in the United States was an interesting dimension to a high school senior. I think back and thank my luck that I didn't get into more trouble, but I learned to negotiate all the different needs in both languages and in both countries very well.

Black Sheep

I grew up with so many cousins! I remember my dad counting them one day and saying I have 86 of them. I have beautiful memories of playing together, getting into mischief together—our favorite was blowing out all the candles on my grandma's shrine to the "Virgen de Guadalupe." She would get so upset and say funny things to us that didn't make much sense.

I was also the first one to go to college in my family, one of the few—2 out of 86 of us. And we were seen as the "black sheep." We didn't have kids in our early twenties,

were single well into our thirties, worked for free—meaning we volunteered at local organizations.

It's still hard going back home for family functions. The two of us have become very close, but the other 84 still like to poke fun at our American way of life.

Chemistry and Academic Probation

My high school chemistry class had no lab, my psychology class had no books and the football coach was the teacher. I was the star of my cohort—highest GPA, ASB president, and was applying to every single elite school I could think of.

My first semester in college I had to take both chemistry and psychology as general education and promptly failed the courses. I studied for hours, pored over the books, went to all the sessions while the other students laughed at how they "did this in high school" and how this was "repeating lots of the same concepts." And the chemistry professor actually said "You don't really have to come to class if you read my book." I'm pretty sure there were a few sections that I was the only student there.

I read and I studied and I went to the free tutoring center. I became friends with the graduate student TA. I was at her office hours so much. I thought I was going to fail out of college. I was so mad at the falsehood of my high school experience.

I remember submitting my final and shaking my head as I turned it in and the TA whispering, you won't fail, you worked too hard. Two D's later, I was put on academic probation—where's the star student? My high school diploma was not as valuable as the others.

Checks Are Fake Money

My parents were always cash people. My dad would cash his construction check at the local liquor store and get a weekly wad of cash. This was normal to me. "This is real money, not fake money—don't ever buy anything you can't pay for in cash" was my life lesson from my father.

Our bills would be paid for with money orders. My mom would neatly arrange each bill, electricity, water, etc., along with the money orders and then buy her stamps to mail off our bills.

When all the fees began to appear for college, AP exams, SATs, college applications, they always said somewhere "make the check out to" and then the name of the organization. I had never even seen a check before. For the first PSAT my dad bought me a money order. I filled it out like I would see my mom do it and brought it to school for my counselor. She said "You don't have a check?"—her tone made it sound like I had done something wrong—I shook my head no and she took it.

After that I was determined to have a check.

On my way home from school I walked to the local bank. I said I needed an account where I could write checks. The lady told me that it was called a checking account and that I would need to have an adult with me because I was too young.

When I asked my mom to come with me she said the money order was fine and that I didn't need a check. That the money orders worked just fine. I begged her. I told her that I was embarrassed because everyone else had checks. I also told her I had money to put into the checking account from odd jobs and chores. She went with me but wasn't

too happy with this—the belief was that checks weren't real money and that it makes it easy for people to spend when they don't see it's real worth. I got the "in Mexico we don't use checks" lecture. It was always a comparison of Mexican and American values, and how silly American ways were, how silly and false.

From then on I had my own checking account and would deposit the money I needed to pay for these things into my account. I remembered that in math class there was a section about balancing a checking book and I looked it up in order to help me with it. I still have that habit, even now with all the online banking, of keeping a very neat and detailed checking book.

First to Go to College

I grew up with a very large extensive family living in very close proximity, always talking about how we are in this country to succeed. And how in this country education gets you to many places. This message was played for us at every occasion, with every consejo that was told to us by our family.

So when I began to get letters pursuing me to attend their college all over the USA my family turned. You can't go here, too far. This is too far—aren't there schools in San Diego? You will have to live here with us—you can't move, you're not married. No 18-year-old girl will leave our family without a husband. It was all the same message with a different spin depending on which family member said it.

I applied to all the close schools and then to some dream big schools—surely if I got to Harvard, or Stanford, or Yale they would feel differently, no?

When the acceptance letter to Stanford arrived, I knew this was going to be the best college anyone got into in my high school. I was so proud!

"Where is this school?" was the first question I heard. And then a reminder lecture of the importance of staying at home—that we don't do this to our kids in our culture. That it is improper for a girl to leave home.

I was right. It was the proudest moment for our high school class to have someone be accepted at Stanford. My principal gave me a shout out at a pep rally and everyone cheered. He made his way to me later that day to congratulate me once again and I burst into tears. I told him I couldn't go, that I had to stay in San Diego.

A couple of days later there was a knock on the door during dinner time—there were always at least fifteen people eating dinner at my house. It was Mr. Goycochea, the principal. He said he wanted to talk to my parents about Stanford. They replied that he would talk to everyone there. I remember the one that put up the biggest argument was my grandmother. I was so worried that we were being disrespectful to my principal. This heated debate went on for over an hour. My principal had negotiated me going to college, in San Diego, but living on campus. On his way out he winked at me and said, "Transfer out of there as soon as you can!"

White People's Home

The first time I went to a white person's house was when I was in 10th grade. I was a part of the Science Olympiad and our biology teacher was in charge of the Science Club. She would drive those of us without a ride to the competition. We didn't have a car so I was always under her care.

During a big competition, she said she lived around the corner and needed to run an errand and would I go with her. I said yes, and I remember her big beautiful home. She didn't have many neighbors, and the size of her living room was probably the size of our entire apartment. She also had a backyard AND a front yard. I was in awe. I promised myself that one day I would have that too, a home of my own, with a garden like hers and a big living room.

I never told anyone that before, but it has driven my ambition in many ways. Maybe I should look her up and tell her that.

Summary

These vignettes are an important component of this study because they bridged all participants together, into a collective space of experience. I attempted to pick the "just right" share in order to create these pieces in deep appreciation of their participation and trust of their stories. When I shared all of the vignettes with each participant, they each had emotional connections, tears, laughter, and many "me too's." I created these pieces with their stories in their honor, to connect them, and also to perhaps give them some vignettes to share with the students they now teach as a way to further connect with young Latinas.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Summary of Study

This study was prompted by the need for educational research that provides an in-depth portrayal and analysis of the journey towards leadership roles for Latinas in the United States given that this particular journey is still regarded as an anomaly. This study was guided by the following research questions: (a) How do Latina school principals describe their lived experiences as an academically successful student in K-12 grade? (b) How do Latina school principals describe their lived experiences during and after college as related to their development as leaders? (c) In what ways does the organizational culture of the K-12 setting influence or is influenced by a Latina leader? The literature review spanned across the academic trajectory of a Latina in the United States, beginning with being a student in the K-12 setting, then as a student at the university, and finally, being a leader of a public educational organization. Research on Latina leadership is sparse, and the literature describes the academic life of Latina students as very negative—from low socio-economic communities and all of its woes to ill-equipped and low performing schools that produce failure. Thus, Latinas feel ill prepared for university coursework and often have difficulty with graduating from the university. They also find themselves in a constant struggle of ethnic culture and mainstream culture with confusion as to where they belong. With this narrative, I sought to tell a counter-story, to give voice to successful Latinas who are now leading schools in southern California. I also wanted to honor a cultural tradition of story-telling. More

intentionally, the goal of this study was to investigate and understand their leadership development. In this chapter, I present the discussion of findings and conclusions drawn from the study, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research which provides an overall sense of this study.

Discussion

As a result of three individual interviews with 10 participants, there were several themes that emerged across their stories of leadership development and their experience as a Latina in the United States. The major themes that were present were the following: *the role of language and how having the role of family translator affected voice and leadership development; the role of family, both with support throughout participants academic journey, or not, and the misunderstandings that arose once the college acceptance letters arrived; the tension between being Mexican versus being American and how the participants experienced what Chicana Feminist theorists have described as a dual identity; preparation and ability questioned at the university due to feeling unprepared by their high school and having a rough start in a university setting; being a teacher of culture and embracing this responsibility as they return to schools with Latino population; and finally, leading a school with a high Latino student population and whether or not this is a choice, and the difference they make in students lives.* The following section is organized by each of the themes that surfaced from the study along with a brief statement about the connection to the current literature and possible implications for further study.

The Role of Language

The participants' bilingualism (Spanish and English) appeared several times

across all interviews. All participants described the responsibility of translating for their

family and how this reverse role of power and authority either helped build their voice or

aided in silencing them. They shared stories of translating important documents like

letters from the IRS, rental contracts, even filling out Social Security applications for

older neighbors. Participants described being highly sought after by family members for

their skill; however, they also shared that this experience also put them in difficult adult

situations. An example Azucena describes:

> I learned from a young age how to communicate and problem solve without fully
> translating. I have vivid memories of my mother being angry at whoever was on
> the phone line or in person and wanting me to translate telling them off. I learned
> to sift through her anger and get the real message across. I learned at a young age
> that I wasn't going to get something resolved by arguing—this skill has really
> helped me do some problem solving and listening now.

Similarly, Claudia states

> This is a funny question because I know my cousins were in a similar place with
> their parents, and some of them would lie, flat out, when they were translating just
> so they wouldn't upset their parents. I would just freeze because I was torn
> between trying to help my parents but also giving them the news that they weren't
> going to get whatever they wanted. It's a lot of responsibility for a young child.
> As the messenger I was often the one killed.

However, the skill underneath these stories, of being able to connect and

communicate understanding whilst trying to problem solve, is an important skill that

leaders must develop in their leadership. This connection to leadership was offered by

one participant and I began to look for leadership themes as one piece of themes within

coding. There is a subtle context within the stories that the participants shared about this

skill. The ability to stand in a space between two factions (parents/family and an outside organization) and have the responsibility to forge understanding is a difficult. Although specific connections to leadership were not explicitly made by all participants, this is noteworthy, and previous literature has not examined the role of the translator, nor has it examined fluidity between two languages with a positive, leadership development lens.

Language played a different role when they entered the teaching profession as bilingual teachers. They expressed that their Spanish, although functional, was not academic. There was real trepidation of being discovered as a fake Spanish teacher and of being able to speak fluently to families without the difficulties of searching for translations. All participants did not receive formalized Spanish education, and expressed that their Spanish skills were developed at home, in a very informal way. As an example, Marina shared

> I got a note that still haunts me, from a parent that described "el aula" and I kept thinking, what is that? I've never heard of that before in my life! I went to my handy Larousse dictionary and found that it was the proper term for "classroom" and that my use of the word "clase" was more Spanglish than Spanish—a bilingual teacher that doesn't know the word for classroom, go figure.

There was an expression of relief when the population they served was low-socioeconomic or low levels of educational attainment in Mexico, as Miroslava states

> I remember my first letter to the parents, I was so nervous translating that letter into Spanish, I worked on it for hours, looking up words and ensuring that it was a proper Spanish letter—two days later one of my parents jokingly asked me "nos escribio esa carta en italiano o que? No le entendi nada (*did you write that letter in Italian or what? I didn't understand any of it*).

Another example from Noemi:

> My community spoke my Spanish and my slang, I am able to connect with them because I am them—every once in a while there's a well educated recent

immigrant that I immediately have to shift my use of language to more proper vocabulary.

According to Yosso (2006), as a school principal, the role of language is also important and is true linguistic capital. Participants expressed the comfort and welcome families feel when they can speak directly in their language, and also the gratitude parents initially express when they find they have a bilingual school leader. As one participant shared, "My last name throws them off, and then I look white, with my green eyes and blonde hair, so there's this actual sigh of relief when I greet them in Spanish and ask how I can help." They also shared other examples throughout the normal operation of a school that their bilingual skills are an asset, yet they are remain concerned about the academic component of Spanish. For example Montserrat shared:

> I tend to translate IEP [Individualized Education Plans for Special Education] meetings and those get really technical. I find myself describing what things are instead of directly translating, but it's important for me to ensure that parents understand these concepts too, I actually think that my lack of technical terms is helpful in these descriptions for families.

The literature review did discuss bilingualism as an asset and as linguistic capital (Yosso, 2006), but the subtleties such as the role and responsibility of being a translator for family members or the perception of the participants Spanish as not being strong enough to teach to others that were uncovered in this study have not been addressed in empirical studies.

The role of translation and bilingualism is complex as indicated by the comments of the Latina principals in this study and warrants more research. Specifically, the dimensions that emerged touch upon the following: The responsibility that the translator role for their families causes for young Latinas; the adult, real life situations that this

necessary dynamic places them into (representing family members with IRS, Social Security, Border Patrol, etc.); the role reversal of power and authority when the child is able to communicate but the parent is not; and finally, the dynamic of seeing bilingualism as social capital and not as language deficit. The other, more positive dimension is how this connects to their ability to communicate, to bridge between two cultures, and to problem solve, all skills learned very young and which now aid in their leadership and which are also described as positive assets for any leader to have within leadership literature. This discussion began in the first interview, as I sought to understand the academic experience during the K-12 years and specifically their role within their family as a successful student. The responsibility that participants described of the English voice for the family poured out of them.

The Role of Family

This theme is interesting as it offers some very dichotomous experiences between and within the pool of participants and in the literature review. There is a clear divide when it comes to Latino/a academic achievement and parent engagement. Current Latino/a scholars actively tell the stories of how supportive and how caring their families are, as a counter story to the narrative of lack of parental engagement in the Latino community in education. The term *familiasmo* was coined to describe the important and caring role of this tight knit familial space. The literature that surrounds *familiasmo* even sounds resentful towards any sort of critique of parents when it comes to academic achievement in the United States for Latino/a students. The literature describes that Latinas often seek guidance from their families for important decisions and have largely

influenced the strong values and morals for this community (Gloria, Castellanos, &

Orozco, 2005). There is also a description of the awareness that develops for Latinas as

they come to understand the immigrant journey of their family and the sacrifices they

make for the improvement of the next generation. This develops a sense of obligation to

family in the form of gratitude (Gandara, 1995; Suarez-Orozco, Todorova, & Louie,

2002). The literature also describes another strong sense of obligation towards having

opportunities that other family members do not have (Valverde, 2008). For example, as

Idania describes:

> The border is fluid for me, I come and go all the time, and I know that my cousins
> in Tijuana would have had a much different life if they were born here, or vice
> versa. This country gave me lots of opportunities that they did not have and it's
> not right to squander them away. This has added tension between family
> members as I'm the rich one, so I'm often the one that contributes financially to
> things that families need, especially around weddings, deaths, that kind of thing.

The findings that emerged from this study were stories of family support, or

familiasmo (a strong identification and attachment of Hispanic persons with their nuclear

and extended families (Smith-Morris et al., 2012), as well as the complete opposite of

that. Instead, they are stories of intragroup marginalization. The further Mexican

American students move up the educational ladder, the more difficult it is for them to

connect with their families, and vice versa (Castillo, 2013). Castillo (2013) describes that

this is not a lack of support, but more of a lack of understanding an acceptance and

development of a culture that is foreign and sometimes opposite of cultural norms. These

two examples of the Mexican American experience emerged in this study. For example,

two of the participants continue to live with parents because they are not married and the

cultural norm is to stay home until this occurs. They don't express this negatively, it

simply is. Hence the straddling of two cultures continues to be a part of their daily life.

There are also tales of lack of academic support because families don't understand. For

example Brisa shares,

> What I do is often misconstrued—teacher was closely understood, yet I have cousins who are preschool teachers (they don't need degrees) and I was under the same group, we are all teachers to our families, then when I became a teaching coach, that was really nebulous, what do I do all day?

And Monica:

> I have been a university student most of my kids life, masters degrees, credentials, and they all stopped coming to the graduations or the parties, everyone was there for high school, but the higher I get the less they understand and participate in celebrations and . . . when I go to family functions and meet new people, I simply share that I'm in "education" the assumption is always either substitute teacher or teachers' aide—I wonder about the level of expectations we have for our community when that's the highest we assume we go.

There was also a deep tension between family support to succeed in school and go to

college, but not allowing Latinas to leave home for college. All participants went to a

local university due to this restriction. Many of them described giving up their dream

schools or negotiating living in a dorm whilst in the same city as their family. This

caused much misunderstanding within the families themselves "My school principal

helped me talk to my family about college—I was accepted into Berkeley but couldn't go

cause it was too far. All this talk about being successful, but when it came down to it,

culture rules." This also appeared as principals, participants described situations where

they would broker understanding of the American school culture and the Latino culture.

For example, Azucena noted:

> When I was in sixth grade my mom didn't let me go to sixth grade camp, something about young girls don't leave their families for a week, and now as a principal at a school that has sixth grade camp, I'm constantly having these

conversations with families, of assuring them that boys and girls sleep separately, that the camps is a school, with its own principal and nurse, that I've never, in all my years, seen any tragedy happen—I wish someone had done that for me when I was 12.

The literature review is extensive and encompasses the role of parent engagement and the correlation with academic success, along with the thick descriptors of strong familial ties in Latino families. However, there is very little research that describes the separation of families when one of its members begins to excel in the new mainstream educational culture. There is some literature that references intragroup marginalization (Castillo, 2013) amongst Mexican American families where the first college student in the family is forced to choose between family obligations and academic ones. This difficulty of feeling like you have to choose between your ethnic culture or being academically successful causes psychological conflict for young Latinas (Elenes, 1999) also is connected to the following theme.

Tension Between Cultures: Mexican and American

This was a very prevalent theme throughout all three interviews and is also deeply present in the literature describing the Latina experience. The description is strong, such as a triple oppression that Latinas face: racism, sexism, and culture traditions that encourage passivity and submissiveness (Barragan, 1980; Melville, 1980). Chicana feminist theory accentuates the imperative dexterity of living and thriving between two cultures: learning how to maintain two distinct identities, one tied to an ethnic/cultural identity; and also the ability to adapt and adopt the dominant mainstream culture (Vera & de los Santos, 2005). In her theoretically pioneering book titled *Borderlands: La Frontera*, Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldua (1987a) proposed a third, hybrid identity

that emerges from the process of continuously straddling two cultures, called the "mestizo" identity. The mestizo survives and even manages to thrive by a broadening acceptance for contradictions, ambiguity, and learning to manage cultures even when they are in direct value conflict with one another. The term "mestizo" has also been defined as living with ambivalence while balancing opposing powers (Bernal, 2001). These important feminist theories illuminate the internal borders Latinas cross on a daily basis, constantly shifting and adjusting in and out of different social contexts with diverse gender and cultural expectations. Absent from the literature are empirical details of exactly how Latinas successfully negotiate these borders and how these skills deepen their leadership ability. For example, Fullan (2001) described the ability of good principals to be able to live positively with ambiguity— a skill well developed by successful Latinas.

This tension, or hybrid identity, or negotiation between cultures emerged throughout this entire study—in small ways, such as families outwardly stating "you are not gringa!" at things such as roller skating with friends, choice of television shows, dress, mannerisms, friend choice, but also in more impactful ways, such as moving away for college, or living as a single female. Participants described being able to be covert in their ways so as to not deny their own culture but also be accepted into mainstream culture. For example, Idania stated: "I think if you're a first generation immigrant to the United States you are living a double life, one that maintains all the cultural or religious rules of home, and one that takes in and loves the freedom of the American way" and similarly Noemi noted that "Music was a clear line of separation for me, I knew what I

could listen to at home and what I could listen to at school or with friends, both sides

didn't accept each other."

This very clear message of "you are not one of them" followed these participants

into college and now into careers. And whilst this clear distinction was drawn at home,

there were other distinctions drawn at school and in the work place, thus supporting

Anzaldua's hybrid identity, and the duality of continuously existing in "non-belonging"

spaces (Elenes, 1997). This space, connected to being the school administrator versus

being a classroom teacher, also exists within the context of a public school—a space that

Latina principals are very familiar with.

The literature for this duality, or straddling of cultures is thorough and thick with

different metaphors and descriptors and has a long tradition in Chicana Feminist Theory

and in LatCrit. Yet, what this research points to is how these skills of easily maneuvering

through and even thriving in this "hybrid" space can contribute to leadership

development. Leadership theory discusses the need for close listening, for dealing with

adaptive challenges, for being calm in ambiguous times (Fullan, 2001)—all three of these

examples have surfaced in this study for Latinas in their youth.

Preparation and Ability

In this study there was much discussion of feeling prepared or not, of feeling

fearful of not being able to do something different than what has been done before as a

first generation college graduate or as the first Latina principal of a school. The internal

dialogue and maneuvering of the hybrid space, of belonging and not belonging, fed this

narrative. One very strong theme was the discussion about a meaningful high school

graduation diploma. All 10 participants were successful in K-12 settings, some even were at the top tier of their high school class! However, once at the university, many experienced academic difficulty on top of cultural alienation. Latina students in this research and in other studies who attend a university report having feelings of alienation and experience culture clash. In most instances, the student population and the academic culture of higher education are vastly different from their prior experience and thus many Latinas struggle to make sense of their new environment. Many Latinos grow up in Mexican neighborhoods where they are the majority population. Entering a college campus flips this experience altogether. Due to socio-economic environmental factors, most Latina college students graduated from low achieving high schools. This fact also contributes to feelings of being ill prepared and fuels self-doubt in their college going experience. The university becomes a place of cultural shock, discomfort and isolation (Vasquez, 1997).

Many empirical studies have reported that compared to other ethnic groups, Latinos have lower college aspirations and expectations (Bohon et al., 2006; Hurtado, Inkelas, Briggs, & Rhee, 1997) and are more likely to be concentrated in schools that offer limited college-related information and a lack of commitment from staff to facilitate students' access to these resources, possess less knowledge about the costs of college (Grodsky & Jones, 2007), and are least likely to apply to college and to engage in an extensive college search and choice process (Desmond & Lopez-Turley, 2009; Hurtado et al., 1997). All 10 participants are deeply aware of these findings, because of their own experience as students and the level of commitment and work necessary to break through,

but also through their scholarly knowledge. This is exactly why they choose to work at schools populated with Latino students. They want to offer college information, hope, and commitment to students.

The literature review is full of quantitative and qualitative studies about the dire circumstances of the Latino/a academic trajectory. Currently, strength-based counter stories, such as this study, are beginning to emerge. This is a necessary continuation to promote the knowledge that there are other trajectories and that it is possible for those in the Latino community to succeed. The literature is much more sparse as Latinas move up the educational ladder.

Teacher of Culture

As Latinas begin to enter the professional workforce, their ethnic minority status continues to demand that they live in the hybrid space described throughout this study. Participants expressed that although there was discomfort amongst work colleagues, working at schools that mirrored their own ethnic culture was helpful in "belonging" but also aided their feelings of purpose and effectiveness. As Brisa describes, "I was so excited to do my student teaching in National City; I was at the University for too long, it was like coming home" and Claudia concurs, "I wanted and still want to provide the things I know work for students, what helped me navigate my way to college, I talk to students and families about this all the time." Although many people of color do not like to take on the role of being a representative from their group, all 10 participants expressed the necessary teaching they had to do as a representative of the Latina culture. Azucena stated, "I was the token Mexican, but I also felt like I needed to speak up, I

needed to change the things I knew didn't work for my community." One particular

piece was discussed by many of the participants; one example from Miroslava:

> I think on a yearly level I have to have the discussion of "teacher teacher." My colleagues get very aggravated at not being called by their name and even snarkily reply to students "student, student." This is a clear example of not knowing the community you teach, I have to tell them that this is a sign of utmost respect and not to respond with such a mean comeback, especially towards young children. And other times, they see themselves in their mis-understood students, My favorite one was when a teacher was appalled that a little girl showed up with garlic cloves in her ears—my grandma often sent me to school this way and no joke, I still do it.

And thus, while Latina leaders are in the hybrid space within their cultures, they

are also attempting to teach their organizational culture within their educational settings.

This third cultural lens related to one's organizational culture is very present and warrants

future research. As Latinas continue to attempt to teach about the Latino culture to

teachers who are responsible for academic outcomes of this population, they

simultaneously have to engineer the organizational culture conditions for teachers to be

open to learning about their students' ethnic culture in relation to their teaching, yet also

feel that they are a part of an efficient and safe organization that values them as

employees. One strong link between all participants was their utmost devotion for social

justice and equal educational opportunities for all students and their attempts to create

this sense of urgency within their organizational culture.

Leading a Latino Populated School

Gandara (2010) asserts that the Latino community is consistently the least

educated of all major ethnic groups. The Latinas in this study were able to navigate

through complex systems in order to now lead the schools that help produce the outcomes

Gandara (2010) discusses. The Latinas in this study described that their ability to

connect with the community in meaningful ways helps them to lead a school in an

effective and equitable way. Participants expressed their ability to see the social capital

that students bring to school and their ability to shift the narrative and stereotype of the

Latino student. For example, Noemi stated:

> We value experiences of children who travel, or who go to museums, we
> somehow created a hierarchy of acceptable skills and learnings that students
> experience, but I have students who are responsible for five younger cousins, who
> help with all homework assignments, who cook dinner and who know how to do
> laundry, why have we categorized one skill set and not the other?

> Castillo et al. (2009) found that the influence and expectation of school faculty

and staff was one of the top three most significant factors in the academic success or

failure for Mexican American Students. Effective leaders create the culture and school

environment to ensure that all students achieve. The Latinas in this study spoke

passionately about the strategies and commitment they have to end the achievement gap

at their schools and understood that this shift requires special attention, as Claudia

captured,

> Many teachers come to these schools to save students—their purpose and their
> heart is in the right place, but their ability to do so isn't. If you see someone as
> less than, as needing your particular help, then you've already placed them at a
> lower level.

> Principals play a pivotal role in creating school cultures that value diversity,

leading to increased minority student achievement (Gardiner et al,. 2008; Ross & Berger,

2009). The Latinas in this study were aware that their ethnicity positively affected their

campuses. Because they were able to fully communicate with families and students in

both Spanish and English, they shared similar life experiences. They were passionate

about being at these schools and they serve as role models for students and community members.

Research is beginning to emerge on Latina leadership in general and in education. However, even as Latinas continue to enter the education field, there are still very few of us in leadership positions. The few that exist are leading schools where the majority of the population is Latino students. This raises an interesting and unstudied topic: Is this placement truly a choice? Or, is this where Latina principals are deemed necessary and useful? Research on African American female principals describes the same dynamic— they lead in schools that serve primarily African American students (Byrd, 1999). This topic needs further study, and perhaps even a longitudinal study to see if there is a marked academic achievement difference when leadership mirrors student population. And also if leadership at Latino populated schools is truly a choice for a Latina principal.

Implications for Practice

The participants in this study were very generous with their prior and present experiences as both Latina students and Latina educator practitioners. Their stories can help guide assumptions, biases, expectations, and promote a bridge of understanding with this growing population. This next section will suggest some implications for the current practice in our public schools, parent and family engagement and education, and postsecondary faculty.

Public Schools

Understanding the Latino cultural attitudes towards women leaving home for college is necessary for all educational practitioners, will deepen the connection from

teachers and counselors to families, and will build an understanding of the differences in cultural practices, perspectives, and expectations. Creating a "college going" culture from a young age and incorporating information on the American school system is imperative, as parental roles have proven to be a key indicator of academic success (Lee & Bowen, 2006). Although not explored in this study, parental education should incorporate differences between degrees, credentials, community colleges, and universities. There seems to be a larger aspiration of growth for families, but uncertainties when it comes to specifics, or specific action to take. This includes knowledge about financial aid applications, college choices, and other standardized necessary examinations.

Parental Support

The dichotomy of parental support found in this study (either fully supportive and engaged in strong family units, or lack of support and intragroup marginalization) demands future research on the factors that create resilient and independent students with or without parental support. In addition, 8 of the 10 participants discussed that their siblings either dropped out of high school or did not pursue higher education. The participants and their siblings shared the same environmental and genetic factors, yet there was a marked difference in academic achievement. Future research that examines the intrinsic factors that differentiate academically successful Latina students from their less successful siblings or other family members will add to the understanding of Latina academic achievement.

Postsecondary Faculty

It is profoundly critical that Latina college students become acclimated to their universities by way of purposeful and relevant affiliations. The role of faculty and staff is essential as a source of support that draws strong relationships for Latina students (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007). The universities' diversity of employment is also an important role for students of color, in general. As Marina states:

> It's difficult to be in a setting where the adult Latinos or Latinas are all either cleaning bathrooms or mowing the lawns. It wasn't until I took a Spanish Literature class for a Spanish minor that I had a Latino professor, but he was from a Mexican University and was only there for one semester.

Contribution to the Literature

This study highlighted the lived experiences of 10 Latina elementary school principals in southern California. All participants in this study were first generation college graduates, hold postgraduate degrees, and lead large organizations. Much of the literature describes the experiences of Latino students, without separating this population by gender. This study brings forth the unique and complex gender specific barriers that Latinas face, including ethnic culture specific gender expectations, yet currently Latinas are outperforming their Latino male counterparts. This research focused on the narratives of successful women, and did not mimic the current narrative of deficits often told of Latinas. And although research on Latina leadership and Latina school administrators is starting to emerge, this particular study delves into the positive attributes of the academically successful Latina, and how these prior educational experiences emerge within their current leadership, especially since Latina principals are returning to the schools that produced them.

This study also uncovered the possibility that currently defined barriers in the Latina experience have positive potential as a leadership asset. For example, according to Fullan (2001) an effective school leader can move others through complex change by exercising certain components of effective leadership: They understand the process of change as an on-going re-culturing process and are motivated by making a positive difference in the lives of students. These leaders are adept at forming relationships with diverse people and groups by fostering purposeful interactions and problem solving. They are proactive in generating and sharing knowledge inside and outside the organization, and they seek coherence even as they live with the tensions inherent in ambiguity and creativity wrought by change. This connects to the experiences described by the participants in this study throughout their youth that have often been deemed as "barriers." Specifically, the hybrid identity that is created, with an ability to navigate ambiguity, is described in Chicana Feminist Theory (Anzaldua, 1989), and by Fullan (2001) as an asset. The participants' experiences as translators in different familial situations developed their ability to listen with intention and to problem solve. Although it might have seemed like a burden, especially to a young child, this helped to develop a different way of brokering connectivity and of understanding. These specific and identified barriers have not been connected to leadership assets in current literature.

Lastly, what also emerged throughout this study and throughout the described experiences in these Latina leaders is the consistent negotiation between being Mexican and being American. I attempted to capture that tension by stating the difference in ethnic (Mexican) and mainstream (American) culture reported by the Latinas. What also

emerged is their negotiation between cultures that adds a different and complex

dimension as the Latina principals are now leading, creating, and contributing to the

organizational culture of a K-12 public school setting. Organizational culture is a very

important component to leading a school setting (Fullan, 2001) and now their own

personal ethnic and mainstream culture tension exist within an organizational culture.

This was subtle and nuanced and warrants more explicit study.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study was conducted in southern California, close to the international border

and specifically with Mexican-American Latinas. Thus more research that incorporates a

larger geographical sample and encompasses a more diverse Latina ethnic culture is

necessary. The role of the international border adds a somewhat unique dimension to this

study and might warrant different findings if the same issues were examined with

populations that live further from the border. However, there are also a lack of studies

that describe the effects of living in a border town and how that aids or deters academics.

Hence, more studies about the role of literal international borders would also be helpful

to understand if this intensifies the tension between being Mexican or being American.

Many of the issues discussed by the participants were tied to how their family

views success and the American school system, and how sometimes the two views

collide. For example, leaving home for college is an American rite of passage for

successful students, yet this transition for Latinas is in complete opposition of what their

ethnic culture view as appropriate for single young women. It is important to develop

and understand these cultural norms and values in order for practitioners to enact. These

principals are attempting to be actively engaged in re-framing cultural and academic norms, but more research is warranted in these efforts. Specifically, are Latina leaders successful in teaching their White teachers in order to impact academic outcomes and is it sustainable?

As the Latina population continues to grow in the United States, their career development and leadership growth is still underrepresented in the literature (Hite, 2007). This study showcased the voices of Latina principals and shared counter-stories about being a Latina in the United States whilst simultaneously honoring the cultural tradition of storytelling. However, in educational leadership, there is a significant gap in the literature on Latina school principals and the contribution they make towards bridging academic achievement gaps for students. The gap in Latina leadership literature is even greater and there is much research to be done in this area.

This study also discussed the passion and drive Latina principals have for returning to schools that served them as students in the K-12 setting. In order to fully understand this relationship and to analyze any causation, I recommend the following studies: A longitudinal study of the effects of Latina leadership on Latino/a students at the schools they lead; whether Latina leaders truly choose to serve these schools or if these are the only schools they are deemed purposeful; and whether Latina principals also have a positive academic effect on students of all ethnicities.

Conclusion

It has been 67 years since the historical and pivotal *Méndez v. Westminster* (1946) case. Yet, Latina students in California and across the nation are still continuously

underperforming academically. As one of the fastest growing demographic groups in the United States, Latina/os will play a pivotal role in the future of the United States. The failure to meet the needs of Latina/o students can have negative repercussions for our society where, as Horace Mann has said, "Education is the great equalizer of the United States" (quote carved on the side of Horace Middle School, San Diego, California).

The personal stories of these Latina principals were used to provide a voice to an often-disenfranchised group. The narratives may serve aspiring Latina/o leaders in their pursuit of the principalship and of connecting possibilities for an entire community. These counter stories were told not in despair, but to create an ethos of hope (Gandara, 1999).

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW #1

Interview #1

Questions

Tell me about your background, in general.

Tell me about your experience as a Latina student? K-12
- What were some supports?
- What were some barriers?

Define any primary attributes from your family, how have they contributed in your academic success?

When you encountered adversity how do you manage it?

How did your role of academically successful Latina play out in your household?

Discuss any stories that continue to live within you from your K-12 school years.

What were some formative experiences?

Why are these significant to you?

How would you describe leadership development through your youth?

Do you notice how any of these experiences emerge in your current practice?

I've been asking you about specifically Latina experiences, what do you make of that?

Is there anything I did not ask that you would like to comment on?

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW #2

Interview #2

Questions

Tell me about your experience as a Latina college student.
- What were some supports?
- What were some barriers?

If you encountered adversity how did you manage it?

Please share any stories that continue to live within you from your college experience as a Latina student.
- What were some formative experiences?
- Why are these significant to you?

Define any primary attributes from your family, how have they contributed in your academic success?

How did your role of Latina college student play out in your household?

How would you describe leadership development through your college experience?

Do you notice how any of these experiences emerge in your current practice?

Is there anything I did not ask that you would like to comment on?

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW #3

Interview #3

Questions

Tell me about your experience as a Latina principal.
- What were some supports?
- What were some barriers?
- When you encounter adversity how do you manage it?

Leaders create culture, as a current educational leader, how does your Latina ness influence (or not) your org culture?

What does it mean to exist/live in a state of leading education process?

What strategies do you believe you bring to principalship?

Define any primary attributes from your family, how have they contributed in your leadership as principal?

What advice would you give a Latina aspiring to your position?

How does your role of Latina principal play out in your household?

If you /how do you see yourself in this community?

As a current educator, what is something you would like to tell your younger, student self?

How does your prior student experience as a Latina manifest in your leadership practice?

Is there anything I did not ask that you would like to comment on?