

*HERMANIDAD: PERSPECTIVES OF THE JOURNEY OF LATINA SUPERINTENDENTS IN
SCHOOL DISTRICTS*

A Dissertation

by

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This dissertation meets the standards for scope and quality of
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi and is hereby approved.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological dissertation was to understand the perceived lived challenges Latina leaders faced when serving in the position of school district superintendent. The review of the literature affirmed the oppressive forces that Latina leaders encounter, as well as the lack of mentorship programs available for them; yet, it also brought to light the cultural community wealth, skills that Latinas leaders possessed when in top leadership positions. To best capture the essence of their experiences, five eligible participants who served in the position of district superintendent in K-12 non charter public school districts in the state of Texas, concentrated in South Texas, were interviewed. The approaches implemented for this study were transcendental phenomenological and narrative inquiry which were appropriate to use to best capture Latina superintendents perceived lived experiences. These approaches have been frequently used in educational research as means of eliciting participant voice.

The methods of data collection included interviews, field notes, reflective journaling, ‘memoing’ and member checking which allowed for triangulation and established credibility of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The lived experiences that Latina leaders faced when in the post of superintendent illuminated methods to best support them and others in leadership roles. Furthermore, the research also informed of the need to conduct a cross-examination of systems and policies that suppress Latina leaders in reaching and persisting in district leadership positions and called on politicians, leadership program evaluators, and state and national leaders who develop and write policy on the changes needed to increase the number of Latina superintendents in the state of Texas and the nation.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to all the Latinas who have come before me and who have created a smoother path for me, particularly my grandmothers, Petra Rivas Montenegro and Guadalupe Padilla Sanchez who were not privileged to a formal education but were amazing leaders. Also, to my parents, Francisca Rivas and Rodolfo Rivas who worked tirelessly to ensure that their ten children have a better life.

Most importantly, I dedicate this dissertation to my husband Jose Luz Garza, Jr who spent many nights sitting a few feet away, and never once complained, and for me it was the best support. I love you and thank you for always believing in me. My son Adam, who took time to proofread some of my work and used his editing skills to make it better. My daughter Andrea, a young trail blazer, who never said no when I asked her to come and read my paper and always offered advice. My son Joseph, who frequently came by the table where I worked and gave me a “high five,” his way of encouraging me. I love you all immensely. Also, to my stepchildren and son-in-law, for all their love and support and for the meals that were cooked and sent over and for delivering the books when they arrived. To my grandchildren, I love you and you inspire me to be better.

I also want to dedicate this dissertation to my six sisters. Thank you for encouraging me to be and do better and for taking the time to listen or simply send an encouraging text. I love you all.

To my friends and colleagues, you are unstoppable Latinas; I admire your tenacity, intelligence and resistant capital. Your motivational words encouraged me to keep going.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The parity of representation of females in the position of school superintendent is not commensurate with the number of females serving in the field of education. Teachers in the nation's classrooms account for 75% of women and over 50% of the nation's total population; nonetheless, the representation of females in the position of superintendents continues to be absent (Robinson, et al, 2017). Since the inception of the superintendent position, "it has been labeled and institutionalized as men's work" (Skrla et al., 2000; Grogan, 1999; Shakeshaft, 1989). The superintendency has been traditionally held particularly by White males, who have been historically advanced to district leadership by what is often referred to as the "good ole' boy" network (Hord & Estes, 1993). The applicant pool of Latinas is large and talented, yet the number of Latinas in executive roles is bleak compared to White and even Latino males (Superville, 2017). The school superintendent position is seen as the most gender-hierarchic occupation in the United States (Skrla et al, 2000). "In a five-year study of American school superintendents released in 2015 by AASA, the School Superintendents Association, it was revealed that only 27 percent of district superintendents are women" (Kominiak, 2016). A study conducted by the Council of Great City Schools [CGCS] (2016) informed that 46% of superintendents identify as White, 45% as Black, 9% as Hispanic, and 2% as Other. Moreover, the tenure of females is 1.2 years shorter than most superintendents who are male (Bryant, 2018).

In the superintendent role, females remain underrepresented and even fewer Latinas are represented in the position (Rodriguez, 2014). While there has been somewhat of an increase in the number of females and persons of color serving in the role of superintendent in the last three decades, the fact remains that these positions do not reflect the change in the nation's student demographics in public schools (Kowalski et al., 2011). Further research in this area is needed to

reveal the factors that contribute to the small number of Latinas in the role of superintendent in school districts.

Of the 14,000 superintendents in the nation's K-12 school districts, men continue to dominate the chief executive office, while only 27% are women and 2% are Latinas (Superville, 2017). In Texas, where 52.8% of the students in K-12 education are Latino, there are only 8% Latino superintendents (Texas Education Agency, 2019). The Latino teacher represents 27.13% of the K-12 population, and Latino principals are at a mere low of 23.99% with only 1% of superintendents being Latina (Texas Education Agency, 2019). These statistics reveal the underrepresentation of Latina superintendents in Texas and in the United States (Rodriguez, 2014).

The superintendent position and the challenges it encumbers have been deemed fit for males, while females are perceived to be nurturers and creators of a safe environment like the role of classroom teacher (Rodriguez, 2019). When examining the interrelationship of race and gender in the superintendency role, data further unmasked the lack of representation of female African American superintendents (Brown, 2014). Superville (2017) noted that Latino students could benefit substantially from having administrative leaders from their own racial and ethnic group who can serve as successful role models. Latino students gain greater academic opportunities because Latino leaders have high expectations for them and inspire them to achieve prominent positions in the future. Yet, to date Latino leadership is marginal.

According to Robinson et al., (2017), female superintendents are three times more knowledgeable in curriculum and instruction than their male counterparts. The small number of females and Latinas at the helm of districts nationwide further compounds the lack of strength in a district's curriculum and instructional focus. Superville (2017) indicated that a Latina

superintendent recognizes that the strength in the education system comes from the forming of trusting relationships between districts and their community, and Latinas are understanding of the strengthening of these relationships.

The lack of Latinas in the superintendent position is a disturbing phenomenon, especially mindful of student, teacher, and principal demographics in Texas and the United States. The professional trajectory of Latinas in district leadership has failed to improve, with Latina leaders remaining underrepresented in every district leadership role, particularly in the superintendent role (Reyes Rodriguez-Casas, 2004).

Latinas overall are twice the minority, not only framed as females, but also in relation to their race and embedded cultural expectations and beliefs (Quilantán & Menchaca-Ochoa, 2004). “Latinas in public school superintendent roles are three times a minority as they encounter the challenges of navigating a position that political, yet isolated from the organization” (Quilantán & Menchaca-Ochoa, 2004, p. 125).

The small number of Latinas securing superintendent positions across Texas was a reason to analyze gender and racial inequalities in Texas school districts and to unmask the challenges that contributed to the mere 1% Latinas who reach the role of superintendent and discover facets of support to increase the percent of Latinas in the school district superintendent position (Rodriguez, 2014).

Personal Rationale

My personal rationale below represented a more non-traditional approach to research in that I chose the stream of consciousness style of Carolyn Ellis (1997), who petitions, “I want to talk a different way, not just talk about talking a different way” (p. 116). I also applied a method used by Skrla (2000) in her self-proclaimed non-traditional academic writing style, and

that was “introductions, elaborations, and explanations are provided at the point they become necessary (in my view) in the flow of the text rather than where they might customarily be expected” (p. 612). Carolyn Ellis (1997) equates this to the tight insertion of two different ideas.

Early Years

As a seven-year-old female elementary school student, the concept of racial microaggression had yet to be unmasked; nonetheless, that innate intuition and the painful feeling of not possessing the right culture and language in my classroom was undeniable. Sue et al., (2007) defines racial microaggression as “a brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional that communicates hostile derogatory or negative slights and insults towards people of color” (p. 279). Emotions of inadequacy enveloped me during my daily engagement in that classroom; my mind couldn’t process these experiences, and I was not cognizant or able to conceptualize and understand the oppression that I was sensing. Pierce (1989) describes the cumulative, negative, emotional, and physical effects that microaggression has on people of color. Even at my young age, in that classroom, I understood that the language I brought with me was oppressed by the person in charge. These cultural differences are noted by Orozco (2008, as cited in Locke et al., 2017) where students and the schools they attend create climates where they faced the inability to express their complex struggles. My language and my ideas were not valued in this space. The classroom climate replicated the lack of cultural wealth and language that Latino children are conditioned to believe is second-class to that of the Western/White American (Rivera et al., 2010 as cited in Locke et al., 2017).

As more memories emerged, the thought of not speaking a word of English when entering elementary school was still vivid. I go back to the space that a young, curly haired girl

failed to own. My assets were treated as deficits, and my wealth of knowledge was not valued in this oppressive system (González & Moll, 2002). This memory is vivid and brings me an understanding of the teacher's lack of perspective on cultural awareness. The gnawing notion that what I offered was not good enough has haunted me since that moment in elementary school. It is these despotic forces with racial microaggressions that students of color struggle within this oppressive system (Huber, 2009).

Latina Leaders

The research topic emerged from the voices and lived experiences of my Latinas colleagues in school district leadership who are close to my heart. The study allowed me to tell “our” story so that the voices of the commonly oppressed are heard and our collective resilience, determination, and aspirations were made visible.

Society has attempted to train us to adhere to the “unspoken rules” of leadership; nonetheless, we must speak and act confidently so that the assets and skills that we possess are visible. Yosso (2005) describes community cultural wealth as “an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by communities of color to survive and resist racism and other forms of oppression” (p. 175). It is the marginalized groups which others want to keep silent that motivated me to narrate these stories. The stories were written for those who question our resilience even though they see us showing up at the table many times after being silenced.

My extensive expertise in leadership does not stop me from questioning that what I know and can do is good enough and with the “right qualities.” These experiences speak vividly as I sit in district leadership, as well as school board meetings, and pay attention to the extensive questioning. As a principal and curriculum supervisor, I have created a language for the

experiences that I have faced and have construed those expectations for female leaders are different from that of the males.

Days spent at meetings propelled me to begin writing down the question that were asked of female district leaders in comparison to those asked of male colleagues. Even though many of us have conversed about the inequities, microaggressions, and societal expectations of Latinas in leadership, we now demand answers. For a long time, I have been paying attention to the dynamics of gender imbalances and speaking about them in my inner circles. I speak about them so that we have *conocimiento*, or (awareness), of these experiences and act and transform these spaces.

Female leaders cannot continue to struggle to get promotions which we solely deserve, work hard, and prepare for. We are not advancing at the same rate as our male counterparts (Robinson et al., 2017). Many of us are kept in middle level administrative positions, and a few of us have made a few strides in breaking the “glass ceiling,” the barriers that keep us in lower-level positions. Latina leaders are still doubtful of their expertise and are made to believe that the expectations set forth by society for top leadership positions are above their capability and unattainable for them.

I have included the term *hermanidad* in the title and in my study. *Hermanidad* for marginalized populations of female leaders who are made to feel invisible, as well as the voiceless who so frequently apologize for having a voice. *Hermanidad*, a form of bonding, sisterhood, for the many Latinas leaders like me, who are interrupted and quieted if they take too long when expressing thoughts or ideas and kept out of critical conversations and decisions in attempt to disempower us.

Latina leaders have proven to understand the intricacies in school districts related to the need to empower others to have success in the organization (Hill, 2019). They understand that they hold the power to build relationships and form teams for the benefit of all district staff. Sadly, often, Latina leaders have been disregarded from the position of superintendent. This propels Latinas to navigate and persist in systems not designed for people of color in mind, where challenges are great and resources limited (Yosso, 2005)

Latina leaders possess resistant wealth by getting up every morning and hoping for a better professional future despite the inequities, oppressions, challenges, barriers, and stereotypes. We have linguistic capital, which is the ability to speak two or more languages fluently that enables us to speak the language of the community that we serve. The familial capital or cultural wealth that we nurture and embrace and enhance our connections with the community. Furthermore, social capital strengthens our understanding of the people and invigorates the mobilization of the right resources needed to serve our students. Our navigational capital further, permits us to strive to function in leadership even when systemic institutions tell us that we do not belong because we are not the right gender or race due to cultural expectations, stereotypes, and biases. We, as Latina leaders embrace our resistant capital used to challenge the oppressors, many of whom we work for daily. In this study, I unmasked the obstacles Latinas in leadership faced by unveiling their lived experiences, advocating for other Latinas, and offering support in spaces of leadership. Securing, implementing, and educating through a form of solidarity (*hermanidad*) proved impactful for a prolonged footprint. Ensuing a discourse of language of 'self-authorship' empowered Latinas to articulate and write authoritatively in political rhetoric that is vital to entice and cultivate true transformation. Only other Latinas can truly comprehend the lived experiences of Latinas in educational leadership positions. Therefore,

a form of *hermanidad*, coming together, and encouraging others to speak about discrimination, microaggressions, stereotypes, and other barriers in the workplace can provide other Latinas the spaces to speak the language which empowers them.

Academic Rationale

Promotions and access to the role of superintendent for females in US school districts reflected dismal progress of females in top management positions in US workplaces despite their experience and preparation (Haveman & Beresford, 2011; Pirouznia, 2009; Glass and Björk, 2003; Glass, 2000). There are more females than males that complete doctoral educational leadership programs and attain credentials for the superintendency. This makes females better qualified for the position of superintendent (Sperandio & Devdas, 2015). Females are prepared, motivated, and experienced to take on the superintendent role. Moreover, their cultural wealth and years spent in the classroom prepare them to improve teaching and learning in schools which ultimately has the potential to increase the academic success of all students (Sperandio & Devdas, 2015).

Conversely, Latinas historically have endured deficient schooling throughout their educational years because of the lack of resources needed (Gaxiola Serrano, 2017) to prepare them for postsecondary education. Latina(o) students largely attend schools that suffer from finite resources such as limited Advance Placement (AP) and honor courses, impoverished facilities, unprepared teachers, few counselors in largely overcrowded schools, and limited college preparation, information, and workshops (Hines et al., 2019). Comparably, Latinas encounter endless inequalities to learn or gain knowledge (Perez-Huber & Solorzano, 2015). Despite these challenges, Latinas have persisted, navigated, prepared, completed doctoral educational leadership programs, and attained credentials for the superintendency. The lived

experiences of Latinas in leadership must not be omitted from the research. Their voices of struggle, oppression, and resiliency are extremely important to overcome barriers and challenge stereotypes which Latinas in district leadership experience.

The mere fact that only 2% of the nation's superintendents are Latina requires the attention and action from all educational organizations, university preparation programs, and educational policies (Rodriguez, 2014). The lack of representation of females in the role of superintendent (Sperandio & Devdas, 2015), particularly Latinas, continues to be alarming. With the growing number of Latino students in the nation's schools, there is a call to action to hire district leaders who understand how to gain the trust of the community (Ortiz, 2001). Studies revealed that when leaders of color are hired, they are more prone to connect to the parents and the community (Ortiz, 2001). Essential areas required for strong leadership reveal no gender differences in effectiveness (Allison & Bencomo, 2015). The increase of females in the superintendent position will create a pipeline for other females in district and campus leadership.

A clear understanding of Latinas leaders' perspectives of their lived experiences with oppression related to microaggression, culture, familial expectations, stereotypes, and biases can change the hiring district practices. Robinson et al., (2017) voiced that "problems that are documented are more likely to be solved than those that are not tracked" (p. 2). Furthermore, designing mentorship programs exclusively for Latina leaders can bring to focus the unique needs of Latinas. Mentorship programs need to be established so that Latinas in positions of power can help train, mentor, and support other Latinas. Currently sixty percent of male managers in the U.S. state they are uncomfortable mentoring, working alone, or socializing with a female colleague - a 32 percent increase since the rise of the #MeToo movement (Valdiva, 2020). In turn, the limited network opportunities for Latina leaders, the failure to secure mentors

connecting them to leadership positions, obtaining relevant job embedded experiences, and navigating through difficulties can be challenging for them because of the low number serving at the helm of school districts (Superville, 2017).

Moreover, within an examination of the different manifestations of cultural community wealth possessed by Latinas, there was an understanding of the depths of their purpose in leadership. Their purpose to manifest and thrive in oppressive environments, led them to serve as role models and uplift other Latinas along the way, a method of *hermanidad*. Conversely, the intensity for the study related to the lived experiences of the researcher to understand the unequal number of Latina superintendents in school districts.

Chapter II provides a review of the literature which briefly delineates Latino demographics in the US and details the lived experiences of Latinas in leadership positions; Latinas' perspectives with oppressive forces related to familial expectations, stereotypes, and biases are also unveiled, as well as an understanding of their experiences with microaggressions due to being female and Latina. Grogan (2000) informed of the gender realities of the position and its form of male dominance. Further analysis of the masculine standardization has traditionally shaped rhetoric, practice, and research on women in educational leadership. Recognition of the benefits of Latina leaders when in supportive working environments can potentially change the common practices found in mentoring Latinas. Furthermore, the assets and skills that Latina leaders possess were made visible for those who have chosen to ignore them.

Statement of the Problem

There is a problem regarding the significantly small number of Latinas in the role of superintendent in school districts. Even though there has been an increase in the number of

women of color that complete doctoral programs in educational leadership, it was also revealed that many more women apply and set goals to obtain positions of leadership in the field of education and the superintendent position (Robinson et al., 2017). Problems faced disproportionately by women of color in the superintendent role exist and transcribe onto underrepresented students. Failure to address the problem will continue to widen the educational attainment of Latina/o students who have historically been repressed within the American educational system (Perez Huber et al., 2015).

Guajardo (2015) called for extensive research to help increase the understanding and a call for action of how Latinas seeking superintendent positions to overcome the challenges and oppressions associated with career advancement and the need for mentorship programs.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to reveal the perceived challenges and *hermanidad*, or justice, in support of increasing the number of Latina superintendents. The history of Latinas in district leadership and their lived experiences have been omitted from the research and their contributions excluded (Méndez-Morse, 2000). This phenomenological study reveals the challenges and inequities that Latina leaders faced towards career advancement, particularly those aspiring to become school district superintendents and in district leadership. Their lived experiences were examined to inform others of their strategies for overcoming challenges, shattering the glass ceiling, the necessity of mentorship and networking programs and the need to cultivate a culture of *hermanidad* or undeniable belonging for Latinas in the leadership realm.

Research Questions

Several research questions were developed for the purpose of the study. Creswell (2018) suggested that in a qualitative study, inquirers state research questions, not objectives or hypotheses.

1. What are the perceptions of Latinas superintendents regarding their aspirations, motivations, challenges, and cultural community wealth in their role?
2. What influence would collegial networks have in the representation and success of Latinas in the superintendent position?

Methodology of the Study

The study established a phenomenological methodological approach. Thinking phenomenologically in a qualitative study allowed for grounded composition to the phenomena of what was being studied (Saldaña, 2015). Naturalistic inquiry is observing the world as it unfolds, not constructing or controlling the environment which the researcher studies (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The methodology of phenomenological research was to gather qualitative data via interviews, field notes, journaling, and ‘memoing.’ Qualitative researchers discover a phenomenon, an “object” of human lived experiences (van Manen, 1990, as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative data offered the distinctive transparency of procuring the voice (Creswell & Poth, 2018) of Latina superintendents in the TEA regions 1 and/or 2 in South Texas. Through the amplification of their voices, the research conceptualized the unique understanding of the misrepresentation of Latinas’ lived experience as they led the nation’s K-12 educational systems.

The researcher used a purposeful sampling approach for the inquiry in question where the selection of participants and sites were chosen to highlight the research problem and central

phenomenon in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher delved into the unique aspects of the perceived challenges and attempted to explore and understand the lack of mentoring programs solely for Latina leaders. The selection of the participants was made ahead of the study to determine that the sampling was aligned to the phenomenon in question (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The researcher purposely selected five sitting public-school non-charter district superintendents in the state of Texas in the TEA regions 1 and/or 2 in South Texas and conducted two one-hour in depth, one-on-one semi-structured interviews with each. The participants were selected through the researchers' professional search. The researcher established five criteria indicators for the potential study including that participant must be: 1) female, 2) identify as Latina/Hispanic, 3) be employed in a K-12 public non-charter school district in South Texas as superintendent, 4) serve in a district with a student population of 75% or more of Latino/Hispanic students. The final criteria were that the participant served in the capacity of superintendent for one or more years. Marshall & Rossman (2016) informed that this sort of "purposeful sampling affects the credibility, trustworthiness, and transferability of the researcher" (p. 113). It was the distinctive criteria used for the selection of participants that provided the data in support of the study.

Significance of the Study

The research of Latina leaders in K-12 education is limited to unpublished dissertations, most of which focus on the phenomenon that Latina district leaders are underrepresented in the superintendent role (Robinson et al., 2017). This study aimed to expose the underrepresentation of Latina superintendents and illuminate the decolonization of their lived experiences with microaggressions, societal expectations, stereotypes, biases and the absence of mentorship and

networking programs designed for Latinas. This research was notable because the stories of oppression and discrimination taking place in the hiring of Latina superintendents will begin to change the outcome of other's careers (Castillo et al., 2021). Other Latinas can inform these lived experiences in leadership positions.

Nurturing and encouraging the ability and courage to speak about oppressive forces, the need for mentorship programs, societal expectations, as well as their impact of cultural community wealth in the workplace can potentially project other Latinas into leadership roles and begin to transform the lives of students (Rodriguez, 2019). The study permitted Latina district leaders the space to speak the language that empowers and take steps to transform challenges.

Furthermore, through exhibiting factors of how Latinas are commonly left behind when seeking leadership positions, this work allowed Latinas to fight visible and invisible barriers that they and others place before them (Perez Huber et al., 2015; Powell & Butterfield, 2015). There is a method to intertwined racial and gender discrimination that prevents Latinas from leading, a method that when exposed will decrease in vigor (Rodriguez, 2014; Sue et al., 2007; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal 2002). Once Latinas understand the forces at play, they will feel more confident in seeking promotions, receiving praise, and taking risks (Rodriguez, 2014).

The ability to articulate and formulate the language of their experiences was a crucial tool for Latinas when challenging discrimination and educating others (Rodriguez, 2019). Female superintendents are torn when expressing their struggles for equality with their narratives about professional work (Manuel & Slate, 2003). Through amplifying the voices of Latinas in the superintendent role, the research could achieve an understanding of misrepresentation,

oppression and account of their cultural community capital, skills, and strategies when in leadership.

Limitations and Possibilities of the Study

The limitations of this study were that only a small number of Latina participants serve in the role of superintendent in Texas school districts. There are only one percent of Latina superintendents in the state of Texas (Texas Education Agency, 2019). The second limitation was the subjectivity and bias the researcher as in a current district leadership might bring to the study. A Latina myself in the field of education, I might unconsciously transmit biases due to the same lived experiences as the participants.

Nevertheless, the participants became coresearchers by inviting them to review, assess, and comment on the analytic findings in progress form of corroboration (Saldaña, 2015) so that the study stayed solely based on the participants' lived experiences and not only those of the researcher. The research questions were anticipated to convey Latina superintendent perceptions of their lived experiences of the challenges and barriers that helped them to overcome those obstacles to reach the role of superintendent. These was solely their perceptions of challenges known to them.

The limited research coupled with the lived experiences of Latinas in administration continues to have gaps (Brunner, 1999, as cited in Castillo et al., 2021). The study provided insight of Latinas' challenges consisting of societal expectations, microaggression, stereotypes and biases and the absences of strong mentorship and networking programs needed when serving in the role of superintendent. The determination of Latina superintendents who combat systemic racism, oppression, and gender discrimination served as role models to others wanting to lead

and transform educational systems which yield student success. It was the stories of resilience, determination, and aspiration of Latina superintendents that must be written.

Chapter Summary

The study focused on the lived experiences of the perceived challenges Latina superintendents faced when seeking and serving in the position of superintendent. The focus of this study also sought to challenge the hegemonic forces that limit the aspirational capital and resilience that Latina superintendent possesses when seeking and retaining the highest position in district leadership. The study anticipated illuminating the perceived lived experiences of Latina superintendents in districts and salient themes were explored. This portrayal of Latinas in the superintendent role offered other women of color the space to lead and allowed others to recognize the cultural community wealth which they bring to leadership positions for the success of all students, specifically students of color (Yosso, 2005). It was the anticipated stories of resilience and determination of the Latina superintendent that must not be silenced or excluded from the literature.

Chapters II through V follow. In summary, Chapter II is a review of the literature on female superintendents' perceived challenges, aspirations, motivations, and skills they possess. In Chapter II, topics that were discussed were the research of female leaders in the US and in Texas, female leaders perceived oppressions and the benefits of strong mentorship programs, the need to create mentorship programs solely for Latina leaders and the cultural community wealth, skills, strategies, and connections possessed by Latinas. Chapter III included the research design and the method in which it was conducted. The remaining chapters focused on the actual research conducted for this study. The results and findings of this research are provided in Chapter IV, and the interpretation of the findings are noted in Chapter V.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

There is an urgency defined by the insufficient numbers of Latina leaders in K-12 district schools. The oppressive factors which Latinas face as well as the need for formal and informal mentoring programs for Latinas contribute to the wide disregard Latinas encounter when seeking career advancement (Méndez-Morse, 2000). This phenomenological study highlighted the challenges and inequities that Latina leaders faced towards career advancement in the superintendent role and the necessity for mentorship programs developed for Latinas in district leadership. Furthermore, it unveiled the skills and assets that Latina leaders possess when seeking and retaining the highest position in district leadership.

The goal of this literature review was to provide a brief historical account of Latinas in the United States and detailed the perceived lived experiences of the uniquely oppressed population as they confront the opposition of becoming district leaders. There was a focus on the oppressive factors experienced by Latinas leaders while in the position of district leadership and the necessity of the development of strong mentorship and networking programs that solely focus on the needs of Latinas. Additionally, the capital and expressions of power demonstrated by Latina leaders were dissected as a perspective crucial to examining their endurance.

Latinas in the United States

The US Latino population had reached a record high of 60.6 million in 2019, up by 930,000 since the previous year (Bustamante et al., 2020). Latinos accounted for about half, 52% of all U.S. population growth and are the country's second largest racial or ethnic group (Bustamante et al., 2020). It is predicted that by 2060, the Latina female population in the United States will be 31 percent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Since the 1980s, the Latina female population has exceeded the male population (Flores et al., 2017). Latinas are a growing and

prominent population in the United States and are making progress in education and other areas, nevertheless, there is still much work to be done to entirely close racial, ethnic and gender disparities, particularly in district leadership (Flores et al., 2017). This data placed a focus on the need for scholars to pay attention to the lived experiences of Latinas in the United States, particularly in the field of educational leadership and mentorship programs geared for Latina leaders.

Historically, the Latina population in the United States has endured racism and inequality by the dominant white culture. Latinas are also vulnerable to discriminatory practices directed to their ethnic identity and gender therefore they are twice the minority, not only composed as females, but also in connection to their race and cultural expectations and beliefs (Quilantán Menchaca-Ochoa, 2004). Studies informed that Latinas' employment advancement opportunities have not progressed and continue to be underrepresented in all education and business administration positions, particularly the top-level positions (Reyes Rodriguez-Casas, 2004).

It has been accurately depicted, that Latinas experience disparities in most social, economic, employment, and educational spheres in American society (Pole et al., 2005; Williams et al., 2003; U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2001; Guendelman & Wagner, 2000). When compared against gender peers, Latina females were seen less-than on the grounds of their ethnic identity and discriminated against by their white peers (Allison & Bencomo, 2015).

When it comes to economic security, Latinas earn disproportionately less than their male and non-Latino white equals. These earnings inequalities have left many Latina females more vulnerable to poverty and its ramifications (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

Latina Leaders in Texas

Only one percent of Latinas hold the superintendent post in Texas (Texas Education Agency, 2019). White men have predominantly held many of the superintendent positions in Texas and the United States. Since the inception of the position, 82-99 % of white males have held the post (Brunner & Grogan, 2007). In South Texas regions 1, 2, and 3 there was approximately 30% of superintendents are female – this number was higher than the national percent of women superintendents that being 24.1% (Kowalski et al., 2011). There was also a high number of Latinas procuring superintendent positions in rural school districts in deep South Texas with high number of Latino students (Castillo et al., 2021). This was an abnormal number of female Latina superintendents who were known to be hired in South Texas school districts where great challenges were found – low graduation rates, extensive poverty, low student academic achievement, and high Hispanic population (Allred et al., 2017).

Furthermore, the low representation of ethnic minority females in the role of district superintendent and executive level positions in South Texas and other parts of the state and country brought about constraints on the data collection related to experiences specific to these groups (Robinson et al., 2017). Their experiences in the position of superintendent and in district leadership have been given little attention (Allred et al., 2017). Data was also limited and inaccurate on superintendents related to gender and ethnicity (Robinson et al., 2017). According to the TEAs Certified Superintendent Demographics by Preparation Program, 2019, between 2014-2018, the number who received a standard superintendent certification through an educator preparation program in Texas was higher for females than that of males. For Latina/os it was 14% who received the superintendent certification. The data revealed in the report did not inform of the number of Latina/Hispanic females separate from males who received this certification.

Oppressive Forces

The knowledge of people of color has historically been deemed ‘outsider’ knowledge and rendered inferior, disempowered, invisible, and marginalized (Hill Collins, 1986 as cited in Yosso, 2005). When not born into a family whose knowledge was deemed of value, the academic and social outcomes were deemed of less value. The traditional assumption that Latina district leaders have cultural and aspirational capital deficiencies was seen in their absence in the superintendent role, the highest position in district leadership. Latinas’ cultural community wealth has often been unacknowledged and unrecognized. There is a danger in this hierarchical oppression. In truth, racism and its intersections with gender subordination shaped the lived experiences of Latina women (Yosso, 2005).

Impact of culture

It was important to comprehend the cultural influence that Latinas faced and their struggles to discover their own identity in various contexts. Latinas faced a variety of cultural influences that shaped their personal identity. Hofstede (2010) defined culture as the “collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others” (p.7). Social roles measured by gender exist in populations and the culture of the population determined whether the socially determined roles were described as masculine or feminine. Hofstede declares that in many societies “men are supposed to be assertive, competitive, and tough. Women are supposed to be more concerned with taking care of the home, of the children, and take the tender roles” (p. 138).

The United States is defined as an individualist society, while on the contrary, the Mexican culture has been historically known as a collective society. Latina females have been fostered with “collective beliefs where one's sense of self was based on affiliation with the group

and responsibility to other members of the group, rather than on personal achievement for her own ends” (Trumbull, Rothstein, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2001, p. 12). When Latinas enroll in the United States educational system, they promptly homogenize into an individualistic society where children are educated employing the traditional European-American model (Trumbull et al., 2001). The combination of the two cultures brought about identity struggles that Latinas faced. “A third generation Latina finds herself reared by traditionally oriented parents, educated by middle class standards, thrown into a society whose values are familiar, but they may be against her upbringing” (Flores, 1998 p. 95). Latinas dealt with denouncing the customary sex-role demands that have been controlled for many years by the traditional Mexican culture (Quintalan & Menchaca-Ochoa, 2004).

Familism

Latino culture placed high importance in family; known to pattern children's thinking and being (Salinas, 2013) and it being the central unit. At times, Latino families consisted of living in multigenerational homes where children are taught to obey not only their parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles, but older adults who have close ties to the family (Salinas, 2013). Many Latino families provide great support during transition systems and challenges that they might face when migrating to a new country (Salinas, 2013; Viramontez Aguiano et al., 2010). Latinos have learned that an individual's needs and aspirations is second to the needs of the family (Haynes & Zacarian, 2010; Leeder, 2004; Zambrana, 1995 as cited in Allison & Bencomo, 2015). Offering the individual's wants and aspiration for the good of the family is seen as a sign of respect, loyalty, and fidelity known as *familism* in the Hispanic family (Villarreal et al., 2015). Hogan (2001) focused on the generational social capital of Latino families known for its importance of success and strong family outcomes. “Latino families have been described as sociocentric, which

is conducive to the development of social capital” (Salinas, Viramontez Anguiano, & Ibrahim, 2008 as cited in Hogan, 2001).

Trueba (2002) stated that much of the resilience in Latino families came from the nurturing within families. The barriers and challenges overcome by Latinos signify resiliency. The adaptation and resistance of Latinos in the community in which they live strengthen the familial nucleus (Viramontez Aguiano et al., 2010).

Latino parents see education as the gateway for success in life. Parents' greatest pride and joy is an educated child (Bal & Perzigian, 2013). Nonetheless, for Latina females the cards do not face in the same direction compared to males. Latinas encounter knots between their aspirations and cultural oppression (Villarreal et al., 2015). It was the demands of the family that Latina leaders were expected to prioritize. The obligations of spending time with family, living close to extended family, and taking the caretaker role (Villarreal et al., 2015). The “good daughter dilemma” was described as the gatekeeper for Latinas; the demands of familial principals in the Latino families (Espinoza, 2010 as cited in Villarreal et al., 2015). Moreover, due to familial expectations and the need to become the caretaker at a young age, the tenderness and understanding that Latinas brought to their jobs is seen as a sign of submissiveness and not assertiveness (Eagly and Chin, 2010 as cited in Allison & Bencomo, 2015).

Good mom vs. career dichotomy. Latina women have been brought up in a society which instilled in them that the quieter and less opinionated they became, the more they would be liked by their peers, families, and spouses (Villarreal et al., 2015). It was this form of oppression in a culture that was deeply conflicted on the notion as to when and where Latinas in leadership should exercise authority. Latinas were expected to speak softly, take care of others, and be unselfish; unlike the ideal male leader who is seen as decisive, assertive, and independent

(Robinson et al., 2017). It is this mismatch between conventionally perceived behaviors necessary for leadership that Latinas who were not known to evidence these behaviors, found themselves left behind in the leadership positions they prepared, worked, and aspired. Females who prepared and attained the high leadership positions frequently given to White males were deemed intelligent and hardworking, nonetheless, also seen as less agreeable compared to their male counterparts (Allison, & Bancomo, 2015).

The stereotypes added that family and child rearing was the primary focus, thus which positioned Latina leaders as having conflicting dichotomies of family-work balance. It was these stereotypes that dressed Latina leaders with garments of oppression and leadership disparity. Méndez-Morse (2000) proffered that “these stereotypes not only limit, it prescribes” (p. 588). Studies conducted revealed that the stereotype of Latina women narrated the inability to select Latinas at the helm of district leadership. The stereotypical blindfold kept others from seeing Latinas as assertive, decisive, and strong aspirational leaders (Méndez-Morse, 2000).

Microaggressions

“Racial microaggressions are a form of systemic, everyday racism used to keep those at the racial margins in their place” (Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2015 p. 224). Silence is a must if women want to attain and persist in the role of superintendent (Rodriguez, 2014). Their deficit thinking and way of being aggregates to the microaggressions that Latina encounter in the workplace (Lechuga, 2012 as cited in Avalos & Salgado, 2016). Latinas in leadership are often barraged with negative comments about perceived engagement in illegal activities, their large families (Cheung & Halpern, 2010) and deliberate mispronunciation of their “too ethnic” names. Du Bois (1887) informed of the manner Colored People have acknowledged themselves based on how others see them, known as the “veil.” The blindfold that covers Latinas with doubt of the

assets, resilience, and persistence that they possess (Huber & Cueva, 2012). The white society has drowned the voices of Latinas with their noise (Anzaldúa, 1987). This racism that people of color have always known to exist. Uttal (1990) informed that “racism is especially rampant in places and people that produce knowledge” (p. 17). Latinas have been taught to distrust the knowledge they possess (Freire, 1970), recognizing the (im)possibility to decolonize knowledge.

The lack of Latinas in the superintendent role connects to a form of discrimination, related to microaggression (Carlson & McHenry, 2006). The microaggression that unconsciously speaks in ways of doubt of the knowledge that the Latina superintendent brings to the role. Gildersleeve, Croom, and Vasquez (2011) reported that racial microaggressions, marginalized Latinas to examine their assets and sense of belonging in spaces of academia. Latinas questioned their self-efficacy and saw themselves as inferior to others, furthermore, when faced with daily forms of microaggression, it was found that they experienced increased levels of stress (Urrieta and Chavez, 2010 as cited in Perez Huber et al., 2015). Latina leaders recounted the experiences they faced with microaggressions in the workplace, these negative experiences that caused excess levels of physical and psychological stress (Perez Huber et al., 2015). Consequently, the daily experiences of microaggressions and the methods in which Latinas dealt with these experiences told of their dismissal self-care, to prove they belonged in spaces of academia and leadership (Arriola, 2014).

Racial microaggressions

The killing of George Floyd, a 46-year-old unarmed black man, at the hands of a white police officer, spread unrest of protests across the US (Dixon & Dundes, 2020). The killing depicted an extreme example of racial discrimination that people of color have historically endured.

There is less attention of the daily racial and gender discrimination of people of color associated with psychological anguish and racial struggle (Tao et al., 2017). Several studies have revealed that the consistent, cumulative forms of microaggressions have damaging effects on mental health (Nadal et al., 2014). The research established on racial microaggressions had suitably employed a lens that which evaluates subtle and persistent effects of discrimination of racially and socially oppressed groups of people (Robinson and Rubin, 2016; Torres-Harding & Turner, 2015; Nadal et al., 2014; Ong et al., 2013; Sue, 2007).

The concept of *racial microaggression* coined by psychiatrist Dr. Chester Pierce first noted the harmful effects of the persistent, oppressive, and disparaging racist offenses lived by black people repeatedly (Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2015). Separately from the tragic experiences with microaggressions that people of color have persistently endured in society, there are more subtle microaggression experiences endured in the workplace that consequently takes an emotional and physical toll on them (Robinson & Rubin, 2016).

Microaggressions in the workplace can affect work-related facets like motivation and performance (Nadal et al., 2014). Critically, the identification of the distinct pressures that were detrimental to Latinas and other marginalized groups was increasingly important (Nadal, 2011; Rivera et al., 2010; Sue et al., 2007).

Barriers and stereotypes

In studies related to stereotypes and leaders, researchers revealed that stereotypes about leadership are markedly male (Koenig et al., 2011). The latest research showed (Crites et al., 2015) stereotypical male characteristics as “independence, aggression, competitiveness, rationality, dominance, objectivity – characteristics that correspond with present-day demands of leadership (p. 17). Female leaders are adversely affected by these gender stereotypes when being

ranked lower than male leaders who better fit this male stereotype. Latina leaders who displayed leadership characteristics defined solely for males were often described as “angry” or “emotional” when they were being assertive (Crites et al., 2015).

Latinas must persistently operate through the defined stereotypes knowingly that the “superintendency” has been and remains a masculine role (Kowalski et al., 2011). Earlier work of Brunner and Grogan (2007) proffered that the profession of “teaching is feminized, and the work of administrators is masculinized” consequently, females assenting to the superintendent position must move from a “feminized culture to a masculine one” (p. 14). Tallerico and Blount (2004) further informed that females in administrator roles were prone to face gender biases related to inferior networking and mentorship practices typically influenced or controlled by white male administrators.

Gender biases. The gender parity of the superintendent position is primarily and conceivably most importantly a matter of fairness. Leaders are influential, so when females are excluded from the superintendent role, they are withheld from power to have an effect in the world (Hill, 2019). Leaders relish respect and privilege, and the superintendent position is one facet that provides these opportunities, which advances the benefits of the position. In leadership positions, the leaders at the helm of an organization are compensated and known to have the highest salaries (Hill, 2019). Leadership is lucrative.

Conversely, stereotypes found about manly leaders, told that leadership was not innately masculine. In society, white males have historically retained majority of leadership positions; the notion of leadership has been pervaded with stereotypically masculine traits – “aggression, decisiveness, willingness to engage in conflict, strength; these traits are not uniquely available to white males, of course, nor are they predominantly traits in all men” (Hyde, 2014 p. 398). For

some time, researchers have examined the necessary components of leadership and have discovered no gender dissimilarities in leadership efficacy (Hyde, 2014).

Clearly, Latina leaders are denied the opportunity to lead at the helm of district leadership at the pinnacle of a long successful career and their opportunity to lead in a district disappears at countless points along the way (Hill, 2019). “Race, ethnicity, age, income, health and sexual orientation affect women’s leadership opportunities, and these factors can add up to dramatically different experiences among different groups of women” (Hill, 2019, p. 5).

According to Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011), the notion of the underrepresentation of females in the superintendent role was not due to females lacking traits such as decisiveness, problem-solver, driven, decision maker, willing to engage in conflict; it was because females faced stereotypes and oppressions that men in the same position do not encounter. Latina superintendents were stereotyped, underestimated, undervalued, and marginalized (Rodriguez, 2019). Due to systemic leadership inequities, Latinas must persist and resist, which is something they have learned to do from a young age. It is these assets that, when brought to the superintendent role, make them indispensable for the position (Martinez et al., 2019). Tomas Chamorrow-Prezumic (2019) proffered females do superior work in leading organizations compared to men because many men do not have beneficial effects due to them being exceedingly confident. The majority of men project strong confidence before and after they are appointed to a leadership position. Nonetheless, confidence bears little relationship to competence (Fullan, 2020). Chamorrow-Prezumic (2019) argued that “the most competent people will exhibit much self-criticism and self-doubt, especially relative to their expertise” (p. 24). Women leaders have been the most competent applicants for high level district leadership positions. They are prepared to overtake leadership positions due to their extensive

experience as teachers, campus principals, and district administrators, and have attained the superintendency credentials and earned doctoral degrees (Hill, 2019). Nonetheless, female Latina leaders continue to face barriers when it comes to attaining superintendent positions.

Negative beliefs. Quintalan (2002) voiced that the Latino culture was commanded by a moral system that had been set for years on end which commands actions of obedience and passivity in adolescent Latinas. The upbringing of Latina students tended to undermine their intelligence and social capital which they possess. Latina's grandmothers who spent their lives in Mexico, tell them of the need to tend to their husbands; being that a husband is the boss and is a wife's responsibility is to comply with his needs (Avalos & Salgado, 2016). Avalos & Salgado (2016) confirmed that "gender expectations always benefited the males in the family such as during meal-times, men would be first to be served while the women waited on them" (25). Stated in the literature, Latinas were identified as wife and mothers (Castillo et al., 2021; Avalos & Salgado, 2016; Villarreal et al., 2015). Latinas routinely have been omitted from history and seldom depicted as divisors of ideas, but more so as unresisting and needy (Avalos & Salgado, 2016). Mutual attempts are required to transform the efforts that need to change in what stands in the social organizational belief of males as leaders and females as followers (Avalos & Salgado, 2016).

It was critical to recognize the cultural impact that Latinas come up against and the struggles they endured to recognize their own identity in distinct conditions (Cavazos, 2016). Latinas encountered a myriad of cultural influences which formed their identity. It has been well documented that Latinas in the search for the superintendent position experience unconcealed biases that are put on while hiring and equity practices (Olsen, 2019; Avalos & Robinson et al.,

2017; Salgado, 2016). Oftentimes Latinas are naive of the phenomenon of gender and color inequity in educational leadership (Olsen, 2019).

Effective in grappling with and combatting oppressive forces, mentorships and networks for Latinas seeking the superintendent position are pivotal for change. Currently, the few studies related to mentoring programs and its perceived rewards have been in the business sector, and only a small number conducted within Latinas leaders in K-12 education. The impact of Latinas perceiving other Latinas in the superintendent role as well as receiving meaningful career and emotional guidance would dramatically improve their likelihood of ascending to the superintendency (Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011). Furthermore, mentorships in which the mentor is invested in the mentee, puts them on a faster track, likely to result in Latina leaders advancing to the position of superintendent in the early levels of their professional career (Vega, 2016).

Mentorship Programs

Studies revealed that mentorship programs and network opportunities enabled female leaders to share with others in like positions, their experiences, professional abilities and permitted them to document achievements (Goffney & Edmonson, 2012; Mendez-Morse, 2000). Earlier studies Quitalan and Menchaca-Ochoa (2004) proffered that Latinas in leadership roles who were mentored and have opportunities to professionally engage with other professionals in their field, experienced success in their career advancement. Network and mentoring opportunities fostered courage, determination, and tenacity in their leadership abilities (Castillo et al., 2021). Furthermore, Cavazos (2016) informed that strong mentorship relationships in the workplace cultivated learning, fostered growth and development, and helped new leaders understand the need to navigate through the workplace culture. Conversely, for this study, the literature review focused on the benefits related to Latinas in district leadership,

mentoring, networking, and the assets, skills gained when participating in mentoring programs with other Latinas to build on their social capital.

Mentors

Cavazos (2016) informed that mentors and sponsors were vital in the socialization and the ability to accomplish career goals of aspiring educational administrators, provide developmental, psychological, and emotional support, and mentorship should not be underestimated. It is these relationships formed through shared experiences that can empower an individual (Cavazos, 2016). In educational systems, forms of mentorship are vital when connecting novice and experienced leaders in an organization, as well as a means of introducing leaders to new learning, skills, and perspectives recommended in a new role (Mendez-Morse, 2004).

Mentors are known to play critical roles for district leaders because they often presented themselves as mediators between superintendent candidates and school boards. In some instances, mentors furnished candidates with knowledge on in-district promotion opportunities and job opportunities in similar districts and counties (Cavazos, 2016). Mentors are indispensable to females who aspire and seek the position of superintendent. Nonetheless, studies revealed that mentors have historically been absent in the support of Latina leaders because there are few females in top level positions of district leadership, and this added to the limited opportunities for mentorship of prospective female leaders (Superville, 2017).

It is critical to form a community of mentors for female leaders. Salazar Montoya & Kew (2020) reported that a high percent of females lacked professional networks, and many were not mentored when in district leadership. These limitations of networking and mentorship added to the roadblocks of the career trajectory to the superintendent position.

Additionally, it was discovered that the limited number of mentors are primarily members of dominant groups within institutions (Vega, 2016). Due to the absence of Latinas in superintendent roles, the forming of mentorship relationships was also uncommon (Quilantan & Menchaca-Ochoa, 2004).

Formal and informal mentoring

Mentorship relationships are described in forms of formal and informal models (Bynum, 2015). The key differences between these two forms are built on the relationship structures. Informal mentoring was defined as a distinct relationship formed in social groups, or in the workplace, centered on familiar and similar passions or attractions amongst individuals. Conversely, professional mentoring, or formal mentoring, traditionally, was a senior colleague appointed to advise a younger employee, happens over an extended time in a form of structured conditions, such as a place of work, and can comprise some form of a matching arrangement (Bynum, 2015).

Informal mentoring was commonly self-selected, inclusive of peers, close family, friends, or a form of close engagement with others. These relationships are as important as formal mentoring programs due to the difficulty in forming close and profitable relationships in formal environments (Cavazos, 2016). Peer mentoring are connections amongst peers who many times are in the same work position (Núñez et al., 2015), and possess common behaviors and characteristics. The relationship develops naturally and are not forced and found to increase communication, provide emotional support, and a form of friendship. When individuals engaged in peer relationships, both defined the success of the goals and commonly experienced a sense of satisfaction when assisting and encouraging one another (Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011).

Another form of informal mentoring came from family. Family mentoring was vital to accomplishing work goals. Even though families lacked knowledge of the intricacies and expectations of the job, their unconditional love and care provided help for leaders to persist during hardships.

Researchers defined the superintendent position as a lonely place for Latinas (Goffney & Edmonson, 2012; Franco et al., 2011; Mendez-Morse, 2004) and a form of informal mentoring benefits Latina leaders to reach goals. Conversely, the lack of encouragement, emotional support, and guidance in a form of formal and informal mentorship contributed to the isolation that Latinas leaders endured while in district leadership positions (Desimone et al., 2014).

Formal mentoring programs for Latinas in administration need to be developed to provide opportunities for career advancement and support (Turner, 2015). Hansman (2002) informed that “mentoring programs in many organizations mirror society, thus individuals esteemed as “other” by virtue of their intersection of gender, race, class, ethnicity, or sexual orientation faced obstacles in participating in formal or informal mentoring relationships” (p. 39).

There is an urgency to establish additional collaborative mentoring models for the contribution of success of Latina leaders. Encouraging was the fact that there are benefits for Latinas in their career advancement when forming formal or informal mentoring relationships with more than one mentor. Studies informed about the increased growth in leadership development when formally and informally collaborating with immediate supervisors, executives, or direct reports (Turner, 2015; Goffney & Edmonson, 2012). Mentoring is a vital element known to provide support and encouragement for Latinas within their leadership roles and often offer networking opportunities that contribute to career advancement. Notwithstanding,

Tallerico and Blount (2004) confirmed that females in administrator roles were prone to face gender biases related to inferior networking and mentorship practices typically influenced or controlled by White male administrators.

Multiculturally mentor. Pope, Reynolds, and Mueller (2004) defined multicultural competence as the recognition, understanding, and expertise required to ethically and successfully mentor others who are culturally distinct and alike. Multicultural scholars proffered that the possessed beliefs and values, perceptions and realities of individuals are dismissed, underestimated, or recognized as insignificant (Sue & Sue, 2003). Formal or informal mentors who are unable to understand the unique experiences and struggles faced by Latinas when working in a predominately white district, the isolation many experienced while in leadership positions, the oppressive factors they faced, or understand the importance of family, may not be able to support them in their careers.

Uplifting and amplifying the voices of Latinas. The definition of mentoring needs to be defined by Latinas leaders. It is Latinas who can truly understand the resources, connections, and supports needed to be successful in their careers or higher education. In a study conducted of Latina women in higher education, Latinas defined mentoring to include “soft” mentoring, as the ability to simply acknowledge other Latinas in leadership roles in college campuses (Valdivia, 2020). Samantha, a participant in the study concluded that “seeing Latinas in staff and faculty, seeing someone that looked like me has been very inspiring for me.” The participants in the study also stated that when others like them help mentor, they seemed to better appreciate and value their identity; valuing someone’s identity is a strong form of mentorship (Valdivia, 2020).

Professional networks

A network is composed of informal relationships between people who carry out sponsorship commitments or mentors, and future leaders. The absence of well-established networks revealed barriers for Latina leaders who aspire to enter the superintendent position (Shakeshaft et al., 2007). Networks were vital when supporting female leaders (Cavazos, 2016) and mentoring females for leadership positions developed confidence, compassion, faithfulness, encouragement, and honor (Cavazos, 2016). Aspiring Latina superintendents were encouraged to form professional networks from the start of their careers; thus, these professional relationships supported them in forming strong professional connections (Salazar Montoya & Kew, 2020). The forming of these relationships connected Latina leaders to favorable circumstances, strengthened professional references, and bridged novice leaders with professional advantages and professional groups (Salazar Montoya & Kew, 2020). Latina leaders who were provided with the practicability of networking and the opportunity to be mentored in the trajectory of their careers by leaders within the organization, tended to be promoted more often compared to Latina leaders who were not given networking and mentoring opportunities (Peterson & Vergara, 2016). Moreover, when Latina leaders supported other Latinas who understood the successes and struggles, they faced, Latinas profited from these relationships. There were known benefits for Latinas when engaging in networking opportunities, nonetheless, the absence of networking opportunities for Latina leaders contributed to their absence in top district leadership roles (Peterson & Vergara, 2016).

Self-evolution

In the process of self-evolution, a person, and its environment interconnect (Kegan, 1994, 1982). Latina leadership development on self-evolution consisted of centering on their own

values and beliefs and not giving in to the pressures or the behaviors of others that comprised their own values and beliefs (Perez, 2018). Latinas were equipped with skills that when confronted with challenges, they created a method of thinking that helped them form relationships between self and others. An example of self-evolution for Latina in district leadership was the ability to show up as their authentic selves in all spaces, to speak their mind, stand firm on their beliefs and values and not be intimidated.

Self-authorship

Self-authorship was defined as the ability to rely on one's own vision and not follow external formulas or expectations placed by others (Kegan, 1994). This happened when Latina leaders learned to take time to listen to their own internal voice and make decisions based on their intuition (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Leaders learn that people and circumstances are out of their control and the only thing that is in their control is how they respond to it (Baxter Magolda & Taylor 2016). It was through formal and informal mentoring connections that Latina leaders learned to use their own internal voice to respond to situations or challenges that they faced and learned to construct an inner devotion and built an internal foundation that steered their decisions.

Cultural Community Wealth

The exclusiveness of voices, history, and stories of Latina leaders in academia brings about a deficit thinking model of the knowledge and skills which are withheld by Latinas in the educational system. Deficit thinking positions people of color as responsible for their educational failure since they do not possess the skills deemed valuable by dominant white culture (Yosso, 2005).

Conversely, despite the oppressions and challenges faced by families of color, Espino (2020) stated that families, particularly Latino families, were resilient and came from strong units which provided a uniquely interconnected support and encouragement to their families.

The barriers and challenges so often clouding the main lens of perceptions when studying communities of color are overcome by Latino(a)s and thereby signify a resiliency worth examining (Northouse, 2015). Furthermore, studies informed of Latinos' extensive cultural community wealth. Cultural community wealth was defined as the skills, capabilities, and connections which socially marginalized groups possess that are often unrecognized by the dominant culture (Yosso, 2005). Culture community wealth (CCW) consisted of six enriched capitals which people of color uniquely acquire (Yosso, 2005). The capitals were aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant. Aspirational capital was defined as having the ability to hold on to one's hopes and dreams of a brighter future despite the oppressive forces that one may face. Latina leaders frequently encountered challenges which seemingly prevented them from reaching their goals and attaining career advancement, nevertheless, they persisted, worked hard, and held tightly to the dreams and hopes they had for their future (Solorzano & Delgado-Bernal, 2002; Delgado-Gaitan, 2001, 1992; Aurebach, 2001, as cited in Yosso, 2005). Regardless of racial, social and gender inequalities, Latina leaders uplifted their aspirations by accomplishing the near impossible.

Linguistic capital was defined as the ability to effectively communicate in an intellectual and social manner in more than one language or mode (Faulstich Orellana, 2003). People of color communicate in various languages using the learned social skills and intellects that have been acquired through multiple life experiences (Yosso, 2005). These life experiences were acquired through storytelling, art, music, poetry, and the ability to translate/interpret in the

context of a school setting or community. Latina leaders were known for using their linguistic capital to help build strong connections between the district and its communities (Nieves, 2016). Furthermore, Faulstich Orellana (2003) relayed that Latinos were the translators between the school and their parents (or other adults) and possessed a myriad of social tools through the “vocabulary, audience awareness, cross-cultural awareness, real world literacy skills, math skills, metalinguistic awareness, teaching and tutoring skills, civic and familial responsibility, and social maturity” (p.6).

Familial capital was defined as the nurturing among family members in the Latino family that transfers into its community (Delgado Bernal, 2002; 1998). Familial capital referred to the ‘extended family’, consisting of an aunt, uncles, grandparents, and friends often which were treated as part of the *familia*. It was the experiences and connections with the extended family that Latinos understood that family was inclusive of the community in which one lived and its resources. Latina leaders treated their extended community as part of their family. They were known to care, provide resources, emotional support, and consistently help their communities navigate through the educational system that they might not understand (Nieves, 2016).

Moreover, social capital was explained as the formation of networks of people and neighborhood assets. These networks provided people of color social contacts and emotional support (Stanton-Salazar, 2001, as cited in Yosso, 2005; Gilbert, 1982). For example, Latina leaders might form peer networks to help one another navigate through the process of enrolling in advanced education programs, understand the intricacies of a new position, or in preparing and applying for higher leadership positions. Scholars noted that historically, people of color have continuously leaned on their social capital to complete an education, understand the legal system, gain employment, and acquire health care. Delgado-Gaitan (2001) confirmed that “families of

color transcend the adversity in their daily lives by uniting with supportive social networks” (p. 105).

Navigational capital was defined as possessing the skills to traverse through social institutions, specifically when navigating through places historically not designed with communities of color in mind (Yosso, 2005). Stanton-Salazar & Spina (2000) noted that “social competencies and cultural strategies permit individuals to not only survive, recover, or even thrive after stressful events, but also to draw from the experience to enhance subsequent functioning” (p. 229). Therefore, Latina leaders were experts in navigating exclusionary academic and workspaces often dominated by white men.

Lastly, resistant capital was the knowledge and assets gained through oppositional behavior that confronts inequality (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2002; Delgado Bernal, 1997; Freire, 1973, 1970). Consequently, obtaining and distributing the many facets of community cultural wealth was also part of the knowledge base of resistant capital. Robinson & Ward’s (1991) research centered on African American mothers who knowingly reared their daughters as ‘resistors’. The Black mothers modeled and taught their daughters to “assert themselves as intelligent, beautiful, strong and worthy of respect to resist the barrage of societal messages devaluing Blackness and belittling Black women” (p. 88). A similar study by Villenas & Moreno (2001) told of the “contradictions Latina mothers face as they try to teach their daughters to *valerse por si misma* (value themselves and be self-reliant) within structures of inequality such as racism, capitalism, and patriarchy” (p. 673). Latina leaders embodied resistance as a form of means to thrive in the most exclusionary of spaces. Through the embodiment of resistant capital Latina leaders redefined the ways in which their oppressions operate into a means of powerful resistance.

CCW directly opposed the deficit mindset by defining and describing the wealth possessed by communities of color as well as the capitals shared amongst families and networks (Yosso, 2005). A deficit mindset in academia is not only exclusionary of Latina leaders' lived experiences, but also a danger to communities of color who lack the language of the knowledge and skills which they carry with them and amongst them (Yosso, 2005). Through an examination of the various forms of capital possessed by Latinas we can understand the depths of purpose a Latina in a leadership position holds. These depths of purpose manifested to not only thrive in oppressive environments, but to discover and uplift other Latinas along the way. Therefore, opposing the deficit mindset of the white patriarchal lens, was the means to an authentic evaluation of how Latinas lead and epitomize true capital.

Review of the Literature Summary

The chapter provided a review of literature centered on a brief history of Latinas in the United States, told of the oppressive forces that Latina leaders faced when in district leadership positions, the benefits of establishing mentoring programs solely for Latinas in district leadership, and explained the cultural community wealth, skills, that Latinas possess.

Research is needed to act upon and further reveal the (mis)alignment of racial and gendered values as they impact Latina leaders (Murakami-Ramalho, 2007). A cross-examination of systems and policies that suppress Latina leaders in reaching and persisting in district leadership positions must be conducted, understanding of the cultural community capital of Latina leaders at the helm of a school district, and consistent of the changing of the nation's demographics that inform of Latinos being the largest minority majority (Crawford & Fuller, 2015; Murakami et al., 2015).

Contributions of the Study

The disappointingly low numbers of Latinas holding superintendent positions across the United States and Texas provided a motive to analyze gender and racial inequality manifesting in the education system. Understanding that Latinas are considerably underrepresented in the role of superintendent, it was urgent to gain knowledge of Latinas who are presently in superintendent positions to open the way for others. Although Latinas are experienced, prepared, qualified, available, and spend more time in the classroom and in intermediate positions of leadership, the superintendent positions are often given to men (Kowalski et al., 2011).

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research approach was employed for this study because studies of human experiences are not attainable through quantitative approaches. Interactions among people are difficult to draw with statistical measures and may not be understanding of the sensitive issues of the marginalized populations, gender differences, or race (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

For this study, which examined the perceived challenges, oppressive forces, and the need for the development of mentoring programs for Latinas in the role of superintendent, qualitative methodology was appropriate. The study also lent credence to the cultural community wealth, skills, that Latina leaders possess. It brought to light the perceptions of Latina superintendents in Texas, particularly in South Texas to comprehend the racial and gendered perspectives of Latinas who fight to overcome challenges in the role (Young & Skrla, 2003). A qualitative approach that interconnects phenomenological and narrative inquiry was the design that most accurately captured the perceived lived experiences of a marginalized group of Latina superintendents in Texas.

In this qualitative phenomenological research, a transcendental phenomenological and narrative inquiry approach was applied which is often used in educational research due to its power to induce voice (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Merriam, 2009, 1998; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). These approaches were implemented to obtain the collective voices of Latina superintendents based on their perceived lived experiences. The narrative approach was interpreted by Creswell (1998) as “an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social human problem” (p.15).

The organization of this chapter consists of research questions, proposed research design,

research methodology, method of participants selection, data collection procedures, ethical considerations, data analysis, and a summary of the chapter.

Research Question

“... data will provide a textual and structural description of the experiences, and ultimately provide an understanding of the common experiences of the participants.”

Moustakas, 1994, p.79

1. What are the perceptions of Latinas superintendents regarding their aspirations, motivations, challenges, and cultural community wealth in their role?
2. What influence would collegial networks have in the representation and success of Latinas in the superintendent position?

Research Design

Richards and Mores (2012) proffered the use of methodological congruence as a framework to organize a study by identifying a purpose, questions, and method of research that are interconnected and interrelated so that the study is framed cohesively. Maxwell (2013) added that in the interactive approach to the design of qualitative research, the researcher is conscious of the interrelation of the parts and connection of the design process. The undertaking of this study by the researcher was to understand the perceived connections of the challenges of oppression of Latinas in the superintendent position.

In this study Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological and narrative inquiry approaches were used. These approaches granted the ability to explore the lived experiences of Latina superintendents and collect emergent data from the participants by using semi-structured in-depth interview questions. Moustakas (1994) transcendental phenomenological approach is described as the understanding of a specific group's shared experiences through interpretation of

original data shared by the participants, noting that the phenomenological data collected derived from semi-structured open-ended questions and discourse between the researcher and participants. Moustakas (1994) transcendental approach had minimal focus on the interpretations of the researchers and more on the descriptions of the lived experiences of the participants. Conversely, Moustakas (1994) focused on Husserl's concepts, epoche, or bracketing, in which a researcher suspends judgement of the participants' shared lived experiences, to the extent possible, to draw a new perspective of the phenomenon being studied. The researcher spent time deeply analyzing the data, proceeding to succinctly summarize the information to significant statements or quotes and connecting the statements into themes (Moustakas, 1994).

Kahneman (2011) informed that humans, unlike other beings, have intuition and develop skills that help them recognize and interpret their lived experiences over time. "Valid intuitions develop when experts have learned to recognize familiar elements in a new situation and act in a manner that is appropriate to it" (p.12). The researcher waited patiently for the data to emerge without being forceful or coming with predetermined ideas or theories. This study of Latinas in district superintendent positions explored the oppressive epistemologies of their lived experiences in district leadership and the perceived assets, skills, they possess. The experiences were narrated in their own words to understand them, and form organized themes that helped explain them.

In naturalistic inquiry, it is the innate human interactions between the participant and the researcher that occur in the context of the daily routines which are the essence of their lives. The complex journey Latina leaders experienced were shared in a non-chronological form because when they are shared with researchers, it is done in a manner which did not follow a prescribed process (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Flexibility in the research design was imperative for the researcher to pursue various categories and themes. It was a method of being open to the how and why of the research and the form how it evolved (Patton, 2002). Lincoln and Guba (1985) disclosed that “what these considerations add up to is that the design of a naturalistic inquiry (whether research, evaluation, or policy analysis) cannot be given in advance; it must emerge, develop, and unfold while listening to the lived experiences related to oppressive factors” (p. 213). The call for an emergent design by naturalists was not simply an effort on their part to get around the ‘hard thinking’ that was supposed to precede an inquiry; the desire to permit events to unfold was not merely a way of rationalizing what is at bottom ‘sloppy inquiry.’ Lincoln and Guba (1985) informed that “the design specifications of the conventional paradigm form a procrustean bed of such a nature as to make it impossible for the naturalist to lie in it—not only uncomfortably, but at all” (p. 225).

It was the data collection of Latinas lived experiences, stories, and other materials that permitted the researcher to discover and respond to a path for new information. The researcher’s flexibility was imperative to the uncovering of the data. The researcher did not come to the field with only one method for gathering data (Saldana, 2015); the researcher found avenues to follow which take one to the data.

Research Methodology

“Remember that the root meaning of datum is something given, not something collected.”

Saldaña, 2015 p. 59

Instrumentation

The researcher used various instruments to gather data, i.e., conduct semi-structured, open- ended face to face and virtual interviews, gathered field notes, journals, ‘memoing,’ and used audio recordings . . . to gather participant data, hence the principal instrument was the

researcher herself (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Ultimately, to improve the process of the validity and reliability of the data collection, the researcher learned to navigate through oppressive layers of a white male dominated system, incorporated prestige research skills, acquired formal training and prepared extensively (Patton, 2002).

The researcher's engagement with the participants created bonds that only people with shared lived experiences can have (Saldaña, 2015). It was the intimacy and involvement with the participants, situation, or phenomenon which yielded understanding (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). As Latina district leaders, the participants and researchers came together to build a bond that only Latina administrators who share similar lived experiences can form. As the instrument of the research, it was the connections with other Latinas in district leadership and the attempt to understand their perceived lived experiences of the phenomenon that only a researcher with similar perceived lived experiences can understand. The personal contact that the researcher developed with its participants helped in understanding their lived experiences (Patton, 2002). The researcher's own experiences that she brought to the fieldwork were also central to the in-depth understanding of the study (Saldaña, 2015). Furthermore, controversies arise pertaining to the "closeness" of the researcher to its participants; nonetheless, the alarming suggestions to stay distant to the people we study so that one stays "objective" to the study, weakens its understanding (Saldaña, 2015). This type of detachment limits the true perspectives that a Latina researcher herself attempted to discover within the nature of the study. The strength of the study was dependent on the researcher's inquiry of its emotions and the participants' emotions (Saldaña, 2015).

Researcher as an instrument

It was the voice of the researcher that personified the participants rather than simply data extraction (Saldaña, 2015). Rather than allowing an academic voice to dominate the research, a personal voice of qualitative analysis, which acknowledges the humanity of the researcher as well as the participants, simultaneously demonstrated a genuine respectfulness towards relationship building. The context of findings was influenced by the voice and emotions of the researcher. Collins and Cooper (2004) expressed that it is the humanistic aspect of the researcher solidifying the authenticity of the study. Therefore, voice and self-awareness were crucial elements to evolving a qualitative study from a dehumanizing dialogue to a valuable discourse. Developing self-awareness required an understanding of the computational methods of designing a qualitative study which revolved around the benefits as well as the limitations of human computation (Marshall & Goodman, 2016). The researcher inevitably shaped the credibility of the research. A thorough and competent researcher practices reflexivity (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Reflexivity highlights the necessity of researchers to reflect on their own self-awareness, perspective, and cultural-political consciousness. Continuously examining one's own perspective and voice challenges one's own biases, limitations, and awareness of others' perspectives (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

The researcher audio recorded each interview, using a dictate-voice device found in the computer and a hand-held audio recorder and subsequently download each transcript onto Word. This allowed the researcher to intently listen to each interview and form an appreciation of the participants' inflections within their voices as they revealed their perceived lived experiences as well as the skills and characteristics they brought to the position of superintendent. Furthermore, each participant was informed of the date and time of the interview via an electronic invite.

Participants

The collection of rich and purposeful data which is relevant to the researcher's phenomenon can be found in one person, culture, community, or event. It was the distinct participants who provided information that led to additional questions in this study. To fulfill the proposed research, Latina superintendents in Texas school districts were selected for the study. The deep questioning and observations supported the researcher's initial hunches in discovering Latina superintendents' perspectives. Purposeful sampling affects the credibility, trustworthiness, and transferability of the research (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). It was the extensive specificity of the data of the participants that provided ample information for the researcher (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Avoiding the generalization of information was the intent of the researcher. The idea was to elucidate the details and distinctions of the information. It was the purposeful selection of the five Latina superintendents which informed the researcher of the phenomenon of the study and the various paths that could be taken to make sense of the perceived lived experiences of Latina superintendents related to their perceived challenges and their cultural community wealth they brought to the superintendent role.

It was the intimacy and involvement with the participants that yielded the understanding of their narratives as it related to the phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The researcher made connections with the Latina superintendents and the phenomenon that she attempted to understand and embraced what it was materializing. The close contact that the researcher developed with its participants helped her understand their lived experiences. The research was central to the in-depth understanding of Latinas superintendents in their perceived lived experiences. The strength of the study was dependent on the researchers' inquiry of its emotions and the participants' emotions as the study was conducted (Saldaña, 2015).

The information which the researcher gathered was examined independently of one another; sometimes unknowingly and other times after deep reflection (Saldaña, 2015). It was key to assume each case was unlike the other. Understanding the details of each Latina superintendent in the study was a form of not only respect, but authenticity (Saldaña, 2015). To do justice to the study, the researcher holistically described details when navigating the depths of this phenomenology. The more individualized a study is articulated, the higher quality it achieves when capturing differences and similarities in the inquiries. Each participant was honored with their stories and individualized means of data gathering, individualized questionnaires, and the setting that best fit each participant. When gathering data, it was the seeking of differences within the study that respected the uniqueness of each participant and the data offered (Saldaña, 2015). It was easy to categorize and generalize participants to best fit the context of a study; however, by doing so a researcher commits a disservice to the participant and limits the findings (Saldaña, 2015).

Procedures

Prior to conducting the study, the researcher obtained university approval. The researcher also completed the ethics training expected by the Internal Review Board (IRB) at Texas A & M University- Corpus Christi through CITI Training Solutions and the required application documents were submitted before the start of the data collection of the study. Once the researcher was approved by the IRB to conduct the research, participants were sent a recruitment form via email prior to being interviewed. To ensure ethical research, the researcher used an informed consent to provide information to all participants (Kvale, 1996; Holloway, 1997). The informed consent form provided the following information:

- Participants understood the purpose of the research.

- Participants understood the procedures of the research stated on the consent form.
- Participants acknowledged that their participation was voluntary and could withdraw from the study at any time.
- Participants affirmed that she is at least 18 years of age.
- Participants identified as Latina/Hispanic
- Participants identified as female
- Served in TEA regions 1 and / or 2 in South Texas public non-charter K-12 school district as a superintendent
- Employed in a school district where the enrolled student population was 75% or more Latino/Hispanic students
- Participants acknowledged that at any time their refusal to participate in the study involved no penalty or loss of benefits to which they were entitled.
- Participants understood that there was no compensation for participating in the study.

Data Analysis

The study employed the use of semi-structured open-ended interviews and informal pre- and post-discourse between the researcher and each of its participants for triangulation and member checks (Erlandson et al., 1993). Welman and Kruger (1999) proffered those questions asked of the participants are “directed to the participant’s experiences, beliefs, and convictions about the phenomenon” (p. 196). Kvale (1996) proffered that the collection of data when in the process of an interview, “is literally an interview, an interchange of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest.” This is where a researcher works to “understand the world from the participant’s point of view, to unfold the meaning of people’s experiences” (pp. 1-2).

According to the Sapir hypothesis, our language entirely constructs our reality and actions. Therefore, qualitative inquiry was confined to the individualized inductive logic of each participant. Rather than approach qualitative studies with an inductive design, researchers should not make prior assumptions of data, correlations, or hypotheses (Saldaña, 2015). It was not the inferring of the study but negotiating the understanding of qualitative data which reflected the grounded experience of direct and specific observation, conversation, and details. Through an inductive approach of a study, the researcher expanded the amount and quality of the data gathered (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Data Collection

The study adhered to the protocols of a phenomenological study. The forms of qualitative data collected consisted of two 60-minute interviews with each participant; observations conducted during the interviews, researchers' self-reflection, notes gathered during the interview, and observation called 'memoing'. Miles & Huberman (1984) disclosed 'memoing' as a form of source for data collection used in qualitative research (p. 69). It was the field notes, 'memoing' about what the researcher heard, saw, experienced, and thought during the data collection and reflection that the researcher noted.

Two in-depth semi-structured interviews were performed with each participant as a main data gathering technique. The interviews were conducted in a place or platform in where the participant felt most comfortable and permitted a space of confidentiality. Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, two participants chose to conduct both interviews virtually. The three other participants requested the first interview to be conducted in their office and the second interview to be done virtual. All interviews were recorded and transcribed for subsequent analysis. This interview protocol was an adaptation of Seidman's (2013) three-interview series by collapsing it

into two, three-part interviews. The protocol explored three different areas; (a) a focused life history of Latina's lived experiences, (b) the details of their perceived lived experiences; the skills and assets they perceived to possess in the ascension and while in the superintendent role (c) the impact that mentorship and network of solidarity amongst Latinas in leadership roles (*hermanidad*) make in the representation of Latinas in the superintendent position. Together, these three areas helped collect information directly related to the study.

Table 1

Participant Interview Schedule

Interview # 1			Interview # 2	
Participant	Date	Location	Date	Location
Pacheco	September 28	Video Conf.	Oct. 13	Video Conf.
Chavez	September 28	Video Conf.	Oct. 15	Video Conf.
Cavazos	October 5	Face-to-face	Oct. 19	Video Conf.
Nervarez	October 7	Face-to-face	Oct. 20	Video Conf.
Salazar	October 7	Face-to-face	Oct. 29	Video Conf.

The researcher deeply understood ample data needed to be collected to enhance the credibility and the trustworthiness of the research. It was the realm of the participants' environment where meaningful and dependable narratives were collected through in-depth interviews and observation. During the observations and interviews that were conducted, Glensne (2011) stated that the writing of notes displaying ideas which come to mind are necessary to secure knowledge of the discovery in the data and to deeply understand what was revealed. Understandably, it was during interviews, observations, and self-reflection by the

researcher that the vulnerability and openness of the participants' emotions and knowledge of the phenomenon was protected and respected by the researcher (Saldaña, 2015). It was with empathy and without judgment which permitted the emotional connections and understanding of the participants to be experienced by the researcher. Additionally, interest and caring through the rigorous interviews and observations conducted provided the researcher a deep understanding of the participants' experiences (Saldaña, 2015).

Data trustworthiness and reliability

Creswell & Poth (2018) defined qualitative trustworthiness and reliability as the steps a researcher takes to check “for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures” (p. 232). There are numerous strategies to promote trustworthiness and reliability that qualitative researchers can employ to provide evidence their data is valid and reliable. There are no specific strategies for a phenomenological approach. Creswell & Poth (2018) recommended that researchers utilize at least two strategies in any given study. Strategies promoting trustworthiness (internal validity) begins with the utilization of member-checking, the “sharing interview transcripts, analytical thoughts, and/or drafts of the final report with research participants to make sure you are representing them and their ideas accurately” (p. 232). The extensive auditing of the data is another method. These strategies were implemented by the researcher.

Clarifying the bias that a researcher brought to the study was pertinent to the study. Contrastingly, strategies promoting transferability (external validity) included providing rich and thick descriptions. The goal and significance of what sets phenomenological research apart from other methodologies is the focus approach of this research of exploring the life of one or more individuals through their lived experiences. Exploring the lives of others was primarily done through interviews and documents.

Ethical assurances

The participants were contacted by the research via email for the discussion and explanation of the proposed study. The time requirement from the participants were also discussed during this communication so that participants understood the commitment that they were making to complete the study. The participants were also informed that the study was voluntary and that the findings of this study will be kept secured for three years and shared with Texas A & M University- Corpus Christi. Following this communication and upon the participants' agreement to participate in the study, the participants were selected.

Coding of the data

The data obtained from the interview transcripts were hand-coded on an Excel document and initially framed to focus on the racialized and gender of five Latina superintendents related to their lived experiences with oppression and the perceived cultural community wealth, skills, and strategies they possess.

The researcher used *in vivo* coding techniques to preserve and honor the voices of the participants while examining potential themes across interviews (Saldaña, 2015). Saldaña proffered *in vivo* 's root meaning as “in that which is alive” a code or word used by the researcher that labels a participant’s specific words (p. 105). Saldaña noted that the choices that a researcher elects when coding its data is a process that first emerges as a pattern, then a category, a theme, and concepts that at times move in the direction of a theory. Grounding the emerging categories, patterns, and themes, a researcher creatively synthesizes the data to comprehend what aspects are key, not only to understand the overarching theme, but to emerge its theories. Once the initial phase of coding was completed, the coding was categorized into themes otherwise known as analytical coding to further develop concepts that emerged from the interviews

(Merriam, 2009). During phase I of the coding, descriptive coding helped the labeling of various pieces of data. The coding process involved examining explicit and implicit themes related to racism, gender discrimination, forms of oppression, and the perceived assets, skills possessed by the participants.

The following of the data and not the design was what took the researcher to the deepest level of synthesis. The collection of ample data helped the researcher create meaning (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Latina superintendents in Texas school districts in South Texas, described their perceived challenges and inequities that they faced, particularly in the superintendent role. Moreover, the study also weighed on Latinas leaders' perceived skills or cultural community wealth needed to be successful in the role (Yosso, 2005). It was Latinas' narratives of the phenomenon that took the researcher to various directions of study.

It was the extensive collection of expansive data that unfolded a phenomenon that was then described in detail by the researcher (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Using Latina superintendents' own words and direct quotations, the researcher obtained meaning which enlightened their perspectives. It was the researcher who travelled with the participant through their encounter of their perceived lived experiences and explained in their own words what it means to have been there (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

In qualitative research there is not a set system from inquiry to outcome; in fact, there are nonlinear complexities in the processes of a cause (Saldaña, 2015). In any type of study, change is inevitable, people change, situations change, and cultures change; it is expected and inevitable in human experience. In qualitative inquiry, the researcher documenting the change as it happens is a nonlinear process that is followed, noting the change as it happens in real life (Saldaña, 2015). The fluidity of a qualitative study lent itself to thorough development and movement

towards the collecting of data while the change was occurring. A researcher expects change and does not control it or attempts to alter it. In naturalistic inquiry, the researcher is present throughout the dynamics of change in an individual, an organization, a community, or a culture and diligently works toward its verification (Saldaña, 2015).

Data storing methods

The audio recordings collected after the approval from each participant were assigned a code. The code was labeled, for example, “Participant 1, 21 October 2021.” If more than one interview was recorded on the same date, the participants’ audio recording was labeled, for example, as “Participant 2, 21 October 2021.” Each interview was recorded separately and labeled as stated. As soon as the interview was conducted, the researcher calendared time to instantly transcribe key words, phrases, and statements which allowed for the participants to speak in their own words. There was a type of discipline required to sustain superior up-to-date field notes.

Eason et al (2000) informed of the need to be cautious when one gathers data. Technology failure might threaten the collection of data. Understanding this, the researchers also used her personal laptop audio recording.

Field notes and ‘memoing’ were used as an added data collection method for this study. The field notes were important for the qualitative research so that written data could be retained (Lofland & Lofland, 1999). The researcher listened intently and was disciplined to record, without judgement, the distinct data gathered from each participant. Moreover, Lofland and Lofland (1999) asserted that field notes “should be written no later than the morning after” (p. 5).

The researcher committed to intently engage in the undertaking of qualitative research to

study a problem and the demands of time and resources (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A phenomenology qualitative research approach is as rigorous and time consuming as a quantitative approach implemented in a study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative inquiry was for the researcher determine to deeply commit to 1) extensive time in the field, 2) time-consuming data analysis, 3) record and write descriptive notes, 4) connect dynamic and emergent procedures, 5) consider and respond to ethical issues that might arise (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Furthermore, the data collected from the participants was stored in an Excel file and protected using a secured storage device. The data was coded using pseudonyms to protect participants in the study. Three years after the approval and acceptance of the dissertation, the Excel file will be erased from the protected storage device. The transcripts and participants' consent forms and all notes gathered during the interviews were stored in a safe box where the researcher is the only one who knows its code; three years after the approval and acceptance of the dissertation, all data will be shredded.

Explication of the data

The data gathered from the phenomenon in study was investigated. The analysis of the data provided a detailed and sound understanding of the context of the whole. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) considered analysis as the “systematic procedure to identify essential features and relationships” (p. 9). It was a method of metamorphosing the data amidst its interpretation. The explanations process was used to distinguish the themes with justifiableness to the phenomenon.

Bracketing and phenomenological reduction

Bracketing and phenomenological reduction, first coined by Husserl, was considered by Hyener (1999) as regrettable because it omits the reductionist nature of natural science

methodology. Phenomenological reduction “to pure subjectivity” (Lauer, 1958, p. 50), it was a method used by the researcher to open herself to the phenomenon “in its own right with its own meaning” (Hyener, 1999; Fouche, 1993). It continued to add a suspension or ‘bracketing out’ (or epoche) as a means of not making any judgement (Lauer, 1958). It was the bracketing of the researcher’s own perspective or assumptions (Miller & Crabtree, 1992). Holloway (1997) and Hyener (1999) confirmed that the researcher should spend ample time listening to the audio recording of a participant’s interview and become familiar with their voice and meaning behind it so that a holistic sense, the gestalt is developed.

Delineating units of meaning

A vital phase when explicating the data was the delineating units of meaning, the extraction of statements by the researcher, that seemed to cast light upon the researched phenomenon (Hyener, 1999; Creswell, 1998; Holloway, 1997). As the researcher of this study, it was the ability to consciously make a substantial amount of judgement calls when bracketing my own assumptions so that subjective judgements were omitted from the research.

Clustering of units of meaning to form themes

The researcher bracketed assumptions so that the phenomenon was kept pure and evaluated the list of units of meaning that were noted to better elicit the essence of meanings of units within the holistic context. Groups of themes were created by grouping units of meaning together (Creswell, 1998; King, 1994; Moustakas, 1994) and set out to link important topics, also called units of significance (Araujo Sadala & de Camargo Ferreira Adorno, 2001).

Trustworthiness and credibility

The researcher informed the participants the purpose of the study and the significance of their truthfulness in their explanation of their lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Latina

superintendents in Texas, primarily in South Texas were purposefully selected for the study. Following the transcription of interviews, the participants were emailed the verbatim transcript of the interview to provide them with access to member checks and ascertain that the transcribed information was accurate (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checking added to the trustworthiness and credibility of the study because it permitted the participants to ascertain the researcher's findings and help assure the precision of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Moreover, it was through the pre and post discourse and the form of 'memoing' where the researcher attempted to form trusting relationships with the participants to intensify the level of trustworthiness as the participants answered the interview questions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The joint exploration of worlds told in interviews and the ability for participants to thoroughly express their lived experiences afforded the researcher the opportunity to verify with the participant that what was shared within the narrative brought trustworthiness to the study (Saldaña, 2015). The researcher was compelled to substantiate that the data collected from the participants for this study was trustworthy and credible to explain the essence of the lived phenomenon. Credibility is a critical tenet in qualitative research that justifies its trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Viewing the data from this perspective informed the researcher that it is the participants' beliefs that were essential to the study and not her heuristic thinking (Saldaña, 2015).

Summary of Methodology

Chapter III delineated the research method employed to respond to the research questions for this study. The chapter also outlined research procedures, participants in the study, data collection methods, data storing-methods, ethical considerations of the study, trustworthiness, credibility, and the methods implemented to analyze the data. A phenomenological methodology

was used to understand the transformation of a system must undergo to increase the number of Latinas into the superintendent role. All study participants contributed to the analysis of the phenomenon by sharing their perceived challenges, the benefits of effective mentorship programs, and the recognition of cultural community wealth they bring to the position. Chapter IV, which follows, was written to present the results and show that the methodology outlined in Chapter III was adhered to.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

Latina females continue to be underrepresented in the school superintendent position. Even though the nation's demographics, economic, and political changes call for school district leaders who know and understand how to create positive learning environments and serve as role models for Latino students (Avalos & Salgado, 2016), many remain excluded from the position. Latinas are faced with systemic barriers, cultural stereotypes and must navigate through the good ole' boy system. Latinas must also persist in their careers with limited supports, and be determined to resist barriers, be self-reliant, and overcome obstacles and systemic oppressions in their attempt to attain the highest level of district leadership. Wilson (1980) exclaimed, "The most successful superintendent is male, Anglo-Saxon, middle-aged, Republican, intelligent, and a good student but not gifted" (Grogan, 2000, p. 20). The purpose of this study was to explore Latina superintendents in South Texas school districts, the perceptions of their determinations, motivations, challenges, cultural community wealth, skills, and the influence of collegial networks in their representation and success in the superintendent position.

The extensive field notes captured during the interviews, observations, and the hundreds of pages of interview data, produced four major themes and several subthemes within the major themes. The themes are: (a) Barriers Faced by Latinas; (b) Preparation to Lead; (c) Enactment of *Hermanidad*; and (d) Determination to Persevere.

Participants' Background

A recruitment letter was distributed to identified participants that met the inclusion criteria for the study. The participants identified as female, Latina/Hispanic superintendents, serving in TEA regions 1 and/or 2 in South Texas public non-charter K-12 school districts with an enrolled student population of 75% or more Latino/Hispanic students. The study was designed

to collect background information for each of the five participants who agreed to participate. The participants' tenure as superintendent ranged from one to seven years. Their ages ranged from 46 to early 65 years old. Table 2 presents the demographic information of the selected participants.

Table 2

Latina Superintendents Demographic Information

	Age	Current Marital Status	Yrs. in Ed	Yrs. in Superintendency	% of. Latino/ Hispanic Students
Superintendent Pacheco	56-60	Married	35	7	98.8
Superintendent Chavez	46-50	Married	27	2	99.7
Superintendent Cavazos	46-50	Married	25	2	86.1
Superintendent Nervarez	51-55	Divorced	30	1	93.4
Superintendent Salazar	61-65	Married	35	2	99.5

Data retrieved from superintendent interviews.

Superintendent Pacheco

Superintendent Pacheco is between 56-60 years of age and has served as superintendent in two different districts. She grew up in a predominately Latino poor community and is a first-generation college student. Her parents had limited education, nonetheless, both defined formal education as “sacred.” Superintendent Pacheco began her professional career as an elementary teacher and followed the path as campus administration until, “I was recruited to work at the Regional Service Center and recruited again by the superintendent of a small school district for a district level administrator position.” Superintendent Pacheco served in the role of assistant superintendent in that district before taking on the role of superintendent. A few months before taking on the role of superintendent, she described a time when she was approached to take on the position of superintendent, “When my baby was like six months the board asked me if I would apply for the superintendent position and I said no, there’s no way, they asked me to be interim and I said I can’t, I’ve got curriculum writing and all of that.” Superintendent Pacheco is the first Latina superintendent ever hired in the district in which she currently serves as superintendent where over 99% of the enrolled student population is Latino/Hispanic.

Superintendent Chavez

Superintendent Chavez is 46-50 years of age and had not completely taken a traditional educational career path to the superintendency. After working at several school districts in Region One, as teacher, assistant principal and then principal, Superintendent Chavez worked for a Texas communities foundation and at the university level before taking on the role of superintendent in a rural school district. Superintendent Chavez reminisces about a time that, “I ran into my former superintendent, a mentor, and when he congratulates me, he says, well, your job is going to be harder than mine. I just have to focus on the board and get the right people to

support my vision, you have to do it all in there and all the special programs.” Superintendent Chavez has just started her second year as superintendent. “I was inspired to be a superintendent when I didn’t see enough Latinas as superintendents.” The district’s enrolled student population is over 99% Latino/Hispanic.

Superintendent Cavazos

Superintendent Cavazos has been at her current school district for two years. She is the first Latina/Hispanic hired for the position of superintendent in the history of the district. She described a piece of advice that a good friend and colleague shared, “Start applying because it takes years before you get hired.” She also expressed that, “the district was in such bad financial place when I got here. I was aware that there were financial problems, but I never expected that we might have to borrow money to make the payroll.” She came into the job with a wealth of teaching and administrator experience all at the secondary level. She also worked as an assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction at a second district before taking on the superintendent post. Superintendent Cavazos is between 46-50 years of age. The district’s demographics consist of over 85% of Latino/Hispanic student population.

Superintendent Nervarez

Superintendent Nervarez is the first Latina/Hispanic superintendent hired in the district. She seemed to be in a state of disbelief when she spoke about her current position at the district, “So I often ask myself, you know, why me, why do I sit here right now?” Her 30 years of experience in education started as an elementary teacher, university program director, and campus administrator. She then moved to her current school district where she served in various campus and district administrative roles before taking on the role of superintendent. She stated, “I don’t sell myself short, but I do think that there is, there is some hard work and I do believe

that some of it had. . . there's a degree of luck and opportunity." Superintendent Nervarez has served in the superintendent role for less than a year. The enrolled student population in her district is over 93% Latino/Hispanic.

Superintendent Salazar

Superintendent Salazar has been in the field of education for the last 35 years. Only two of those years have been as district superintendent. She is a first-generation college graduate. She stated, "My degree is not in education. I received a degree in business administration with a focus in finance." The private sector was her first job after graduating from college. "After I got married, we decided, you know to have kids, and so I did not want to travel that much, and so I figured that I was going to have to change careers and so I thought you know, I'll be a teacher." The wealth of educational experience has all been at the same district where she navigated through the ranks of teacher, campus administrator and district cabinet level administration before becoming superintendent. The enrolled student population at the district is over 99% Latino/Hispanic students and over 90% of the student are labeled economic disadvantaged.

Barriers Faced by Latina Leaders

The participants passionately shared their lived experiences regarding the barriers they faced as Latina leaders in search of advancement in their careers. They described their attempts to be recognized and selected as district superintendents as well as their acknowledgement of the hidden obstacles that they overcame to hold the highest district position. For example, "There isn't enough Latina representation [top leadership]. There is not a chance I'm ever going to become a superintendent." Furthermore, each participant communicated that it was important to reframe and rephrase their skills, preparation, and experience to be understood that those were

just as powerful and knowledgeable as though they were to come from a man. Superintendent Chavez said, “I’ve worked with groups of powerful women, why are we so underrepresented?”

The participants lamented the systemic barriers present. For example, Superintendent Pacheco explained:

There is a form of surprise coming from some people that Hispanic women can be successful leaders. I am surprised that you can do this, speak on certain topics, somewhat not what they are expecting, *the success of a female Hispanic woman*.

There was a common language that emerged from the participants aligned to the societal perceptions that Latinas are not capable of being effective superintendents. These perceptions were based on stereotypes and biases. The participants shared that they realized they were unlikely to be selected as district superintendent no matter how extensive their experience.

Superintendent Nervarez pensively questioned herself during the interview, “why me, I often have asked myself, why do I sit here right now?” It was her expression that captured her disbelief in the possibility of having attained the position. Even with over thirty years of experience in the field of education including campus and district leadership experience, Superintendent Nervarez was in a state of incredulousness.

Even when having attained numerous accolades, doctoral degrees and extensive experience, the participants called the ability to reach to the highest position of district leadership, “a form of luck.”

The participants shared that often they were perceived as unskilled and ineffective to take on the role of superintendent. This propelled them to be resistant to the naysayers and work hard. Superintendent Chavez stated, “I think that the lack of seeing people like me in the role, inspired me to work hard to get there.” Superintendent Cavazos reinforced, “There were

many times that I worked really hard, pulled more than my share for a district and when openings came, I was not even considered for those jobs.” The accounts of all participants told of the frustrations encountered due to the racial and gender prejudices they faced in the ascension to the role of superintendent. Superintendent Chavez shared,

But another sad thing in [district], I was never going to be superintendent there. I surely knew that I wasn't going to be a female Hispanic superintendent, so you just run up along these roadblocks. And sometimes you have to be willing to walk around them.

The systemic barriers faced by the participants were not deterrents in their aspiration and preparation for the role. “*Adelante*” was the common term, meaning “to bring forward,” described by the participants. As Latinas leaders, they understood that they must fight the barriers, stereotypes, biases, and expectations that others have of them.

Gender and Racial Biases. The systemic barriers described by the participants which placed roadblocks in their ascension to the superintendent was related to the male dominance of the position, specifically white males. There was a perceived notion among all participants that females are interviewed for the position for the sole purpose of meeting some “quota” to diversify the pool to include female applicants, specifically females of color when there was no actual intention that they would be hired to fill the top role. Superintendent Chavez shared,

I do know that some people interview Hispanic women, so they say they do that. I’ve heard and experienced that. It hurt my feelings when it happened. They just want to say that they are trying there.

Three participants acknowledged that males leave the classroom for promotions way before their female counterparts; promotions happen for them even with less experience and credentials.

Superintendent Cavazos recounted,

I think that we are losing the female aspiring superintendents early in their careers. It happens during their teaching career. Many of them are not being promoted into the campus administration roles, and this means they can never be superintendents.

The Latina superintendents recognized that they must break through the glass ceiling if they want to attain the position of superintendent. Superintendent Chavez shared an experience she recently had when attending a leadership conference. She recalled thinking that there was not a chance that she would ever become a superintendent. She shared,

I remember walking in and I'm like, 'what the heck am I doing here?' It (sic-the attendees) was predominately white male. There was a white lady from [city] and I was the only Latina. I called my husband and said, 'I am in the wrong career pathway. They're all white, Anglo-Saxon men sitting in this room'.

Superintendent Salazar added,

When I was an assistant superintendent, our CFO was a male and I remember that he would tell me, I went to eat lunch with such and such board member, and I was like I don't think I could ever do that, probably because I can't, you know I'm a woman and they wouldn't invite me. So, I thought that that was like a set-back, like an unfair advantage for him.

There was resonance among the participants in their understanding that they fit into two well-known disadvantaged groups: women and a racial minority. The superintendents understood the reality that women, specifically women of color, don't receive the same respect as a man. Superintendent Chavez shared that even when in the position, women continue to face obstacles, she explained, "They listen to a man before they listen to a woman's voice."

The participants spoke about the board make-ups and the district demographics in

relation to Latinas being hired for the superintendent position. When the number of females on the (school) board is non-existent and the percent of Latino student population is not high, they have come to the realization that they will not be hired as the superintendent. Superintendent Chavez shared, “I look at like student population, the board makeup, I look at demographics and more than likely, they are going to hire a white person as opposed to a person of color.”

Microaggressions. Participants shared their experiences with microaggression, included of subtle put downs, which inhibited their ascendance to the superintendency. These experiences continued to persist many times even after acquiring the role. Superintendent Salazar shared,

I experienced microaggression in my role as a superintendent, even as a principal.

I have learned that when this happens, I will be the listener and not the aggressor. These microaggressions come from people who are in high positions.

Participants shared that these microaggressions continued to unconsciously speak to them related to being female and Latina, and continued to create a form of doubt about their efficacy to perform in their roles. During the interviews the participants spoke of the need to form a thick skin to survive in the job. The participants shared about the forms of microaggressions from the people they worked with, specifically males, members of the board, strong community members and city leaders. The participants corroborated that they were often perceived as incapable of doing the jobs. Superintendent Cavazos noted,

One of the greatest challenges that I had was the city mayor, he was Hispanic, more challenging than a white male. It is almost as if I am not going to make it out of the pot, neither are you. He would tell me, I will get one of the guys to do it, that kind of attitude. I think that affects Hispanic females more.

Among the participants, it was noted that due to the lack of representation of Latinas in the superintendent role, it was a constant reality that Latina superintendents' abilities, leadership, effectiveness was questioned through the subtleties of the experiences with microaggressions. Superintendent Nervarez told of the frequent experiences with microaggression that she faced,

So, I may go to an event with [district administrator] who is male, tall male, he's gotta be about 6 feet tall. So, we may go to a meeting and for whatever reason, there's almost an assumption that he may have a higher role and, he may get a little bit more of the attention. There is a natural inclination for people to think that this tall male must be in some type of higher position up until my title [superintendent] gets revealed then you know the tone changes. It's not like, I said, it's almost that dismissal piece, until title is put out. A form of disrespect I would say.

Superintendent Chavez, described a male superintendent for whom she worked for and who should have modeled the role of the mentor, but used his power to instead instill in her self-doubt. When this superintendent learned that she was offered a leadership position at another district, he questioned her ability and expertise to take a higher position. Superintendent Chavez shared,

When I got offered a job, the district superintendent took it personally, asking like why are they [another district] offering you a job? Well, thinking to myself, 'you're already a superintendent in this district' and the job that I was offered was going to be in the valley and it wasn't a superintendency [position] anyway. Yeah, and then you hear comments (district staff) oh, cause you're young and pretty, that's why you got the job offer. Really, . . . I mean, it wasn't 'cause I had the experience and I had the talent?

Holding back tears, Superintendent Cavazos sadly talked about the experiences she encountered with microaggression when working in her previous district. She said that after many years, she was still angry at herself and regrets the many hours that were spent away from her family while others reaped the benefits of her hard work. She acknowledges that she should have stepped back sooner than she did. Superintendent Cavazos shared,

Back in another district, if you weren't in the clique, you were never going to be an administrator, but they wanted you to do all the work. You were the workhorse behind the scenes. Anglo females were not willing to do the work, wanting the accolades, but not wanting to sacrifice anything in their life. You were the one developing and implementing and getting the staff on board, that is not fair. When you didn't follow along, then it was your fault, and you were no longer on the team.

The participants accepted that they must work harder than others because they are held to higher standards for the sole reason of being female and Latina. The diminished value of their educational experiences, preparation, and work ethic resonated with the participants. They all acknowledged that Latinas in the role of superintendent continue to be challenged.

Limited Support. Getting support from others, even informal support, was important for the advancement of the participants' leadership aspirations, ultimately rendering them access to the superintendency. The participants communicated that they were able to establish considerable mentoring and networking systems while pursuing the superintendent post. Nevertheless, once in the superintendency, there was a lack of mentorship available for them.

Formal mentorship and networking programs established for Latina superintendents who look like them and understand their lived experiences were absent while in the role.

Superintendent Pacheco stated that she often searched for networking opportunities, “I network a lot with other female colleagues and even male superintendents.” Superintendent Chavez added, “but specifically we don’t have a Latina superintendent group in Texas. We are not as strong as a Latina group.” Superintendent Chavez added,

Even though Texas has this [networking program], I’m not part. I’m not active in it. It is a women’s superintendent network . . . for all women. Uh, I think, I always say I would but . . . My family and my work keep me from doing the extra stuff I’d like to do.

Three of the superintendents reported being the first Latina/Hispanic female hired in the history of the district. Superintendent Cavazos described,

I’m not so good to call and ask for help. There aren’t many females out there so you kind of get lost in the shuffle and we [Latina superintendents] are sometimes left behind.

Yeah, I guess, I am the first Hispanic female . . . there were several Hispanic males [superintendents] before me in this district.

Superintendent Pacheco explained, “I told them you may see me petite but don’t be mistaken. You may see me as a woman because you’ve never hired a woman. But don’t be mistaken, I can and will do the job.” Superintendent Nervarez noted that her experience related to mentors may be the exception, because she did have mentors who were men already established in their career,

The networking piece is such a critical component for a superintendent. As a Latina superintendent, you need to search the right connections and acquire the right experiences. I was blessed along the way with people who created opportunities for me. These people were mainly males.

The small number of Latina superintendents in the state of Texas is significant and the challenges that the Latina superintendents encountered included lack of mentoring opportunities.

Participants shared that their family responsibilities were a challenge when seeking mentorship programs. Superintendent Cavazos shared, “I think again it’s ingrained in our culture that you’re supposed to be this strong female that can take care of themselves.” The participants corroborated that they were raised to take care of others and take care of themselves. They grew up taking care of the males in the families and when married, they had the responsibility to take care of the husband, the children, and the household. They had to be strong but *depend on a man*.

Effect of Culture. Latinas faced a variety of cultural influences which shaped their personal identity. It was their families who placed guilt when they [participants] chose to advance their careers. Superintendent Chavez recalled a time after the birth of her son. She said that her own mother questioned her return to work, “She’s like, you’re going back to work? Who’s going to take care of your son? You are the mom. You have to raise him. I raised all of you.” Several participants noted barriers placed before them by their assigned family responsibility. Superintendent Nervarez disclosed,

The assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction position opened here at central office. The position had opened twice . . . I didn’t apply the first time and I was asked if I would consider it, but at the time I did not and at that time I was married. I’m divorced now, but at the time I was married and so you know when I talk about reasons for females, I also think sometimes family, your family life, those things, consciously or unconsciously are reasons why you [Latina leaders] don’t move forward and in our culture, in the Latino culture, where it’s very family oriented. It was also during my first principalship that I was opening a brand-new campus, so there’s a lot of work that goes

into opening a campus. At the time, I was living with my ex-husband, I remember him saying, I'm scared that the job is going to distance us because you work so much and so forth. I remember thinking, no job to me is important enough that I would sacrifice my marriage.

The participants recognized that if they aspire and prepare to attain the superintendent position, they must denounce the customary sex-role demands that have been controlled for many years by the traditional Latino culture. Superintendent Cavazos shared about an experience she faced during her first year as superintendent. The district had hired a construction company to renovate the football stadium. As a Latina, she realized that she had given her power to a white man and failed to check the progress of the work. She shared,

Hispanic females, we tend to not be as vocal around white males in their industry, so we are allowing them to lead us through this process and we are not checking. We trust the white man to lead us, and we were not checking.

It was during this experience that she faced in which she later recognized that she had trusted a white man and gave him charge of the construction project and the power to make the decisions. She realized that the white man was looking out for himself and not for the betterment of the school and the students.

Even when they work hard and prepare for the position, they [participants] don't see themselves as deserving of the position due to Latina role models and women in general have been left out of history and rarely seen as innovators, but rather perceived as submissive and reliant. As young females, they saw males being given opportunities to be the decision makers at home and take on the leadership role, while females were limited in those decisions or not given any roles at all. Superintendent Pacheco told,

I never saw myself as a superintendent or assistant superintendent, it was never in my plan. I was drafted. I said to him [colleague], you know it, it was by default, and he said, don't ever say that they [school board] saw it in you.

The participants revealed regrets they had, particularly when sharing about the many hours spent away from their families in the ascension and while in the superintendent position. There are trade-offs for the female superintendents. Even though their families understood the necessity of the long hours spent at work, there was a form of guilt and regret that is carried by the Latina superintendents, *many times they longed to have spent more time with family, but they said that the commitment to the work took that away.*

Latinas acknowledge that to attain the superintendency they needed to overcome biases, stereotypes, resist the effects of microaggressions and the Latino culture and operate in the career with limited support.

Preparation to Lead

The second theme that transpired addressed that as leaders, Latinas must know their worth. The participants represented the modern Latina leader who had resisted the stereo-typical submissive role and become, rather, risk-takers, as well as courageous and confident leaders. The superintendents demonstrated self- authorship and were self-assured in their expertise and ability to take on the role. They have come to the realization that as females and Latinas, they must know their own worth because people don't automatically respect them even when in the superintendent position. Superintendent Chavez shared,

People don't automatically say, oh there's a new Latina superintendent. We [Latina] leaders must also know that we must not only talk about knowing our worth, but also showing our worth. Don't expect someone to give you a space to shine.

It was with confidence that the participants stood up for themselves and did not let others devalue their worth. Superintendent Pacheco talked about applying for a position as a superintendent and realized that the search firm might just be looking for a token. She said, “When the search company kept calling me, I told them, don’t waste my time if you just need another number, please don’t waste my time.”

The participants judged that in district leadership they must show up as their authentic selves in all spaces, speak their mind, stand firm on their beliefs and values, and not be intimidated. They have reconciled (for better or worse) with the fact that they must navigate in a male dominated profession. They recognized that when preparing to interview for a leadership position, and in the superintendency, they must do their homework and exude confidence. The confidence that informs others that they belong there. Superintendent Pacheco stated,

I came back that evening for the second interview and I saw a young man walking out and I was told there was only two finalists and I thought that young man is my competition? I don’t think so. Because we are females in a man’s world, we need to be more verbal and persevere more.

Superintendent Nervarez added, “there's a degree of you have to be willing to put yourself out there, be willing to go out into the community and network.”

There were barriers that the participants faced related to the stigma of being Latina. The self-doubt masked their expertise and preparation to secure the superintendent position. The participants questioned the opportunities available for them to occupy the highest office in a school district. Furthermore, the stereotypes that others have of Latina leaders propelled them to excel in their preparation, be knowledgeable in curriculum and instruction, and be prepared to take on the role in challenging districts. Superintendent Cavazos commented,

There was a bit of a challenge when I came into the role because the district was in such bad financial place. They [school board] did give me a heads up, but I didn't realize how bad it was. The district needed a loan just to make payroll. We were able to recover quite a bit the first year.

The participants exhibited personal traits of assertiveness and perseverance, which are needed characteristics when navigating in a male dominated field. Superintendent Chavez shared,

Latinas need an attitude of never giving up. It's a little harder for us.

You know men don't say yes to everything. So why do I have to do it?

Sometimes you just have to set up those conditions because people don't automatically do it for you.

Learning to persist through oppressive systems and having systems of support in place was shared by the participants as vital for them as Latina superintendents to perform optimally in their roles. Superintendent Salazar told,

I make sure that I am not caught off guard. I research the information – being overly prepared. Sometimes there is that expectation that a female superintendent is not prepared. I make sure that I have my background information.

The participants stated that many times they must overcome the low expectations that others have set for them and “prove” that they are able to succeed in the position. They conceived that as female and Latina, they needed to know their self-worth and project to others who might not see it. Furthermore, they must resist stereotypes to be able to compete and persist in the male dominated profession of the superintendency.

Enactment of *Hermanidad*

The third theme to emerge revealed of the participants' commitment to support other Latinas. *Hermanidad*, or the facilitation of sisterhood, was strongly evidenced among the participant responses. They understood that there had to be a degree of community amongst leaders. Superintendent Nervarez shared,

You [Latina leaders] have to be willing to put yourself out there and be willing to meet people. You have to have the willingness, even if it's not your comfort zone to come and network and be a public figure. We cannot be in the background doing the work.

The participants expressed that they want Latina leaders to educate themselves, stay true to their personal beliefs and commit to the children they serve. They acknowledged that Latinas must come together and open doors for each other and have a responsibility to support and encourage others to succeed. Superintendent Chavez exclaimed, "Let's inspire other Latinas to get their doctorate and to get the superintendency positions. We're in this together." It was a form of *hermanidad*, sisterhood, that was noted with all the participants. Even though the participants went through challenges in their ascension and in the role, they were ready to form meaningful relationships and continue a community of mentorship and networking.

Superintendent Salazar expressed,

Being a Latina in a leadership position added a different perspective to the leadership role. Latina leaders tend to be motherly, nurturing, and wanting the best for the students of the community. Latinas bring that nurturing instinct and a unique strength to how we do our job, more than a male leader brings.

Superintendent Pacheco started the interview by saying, "I'm a strong supporter of higher education and especially for women, so you know I wanted to celebrate your accomplishments."

This gesture was evident of her encouragement of other women. The participants expressed their desire to form meaningful relationships with other Latinas leaders and to support them in career advancements and opportunities. Superintendent Pacheco explained,

We as women, and Latinas, we need to continue to open doors for each other, that is something that that we need to do more of. How do I create opportunities for others? Women need to lift up other women.

The absence of mentoring for Latinas leaders in their ascension to the superintendency hinders the likelihood of interacting with superintendent search consultants and hiring school districts (Tallerico, 2000). The participants identified that there are limited number of Latinas in leadership roles who can mentor other Latina leaders. Superintendent Nervarez exclaimed, “I felt a responsibility to grow them [Latina leaders].” The participants acknowledged that Latina leaders frequently endure feelings of separation and exclusion from their work environment. Superintendent Nervarez added,

Having those right people, the right leaders alongside you. The superintendency is so much about relationships and it's so much about community with other leaders. One [Latina leaders] must have the right connections and the right experiences.

There was common knowledge among the participants who spoke of the need to form the right mentor-mentee relationships. It is the guidance of Latinas leaders in high district positions that can encourage others to work and prepare for the “impossible,” attaining the highest role in district leadership, and learn to overcome challenges.

The participants were committed to help change the career trajectory of other Latinas. The lack of seeing females like them in the superintendency motivated them to help others succeed in the ascension and while in the position. They expressed that they want to be the

mentors that celebrate other Latinas' strengths. The superintendents want to help other Latina leaders and come take a front row seat, in the main seat of the room, and not spend their time in the background doing all the work.

Determination to Persevere

The fourth theme to emerge illuminated the participants' intuitive abilities, strategies, and skills which promoted their success as a Latina superintendent. It was during the interviews that the participants told of the need to be risk-takers, adaptable, good communicators, resourceful and build relationships in the community and with the school board. It was the overcoming of fears and shattering the "glass ceiling" that the participants shared that made them successful. Superintendent Chavez shared,

There's always going to be barriers and you have to find the good and the reasoning of how you're going to end up winning through the obstacles that are put in front of you. We [Latina leaders] just have to step it up.

Superintendent Pacheco shared about a time in which she had to spend time at a hospital, and it was there that she completed her dissertation. She emitted grit and determination during life's greatest challenges. Superintendent Pacheco related,

My husband got diagnosed with a brain tumor and we were going to MD Anderson for two weeks and you know, there's only so much work you can do away. So, I packed everything [dissertation] and my Chair kept saying, send me the chapter, so I sent her my first chapter and she says if the other two are as good as these send them to me right now.

They informed of the need to have the emotional intelligence to walk away from a job where the people in power did not value the leadership skills they possess. Superintendent Cavazos stated,

If they won't allow you to make a difference somewhere, then you go somewhere that they will allow you. You can't let people take advantage of you. It [superintendency] is hard and it just comes back to being adaptable and compassionate.

The participants understood of the unspoken hiring practices which include male established networks and male sponsorships that historically have created barriers for predominately females of color, who have traditionally not fit into the mold that has been created of the superintendent position. However, it was their resourcefulness, preparation and hard work that sustained them. Superintendent Cavazos stated, “To me is go in prepared because at the end of the day, whether you get chosen or not, you still want to leave a good impression, right?”

Latinas embodied resistance as a form of means to thrive in the most exclusionary of spaces. It is through the embodiment of resistant capital that women of color have redefine the ways in which their oppressions operate into a means of powerful resistance (Yosso, 2005).

Perseverance. The mentioned of the need to be a risk-taker while in the job resonated amongst the participants. The participants were employed in districts where resources were scarce, and many had to work without the large personnel that big districts are fortunate to have. Furthermore, it was also in these districts where students came to school with great academic challenges, and many spoke a language other than English. Superintendent Chavez explained about her experience when preparing to apply for a superintendent position, even when a former superintendent had advised her that the school board had already promised the job to someone else,

When I applied at [district], I reconnected with the former superintendent. I told her I was applying, and she said, “well, the board already knows who is going to get the job. It’s a

political thing.” She then proceeded to tell me to study the district’s finances. I went home and did a good job with my homework and I got the job.

The participants understood that one must wear different hats no matter the size of the district. The COVID-19 Global Pandemic made it difficult for the participants, due to the lack of resources that were available for their students and the need to close all campus buildings to keep the children and staff safe. It was their leadership that helped overcome many of the struggles that districts faced to keep the district staff and student safety at the forefront. Superintendent Pacheco shared,

When the pandemic started, the Commissioner of Education started having daily meetings with us [superintendents]. And they [Texas Education Agency] wanted us to open the schools and so forth. And, you know, I spoke up. And it was all the regional superintendents with the Commissioner. I told him, you know, with all your respect Commissioner, we just lost our high school nurse and two other employees. I am very sorry but we are not going to put our teachers, our staff in harms’ way. So, they [students] are all going virtual. I had the statistics and the data because we had just met with the county judge.

Participants shared of the need to be resourceful and find solutions for the district to succeed. Superintendent Chavez informed,

I just keep an eye on those districts. like what are they doing or their web page. I study them in case I need anything, but that's really the kind of the work I do because I don’t have a central office, so it's me and my CFO. So, I think that's been one of the things that helped me become successful. Is being able to be resourceful and reaching out to people. A “whatever it takes” attitude, was projected amongst the participants. One participant

shared about her experience of leaving her family eight hours away to take on the position of superintendent and having to carry two mortgages for several months. Superintendent Cavazos relayed,

You know, in my former district, if you weren't in the Barbie Doll [Anglo white female] click, you were not going to be promoted. You weren't even considered, didn't even get an interview, even though you were the one leading the turnaround, dysfunctional campuses. You followed the rules. You read every book and studied and prepared, while other people would just show up. You know, they [white female leaders] waited for you to give the responses and waited for you to do all the work, but in the meantime, they got all the credit and recognition and it's not about the credit and recognition, it is about who is doing the work. If you are not getting the opportunities that you deserve, you just have to get up and move on.

The participants represented themselves with an ability to navigate through complex situations and the courage to take the leap when career opportunities were presented. They spoke about possessing an attitude that sees challenges as concealed opportunities. Superintendent Salazar informed,

It was one week before school started and the superintendent tells me, I want you go over there [school]. I am moving you there[campus] this afternoon. I want you to start over there tomorrow and everything that you did here [school], I want you to do it over there. We did very well, so after that, the next superintendent asked me one more time if I would come and lead a middle school that was rated Not Meeting Adequate Yearly Progress for two consecutive years. She [superintendent] asked me to go and I did and we became a Recognized School my first year. I was getting ready to start my second

year at the middle school, that was when our assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction became the superintendent and she hired me as the assistant superintendent.

The participants possessed the skills and ability to endure challenges, take risks, and overcome obstacles. It was their perseverance during a Global Pandemic, limited resources, racial discrimination, and career reassignments that displayed their grit and determination to do the job.

Self-efficacy. The participants were driven and exhibited an inherent sense of intrinsic motivation. It was these characteristics which advanced their leadership promotions and success in their professional careers. It was when applying for a superintendent position that Superintendent Chavez expressed her sense of self-efficacy,

I had applied for a superintendent position at a district closer to my home. So yeah, I did a bit of homework, and I was a finalist. The last question they asked me was, will you take the job on a split vote, on a 4/3 vote? In order to be an effective superintendent, you have to have a team of eight. If we can't work united and move this district together, then I won't take it [job] on a split vote.

When she walked out of that interview, she knew she was not going to get the job. It was her strong belief that if she was going to take a job, it was going to be at a district where all board members were committed to the same goals.

It was as a young adult growing up in poverty and in a strict household that Superintendent Cavazos revealed a strong determination to succeed despite the circumstances presented to her. She shared,

I grew up in a very traditional Hispanic household. My mother and dad were Jehovah Witnesses. When I say traditional Hispanic; it was a structured household almost cultish.

I wanted to go to school and be everything, but my mom didn't want me to go to school because of her religion.

It was that strong determination early in life that gave her the courage to lead in various school districts where she faced racism and at times ostracized by the people in power.

Self-efficacy was displayed by a participant when she denounced her internal voice of doubt and accepted the superintendent role. Superintendent Pacheco shared her experience of being tapped by board members to take the position of superintendent where she served as the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction. Superintendent Pacheco told,

They asked me to be interim and I said I can't, I've got curriculum writing and all of that.

The people interviewing for the position of superintendent were from in-house and the board said, they [applicants] kept saying, 'I am applying just because we need a superintendent, but our superintendent is sitting out there.' So, the board calls me in and they said, you've been drafted.

The participants shared the same belief of being hired for the position of superintendent because they could do the job. They prepared well, were impeccable with their word and always did their homework no matter the task. Even though they faced their own insecurities and doubted their expertise, they overcame the negative voices and took the challenge of the superintendency mostly in struggling districts.

The superintendents possessed skills and the ability to endure obstacles, take-risks and persevere through difficulties. It was their determination and self-efficacy during a global pandemic, working with limited resources, overcoming prejudice and reassignments that unveiled their grit and will power to do the job.

Summary of Findings

This chapter presented the four findings revealed from the data collected during the study. The analysis revealed four themes: Barriers Faced by Latina Leaders, Preparation to Lead, Enactment of *Hermanidad*, and Determination to Persevere. The next chapter extensively analyzed, interpreted, and synthesized these themes in the context of the literature, and conclusions were drawn from the study.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

School districts in the United States have made strides in the last three decades to increase the number of women of color in district leadership positions. Nonetheless, even now, women of color remain significantly absent in these positions (Avalos & Salgado, 2016). Overly present are the biases and stereotypes that remain for women of color in school district leadership.

There is limited research written about the compelling forces and barriers that keep Latinas from reaching the helm of school district leadership. The research that has been written traced these obstacles to the male dominated civilization which has prearranged gender positions in which males are deemed superior and correspond to the ‘norm’ while females are secondary and regarded as inferior and deficient of power (Mendez-Morse, 2004). Among the barriers which have been cited are the effects of their culture, and the scarcity of professional mentors and networks, as well as the existence of organizational barriers comprising of deficit thinking which augments the standardization that Latinas face from the beginning of the educational careers. Furthermore, Latino cultural beliefs merely increase the stereotypical treatment of women in compliant roles.

Participants

The participants in the study included five female Latina superintendents who serve predominately Latina/o students in their districts. All participants had over twenty-five years of educational experience in the field of education and had served in numerous campuses, district, regional administrative roles. Four of the five participants had been in the role for less than three years and one was starting her seventh year. The age range of the participants was 46 – 65 years of age. Additionally, eighty percent of the participants had earned a doctorate degree and one

hundred percent of them held the superintendency certification. Furthermore, all participants had extensive experience in working in challenging districts.

The participants were from South Texas and served in school districts in which the student enrollment population ranged from 300 to 28,000 students and above eighty-five percent of the enrolled students were Latino/Hispanic.

Statement of the Problem

Latinas continue to be underrepresented in district superintendent positions. The increase in the number of women of color that complete doctoral programs in education and earn a superintendent certification has not change the statistics regarding the diminutive percent of Latinas at the helm of district leadership. Studies revealed that more women apply and set goals to obtain positions of leadership in the field of education (Robinson et al., 2017) nonetheless, there are minute opportunities to get hired in the role due to set barriers and stereotypes. The barriers faced by women of color to attain the superintendency transcribe onto underrepresented students. Failure to address the underrepresentation of Latinas in the superintendent position will continue to widen the educational attainment of Latina/o students.

Analysis of Data Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore Latina superintendents' perceptions of their determinations, motivations, challenges and skills and the influence of collegial networks in their representation and success in the superintendent position. This study consisted of two central research questions. The central research questions were: What are the perceptions of Latinas superintendents regarding their aspirations, motivations, challenges, and cultural community wealth in their role? What influence would collegial networks have in the representation and success of Latinas in the superintendent position?

The research questions were central to leading the study. The themes from this study are as follows: (a) Barriers Faced by Latinas; (b) Preparation to Lead; (c) Enactment of *Hermanidad*; and (d) Determination to Persevere. Each theme is explored below in relation to the extant literature with the study ending articulating the study's contribution to the literature.

Theme I: Barriers Faced by Latina Leaders

Participants' responses during the interviews indicated their acknowledgement of the barriers that they must overcome. All the participants agreed that the lack of females and Latinas found in the superintendent position added to the challenges they faced. My research indicated that all the participants agree that historically, there have been a small number of Latinas in educational leadership positions, and this course continues even today (Méndez-Morse, 2004; Montenegro & American, 1993; Jones & Montenegro, 1982). This phenomenon portrays an "exclusion and neglect [of] the contribution[s] of Latina leaders" (Méndez-Morse, 2000, p. 584). Concluding that Latina women are significantly underrepresented in the superintendent position, it is urgent to study Latina women who are currently in superintendent positions to build a blueprint for others.

The participants blamed themselves of the challenges faced in their ascension and while in the positions. They told of the need to work hard, prepare, and fight the naysayers. This paralleled with the research that Latinos have historically experienced discrimination and have accepted that they must persevere and resist oppressive forces that they face in the spaces that have not been built with them in mind (Avalos & Salgado, 2016).

The "glass ceiling" was often referenced by the participants to describe why females and Latinas are unable to ascend to top level positions. Superintendent Chavez stated, "Men tend to be a little more disrespectful to a female than they are to another man."

A sense of bewilderment and disbelief, as well as overt humility, was projected by the participants when discussing their selection to the position, perhaps to their detriment. They reasoned that it was due to external factors, and other people who got them there and not their own expertise, extensive leadership experience in challenging district, and the formal and informal preparation they had acquired. Superintendent Nervarez expressed, “I will say that I have a phenomenal board who believed in me and when the position opened, they did only an internal search.”

The struggle recorded in the transcriptions of this research represented the critical awareness of the oppressive conditions, skills, and determination that the Latinas need to possess to attain and persist in the superintendent position. This awareness signals that moment of consciousness, described as the ability to reflect and engage in one's own consciousness and explore methods to transform it (Freire, 2000).

Subtheme: Gender and racial biases. It was in the transcripts of the interviews that consistently revealed of the gender and racial biases that the participants experienced in their careers. It was these forms of oppressions faced for the sole reason of being female and Latina. This is in alignment to Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) that ascertained of the insufficient number of females was because females encounter stereotypes, biases, and oppressions that men in the same position do not face. Superintendent Chavez shared, “It’s harder for us, right? So, we’re not seeing the same way a male is seen.”

The participants shared a variation of gender being a barrier because women are considered first to be mothers and second, leaders of organizations. They acknowledged a hesitation when school boards considered hiring them for the superintendent role; the participants sensed that they were seen more of a burden than an asset to the school district. This

corroborated with the traditional perception that males ought to have access to executive positions, a result of the assigned gender roles through much of history (Robinson et al., 2017). Each participant communicated that it was important to reframe and rephrase their skills, preparation, and experience; to be seen and understood that their skills, expertise, and experience are just as powerful as though they were to come from a man.

Moreover, some scholars have found that when females of color are hired in a superintendent position, many times it happens in least desirable districts where challenges are towering and most of the students come from poverty (Allred et al., 2017). The participants shared the significant challenges that they discovered when in the superintendent position. Three of the superintendents shared examples of the financial deficits that the district was dealing with when they first were hired which they had dealt with expertly. Superintendent Cavazos shared, “The district was in a bad financial place and there was an expectation from the school board for me to fix it quickly.”

Furthermore, the aspect of race played significant role particularly with one participant who spent most of her career in east Texas school districts. She shared reflections on the frequent discrimination that she faced related to being Latina. The other participants had spent all their careers in South Texas where over eighty-five percent of the population is Latino, nonetheless, it was when they traveled outside of the valley for educational conferences that some experienced discrimination. These findings corroborated with Olsen’s (2019) research which stated that, “women are not aware of the realities of gender and color discrimination in educational leadership. Female leaders are brought up to believe that anything is possible, but they do not fully understand the obstacles that they may encounter, though women of color are more likely to know and understand that they will face adversity” (p. 24).

Subtheme: Microaggressions. Each participant shared her experience with navigating various microaggressions while in the role of superintendent. Vences (2018) described microaggressions as a form of outright discrimination. It was the repeated subtle and overt put downs and actions that the participants experienced. Superintendent Chavez articulated microaggressions best when she stated, “oftentimes in education or society, Latinas are put in the same category. People think that we all have the same work ethic.” Each participant shared a variation of, *“It is the put downs that I’ve faced during these encounters that makes me stand taller and speak with great confidence. I may stay silent when the microaggressions happen, but it does not mean that someone else’s word is more powerful than mine and I have learned to address these confrontations in a professional manner.”* It was the personal characteristics displayed by the participants that corroborate with Robinson and Rubin (2016) research that stated that assertiveness and confidence are advantageous attributes for Latinas in educational leadership roles.

Subtheme: Limited Support. The subtheme that was illuminated in the interview transcripts addressed the concept of professional mentorship and network supports. The professional supports discussed were related to Latina’s form of mentorship and networks with other Latinas in similar roles. Mendez-Mores (2004) described a mentor as “someone who actively helps, supports, or teaches someone else how to do a job so that she will succeed (p. 561). The participants discussed reaching out to other leaders, not necessarily females or Latinas. They shared their insights about the lack of Latina superintendents in the state of Texas and how this presented challenges for them when in need of a mentor who they could share many of the same personal and professional lived experiences. The informal mentors that the participants engaged with were mostly considered friends whom they had met while attending

state conferences or during regional meetings. Also, the mentors were former administrators whom they had worked with. Superintendent Salazar shared, that she considered the first principal, who is now retired, as her mentor. It was leaders that they had met along their professional careers which they considered to be mentors and it was them who they networked when they faced challenges.

The participants experience with mentorships and networks corroborates with Mendez-Morse (2004) research which informed that Latina leaders discover ways to rally or form mentors and networks from differing contacts that meet their specific needs and priorities.

Subtheme: Effect of Culture. Anzaldúa (1987), affirmed that Latina women are believed to be self-centered when they do not concede to traditional role expectations. Latinas face a variety of cultural influences that shape their personal identity. When asked the question related to the impact of the Latino culture in their professional careers and aspirations to advance to the highest level of district leadership, the participants noted of the challenges that they all faced. Superintendent Nervarez shared that “our own culture holds us back because Latinas are so much about family and certainly in this community even more so. I often wonder what impact that culture has on women when choosing not to pursue the superintendency.” One of the participants shared that she was no longer married and that it certainly made it easy to be in the role. She explained that many times she wondered if she would be able to be in the role of the superintendent if she was still married. This corroborated with Avalos & Salgado (2016), explained that “Latina girls and young women have sustained culture constraints that limit what they do and what they can become” (p. 26). One participant best expressed that having kids and being married brought challenges to the job due to what is expected of them as mothers and wives. The participants discussed of having to endure the notion of their families accepting them

in the district leadership role, as well as being accepted in the district in which they were hired as the first Latina superintendent.

Theme II: Preparation to Lead

The second theme that came to view reflected the participants' steadfast self-promotion to succeed as Latina superintendents. The shared experiences amongst the participants highlighted the assets that they possessed as Latinas and as district leaders.

They prepared, put themselves out there so that the people in power and the larger community took notice of the expertise in the field of education and the abilities and skills they possessed as Latinas and as leaders. The finding paralleled with Olsen (2019), "Being great at one's job is not good enough—women need to understand the nature of educational institutions and call attention to their good work more publicly" (p 24). One of the superintendents put it soundly when she shared that Latinas must be their own biggest cheerleader, to be prepared and not let anyone catch them off guard. Latina leaders must do their homework and connect themselves with the right group and the right people. The people who are going to see their worth. A conclusion to be drawn from this is that Latina leaders have often resisted what is expected of them and broken through the challenges that they frequently face.

Theme III: Enactment of *Hermanidad*

The third theme to emerge was the participants' commitment to help change and support the career trajectory of other Latinas. The participants discovered that it was particularly important that Latinas assemble to help each other navigate through the struggles that many of them face. This paralleled with Olsen (2019) who stated that, "when women are more conscious about what they face in common, they can work together and help one another" (p 27). The participants reflected on the power of the mobilization of resources and support that they can be

used to promote other Latinas. A conclusion that can be drawn was that the participants were more than willing to support other Latinas in educational leadership particularly balancing the dynamics of career and motherhood. Superintendent Salazar commented, “Latinas leaders can help promote other females in career advancement, support their professional growth and celebrate the professional and personal successes. It is a form of *hermanidad*, sisterhood that was discovered amongst the participants. *Hermanidad* develops multilayered networks, which help other Latina leaders gain access to the superintendency. This supports the literature that states that the mentor-mentee relationships and networks formed amongst Latinas can be a platform to provide information and professional connections to aspiring superintendents (Ortiz, 2001).

Theme IV: Determination to Persevere

The fourth theme to emerge reflected the superintendents’ possessed skills and ability to navigate through obstacles and challenges that promote their success as a Latina superintendent. A great number of obstacles are faced by many Latinas when navigating through the leadership channels and when in school district leadership (Perez Huber & Solorzano, 2015). The participants shared of overcoming challenges of societal and cultural adversities, prejudices, marginalization, and dealt with limited support. They shared being hired in districts that faced great challenges. All the participants described multiple examples of how they strategized, used their innate skills, and took risks to lead and succeed in their districts. Nonetheless all the participants associated their success to external factors. This resonated with the belief that they didn’t do anything to deserve the position. One participant told that being hired was a form of a blessing and she was fortunate of being given the position. This paralleled with Salazar Montoya & Key (2020) who stated Latina leaders attribute their success mostly on others’ validation,

acceptance, and opinions, and often, their hard work and strong preparation is left out of the equation.

Subtheme: Self-efficacy. Bandura (1994) defined self-efficacy as “the belief in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations” (p.75). There was a strong correlation related to the confidence of the participants in performing tasks that were presented to them and their failure to recognize their innate assets of tenacity, resistance, persistence, and courage. The conclusion that can be drawn from this notion was that the innated wealth of skills, had been formed to pursue educational leadership when they tackled impeding experiences in the American school systems. It is navigating through the American education system, where Latino students have learned to lean on themselves and not the people in power, and overcome the obstacles and challenges presented daily. This form of hinderance from the participants was paralleled with Anzaldua (1987), described it as a method of awareness through the participants lived experiences and resilience that helped them confront and overcome the effects of oppression to strategically navigate in district leadership.

Contributions to the Literature

Research of female leaders found is minimal and only a handful include Latinas (Palacio, 2013; Loeb, 2004; Méndez-Morse, 2004). The small number of studies conducted about Latina leaders derives from student dissertations which inform of the emergent themes related to the barriers that Latinas face in their ascension and in the superintendent position in school districts.

The disappointingly low numbers of Latinas holding superintendent positions across the United States and Texas provided a motive to analyze gender and racial inequality manifesting in the superintendency. Understanding that Latinas are considerably underrepresented in the role of superintendent, it is urgent to gain knowledge of Latinas who are presently in superintendent

positions to open the way for others. Although Latinas are experienced, prepared, qualified, available, and spend more time in the classroom and in intermediate positions of leadership, the superintendent positions are given to white males with less educational experience (Kowalski et al., 2011). Based on the finding of this study, it is pivotal to document the lived experiences of Latinas leaders who have reached the position of superintendent so that school districts can be transformed, and Latino students social and economic prosperity can improve.

The Latina superintendents in this study recognized the racial and gender imbalance of the position, and the barriers that they faced as Latina educators. The barriers included the feelings of loneliness in their search of other Latina superintendents they could network, particularly when presented with great district challenges. Furthermore, the effects of the Latino culture impacted their decision to seek the superintendent position. The reason for this was because as Latinas, roles of power are not encouraged of them. The Latino culture expects women to prioritize family above anything else.

Furthermore, another finding from this study identified the dismal treatment from others and the challenges that they faced as leaders which derived from the stereotypes and biases that differ than that of a male leader, particularly white males. These findings corroborated with Grogan (2000), “women leaders are aware that they are women of color within a white man’s profession” (p.12).

Another finding in the study posited that despite the challenges and barriers that Latina superintendents faced, they were determined to navigate and resist the obstacles that were present and promote their success as a Latina superintendent. Furthermore, the participants clearly highlighted and excitedly expressed their commitment to support other Latina leaders in their ascension to the role. Superintendent Nervarez stated, “women need to continue to open

doors for each other. We need to create opportunities for others, that is something that we need to do.”

They recognized that in their position as superintendent, they had the power to promote other Latinas. It was this form of *hermanidad*, sisterhood, to protect other Latinas from the known challenges that they had experienced as leaders.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The finding of this study revealed that Latinas leaders experienced oppressive factors that add to the neglect they face when seeking career advancement. Nevertheless, the barriers they encountered motivated them to work hard, persistent, and resist the obstacles they confronted. One participant after the other shared their stories of perseverance and tenacity during challenging times. The method of combatting discriminations and oppressions was done with determination and grit. The participants shared their perceptions of the unfair hiring practices and equity practices that must be evaluated, as well as the future direction of educational reform to find solutions of the gender and racial imbalance in the Texas public school district superintendent position. All the participants worked to provide and mobilize resources which offered students a rigorous curriculum, and cared for their well-being, even when the students were not in school. Kowalski et al., (2011) informed, “strong district leadership impact the academic success of students, especially students of color” (p.44).

The findings of the study further concluded that formal and informal mentoring programs need to be established for Latinas leaders that could contribute the formation of bonds with other Latina leaders. The participants shared that while in the position of superintendent, they often faced feelings of loneliness. The participants said that their experience in the superintendent

position was found to be lonely and the lack of Latinas in the superintendent role exuberated the feeling of isolation.

Many times, the participants turned to family or friends for support. They shared their lack of involvement in state and national professional networks and understood that they had a responsibility to advocate and seek others' support. The participants must be encouraged to get involved in the professional organizations that are currently available at the regional, state, and national level, since mentoring and networking programs can support the transformation of Latina leaders through discourse and dialogue specifically regarding their empowerment as leaders. The forming of these relationships can connect Latina leaders to favorable career advancement, strengthen professional relationships, and bridge novice leaders with professional advantages and professional groups.

Traditional literature theory has omitted women's knowledge and narratives, and has resulted in sexist educational materials in leadership preparation programs (Shakeshaft et al., 2007). The study findings revealed a necessity for strong leadership preparation programs that can provide a healthy pool of female superintendent candidates for Texas school districts and implements research based practices that have proven to be effective for Latina candidates who face multitude challenges related to the impact of the Latino culture, the barriers they experience in leadership positions, and address the professional and personal needs of Latinas in the search of the superintendent position.

Summary

This study examined the lived experiences of Latina superintendents and the barriers they confronted, the impact of their culture and the skills and strategies that could be used to

overcome these obstacles. The participants have served in districts where the academic challenges are towering and labeled as high poverty districts.

The information gathered from the study may be used to inform university and regional superintendent preparation programs, local and state mentoring and networking programs, school boards, and local and state politicians the type of support that district leaders, particularly Latina superintendents benefit from. Furthermore, this study can also inform policy makers of the need to evaluate hiring practices.

The review of the literature provided a brief historical account of Latinas in the United States and detailed their perceived lived experiences as a uniquely marginalized population as they confront the barriers faced in their ascension and in the position of school district superintendent. The literature included a focus on the oppressive factors experienced by Latina leaders and the necessity of the development and establishment of strong mentorship and networking programs that focused on the needs of Latina leaders. Furthermore, the capital and expressions of skills and strategies demonstrated by Latina leaders were dissected as a perspective crucial to recognizing the exponential assets that add to the betterment of the social and academic achievement of Latin(a)o students and the positive relationship it brings the community. Magdaleno (2016), informed that “school and district leaders are often perceived by Latina and Latino students as positive role models who represent their future” (p. 12). The assets that Latina leaders bring to district leadership can transform educational systems and improve the academic success of students of color.

Utilizing the Texas Education Agency’s District Directory (TEA) listing for regions 1 and/or 2 in South Texas, a report was generated which profiled Latina district superintendents who served in a public non-charter school district with an enrolled student population of 75% or

more identified Latino/a students. Twelve identified potential participants were contacted and five of the participants accepted the invitation to participate in the study.

The data gathered for this study addressed two research questions that centered on the perceptions of Latina superintendents regarding their aspirations, motivations, challenges, and cultural community wealth and the skills needed to be successful in the superintendent role and the influence that collegial networks have in the representation and success as superintendents. Four themes emerged from this study. The results paralleled with the existing research that informed of the challenges and barriers that Latinas leaders face related to their gender and racial discrimination, the necessity of mentorship and network programs that can be formed to meet the personal and professional needs of Latinas, and the effects that the Latino culture, related to Latina aspirations, success in the position, and the strategies of determination, resilience, and tenacity used. Another theme related of their proactive approach and commitment to support other female Latina leaders in their ascension and while in the position of superintendent. The participants were eager and willing to remove the barriers that exist for Latina leaders; a form of *hermanidad*, sisterhood.

The outcomes of the study suggested the need to evaluate the unfair hiring practices and equity practices found in Texas superintendent positions and a need to research and implement solutions of the gender and racial imbalance found in the Texas public school districts superintendent positions. Furthermore, a need to influence policy to change hiring practices, form innovative preparation programs that can provide a strong pool of Latina superintendent candidates. The outcomes also illuminated the need to establish mentoring programs which are recognized as forms of supports for Latinas in district leadership who understand the personal and professional struggles many faces.

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APPENDIX 1
SAMPLE EMAIL SOLICITING PARTICIPANTS

Good evening _____,

My name is Nora Rivas-Garza and serve as Executive Officer for Secondary Schools at Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD. I am currently ABD in the Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership at Texas A & M University Corpus Christi. As I work through my area of study, I am searching for possible participants to be a part of my research study. I am seeking Latina superintendents in South Texas, regions 1 and/or 2. Your name was found in the Texas Education Agency District Directory as a possible participant. Please see the letter attached to understand more about your involvement. It will be strictly informational and confidential.

I humbly ask for your cooperation in the study. Please feel free to contact me as a response to this email or at (956) 354-2000, ext. 1196 or 1197. I look forward to hearing from you very soon. Have an amazing year and best of luck in all endeavors at your district!

Sincerely,
Nora Rivas-Garza

APPENDIX 2

RECRUITMENT LETTER

Fall 2021

Dear District Superintendent,

Texas A & M University Corpus Christi is conducting a study on Latina superintendents in South Texas which focuses on the perceptions of Latina superintendents pertaining to their aspirations to the role as well as their resilience as they navigate challenges and oppressive forces in their role of superintendent in public non-charter K-12 school districts through the educational Leadership Department under the supervision of Dr. Gerri Maxwell. As you may know, this research will be notable because there are limited stories of Latina superintendents' experiences.

Because you are Latina serving in the role of superintendent in a Texas public non-charter K-12 school district in South Texas regions 1 and/or 2, your opinions are important to this study. Thus, I would appreciate the opportunity to speak with you about this.

Participation in this study is voluntary and would involve two 60 – minute interviews in your district office, virtually, or at an alternate location that is convenient to you at two different times. This research involves minimal risks or risks that are no more than what you may experience in everyday life.

The main risk may include:

Your participation will involve collecting information about you. There is a slight risk of loss of confidentiality. Your confidentiality will be protected to the greatest extent possible. You do not have to give any information to the study that you do not want to give. Some questions may be embarrassing or uncomfortable to answer. Sample questions that you may be asked are: Tell me a little bit about yourself both personally and professionally as you are comfortable sharing? Who or what inspired you to become a superintendent?

You may decline answering questions you do not want to answer. If you choose to participate in this study, your interview will be audio recorded. Any audio recordings will be stored securely in a password-protected file and will be kept until it has been transcribed and de-identified. After transcription, the recordings will be permanently deleted.

All information you provide will be considered confidential and grouped with responses from other participants. You will not be identified by name in any report or publication resulting from this study. The data collected through this study will be kept for a period of three years.

You may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

This study has been reviewed and approved through the Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Institutional Research Board (IRB). If you have questions, you can contact them at (361) 825- 2497 or irb@tamucc.edu.

For all other questions, or if you would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please feel free to contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Gerri Maxwell at gerri.maxwell@tamucc.edu, or Nora Rivas-Garza, Student Investigator at (956) 354 -2000 ext. 1197 or nora.rivas@psjaisd.us

Thank you for your assistance with this project.

Nora Rivas-Garza, Student Investigator

APPENDIX 3

CONSENT FORM

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study is to reveal the perceived challenges and justice, in support of increasing the number of Latina superintendent in South Texas school districts and tell of their stories of aspiration and resiliency when in the role of superintendent in South Texas public non-charter K-12 school districts in regions 1 and/or 2. This study will bring to light the lived experiences of Latina superintendents that have been omitted in the research and their contributions excluded.

Why is this research being done?

The goal of this research study is to will tell of the challenges and inequities that Latina leaders face towards career advancement, particularly in the superintendent role and inform of their perceived methods for combating systemic oppression.

Who can be in this study?

We are asking you to be a part of this research study because you are a Latina superintendent serving in South Texas public non-charter K-12 school districts in regions 1 and/or 2.

To be eligible to be in this study, you must:

- Be over the age of 18
- Identify as Latina/Hispanic
- Identify as female
- Serve in TEA regions 1 and / or 2 in South Texas public non-charter K-12 school district as a superintendent.
- Employed in school districts where the enrolled student population is 75% or more Latino/Hispanic students.

Up to five Latina superintendents will be asked to be in the study.

What will I be asked to do?

Being in this study involves two 60-minute interviews at two different times with the participant and observations conducted during the interview and a review. The participant also will review the summary of the interview transcript to make sure that they and their ideas are being represented accurately.

If you agree to be in this study, you will be in this study for two one-hour interviews.

If you choose to be in this study, the following things will happen:

- Your participation will involve collecting information about you during the interview
- You will be asked to answer some questions by a brief interview
- You will be asked to review the summary of the interview transcript for accuracy

What are the risks involved in this study?

This research involves minimal risks or risks that are no more than what you may experience in everyday life. The main risk may include:

- Your participation will involve collecting information about you. There is a slight risk of loss of confidentiality. Your confidentiality will be protected to the greatest extent possible. You do not have to give any information to the study that you do not want to give.
- Some questions may be embarrassing or uncomfortable to answer. Sample questions that you may be asked are: Tell me a little bit about yourself both personally and professionally as you are comfortable sharing? Who or what inspired you to become a superintendent? You do not have to answer questions you do not want to.
- If you choose to participate in this study, your interview will be audio recorded. Any audio recordings will be stored securely in a password-protected file. Any recordings will be kept until it has been transcribed and de-identified. After transcription, the recordings will be permanently deleted.

If you have any of these problems or changes in the way you feel about being in the study, you should tell the study team as soon as possible.

What about protecting my information?

This study is confidential.

When information collected about you includes identifiers like name, email, phone number, the study can involve confidential information.

Your information will be protected by:

- Restricting access to only authorized personnel, storing data in password-protected, secured location, etc. Some examples are provided below.
- The interview once transcribed will be anonymized (a process by which identifying information is removed) by using pseudonyms (a fictitious name). The interview recording will be deleted after transcription.
- Using coded information: Your direct personal identifiers will be removed from the research record and replaced by a code. The key that links the code to your personal identifiers are stored separately from the research record under restricted access.
- All research records will be kept securely.
- A password protected research record will be created and kept in a personal hard drive owned by the researcher
- Research records will be seen only by authorized research team members.
- We will share your information only when we must, will only share the information that is needed, and will ask anyone who receives it from us to protect your privacy.
- No identifiers linking you to this study will be included in any report that might be published or presentation.

Once data analysis is complete, your identifiers will be removed from the research data, after such removal, the de-identified information could be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator for future research studies without additional informed consent from the subject or the legally authorized representative.

What are the alternatives to being in the study?

Instead of being in this study, you may choose not to be in the research study.

What are the possible benefits of this study?

There are **no** direct benefits to you from being in this research study. By being in this study, some possible benefits may include: contribute to the limited research of Latina leaders in Texas public non-charter K-12 school district in South Texas regions 1 and/or 2, expand on the existing limited research found of the perceived challenges of Latina superintendents in the hope to change the outcome of other's careers and achieve a unique understanding of misrepresentations, perceived oppressions and account of Latina's capital when in leadership positions.

Do I have to participate?

No. **Being in a research study is voluntary.** If you choose not to participate, there will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

What if I change my mind?

You may quit at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may decide not to participate or quit at any time without your current or future relations with Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi or any cooperating institution being affected. If you withdraw from the study early for any reason, the information that already has been collected will be kept in the research study and included in the data analysis. No further information will be collected for the study.

Is there anything else I should consider?

Taking part in this study may lead to added costs to you, such as time taken away from your busy schedule. There are no plans for the study to pay for these costs.

Who can I contact with questions about the research?

Dr. Gerri Maxwell is in charge of this research study. You may contact Dr. Maxwell at Gerri.Maxwell@tamucc.edu with questions at any time during the study.

You may also call Nora Rivas-Garza, Student Investigator, via phone at (956) 784-4666 and/or via email at nrivasgarza@islander.tamucc.edu with any questions you may have.

Who can I contact about my rights as a research participant?

You may also call Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Institutional Review Board (IRB) with questions or complaints about this study at irb@tamucc.edu or 361-825-2497. The IRB is a committee of faculty members, statisticians, researchers, community advocates, and others that ensures that a research study is ethical and that the rights of study participants are protected.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

To participate in this research study, you will be asked that you have read and understood the informed consent form and be asked if you agree to participate in this study to the researcher. By acknowledging you have read the informed consent form and agreeing to participate in an interview, you are agreeing to participate in the study. By participating in this study, you are also certifying that you are 18 years of age or older. If you do not agree to participate in the research study, state that you do not wish to participate in this study or that you do not wish to be interviewed.

APPENDIX 4

INTERNATIONAL REVIEW BOARD PROTOCOL

Protocol Title: *Hermanidad: Perspectives of the Journey of Latina Superintendents in School Districts*

Principle Investigator: Dr. Gerri Maxwell

Study Objectives: This study focuses on the perceived challenges and cultural community wealth impacting South Texas Latina superintendent's career advancement and success through the Department of Education and Human Development under the supervision of Dr. Gerri Maxwell.

Background: Acknowledging the impact of Latina's cultural community capital in leadership is integral in recognizing the methods that educational leaders can implement when preparing the rising of Latinas leaders to be empowered to lead Texas school districts. The knowledge of Latinas has historically been deemed 'outsider' knowledge and rendered inferior, disempowered, and marginalized (Yosso, 2005). The traditional assumption that Latina district leaders have cultural and aspirational capital deficiencies is seen in their absence in the superintendent role. Furthermore, Latinas often are faced with barriers due to cultural influences that shape their identity, barriers and stereotypes and gender biases due to their being females and Latina. Research has not only focused on the male as a superintendent; it fails to illuminate Latina's cultural community capital and the assets they bring to leadership positions. Cultural community capital intersectionality of relationship, forming strong bonds with its community and the skills that they possess when confronted with challenges. These skills and assets that are often unnoticed and unrecognized by the dominant culture (Yosso, 2005). Latinas are known to rely on their own vision and not follow external formulas or expectations placed by others (Kegan, 1994). Latinas dominate their own strength from their cultural background. The depth of this study will focus on the perceived challenges that Latina leaders face and the cultural community capital that impact the Latina superintendent success.

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria:

To be eligible to be in this study, you must:

- Be over the age of 18
- Identify as Latina/Hispanic
- Identify as female
- Serve in TEA regions 1 and / or 2 in South Texas public non-charter K-12 school district as a superintendent.
- Employed in school districts where the enrolled student population is 75% or more Latino/Hispanic students.

Study Recruitment:

Study Locations

Two one-hour in-person or virtual interviews, by the choice of the participant, will be requested from each participant at times convenient to them. The two one-hour interviews will be scheduled at two different times. Location of in-person interviews will be determined by the participant for the utmost confidentiality. Participants will be asked to meet for one interview lasting for an hour.

Subject Identification

- Utilizing Texas Education Agency's District Directory (TEA) listing for regions 1 & 2 in South Texas and TEA's district's Snapshot: District Profile Report for the populace will be reviewed to determine if the superintendent leads in a public non-charter school district in which the enrolled student population is 75% or more Latino/a students.
- From these indicators, the potential participants will be sent the initial recruitment email listed in the projected participants for this study.
- Email correspondence will be monitored, and a second email will be generated after one week following the initial email to all superintendents who have not responded to the initial email with consent or non-consent for participation.
- Two weeks after the first email is sent, a phone call will be made to the final responders. Any individuals that contact was unable to be made will be counted as non-participants.
- Five participants will be selected from this sampling pool, purposeful sampling will occur to include Latina superintendents serving in TEA regions 1 or 2 in South Texas. All procedures outlined will be adhered to for this purposeful sampling method.

Subject Approach

- Of those potential participants, the researcher will email a recruitment letter
- None of the potential participants are supervised by the researcher.
- Several dates to pick from will be provided to each participant for scheduling purposes.
- Once the interview is scheduled, a calendar invite will be emailed to each participant.
- The researcher will emphasize that participation is voluntary, and the participant can withdraw at any time.

Procedures Involved:

- Internet will be used to conduct virtual interviews (with the participants that prefer virtual interviews) and will be recorded through Microsoft Teams platform as well as through Microsoft Teams application which transcribes audio to text in Microsoft Word. For virtual interviews, as a backup, a digital audio-recording device will be used to record the interviews.
- Participants will be asked 16 questions related to their perceived, lived experiences with challenges they faced towards career advancements, particularly

in the superintendent role and inform of their perceived methods for combating systemic oppression.

- For participants choosing to meet in-person for the interviews, a digital audio-recording device will be used to record the interviews.
- Researcher's journal will be maintained in which memos will be noted.
- Participants will be given an opportunity to do member checks to ensure that they are in agreement of the information.
- Data will be analyzed by:
Researcher exercises Epoch or Bracketing
Highlighting significant statements from participants
Interviews will be analyzed, coded, and cross checked with journals
Individual responses will be analyzed and pre-code segments of key words from the interviews on Microsoft Excel spreadsheet
Create themes and a final composite description of the phenomenon.

The study will involve collecting information from the participants. Being in this study involves answering questions in an interview with the researcher.

- The participants do not have to give any information to the study that they do not want to give. By reading the informed consent form, a verbal consent will be asked, authorizing the collection and use of the information outlined in this form.
- Contact information will be obtained, including telephone numbers, so that participants may be called to get additional information that may be missing.

Data management:

Data sources

- The researcher as the instrument is necessary in qualitative inquiry. The researcher will conduct the participant interviews (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).
- Observations and field notes will be collected
- Data will be kept in researcher's journal, personal computer, audio recording device and pseudonyms will be used for the principal's participants.

Data collection

- Each interview will be transcribed word for word utilizing both hand transcription and transcription from a speech to text application. The researcher will create an Excel spreadsheet and seek common themes that all participants allude to during their respective interviews.
- The researcher will seek to discern common themes based on each interview individually as well as collectively across interviews.

Data security

This study is confidential. When information collected about the participants includes identifiers like

name, date of birth, addresses, email, phone number, the study can involve confidential information.

The information of the participants will be protected by:

- Restricting access to only authorized personnel, storing data in password-protected, secured location, etc. Some examples are provided below.
- The interview once transcribed will be anonymized (a process by which identifying information is removed) by using pseudonyms (a fictitious name). The interview recording will be deleted after transcription.
- Using de-identified information: All direct personal identifiers have been permanently removed from the data. No code or key exists to link the research information to the participant's identifiable information.
- Using coded information: Participant's direct personal identifiers will be removed from the research record and replaced by a code. The key that links the code to the participant's personal identifiers are stored separately from the research record under restricted access.
- All research records will be kept securely.
- A password protected research record will be created and kept in a personal hard drive owned by the researcher.
- Research records will be seen only by authorized research team members.
- We will share the participant's information only when we must, will only share the information that is needed, and will ask anyone who receives it from us to protect the privacy of the participants.
- No identifiers linking the participant's information to this study will be included in any report that might be published or presentation.

Once data analysis is complete, the identifiers will be removed from the research data, after such removal, the de-identified information could be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator for future research studies without additional informed consent from the subject or the legally authorized representative.

APPENDIX 5

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself both personally and professionally as you are comfortable sharing?
2. Who or what inspired you to become a superintendent?
3. What skills and assets do Latina superintendents need to possess in order to experience success in the superintendent role?
4. Do you believe it is important to have a Latina as superintendent in a predominately Latina/o student populations in a school district? Why or why not?
5. What collegial networks have influenced your success as a Latina superintendent?
6. Why do you believe you were selected to the position of superintendent?
7. What are some of your personal abilities and skills that have contributed to your success?
8. Describe challenges that you have faced as a Latina superintendent?
9. Do you have a mentor? If so, is this mentor a female superintendent? In not? Why not?
10. Who encourages you to persevere during challenging times when in the position of superintendent?
11. Have your family dynamics helped or hindered you in the positions of superintendent?
12. To what degree do you consider gender to be a barrier when it comes to Latinas obtaining the superintendent position?
13. To what degree do you consider race to be a barrier when it comes to Latina's obtaining the superintendent position?
14. What strategies and supports are available for Latina superintendents?
15. Have you experienced microaggressions as a Latina superintendent or at other times in the workplace? How has this affected you? Why or why not?
16. Would you like to make or add any other comments?

APPENDIX 6

EMAIL FOR MEMBER CHECKING

Good evening _____,

First, thank you again for your time in allowing me to interview you for my study. Your insights and perspectives about Latina superintendents have helped me to further understand this phenomenon and provided opportunities for me to add to the limited research.

As mentioned during our interview, I have completely transcribed the entire interview. However, for the sake of time and efficiency, I have sectioned off some quotes that possibly will be used in my paper. I have attached it in an excel document here and would appreciate you taking time to review it thoroughly for accuracy and credibility. Some phrases may still be fragmented, and proper names of schools or colleagues may still be included for you to be clear of your statements. However, all of that will be corrected and removed if the quotes get used.

Since I am moving quickly through the data analysis, I appreciate your quick review and response if anything must be clarified. I request that you respond to me by Monday, November 22nd, otherwise I will assume the quotes are suitable for use as is. Again, this study could not be possible without your assistance and for this I am forever grateful!

Thank you for sharing your story with me and for your leadership. Best wishes for a great year!

VITA

Nora Rivas-Garza

EDUCATION

Doctoral Candidate (ABD) in Educational Leadership. Texas A & M University Corpus Christi, Texas, August 2019 - May 2022. *Hermanidad: Perspectives of the Journey of Latina Superintendents in School Districts*. Chair: Dr. Gerri Maxwell

Master's in Educational Leadership. University of Texas Pan American, August 1994 - May 1996, Educational Leadership, Edinburg, Texas

Bachelor of Science. University of Texas Pan American, August 1984 – December 1990, Pan American University, Edinburg, Texas

ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

Executive Officer of Secondary School, Pharr-San Juan- Alamo Independent School District, July 2016 – Present. As the Executive Officer of Secondary School, I serve as the direct supervisor of secondary campus principals and secondary curriculum for over 15,000 students. Additionally, responsibilities include to serve as an integral part of a team of District Program Directors, Curriculum Specialists, and other educational leaders that supervise and support school in the Pharr-San Juan-Alamo community.

Administrator for Student Success, Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Independent School District, July 2014 – June 2016. Supervised the District Program Directors in the implementation of educational programs for student groups in the district. Served over 32,000 students working collaboratively with program directors, coordinators, and staff.

July 2014, Designated, by the Texas Education Agency the Early College Designation of a Wall to Wall Early College High School for Pharr-San Juan-Alamo High School. The designation came after the completion of a rigorous state mandated application and in-depth interview with the Texas Education Agency.

High School Principal, Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Independent School District, July 2009 – August 2014. Provided strategic direction to the school system in the areas of curriculum, instruction and assessment. Collaborated with campus teachers and district staff in the development of a standardized curricula, assessments, and assessments methods. Monitored the academic progress of students and individual student groups and encouraged the involvement of parents. Administered the spending of the campus budget, evaluated staff and oversaw the campus facility.

Award, 2009 & 2010, T.E.A. Recognized School Status. Texas Education Agency's recognition was awarded for San Juan Middle School as a Recognized Campus based on student academic achievement and academic progress.

Middle School Principal, Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Independent School District, August 2007 – June 2010. Provided strategic direction to the school system in the areas of curriculum, instruction and assessment. Collaborated with campus teachers and district

staff in the development of a standardized curricula, assessments, and assessments methods. Monitored the academic progress of students and student groups and encouraged the involvement of parents. Administered the spending of the campus budget, evaluated staff and oversaw the campus facility.

High School Assistant Principal, Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Independent School District, August 2006 – June 2007. Accountable for several essential leadership areas at Pharr-San Juan-Alamo High School. Charged to lead the Reading Language Arts Department curricula and staff, student discipline, conducted the evaluation of teachers in the Reading Language Arts Department, provided professional development in the area of literacy, and oversaw student instructional programs focused on literacy.

High School and Middle School Dean of Instruction, Edinburg Consolidated Independent School District, July 2002 – June 2006. Developed and trained teachers on proven instructional practices. Conducted all training for the implementation of the state assessment and collaborated with campus staff on the administration of the state assessment. Worked collaboratively with campus teachers and staff on lesson planning and delivery of instruction. Monitored student academic progress and provided lesson and curricula interventions.

Middle School Lead Teacher, Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Independent School District, August 2000 – May 2002. Supported and coached campus teachers on proven instructional practices. Collaboratively worked with teachers on lesson planning and lesson delivery and provided researched based professional development for all campus teachers and staff.

Middle School Teacher, Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Independent School District, December 1990 – May 2000. Lyndon Baines Johnson, Middle School, taught English Language Arts for grades 6-8 students. Planned lesson to meet the needs of diverse learners and collaborated with campus Language Arts Teachers on proven instructional practices.

WORKS IN PROGRESS

Rivas-Garza, N. (2022). *Hermanidad: Perspectives of the Journey of Latina Superintendents in School Districts*. [Dissertation].

AWARDS

July 2016, Selected by The Holdsworth Center to participate in top of class Leadership Development Program which focused on improving the quality of public school for Texas Students.

July 2013, Selected by Raise Your Hands Texas, as one of seventy-four Texas principals to participate in the Harvard Leadership Program that focused on the implementation of a Theory of Action.

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIP

Texas Association of School Administrators (TASA)

Texas Association of Secondary School Principals (TASSP)

Region One Instruction Leadership Network