LAS VOCES NUEVAS

EMERGING SCHOLARSHIP ON LATINAS IN LEADERSHIP

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Las voces nuevas:

Emerging scholarship on Latinas in leadership

2023 CEDER yearbook

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Editors' welcome

Gerri Maxwell
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It has been our pleasure as a team of CEDER editors and reviewers at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, a designated Hispanic-Serving Institution, to first make this call and now humbly present the body of work produced by *Las voces nuevas*. The scholarship that moved us initially was a body of dissertations produced by our own Latina doctoral students, all of whom live, work, and lead in public schools in the Rio Grande Valley, serving majority Latina/o students living in poverty. Being incredibly honored to call them our colleagues, as well as inspired by and in awe of the enormity of their work and impact on students in the border region, we not only felt their struggles and heard their pain as they lead in their current roles but were implored to illuminate their work. Their studies are based on numerous *pláticas* (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013) with and *testimonios* (Beverly, 2005) of Latina leaders from South Texas, as well as several studies specifically from the geographic border region of Texas and Mexico.

Yet, we were impassioned to further broaden the call, inviting *voces nuevas* from across the country. We are incredibly pleased to include this cacophony of new scholars' voices. As noted by Martinez and Mendez-Morse (2021), the field is overdue in welcoming and embracing the insight, passions, and perspectives of Latina leaders, which must be unearthed from unpublished dissertations and laid bare on the landscape of this critical transformative period in education.

We appreciate the support of the Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi College of Education and Human Development Dean David Scott, who has remained committed to this effort. We have been further honored that *doctoras* Melissa Martinez and Syvia Mendez-Morse have graciously contributed foreword commentary in support of this volume. Finally, following the contributions of the authors, we have included a call to action in honor of longtime Latina employee and community member Dr. Rose Zuniga, who was awarded her doctorate in education posthumously.

Nuestra invitación a convivir con Latina leaders: A foreword

Melissa A. Martinez
Sylvia Méndez-Morse

Que orgullo, no? To be able to see a collection of scholarly works in one volume purposefully focused on examining the experiences of Latina leaders across the PK-20 education spectrum? It feels like an opportunity to be in community, a *convivir*, *plática*r, *aprender* y *apoyar*. It feels like home.

As Latinas in the field of educational leadership, we have been purposeful in our careers helping build a home for the scholarship on and with Latina leaders; contributing to the knowledge base in this area (Martinez et al., 2022; Martinez et al., 2016; Martinez et al., 2019; Martinez & Rivera-McCutchen, 2021; Méndez-Morse, 2000, 2003, 2004; Méndez-Morse et al., 2015). We know firsthand just how few of us there are in school and district leadership positions; we are few in numbers as professors and administrators in higher education as well. However, within individual educational organizations and communities, some of us bear the weight of being the only Latina leader among administrators. It is a weight that can feel overwhelming and isolating.

Yet from our own experiences in leading as *maestras*, in mentoring and supporting Latina scholar practitioners as *profesoras*, and in capturing the narratives of Latinas through our own research, we know we, Latinas—as leaders—are *chingonas*, *poderosas* with unlimited potential even when we are the only one or among few in numbers. We make a difference every day in our communities as teachers, school counselors, instructional coaches, assistant principals, professors, and student and academic affairs administrators. We harness our cultural knowledge and gifts to empower and connect with others, treating others' children like our own. Because it is through *comunidad* and the uplifting of each other where justice and joy abound.

In our edited book, *Latinas Leading Schools* (2021), we developed a framework, a metaphorical *mantel* representing overarching, interconnected themes that were woven through the chapters which included first-hand accounts from Latina administrators from the field and master's thesis and dissertation research conducted by Latinas and Latinos to garner a deeper understanding of Latina educational leaders. The themes reflect key aspects of Latinas' leadership in PK-12 schools, though we argue that they are similarly found among Latina leaders in higher education contexts. These key characteristics revolve around the *amor y fuerza*/*love and strength* that Latinas exhibit as leaders when working with their school and educational communities. They develop *confianza* with students, colleagues, parents, and families, and draw on their strength in difficult times. Though not all Latina leaders speak Spanish, many do, and their bilingualism becomes a conduit to relationship building and their advocacy not only for emergent bilingual students but for all students who experience marginalization in schools. Their *idiomas*/*languages* reflect their cultural identity and roots. Amidst challenges they experience directly in their roles, whether with microaggressions and systemic inequities, or with injustices that their university and school communities face, Latina leaders exhibit *resistance and resilience*. They stand in their power and stay the course combating prejudices held toward them and their constituents. Successfully navigating to and through leadership, however, cannot be done alone. Latinas recognize this and value *mentoring that matters*, both as they seek mentorship, serve as mentors themselves, and garner support and guidance from their *familia*. Latinas work to give their all to their professions, as well as their families and communities, which can be a difficult *balancing* act as they traverse distinct and often combating cultural norms of the white, Eurocentric, American education system and their collectivistic, Latino culture. Nonetheless, they lean into their Latinas' ways of knowing (Anzaldúa, 1987; Delgado Bernal et al., 2012) for continued strength; their *testimonios* and *relationships* built through *comadrismo* and *plática* illuminating *consejos* and *dichos* passed down through generations that reflect the courage and ingenuity of our peoples.

We concluded *Latinas Leading Schools* with an invitation to scholars and practitioners to build upon this work: "to move research and practice on and with Latinas in leadership forward" (p. 191). This special issue of the *CEDER Yearbook, Las Voces Nuevas: Emerging Scholarship on Latinas in Leadership*, responds to this charge. Contributing authors are primarily scholar practitioners whose research represents a broad spectrum of Latina leaders, including teachers, principals, and superintendents in PK-12 settings, as well as master's and doctoral students, student affairs leaders, and faculty in higher education. Consequently, when we first saw the call for this special issue, we were ecstatic and immediately contacted each other about the news. We were then humbled at the invitation to contribute to this important volume through this foreword.

We are also cognizant about the critical timing of this volume, as the Latino diaspora nationwide continues to grow. In the state of Texas, where most studies in this volume are situated, Latinos are now officially the racial/ethnic majority (Ura, 2023). Educational leaders across schooling systems today are also facing backlash against diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives and accused of indoctrinating students through Critical Race Theory (CRT); a theory generally taught only in higher education settings that has been misunderstood and politized (Farag, 2023). CRT recognizes race as a social construction that has real life implications for racially minoritized communities. Developed by legal scholars in the United States, CRT posits "race as a lens—an analytical tool—through which to examine and challenge power structures embedded and systemic in U.S. law, institutions, and public policy" that result in the inequitable treatment of communities of color (Mack, 2021, as cited in Kaplan & Owings, 2021). CRT has been a useful tool in education research and been built upon to develop other critical and asset-based theories that recognize the inherent gifts of students, educators, and leaders of color, including community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) and applied critical leadership (Santamaría & Jean-Marie, 2014; Santamaría & Santamaría, 2011).

The anti-CRT and anti-DEI political climate has fueled legislation in states across the country, resulting in a chilling effect among educators

and educational leaders who work on eradicating the impact of racist ideologies present in educational policies and practices. Educational leaders are also still dealing with the aftermath and trauma induced by the pandemic, increased mental health needs among students, with PK-12 educators leaving in droves due to all these factors, combined with continued high-stakes testing pressures, an increased concern for safety in schools, and the deprofessionalization of teaching.

What this volume provides is: new perspectives of mentorship among, for, and by Latina leaders at different levels and roles in P-20 education. The whole concept of mentoring was studied in various configurations. One chapter takes a unique approach and looks more intentionally at mentoring from a 'generational' perspective by exploring the experiences of undergraduate students' being mentored by graduate students who were mentored by doctoral students who themselves were mentored by professors. Representation came up often in several chapters; mentees really drew strength from the representation of other Latina/os as leaders and were cognizant of their own role and responsibility in being part of this. Also, some chapters studied the differences between formal and informal mentoring programs at various organizational levels. The chapters collectively add to the emerging knowledge base of the development of Latina educational leaders, wherever they are present. Moreover, the focus on mentoring expands our understanding of this frequently mentioned aspect of leadership growth that remains not only underused but misconstrued, yet frequently offered as a process without authentic implementation to truly foster leadership qualities. Other less prominent themes in the volume include the role of teacher leadership during the pandemic, how best to remove barriers and support Latinas in their ascension into leadership in PK-20, the development of a counseling identity among Latinas, and the role of culture in Latinas' leadership.

As with all publications, there are shortcomings. A limitation of this yearbook is that it primarily focused on Latinas in Texas. It is regionally confined but still of great value. This volume's strong focus on Latina leaders primarily in a particular geographical area does not diminish its importance or impact. It remains for other scholars to grab

the 'baton' and take it further. We need to learn more about this unique group of women leaders who are frequently ignored, neglected, yet occasionally called in to 'clean up' a situation. How do the experiences of these Latinas compare to those in other regions of the country, and even in international contexts? How do Latina leaders foster equitable learning environments? How do Latina leaders deal with racist teachers, staff members, parents, and policies? How do Latina leaders help their community recuperate from traumatic experiences such as school shootings? These are but a few of the questions that future scholars and practitioners must examine.

We close this foreword with a transition for what's to come. We've borrowed from Glesne's (1997) poetic transcription process, identifying direct quotes that Latina participants shared in the articles in this volume to tell a bit of their collective story through poetry. It is these rich, descriptive *testimonios* and *experiencias* in Latina leadership that we draw from and that await you.

Las Voces Nuestras

I'm a proud Latina from Mexican descent parents.
　　My foundation is my culture.
[Sometimes I'm] the only brown face,
　　[Therefore] I tell my story to kids. I tell my story to teachers.
You get to tell your story, that's your legacy.

I've started to allow my culture to come through,
　　and that's helped find myself as a counselor and who I want to be.
[Yet] sometimes I feel like I have to be twice as good at everything I do,
　　because I am Latina.

I think I've always been told, I can't.
　　I mean as early as kindergarten…
and so, to still have that feeling that I did when I was in kindergarten…
　　you don't belong here.
[But] I think if you stand firm on what you believe in,
　　and you make your presence known,

others will come to respect you.
    [After all] my service is to make children's lives better.

[Know that] you're not going to be able to do it all by yourself,
    you've got to have your support system, your network of people.
[Which is in part, why] I never gave up…I went from dropout to doctor.
    [I showed how] women just get things done.

[The fact is] I've worked with groups of powerful women,
    [Then] why are we so underrepresented?
If we don't do something to make them feel valued,
    we're going to keep losing them.

[Still, I continue], I've gone into the cafeteria and cleaned up the
cafeteria,
    doing sweeping and so forth at lunchtime.
It was a big burden to carry when you're the only one.
    [So, I've learned to] not let people see that you're stressed or fearful.

I'm happy. You know where I'm at now.
    You know where I can, trust this lady [as a mentor]…
And she's going to guide me in the right direction.
    Really humanizing the experience of what it is to be a Latina in
    academia.

[My advice is]: Don't close your own door.
    If you think you're the right person then apply,
but don't close that door for yourself.
    [And] forgive yourself for mistakes you have made.

Know that you didn't do it with ill intentions,
    knowing and understanding that your heart is open to loving
    everybody
unconditionally regardless of whether you've failed them.
    You have to love yourself unconditionally too.

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Aprender

Liderazgo en la industria de educación: *Conflict and commitment unpacking Latina leaders within the P–20 educational continuum*

Karena Alane Escalante
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Alonzo M. Flowers

Abstract

Leadership roles in education have a long history of underrepresentation of women. Research continually emphasizes the need for diverse leadership, yet statistics reveal less than 3% of professors identify as Latina (Negrón-Gonzales & Barrera, 2023) despite Latino students making up more than 20% of college students and 27% of primary and secondary students (Biden-Harris Administration, 2021). While Latina leaders in education are especially relevant in United States education, there remain significant barriers to their progression in attaining formal leadership roles. This study demonstrates the critical importance of increasing the presence of Latinas in educational leadership by reviewing recent salient research and providing recommendations for educational institutions and allies/champions to remove barriers while creating and holding space for the advancement and retention of Latinas. Recommendations emerge and are provided for stakeholders to intentionally support the increase of Latina leaders. Opportunities for policymakers, administrators, hiring managers, and researchers are provided.

Introduction

*The word "Latina" refers to all people who identify as Latina.

Women in educational leadership

Research has highlighted gender inequity in leadership across sectors, specifically noting the bottleneck for women transitioning to formal and higher levels of leadership due to social and cultural norms in patriarchal and white-dominated spaces such as education (Clark & Johnson, 2017). Many explanations have been offered through research of the significant lack of women in educational leadership roles, including: "socialization practices," "societal opportunities," lack of role models, and demands of family life (Klenke, 2017, p. 403). While research acknowledges that women are making incremental gains, significant systemic and social factors are still obstructing women, especially those of minoritized populations, from reaching and persisting in leadership (Choudry, 2019; Clark & Johnson, 2017; Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016; Porritt & Featherstone, 2019; Shields, 2004; Smith & Nkomo, 2021).

This is an extremely pressing issue when considering the impact of educational leaders. P–20 education leaders directly influence the educational system through creation and enforcement of formal and informal policy, daily leadership praxis, controlling funding decisions, and as representation of actionable change (Fowler, 2009; Lewis-Grant et al., 2022; U.S Department of Education, 2016). According to Marzano et al. (2004), school leadership impacts student achievement through classroom instruction, organizational conditions, community support, and setting the teaching and learning conditions. In fact, researchers have demonstrated that effective leaders have a multiplier impact on improvement initiatives (Manna, 2015; Lipke & Manaseri, 2019).

Not only are women notably underrepresented in P–20 educational leadership, but most women leaders in the field also belong to the white racially dominant group (Dittmar et al., 2018). This is an important component when understanding the consequences of not having women of color in leadership roles. Leadership decisions have dramatic consequences, intended and unintended, on students, families, educators, and communities of minoritized groups that are impacted by the economic,

social, racial, and gender identities of educational leaders (Bensimon & Marshall, 2003; Shaw, 2004).

Significant research has been published centering women in educational leadership at the school level (Clark & Johnson, 2017), district school board level (Blackmore & Kenway, 2017), superintendent level (Glowacki-Dudka et al., 2016; Krumm & Krumm, 2013), and higher education level (Carlson Reis, 2015; Clark & Johnson, 2017; Flowers & Banda, 2017; Struloeff & Flowers, 2021), but there is a need for understanding how Latina women progress through existing systems of oppression and navigate white-dominated spaces. Smith & Nkomo (2021) highlight that while progress has been made over the course of the last 30 years as women acquire leadership roles, there is still a disproportionate level of power between women in dominant groups versus those in nondominant or historically minoritized groups. In recent years, a growing number of scholars have focused their attention on the importance of representation in leadership of women from minoritized groups in educational leadership and policy (Porritt & Featherstone, 2019; Klenke, 2017; Oates, 2019). While this progress is promising and impactful, there remains a need to not only continue increased traction for these women and communities, but also, to push for shifts in the demographics of P–20 educational leaders (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). The next step forward in this progression of finding voice, cutting pathways, changing systems, and ultimately moving toward representation of marginalized women in educational leadership is to delve into the spaces where Latinas are holding educational leadership roles in the P–20 system and learn from their experiences.

Latinas in educational leadership

Many higher education institutions often require individuals of multicultural backgrounds to assimilate to the dominant culture (Strayhorn, 2018). One of the first theories exploring the impact of a person's social integration on their academic performance and retention was Spady (1970), who linked attrition and withdrawal behavior in students to lack of social integration. Later, Tinto (1993) expanded Spady's theory, focusing on the attention and attrition of nontraditional students to

understand why some students leave institutions before degree comple-
tion, noting that a lack of social integration or negative social experi-
ences are strong predictors of student departure. This phenomenon has
also been observed in the retention of faculty of color and educational
leaders (Harris, 2017). Given previous research showing the disadvan-
tage individuals of minoritized backgrounds face in light of assimilation
culture, Museus and Maramba (2010) elaborated on Tinto's theory, ac-
knowledging the dissociation people of color face as they denounce their
own community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) to persist in an academic
climate centered around dominant individualist norms. Consequently,
Latinas within predominantly white institutions often face additional
pressures to dissociate from their cultural upbringings to adapt to an
institution that lacks representation.

Latinas have been found to face cultural incongruence when work-
ing within the education sector. Further, Latinas in educational leader-
ship remain underrepresented nationally. This phenomenon might be
impacted by cultural factors or values that are not highly presented
in P–20 leadership roles. In contrast to western values of individual
autonomy, Latinas come from cultures in which they are expected to
seek authority from the leaders and elders in their family in making
decisions such as what school to attend, where to seek employment, or
how to support their families (Abalos, 2007). In one study, researchers
found that nearly 60% of Latinos faced social integration issues due to a
contrast between their collectivist culture and the individualistic culture
embedded in western schools (Burgos-Cinfuegos et al., 2015). Despite
the rising representation of women in leadership, the tension between
cultural components in education persist and impact the representation
of Latinas in leadership.

The intersection of Latina and female identities has a profound
influence on the educational leadership role, illustrating the concept of
intersectionality and prompting consideration of whether the amalgama-
tion of these two identities engenders a separate and distinctive identity.
Through a lens of intersectionality (Collins, 2019; Crenshaw & Thomas,
2004), Latina educational leaders hold multiple socially and systemically
minoritized identities, creating unique experiences and barriers. Even

though Latina educational leaders have shared social identity categories, their individual experiences are diverse and complex, and they should not be viewed as a monolith (Rodriguez et al., 2016). Hancock (2007) highlights how with an intersectional approach, multiple marginalized identities, such as race and gender, work in multiplying the effect on the individual's burdens and barriers, which exponentially increases the need to dismantle unequitable social practices and systemic policies.

Leadership roles as women's empowerment

Recent developments for gender equality have shown the importance of women's empowerment in advancing multicultural reform in education. A large part of attaining women's economic and political empowerment is tied to advancing diverse leaders to inform educational practice. According to Parpart et al. (2003), "women's empowerment is reflected in their persistent demands for these rights despite strong opposition" (p. 29). The voices of women of color have gotten louder and gained traction due to both population shifts and the rising representation of women in leadership.

The existing body of research on women in leadership suggests that increasing the representation of Latinas in educational leadership is critical in confronting and addressing racism and sexism embedded within traditional gender norms and roles. Jain (2005) examines the various ways in which women have impacted the work and educational agenda of the United Nations since the organization's inception in 1945. In this text, she highlights the impact of Mexico laying a foundation for women leaders to build alliances as the host country of one of four global women's conferences. The United Nations hosted its first World Conference on Women in 1975, bringing together 133 governments, most of which were led by female delegates. These efforts gave credibility to the women's empowerment agenda in the global political arena and led to the regular dissemination of information on gender equality. The international and national convening and conversation on women of color in leadership on a global scale represent broader trends of research gaining traction and bringing "new information and knowledge along with a new mindset" (Jain, 2005, p. 80).

U.S. President Joe Biden also stated that global leadership across various fields is tied to the success of Latino students, who make up more than 27% of pre-K–12 students, as well as 20% of college students (Biden-Harris Administration, 2021). At this time, Biden passed an executive order to re-establish the White House Initiative on Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, and Economic Opportunity for Hispanics to highlight the Biden-Harris Administration's commitment to advancing equity for local Latino communities. The Administration acknowledges "barriers to equity in education can compound and intersect for Hispanic and Latino students who are women and girls, LGBTQ+ individuals, English language learners, and individuals with disabilities" (Biden-Harris Administration, 2021, para. 3).

Despite the progress made in the United States and abroad in addressing systemic barriers, significant challenges in equitable representation remain. New research continues to emphasize persistent inequalities across gender, race, and class, among other intersecting identities. Many countries and institutions have adopted a gender equity agenda; however, significant gaps in the research persist, as putting policy into action is often flawed, and funding to advance such efforts is lacking.

Purpose

The purpose of this manuscript is to demonstrate the critical importance of increasing the presence of Latinas in educational leadership by reviewing recent salient research and providing recommendations for educational institutions and allies/champions to remove barriers while creating and holding space for the advancement and retention of Latinas in the field. This research seeks to address the following questions:

1. What are the main aims of these studies, and what methodologies are used to achieve them?
2. What are the collective recommendations for educational institutions and allies/champions to remove barriers while creating and holding space for the advancement and retention of Latinas in the field?

This argumentative literature review contributes to the existing research by examining the recent contributions by Latina educational leaders to engage in discussions about the nuances of being a school leader as a woman of color and persisting as a Latina leader.

Methods and design

As educational researchers, we engaged in an argumentative literature review. This qualitative meta-analysis allowed for diverse methodologies examining the experiences and representation of Latinas in education leadership (Alrasheedi, 2019). While meta-analysis can entail a variety of methods, we employ an argumentative literature review design, which is a form of qualitative meta-analysis that "examines literature selectively in order to support or refute an argument, deeply imbedded assumption, or philosophical problem already established in the literature" with the understanding that "argumentative approaches to analyzing the literature can be a legitimate form of discourse" (Larabee, 2019). According to Levitt et al. (2018), this process "involves the interpretive aggregation of thematic findings rather than reanalysis of primary data" (Levitt et al., 2018, p. 40). In the present study, the researchers selected a body of literature that critically examines the representation of Latina leaders in education and their documented experiences in the last five years.

Inclusion criteria

To be transparent and reproducible, the research registries and key terms used to conduct the search are provided. The following criteria elements were developed for inclusion and exclusion to inform the data analysis stage (Cottrell & Duggleby, 2016):

- The article had to be published in a peer-reviewed journal.
- The article had to be published between 2018–2023.
- The article had to be an academic publication.
- The article had to be available in English.
- The article had to include the following keywords:
  - Latina/x
  - Leaders/leadership

- Education/educational
- Woman/en
- The article had to be written by a self-identified Latina.

Recognizing that representation and voice within academic literature is key for ensuring accurate restorying and perspective, it was determined that at least one of the authors must be a self-identified Latina. Identity was determined either in the article by the author or in a public-facing page such as LinkedIn, Twitter, university, or organizational affiliation. A total of 3 databases were searched: ERIC (Institute of Education Sciences), Google Scholar, and JSTOR. Seventeen articles were selected, which meet the inclusion criteria outlined in Table l.

Table 1
Articles meeting inclusion criteria

Source	Count
ERIC	5
Google Scholar	9
JSTOR	3
Total	17

Data analysis

Researchers conducted the search using the aforementioned inclusion criteria and collapsed the findings into one single database in Microsoft Excel to identify trends across the methodologies, aims, and findings of each study. The following variables guided the initial coding of the data: source (ERIC, Google Scholar, or JSTOR), authors, year of publication, study design (qualitative or quantitative), methodology, context (K–12 or higher education), key findings, opportunities, and challenges. The data are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Selected research studies related to Latina leaders in education

Source	Authors and date	Participants	Purpose and PK–20 context	Methodology and study design	Key findings, opportunities, and challenges to Latinas in education
ERIC (1)	Rodriguez, S. (2022)	6 Latina Superintendents	K–12; to highlight the ethical choice making and provide insight on Latina leadership and Mexican-American identity	Qualitative; narrative inquiry	Effective leadership for Latinas includes a desire to change historically oppressive systems while maintaining personal and professional standards
ERIC (2)	Rodela et al. (2021)	5 Oregon- and Washington-based administrators	K–12; to highlight the new Latinx diaspora and offer counter stories to examine the experiences of Latinx educational leaders	Qualitative; narrative inquiry	Reconsider how to implement critically race-conscious practices and trainings to address sexism and systemic racism

(continued)

Table 2, continued

Source	Authors and date	Partici-pants	Purpose and PK–20 context	Meth-odology and study design	Key findings, opportuni-ties, and challenges to Latinas in education
ERIC (3)	Martinez et al., (2020)	4 Latina princi-pals in Nevada, Colo-rado, Texas, New York	K–12; to document, validate, and extend the educa-tional focus on Latina leaders	Qualita-tive; narrative inquiry	Reveal ten-sion between Latinas' op-pressive expe-riences in professional leadership roles; need for more Latina role models
ERIC (4)	Rodri-guez, S. (2019)	6 Mexi-can-Ameri-can Superin-tendents in Texas	K–12; to ex-amine con-ceptions of school leadership roles held by Mexican women who defy submissive Latina ste-reotypes	Qualita-tive; phenom-enological	Continue examina-tions of how leadership is conceived in societal norms based on culture and gender

(continued)

Table 2, continued

Source	Authors and date	Partici-pants	Purpose and PK–20 context	Meth-odology and study design	Key findings, opportuni-ties, and challenges to Latinas in education
ERIC (5)	Macias & Stephens (2019)	28 arti-cles and books on race and gender in the educa-tion work-place	PK–20; in-tersectional analysis to examine the experi-ences of minorities and women in the pro-fessional workplace	Qualita-tive; literature review	Latina school leaders possess unique leadership qualities reflecting empathy, community, and sensitiv-ity; training on intersec-tionality is crucial
Google Scholar (6)	Lac, et al. (2022)	3 Latina leaders in a principal prep program	K–12; study of principal prep pro-gram with communi-ty-based and equity-oriented lens leadership	Qualita-tive; case study	Broaden image of leadership and center lived expe-riences of current stu-dents in prep programs

Table 2, continued

Source	Authors and date	Participants	Purpose and PK–20 context	Methodology and study design	Key findings, opportunities, and challenges to Latinas in education
Google Scholar (7)	Martinez, et al. (2022)	4 Latina Assistant Principals	K–12; empirical study of Latina educational leaders enacting applied critical leadership	Qualitative; testimonios	Leadership journeys for Latinas include social supports and public discrimination; cultural responses as administrators are highlighted as agents of change
Google Scholar (8)	Olivares-Urueta (2022)	N/A	HE; examining expectations within community college administration	Qualitative; practice brief	Institutional efforts for the development, support, and mentorship of Latina leaders cannot be optional

Table 2, continued

Source	Authors and date	Partici- pants	Purpose and PK−20 context	Meth- odology and study design	Key findings, opportuni- ties, and challenges to Latinas in education
Google Scholar (9)	Pagan et al. (2022)	3 Latina early- career profes- sors	HE; center current junior Latina faculty to highlight their concerns and increase the retention of faculty of color	Qualita- tive; narrative inquiry	A call for improved development and academic mentorship for Latinas in junior faculty roles
Google Scholar (10)	Sangha- Rico & Hernán- dez (2022)	5 senior- level Latinas in California	HE; to ex- amine the relationship between race and gender in CA public higher education context	Qualita- tive; narrative inquiry	Latina women carry addi- tional burdens leading as transfor- mational disruptors based on race and gender identity

Table 2, continued

Source	Authors and date	Partici-pants	Purpose and PK–20 context	Meth-odology and study design	Key findings, opportuni-ties, and challenges to Latinas in education
Google Scholar (11)	Cas-tillo et al. (2021)	3 Latina superin-tendents in rural Texas	K–12; highlight the stories of Latina superin-tendents in south Texas	Qualita-tive; case study	Latina super-intendents share familial perspectives with rural communi-ties and may be more receptive to Latina leaders than urban educational contexts
Google Scholar (12)	Salazar & Kew (2020)	3 Latina superin-tendents in New Mexico	K–12; ex-plore glass ceilings impacting Latina se-nior leaders	Qualita-tive, por-traiture	Dedication to learning, professional networks, authenticity, build strong relationships with local leaders and peers

(continued)

Table 2, continued

Source	Authors and date	Partici-pants	Purpose and PK–20 context	Meth-odology and study design	Key findings, opportuni-ties, and challenges to Latinas in education
Google Scholar (13)	Martinez (2019)	3 Latina admin-istrators with PhDs	HE; examine Latina educational trajecto-ries that catapulted them into the academy	Qualita-tive; narrative inquiry	Intentionally address how racism inter-sects with the educational trajectory of Latinas through policy and program-matic shifts
Google Scholar (14)	Rodri-guez et al. (2018)	6 Latina leaders in Cali-fornia	K–12; ex-plore Latina leaders' educational experiences surrounding promotion and men-torship	Qualita-tive; narrative inquiry	Continue to investigate how gender and ethnicity impact decision making and problem solving to advance educational equity

Table 2, continued

Source	Authors and date	Partici-pants	Purpose and PK–20 context	Meth-odology and study design	Key findings, opportuni-ties, and challenges to Latinas in education
JSTOR (15)	Vega (2022)	8 high educa-tion and student affairs (HESA) profes-sionals	HE; explore racialized ideologies of educa-tion profes-sionals	Qualita-tive; col-laborative autobiog-raphy	Acknowl-edging and addressing racial conflict by exploring racial identity in education professionals
JSTOR (16)	Dache et al. (2019)	3 Afro-Latina women	HE; juxtapose literature in higher education to experi-ences of AfroLatinx educators	Qualita-tive; con-ceptual; personal testimo-nies	Use personal testimonies to create a conceptual framework that resists metanar-ratives of Latinos in education
JSTOR (17)	Wallace et al. (2018)	3 women in higher educa-tion	HE; examine the role of race in faculty friendships	Qualita-tive; col-laborative autoeth-nography	Exploring friendship as therapeutic counterspace to examine race and identity

This study employed a thematic analysis technique adopted from Saldaña (2021) and Braun and Clark (2006). Thematic analysis differs from most content analysis, as it allows emergent themes from the data through careful reflection and strategic choices (Saldaña, 2021). Using thematic analysis in education, the researchers actively searched for certain themes or patterns across the entire data set, which consisted of 17 articles, rather than within a data item, such as an individual interview or article (Braun & Clark, 2006). This approach guided the argumentative literature review of how Latinas in education leadership positions warrant further institutional support and development considering multicultural education reform and gender equity. Three researchers first engaged in open coding, then axial coding where codes were grouped into emergent categories, followed by thematic analysis. At each stage of the coding, researchers negotiated agreements to strengthen the intercoder reliability (Saldaña, 2021).

Researchers' positionality

The research team for this manuscript consists of three higher education professionals of different ethnic backgrounds: a Latina graduate student who identifies as a daughter of immigrants from El Salvador and Mexico who is a first-generation candidate, a white senior director who identifies as a queer, cisgendered woman racialized as white with an invisible disability, and a tenured associate professor who identifies as a Black male critical researcher. The authors are also spread across two regions between a large state school in Texas and a PWI in an urban city of Pennsylvania. We individually and collectively recognize our various identities and privileges that enabled us to engage in this review and that directed our methodological and epistemological choices. We also acknowledge the active role researchers play in the methodological design of any study, including the identification of themes and presentation to readers (Braun & Clark, 2006). We are passionate about understanding power relations that are socially and historically constituted, and we believe knowledge is shaped by our various social and diverse environmental contexts and are committed to making connections beyond the academic abyss through the commitment of social transformation.

We have enjoyed developing relationships with each of the co-authors – a dear classmate and former professor who uplifted one another in a networking opportunity to participate in this book chapter. The tenured professor formally scaffolded the entry process into a career in academia for the first-generation Latina graduate student and newly promoted senior director, modeling responsible leadership as praxis. This manuscript centers cultural wealth that has helped us inquire about the longstanding impacts of sociopolitical systems on communities.

Findings

RQ1: What are the main aims of these studies, and what methodologies are used to achieve them?

Regarding the first research question, the main aims of the identified studies were to explore and understand the experiences of Latina leaders in education, as well as to address the gaps in existing literature. Of the 17 salient articles meeting the inclusion criteria, all articles were qualitative. Nine out of 17 employed *testimonio,* or narrative-based methodology. Additional methodologies included case study, autoethnography, phenomenology, intersectional analysis of literature, and practice brief.

The studies covered a broad spectrum of the PK–20 educational continuum. Seven studies focused specifically on higher education aimed to examine the experiences of Latina leaders within postsecondary institutions. Nine studies focused on the PK–12 educational system, exploring the challenges and experiences of Latina leaders in primary and secondary education settings. One study encompassed the entire PK–20 spectrum, offering a comprehensive perspective on the experiences of Latina leaders across various educational stages. Regardless of the specific methodology or educational level under investigation, all 17 studies consistently documented the common experiences faced by Latina leaders. These experiences included cultural incongruence, racism, and a lack of preparation to navigate predominantly white and male-dominated spaces. By shedding light on these challenges, the studies aimed to contribute to a deeper understanding of the experiences of Latinas in educational contexts and diversifies the existing literature in the field.

RQ2: What are the collective recommendations for educational institutions and allies/champions to remove barriers while creating and holding space for the advancement and retention of Latinas in the field?

In response to the second research question, the collective recommendations have been identified and organized for various stakeholders who can serve as active allies and champions in creating an inclusive and supportive environment for the advancement and retention of Latinas in the field of education. These recommendations aim to remove barriers and ensure that educational institutions and their allies are actively engaged in creating and holding space for the success of Latina educational leaders. Expanding opportunities for the advancement of Latinas in education will require multiple approaches from diverse stakeholders. This article offers a set of both policy and praxis strategies that can assist in increasing and sustaining the retention of Latina leaders.

Opportunities for policymakers

Policymakers are encouraged to delve into how qualitative data is interpreted and applied to their policy agenda, specifically considering how existing qualitative research captures the nuanced experiences of Latina leaders. Table 2 provides a comprehensive overview of the significant opportunities available to policymakers by disaggregating data and making it accessible to the public. Recognizing the importance of not solely relying on quantitative statistics, policymakers must embrace the utilization of qualitative data to inform their policy-making practices, as it plays a critical role in advancing the recruitment and retention of Latina leaders in the field of education. Further efforts to explore the access to leadership and mentorship opportunities with the financial and structural support of policymakers are needed for accountability, particularly with a racial equity lens (Martinez, 2019). Policymakers are urged to support policies that advocate for race-conscious leadership preparation programs that align with the objectives of administrators, senior leadership, and hiring managers. This strategy could include examining current diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts across the education sector, with a focus on the experiences of Latinas and other women of color to increase

representation and address the racial and gender divide seen in leadership trends.

Opportunities for administrators/hiring managers

In addition to implementing a range of policy solutions that span the spectrum of Latina leaders across all levels of education, this meta-analysis reveals opportunities for administrators and hiring managers to establish formal mentorship opportunities for women of color. Administrators should also engage in equity-based training to reduce gender and race-based discrimination in hiring and daily practices. To address historically racist and patriarchal systems, administrators should also examine current policies and practices within institutions to "dismantle their color-evasive lenses and contribute to organizational change" for an effective inclusion of Latinas and diverse leadership representation (Vega, 2022, p. 73). Recent literature also suggests creating and holding spaces for challenging and uncomfortable conversations centering on identity and race (Wallace et al., 2018). These efforts would support awareness among administrators and hiring managers, leading to an increase in opportunities and agency for Latina leaders within the PK–20 educational continuum.

Opportunities for researchers

To adopt measures of integration, institutions must take active steps to affirm the cultural identities of leaders of color (Harris, 2017). Some opportunities for researchers include more mentorship on how to translate dissertations into academic scholarship (Rodriguez et al., 2018; Olivares-Urueta, 2022). The findings also revealed opportunities to engage in mixed methods and quantitative research designs to amplify the voices and work of Latina leaders (Vega, 2022). Employing indigenous methodologies in traditional and non-traditional academic publications are also ways to democratize research on Latinas in education leadership (Dache et al., 2019). Researchers can help mold the education sector into a field that is more equitable and just. Although expanding research and opportunities for Latinas in educational leadership contexts is not a blanket solution to extreme race and gender gaps that persist in society at large,

it is one practice that scholars can employ to combat race and gender inequities. Increasing the visibility of research that has advocated for diversified leadership in educational institutions can help build representation, support, and equity for historically excluded communities. The ideas and suggestions expressed in this paper are tactical steps that seek to respond directly to the urgency of building strong educational leaders for a sustainable system.

Limitations

This study is not without limitations. For example, argumentative reviews "introduce problems of bias when they are used to make summary claims" (Larabee, 2019). While this approach offers an overview of existing literature, complexities and diversity among methodologies may raise issues related to combining empirical and theoretical reports. The authors reflect on their power and privilege, and disclose their positionality and motivation for the study so as not to mislead readers. The combination of incorporating an array of methodologies can also lead to bias and/or imbalance of representation. This study draws on previous publications that categorize Latinos as a singular identity; however, the term represents a variety of national origins, languages, and cultural practices. Since this is not often distinguished in data, future studies should consider assessing the needs of educational leaders by understanding a diverse range of experiences for increased representation and advocacy.

Significance/research implications

While existing research supports the cultural affirmation of student identities, research examining the cultural significance of Latina leaders in education is sparse. This research assists in the creation and implementation of equitable educational policy for diverse representation. In addition, research has shown that school leadership affects achievement through multiple modalities, including classroom pedagogy, organizational climate, and community support systems (Marzano et al., 2004). It is important to note that while there were numerous dissertations outside the scope of this study examining Latinas in education leadership, not as many peer-reviewed studies exist in the current literature.

Further, research demonstrates that strong leaders in education have a multiplier effect that can aid in advancing equitable initiatives (Manna, 2015; Lipke & Manaseri, 2019), and this study helps advance multicultural reform movements in education leadership through supporting the advancement and retention of Latinas in the field.

Recommendations for allyship for Latina leaders

To cultivate an environment that supports the success and growth of Latina leaders in educational institutions, allies and champions should consider the following recommendations. It is crucial to acknowledge and address the cultural incongruence and tension that Latinas often face throughout their educational journeys. Additionally, modern conceptions of educational leadership should encompass and incorporate the cultural values of Latinas, such as family, motherhood, and collectivism. By broadening the traditional archetype of an educational leader, we can create space for Latina leaders to thrive. Lastly, true allies should actively engage in an uplifting model that involves modeling leadership and career skills to empower Latina leaders. It is crucial to emphasize that these recommendations are not comprehensive, and it is imperative to continuously engage in dialogue, actively listen to the experiences of Latina leaders, and collaborate with them to develop strategies that effectively address their unique needs and challenges in the field of education.

1. Promote cultural awareness and sensitivity: Allies and champions can facilitate workshops, training sessions, or cultural competency programs that raise awareness about the diverse cultural backgrounds of Latinas and the unique challenges they face in education. This can help create an inclusive and supportive environment.
2. Foster mentorship and sponsorship programs: Establish mentorship and sponsorship initiatives that pair Latina leaders with experienced professionals who can provide guidance, support, and opportunities for professional growth. These programs should aim to address specific challenges faced by Latina leaders and help them navigate the educational landscape effectively.

3. Encourage inclusive leadership practices: Educational institutions should strive to adopt inclusive leadership practices that value and embrace diverse perspectives, including those of Latina leaders. This can be achieved by actively seeking their input, involving them in decision-making processes, and ensuring their voices are heard and respected.

4. Provide professional development opportunities: Offer targeted professional development programs and resources specifically tailored to the needs of Latina leaders. These initiatives can focus on leadership skills, networking, advocacy, and navigating institutional structures. By investing in their professional growth, institutions can empower Latina leaders to thrive.

5. Address systemic biases and barriers: Recognize and address systemic biases, racism, and sexism that may hinder the progress of Latina leaders. Review and revise policies, practices, and procedures to promote equity and inclusivity. This may involve implementing recruitment and hiring practices that actively seek out diverse candidates and creating transparent promotion processes.

6. Celebrate and showcase Latina leadership: Highlight the achievements and contributions of Latina leaders within educational institutions. Provide platforms for them to share their experiences, insights, and success stories. This can inspire other Latinas and foster a culture of recognition and appreciation for their leadership.

Conclusion

The role of Latina leaders within the PK–20 educational continuum is intricate and diverse, marked by both conflict and dedication. On one hand, Latina leaders confront notable hurdles and barriers within the educational system, such as racism, sexism, and bias. They may experience opposition to their leadership and find themselves compelled to navigate intricate power dynamics and institutional frameworks that lack provisions for their advancement. Despite these challenges, Latina leaders are committed to advancing the cause of education and improving outcomes for Latinx students. They are driven by a deep sense of responsibility to their communities and a desire to create a more equitable and

just educational system. Through their leadership, they seek to empower Latinx students and ensure that they have access to the resources and opportunities they need to succeed. Latina leaders within the PK–20 educational continuum are also committed to advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion within the educational system. They recognize that the current system is not designed to meet the needs of all students, particularly those from historically marginalized communities, and they are committed to creating a more inclusive and culturally responsive environment. Through their advocacy, they seek to challenge traditional models of education and promote a more equitable and just approach that reflects the experiences and perspectives of all students. Finally, Latina leaders in education have made an indelible mark on the cultural landscape of the United States. Through their leadership, advocacy, and dedication to education, they have inspired and empowered a new generation of Latinx students, educators, and scholars to challenge the inequitable systems in education that still exist.

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Apoyar

2

Platicando con nuestras hermanas:
Mentoring experiences of Latina senior-level student affairs administrators

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to describe and understand the mentoring experiences of five senior-level Latina student affairs administrators in Texas. Using an ethnographic collective case approach, this study employed feminism and LatCrit as its theoretical framework. The primary sources of data included pláticas *(talks), artifacts, and reflections. Inductive analysis and initial coding frameworks were used to analyze data. Arts-based techniques were used to represent themes of* siendo intencional *(being intentional),* conexiones fuertes *(strong connections),* ofreciendo esperanza *(offering hope), and* ganando confianza *(gaining confidence) in the retelling of the participants' mentoring experiences. The findings indicated the importance of advocating and nurturing informal mentoring models, which include a more collective approach in bringing people of similar cultures and values together to develop/strengthen connections with one another.*

*Hispanic is a widely-used term in policy to identify the pan-ethnic communities of Spanish speakers and Latin American descendants. For the purpose of this article, the authors use the term Latinas to describe the participants in the study.

Introduction

Despite the increased enrollment of female Hispanic students in college (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022), representation disparities in higher education leadership roles persist (American Council on Education, 2021). In 2020, close to 21% of college students were female Hispanics, which doubled since 2010 (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2021a). Yet in student and academic affairs and other education services they remain underrepresented (7%) (NCES, 2021b), with even fewer in senior-level administrative positions, particularly in student affairs (Sánchez et al., 2021). Examining who is represented, or not, in these positions raises important practical questions surrounding how institutes of higher education (IHE) support the advancement of Latinas to senior level administrative roles.

It may be that the described hierarchical and bureaucratic characteristics, with limited initiatives "to educate, train, and develop their own leaders" Fincher (1991, p. 12) prevail. There are also the dominant models, practices, and prevailing notions of acceptable gendered and cultural roles relative to leadership practices that may contribute to few Latinas in these senior administrative positions (Núñez et al., 2015; Yakaboski & Donahoo, 2011). For instance, institutional patriarchal culture can serve as a primary environmental barrier that affects a woman's career trajectory in higher education (Eddy et al., 2017). Other factors, such as the "concrete ceiling" (Beckwith et al., 2016, p. 118), isolating work environments, and lack of support contribute to negatively influencing the career trajectories of women (Yakaboski & Donahoo, 2011). Although literature exists to explain race and gender issues within the organizational structures of IHE that may inhibit the advancement of Latinas to leadership positions, little is known about their experiences and circumstances that may have influenced their career path into senior leadership roles (Sánchez et al., 2021).

Research has highlighted the importance of mentoring, both formal and informal (McNair et al., 2013; Vaccaro, 2011), yet, as indicated by Blackhurst (2000), without representation, women mentoring women is limited and in turn creates a vicious cycle. For women who are in leadership positions and who sought to help others aspire to the same,

they can share how they navigated work-family balance and career barriers (Fochtman, 2011). Mentorship and role models (and the absence of them) play an important role in developing and supporting educational leaders (McNair et al., 2013). However, little has been studied on how Latinas have experienced mentoring, both as a mentee and mentor, as they advanced to their leadership positions in student affairs.

The purpose of this study was to describe and understand the mentoring experiences of senior-level Latina student affairs administrators in Texas. The following questions guided the study: 1. How do Latinas describe their experiences as mentees? 2. How do Latinas describe the ways in which they have mentored aspiring Latina professionals?

Literature review

The student affairs division in higher education has become increasingly precise to provide co-curricular opportunities that will enhance the academic and personal education of individuals attending college or university (Perkins & Herring, 2021). Student affairs staff play a huge role in providing a positive climate for the campus community (Komives & Woodard, 2003). They play an even larger role in helping to connect and support students. When students of color feel connected, supported, and valued through role models they can identify with culturally, they are more likely to persist (Strayhorn, 2019). With the shift of student demographics, there is now an intercultural community on campus that expects student affairs professionals to understand cultural change and respond appropriately to their needs.

However, as college enrollment has become increasingly diverse in social identities such as race, gender, sexuality, and college generation status (Mayhew et al., 2016; NCES, 2021a), there remains a lack of diversity among staff, administrators, and faculty (Turrentine & Conley, 2001; Whitford, 2020). Although Hispanics and women now represent one of the fastest growing demographic shifts in post-secondary enrollment (NCES, 2021a), Sánchez et al., 2021(and others) noted the lack of Latinas in senior level positions within student affairs divisions in higher education institutions.

Relationships, community, and social networks are important contributors to the persistence and advancement of Latino/a/x student affairs professionals (Oseguera, 2018; Sánchez et al., 2021; Savala, 2014). A natural relationship that is developed in social networks, or at work, based on common interests or attraction to one another has been described as informal mentoring (Bynum, 2015). Bynum explained that informal mentoring can involve peers, family members, or collaboration with others. Formal mentoring practices, by contrast, usually occur over a period in some type of structured environment, such as the workplace, and involve a matching process. Regardless of which type of mentoring, Benishek et al. (2004) noted that individuals desire mentors who are like them. However, they explain that it is difficult to find mentors within their professions with whom they identify regarding gender, race, and ethnicity. They further explained perceived and real issues associated with being mentored by someone who is not of the same race or ethnicity, such as being viewed as a token or not being afforded the same professional development opportunities as others.

It is recognized that power, position, privilege, and advocacy are inherent issues involved in Latinas securing senior-level administrative positions, and as such, LatCrit was used as the theoretical frame for this study. The means by which LatCrit ensures that the "voices of all 'out' groups are heard and interconnected" (Revilla, 2001 p. 2) were crucial to this study. The Latino/a/x culture incorporates a long, rich tradition of storytelling; as such, storytelling, counter storytelling, and naming one's own reality (Delgado & Stefancic, 1997) is used in this study to challenge hierarchical notions of mentoring, and as Núñez et al. (2015) noted, to broaden "opportunities for those from marginalized groups to support one another" (p. 89). In turn, there exists an opportunity for a sense of belonging and to create a more inclusive environment.

Methods

The research design of the study lent itself to an ethnographic collective case study. This approach was appropriate due to the cultural sharing of the cases (Merriam, 2002), mentoring as defined as a sociocultural process (Taylor et al., 1995), and the intensive, holistic description and

analysis of the mentoring experiences of five collective cases defined by context and setting (Stake, 1995). Five Latinas in senior-level administrative positions in student affairs at Texas universities and colleges participated in the study: La Mera Mera, Angela, Isabella, Julia, and Santa. Their shared experiences included having been mentored and having mentored a Latina who aspires to achieve professional success.

Over the course of 10 months, three rounds of *pláticas* were used to explore the meaning of each participant's stories of career and mentoring. *Pláticas*, or conversations, are a part of a long, rich tradition of storytelling and counter storytelling to name one's reality in the Latino/a culture (Delgado & Stefancic, 1997). A general inductive analysis of data from *pláticas*, journals, documents, and artifacts were employed. Initial coding frameworks (Saldaña, 2009) included mentors, culture, mentees, descriptors. The findings were interpreted to remain as close as possible to the participants' experiences and meaning and culture (Van Nes et al., 2010). As such, there are times when Spanish is used to frame the participants' stories because their experiences were shared using Spanish and its cultural context.

Findings

Three themes are presented using artistic and visual representation accompanying the written word. Following Sandelowski's (1991) work, the re-telling of the participants' mentoring experiences was selected to "include a temporal ordering of events and an effort to make something out of these events to render, or to signify, the experiences of persons-in-flux in a personally or culturally coherent, plausible manner" (p. 162). Art-based approaches using poetry, drawings and visuals were used to re-present findings of the data and to allow the findings to be more accessible for reader engagement (Boydell et al., 2012).

Siendo intencional *(Being intentional):*
For the participants, formal mentoring models were difficult to find, much less experience, partly because these models were nonexistent or contrived within their settings/environments. Mentoring experienced by the participants was informal in nature and happened when there was a

need, when their mentor saw an opportunity to teach them about a certain topic, or to address certain issues within their personal or work life. If they had experienced a formal mentoring process, it was not natural. Julia shared that she experienced formal structured mentoring processes over the years and saw how they "fizzled out" due to the lack of natural connections with one another.

For the participants, mentoring was about being natural and organic, occurring instinctively. La Mera Mera stated that she saw mentoring happening naturally, "It's people observing how I do things, and some of it is really encouraging people to take risks and challenging them to do things that they for some reason don't think they are ready to do yet." She indicated that mentoring relationships that are more natural are the ones that matter the most.

The participants' experiences of receiving mentoring from others was about the informality of it all. The word 'mentoring' was not part of their vocabulary. They described how people looked out for them and helped them along while in school or at work with no matching process occurring. The mentoring that took place was natural. It happened instinctively in all different sorts of settings, like their homes, schools, universities, the military, and in work environments such as the office, while at lunch, or passing in the hallway. It was usually done during regular conversations with one another, or sometimes it occurred behind closed doors during meetings with their supervisors. La Mera Mera described mentoring as being intentional and natural.

Mentoring became personal, insightful, and authentic. For Julia, she learned how she could make a difference to empower herself, organize, represent people, and honor her culture. Furthermore, she learned about the intersection of privilege and protest and her role in those situations.

Santa developed her own way to mentor. She explained, "It's about sharing a moment; sharing the experience together; it's talking through things together." She had pláticas with her mentees giving advice on how to work through situations and modeled her responses.

The participants were quick to share advice from their mentors. They leaned into the advice to assist in navigating and understanding complex organizational dynamics. Angela reflected on how the encour-

aging words and guidance she received thrust her to where she is today. She remembered a time when she guided a mentee to listen. "(I would say) 'Lisa, listen. Don't talk anymore.' I'd sound like my father. We'd be in meetings, and she'd blurt something out, and I'd say, 'Wait, wait, wait.' It was weird, but at the same time, I wanted her to get in a position to where people would respect her when she spoke, and I think that was critical."

Oye *(Listen)*
Be prepared for anything
Be able to survey a place, group, event
Be able to assess, plan, mobilize
Ya no hables, Oye, (Don't talk, Listen)

Be gentle and kind
Be smart and proud
Help Others
Ya no hables, Oye (Don't talk, Listen)

Protect those you Love
Hace Caso (pay attention)
Hace algo (do something)
Oye (Listen)

Conexiones fuertes (Strong connections)

Their mentors also experienced marginalization, oppression, or being othered. Isabella described one of her mentors as being a Jewish male faculty member. They had this common connection of having been raised in a culture that was oppressed. Isabella was raised as a Mexican American woman in an environment rampant with discrimination. The mentoring relationship grew over the years because of the connections they each had with one another.

La Mera Mera recalled that as an undergraduate student at a private university, there were not many professionals on campus who looked like her. In fact, she shared that there was only one Latina professional

on campus, and she sought her out. La Mera Mera recalled frequently visiting with the Latina, the "only brown face," during her freshman year, mostly to say hi and to keep a connection. Still, her "first true mentor" was an African American male, and another was a Hispanic male provost who recruited her to his university. While La Mera Mera did not seek out these men, they went out of their way to help mentor her early in her professional career, preparing her for the next position that she would aspire to as she climbed the student affairs administrative ladder.

Julia's early mentors were Chicano/Mexican American male faculty members. These men were passionate about the current state of Chicano rights and taught at the university Julia attended as a graduate student. Her faculty mentors inspired her to become involved and to become an advocate for others. She attributed these experiences to helping her further her career and becoming a vice president.

Isabella's mentoring relationships primarily came from Latinas within professional organizations such as the Texas Association of Chicanos in Higher Education due to a lack of representation in her higher education institution, whereas Santa's mentoring relationships were established as a graduate student. She described her mentors as being Latino male faculty members. It was from these first mentors that she was able to build trust and confidence in her abilities. She also had an African American female mentor when she lived out of state. Because of their similar backgrounds growing up they had a strong connection. However, not all of her mentors were from within the higher education setting. She recalled a Latino mentor who was a vice president for a major company that oversaw all of Latin America. She credited him with "knowing when it's time for me to move, knowing when it's time for me to stand up, and what to stay away from." However, she also acknowledged how collectively her mentors encouraged her and provided countless opportunities for her to advance in her career.

One of Angela's mentors was a Latina principal who provided her with advice that she still uses: "Remember that in your classroom, everything that happens is either teacher caused, or teacher permitted. You have an option." It is a phrase that resonated with her and held her accountable for her actions and how she worked to develop others.

Ofreciendo esperanza *(Offering hope);* **Ganando confianza** *(Gaining confidence)*

While the participants shared and retold their stories of receiving mentorship, they included their aim to carry on the legacy of learning from their mentors. They took the experiences from their mentors and passed them on to their mentees to move the culture forward and advocate for themselves and others. They set themselves up as role models to disrupt the prevalent negative stereotypes of the Latino/a/x culture.

They carried forward the informal mentoring they experienced. As such, they identified themselves as an advisor, coach, and teacher as they sought to help other Latinas who aspired to senior-level administrative positions in student affairs. Regardless of the role, they each sought different ways to convey knowledge and experience to their mentees. For example, Julia recognized the importance of mentoring other Latinas. She shared actions she took to be successful, hurdles she overcame, and career advice. She explained,

> For Texas and the U.S. to thrive, it makes economic sense for all of us to work together to better educate Hispanics, Latinos, and/ or Chicanos. I have mentored Latinas (Mexican and other Latino descent) and Latinos due to this personal commitment. I've learned it promotes the common good to have as many of us as possible well educated.

She went on to explain that as mentors, "we light the way to help illuminate their pathway into their future" (Figure 1).

Angela's mentoring discussions revolved around the various roles (boss at work, mom at home, wife in bed, daughter, and sister) she managed on a day-to-day basis. These difficult conversations assisted her mentees in pursuing personal and career goals. Angela shared how helping early-career Latinas is a constant, recognizing opportunities to share lessons learned and providing space for them to talk with others and be able to negotiate amongst themselves. She shared,

> To allow yourself to forgive yourself for mistakes you have made, know that you didn't do it with ill intentions, knowing and understanding that your heart is open to loving everybody unconditionally regardless of whether you've failed them, you have to love

Figure 1
"We light the way to help illuminate their pathway into their future."

> yourself unconditionally too. And I think that is the greatest lesson, and we don't tell each other that.

She explained that the time and personal commitment put forth in mentoring is like parenting and involved mutual trust and belief.

For Isabella, mentoring was a responsibility, a commitment. She explained, "I want to mentor and feel it's my mission, my responsibility to mentor Latinas to do what they need/want, to do to get to where they want to be." She knew that each of her mentees was capable and had the intelligence to be successful. However, she believed that Latinas go through the system with no one really paying attention to them.

For her, higher education was an avenue to begin to mold, develop, and mentor them to be successful. Early in her career she experienced vulnerability, sharing she knew she was smart enough, but she had not had the confidence in herself as a Latina woman to get things done. She attributed this to lack of representation; therefore, she sought to be visible in senior administrative roles or professional organizations.

Discussion

Santa, Julia, Angela, La Mera Mera, and Isabella spoke of how they charted the unsettling waters of academia as Latinas (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014; Eddy & Ward, 2015; Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000). At times it was difficult and hard to endure, but in the end, they found ways, some of which were from the mentoring they received, learning how to make things work, becoming resilient, and paving their own ways. They mentored with purpose, *para hacer la diferencia* (to make a difference) and *para cambiar la mentalidad* (to change the mindset) that has been perceived by society about Latinas. It was an ongoing mission for them to debunk the deficit-minded framework that society has associated with the Latino/a/x culture, and about moving the group forward.

The participants alluded that they tried to create change and move the Latina culture forward, standing and speaking up for what they believed in and trying to have more Latinas in the profession, especially in the upper administrative positions (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002; Sandoval, 2000). Their efforts mentoring other Latinas are about *rompiendo los esteriotipos* (breaking the stereotypes), bringing forth a new representation of successful Latina women in higher education, and creating *un circulo de empoderamiento* (a circle of empowerment). Through mentoring, the participants provided guidance, coaching, and advice to advance Latinas, and the mentees received this transferred knowledge and developed a strong bond to use for benefit in their careers and in their lives. They provided positive influence and taught their mentees to not give up, not give in; and stand their ground so that they could continue toward success.

The findings indicated that Latina mentoring is like nurturing a deeply-rooted family tree (Figure 2). It first starts with a seed (mentee)

Figure 2
Latina mentoring is like nurturing a deeply-rooted family tree.

Image credit: Lily Gonzalez

that is nurtured with water and sunlight (mentor). The seed is transformed into a seedling and eventually, with more nurturing, into a small tree. As the tree grows, the rings of the tree form annually and indicate its history.

Conclusions

The participants learned and used the concept of leveraging to benefit others as a whole and widen the path of opportunities for all future generations of Latinas to forge ahead. From their stories, the first author was reminded of a poem that she drafted (early in her doctoral studies) from her own struggles as a Latina, and as a novice administrator, and when seeking advice from one of her mentors. She added to it and arranged it in a way to highlight the essence the participants captured through their experiences of guiding their mentees through the work environment as a Latina.

KNOW THE SYSTEM
Mentoring Latinos in Higher Education...
It's more conscious & deliberate
I tell about the struggles to get here

Latinos...
who did not want to get help
who were arrogant
who thought that they knew it all
who did not know how to work the system
who wouldn't listen
who thought they would make it through the school of hard knocks.

I say...
to be successful, you have to understand;
we think we know how to mentor but we don't;
we think *la palanca* works, but it doesn't;
we think we're doing good, but we're not;
we let our pride get in the way.

I talk…
about people pointing the way
about people helping me out
about people helping me to be successful.

about people needing to be vulnerable
about people not needing to know everything
about people not being EXPECTED to know everything.
It hasn't worked for them, but I haven't given up.

I continue to approach.
I continue to share.
I continue to coach.

Let's all continue to…
help each other.
stop the injustice.
take opportunities.
seek help along the way.
We need to…
Know the western culture.
Know how to navigate the western way.
KNOW AND WORK THE SYSTEM!

By knowing the system and navigating through it strategically, the participants became successful. Despite not having many Latinas to turn to for mentoring, the participants learned to play the game, gained confidence, and continued to move forward in what they were meant to do as student affairs professionals. They developed the knowledge needed to negotiate and navigate the system and used this understanding to help other Latinas become successful within their careers.

The participants from this study provided insights from their experiences and showed that mentoring from an array of individuals, including family members, supervisors, colleagues from professional organizations, and administrators assisted in their success. As Latinas, they worked toward a systemic social transformation and somewhat disrupted the hierarchies that have been historically dominated by men by becoming senior administrators within their respective institutions. By forging the path, they are part of the changing landscape in higher education and continue to address systemic elements that resisted having Latinas in

positions of power and authority, first by being successful Latinas, and second by mentoring, supporting, and advocating for others to become representative leaders of their institutions.

During their time of being mentored, Angela, La Mera Mera, Isabella, Julia, and Santa witnessed the lack of representation of Latinas in senior-level positions in higher education and had few Latinas to choose from to serve as their mentors. Now, more than 25 years later, a few more Latinas, such as themselves, are represented in senior-level positions and they have become the social transformation in the higher educational system. Their representation in visible positions of authority has played a significant role in contributing to the persistent interest of mentoring other Latinas to move the Latina culture forward. La Mera Mera, Isabella, and Julia advocated for other Latinas to fill positions and spoke up when Latina/os were being viewed as less than. Like Isabella, Julia, Angela, La Mera Mera, and Santa, the first author continues to be a mentor to others, reaching out to those who are near her or are coming up in the field, to be a positive influence, to advocate for Latinas, to be the *madrina* (sponsor) she is meant to be, and continues moving us forward. *Adelante*!

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Formal or informal: Differing approaches to mentorship of Latina doctoral students

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Abstract

Although abundant literature discusses the importance of mentorship and its positive impact on university student success (Crisp et al., 2017; Villaseñor et al., 2013), research has primarily focused on undergraduate students, leaving a gap in the research on graduate students. This case study provided advanced Latina doctoral students at a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) an opportunity to share personal experiences with faculty mentorship as they journeyed toward doctoral degrees. This study examined how faculty mentorship of advanced Latina doctoral students aids in a sense of belonging, persistence, navigational capital, and aspirational capital in their respective doctoral programs at an HSI. Data analysis revealed an emerging theme of Latina doctoral students experiences and differing approaches to mentorship. *The subthemes that emerged regarding these experiences focused on the formalized mentoring process and creating an informal mentor/mentee relationship.*

Introduction

Latinas who make the commitment to earn a doctorate do so with the belief that they will complete the goal. Unfortunately, this is not always the case, as many doctoral students, Latinas included, discontinue the program before completion. Statistics show that only 9.1% of doctorate degrees awarded in the 2019–2020 academic school year were earned by Latinas, while white females earned 63% (NCES, 2021). Through mentorship, faculty members must provide students support, guidance, and motivation to continue the program. As presented in this research study, faculty mentorship, whether formal or informal, aids in the sense of belonging, persistence, and navigational and aspirational capital of Latina doctoral students.

Conceptual framework

This research study was undergirded by Las Comadres Mentorship (López et al., 2020), Mujerista Mentorship (Villaseñor et al., 2013), and the construct of aspirational capital (Yosso et al., 2009). López et al. (2020) explain the formalized mentorship program, Las Comadres, is a support for Latina faculty, staff, and students that focuses on providing socio-emotional and academic resources to undergraduate students by matching them with Latina faculty/staff mentors and then providing access to group enrichment activities. López et al. (2020) share the importance of increased representation of Latina faculty and staff on college campuses to support the growing Latina undergraduate population (Abraham, 2020). Las Comadres Mentorship is applicable for advanced Latina doctoral students, providing a framework that accounts for academic resources and relationship building warranted for persistence.

Villaseñor et al. (2013) define *mujerista* mentoring as an assets-based mentorship model that values the lived experiences and cultural wealth of Latinas. It focuses on building community and mentoring relationships while challenging traditional models of mentorship that utilize a hierarchy between a mentor and mentee. While most formalized higher education mentoring programs focus on the assimilation of students into the collegiate culture, *mujerista* mentoring, as Villaseñor et al. (2013) explain, focuses instead on utilizing Latina culture. It provides

an alternative to traditional mentoring and instead focuses on the need to bridge the academic, professional, and the personal in a culturally-specific framework to create more meaningful and enduring mentoring relationships to increase the likelihood of Latina students' academic success. Such mentorship allows Latinas to embrace their culture instead of leaving it behind, as is usually the case in the transition into the world of academia (Villaseñor et al., 2013). Current mentorship programs, even within the HSIs, are typically devoid of the cultural aspects and values from which Latina students can benefit (Mireles-Rios & Garcia, 2019; Crisp et al., 2017; Villaseñor et al., 2013).

Literature review

Defining mentorship

Some scholars define mentoring as a form of structured or formal interaction between mentor and mentee (Mireles-Rios & Garcia, 2019; Torres & Hernandez, 2009), and as a valuable support system in which mentors guide and validate mentees as they develop and progress (Murakami & Nunez, 2014; Méndez-Morse, 2004) while focusing on creating a relationship that may enhance a mentee's personal and professional growth and development (Méndez-Morse; Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006). Mentoring is also defined as a dyadic relationship in which an individual with more experience shares knowledge, guidance, and insight with an individual with less experience (Acevedo-Gil & Madrigal-Garcia, 2018; Torres & Hernandez, 2009) that may result in positive professional and personal relationships and academic competence (Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006). Research (Mireles-Rios & Garcia, 2019; Murakami & Nunez, 2014; Perez & Banda, 2021; Torres & Hernandez, 2009) posits the important role of both formal and informal mentorship as it pertains to student success.

Informal mentorship

Others like Villasenor et al. (2013) define a non-traditional type of mentoring that creates relationships through informal collaboration and incorporates general, academic, and interpersonal contact. Informal

mentoring requires that the mentor or mentee take initiative to pursue and cultivate the mentoring relationship, creating a less structured and formalized personal and professional collaboration (Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006). Informal mentorship occurs through less structured interactions between students and faculty members (Castellanos et al., 2016; Johnson et al., 2007). At times, informal student mentoring originates when the faculty member is the student's assigned advisor. This relationship then evolves, through faculty and student interaction, into an informal mentorship arrangement (Castellanos et al., 2016; Johnson et al., 2007).

Formal mentorship

Zalaquett and Lopez (2006) define formal mentoring as an established program in which mentor and mentee are paired by a third party from within the program and usually have set procedures, goals, training for mentors, and guidelines for the pairing of mentors and mentees. Torres and Hernandez (2009) explain that formal mentoring relationships provide planned opportunities and help create networking connections. These relationships also provide support and encouragement through appropriate teaching and practice of the necessary skills that allow mentees to take advantage of these new opportunities (Torres & Hernandez, 2009). Within this study, mentorship is defined as a formal or informal program that provides the necessary guidance and skills to help Latina doctoral students progress through the doctoral program, to graduation, and transition into a career by utilizing the beliefs and cultural assets of Latina doctoral students (Perez & Banda, 2021).

Methodology

Understanding how participation in a mentorship program improves doctoral program experiences and increases the likelihood of degree attainment for Latina doctoral students is a representation of ethnography qualitative inquiry (Patton, 2015), the method utilized for this research study. This type of inquiry allows the interviewees to share their stories and life experiences as Latinas living the day-to-day life of doctoral students. This study sought to answer: How do Latina doctoral students' experiences with a faculty mentor at an HSI cultivate aspirations?

Participant critera included: (a) Self-identify as a Latina, Hispanic, Chicana, or Latinx; (b) Enrollment as an advanced doctoral student (proposal writing and beyond); (c) Enrollment in an educational doctoral program; (d) Informal or formal participation in mentorship as a mentee; and, (e) Enrollment at a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) in South Texas. A triangulation of data sources via narrative inquiry (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001), in the form of demographic profiles and autobiographical sketches, also known as written *testimonios* (Fierros & Bernal, 2016; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001), and photo elicitation (Flores, 2017; Glaw et al., 2017), were collected and reviewed to aid in the facilitation of the *pláticas* (Fierros & Bernal, 2016; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). A total of seven participants took part in this study. Presented is a subset of data collected during two *plática* sessions. All data sources were transcribed verbatim so that the data analysis would reveal themes. The *plática* sessions were transcribed as best possible while replaying and reviewing the recordings. Before conducting the *plática* sessions, the researcher was prepared to complete the transcription as is and include all languages spoken by the participants during the *pláticas*. Multilingual transcription would lend to the purpose and nature of the study, but only English was spoken during the sessions, so this was not necessary. Once transcriptions for each *plática* session were completed, the data were triangulated with the analysis of the demographic profiles, autobiographical sketches, and the photo elicitation.

Data analysis

To complete the data analysis for this research study, the software program NVivo was utilized. With the help of NVivo, pre-coding was completed, and the information was used to complete the initial coding, allowing the researcher to determine the themes and subthemes that began to present. During the pre-coding process, the coding that was presented using NVivo was added to an Excel spreadsheet and analyzed to determine possible themes and subthemes. After the initial data analysis was complete, another review of the emerging themes and subthemes was conducted. Completing this step allowed for a more concise and understandable presentation of the collected data.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), is comprised of four truth values that include credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. For this research study, credibility was implemented with the triangulation of data via journaling, autobiographical profile sketches, thick description, and triangulation. To ensure dependability, member checking and peer debriefing were employed. Participants were emailed a copy of the *plática* transcript to provide them with an opportunity to add, remove, or clarify what they shared in the session. To ensure confirmability via audit trail and researcher reflexivity (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019), the first author journaled her thoughts and ideas throughout the study. Transferability was achieved via purposeful sampling and group characteristic sampling that allowed for thick description of participants as well as a profile of the institution.

Site selection

The site selection was a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) in the South Texas area. The chosen four-year higher education institution serves over 11,000 students, of whom approximately 400 are graduate students (College Factual, 2021). Almost 60% of the graduate students attending this HSI are women and about 30% of graduate students are Hispanic (College Factual, 2021).

Participants

The desire to earn a doctoral degree is strong among the Latina students participating in this research study. The demographic profiles that participants provided illustrate differences and similarities of these Latina doctoral students (See Table 1). The educational background of each participant provided additional knowledge regarding the personal decisions each had to make when furthering their education. (See Table 2).

While analyzing the information provided in the two tables presented above, the struggle to decide to further one's education while being wives, mothers, daughters, sisters, and friends became evident. Although each participant has different reasons for embarking on this journey, the desire to complete the program with the guidance of a faculty mentor is

Table 1
Demographic profiles

Pseudonym	SE Reyna	Chemi	Montserrat	Consuelo	Socorro	Jenny	Cora
Self-identity	Hispanic	Hispanic	Hispanic	Latina/ Mexican American	Hispanic	Hispanic	Hispanic
Marital Status	Married (23 years)	Single	Married	Married (10 years)	Married (22 years)	Married (5 years)	Married (28 years)
Children	Three sons	Seven children, four daughters, three sons	Three step-children	Two daughters	Three step children & two children		Two children
Children at home	One son lives at home	None live at home	None live at home	Both live at home	Two live at home	Empty nester	None live at home

Table 2
Educational profiles

Pseudonym	SE Reyna	Chemi	Montserrat
Bachelor's institution	Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center	Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi	University of Texas-Pan-American
Age began	33	39	18
Age completed	34	59	22
Bachelor's degree	Bachelor's degree in science and nursing	Bachelor's degree in sociology	Bachelor's of science in kinesiology-minor in English
Master's institution	Hardin-Simmons University	Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi	University of Texas-Rio Grande Valley
Age began	36	60	30
Age completed	38	63	32
Master's degree	Master's degree in nursing, family practitioner track	Master's in curriculum and instruction	Master's of arts in rhetoric and composition
Doctorate institution	HSI in the South Texas area	HSI in the South Texas area	HSI in the South Texas area
Age began	46	70	37
Doctorate degree	Doctor of nursing practice	Doctorate in educational leadership	Doctorate in educational leadership
Faculty mentor	Female, Caucasian	Female, Hispanic	Female, Asian

(continued)

Table 2, continued

Pseudonym	Consuelo	Socorro
Bachelor's institution	Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi	UTHSC-SA
Age began	18	18
Age completed	22	22
Bachelor's degree	Bachelor's in psychology and Spanish	Bachelor's in nursing
Master's institution	Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi	Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi
Age began	22	44
Age completed	26	47
Master's degree	Master's in counseling (marriage, couple, & family therapy)	Master's in nursing education
Doctorate institution	HSI in the South Texas area	HSI in the South Texas area
Age began	33	49
Doctorate degree	Doctorate in counseling and educational psychology	DNP executive leadership
Faculty mentor	Mexican American, male	white, female

Table 2, continued

Pseudonym	Jenny	Cora
Bachelor's institution	Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi	Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi
Age began	37	26
Age completed	42	30
Bachelor's degree	Bachelor's of science in kinesiology	Bachelor of arts in elementary education
Master's institution	Texas A&M University -Kingsville	Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi
Age began	43	31
Age completed	45	32
Master's degree	Master's of science in instructional technology/masters of education in adult education	Master's in educational administration
Doctorate institution	HSI in the South Texas area	HSI in the South Texas area
Age began	50	44
Doctorate degree	Doctorate in educational leadership	Doctorate in educational leadership
Faculty mentor	Latina, female	Female, Latina

the same. While Cora and Socorro mentioned working toward a doctorate to honor their mothers, Jenny, Chemi, SE Reyna, and Consuelo began this journey to gain further knowledge and advancement in their careers. Montserrat sees both of those ideas as important and chose to complete a doctoral program to make her family proud and because of her love of learning.

From the data analysis emerged two themes. One illustrated that for some participants, a formalized process of mentoring proved to be more beneficial and seamless. However, for participants whose departments

followed an informal mentoring process, participants often voiced frustration, and their experiences proved to be challenging. The participant data is shared under these two overarching themes.

Formalized and proactive mentoring process

Some participants discussed throughout the pláticas that being assigned a mentor early in the program was beneficial. Socorro explained to the participants during the pláticas how she was assigned a mentor in her doctoral program:

> At the end of that first semester, we had, I believe, a Zoom with like the chair that's over like the whole [name of] program. And, they shared the faculty bios with us and they're like, read the bios, and she would kind of, you know, review each one and then pick your top three and reach out by email and let them know what direction you're thinking of going. (Socorro, 5/18/2022, p. 12)

In the doctoral program that Socorro and SE Reyna are a part of, one of the first steps in connecting doctoral students with a faculty mentor was to provide opportunities for students to learn more about the faculty in the department. This allowed the students within the program to see the mentors available to them. After learning more about the faculty and their areas of expertise and research, students were asked to choose three faculty members they felt would help them during the program. Socorro explained that this process helps mentees connect with possible mentors before the assignment is official. This step seemed to increase the likelihood of a positive mentorship experience for both the mentee and the mentor. She said:

> See if they [faculty] have interest and want to meet with you and discuss that further, and then if they do, then, you know, give me your top two and then, you know, pick. They'll, you know, help that. Help you get matched up, so it wasn't totally this is your chair we had we did have opportunity to research and meet them first, but I think the others had the opportunity to read and research and meet beforehand and have discussions and then decide if they were a fit. (Socorro, Pláticas 5/18/2022, p. 12)

Socorro detailed the proactive and formalized process of selecting a mentor in her program. She noted that the department chair initiated the process early in the program. What to do and how to select a mentor were evident. This suggests that the mentorship selection and the mentorship itself is a carefully and intentionally curated process.

Similar to Socorro, SE Reyna was also assigned a mentor and explains how those mentors were assigned, "based on expertise and our backgrounds (SE Reyna, Pláticas 5/18/2022, p. 13). She also explained, "It was two semesters ago, she was officially assigned to me" (SE Reyna, Pláticas 5/18/2022, p. 10). Like Socorro, the assignment of a mentor was based on both expertise and background. This suggested a formalized and intentional process by which mentors are selected. SE Reyna shared, "I haven't met my mentor in person, and so that might make a difference for me later on. I'm coming up to campus in July for a couple of days, and she will be there, and so we'll have more interaction at that time. That may change everything…" (SE Reyna, Pláticas 5/18/2022, p. 9). When asked if it would have been better to have her mentor assigned to her earlier in the program, SE Reyna said, "Not for my program, because really, it was still kind of premature for me when I would need her, so I don't think so" (Pláticas 5/18/2022, p. 10). This idea would suggest that the additional support and guidance sought by these participants may not be necessary as the program begins, but rather in later stages, as they progressed toward working on dissertations and final projects, the mentor would be more appropriate. For some, a mentoring relationship is more beneficial as the challenges of the doctoral program increase, instead of at the beginning, when professors are available during classes. Socorro explained:

> In our program, we started in the fall, officially the program, and so they don't assign the chair or the mentor until the end of the first semester because we're still trying to figure out what our project is going to be, what's our direction…they want to tie us to a faculty that knows about that area so that, you know, we're a better match. So for us, I think waiting till the end of the first semester works because you know more of where you're going and then they can better match the faculty with you. (Pláticas 5/18/2022, p. 11)

For Socorro, this knowledge helped guide her request for a mentor she felt could help her through her research because they were interested in similar fields of study.

As our discussion continued, Socorro shared that being assigned a mentor did not always mean that things would go smoothly: "We have some students in our cohort that are still struggling, or like they were last semester with their faculty and not agreeing on the direction" (Pláticas 5/18/2022, p. 11). As our discussion regarding being assigned a mentor continued, Jenny shared: "Before you're assigned a mentor, what is that student about, right? What's their, you know, their background, you know? And do they match with this mentality trying to pair them up with? I mean, I think that's very important as well" (Jenny, Pláticas 5/18/2022, p. 11). As Jenny explained, having prior knowledge of each other's backgrounds and interests, for both mentor and mentee, is important when making mentoring connections. When students and faculty are given the opportunity to meet in casual settings, so they can get to know each other and begin the process of selecting possible mentees and mentors, there are ideas that should be considered. These ideas should include background, career goals, research interests, and compatibility, as these can help increase aspirational capital.

SE Reyna shared how her mentoring relationship was progressing: "We're primarily online where we think once a year, over two years, well, probably not all of our professors. So, I think it would be hard anyway to develop any kind of relationship because we just don't have that face-to-face contact" (Pláticas 5/18/2022, p. 2). As a student in a primarily online doctoral program, for SE Reyna, the connection with her mentor has evolved slowly. Although she is able to meet with her mentor via an online platform, she believes it would be more meaningful if they met face-to-face.

Creating an informal mentor/mentee relationship

For participants who are enrolled in programs that do not utilize formal mentoring, they face the challenge of finding a faculty mentor and cultivating the mentoring relationship on their own. This can make some Latina doctoral students envious of those who are provided a mentor

within the program. Chemi shared that she strongly believed that no doctoral student can make or should make this journey alone without positive synergy from faculty (Pláticas 5/19/2022, p. 2). This suggests that Chemi, like other doctoral students, is aware that she lacks navigational capital for the latter part of the doctoral process, the dissertation.

Jenny shared, "I think if I would have known this professor like from the get-go, you know, when I started here, maybe things, I would feel a little bit different about the situation, but I'm happy. You know where I'm at now. You know where I can, you know, trust this lady. And she, you know, looks on my papers and so forth, and she's going to guide me in the right direction" (Pláticas 5/18/2022, p. 10). The frustration that Jenny felt as she proceeded through the program without a mentor is expressed in her thoughts of how her current situation may be different if she had connected with her mentor earlier in the program. Jenny also explained, "I've had like about six or seven people that have come through this program. As a doctoral student, they've graduated… they've told me, 'Hey, if you're going to go to qual route, you need to seek out this professor'" (Pláticas 5/18/2022, p. 13). Since the doctoral program that Jenny is a part of does not provide a formalized mentorship program, it made sense to her to search for a mentor herself with guidance from former students in the program about their selection of mentor. This proved to be successful, as Jenny now has a mentoring relationship with a professor that she feels is beneficial to her.

Cora shared an idea she shared with her own mentor regarding the need for a more formal mentorship program: "There is a need to start allowing them opportunities to meet the other professors and read their bios and see what their focus is so that they can make connections with them" (Pláticas 5/18/2022, p. 12). As a student working toward a doctoral degree in a department that does not have a formal mentorship program, Cora felt that it was up to her to search for a mentor. She explained that this would have been an easier task if she was aware of the areas of expertise and backgrounds of the faculty in the department. Having the opportunity to learn even some basic information about each professor allows students to determine whether a professor will be a good fit as a mentor (Cora, Pláticas 5/18/2022, p. 12).

Not having a mentoring program where mentors are assigned can make it a challenge for students to connect and create a mentoring relationship, as Chemi explains: "My chairperson is the first person that really I can say since I started the program has been more involved in contacting me, you know, periodically to see how I'm doing" (Chemi, Pláticas 5/19/2022, p. 1). As Chemi progressed through the doctoral program, she mostly felt that she was on her own. It was not until she chose a chair for her dissertation, as she neared completion of the program, that she felt that someone cared about her and her progression in the program.

Discussion of findings

While much research has been completed regarding mentorship and its positive effects (See Crisp et al., 2017; Mireles-Rios & Garcia, 2019; Murakami & Nunez, 2014), those studies have focused on undergraduate student success. The findings of this study support previous research on the positive impact that relationships with faculty members have on the persistence of students (Crisp et al., 2017; Dedrick & Watson, 2002; Mireles-Rios & Garcia, 2019). Faculty mentorship may result in positive professional and personal relationships and academic competence (Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006). This study also supports previous research that emphasizes that faculty members have a unique opportunity to serve as personal connections, informational resources, professional role models, and mentors for undergraduate college students (Cramer & Prentice-Dunn, 2007; DeAngelo et al., 2016). Participants echoed the desire for faculty role models and personal connections. The findings of this study suggest that mentorship and guidance programs can also help Latina doctoral students excel in furthering their education and in turn helping their communities, just as it has for Latina undergraduates (Bordes & Arredondo, 2005; Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Gonzalez et al., 2001; Villaseñor et al., 2013).

Conclusion

Although mentorship opportunities for all students are important, the low retention and completion rates associated with Latina doctoral stu-

dents call for imperatives to create and implement mentorship programs, specifically at HSIs. Research has shown that mentorship and relationships with Latina faculty may not only improve the doctoral education experience, but they may also improve career choices after graduation. Creating formal mentoring programs, rather than allowing Latina doctoral students to forge their own informal mentoring relationships with faculty, will not only make a difference in the life of one, but in the lives of many.

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4

Latina faculty leadership through femtoring and advocacy at a Hispanic-Serving Institution

Hilda Cecilia Contreras Aguirre

Abstract

Institutions of higher education are called to diversify their faculty to better serve a growing diverse student population. This is particularly pressing at Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), whose student and faculty ratio in terms of ethnicity shows considerable disparity. In an urgent need to better serve Latinx students but also involve Latinx faculty at a borderland U.S.-México institution, a femtoring/mentoring program was initiated with early-career Latinx faculty interested in giving back to the community and supporting students. A femtoring approach was used to create a welcoming and respectful space for all, using feminist epistemologies and ideologies to inform and empower student academic pathways. Through a qualitative inquiry approach, Latina faculty shared perspectives on their interactions with students using femtoring, perceived changes needed in classrooms, and their intentions to be those agents of change on behalf of the Latinx student population.

Introduction

In contemporary U.S. higher education, institutions have failed to increase minority faculty representation even when research has found that more diversity in faculty positions yields higher graduation rates among minority students (Stout et al., 2018). Ellsworth et al. (2022) noticed that nearly 90% of faculty in two- and four-year institutions lack parity with the underrepresented student body, reporting almost no changes in increasing faculty diversity since 2013. With this pattern and slow changes, reaching student-faculty parity would take more than 1,000 years. The lack of faculty diversity from minority groups not only affects student degree attainment, but it also influences the type, focus, and scope of research and ideas (Ellsworth et al., 2022). The underrepresentation of minority faculty is more evident in tenure-track lines. According to the American Association of University Professors (AAUP; 2022), academic tenure is "an indefinite appointment that can be terminated only for cause or under extraordinary circumstances such as financial exigency and program discontinuation" (Para. 1). Therefore, tenure is particular to academia, and it guarantees faculty employment for life. The initial goal was that faculty were protected to practice academic freedom and could criticize the government; in reality, tenured faculty are commonly perceived as individuals with privileged positions and expected to be prestigious researchers (García Peña, 2022). Over time, tenured faculty have decreased and now represent 21% of all academic workforce (AAUP; 2022). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES; 2020), of 1.5 million faculty working in postsecondary institutions, 56% were full-time and 44% were part-time.

Figure 1 illustrates a remarkable difference between white male and female faculty and other ethnic groups at all academic ranks. For instance, at the professor level, white faculty represent nearly 80%; such overrepresentation contributes to several issues associated with the limited number of minority faculty in higher education institutions. Matias et al. (2021) highlighted that the rules and decisions are made by white, often male, faculty and administrators who establish standards and measures difficult to accomplish by faculty of color. Furthermore, scholars working in ethnic studies are often evaluated by colleagues

Figure 1
Percentage distribution of full-time faculty in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by race/ethnicity and sex: Fall 2020 (NCES, 2020).
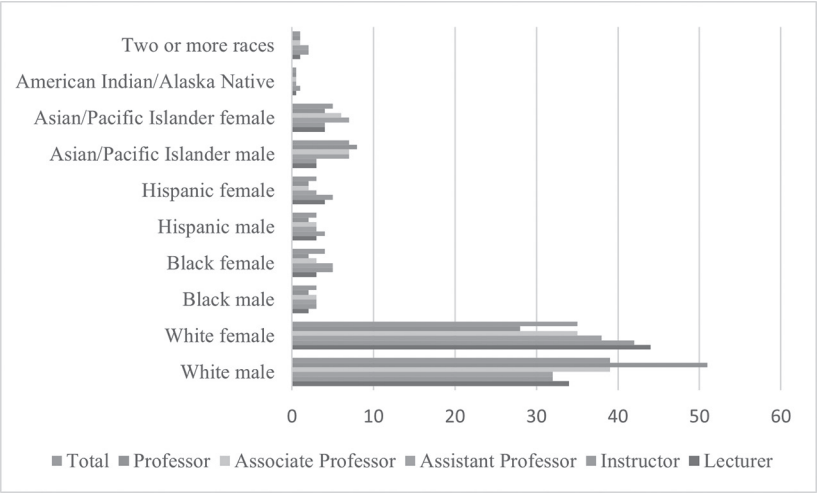
who do not know this discipline well, using bias and inappropriate tools to recognize its value (García Peña, 2022). Settles et al. (2021) used the term "epistemic exclusion" (p. 494) to explain how institutional systems determine what and who is valuable in knowledge generation. Hostile workplace environments, unvalued scholarship, and barriers to promotion in the tenure process make it difficult for minority faculty to remain in their positions at higher education institutions (Settles et al., 2021). This issue is even present at Minority-Serving Institutions (MSI) with a slightly high percentage of minority faculty. This study took place at a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) located in the border area of the United States and México. Ocotillo University, as this four-year institution will be identified, serves many minority students, 63% of those Latinx. Like other MSIs, the number of students does not reflect the minority faculty representation, as only 19.5% of faculty in positions such as adjunct instructor, professor, and assistant professor are Latinx (Huntsman, 2015; OIA, 2022). The reduced number of Latinx faculty

among all departments at Ocotillo University may cause feelings of loneliness, lack of collaboration, and a low sense of community. Therefore, a femtoring/mentoring program was initiated to provide a space where Latinx faculty, staff, postdoctoral associates, graduate students, and undergraduates could interact and build community. Early-career Latinx faculty were intentionally sought to be involved in the program, and after a year of launching the femtoring/mentoring program, six early-career faculty members were involved as mentors: five women, including a nonbinary person, and one man. The study's purpose is to explore early-career Latina faculty leaders in their role as femtors and advocates of change to improve Latinx student college experiences in and out of classrooms. The research question that guided this study is: What aspects do early-career Latina faculty members consider priorities when evaluating their roles at Ocotillo University?

Review of literature

The need for faculty diversification: A focus on Latinx faculty role
A brief literature review introduces important aspects of the representation and presence of Latinx faculty in higher education contexts. An example of it shows that at United States colleges, 81% of professors are white and only 5% of faculty overall are Latinx (Davis & Fry, 2020). The existing racial and ethnic inequities in degree attainment serve as a challenge to the diversification of faculty, as do negative stereotypes, bias, and a feeling of isolation from academic environments (Whittaker et. al, 2015). Showing acts of advocacy and social justice are not always included in the traditional faculty reward system; therefore, institutions must recognize these efforts of a highly diverse professoriate (Murakami-Ramalho et al., 2010). In an extensive research effort on Latina faculty, González et al. (2013) noted the multiple difficulties they face in terms of their "identity, isolation, marginalization, and tokenism" (p. 74). While defining one's own identity may be challenging, Latina faculty are being isolated, marginalized, and tokenized in the work environment, contributing to higher levels of stress and even departures from academia. The ability to be agents of change on behalf of HSI student

populations empowers Latinx faculty and helps shape organizational cultures, transforming the higher education landscape (Villarreal, 2022). In addition, Latina faculty members' gender creates an intersectional dynamic that shapes their experience. Because Latinas are underrepresented in faculty, particularly in STEM fields where they made up only 1.5% of people receiving graduate degrees in the 2015-16 year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017), 'imposter syndrome' is often a problem. Stereotypical media representations of women as homemakers and not professionals (Olsson, 2018), along with added lack of other Latina role models in faculty positions due to underrepresentation, are factors in 'imposter syndrome' for Latina faculty. Mentoring relationships have been noted to help increase confidence in Latinas as leaders and help situate them in the academic landscape (Contreras Aguirre & Banda, 2019; López et. al, 2020).

The femtorship approach

The Civil Rights Movement provided the foundation to help develop diverse ideologies and epistemologies on behalf of minorities; one of those was Chicana feminism, which sought gender and racial equality (González, 2015). For Knecht (2022), "femtorship is the guiding relationship among women that includes their racialized, gendered, and feminist ideologies" (p.111). Through Chicana feminism and Chicana Feminist Epistemology emerged the idea to support each other by sharing Chicanas' experiences with racism, classism, and sexism (Bañuelos, 2006). Chicanas also found a source of support when they recognize their knowledge and experience in aspects such as "culture, language, race, class, sex, and immigration" (p. 26) to help others navigate academia (González, 2015). At Ocotillo University, the femtoring program "seeks to create a space where all people feel welcomed and respected using feminist epistemologies and ideologies" (Contreras Aguirre & Romero, 2022, p. 3). Men and other gender identities participate and use this same approach, fighting against the traditional individualistic Eurocentric patriarchal male mentorship often found in some spaces aligned with the American culture.

The first-generation status

Individuals who are the first in their families to attend college, known as first-generation, face many roadblocks throughout their academic journeys. García Peña (2022) illustrated perfectly what it means to be first-generation as a student and scholar, saying "being first-generation and Black or Brown and poor means we start our journey on foot while others ride aboard a train" (p. 47). The statement emphasizes the numerous barriers that first-generation individuals face in higher education and beyond. Turner (2023) noted the importance of intentional "thin threads" (p. xvi) used by students, faculty, and administrators of color that support and create those needed interventions that make people persist. According to García Peña (2022), academia is against building community, and principles such as "competitiveness, exceptionalism, and ownership" (p. 25) are promoted. Contrasting these principles, García Peña (2022) highlighted that "how we truly grow as scholars and learners is through collective exchange, generosity, and kindness" (p. 25). Faculty of color use some strategies to cope with hostile and unfair environments, including advocating for themselves and mentoring oftentimes outside their own institution (Settles et al., 2021). To overcome systemic racism and oppressive contexts, women of color use mutual care to protect and be there for one another. García Peña (2022) stated that it is through "collective rebellion" (p. 27) that people of color find their legacy. Historically, people of color have fought for gaining space and voice in places such as academia, where scholars have still to rebel against current unfair policies and practices. García Peña (2022) emphasized that mentoring first-generation students of color requires "knowledge, patience, empathy, and compassion" (p. 47). It is an incredibly rewarding experience that also helps in building community and keeps people of color in higher positions grounded in the work that matters.

Conceptual framework

Bourdieu's theory of practice framed this study with the rationale that people can be agents to change cultural and organizational structures (Bourdieu, 1983, 1998). This study argues that Latina faculty can be

those agents of change that HSIs need, able to negotiate and design their careers. Bourdieu's (1983, 1998) theory examined the agents' behavior and resistance to the culture and structure. The following elements illustrate agents' attitudes applied to the higher education context. For example, *agency* determines the type of actions and practices to make it possible for their work in academia. *Field* means the physical space where faculty interact, and institutions set the rules and policies that the professoriate must obey. *Habitus* describes one's perception of the world and one's relationship with it. In other words, every action would have a reaction. Last, *capital* corresponds to the experiences and background that every person has. This last element aligned with Yosso's (2005) Culture Community Wealth framework that illustrated the types of capital (e.g., aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistance) that Latinx bring to the educational space. Overall, Bourdieu's theory helps understand the challenges and risks that Latina faculty must deal with in a work environment that has historical rules to measure success (González, 2014). Such rules may differ from Latina faculty commitment and how service looks for them.

Study methods

The methodology used for this research study included a descriptive qualitative case study, which investigates early Latina faculty roles and necessary changes in a college academic context that keeps diversifying and represents a challenge for the professoriate (Yin, 2009).

Data collection

In this case study, the researcher used multiple sources to collect data. The researcher utilized reflexive journals and documented participants' involvement and interactions. A purposeful sample for the participants was selected based on the following criteria: 1) Identification as Latina, 2) Employment as early-career faculty, and 3) Participation in the femtoring/mentoring program. Table 1 shows more information about these scholars. In the spring 2022 semester, three early-career Latina faculty members participated in the program representing communication studies and education. In fall 2022, two more early-career Latina faculty

joined the program. Throughout spring 2022, Latina faculty along with a few Latinx doctoral and master's students mentored Latinx undergraduate students. Latinx faculty met with students ranging from monthly to weekly and participated in monthly group meetings. These Latina faculty members participated in an hourlong focus group in which they discussed the campus and department climate in terms of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and their role as mentors in the program. Furthermore, in the final group meeting, Latina faculty had the opportunity to share in the form of *testimonios* (Flores & García, 2009) their experiences and learning outcomes of mentoring and interacting with other Latinx colleagues and students. Finally, one-on-one interviews were conducted during fall 2022 and spring 2023.

Data analysis

The researcher made use of all documentation collected, including journal entries, observations, and descriptions of *testimonios* and interviews. The researcher ordered the transcripts using Rev, a company that offers

Table 1
Faculty demographics

Pseudonym	Discipline	Research focus	First-generation?
Star	Communication studies	Identity development	Yes
Siba	Bilingual education	Bilingual education, biliteracy, translanguaging pedagogy	Yes
Luna	Social work	First-generation student academic performance	Yes
Lila	Communication studies	Culture and health communication; DEI; social justice	Yes
Che	Science	Science ed. research - equity in STEM	Yes

transcription services. With the transcripts and other documentation, the researcher used Dedoose, a qualitative data analysis software. The data analysis consisted of reading the *testimonios* and the interview transcripts several times to identify patterns by unitizing the data. The researcher then continued the the content analysis approach and constant comparative techniques in the coding of categories and themes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). What follows is a summary of findings relevant to this study.

Findings

The findings presented in this section include information shared by participants in this study concerning their own experiences in their departments in terms of DEI, their advocacy for minority students including the femtoring approach, and their motivation to change the status quo of how students learn in their courses.

Enthusiasm and commitment as femtors

The participation of faculty members was key to the success of the femtoring/mentoring program. Faculty were happy to help and support Latinx undergraduate students, which unsurprisingly was not their first experience with femtoring/mentoring. Although femtoring/mentoring can be perceived as an obligation to provide an additional type of support, faculty members showed enthusiasm and availability when helping and serving these students. Star, a faculty member of Communication Studies, highlighted the aspect of honesty as key in her femtoring relationships: "At least thus far, building the rapport with my mentee has been, um, really humanizing the experience of what it is to be a Latina in academia." Lila, also from Communication Studies, said that sharing her experience with her femtee helped normalize the struggle to cross the border every morning: "Share a little bit of that…from the different challenges that we had, like waking up at 4:30 in the morning so that we could get to the bridge and be able to cross the border to go to school."

These quotes revealed the positive impact and satisfaction of interacting with younger students with whom faculty share some personal and academic experiences. The fact that faculty shared similar experi-

ences with students might provide them with the hope that they can also accomplish their academic goals and more importantly, be successful in life.

Making meaningful changes to better serve students

The role of Latinas in occupying leadership positions as tenure-track faculty has been consistently small, and proposing changes can be seen as a threat to the higher education status quo and particularly, institutional and departmental priorities. At this HSI, Star and Lila, as faculty members from the same department, assessed the need to make changes to their course content to better reflect and resonate with the characteristics of the student population. On this subject, Lila commented:

> We've brought a lot of changes to that course, given that it hasn't necessarily changed in the last 12 years or so. Uh, and that also comes as a result of who we are and what kinds of things we're bringing to the table.

A Latina faculty approach to teaching and serving students comes with the responsibility to realize who these students are. Beside proposing changes to the course content, interactions with students also play a critical role. Luna, in the field of social work, said,

> I'm very clear in the beginning of, of the semester that I am a first generation, woman, a native from this area…I tell them I worked when I was going to school. I took out loans. I can understand situations.

Similarly, Che, a faculty member in the science department, is trying to make connections between science and students' daily life experiences:

> I talk about the scientists; I talk about connections. They like, sort of example, we talk about, uh, scientists, the study, the sugars, and breastfeeding. So, I talk about like campus breastfeeding, and I didn't know about this. Um, so I don't know, it's weird. I try to show them that it's human.

These quotes showed the different approaches that these Latina faculty are considering for their courses making their course content more relevant for a diverse student population that is often neglected in their learning processes.

Identifying the way out of the ordinary

The academic department climate is quite important for these early-career Latina faculty, not only for achieving promotion and tenure, but also for being able to promote changes. Such changes can be related to their course content, reflecting who they are and their commitment to service and showing what is important to them. The following quotes illustrate the support these Latina faculty have seen in their respective departments. On the one hand, Lila expressed, "It's always us kind of having to pave our way, um, sometimes with a welcomed, um, I guess with a welcome agenda and sometimes not so much, but here at Ocotillo University, at least it's been, it's been rather welcoming." On the other hand, Siba, a bilingual education professor, added:

> Everybody, uh, is aware of equity issues…of diversity issues. Everybody wants to serve our students the best way that we can, but there are blind spots, and these blind spots are becoming glaring…everybody has been very supportive and wants to enact the changes.

These are two interesting examples shared by two Latina faculty from different departments interested in enacting change and improvement. Both comments reflected the unique perspective Latinas have within their departments in proposing changes and feeling the responsibility of not only proposing but putting those changes into practice. Luna also assured that in her department, conversations are happening regarding implementing better approaches in the classroom on behalf of the students. Luna provided a specific example of establishing a respectful climate in her courses. In her quote, she showed this effort by mentioning,

> We have been working in a diversity and inclusion faculty committee; we're just working on trying to identify, you know, some of the things that we can do to help students become more comfortable. I think a very easy thing to do is, when we first started in class, you introduce yourself and say, my name is, uh, you know, Luna, um, and give everybody an opportunity to introduce themselves.

At the department level, different efforts and actions that faculty are part of it or aware of can make a difference in changes needed in department policies and practices, not only specifically on the curriculum, but in

how students interact with professors and the type of relationships they develop. At the institutional level and as an HSI, this institution should be acting and shifting efforts to reinforce its identity and address its needs. Che commented on how she perceived the institutional power game: "Like we're getting, like, we're creating our little groups, like, because the only way we can make changes in institution, I think, is if we start talking together outside of this whole self-power." This quote made evident that Che did not perceive the institutional leadership committed, and she added, "It still feels like we're doing it on the outside to try and reach the walls." All participants provided different perspectives of how they perceive needed changes to increase awareness of specific needs to better serve students and to make real the commitment that an HSI must have with living and experiencing true diversity, equity, and inclusion for all.

Discussion

The study aimed at exploring early-career Latina faculty leaders in their roles as femtors and advocates for change to improve Latinx student college experiences in and out of classrooms. The research question that guided this study is: What aspects do early-career Latina faculty members consider priorities when evaluating their roles at Ocotillo University? This group of scholars identified as Latinas but also as faculty of color, first-generation, and equity-minded individuals part of the 5% of Latinx faculty working at U.S. higher education institutions (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Despite overwhelming underrepresentation and the challenges that represent being isolated, undervalued, and marginalized (García Peña, 2022; González et al., 2013), Latina faculty who participated in this study showed agency and habitus toward students through changes they are implementing in their courses and their approaches to femtor students. Such attitudes and traits perceived in these early-career Latina faculty are critical to becoming change agents and achieving institutional transformation (Bourdieu, 1983, 1998).

    Latina faculty participants showed *enthusiasm and commitment* as femtors, not only in providing students with advice and guidance

to navigate college, but also in sharing their personal experiences and struggles to accomplish their academic goals. Latina faculty addressed racialized, gendered, and feminist ideologies during the one-on-one relationships, helping understand student positionality and potential of women in their future professions (Bañuelos, 2006; González, 2015; Knecht, 2022). The connections and empathy with students were palpable; for instance, most faculty-student interactions are in Spanish or a mix of English and Spanish. This study also found that Latina faculty were *making meaningful changes to better serve students*, which meant being able to recognize that changes are needed and that they are capable to perform such changes. Furthermore, considering the different identities that Latinx faculty bring to the classrooms and HSIs, contexts can enrich students learning and experiences (Murakami-Ramalho et al., 2010; Villarreal, 2022). The information shared by participants demonstrated their critical thinking about who they are, who they represent, and what students are learning. An important aspect is wanting to see changes reflected in their courses' curricula, which is a strong message for all involved: students, colleagues, supervisors, and higher administrators in updating how and what students learn.

Despite representing different disciplines and research interests, participants showed the areas they focus their scholarship on (Table 1), overlapping topics such as social justice, equity in education, and student development. In *identifying the way out of the ordinary*, for example, Lila and Siba, who belong to different departments, described their intentions in enacting change and improvement. Both quotes reflected the unique perspectives Latinas have within their departments in proposing changes, feeling the responsibility of not only proposing but putting into practice those changes. This aspect put into evidence the importance of the capital that Latinas bring into the higher education contexts (Bourdieu, 1983, 1998). In addition, Murakami-Ramalho et al. (2010) posed the challenges that Latinx deal with when they take the role of advocates and commit to social justice by addressing minority issues, aspects that may not be considered important by the faculty reward policies. On the one side, Latina faculty members' personal and cultural experiences contribute to a particular perspective on course content

and access to distinct types of knowledge and pedagogy not commonly considered by white faculty. On the other hand, Latina faculty's first-generation status contributed to their vulnerability in assuring that all their efforts in teaching, scholarship, and service with that social justice and equity approach would be valued and evaluated fairly.

Recommendations for HSIs

According to the literature review and the findings in this study, there are a few strategies that MSIs, and particularly, HSIs can adopt to recruit and retain faculty of color and to reduce the stigma that institutions of higher education are not places for minority faculty.

1. Currently, HSIs usually have DEI statements along with their mission and vision; however, most of those statements are seldom put into practice. Actualizing increasing faculty diversity and improving the faculty-student ratio in terms of ethnicity should be a focus. To achieve this goal, recruitment plans are needed to announce jobs in the appropriate platforms and intentionally seek candidates meeting such requirements.
2. Faculty of color, and particularly, Latinx faculty, bring to the institutions cultural, family, and community assets/practices that if the institutions encourage and support the use of in different faculty roles, can make a difference in both faculty experiences and consequently, others' experiences. This strategy can help with faculty retention.
3. Minority faculty are often overloaded with service activities such as mentoring; nevertheless, institutions minimally credit this sort of service in the achievement of tenure and promotion. HSIs must value and leverage faculty commitment and involvement in the academic performance and success of marginalized students.

Conclusion

Overall, this study addressed early-career Latina faculty members' roles in shaping and transforming the higher education landscape. HSIs are in urgent need of centering the voices of their minority faculty to enrich courses, improve programs, and make more sense of their service on

behalf of their Latinx students. Latina faculty's proposed changes to the curricula, research approach, and service commitment through femtoring might contribute to transforming higher education. In general, MSIs, particularly HSIs, should value their faculty members' performances and further support their promotion and tenure.

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Platicar

Latina administrators and superintendents: Where are we?

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Abstract

This study explored career paths and experiences of Latina school administrators. Critical ethnography (Carspecken, 1996) was used to answer the research question, "Why are there so few Latina administrators and superintendents?" Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2016; Hill Collins, 2019) was the theoretical lens framing secondary questions: What does the career path entail for a Latina in school administration? What cultural characteristics influence Latinas in pursuing the position of superintendent? Data collection included interviews with six Latina school administrators. Findings revealed participants believed race and gender impacted their career advancement. Participants discussed feeling marginalized, tokenized, stereotyped, scrutinized, and left behind by colleagues. Participants employed coping strategies including working twice as hard, self-reflecting, and finding balance. Practical implications focused on the importance of Latina mentors.

Introduction

This study discusses the career paths and experiences of Midwestern Latina school administrators in a PreK–12 setting. The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of female Latina school administrators who hold superintendent endorsements, to uncover the challenges they encounter on their career journeys, and to explore what has kept them from the superintendency. This is accomplished through qualitative research and through Carspecken's (1996) critical ethnograpphraphy. Findings reveal that Latina administrators' barriers mirrored each other. This study seeks to contribute to the research and close this gap in the research by investigating possible reasons why there are so few Latina superintendents. The central research question that guided this research study was: Why are there so few Latina superintendents? Secondary research questions were: What does the career path entail for a Latina in school administration? What cultural characteristics influence Latinas who pursue the position of superintendent?

Background of the problem

This year is the 100th anniversary of the year the first U.S. women won the right to vote. This struggle for women's suffrage is often seen as the beginning wave of feminism in the United States. From there, women have fought for various other rights, like the rights to own property, have equal pay, and choose what we do with our bodies. However, these rights have always first been granted to white women, and then later, to women of color (hooks, 2015). A narrative of struggle also has occurred for various minority populations in the United States. *Brown v. The Board of Education* is the landmark case that determined segregation was not equal related to education in the United States. However, both women and minorities have historically been left behind, and in some cases, left out entirely. This historical oppression has created a society in which minorities and women are seen as "less than" in the area of employment, especially in supervisory positions. Women and minorities lag behind their white male counterparts in the position of superintendent (Grogan & Brunner, 2005; Kowalski et al., 2011).

In 2017, an estimated 70% of executives for Fortune 500 companies were white males (Jones, 2017), which mimics the American Association of School Administrators' (AASA) similar numbers of superintendents, demonstrating that the field of education is no different than the business world (Kowalski et al., 2011). In 2000, the AASA completed a survey of its membership and found that only 1% of all superintendents were Latinas (Grogan & Brunner, 2005). A 2010 study by the AASA found that 24% of superintendents were women (Kowalski et al., 2011). It also found that only 6% of participants identified as minority (Kowalski et al., 2011). In a 2018 research study conducted by the American Association of University Women (AAUW), female educational administrators were paid 78 cents for every dollar a male administrator was paid. Although the discussion has been on women and minorities, these two factors are not mutually exclusive. AAUW's research did not account for minority female educational administrators, which it may be surmised would receive an even lower pay differential than 78 cents. Even though Latinos make up the largest minority group, Latinas are still comparatively underpaid.

In 2019, PayScale reported that women of color must break down the barriers that keep them from earning as much as white men (Eagly & Carli, 2007; England et al., 2004; hooks, 2015). PayScale conducts salary and compensation surveys to collect data for correlating and validating pay and pay disparities. One barrier is that women of color tend to work in "lower-level, lower-paid positions" (PayScale, 2019). Women also average more time off than men for family responsibilities, which causes them a loss of wages compared to their male counterparts (PayScale, 2019; Eagly & Carli, 2007). When women achieve the position of superintendent, it takes them longer to get to this position because they tend to stay teaching longer than men do (Grogan, 2005; Kowalski et al., 2011). What is keeping women from career advancement in K–12 school administration?

Literature review

Although the field of education is predominately female teachers, making up 80% of elementary positions and 56% of high school posi-

tions, women and women of color lag behind their male counterparts in educational leadership positions (Kowalski et al., 2011; National Center for Education Statistics, 2023; Newburger & Beckhusen, 2022). Iasevoli (2018) found that female administrators in Illinois make on average $3,000 to $4,000 less than their male counterparts. However, Iasevoli did not account for women of color. This creates a gap in the research, which has mostly focused on white women in leadership positions (Chin & Sanchez-Hucles, 2007). In 2020, the American Association of University Women found that Latinas with advanced degrees make approximately 30% less than their white male counterparts. Since a position in school administration requires an advanced degree, one can surmise there continues to be a wage gap between Latinas and their white male counterparts. Additionally, Latinas in the field of education lack the career advancement opportunities white males have had (Hernandez & Morales, 1999; Ortiz, 2001). Since there are few women of color (and even fewer Latinas) in educational leadership positions (Ortiz, 2001), it can be difficult to conduct research because participants cannot be found. As mentioned previously, this study seeks to contribute to the research on why there are so few Latinas in educational leadership positions.

Theoretical framework & method

Qualitative research was conducted to answer the above research questions. Six participants were interviewed to understand the experiences of Latina school administrators who possessed a superintendent endorsement but were not superintendents. Critical ethnography was utilized methodologically to critique the societal order that has produced the under-representation of Latinas in the role of superintendent (Carspecken, 1996). Thomas (1993) contends that researchers using critical ethnography not only provide the narrative of individuals, but they also have a political responsibility to use their narratives to change society's oppressive nature. Additionally, intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2016; Hill Collins, 2019) was used as an interpretative lens to acknowledge that individuals experience oppression through multiple identities (race and gender), and individuals can be oppressed and discriminated against for

all of these reasons simultaneously. Intersectionality provided a theoretical framework to understand the complexity of the Latina identity. Both critical ethnography and intersectionality have a common component: each is critical of societal oppression and seeks to change these practices and realities (Crenshaw, 2016; Carspecken, 1996; Hill Collins, 2019; Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016).

Interviews were conducted utilizing a combination of Carspecken's (1996) and Seidman's (2013) semi-structured interview protocol. Participants were selected utilizing criterion, convenience, and snowball sampling; a screening process was conducted to ensure participants reflected the experience the study sought to understand. A semi-structured interview protocol was selected because it allows for specific questions to be written in advance while providing flexibility in questioning based on how participants respond (Carspecken, 1996; Seidman, 2013). These aspects of the methodology allowed the researcher to investigate and collect information through the participant's voice and ensure the participant's interpretation was central to the data analysis.

Interpretation of the findings

Data analysis provided an opportunity to understand, through a thick, rich, description, the lives of Latina administrators. The following discussion is organized through the following categories of data: intersectionality, systemic oppression in education, challenges faced, coping strategies, and finding balance. Within these broad categories of analysis, themes and subthemes emerged to paint a picture of what it means to be a Latina administrator. Although the themes and sub-themes appear to be written in a linear fashion, they are all interconnected.

The career journey for the Latina participants was characterized by marginalization, tokenization, scrutiny, and isolation. In addition, participants had to find balance as Latinas between their families, culture, and navigating careers. Intersectionality overwhelmed the data analysis, as participants were unable to parse out their gender and race. Participants believed their race and gender impacted their career advancement. One participant explained,

> I think it's hard to separate aspects of my identity into boxes,
> because people perceive you from their level of understanding.
> Depending on what their implicit biases are for women, women of
> color, of Latinos, will be different in different spaces.

Intersectionality: Am I a good Latina?

Intersectionality was a common theme. Participants' race and gender
influenced their career advancement. Being Latina was an obstacle to
the majority of participants' careers. Participants' intersectional identi-
ties had real-world implications and consequences. Participants exist
in a country in which they are oppressed and marginalized for being a
woman and for being Latina (Delgado Bernal, 2018; Delgado Bernal &
Alemán, 2017; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). These factors impact their
personal and professional lives all the time. One participant explained,

> Being a girl means something different, especially in the Latino
> community…All these perceptions that people have of a Latina…
> It's very tiring because sometimes you feel like you have to live up
> to those perceptions.

Latinas learn to navigate systems created for and by white males
(Delgado Bernal & Alemán, 2017; hooks, 2015; hooks, 2015). As they
navigate these systems, tensions are created such as those within the
participants, themselves, and outside tensions that are imposed on them.
From these tension points, the themes emerged.

The interview data illustrates how Latinas have multiple expecta-
tions placed on all aspects of their lives. Their families have expecta-
tions regarding their role as a Latina and their colleagues have expecta-
tions regarding their role as an administrator. One participant explained,

> Am I a good Latina? Because when you think of Latina, our place
> is in the home. Our place is raising our children…So, combine
> the fact that you're the teacher and you're Latina and you've been
> raised in this Catholic guilt. All of these perceptions of what you're
> supposed to be able to do, say, and take care of…it's…all-encom-
> passing.

Being a Latina administrator means your existence is navigating
other's expectations while these expectations collide with your own.

These collisions intersect at a space of contradiction that Anzaldúa (1999) calls *Nepantlas*, specifically Latinas living between and navigate multiple worlds. Delgado Bernal and Alemán (2017) describe this as, "…a constant state of in-between-ness, conflict, frustration and liminality" (p. 29). Participants expressed having to balance their family, culture, and career. Keating (2006) explains the impact that living in-between can have: "Their inability or refusal to remain within a single group or worldview makes them vulnerable to rejection, ostracism, and other forms of isolation." (p. 9). Latinas live in a constant state of contradiction. Montoya (1994) explains that educated Latinas are often asked, "'How Latina are you?' Such comments, when made by Anglos, imply that "we have risen above our group…when made by Latinos, however, the questions carry an innuendo of cultural betrayal" (p. 11).

Systemic oppression in education
All participants expressed feeling some level of oppression in their educational experience. It is important to understand the interplay between the participants and social oppression with systemic oppression an ever-present part of their experiences. Each participant experienced varying degrees of oppression, ranging from their experiences as students to their experiences as professionals in education.

Participants recounted being negatively impacted by their educational experiences from a young age and into college. Educational institutions were not seen as caring places for the participants; instead, they created traumatic experiences with lasting impacts. Due to the systemic oppression created in schools, most participants expressed feeling marginalized as students. This marginalization influenced their decisions to become educators. One participant described being marginalized in kindergarten: "I think I've always been told, I can't. I mean, as early as kindergarten…and so to still have that feeling that I did when I was in kindergarten of, like, 'You don't belong here.'"

All participants expressed the reason they work in education is to advocate for students and to be role models for their students and families. They work in education to show students they belong in education. One participant said, "Representation matters for kids because it

allows them to dream and to think that they, in fact, can be whatever it is they want to be." Participants want to be that representative for their students. Participants' laser focus to be role models and advocates for children was a commonality for all the participants. This is at the core of why they entered the field of education and the reason they became administrators. They believe it is their duty to be leaders for their community and its children. A participant explains, "The reason why I work so hard…I'm not doing it for myself. I am doing it for the collective."

Challenges: What the work feels like

When the Latinas in this study reached a position of authority, they faced numerous challenges. Participants were tokenized and had their work dismissed because they are Latina. Participants cited being told they only received their positions because they represented the community, which negates all their hard work and experience. One participant described her experience: "The whole idea that if I'm an administrator and I am a person of color, I can only be one. You're an administrator so I am going to erase the fact that you're a person of color."

   Tokenized and stereotyped. Throughout the interviews, all participants discussed being tokenized or stereotyped. Being tokenized means being the minority in a social context and asked to represent the entire minority group (Baskerville Watkins, Simmons, & Umpress, 2019; Olivas-Luján, 2008; Settles et al., 2019). Participants were frequently the only Latina in their position and they were asked to represent the entire Latino community. Olivas-Luján (2008) and Settles et al., (2019) affirm that stereotyping can be a consequence of tokenization because the token is used as an exemplar of their community. One participant describes being tokenized in her position, "I was supposed to represent everybody that was Latino and it was whatever I did, the whole race went down for it. If it was good, we got applauded and "these Latinas," it was a big burden to carry when you're the only one." The participants expressed dealing with being the token Latina in their position and were frequently asked to speak for all Latinos, a huge, culturally-diverse group.

Scrutinized: Who does she think she is? The participants verbalized being scrutinized and provided examples of how their ideas were met with scrutiny from their colleagues and the families they serve. Participants' examples suggest that scrutiny can manifest in different ways, from dismissing their ideas, questioning their leadership, and in some cases, receiving hate mail from parents for changing a school practice. One participant explained, "I think it's a combination of, I'm female, I am of color, and I'm young that people are like, 'Who does she think she is? What is she here to teach me?'" All participants experienced excessive scrutiny and blatant dismissal of their ideas. These findings align with the research of Heilman (2001) and Eagly and Carli (2007), which suggests that women in leadership positions are seen more negatively than their male counterparts. Heilman (2001) found that women managers were scrutinized more than their male counterparts.

Left behind by colleagues. Sadly, the majority of participants provided examples of individuals who they thought would be allies in their career advancement but were not. Most participants provided specific examples of how other women, women of color, or Latino men deliberately did not help them on their career journey. Participants expressed being especially disheartened by the lack of support from Latinos and other Latinas. Anzaldúa (1999) uses the term "nos-otras" (p. 281) to explain how due to colonization Latinos can be inclusive and exclusive of their own people. Nosotras in Spanish means "we women." However, Anzaldúa (1999) breaks the word up to mean us, nos, and them, otras. She places the dash between the words to explain the division within the Latino community due to the impact of colonization. Due to colonization, Latinos have taken on some characteristics of their colonizers, creating this division among Latinos (Anzaldúa, 1999; Delgado et al., 2017; Keating, 2006). Additionally, Delgado Bernal and Alemán (2017) explain that colonized people often become the "...perpetrator, particularly when we are working with marginalized communities" (p.26). Unfortunately, marginalized peoples oppress each other, which is what these participants experienced. One participant summed up this sentiment, "I think it's so much harder when it's another person of color,

or specifically when it's another Latina, that's like, 'Nope, not helping you get ahead.'" Various studies have found that professional women report feeling left out and/or isolated because there are so few women like them (Gordon & Whelan, 1998; Kelsey, C., Allen, K., Coke, K., & Ballard, G. 2014; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010; Sharp, W. L., Malone, B. G., Walter, J. K., & Supley, M. L., 2004). The Latinas in this study expressed these same ideas of isolation and being left out.

Coping strategies

Since participants were marginalized, tokenized, scrutinized, and left behind, coping strategies were implemented to manage these challenges. One of these strategies included working harder. Additionally, self-reflection also appeared to protect against negative scrutiny. Since participants received scrutiny, they implemented strategies to avoid this scrutiny by proactively adjusting themselves to accommodate their audiences. The data suggests these coping strategies were a reaction to the adversity these Latinas faced on their career journeys.

Working harder: Proving yourself. Participants discussed that as a response to this scrutiny, they must work harder than their male colleagues. Settles et al. (2019) found that when minority faculty members were tokenized, they use "working harder" (p.71) as a coping strategy. All participants confirmed using this strategy and discussed how they worked harder to prove and re-prove themselves. Participants expressed they had to work harder in their positions and carry this heavy workload because they are Latina. Participants expressed working harder as a coping strategy to silence the scrutiny they received as Latina administrators. One participant explained, "I think being Latina in my work, the fact that in order to get there [in administration], you have to be 10 times better. I think I constantly bring that to my work, not once in a while, but on a daily basis." Participants felt they must work harder than others to prove themselves to the scrutinizers.

Reflection. All participants discussed some aspect of a self-reflection strategy. Their interviews suggest that reflection allowed them to determine which coping strategy is best to employ and how to deal

with the challenges faced. One participant stated how important it is for Latina administrators to know themselves when seeking a position in administration. Participants stated that as Latinas, they needed to know "who is in the room" to reflect on and adjust their *Latinidad* so their audience could be receptive to their ideas. One participant explained, "I think depending on the conversation and who's in the room, I approach the conversation differently." Participants provided varying degrees of this. Some participants would adjust how they speak, while another would change their style of dress depending on their "audience." Participants expressed adjusting their *Latinidad* as a strategy to be successful in their positions. One participant explained, "Depending on who your audience is and if you come in as a Latina leader—for me at least, I can't speak for all—I feel that there's some times I'm holding back on that [Latina] flavor." The data suggests participants utilize coping strategies to manage the challenges they face as Latina administrators.

Finding balance

Participants expressed having to juggle their professional and personal lives. Participants discussed that when they were dedicated to work, it would create an imbalance in their lives. When participants were asked what characteristics Latina administrators need to be successful, they reflected on the importance of finding balance in their lives. Participants expressed balancing their gender roles as wives and Latinas with their work ethic. Participants expressed wanting to create a balance between work and home but often struggling with it. One participant said,

> I think for Latinas, it is our family structure, especially if you're married to a Latino. It's expected that you be this amazing rockstar wife and mother, and you're trying to rock it out at work; it's pretty impossible to do that.

The data affirms the research regarding the difficulties of Latinas balancing their work and their families (Anzaldúa, 1999; Guendouzi, 2006; Kamenou, 2008; Sanchez-Hucles and Davis, 2010). Although participants discussed wanting balance, balance is considered an ideal state.

Research by Guendouzi (2006) and Johnston and Swanson (2006) explains how women have to manage conflict and create balance be-

tween their home lives and careers. Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) call this balance "triple jeopardy" (p.174), because Latinas must balance their careers, culture, and family. Participants expressed having to learn to balance perceived gender expectations, cultural implications for being Latina, and desire to advance their careers. Balancing family and work was one reason participants gave for Latinas not ascending to the position of superintendent.

Kamenou (2008) found family responsibilities weighed heavily on women of color. Kamenou's (2008) study also found that women had difficulty integrating their family lives with their work lives and were seen as neglecting family responsibilities. Participants affirmed this reality. One participant specifically attributed her career advancement to the "demise of her marriage." Other participants mentioned not being seen as "good" Latinas because they did not follow their culture's gender expectations. Balancing these imposed cultural and gender expectations along with their careers were challenges that participants struggled with.

Participants had to learn to balance familial duties with work, while learning to balance how to demonstrate Latina leadership. Due to gender and racial stereotyping by the dominant culture, some Latinas chose to adjust their *Latinidad* by audience. Participants expressed having to navigate how they spoke with colleagues so that their ideas would not be dismissed. Participants stated their passion was often seen as "being emotional." This sentiment provides insight into a study by Sachs and Blackmore (1998), who found that when women in educational leadership positions were upset, they hid their feelings to avoid "appearing emotional" (p.7). Sachs and Blackmore (1998) also found that when women in educational leadership positions became upset, they would find space to be alone so their peers would not see. One participant echoed this, saying, "My reality check is that if I want to lose a fuse, it's time for me to go home." Participants had to balance being Latina, a woman, and an administrator with their personal and professional lives.

Implications for practice

Why so few Latinas?

Participants contend that Latinas do not want to be superintendents because they must prove and re-prove themselves. Participants expressed that Latinas receive undue scrutiny and must be excellent at their jobs, which is accomplished through working twice as hard. Participants faced multiple challenges on their administrative journeys. Many were marginalized as students and created a commitment to change the educational system for students of color. Additionally, participants explained how they were tokenized and scrutinized for being Latina. One participant explained,

> I think the reason more superintendents out there are not Latinas, at least in the Midwest, is because you have to work twice as hard. You have to prove yourself as a woman, and you have to prove yourself as a Latina. And in order to do that, you're doing so much more than the typical superintendent that something has got to give.

The participants had to work harder, know their audience, and balance work and home life. Being a Latina administrator means having the odds stacked against you. This is why there are so few Latina superintendents.

Mentoring

Participants commented on the importance of mentoring and the need for Latina mentors in the education community. All participants believe mentors are an important aspect of getting more Latinas into educational administration. One participant said, "Formal mentoring, yes. I think we are starting to talk about having windows and mirrors in terms of education." Another participant echoed, "I started a mentoring program, and that came from the fact that I was seeing, we have children that are Latinos—almost 50% of our school population is Latino—but we have only 14% of our administrators." Since the cultural landscape for Latinas is so entrenched in the patriarchy, it is important for Latinas, both children and adults, to have Latina role models (Anzaldúa, 1999; Arredondo, 2002; Delgado Bernal & Alemán, 2017). Participants cited

a lack of camaraderie from other women of color and Latinos, and that creating Latina mentoring programs is imperative. Without creating mentoring programs, Latinas will continue to self-select out from applying to administrative positions (Glass, 2000; Grogan, 2005). Latinas will continue to not see themselves in leadership positions (Hernandez and Morales,1999; Sharp et al., 2004). Professional organizations should implement programs for women of color. There is a teacher shortage; therefore, an administrator shortage is next (García & Weiss, 2019). Although Latinos are the largest minority group in the United States, they are not discussed in the field of educational administration (Rodriguez et al., 2016). One participant explains how Latina administrators in the Midwest are invisible:

> I think about 24% of women are in the superintendent position. The majority of those are white and then maybe a little under a third of them are Black and then we are at 1%. There is definitely something to be said about our racial and ethnic background. I almost feel to some extent invisible.

Participants needed individuals to expose them to the possibilities of attaining a career in educational administration. Without mentoring, educational administration will continue to be dominated by the white male narrative.

Conclusion

The career journey of a Latina in educational administration is arduous. Participants expressed how being Latina inhibited them from career advancement. Additionally, participants stated that Latinas are self-selecting out of the superintendency because of how challenging it is to be a Latina administrator. The intersectionality of being Latina, both a minority and a woman, impacts their pursuit of a superintendent position. The career path for participants entailed feelings of marginalization, constant scrutiny, being stereotyped and tokenized, doing double the work, intense self-reflection, and trying to balance familial culture and work. All participants expressed the challenges in managing the demands of the position with the demands of having to prove and re-prove themselves on an almost daily basis.

For change to occur, one must actively unlearn the society's oppressive norms (Kendi, 2019). All educators should self-reflect on their practices to see how they are biased. Teachers should have dialogues around their teaching practices; administrators should review their hiring practices; and school boards should discuss how their policies perpetuate a sexist and racist narrative. Educators need to unlearn these biased practices to create equitable classrooms (Delgado Bernal & Alemán, 2017; hooks, 1994). Additionally, Latina mentoring is urgently needed. The next generation of Latina leaders needs Latina mentors to help and bring them up into administrative positions, so students have administrators who represent them.

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On common ground: A study of teacher leadership in the Rio Grande Valley post pandemic

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Abstract

Crises often bring about educational change (Stewart, 2012). The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need for school systems to further support teachers. Between May and October 2020, stress and teacher burnout rose from 25% to 57%, according to a RAND Corporation study (Gewertz, 2021). Few studies have focused on how teacher leadership development aids capacity-building efforts during unexpected events. This study focused on the South Texas region, and more specifically, the Rio Grande Valley, as its high concentration of minoritized and low-income students amplified the need to address this region. The themes that emerged from the participants' responses include leadership identification, adult learning, and crisis leadership.

Introduction

Teacher leadership has been acknowledged in the literature and praxis as crucial to school system success in supporting broad goals and initiatives (Lambert, 1998; York-Barr & Duke, 2004; Lai & Cheung, 2015). However, to date there has been a lack of consonance of the notion of teacher leadership because of the lack of a clear definition of what it is; instead, scholars often use various aspects of the roles and characteristics of teacher leaders to define it (Uribe-Flórez et al., 2014). A post-pandemic assessment of teacher leadership revealed how the emergent frontline role of teacher leaders served to redefine and illuminate the role of these educators who changed to connect, learn, and lead (Berry et al., 2020). During the COVID-19 pandemic, teacher leaders took on various formal roles (ie. team leader, department chair, site-based decision-making committee member, staff developer, curriculum writer) and informal roles that included addressing parent questions and maintaining positive outlooks; all of this despite their own personal pandemic challenges with childcare, health concerns, and loss of loved ones.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this naturalistic inquiry was to inform leadership practices to advocate for teachers' opportunities to grow as leaders within the organization (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The current crisis and other factors contributed to the importance of research that captured perceptual data on how current administrators built capacity and managed during times of swift change particularly as related to the COVID-19 global pandemic. A conceptual review of teacher leadership opened discourse to operationalize the terminology (Jesson et al., 2011). The terms used in the discussion of teacher leadership expanded the perspectives and perceptions of developing skills in others. "Teacher leaders are needed more than ever—and there must be a system to cultivate them" (Berry et al., 2020, p. 14). To facilitate efforts in building teacher leadership capacity, organizations must define and develop a pipeline for leadership. Distribution of leadership, via engagement of teachers, shows that high-performing systems focus on generating a professional culture and distributing leadership roles (Barth, 1990; Spillane et al., 2001). By dis-

tributing leadership across school systems, teachers assume the responsibility of sharing best practices that enhanced the professional culture of the campus and district. During the COVID-19 crisis, formal leadership on school campuses and within districts relied on teacher leaders possibly more than ever before.

At the onset of the pandemic, government officials in the Rio Grande Valley (RGV) region worked to avert further implications of the coronavirus. The RGV is a place that thrives on the closeness of family, community, and social connectedness; thus, the impact of the virus was crippling (Hernandez, 2020). Nearly a third of residents in the region faced health inequities due to factors including a lack of health insurance and a high prevalence of underlying health conditions worsened by COVID-19 (Narea, 2020). The need for ongoing human capital development to create institutional change in schools in the RGV is necessary to support appropriate educational attainment opportunities in an area where more than 80% of the population is comprised of minoritized students and more than 30% of households fall under the label of low-income (Texas Education Agency, 2020).

Review of the literature

Scholarly research from York-Barr and Duke (2004) provided the operational definition of teacher leadership for this study: "the process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement" (pp. 287–288). While the understanding of teacher leadership has evolved over time, a conceptual framework related to adult development undergirds this research study. The application of a teacher-leader model developed by a consortium of various educational practitioners, government leaders, and research entities will contribute to the existing literature on how districts create an environment that grows their leaders. According to Helterbran (2016), "School improvement ultimately will depend on teacher leadership—a factor largely untapped in schools today" (p. 114).

Leadership practices

The importance of expanding research on the building of teacher leadership capacity rests on considering assumptions about leadership, empowerment, and change. Whether exercising power and influence individually or collectively, teacher leaders often play a role in the political nature of organizations. The evolution of teacher leadership described by Silva et al., (2000), as cited by York-Barr and Duke (2004), encompassed three waves: teachers serving in formal roles, leveraging teachers' expertise by appointing teachers to various roles, and involving teachers as the central players to the process of "reculturing" schools (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Key areas of change, including classroom practices, attitudes, beliefs, and learning outcomes, informed leaders on how to support gains in teachers' competence and confidence (Guskey, 2002) to serve as teacher leaders.

Individual agency

Educational improvement practices embed the concept of teacher leadership with a central principle of individual empowerment (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). An early study found that "the fact that schools rely on a clear demarcation of roles and responsibilities presents a major barrier to the idea of teachers as leaders" (Harris, 2003, p. 314). Without clarity on teacher leader roles, researchers suggested that "leaders need to understand who they are and reflect on their roles to embrace the expectations as a leader" (Uribe-Flórez et al., 2014, p. 11). Once an individual agency has started to unfold, teacher leadership may progress, as per Hunzicker (2017): "the progression from teacher-to-teacher leader is a gradual, recursive process that occurs over a period of months and years" (p. 2).

Distributed leadership

While existing research shows that teacher leadership is acceptable in principle, "Distributed leadership requires those in formal leadership positions to relinquish power to others" (Harris, 2003, p. 319). Findings in a research study by Uribe-Flórez et al. (2014) suggested that teacher leadership development needs to emphasize shared leadership: "Both principals and teachers have important and reciprocal roles in the overall

leadership quotient of a school, but to do so, an open and equitable relationship must be in place" (Helterbran, 2016, p. 115). Situating distributed leadership within the context of a global pandemic will further the literature on teacher leadership development. In the aftermath of COVID-19, re-imagining teacher leadership surpasses the division of labor between administrators and teachers (Berry et al., 2020).

Leadership pipeline

Learning environments that promote teacher leadership include language by principals and teachers affirming teacher empowerment (Carpenter & Sherretz, 2012). Through a variety of ways, leaders can leverage the expertise and experience of teachers (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012): "While external factors such as school culture, the building principal, and colleagues can influence teachers' progression toward leadership, the decision to lead or not to lead is ultimately within the power of teachers themselves" (Hunzicker, 2017, p. 22). As individual agency remains a critical component, the teacher leadership progression continues to face some obstacles, including a lack of transparency in the selection process, teacher quality, adaptive innovation, and equity issues (Weiner & Lamb, 2020).

Teacher leader model

Even with decades of research supporting the idea of teacher leadership, the actual practices remain scant. "While recognizing teacher leadership as a stance signals a breakthrough in our collective understanding of teacher leadership, understanding how teachers progress from teacher to teacher leader remains unclear;" specifically, how to confront the barriers to teacher leadership (Hunzicker, 2017, p. 2; Sheppard et al., 2020). According to the Education Commission of the States (2018), 17 of 50 U.S. states have adopted teacher leader standards, and only 10 adopted the Teacher Leader Model (TLM) Standards developed by the Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium in 2011. The National Education Association (NEA) website posited that while teacher leader models define the work, maximum benefits come out of collaboration between those leaders and administration.

Figure 1
Teacher leader model standards

The TLM standards offer seven interrelated domains as guidance for teacher-leader development. It has been categorized into three major areas of focus including learning for continuous improvement, fostering a collaborative culture, and advocating for self and others.

Learning for continuous improvement
With a plethora of school improvement initiatives facing educators, continuous learning requires an investment of time and opportunity. Helterbran (2016) contend that "teaching is the only profession where novice practitioners start anew every generation and are somehow expected to know how to teach expertly when entering their first classrooms" (p. 119). The broad definition of professional development (PD) gives districts an opportunity to shape their efforts and shift resources to more effective practices. To systemically support teachers and leaders,

the context should determine relevant learning opportunities. High-quality capacity building involves sustained, job-embedded professional development with coaching and feedback (Joyce & Showers, 2002; Holdheide, 2020).

Fostering a collaborative culture

Collaborative teaching environments benefit teachers and students (Villavicencio et al., 2021). Teachers learning from other teachers is well-documented in research. "Leadership must emerge from many individuals within an organization and is not simply vested in a hand-ful of formally recognized leaders" (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 288). A pressing need to develop supportive and collaborative communities of practice within a virtual setting confronted the unfamiliar and over-whelming circumstances faced by educators during a global pandemic (Hill et al., 2020).

Advocating for self and others

Knowing how to set goals, navigate the system, and advocate for their growth and development are among the identity-building factors of the teaching profession. Little to no research discusses the impact on how teachers are equipped for teacher leadership beyond the classroom (Sheppard et al., 2020). In addition to building leadership capacity comes the ability for the collegial sharing of knowledge, practice, and reflection. "Teacher leadership reflects teacher agency through establish-ing relationships, breaking down barriers, and marshalling resources throughout the organization in an effort to improve students' educational experiences and outcomes" (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 263). Along with the time and space to discuss the work, everyone provides input on the support they need from others (Stevenson, 2019).

Methodology

This study focused on the South Texas region, and more specifically, the RGV, as its high concentration of minoritized and low-income students amplified the need to address teacher leadership needs in this region. Only those districts located in the RGV and classified as "large" by the

National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) were used during the site selection. Based on data from 2018, the Hispanic population in South Texas comprised nearly 84% of the region's total population. In 2019–2020, the Texas Academic Performance Report (TAPR) for Edinburg and surrounding area reported that 91.1% of teachers in the region identify as Hispanic (TEA, 2020) and 33.3% of households reported an annual income of less than $25,000 in 2018. A recent national study conducted by WalletHub (McCann, 2020) found that the Brownsville-Harlingen area ranked 149 and the McAllen-Edinburg-Mission area ranked 150 in terms of educational attainment. With a high concentration of Hispanics living in South Texas, the region remained an untapped source of information on research impacting educators who serve a high percentage of minoritized and low-income children.

The researcher purposively selected prospective participants from the 12 identified districts. This naturalistic inquiry study focused on the perceptions of recent or current superintendents, district-level leaders, principals, and assistant principals from large school districts in the RGV. Due to the relatively close distance of interviewing participants located near the researcher in the RGV, the interviews were initially planned in a semi-structured format through in-person contact. However, the increase in positive COVID-19 cases in the area moved the interviews to an online platform using Microsoft Teams. A semi-structured interview using open-ended questions in a 45-minute to 1-hour timeframe was used to gather perceptual data.

Patton (2002) distinguishes naturalistic inquiry (Erlandson et al., 1993) from a controlled experiment whereby one sets out to collect information of a person's lived experience in their real-world setting. The interrelation of the research problem, purpose, and questions contributed to the study's methodological congruence (Richards & Morse, 2013, as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The researcher used coaching skills, such as active listening techniques, clarifying questions, summary of participant statements, and reflection on information shared by the participant. Patton (2002) agrees that the researcher becomes an instrument of the study, since her perspective becomes "part of the context for the findings" (p. 64). As a lifelong educa-

tor in the RGV, the researchers' epistemology draws from various lenses based on her gender, ethnicity, and other personal experiences (Saldaña, 2011). In addition, the cultural phenomenon of language provides a link between the researcher and the participants (Erlandson et al., 1993).

An initial coding of the data using first-cycle coding methods such as descriptive coding, In vivo coding, and process coding (Saldaña, 2016), a follow-up interviewing was used for member-checking related to the early development of patterns (Erlandson et al., 1993). Descriptive coding laid the groundwork for second-cycle coding, as it allowed the researcher to categorize, summarize, or index the data (Saldaña, 2016). Furthermore, a systematic process for documenting and interpreting the data contributed to the study's trustworthiness and credibility. Purposive sampling led the naturalistic inquiry researcher to simultaneously seek typical and divergent data based on relevant and emergent insights to the study (Erlandson et al., 1993). A pseudonym was created for each participant to add to the trustworthiness and credibility of the study (Erlandson et al., 1993).

Findings

From grappling with learning how to effectively utilize technology devices and platforms to maintaining safety protocols during a pandemic and natural disasters, leaders faced various challenges that shifted their focus away from leadership coaching and mentoring. Even though teacher leadership development took a back seat to administrative priorities during these unprecedented times, building leadership capacity remained a pressing need for all educators. This study was based in the RGV region. This study sought to glean the perceptions and experiences of administrators in the RGV to inform the extant literature of the unique needs of this region, its students, and its educators, particularly post-pandemic/post-crises.

Participants

Along with meeting the demographics criteria set in the study, including serving in a leadership role as a campus or district administrator in a large school district in the RGV, the participants contributed perceptual

data based on personal experience as teacher leaders before becoming administrators. Their current roles in education place them in a position to develop other teacher leaders. A summary of the demographic data is provided in Table 1.

Districts

The demographics represented in the table align with the target population for this study, including a high percentage of minoritized and economically disadvantaged students. While the student population ranges from approximately 590 to 31,200 students, criteria for large school districts were met, according to the National Center for Educational Statistics. A summary of the demographic data is provided in Table 2.

Table 1
Participant demographics

Pseud-onym	Title	Age	Years teach-ing	Years as an admin-istrator	Level of administrator experience
Sabrina	Executive director for curriculum & instruction	40	9	9	District
Daniel	Elementary school principal	48	9	17	Campus
Hilary	Middle school assistant principal	61	14	19	Campus, district, region
Noah	Superintendent	52	7	17	Campus, district
Jazmine	Assistant superintendent	60	12	27	Campus, district, region
Luca	High school principal	64	7	8	Campus
Mirabel	Executive director for high schools	52	9	15	Campus, district

District demographics

Although the concept of teacher leadership remains rooted in a traditional model with the use of formal roles, the pandemic altered the distribution of leadership in these school districts. The findings encompass the major emerging themes of leadership identification, adult learning, and crisis leadership. Those themes, as well as apropos subthemes, are depicted in Figure 2.

Some common themes that emerged from the data suggested that the primary concerns of the participants to build teacher leadership in their district included how to identify leaders, build capacity, and respond to times of swift change.

Leadership identification

In a broad sense, the participants were asked to describe teacher leadership in their districts. One participant stated, "I think teacher leadership is the single most important thing that you need to have in place." Another, Hilda, said, "For me, a teacher leader is someone that you could take on as a think partner." Melinda said, "Our teachers are the

Table 2
District demographics

Pseud-onym	Student population size	% Hispanic students	% Economi-cally disad-vantaged students	Number of campuses	Number of teachers
District 1	590	99%	90%	3	40
District 2	4,600	99%	90%	10	320
District 3	4,900	99%	70%	5	270
District 4	13,800	99%	95%	20	970
District 5	26,600	99%	90%	35	1,880
District 6	31,200	99%	90%	40	2,160

Note: Numbers reflected on the table are rounded down to maintain anonymity.

ones keeping our districts together because of everything that they're doing right now. They are leading the learning." Yet another participant, Judith, said, "If we don't do something to make them feel valued, we're going to keep losing them." In a positive reciprocal relationship between an administrator and a teacher leader, both educators have something to gain. When asked to define teacher leadership and describe the accompanying attributes and skill sets, more than half of the participants defined teacher leaders in a traditional sense, including department heads,

Figure 2
Teacher leadership emerging themes in the context of COVID-19

Domain I: Teacher leaders foster a collaborative culture to support educator development and student learning.

Domain II: Teacher leaders access and use research to improve practice and student learning.

Domain III: Teacher leaders promote professional learning for continuous improvement.

Domain IV: Teacher leaders facilitate improvements in instruction and student learning.

Domain V: Teacher leaders promote the use of assessments and data for school and district improvement.

Domain VI: Teacher leaders improve outreach and collaboration with families and community.

Domain VII: Teacher leaders advocate for student learning and the profession.

grade level or content leads, or PLC leaders. While a specific definition was not offered, the participants described attributes and skills set of teacher leaders that serve as subthemes to identify potential leaders.

Attributes of teacher leaders. To assist with the task of identifying potential teacher leaders, participants' responses were used to generate a list of attributes. Participants responded with a combination of 35 terms to describe the desired attributes of a teacher leader (see Figure 3). The size of the font in the word gram increased to add a visual emphasis to the figure.

Sabrina said that a teacher leader is "someone who takes ownership of student outcomes, radiates that, and it becomes contagious." Mirabel stated, "We have a ton of teachers with content knowledge and expertise," and added, "Teacher leaders are motivated to learn and to help others learn." Another participant, Hilary, shared that "Teacher leaders show commitment and a willingness to want to grow." An important consideration is that knowledge and expertise in the content are not sufficient to motivate others to "run with the ball," as shared by

Figure 2
Word gram of teacher leader attributes

Daniel. Teacher leaders know the expectation that supports the statement from Noah that "teacher leaders add value to the leadership team at the campus." Other commonalities in shared perspectives of teacher leader attributes included that they are practical, prompt, and caring.

Skill set of teacher leaders. Without a definition or model of teacher leadership, the participants shared some general observations of what contributes to the success of a teacher leader. The three major interrelated categories of the skill set of effective teacher leaders include mindset (hardworking & passionate), communication (desire to help others & collaborate), and interpersonal skills (good listener and willing to engage in crucial conversations). According to Hilary, effective teacher leaders "go back and show other teachers" in a collaborative manner once they have discovered a strategy that works. Noah shared that teacher leaders use their "communication skills and passion" to keep an initiative moving forward. All the participants explained that effective teacher leaders listen to others to find ways to improve on what is working or adjust what is not working through reflective practices.

Adult learning. When asked to reflect on adult learning and their own leadership abilities, Sabrina remarked on the various districts' initiatives that were "not necessarily meshing well," which further complicates the relationship with colleagues. Daniel explained that the monitoring aspect of professional development takes a commitment of time and effort on the part of the administrator to check in. Hilary stated that "impactful learning has been from job-embedded training instead of drive-by PD." The participants revealed their perceptions on access to professional development specifically related to teacher leadership development. Sabrina shared that "there hasn't been a lot of investment in teacher leadership. We need more boots on the ground helping support the teachers." Hilary provided a similar experience that "the district doesn't invest in teacher leadership. If we value teaching teachers, we value creating good teacher leaders."

PD opportunities. With an increase in the availability of professional development through various delivery modes during the pandemic, the participants reflected on the access and categories of professional development: technology, instruction, and accountability. Most participants conveyed that a negative aspect of using a virtual mode of training created a decline in networking opportunities. Aside from a change in the mode of delivery, the pandemic also generated additional content of professional development.

Technology. With the swift change to virtual learning during the onset of the pandemic in March 2020, technology was the first professional development mentioned by the participants. Hilary expressed that "we had to shift the focus to the hottest topic of the moment," including how to support teachers with asynchronous, synchronous, remote, virtual, or blended learning. According to Luca, he observed that "teacher leaders emerged whether by choice or by need." Mirabel and Noah shared a common experience that their respective districts had been ahead of the curve with technology training pre-pandemic. Both participants expressed that it was the teacher leaders who took charge of providing support to their peers. According to Noah, "Teacher leaders supported the learning during this global pandemic because we provided them all the support with technology." When the other participants were asked how teacher leaders supported capacity-building efforts in their district, Jazmine stated that "They contribute tremendously, because they're helping other teachers." Her statement goes back to the idea that administrators had to know their staff members to tap into their expertise in an identified area of need.

Instruction. Throughout the interviews, participants referred to a common pandemic-related phrase that has emerged in education, known as "learning loss." As described by Mirabel, "We have a lot of learning loss that took place because of remote learning." All participants shared the use of teacher leaders; and more specifically, those teachers in the traditional leadership role of department chair, content lead, or grade level lead, to conduct professional development on accelerated learning.

Accountability. The pandemic created a need to temporarily cease state accountability testing requirements and implement an alternative means of accountability in the spring and summer 2020 administrations. Daniel offered that his teacher leaders helped the leadership team closely "monitor data using a tracker to ensure maintaining expectations, not surprises." Luca explained that many of the traditionally identified teacher leaders get assigned to tested grade levels or content areas. Therefore, this group of teachers received training on changes to the assessment and accountability system to share with their colleagues. Hilary and Sabrina described similarly that it was their special populations, students serviced by special education and bilingual/English as a Second Language programs, who noticeably required greater support. While "engaging and collaborative professional development that benefits an English learner" was a goal pre-pandemic, Hilary described the need to increase student engagement in every classroom to "undo over a year of learning in silence from behind a computer screen."

Coaching and mentoring
Daniel, Noah, and Jazmine described a significant difference in their experiences working in a small district versus a large school district. One difference involves the amount of one-on-one time coaching and mentoring teachers. Administrators in large school districts described the challenges of scheduling grade-level meetings. Furthermore, the need to prioritize the support offered to teachers changed dramatically. Sabrina explained that it was important to build capacity, "but more than anything, build their confidence because of the low staff morale." Teacher leaders emerged based on the expertise and confidence they displayed with a specific initiative. In three of the six participating districts, the superintendent and assistant superintendents held a future leaders' academy for teachers going through a master's degree program. Noah extended that "As aspiring leaders, we have yearlong academies where we place someone on a campus to learn from an actual principal." To continue to spread the learning, Mirabel explained that "part of the responsibility of the teacher attending professional development is

to bring back the learning and share with others." Hilary declared that "Teacher leaders contribute by being good models and mentors."

Crisis leadership

The term "crisis" is undeniably associated with the global pandemic. A critical perspective included the ability to adapt to a crisis. While the participants responded to a myriad of questions regarding teacher leadership, the shared experiences of these practicing administrators remained focused on the dynamic nature of adapting to the realities set in motion by the pandemic, as well as the social and emotional needs of all stakeholders.

Adapting to the pandemic. A significant amount of loss and uncertainty captured the emotions expressed by the participants when the interview questions focused on the pandemic. Although all participants agreed that they did adapt during the pandemic, responses varied depending on the situation or topic. Responses included: adapting to new terminology associated with COVID-19 (ie. hot spot), responding to limited technology access, impacts of COIVD-19 on teacher and students' attendance, and student engagement and monitoring.

Social and emotional learning. Hilary stated that from a leadership perspective, "It just makes it very difficult to be able to go out there and support everybody that needs it right now." Daniel expressed that "there had to be lots of open communication with staff because they were scared of getting sick. A daily check-in with teachers to find out how they were doing or what they needed help with became the priority." At the same time, several participants acknowledged a pause to add more tasks to the overextended teacher leaders. Luca offered an emotional perspective on the need for self-care. He stated that

> During the pandemic, things were difficult, not only at work but at home. Family issues, work deadlines, loss of electricity for several days during the winter storm or hurricane season, and the lack of enough food in the home were all stories shared by teachers.

He explained that the rapport he built with staff members caused them

to reach out to him, and he became overwhelmed with concern for staff and students.

A range of emotions exhibited in their words and described in their actions to build teacher leaders amid turmoil elevated the purpose of the study. Even though the participating districts in the RGV do not have a clear definition of teacher leadership, the participants provided the attributes and skill sets of successful teacher leaders they have observed in practice. A glimpse of adult learning practices through professional development and coaching and mentoring contributed to the body of knowledge on teacher leadership development. Participants shed light on how a global pandemic activated crisis leadership to adapt to the pandemic and respond to the social and emotional learning needs of students and adults.

Discussion

The literature acknowledges that teacher leadership is crucial in supporting school systems as they work to adapt to policy changes and move various initiatives forward (Elmore, 1987; Berry et al., 2020; Sheppard et al., 2020); however, nothing could have prepared educators for the challenges brought on by a global pandemic. A review of the literature revealed multiple components of teacher leadership development undergirded by a conceptual framework aligned to leadership practices, contextual barriers, and a teacher leader model. Each component serves as a backdrop to the discussion and impetus for the recommendations provided in this study with the goal of contributing to the existing knowledge to improve the quality of education for marginalized student populations.

The shared experiences unfolding related to the global pandemic have yet to be fully documented in the literature. In the extant body of knowledge on teacher leadership development, the prevalent findings document the importance of teacher leaders to improve the school culture and student learning outcomes (York-Barr & Duke, 2004; Awkard, 2017; Hunzicker, 2017). Technology use, health guidelines, information gathering and sharing, specialized staff, and breaking down complex tasks demonstrated leadership complexity at all levels within an organi-

zation. The greatest challenge has been to deal with this "black swan" (Taleb, 2007, as cited by Bolman & Deal, 2013) of a global pandemic that forced organizations to develop systems immediately and without time for planning, to address the multifaceted needs of all stakeholders.

The challenges posed by the pandemic required flexibility, and the findings from this study, in alignment with current literature, suggest that leadership development requires a systemic approach that includes the overlapping themes of leadership identification, crisis leadership, and adult learning. None of the participants described the use of a model for identifying potential teacher leaders. Therefore, the findings of this study concluded that these large districts in the RGV attempt to build the capacity of teacher leaders without the use of an operational definition or model. Participants suggested the prevalence of a top-down leadership approach to drive initiatives, which is not uncommon (Hunzicker, 2017). The conditions in a dynamic context led to a growing sphere of influence and increased autonomy of leaders and teachers due to the impracticality of monitoring every initiative (Kowalski, 2013). As such, administrators in this research study seemingly shared the sphere of influence with formal and informal teacher leaders to assist with monitoring initiatives and providing implementation support to their peers.

Recommendations

While the researcher obtained substantial qualitative data through a series of questions, the feel of the school or district culture remained a missing element. An area of interest for future research on the topic of teacher leadership in the RGV would be to observe on-site professional development or coaching led by teacher leaders or members of the leadership team. Additionally, gathering a mix of qualitative and quantitative data from institutions of higher learning on the outcomes of teacher-leader programs would also contribute to the existing literature. The findings from this study suggest that professionals in the field of education consider for future practice the following three recommendations.

Recommendation 1: Define the role of teacher leaders
While teachers and administrators customarily wear many different hats,

the pandemic strained the workload of educators. At this point, why is it necessary to define the role of teacher leaders? The world acknowledged that educators are frontline workers in society, and the importance of the role of teachers gained attention (Aguayo Chan et al., 2020). One aspect of effective teacher leadership development requires an understanding of the role of teacher leaders for both teachers and administrators (Uribe-Flórez et al., 2014). In this respect, teachers gain the ability and authority to pivot as the initiative and progress call for them to act. Teacher leaders can exercise their influence by reaching out to parents and legislators to advocate on behalf of their students, which contributes greatly to changes in policy (Aguayo Chan et al., 2020).

Recommendation 2: Facilitate the role of teacher leaders
The findings in this study suggested the need for distributed leadership to adjust to a myriad of changes. As previously referenced, some leaders stay stuck in their thinking (Bolman & Deal, 2013). To mitigate this disposition, collaboration with teams of teachers required a more thoughtful, intentional, and explicit presentation of the initiative, such as sharing power and building positive relationships (Kowalski, 2013). A second aspect of effective teacher leadership development includes training for principals on how to facilitate the role of teacher leaders (Uribe-Flórez et al., 2014). In essence, organizational leadership ensures an effective succession plan by building others' capacity and leveraging on the strength of their human capital. By encouraging a thoughtful exchange of ideas, leaders avoid putting their values ahead of others.

Recommendation 3: Coach and mentor teacher leaders
As stated by several participants in this study, time and energy to coach and mentor teacher leaders became difficult to muster while chaos overwhelmed educators. At this point, why is it necessary to coach and mentor teacher leaders? In part, a return in investment in teacher leadership development relates to the leveraging of human capital while elevating the satisfaction through meaningful work (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Rallying the troops, so to speak, takes more than one leader in large school systems. A third aspect of effective teacher leadership

development involves training for teacher leaders to work with others and be team players within the school (Uribe-Flórez et al., 2014). By creating empowering spaces for teachers to continue to find their voices, teacher knowledge will continue to be illuminated beyond times of crisis (Hill et al., 2020).

Conclusion

The development of teacher leaders continued to run its course despite internal and external obstacles. Although limited in scope, as found in this study, the importance of teacher leadership development remained at the forefront for many administrators. Due to a global pandemic along with a plethora of natural occurrences, this study discovered that teacher leadership development stood at a standstill while the districts prioritized the vast educational initiatives. Educators juggled multiple priorities during the pandemic, including taking care of their job and family responsibilities (Hill et al., 2020). In addition, it became a moral imperative to continue to provide services in the form of meals, health care, and emotional support to all stakeholders in every community (Aguayo Chan et al., 2020). While lessons learned on the comprehensive nature of leadership during a crisis provided insight, the human aspect of the stories shared by the participants heightened the call for a systemic approach to teacher leadership development. The lead author provides these final reflections in the form of a poem.

The struggles kept us on common ground
The struggles of a first-year teacher
Classroom management
Curriculum content and pacing
Instructional strategies using technology
Assessment data and preparation
But what really mattered during a global pandemic?
We found ourselves on common ground.

The struggles of a veteran teacher
New technology

Instruction in a virtual environment
Adjust curriculum pacing
Different test design, data, and platform
But what really mattered during a global pandemic?
We found ourselves on common ground.

The struggles of an administrator
Safety protocols
PD in a virtual environment
Monitoring everything
Attendance issues
But what really mattered during a global pandemic?
We found ourselves on common ground.

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7

Working from the heart: Mexican American counselors-in-training and the development of counselor identity

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Abstract

Within the past 10 years, the fields of counseling and counselor education have worked to improve their professional identities. In addition to the development of a solid counselor identity through the American Counseling Association's (ACA) consensus definition, the field has also worked to diversify its clinicians, faculty, and student populations. However, most students and faculty in programs across the county identify as white. Not much is known about the development of professional counselor identity amongst students of color, specifically Mexican American students. This hermeneutic phenomenological qualitative study explored the lived experiences of Mexican American counselors-in-training (CITs) related to the development of their professional counselor identities. This study helped to identify what is important to counselor identity development and what the integration of cultural and professional identities may look like within the Mexican American CIT population.

Context

One of the biggest challenges within the fields of both counseling and counselor education has been the development and acceptance of an agreed-upon professional counselor identity (e.g. Nelson & Jackson, 2003; Calley & Hawley, 2008; Gale & Austin, 2003; Hanna & Bemak, 1997; Myers, et al., 2002; Swickert, 1997). Professional counselor identity development refers to the process of becoming and identifying as a professional counselor and begins in graduate school when counselors-in-training (CITs) are studying to become professional counselors (Hinkle & Drew, 2020). Murdock, et al., (2013) suggested that a strong professional counselor identity is imperative for the field of counseling to continue to evolve. Not much is known about the development of professional counselor identity amongst students of color, and more specifically the Mexican American population of counseling students. Therefore, studying how Mexican American CITs develop and integrate their professional counselor identities into their cultural identities may help the fields of counseling and counselor education learn more about how to better support these students.

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of Mexican American CITs as they relate to the development of their professional counselor identities and what may be helpful in better supporting these students throughout their journey to becoming professional counselors. Professional counselor identity development refers to the process of becoming and identifying as a professional counselor.

The overarching research question for this study was, what are the lived experiences of Mexican American CITs as they develop their professional counselor identity? The sub-questions that will also informed this study were:

- How do Mexican American CITs develop their professional counselor identity?
- What are the contributing factors that support the successful development of counselor identity for Mexican American CITs?
- How do Mexican American CITs integrate their identities based on their unique lens and the intersection of culture, race, ethnicity, and other roles?

A brief review of the literature

Within the past 100 years, the field of counseling has worked to distinguish itself from the other helping professions within the mental health field. From primarily being in guidance settings in the early 1900s (Calley & Hawley, 2008) to the development of specific areas of counseling, such as clinical mental health counseling; marriage, couple, and family counseling; and school counseling (Hosie, 1989); the evolution of the counseling profession is undeniable. "Counselors have training programs, licensure requirements, doctoral programs, and professional organizations that set them apart from the fields of psychology, social work, and marriage and family therapy" (Gale & Austin, 2003, p. 5), with clear codes of ethics (ACA), board-certified practitioners (NBCC), licensure boards in all 50 states, accredited training programs (CACREP), and the professional honor society Chi Sigma Iota. The evolution of the field of counseling, and with it, the evolution of professional counselor identity, continues to be an ongoing process.

Granello and Young (2019) argue that for professional counselors and CITs "Establishing a professional identity means more than completing the degree requirements, passing licensure exams, and having plaques on the wall" (p.2). They proposed that to develop an identity as a professional counselor, CITs must integrate into their fields through professional identity development. Professional identity developmental processes, models, scales, and definitions have been established to help make sense of how CITs develop their professional counselor identities.

Professional counselor identity is the integration of the personal into the professional within the context of a professional community (Nugent & Jones, 2009). Professional counselor identity development is an integrative process which also may require the reconciliation of culture. One way to encourage this reconciliative process is through cultural self-disclosure when working with other Hispanic clients. Sunderani and Moddley (2020) noted that when working with clients, culture self disclosure can be a "transformative event, which allows the client to feel less isolated" (p. 741) and allows the counselor to be more genuine and authentic in developing rapport. However, integration of these characteristics may be more complex for CITs who are Black, Indigenous, and/or

people of color due to having to adapt to a white-centric, male dominated, heteronormative profession.

According to the American Counseling Association's 2017 demographic information, only 4% of its professional members identify as Hispanic/Latino. Few studies have examined Hispanic CITs and their unique needs in counseling programs. There is limited research about how this population develops their counselor identities. The overarching term "Hispanic" includes multiple American Latino/a/x cultures from more than 30 countries, including but not limited to Puerto Rico, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, and Argentina. Hispanic Americans tend to identify based on their country of origin or the country of origin of their ancestors (Tovar, 2017). However, most surveys and official paperwork only provide the option of "Hispanic" to denote the many ethnicities that may fit under this umbrella.

Conceptual framework

Healey and Hays (2011) argue that as counselors enter the profession, an intersection of the established profession, personal values and beliefs, and socio-cultural factors emerge. This intersection may be better understood through the lens or framework of the multicultural and social justice counseling competencies model (MSJCC). This model, these competencies, and the "map" developed by Singh, et al. (2020) highlight how counselors can "identify their own personal experiences of privilege and oppression and explore how these intersections will influence their work with clients who are similar to or different from them" (p. 245). The importance of counselor self-awareness applies to all those who practice counseling despite their cultural identity; however, those who identify as being a marginalized counselors may need to consider how they might interact with either privileged clients or colleagues or fellow marginalized clients and colleagues. This study was informed by this model as it relates to Mexican American CITs, to better understand how their identities and the intersections of privilege and oppression influence their counselor identity (Singh et al., 2020).

In addition to the MSJCC model, Gloria Anzaldúa's seminal text, *Borderlands La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, which introduced bor-

derlands theory (1987), was also utilized to inform the unique cultural identity of what it means to identify as Mexican American. Borderlands theory refers to this population as living between two worlds, being both Mexican and American, speaking/understanding/relating to two languages (English and Spanish), experiencing two cultures at the same time, and being part of a system as Americans while also being an outsider due to being part of an ethnic minority (Anzaldúa, 1987, p.7). Borderlands theory was the result of Gloria Anzaldúa's collection of stories, poems, songs, and essays using English, Spanish, Tex-Mex, and Nahuatl/Aztec languages, which illustrated her experience as a woman and South Texan who identified with two cultures – "Mexican with a heavy Indian influence, and Anglo as a member of a colonized people in her own territory" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 19). Borderlands theory and the MSJCC model complement each other. The MSJCC model provides a guide for culturally competent counseling practices, while borderlands theory addresses cultural identity specifically from the perspective of Mexican Americans.

Design/methodology/approach

A total of six participants who self-identified as Mexican American women participated in this study. To be eligible for this study, participants were required to (a) Be graduate students currently enrolled in the counseling program, (b) Have completed at least 12 graduate hours in the counseling program, (c) Identify as Mexican American, Chicano/a/x, and/or Tejano/a/x, and (d) Be 18 years of age or older.

Participants were asked to complete a demographic survey that included a narrative response. The estimated time to complete this portion of the study was approximately 20 minutes. Participants were also asked to participate in a 45 to 60-minute semi-structured interview, as well as to review initial themes from their data and make comments or corrections via email, which took approximately 15 minutes. The total time commitment for this study was no more than 1 hour and 35 minutes.

This qualitative study utilized hermeneutic phenomenology, the interpretation of a phenomenon "from the inside" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 8). This type of research is the practice of interpretation and helpful with

the possibility of misunderstanding (Van Manen, 1990). This approach is also helpful when the researcher (primary instrument) has firsthand experience with the phenomenon being observed (Van Manen, 1990). Hermeneutic phenomenology is not a procedural system; instead, the method requires ability to be reflective, insightful, sensitive to language, and thoughtfully open to the experience of others (Van Manen, 1990).

Data was analyzed utilizing Van Manen's (1990, 2014) thematic analysis approach using three different coding levels. Thematic analysis, according to Van Manen, (1990) is the "desire to make meaning" (pg. 79) of experience through the reflective understanding of stories and helps us to make sense of phenomenological experience. To promote trustworthiness, it was also important to get participant feedback about initial themes from both the participants of the study as well as from an external reviewer (Van Manen, 1990; 2014).

Findings

After a thematic analysis that included three levels of coding as per Van Manen (1990; 2014), five themes with corresponding subthemes emerged. The themes and subthemes are written in the first person to voice the findings from the perspective of the participants. Participants chose pseudonyms to protect their anonymity for the purposes of this study. These themes highlight the importance of how the integration of cultural identity into professional counselor identity may impact the development of Mexican American CITs. These findings provide a glimpse into the unique cultural lens through which these Mexican American CITs see as they develop and integrate their professional and cultural identities. Themes identified are shown in Table 1, and as follows:

My cultural identity is who I am as a Mexican American CIT
This first theme has to do with how cultural identity directly relates, impacts and is interwoven into the professional identity of Mexican American CITs. Cultural identity is the lens through which these CITs see themselves, their clients, and the world around them. One participant by the pseudonym of Rocio stated, "My Mexican culture is who I am," while another participant, Olivia, exclaimed, "My foundation is

Table 1
Participant demographics

Main theme	Corresponding subtheme
My cultural identity is who I am as a Mexican American CIT	• Passion and pride for my culture • Pressure to represent my culture • Spanish is part of my identity
As a Mexican American CIT, I need different types of support	• Representation as support • Family support • Peer support • Program support
My Mexican American culture makes me a better CIT	• Professional self versus the Personal self • Working with Hispanic clients
I want to help my people	• Cultural self-disclosure • Making a difference
I am a lifelong learner	• Pride in education • Personal counseling • Contributing to the field

my culture." For these participants, cultural identity appears inextricably connected to the development of professional identity. The participants of this study were unable to disconnect from their culture in a professional setting and instead integrated this into their identities as CITs.

Passion and pride for my culture. In this subtheme, participants expressed how pride in their culture was important to them. It was not always easy, as stated by some of the participants, due to the combination of internalized biases and setting aside cultural identity to appear more professional. Nicky Gonzalez said, "I've started to allow my culture to come through, and that's helped me to find myself as a counselor and who I want to be." Passion was a part of the cultural identity of these participants evident in the emotions and tears expressed during

their interviews. Pride in their culture and where they came from seemed to allow the participants to connect on a deeper level within their programs, and as a result, to experience a sense of privilege as CITs. This sense of privilege, according to these particpants, increased their feelings of pride, especially as they began to work with clients.

Participants also noted how through feeling pride in their culture, they were also able to recognize their privilege as Mexican American CITs. The privilege of being a student in counseling, the privilege of being in graduate school, and especially the privilege to work with other Hispanic clients was expressed by the participants. KayCee Roxanne also talked about how she experiences privilege when working with other Hispanic clients: "I acknowledge my privilege as a CIT when I am working with my clients, but yeah, I think also knowing that I am Hispanic helps them to feel more comfortable with me."

Participants also identified their program's multicultural class as important in the development of their cultural identities, as well as in learning about their culture. Betty stated that after taking the multicultural class and writing a paper about her culture, she realized, "I had to overcome a lot of bias I had about my own culture that I think I internalized; I had to overcome this; I've always felt I needed to compensate because I am Hispanic." Nicky Gonzalez said that throughout taking her multicultural class that she felt "seen" as a Mexican American who is studying school counseling, and she became more confident as a result.

Pressure to represent my culture. Another subtheme discovered throughout this study was the pressure that participants felt to represent their culture. Experiences of assimilation, wanting to improve representation in the field of counseling, and wanting to learn more about other cultures while celebrating diversity in the field of counseling were cited by participants as part of that pressure. Rocio talked about how her "… Culture is a huge part of how I live and how I work, but I feel pressure to show this." One participant, Chula, said, "Sometimes I feel like I have to be twice as good at everything I do because I am Latina." This highlights the pressure that these Mexican American CITs experience in representing themselves as well as their culture.

Spanish is part of my identity. The subtheme of the Spanish language as being a part of the cultural identity of Mexican American CITs explains that language is a way for these students to connect with their peers, mentors, and clients without having to code-switch; however, guilt regarding proficiency is a struggle. Many of the participants talked about how the Spanish language is an important part of how they interact professionally with other Hispanic peers, mentors, and clients. Using Spanish words to communicate in professional settings is a way for these Mexican American CITs to feel connected and develop rapport. They talked about how this connection is not there with their non-Hispanic professional relationships due to having to code-switch. It is important to note that only one of the participants in this study considered themselves fluent in Spanish, and she indicated that being bilingual for her was a big part of her identity. The other five participants did not consider themselves fluent, although they understood and could speak a lot of Spanish, and this created feelings of guilt. Betty shared that "My Spanish is not fluent" and that this makes her feel guilty because she knows a lot of people need mental health services in Spanish.

As a Mexican American CIT, I need different types of support

Mexican Americans are often thought of as being family-oriented and part of a collectivistic culture. While family support was extremely important to the participants of this study, their families did not often understand their chosen field of study due to the cultural stigma of mental health and help-seeking attitudes in Mexican American culture. As a result, various other forms of support that help to affirm their decision to study counseling may be helpful.

Representation as support. For study participants, representation was experienced as its own form of support. Representation from Hispanic faculty, mentors, supervisors, and other counselors in the field allowed the participants of this study to feel more comfortable and connected. The importance of representation in the field of counseling was indicated by all participants. Being able to see leaders in the field that identified as either Hispanic or Mexican American helped these CITS

to feel seen, accepted, and have a sense of permission to be there. This is also important because most of the CITs in this study did not have anyone in their families working in the mental health field.

Family support. The subtheme of family support was an essential part of being a Mexican American CIT for participants. All participants revealed that even though their families did not always understand their chosen field, having their support was very important. Betty explained, "My family has been very supportive, but they do not always understand what I am doing. All participants discussed how proud of their families were of them for pursuing a graduate degree. Even though they did not understand why they were studying counseling, they were still proud of their educational pursuits. Betty discussed that as a Mexican American CIT, "…My family is my motivation to continue." Mexican Americans come from a collectivistic and family-oriented culture, and many participants noted that their families' pride in them was part of their motivation to not only pursue a degree but to continue in their fields post graduation.

Peer support. The subtheme of peer support was identified as having helped the Mexican American CITs in this study to feel more hopeful and supported in their programs. Participants talked about how they felt like they were breaking stereotypes about Mexican Americans and addressing the stigma surrounding mental health amongst Hispanics with the support of their peers. They found themselves gravitating to each other for this reason. Chula talked about how "I gravitate toward other counseling students that are Hispanic." KayCee Roxanne explained how her Mexican American CIT peers make her feel like "…we are headed in the right direction." Seeing other Hispanic peers in her program helped Nicky Gonzalez to feel "less alone," especially seeing her peers that are also working full time while in graduate school.

Program support. The subtheme of program support helped these Mexican American CITs to feel both encouraged and validated, especially when cultural identity and diversity have been encouraged in

their classes. Nicky Gonzalez said, "Because of my professors in this program, I feel free to work on who I am and who I want to...and feel proud of where I come from. They are always talking about culture and diversity and inclusion in their syllabi, which is really nice."

My Mexican American culture makes me a better CIT

The third theme in this study has to do with the integration of cultural identity into professional counselor identity and how the intersection of culture for these participants is part of their developmental process in becoming counselors. This process of understanding and connecting to one's own culture allowed these Mexican American CITs to feel more genuine and authentic in their interactions with peers, faculty, supervisors, and especially, clients. Participants in this study explored how they felt their Mexican American cultural identities made them better CITs. This cultural integration allowed them to better connect with their Hispanic clients. Participants also discussed how their Mexican American culture allows them to support the concepts of "personalismo" and "simpatico," but in this case, how it is applied to working with clients and the ability to be warm and caring in counseling relationships. One participant in this study, Nicky Gonzalez, who gave voice to the title of this study, stated, "Being Hispanic and connecting with my culture means I am very open and can connect with my clients; as Mexican Americans, we work from our hearts." She was able to identify that her connection to her culture allows her to be more "authentic" as a CIT.

Professional self versus the personal self. This subtheme has to do with the integration of cultural identity into professional identity and how the personal self is different from the professional self. The integration of the personal self into the professional self allowed these Mexican American CITs to feel more genuine and authentic with their clients. Several participants noted that who they are with their families is different from who they are in professional settings. Being able to celebrate cultural holidays or important events like baptisms and quinceañeras with family and maintaining these cultural connections for the personal self is important. Vulnerability, especially when expressing the cultural

self in professional settings, was also revealed. KayCee Roxanne talked about how she has felt vulnerable "…trying to be proud of who I am as a Mexican American while being in the counseling world."

Working with Hispanic clients. This subtheme addresses how the integration of cultural and professional identities became easier for the Mexican American CITs in this study when they started to work with Hispanic clients. Rocio shared, "I know what people of my same culture like. They like when you are warm, caring, make small talk, and use humor and Spanish words to connect." She also said people of her same culture "…prefer more directive counseling," and that the integration of her culture allows her to connect with her clients so that "I can help them." It would appear that working with Hispanic clients and the ability to practice blending or integrating their culture into their professional identity may have allowed these Mexican American CITs to better integrate their culture into their professional roles.

I want to help my people

The fourth theme of wanting to help their people emerged throughout this study and was present in every interview. One of the Mexican American CITs' main motivations for entering the field of counseling was to help other Hispanics and Mexican Americans in their communities. They could see themselves working within their Hispanic communities in the future. They were able to acknowledge the stigma of mental health and help-seeking in their communities and wanted to be part of helping to reduce that stigma. Betty talked about wanting to continue working with Hispanic clients in the future, especially those that are part of the lower SES population, because this is where "her heart is at." She wants to be able to stay "true to who I am" while also helping her people. Both Betty and Nicky Gonzalez revealed how their hearts are an important part of the work they do as CITs. This theme is different from the aforementioned subtheme of working with Hispanic clients, because it highlights that for these participants wanting to help their people is part of their motivation for entering the counseling field.

Cultural self-disclosure. This subtheme has to do with the intersection of cultural identity and professional counselor identity and the disclosure of this when working with Hispanic clients. Cultural self-disclosure allowed these Mexican American CITs to better develop rapport with their Hispanic clients. Betty said, "I have been more in tune with my Mexican American identity when working with Hispanic clients as a case manager." Olivia said, "Telling clients about my culture allows me to be empathetic, to be more caring and genuine with clients that I am trying to help." Some participants disclosed how their appearance has impacted how they have interacted with their Hispanic clients. Olivia talked about how she sometimes gets mistaken for being "Caucasian" due to her light complexion; however, when she discloses her cultural background, her clients "…feel more comfortable around me and can express themselves better," especially when communicating in Spanish, saying, "Some things just sound better in Spanish."

Making a difference. The subtheme of wanting to make a difference and serve their communities in the field of counseling is an important part of being a Mexican American CIT. Rocio said, "I want to make a difference with my clients who don't speak English, I want to be where I am needed the most." Olivia stated, "I want to be a counselor to make a difference because mental health is so stigmatized in our culture." And Betty said, "my grandmother did not speak English, and that made life very hard for her in the United States. I want to be able to help people like my grandma who need counseling."

I am a lifelong learner

The fifth and final theme is about incorporating education and educational pursuits as part of the identity of Mexican American CITs. Participants all discussed their families, friends, and themselves being proud of their education. Education was seen by these Mexican American CITs as a way to improve themselves, their families, and their people, and to improve representation in the field of counseling in the process. Education and being lifelong learners were part of the identity of the Mexican American CITs in this study. Olivia talked about how "I am always

going to be learning as a counselor. Being a lifelong learner is a big part of my identity as a Mexican American student."

Pride in education. The subtheme of pride in educational accomplishments was referenced by all of the participants in this study. Each identified as being Mexican American first-generation college students. Olivia stated, "Where I am from, not a lot of people go to college. I am the only one I know getting my master's degree, so I am really proud of myself, especially with being a single mom." Pride in educational accomplishments was noted by both the participants and their families. Participants felt proud of being graduate students and continuing their education. Their families were also proud of their educational pursuits. One participant stated how her family brags about her being in graduate school. Because of this pride, there is also a sense of pressure that the participants felt. The pressure to succeed was not just for them as individuals but also to make their families and communities proud.

Personal counseling. Several of the participants noted how personal counseling and engaging in counseling while they were in their graduate programs were helpful and important in their development as CITs. One participant, Olivia, discussed how seeing her Hispanic peers get counseling was comforting to her. She said, "Knowing that other Hispanic counseling students have suffered from their mental health, that their families have not been understanding, and that they have been to counseling makes me feel like I am not alone." Personal counseling for the participants of this study was a way to get support as graduate students, first-generation college students, and students who are part of an underrepresented population.

Contributing to the field. Contributing to the field was an important part of being a Mexican American CIT for these participants. They were able to identify early on in their programs that this was part of their motivation to become a counselor. Improving representation, giving back to their communities, and participating in this research study helped these participants feel like they were contributing to their field.

Discussion

This study explored the development of counselor identity within the Mexican American CIT population. At the time this study was conducted, no research on the counselor identity development of Mexican American CITs could be identified. With the recent increase in the Hispanic population, more Mexican American representation in the fields of both counseling and counselor education may help to reduce stigma and improve help-seeking, increase diversity in counseling programs, and add to the number of Mexican American counseling faculty. This study addressed the dearth of research surrounding Mexican American CITs.

The lack of research surrounding Mexican American CITs has allowed for a unique glimpse into this historically excluded population of students. Gibson, Dollarhide, and Moss (2010) found that CITs go through specific developmental tasks that transform their professional identities as counselors, one of which is seeing themselves as part of their professional communities through the development of relationships with others in the counseling field. The current study seems to support this finding, perhaps adding specificity regarding Hispanic culture, and examining that Mexican American CITs' ability to work with others in the field that share the same culture could allow them to better develop and integrate into their professional community.

Unique in my finding was the importance of the Spanish language for Mexican American CITs, despite not always having fluency. All participants discussed how the Spanish language was part of their identities and helpful with connecting with their peers, mentors, and clients. An additional finding not yet explored in the literature was that the integration of cultural identity into professional counselor identity may emerge throughout the process of working with Hispanic clients.

Research surrounding Mexican American CITs is limited, thereby making the implications for the field of counseling that much more important. The findings of this study support the need for more research involving Mexican American CITs, more representation of Hispanic faculty, mentors, and supervisors in the profession, and availability of different forms of support, including encouraging the integration of cultural identity into professional identity in coursework.

Recommendations for future research

Replicating this study would be helpful to give further voice to this understudied population. It would also be helpful to study Mexican Americans in different parts of the country. Learning about counseling students in other heavily populated Mexican American areas like other parts of Texas, Arizona, and California would be advised.

The participants of this study all identified as female. Future studies should include Mexican American CITs who identify as male and nonbinary, as well as CITs from the LGBTQ+ community. Both gender and sexual identity can impact the development of personal and cultural identity, as well as the ways in which professional identity develops, especially relative to minority and historically excluded populations. It might also be helpful for future research to explore how Mexican Americans differ in their counselor identity development compared to their other Hispanic subpopulations, such as Puerto Rican and Cuban Americans.

This study was conducted to explore the lived experiences of Mexican American CITs and the development of counselor identity. Further investigation surrounding counselor identity development within the Mexican American population of CITs is needed to further examine how the lived experiences of this population contribute to professional counselor identity. Learning more about how to better support this subset of Hispanic CITs would help to retain, graduate, and therefore encourage more licensed professional counselors who identify as Mexican Americans. This may allow them to better serve their communities, thus reducing stigma and improving help-seeking behavior and attitudes in Hispanic populations.

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Hermanidad: *Using Latina community cultural wealth to rise above microagression and societal oppression hindering ascension and tenure in the superintendency*

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to understand the perceived lived experiences that Latina leaders face in their ascension to and service 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 community cultural wealth skills that are imperative to Latinas leaders' success in top leadership positions. Furthermore, this study also revealed the need to conduct a cross-examination of systems and policies that suppress Latina leaders in reaching and persisting in district leadership positions. Recommendations are for politicians, leadership program evaluators, and state and national leaders to develop and write policy on the changes needed to increase the number of Latina superintendents in the state of Texas and the nation.

Introduction

Hermanidad is empowerment of women affording bonding or sister-hood, for Latina leaders who are daily interrupted, quieted, and barred from being given voice in critical conversations. Latinas experience multi-layered societal oppression, not only as females, but also in rela-tion to their race and embedded cultural expectations (Quilantán & Menchaca-Ochoa, 2004). Emerging intersectionality theory seeks to acknowledge the impact and dynamics multi-layered oppression enacts (Collins, 2019). Quilantán & Menchaca-Ochoa (2004) noted, "Latinas in public school superintendent roles are three times a minority, as they en-counter the challenges of navigating a position that is very political yet isolated from the organization" (p. 125). Scholars have found that when females of color *are* hired in a superintendent position, the position is in least desirable districts, where challenges are towering and most students come from poverty (Allred et al., 2017). While the applicant pool of Latinas is large, talented, and credentialed, the actual number of Latinas in executive roles is bleak compared to white and even Latino males (Superville, 2017). Superville (2017) and others have asserted that Latino/a students could benefit substantially from having administrative leaders from their own racial and ethnic groups who can serve as suc-cessful role models. The "power of the presence" of minority profes-sionals cannot be overstated (Quiocho & Rios. 2000, p.285).

Since the inception of the superintendent position, it has been seen as the most gender-hierarchic occupation in the United States and "has been labeled and institutionalized as men's work" (Skrla et al., 2000; Grogan, 1999; Shakeshaft, 1989). "In a five-year study of American school superintendents released in 2015 by AASA, the School Super-intendents Association, it was revealed that only 27% of district super-intendents are women" (Kominiak, 2016) and minorities are ill-repre-sented. 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 male superintendents (Bryant, 2018). In the superin-tendent role, females remain underrepresented, and even fewer Latinas are represented (Rodriguez, 2014).

Context

Latinas face a variety of cultural influences that shape personal identity. Latinas in leadership roles experience struggles with denouncing the customary sex-role demands that have been controlled for many years by the traditional Mexican culture (Quintalan & Menchaca-Ochoa, 2004). For example, on the one hand, Latino/a parents see education as the gateway for success in life. A Latino/a parents' greatest pride and joy is an educated child (Bal & Perzigian, 2013). However, Latinas encounter disconnects between their aspirations and cultural oppression (Villareal et al., 2017).

Latinas are also expected to meet the obligations of spending time with family, living close to extended family, and assuming caretaker roles (Villareal et al., 2017). The "good daughter dilemma" has been described as the gatekeeper for Latinas, emphasizing the demands of familial principles in Latino/a families (Villareal et al., 2017). Moreover, due to familial expectations and the need to become the caretaker at a young age, the tenderness and understanding that Latinas bring to their jobs is seen as a sign of submissiveness and not assertiveness (Eagly & Chin, 2007). In addition to familial cultural constraints, Latina leaders daily navigate societal oppression and 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). 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. Due to this constant micro aggressive undercurrent of behaviors, language, and practices, Latinas often doubt their own assets, resilience, and persistence (Huber & Cueva, 2012). Gildersleeve et al. (2011), too, revealed that racial microaggressions marginalize Latinas even in spaces of academia. Latinas often question their self-efficacy and see themselves as inferior to others. Indeed, when Latina leaders recounted the microaggressions they faced in the workplace, these negative experiences often caused excess levels of physical and psychological stress (Perez Huber et al., 2015).

Theoretical framework

The exclusion of voices, history, and stories of Latina leaders in academia evidences a deficit thinking model, withholding assets held by Latino/as that could afford them increased ascension into leadership roles. The construct of 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/a families, are resilient and come from strong units that provide a uniquely interconnected support and encouragement to their families. Latina district leaders do have cultural and aspirational capital and can and do use that to ground their leadership approaches.

Community cultural wealth

This study utilized Yosso's (2005) model of Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) as a framework to better understand the Latina leaders' persistence and motivation to seek and retain superintendent positions. CCW is defined as the skills, capabilities, and connections that socially marginalized groups possess that often go unrecognized by the dominant culture (Yosso, 2005). This assets-based model is grounded in Critical Race Theory (CRT) and describes the unique and varied forms of capital that persons from historically underserved groups foster and depend on within marginalized spaces (Villapando et al., 2005). Alongside CRT, the concept of *funds of knowledge* (Moll et al., 1992) also serves as a foundational pillar of CCW. Funds of knowledge, or the various types of local, cultural, community- and experienced-based knowledge and resources in which Latina/os engage, help to influence their abilities, habits, ways of knowing and social networks (Locke et al., 2017). Latina/os often rely on such funds of knowledge to sustain themselves in oppressive environments. 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 manifest to not only thrive in oppressive environments, but to discover and uplift other Latinas along the way.

Statement of the problem and purpose of the study

A clear understanding of Latina leaders' perspectives of their lived experiences with oppression related to microaggression, culture, familial expectations, stereotypes, and biases can reform hiring 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). Limited networking opportunities are compounded due to the small number of Latinas serving at the helm of school districts (Superville, 2017). The history of Latinas in district leadership and their lived experiences have been omitted from the research and their contributions excluded (Méndez-Morse, 2000). Furthermore, 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). This study explored Latina community cultural wealth, as evidenced by the Latina superintendents in this study, as a means of navigating microaggressions and societal oppression that hindered their ascension to and tenure in the role.

Methods

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 lead researcher was to understand the perceived connections of the challenges of oppression and microaggression on Latinas as they sought to ascend and retain the superintendent post.

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 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 is derived from semi-structured open-ended questions and discourse between the lead researcher and participants. 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 lead 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).

Role of the researcher

Flexibility in the research design was imperative for the lead researcher to pursue various categories and themes. It was a method of being open to the *how* and *why* of the lead research and how it evolved (Patton, 2015). Lincoln and Guba (1985) disclosed that "These considerations add up to...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). Thus, flexibility in the data collection of Latinas' lived experiences, stories, and other materials was imperative to permitting the lead researcher to discover and respond to a path for new information.

Data collection and analysis

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 analytic memoing (Saldaña, 2015). Through review of field notes and participant data, this analytic memoing supported the emergence of themes across the data.

Two in-depth semi-structured interviews were performed with each participant as a main data gathering source. The interviews were conducted in a place or platform in which 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 offices and the second interview to be done virtually. 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, as well as the skills and assets they perceived to possess in the ascension to and occupation of the superintendent role; and, c) The impact that mentorship and networking of Latinas in leadership roles (*hermanidad*) make in the representation of Latinas in the superintendent position. Together, these three areas helped inform data collection directly related to the study.

The lead researcher deeply understood that 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. Glensne (2011) stated that during observations and interviews, it is necessary to write notes displaying ideas that come to mind, 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). Use of an empathetic neutrality approach permitted the emotional connections and understanding of the participants to be experienced by the lead researcher while also bracketing the researcher's own perspectives (Patton, 2015). Additionally, interest and caring through rigorous interviews and observations provided the researcher a deep understanding of the participants' experiences (Saldaña, 2015).

Findings

While participants in part blamed themselves for the challenges faced both in their ascension and during their tenure in these leadership positions, they also told of the need to work hard, prepare, and fight naysayers. Their willingness to place personal blame seemed to have cultural carryover. Each participant shared her experience with navigating various microaggressions while in the role of superintendent. Additionally, the participants discussed reaching out to other leaders, but not necessarily females or Latinas because of the absence of those mentors. Study participants were more than willing to support other Latinas in educational leadership, particularly, balancing the dynamics of career and motherhood, for example. The participants shared their experiences of overcoming the challenges of societal and cultural adversities, prejudices, marginalization, even with limited support. All the participants described multiple examples of how they strategized, used their innate skills, and took risks to lead and succeed and persevere in what were often very challenging school district contexts.

Data shared in this section includes background on the study participants. Additionally, following the participant data, Figure 1 depicts the juxtaposition of the challenges faced by these Latinas as well as their intentional constructive response of enactment of *hermanidad*.

Participants

The selected 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/a/Hispanic students. The participants' tenures as superintendent ranged from one to seven years. Their ages ranged from 46 to 64 years old, and they each had 25 or more years of educational experience in public-school districts. Four out of the five participants were married with children. Only one participant introduced herself as being divorced and without children. Table 1 depicts demographic information about the participants, and their brief descriptions follow using assigned pseudonyms.

Table 1
Demographic participant data

Pseudonym	Age	Current marital status	Yrs. in Ed.	Yrs. in Superin-tendency	% 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 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." A few months before taking on the role of superintendent, she described a time when she was approached to take on the position: "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.'" Eventually, the board convinced Superintendent Pacheco to serve as the first Latina superintendent ever hired in the district.

Superintendent Chavez was the youngest of the participants interviewed. She had just begun her second year as superintendent in a rural school district. Superintendent Chavez shared that she was inspired to become a superintendent when she didn't see enough Latinas serving in the role.

Superintendent Cavazos had served in her current role for two years. She was the first Latina hired for the position of superintendent in the district's history. Superintendent Cavazos shared that the district was in a bad financial place when she got there. During the interview, Superintendent Cavazos recounted a piece of advice that a good friend and colleague had shared with her as she began to apply for district leadership positions. The colleague told her to start applying, because it would take years before she would get hired.

Superintendent Nervarez was also the first Latina/Hispanic superintendent hired in her school district. During the interview, she seemed to be in a state of disbelief when she spoke about her post as district superintendent. She shared that even though it had never been in her nature to sell herself short, and she had put ample work in every position she ever had, she believed that there was a degree of luck and opportunity in becoming the district superintendent.

The most experienced of the participants was Superintendent Salazar, a first-generation college graduate. Her degree was not in education; she earned a degree in business administration with a focus in finance. The private sector was her first job after graduating from college. Nevertheless, after she got married, both she and her husband decided that raising a family would be a priority, and she would become a teacher so that she wouldn't have to travel that much. Superintendent Salazar's 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.

Challenges faced by Latinas

The participants passionately shared their lived experiences regarding the challenges they faced as Latina leaders in search of advancement in their careers. They described not only their attempts to be recognized and selected as district superintendents, but also, their acknowledgement of (what were often first hidden) obstacles that they overcame to hold the highest district position. Each participant communicated that it was important to intentionally reframe and rephrase their skills, preparation, and experience to be understood that they were just as powerful and

Figure 1
Seeking enactment of Hermanidad in support of enhanced Latina leadership
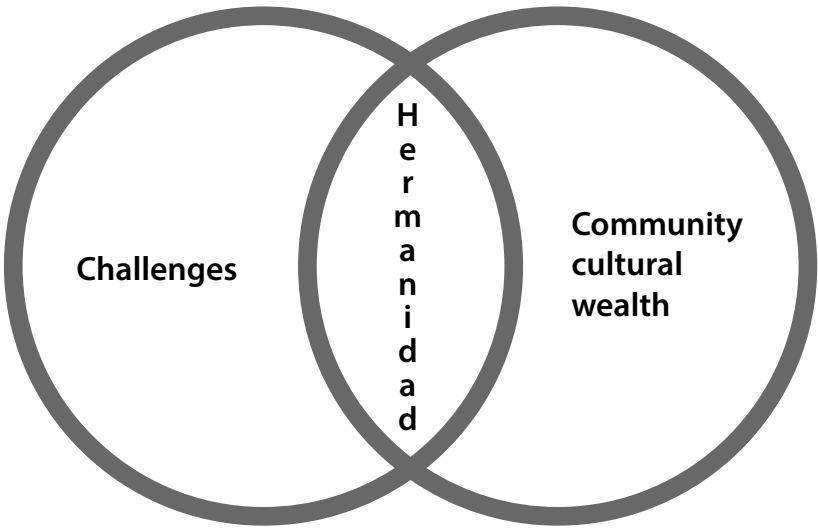
acknowledgeable as a man. For example, Superintendent Chavez said, "I've worked with groups of powerful women. Why are we so under-represented?"

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 such as 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.

Superintendent Nervarez pensively questioned herself during the interview: "Why me, I often have asked myself; why do I sit here right now?" Her expression captured her disbelief in having attained the posi-

tion. Even with more than 30 years of experience in education, including campus and district leadership experience, numerous accolades, a doctoral degree, and all required credentials for the superintendency, Superintendent Nervarez was incredulous. 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 frustrations due to the racial and gender prejudices they faced in the ascension to the role of superintendent.

Facing microaggressions. Participants shared their experiences with microaggression that inhibited their ascendance to the superintendency. These experiences persisted 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, inclusive of subtle put downs, continued to subconsciously speak to them related to being female and Latina and continued to cause doubts that permeate their thoughts about their efficacy in their roles. During the interviews, the participants spoke of the need to form a thick skin to survive in the job. They shared the various forms of microaggressions from the people they worked with, specifically males, members of the school board, powerful community members, and city leaders. The participants corroborated that they were often perceived as incapable of doing the jobs.

Participants noted that due to the lack of representation of Latinas in the superintendent role, Latina superintendents' abilities, leadership, effectiveness were constantly questioned through the subtleties of micro-aggressions. Furthermore, holding back tears, Superintendent Cavazos sadly talked about the experiences she encountered with microaggression in her previous district. She said that after many years, she was still angry at herself and regrets the many hours 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.

Effects of culture. Latinas faced a variety of cultural influences that shaped their personal identities. Their families 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/a 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 aspired and prepared to attain the superintendent position, they needed to denounce the customary sex-role demands controlled for many years by the traditional Latino/a culture.

Enactment of hermanidad

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.

However, formal mentorship and networking programs established for Latina superintendents who look like them and understand their lived experiences were absent once they entered 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.

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.

Informally, though, *hermanidad*, or the facilitation of sisterhood, was strongly evidenced among the participants. 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."

This was an example of *hermanidad*, sisterhood, noted with all the participants. Even though the participants went through challenges in their ascension to and execution of the role, they were ready to form meaningful relationships and continue a community of mentorship and networking.

Focus on assets and determination to persevere

Illuminated were the participants' intuitive abilities, strategies, and skills, which promoted their success as Latina superintendent. During the interviews, the participants told of the need to be risk-takers, adaptable, good communicators, resourceful, and to 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.

These Latina leaders shared that they must 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 the unspoken hiring practices that include male-established networks and male sponsorships that historically have created barriers for females of color, who have traditionally not fit into the mold that has been created of the superintendent position. However, their resourcefulness, preparation, and hard work sustained them. Superintendent Cavazos stated, "To me, I 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?"

The Latina superintendents embraced resistance and actually used it as a means to thrive in the most exclusionary of spaces. Through the embodiment of resistant capital, women of color have redefined the ways in which their oppressions operate into a means of powerful resistance (Yosso, 2005). Their resistant capital led them to be resourceful and find solutions for the district to succeed in districts where many students came from poverty. Superintendent Chavez said:

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. That is, being able to be resourceful and reaching out to people.

The participants projected a "whatever it takes" attitude. 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. Others shared the need to put themselves in positions in which they knew others did not want them. Superintendent Cavazos said:

You know, in my former district, if you weren't in the Barbie Doll [Anglo white female] clique, 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. Conversely, they understood the reality that women, specifically women of color, don't receive the same respect as men. A superintendent 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 makeups 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-ex-

istent and the percent of Latino student population is not high, they have come to the realization that they will not be hired as superintendents. Superintendent Chavez shared, "I look at factors 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." Understanding the obstacles did not stop any of the participants from working hard, preparing, and applying for the highest position in district leadership.

Discussion and significance

The findings of this study revealed that Latinas leaders face oppressive experiences that add to the challenges they face when seeking career advancement. Nevertheless, for the Latina leaders in this study, barriers motivated them to work hard, be persistent, and resist the obstacles they confronted. The participants shared examples of how they sought to tap into their collective community cultural wealth. For example, all the participants worked to provide and mobilize resources that offered students a rigorous curriculum, and they cared for students' well-being, even outside of school. This became especially evident during the recent pandemic of 2020+. Many times, the participants turned to family or friends for support. The participants' experiences with mentorships and networks corroborates with Mendez-Morse's (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. The small number of Latina superintendents in Texas is significant, and the challenges that the Latina superintendents encountered included lack of mentoring opportunities.

Additionally, participants shared that their family responsibilities were a challenge when seeking mentorship programs. These Latina leaders came to the realization that as females and Latinas, they must know their own worth, because people don't automatically respect them, even in the superintendent position.

One participant after another shared their stories of perseverance and tenacity during challenging times. The participants shared their perceptions of unfair hiring practices and equity practices that must be

evaluated, as well as the future direction of educational reform to find solutions to the gender and racial imbalance in the Texas public school district superintendent position.

Yet, despite these Latinas' focus on assets and collective capital, they realized that they could also enhance their own efforts to build that capital. Participants shared their lack of involvement in state and national professional networks and understood that they had a personal responsibility to advocate and seek others' support. These participants, and Latina superintendents generally, must initiate involvement in the professional organizations that are currently available at the regional, state, and national level, since mentoring and networking programs can support the empowerment of Latina leaders through discourse and dialogue. 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.

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 to the gender and racial imbalance found in Texas public school districts' superintendent positions (Vilches et al., 2023). Furthermore, a need to influence policy to change hiring practices and form innovative preparation programs can provide a strong pool of Latina superintendent candidates. The findings of the study further concluded that more explicit formal and informal mentoring programs need to be established for Latinas leaders that could contribute to the formation of bonds with other Latina leaders. These bonds could ameliorate the loneliness and isolation participants said that they experienced in the superintendent position.

By amplifying the voices of Latinas in the superintendent role in this study, Latina leaders' voices have not only illuminated the microaggressions and oppression experienced by these leaders, but have also highlighted positive accounts of Latina leadership via their own cultural community capital, thus further engendering *hermanidad* to raise up other Latina leaders.

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9

Dos mujeres, un camino – Two women, one road: The testimony of two Latina doctoras in higher education

LeAnne Salazar Montoya
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Abstract

The National Center for Education Statistics reported that only 8.8% of doctoral degrees were received by Latinas in 2018–2019. With limited numbers of Latinas earning doctoral degrees, fewer experiences of these marginalized Latina women in higher education have been extensively researched or documented. This qualitative case study utilizes testimonio *to deliver narratives of marginalized people, comparing the data of two Latina doctoras in higher education through a Chicana/Latina feminist framework. Data sources consist of two autoethnographies, cross interviews, and situational mapping. Through this analysis, the two Latina doctoras' embodied knowledge was evident in their reading and writing of* testimonio. *As such,* testimoniando, *a process of sharing narratives, is a pedagogical tool to explore the multidimensionality of being a Latina doctora in higher education (Huber, 2009).*

Introduction

Diversity is a form of symbolic politics that has emerged to reconcile a contradiction: it is undesirable for liberal institutions to be portrayed as "racist," but at the same time institutional elites have no desire to change existing racist power structures (p. x).

—Angela P. Harris

On a hot and sunny afternoon, in the beautiful Arizona desert, two unsuspecting Latina women met in a living room of a fancy Airbnb, brought together by their employer, a top-tier R1 university. They had been invited to a writing retreat that was penned as: *Writing rocks: A writing retreat for Black, Indigenous, and people of color BIPOC!* Both women were faculty members. Little did they know that the retreat was the beginning to an eye-opening and validating crash course to the life of a professor in the academy. Throughout the retreat, both Latinas shared their *testimonios* (testimonies), or stories, of their hardships and how they managed to succeed; through *testimoniando* (testifying) they found that they had more in common than they had differences. This chapter aims to provide a look into the lives of these two doctoras through a dual lens. The first lens captures their ongoing lived experiences in academia, while the second provides background information as to how they got to their current positions. Both lenses are important to illustrate the bigger picture and expose the barriers that had to be overcome to progress.

As doctoras we have found that we must often work twice as hard, be more educated, and speak in acceptable "tones" to get half the respect our white male counterparts receive. Trailblazing is not easy; from being mistaken for "the help" to having to choose which socio-political agenda to align yourself with; all of it can be exhausting. Despite these obstacles, our stories share that we have persevered and know all too well what it is like to make people uncomfortable simply by being in places and spaces traditionally not made for us. After hours, days, and months discussing the focus of our work, we derived two primary research questions.

- What are barriers that the doctoras have had to overcome to succeed in higher education?
- What types of capital are used in the doctoras' lives that inform their resilience?

Literature review

In reviewing the existing literature, many recurring themes align with this chapter. First, we must explore the context (both physically and culturally) in which we grew up: impoverished, conservative, rural areas of the Southwest United States. In addition, we need to examine how racism, colorism, and misogyny play a role in the journeys of las doctoras. All of this is intertwined to make up the backdrop of their stories, which influence their decisions and journeys to this day.

Women in higher education

Women have been slowly entering the field of higher education since the late 1800s. In 1871, Harriette J. Cooke was promoted to full professor at Cornell College and is "believed to be a first in U.S. higher education' (Rexroat, 2023). Although this was a victory for women everywhere, equality and equity were far from the minds of those in higher education at the time. Throughout then and now, people of color, especially women of color, have struggled to enter higher education as easily as their white female and male counterparts, since they were "denied access until the mid-19th Century" (Gause, 2021). Research has shown that white supremacy has dominated the field of higher education since its conception, providing barriers to women of color such as lack of mentoring, gender inequities, patriarchal systems, racism, sexism, male-centric norms, and more (Gause, 2021; Harvey & Jones, 2022; Key et al., 2012; Ortega et al., 2023; Sangha-Rico & Hernandez, 2021).

Familism and cultural misogyny

Unique about our story is that we refused to follow 'familism' and paved our own way into leadership. Familism is when Latinx children are expected to continue to prioritize "a strong identification with and attach-

ment to nuclear and extended family" (Ochoa, 2022, p. 54); familism includes maintaining an obligation to the family, acknowledging that the family is the first source of emotional support, taking the family unit into consideration when making decisions, and "willingly subordinating individual preferences for the benefit of the family" (Ochoa, 2022, p. 54). Although we both acknowledge that it is important to keep family as a priority, it is well known that within Latinx communities, the women are expected to keep the household and family running. This is a phenomenon called *marianismo*. In *marianismo*, "Women are socialized…beginning in early childhood, which guides normative behaviors of femininity, submission, weakness, reservation, and virginity" with the inclusion of a "sense of responsibility to the family" (Mendez-Luck & Anthony, 2016, p. 926). Through this indoctrination, Latina children are taught that they must value submission, weakness, and femininity above all else. Therefore, *marianismo* is, by default, a cultural misogynistic indoctrination tool that sets up Latina children for failure by imposing values of weakness and resignation rather than leadership skills such as confidence and outspokenness.

Racism
Throughout our lives, we experienced internalized racism from our families. Internalized racism is a form of oppression that causes "marginalized groups to turn on themselves, often without realizing it" (Padilla, 2001, p. 61). Throughout their lives, Latinx people were demonized by the dominant narrative to be a drain on society and resources. These messages have created a colonized mentality where it can "cause us to assimilate to such an extreme that we deny our heritage and all cultural links" (Padilla, 2001, p. 63). Throughout Doctora Delgado's upbringing, she was told multiple times that she should not have an accent, and that she should marry a blond-haired, blue-eyed man to "*mejorar la sangre*." The saying means to "better the blood," thus indicating that her blood is soiled and must be purified by marrying a white person and producing offspring that are "less soiled" or, blatantly put, less Brown.

According to Shankar-Brown (2021, p. 67), "Woke school leaders do more than work against racism; they decenter white orientations

and worldviews in their approach to schooling and uplift the cultural practices, ontologies, and epistemologies of historically marginalized people." One insidious aspect of racism is microaggressions, or "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group" (Nadal et al., 2012, p. 57). Racism and microaggressions are notorious for causing mental and physical health problems, such as cardiovascular disease, obesity, depression, anxiety, and more (Beck, 2019; Nadal et al., 2012).

Meritocracy and first-generation status

We both have had experiences of being asked to be excellent, but not more excellent than our non-minoritized counterparts. This is the reality of meritocracy and of being a Latina in higher education. Meritocracy can be seen as a collection of "characteristics that others deem worthy of reward or praise" (Warikoo, 2016, p. 13), yet when we achieve those characteristics, we are still seen as "other." Throughout the literature, meritocracy is commonly linked with white supremacy. According to Allen and Liou (2019), white supremacy owns meritocracy, where "whites can achieve, and are expected to achieve the intellectual (e.g. smartness and academic promise) and material (e.g. diplomas and degrees, college success, and career choice) benefits of an allegedly meritocratic system" (p. 684). According to Stephens et al. (2014) first generation students do not just need financial and academic skills to succeed in college, they also need psychological resources and a sense of belonging. Non-first-generation students have many privileges that first-generation students did not have access to. For example, non-first-generation students most likely have parents who have had experience going to college, choosing classes, and navigating the financial aspect of university, while first-generation students have to navigate it themselves (Dumais & Ward, 2010; Palbusa, & Gauvain, 2017; Wildhagen, T., 2015).

Gaslighting and microaggressions

Throughout our professional careers, we have been trained to say something if we experience it, but in reality, if and when we do speak up, we have experienced being penned the loud, trouble making Latina. How dare we speak up, when inequities present themselves and/or when we are used as diversity and equity initiatives to symbolize the efforts. We have been brought to tables that we were expected to sit at but say nothing, and when we do say something, we have repeatedly been victims of microaggressions and gaslighting. For those unfamiliar, "microaggression" describes daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental slights and snubs that communicate derogatory or exclusive insults toward people of color (Young, et al., 2015). Microaggressions are a type of microinequity that are one of the hardest types to prove in a work situation, usually involving "small events, which are hard-to-prove, covert and often unintentional" (Aiston & Fo, 2021).

Another form of microinequity is gaslighting. Gaslighting has been explained by Medical News Today (2023) as

> a form of psychological abuse in which a person or group causes someone to question their own sanity, memories, or perception of reality. People who experience gaslighting may feel confused, anxious, or as though they cannot trust themselves. The term 'gaslighting' itself comes from the name of a 1938 play and 1944 film, Gaslight, in which a husband manipulates his wife into thinking she has a mental illness.

It is because of the insidious and cunning nature of gas lighting that microaggressions thrive in work situations.

Social justice

Colleges and universities are recruiting and advertising programs that have a focus on social justice, but what is social justice, and why is it important to this narrative? Both of us were trained to be social justice scholars, as our work has been heavily rooted in historical aspects of injustice. Let us not underscore the fact that social justice is an elusive construct, often charged politically, and subject to numerous interpretations (Shoho, et al., 2005). Its foundation is rooted in theology

(Ahlstrom, 1972; Hudson, 1981), social work (Koerin, 2003), and it has deep roots in educational disciplines like curriculum and pedagogy (Apple, 1996; Freire, 1998, 1996). Social justice has also been studied in law, philosophy, economics, political studies, sociology, psychology, anthropology, and public policy (Brooks, 2008). However, it is a relatively new term to the field of educational administration (Shoho, Merchant & Lugg, 2005). Researchers (e.g. Furman & Gruenewald, 2004; Shields, 2003) contend that social justice has become a major concern for educational scholars and practitioners at the beginning of the 21st Century and is driven by many factors (e.g. cultural transformation), including the demographic shift of Western society, increased achievement, and economic gaps of underserved populations.

Theoretical framework

While many in the academy dismiss qualitative data, we support the use of this rich, honest, authentic, and ever-so-telling information. We are statistical outliers; thus, utilizing qualitative methods is to our advantage, especially for scholars that aim to move the needle for those historically oppressed, minoritized, and affected by generational gate keeping. LatCrit Theory was recently developed, deriving from a branch of Critical Race Theory, and takes into consideration the historical invisibility and violence against Latinas/os in the United States (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Gonzalez et al., 2021). Utilizing this theory means to examine the "evolving ideologies and practices of Euroheteropatriarchy marked by capitalism, colonialism, homophobia, nativism, patriarchy, and white supremacy," to which higher education is no stranger (Gonzalez et al., 2021, p. 1320; Rolón-Dow & Davison, 2021). LatCrit enables scholars of color to navigate their stories as counter narratives, providing space to critically examine the "isms" they have experienced within their own contexts (Salinas et al., 2016). LatCrit gives the opportunity to identify the barriers experienced as well as types of capital gained, developed, or utilized (e.g. social capital) to be able to exist and navigate heavily white-dominated spaces such as higher education.

To complement LatCrit, we also utilize Yosso's community cultural wealth (CCW) model, which helps tease out the types of capital the

authors have utilized and/or gained throughout their lives to succeed. There are six assets to the CCW model:

"(1) *Aspirational capital*: resiliency, a sense of possibility, and persistence; (2) *linguistic capital*: communication skills developed through multiple languages, storytelling, and other forms of communication; (3) *familial capital*: commitment to community, and supportive and caring kinship ties; (4) *social capital*: networks and resources accessed for help and assistance; (5) *navigational capital*: strategies for successfully navigating stressful and hostile institutions; (6) *resistant capital*: skills, behaviors, and attitudes invoked to resist inequality and oppression" (Strangfeld, 2022, p 2).

Yosso explains that "the assumption follows that people of color 'lack' the social and cultural capital required for social mobility" (p. 70). However, the examination of types of capital under *testimonios* has shown that people of Latinx backgrounds have capital that is core to their own *testimonios*, where "family stories, knowledge, and norms were foundational to their aspirational and navigational capital" (Strangfeld, 2022, p. 3). In essence, it is important for chapters like this to be written to provide proof of the types of capital that Latinx peoples hold at any point in time. Yosso (2005) makes sure to acknowledge that previous cultural capital theories, such as Bourdieu's cultural capital theory, provide a very "narrow range of assets and characteristics" which typically include "white, middle class values" that by default exclude people of color (p. 77).

Testimoniando and data collection

Testimonio, a genre that emerged in Latin America, can be defined as personal accounts of struggle that are shared to inform, indicate solidarity, or to shed light on oppression (Elenes, 2000; Latina Feminist Group, 2001). For Elenes (2013), *testimonio* is an "embodied narrative" (p. 137), told or written by individuals who have experienced oppression and seek to activate change through communicating to a wider audience. Along with *testimonios*, the authors engaged with situational maps, a strategy to help articulate elements in the *testimonios* while examining the relationship between the elements (non-human and human), in this

case, the lives of the authors (Clarke, 2005). From there, each element was compared and examined against another element to explore its positionality in the story through a messy map (see Figure 1).

Figure 1
Example of a messy map

These messy maps allowed the authors to create a venn diagram of their experiences, where their similarities overlapped and differences did not. Figure 2 represents the finished Venn diagram after analyzing the messy maps.

Data sources for this qualitative case study consist of two auto-ethnographies, personal *testimonios*, cross interviews, and situational mapping. Through data analysis, our embodied knowledge was evident in the reading and writing of our *testimonio*. Previous journals, photos, blog posts, and social media were reviewed as well, giving the authors a more detailed look at their journeys. To extract pivotal events that affected the overall development of their careers, a cross-examination with open-ended questions allowed for an organic collaboration and comparison of experiences while creating the situational map.

Findings & discussion

Finding 1: You don't know what you don't know.
For many people of color, there is a common theme: *You don't know what you don't know*. Growing up as first-generation students, this was

Figure 2
Venn diagram resulting from messy maps
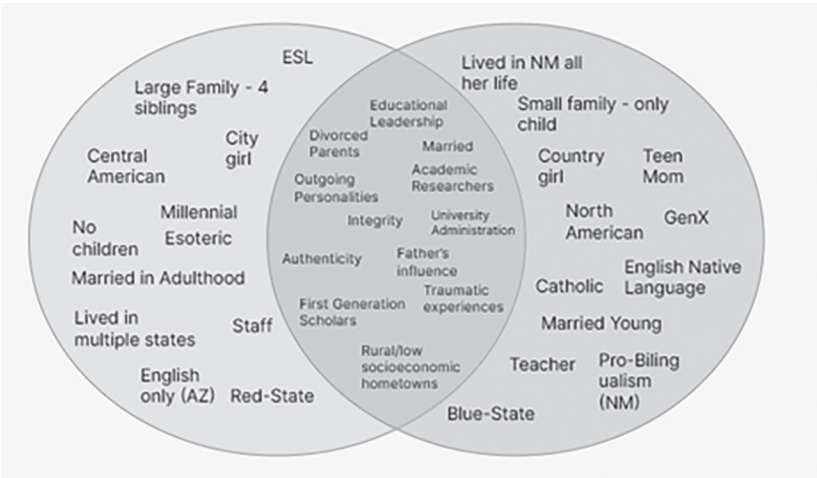
one of the biggest, if not *the* biggest barrier in the road to leadership. Many times, we found that we did not know the ins and outs of how to navigate our progress; we had to experience our mistakes firsthand and figure out how to assimilate into white culture with no handbook. To this day, both doctoras are still experiencing this uncomfortable reality.

Using navigational capital. Doctora Salazar Montoya has had to navigate being a tenure-track faculty member without knowing the social niceties and expectations of the academy. Navigating the "academy" and finding her safe space was not and has not been easy, but through her social capital, survival skills, and willingness to ask questions— even when they were not received well—she put herself out there. This experience has her working with her eyes wide open. There is access to social capital that is still not accessible to her, and she is expected to do the same work with fewer resources, little to no support, and the bar raised higher. Navigating a system that creates more barriers rather than removing them is challenging, but she is resistant and persistent and determined to navigate this pipeline successfully. Doctora Salazar Montoya was raised to speak up when she doesn't know. Her father always told her that an education is something no one can ever take away from you, and you can achieve anything with hard work and determination because the sky is the limit! With the encouragement of her father, she graduated high school early, worked hard, broke glass ceilings, and crushed educational barriers. Today, she holds her PhD and a resume a mile long. She no longer seeks affirmation from anyone; instead she finds joy in mentoring a new generation of Latinx scholars!

Finding a lack of social and familial capital. Doctora Delgado had an instance in which not knowing specific information cost her a full-ride scholarship to a university. Using the situational map, las Doctoras were able to figure out that Doctora Delgado was not given the proper information on how to enter college when she was in high school, and thus missed many important preparation milestones that the other, more privileged students had. This is an example of lacking social and familial capital. During her senior year of high school, Doctora Delgado was

informed that if she passed her writing, reading, and math portion of her SAT with specific scores, she would qualify for a full-ride scholarship to any one of the three public universities in Arizona. Little did she know that the SAT test had preparation books available at the bookstore for her to use and study with. In addition, all of her friends were white, and although they all were straight-A students, she was the only one out of her group that did not receive the scholarship. After asking her white friends what they did to pass, they explained that their parents would drive them to Las Vegas (a two-hour drive) after school every Tuesday and Thursday to attend SAT tutoring courses, which cost upwards of $4,000. Her friends had stay-at-home moms with the ability to drive them to Vegas, while Doctora Delgado's mom worked night shifts and slept during the day.

Not only was Doctora Delgado not given the information she needed to prepare for her studies, she would not have had a chance to compete fairly, because her white counterparts already had an advantage: expensive tutoring. In this case, the parents of the white friends had enough generational wealth and privilege to help them get the scores they needed to have full-ride scholarships, further privileging their futures. Doctora Delgado's parents did not - her father was a slot mechanic making less than $30,000 a year, and her mom was a housekeeper at a casino, making even less. As an added layer of hardship, Doctora Delgado's parents were divorced; her mother did not believe that college was a way to success, and her father was skeptical yet supportive of college. In the end, Doctora Delgado ended up with $40,000 in undergraduate college debt when she could have had a full-ride scholarship.

Finding 2: Power is found through self-reflection

> *"I wake up every day knowing that my existence in higher education and academia is a middle finger to white supremacy and the dominant narrative"*
> *—Doctora Delgado*

Latino elders would often say, "*Soy quien soy, y no me paresco a nadie*", which translates to, "I am who I am, and I am unlike anyone else."

Through self-reflection, we both found a common thread when it came to our family support: our fathers. Although Doctora Delgado's father was skeptical of college, he always supported her dreams and encouraged her to be unique from the rest. Doctora Salazar-Montoya's father was a major influence on her. He never questioned whether she would attend college, and even after she made some questionable decisions at a young age—marrying and then 9 months later giving birth to her eldest son—her father unwaveringly supported her. He believed that college was the ticket out of poverty and politics; it would be a life that allowed personal options and financial freedoms her never knew. Doctora Salazar-Montoya attributes her perseverance, unwavering support of others, and hard work to the tenets of success her father instilled throughout her life. Through this exploration of backgrounds, both of us realized that we utilize our resistance capital every day. This is through our *terca*-ness (stubbornness). We discovered that within their personalities was a need for perseverance. We recognized that when presented with a difficult situation (e.g. experiencing microaggressions, being fired and replaced with white people without degrees), we never backed down, but rather continued to pursue our goals even harder.

Finding 3: Understanding our capital is pertinent to our success in higher education

Throughout both of our lives were moments in which capital was used to move forward. Doctora Delgado learned to walk, talk, and act as white as possible, as a result of being discriminated against in elementary school. She would take time after school to study the voice, inflection, tone, and presence that Jim Carrey had on the silver screen. The purpose was to learn how to speak "not just right, but white." There is no denial that learning to speak in a white accent enhanced her capital to succeed, but ultimately, it became a regret for Doctora Delgado. While this gave her linguistic capital, it cost her an audible connection back to her heritage. In comparison, Doctora Salazar-Montoya grew up in a minority majority community and didn't realize the effects of colorism until adulthood, when it became blatantly obvious. On one hand, Doctora Delgado knew the importance of assimilating into white culture

earlier than Doctora Salazar, but on the other, Doctora Salazar had a stronger tie back to her heritage and roots because of being brought up in a minority-majority state.

In the example of the full-ride scholarship, Doctora Delgado had to use what little capital she had to continue to progress into the eventual leadership pipeline. She did utilize two types of capital: (1) aspirational capital, meaning that she did believe that she was good enough to go to college, and (2) linguistic capital, where she had a command of the English language as well as the American culture. Unfortunately, Doctora Delgado lacked the other types of capital. For one, her familial capital was low, as her parents did not believe college was a necessary step in life. Secondly, she was blinded from navigational capital because she was not informed of the different ways she could study for the SAT test; she only navigated the situation as best as she could with the resources that she was given. Lastly, reflecting on this situation gave Doctora Delgado resistance capital, where in the present time, she now knows to inform aspiring Latina students on how to navigate the pathway into college. Essentially, this experience gave Doctora Delgado information that will help future generations of Latinx students enter college successfully.

As Doctoras, we have had to cater to those in power, generally our white colleagues, and by doing so, we find we are dimming our own light. If we were to outshine our white counterparts, we are seen as threats to the supremacist structures that were put in place by white society hundreds of years ago. As academics we would be remiss to ignore the relevance and importance of these themes also found in much of the existing literature. Although universities and colleges claim that they are "woke" and uphold social justice and diversity, painfully embedded white supremacy and meritocracy ideals still expect scholars of color to conform. The importance of conformity is almost a self-protection mechanism for a scholar of color, because non-conformity will get you nothing more than a ticket back to the train station! This is part of the balancing act Latinx scholars must master: they must conform to not become a threat to their white counterparts, but also uphold social justice in such a manner that it brings prestige to the university.

We have learned that when and if we speak up, the issue itself is never addressed. Instead the tables are turned, and offices of Title IV and/or those in supervisory positions make every attempt to make us question our own experiences and to justify the injustices, thus gaslighting us and causing us to internally experience imposter syndrome. Until we talk amongst ourselves, and in our case as Doctoras in institutions of higher education (among the few and far between, less than 2% of Latinas), we at times wonder whether it is us. We know now that we have two choices, we can speak up and truly serve as social justice leaders by continuing to blaze a trail for those who may follow in our footsteps, or we can, as so many before us, be seen and not heard, and simply assimilate and do as we are told, because if we don't, tenure will be withheld. We have chosen to be leaders and to speak up even when attempts to gaslight our experiences occur.

Concluding thoughts

This chapter braids the technical and the non-formal narratives experienced throughout our lives. We know that belief in oneself and confidence go a long way, yet in reality, we have had to be more than exceptional just to exist in white spaces. As dos doctoras who came from *dos caminos* (two roads) and who have merged into one, a road less traveled for people like us, we have found comfort in knowing our struggles have been real. And so we break down the academic study and translate *los testimonios* (the testimonies) into a language we can all relate to.

We have had long and successful careers, and while one of us has children and the other does not, we both attribute our perseverance to family and a desire to break generational cycles of poverty and be the change our families need. Both of us were highly influenced by our fathers and were raised in broken family settings. While we have learned to navigate academic journeys differently, we agree that it was our education and minimal capital that helped us open doors of opportunity. Our identities have heavily influenced our decisions and the paths we have chosen for ourselves. From generationally oppressed backgrounds to systemic gatekeeping at the steps of the ivory towers, we entered higher education to change it permanently for the better.

Currently, society cloaks racism in broad daylight and hides it amongst everyday interactions through microaggressions. Blatant racism is no longer acceptable in the workplace and in social areas, yet microaggressions persist. The one quality that microaggressions have is a cumulative effect, or "death by a thousand papercuts." Because of the nature of microaggressions, it is hard for victims to prove that they have experienced racism, much less prove that the perpetrator was being malignant on purpose.

> I want us to stop watering ourselves down, and I hope that by sampling from my fire, Brown girls can find their own flames. Not only do I want them to find their flame, I want them to fan that flame to push them towards advocating for themselves and then others. 'Once you've heard your chains rattle, you can't unhear them,' I want them to hear all their chains, so loudly it wakes you up. (Prisca Dorcas Mojica Rodriguez, 2021)

As las doctoras became adults, the racism became even more apparent, which solidified and reinforced their need to uphold diversity and inclusion in traditionally white spaces. The debate has been whether ignorance is bliss or if there is value in knowing and as awareness increases the ability to call out and identify the racism that seems to increase. We question how prevalent it was before we didn't know what we know now, but what we do know is the more we enter spaces and places not intended historically for marginalized people, we feel the pressures and pushback as we break the mold. In 2023, we are still being held to a different standard professionally, many times we do not know what we do not know, and while we are not making excuses, we hope for more clarity, mentorship and grace as we navigate unchartered waters. Dra. Salazar-Montoya talks about the importance of being better, fighting for equity and living and leading in such a way that sets the stage for her future generations as her daughter watches her every move!

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10

Navigating becoming: The invulnerable Latina leader

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Abstract

Although the Latina/o population continues to grow in the United States, Latina/o leaders in education are underrepresented; similarly, the literature on their recruitment, development, and retention is lacking. The purpose of this qualitative naturalistic study was to give voice to Latinas in leadership. Although a few studies have reported the number of Latinas in administrative positions, the study of their administrative experiences is limited. Given an ever-emerging diverse student population, developing Latina leaders is urgent. Data from participants in this study revealed, in the participants' own voices, the complex, multi-layered oppressive challenges that continue to challenge ascension of Latinas to leadership. In spite of all of these challenges, these five successful Latina principals' stories inspire and provide a timely and vital contribution to education research, policy, and leadership practice.

Personal rationale

As a Latina growing up in The Rio Grande Valley (RGV), I was surrounded by many Latina/os, because the "minority race" is a majority. I didn't realize until I got older and my father's job with the United States Department of Agriculture–Farm Service Agency (USDA–FSA) moved us away from the RGV that we were far from being a majority race. I was 16 years old when my family and I were forced to move to the Texas panhandle, which was definitely not the RGV. Being light-skinned, I noticed that I had a particular privilege about me. My light skin seemed to make a difference, because I looked more like everyone else.

We moved midway through my sophomore year in high school. I had already begun Honors Biology II in my previous school, so I needed to take the second part of the course. I walked into my new school's Biology II college prep class, taught by a white male who I later found out was also the varsity golf coach. He said to me, in front of the whole class, "You are a sophomore. You do not belong in this class. This is a college prep class for seniors." I felt my facing turning hot from embarrassment, and said, "Sir, I already took a semester of Biology II back home." He motioned for me to take a seat. Despite never receiving a word of encouragement from him, I ended that semester getting the highest grade in his class. I was never given direction from him, nor anyone at the school. I look back now and realize I had no cultural connection, nor could I identify with anyone. I excelled on my own because of my drive, dedication, and determination to do my best. These innate qualities were due to the expectations my parents had for me. My cultural experiences shaped who I am today.

Now, in my work as a multi-year campus principal, I share that story as a testimony to my faculty and staff to explain who I am as a person and the power we have as educators to either ignite or extinguish a student's fire. I cannot say that I remember the teacher's name, but I still recall where he and I were standing in that classroom when he made me feel insignificant. I will never forget that day, as long as I live. I felt helpless and unwelcome.

When I became an educator, I vowed that I would never make a student feel as if they did not belong or was unwanted. As a Latina school

leader, my mission has been to help my students have a role model to accomplish their goals. I acknowledge that my experiences have shaped me; yet, I still find I have reached a point in my life where I am continuing to question the world around me. Leaning into that reflective lens, in my position as a school leader, I want to make certain that I am doing all that I can, as highlighted through the conduct of this study, to ensure that my Latino(a) students have more positive school experiences that engage them each in ways that enrich who they are as people and as an ethnic group, illuminating their Hispanic/Latino culture in the process of their own becoming.

Academic rationale

Females, in general, have made strides in all aspects of society, contributing to the rise of female leaders in all parts of the world. This parity in female leadership can be attributed to the diverse leadership styles of females, which often include a more democratic and transformational approach, less like the traditional male approach (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Hoyt, 2013; Rosener, 1990). Yet, significant differences in human capital investments, gender traits, and stereotypes have caused systemic visible and invisible barriers preventing females, particularly Latinas, from reaching leadership roles (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Hoyt, 2013). Researchers describe the female journey to the top generally as a "labyrinth," symbolizing the maze of paths and obstacles women often encounter. Along the labyrinth, females become further challenged by the morass of navigating these boggy, vague and career stifling pathways to leadership (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Part of the problem for Latinas is not being well represented in areas of leadership, generally. In the last few decades, more women have entered the educational administrative field, but minority females continue to evidence smaller amounts of participation (Montenegro, 1993; Bitterman, et al., 2013). Although a few studies have reported the number of Latinas in administrative positions, the study of their administrative experiences is limited (Murakami et al., 2018). Along with all these policies and responsibilities that challenge all school leaders, the more

non-traditional Latina school leader is expected to be successful while dealing with double minority constraints (Ortiz, 1981).

For a growing minority race, more strong Latina school leaders are needed to represent and support the Latina/o population. Hernandez and Murakami (2016) asserted that the Latino youth population has increased significantly in the last several years and will surpass other minority populations in the United States by 2020. The number of young Latinos has increased by 45% since the last 2000 census. Tragically, the teacher demographics have not appeared to follow. For instance, just 15% of state-funded teachers and 6% of state-funded school leaders are Latino, in contrast to 82% of white educators nationally (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016). Even though Latina/o instructors and principals are not by any means the only ones who can uphold the advancement of students, it is not astonishing that regularly, Latina/o students need support, representation, and good examples that can support their achievement in schools (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016).

Moreover, Latina/o school leaders are not nationally represented. For instance, the 2013 National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) state of education report shows that of 89,000 school leaders in U.S. public schools, simply 7% are Latina(o), contrasted by 80% white and 10% African American. Bitterman, et al. (2013) also found that Latina/o school leaders are not nationally represented.

Given an ever-emerging diverse student population, developing Latina leaders is urgent. Research advocates that Latinas offer opportunities to best serve minority students due to their qualities, culture, and encounters (Montas-Hunter, 2012). Bordes et al., (2011) suggests that Latinas/os come from a we-bearing culture. A leader who can develop a strong inclusive culture can impact Latina/o student achievement. Latinas/os grow up contributing to their families and communities, creating attributes like cooperation, communication, and charity. Acknowledging these funds of knowledge (Moll, 2019) are just a few of the characteristics that are critical in schools with high concentrations of minoritized children. Unique to Latina/o leaders is their ability to use interpersonal skills that advance relationships in school. Hernandez and Murakami (2016) found that Latina leaders that communicated and interact with

students and parents advanced a significant connection to cultural identity. This is critical in identifying what Latina leaders consider the most important qualities in leadership when leading a school.

Mendez-Morse (2004) concurs that, "Although many women have entered the ranks of educational administration within the last few decades, the participation of minority women in educational leadership positions remains minimal" (p. 561). While a few studies have reported the number of Latinas in administrative positions, the study of their administrative experiences is limited (Murakami et al., 2018). Finally, educational leadership research seldom includes the perspectives of these female leaders of color in education. Although the Latina/o population continues to grow in the United States, Latina/o leaders are underrepresented, and so are their recruitment, development, and retention needs in the literature. Thus, this topic is vital for education research, education policy, and educational leadership practice.

Focus of the study

According to Martinez et al. (2019), Latina principal *testimonios* reflect how Latina leaders are stereotyped, underestimated, and undervalued. The lack of Latina leaders hurts Latino(a) districts, communities, and students. Through structured *pláticas* with the researcher, this study explored the lived experiences of Latina leaders who serve in an urban border district in Texas, to glean their perspectives on what motivates them in their work, what challenges they face, and how their perspectives can contribute to the expansion of Latina leadership nationally (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013).

To get at these heuristic, meaning-making experiences of Latina leaders in this study, *testimonios* as first-person accounts were utilized (Delgado-Bernal, 1998). *Testimonios* provided the tools for theorizing lived experiences (Castillo-Montoya & Torres-Guzman, 2012). Particular to this study, *testimonios* means that the researcher sought the experiences of these Latina leaders via *plática* about the challenges encountered in their professional experiences (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013).

Methods

Participants for this study are Latinas from South Texas urban border districts with at least one year of educational administrative experience. A purposeful sample and snowball sampling were used to increase trustworthiness and credibility (Patton, 2015). The interview protocol was semi-structured, consisting of 10–12 open-ended questions designed to get the participant talking (Bernard, 2002).

The *testimonios* were collected through *pláticas* and were digitally recorded, transcribed, and then coded to reveal and connect themes among the participants. Data taken from the structured interviews was analyzed for themes. The first and second cycle techniques were refined and narrowed down the cluster of codes into themes and concepts (Saldana, 2016). Beyond the first two cycles of initial coding, the researcher interacted with data and allowed it to "cook," using reflexive and analytic memoing to ensure the most accurate representation of participant themes (Saldana, 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Trustworthiness and credibility were ensured via several means. Initial purposeful sampling, followed by snowball sampling, supported the triangulation of participant data. Data analysis revealed common themes across varied participant responses rather than directed by the researcher-developed interview questions specifically (Erlandson, et al., 1993). Member checking was conducted during the interviews as well as afterward to ensure that participants had the opportunity to clarify their responses, and, also post transcript, to adjust or remove any responses they did not want included in the final analysis (Erlandson, et al, 1993).

Finally, researcher memoing as well as the use of digital (video) recordings captured the *pláticas* that allowed the researcher multiple opportunities to review the data, including both verbal and body language responses and conversation inflection (Saldana, 2016; Patton, 2015). Ultimately, after interviewing five participants, 23 preliminary codes emerged using first and second cycle coding (Saldana, 2016). Across those 23 codes, five predominant themes surfaced. In the next section, data about the principal participants is shared, followed by the findings across those five major themes.

The principals

At the southern tip of Texas lies the RGV, also referred to by natives as "El Valle." The RGV is home to the five principals who participated in this study. To be a native of the RGV is to know that it is a region rich in culture, with a clash between two countries that has produced a border region with its own dialect. "Tex-Mex" or "Spanglish" is the language preferred and understood in this region. Four of the five interviews emerged with this dialect by chance, which was not a requirement by the researcher. The conversational *testimonios* (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013) gave voice to the participants' *testimonios* using *pláticas*. This safe space and conversational style afforded participants to share as they were most comfortable at times, also using *dichos* (sayings or proverbs) to better convey their point.

The five participants represented four districts across the RGV. These principals led elementary, special purpose, and high schools, and they were between the ages of 35–65, with 3–26 years of principalship experience. Pseudonyms were selected in connection to the theme of each participant's *testimonio* by choosing a Spanish name that also has meaning as a standalone Spanish word. The participants were:

Esperanza (Hope), the servant leader

"*Cuando más se aprende de la vida más se disfruta de ella*," translated as, "The more you learn about life, the more you enjoy it." Esperanza is an elementary principal with 11 years of leadership experience. She is divorced with two children, boy and girl, and is in her early 40s.

Milagros (Miracle), the situational leader

"*El que quiere, puede; el que no busca, excusa*," translated as, "The one who wants, can; the one who does not, will look for an excuse." Milagros is an elementary principal with three years of principalship experience. She is 35 years old, single, and has no children.

Vida (Life), the transformational leader

"*Más hace el que quiere, que el que puede*," translated as, "The one who wants will do more than the one who can." Vida is a high school

principal with 19 years of principalship experience. She is 49 years old, married, and has one son.

Dolores (Pain), the transparent leader

"*Me he de comer esa tuna, aunque me espine la mano*," translated as, "I have to eat that prickly pear cactus fruit even though I get stickers in my hand," meaning that the person is determined to get things done no matter the consequences. Dolores is a high school principal at a special purpose campus, and she has 26 years of principalship experience. She is 59 years old, married, and has six children (four of her own children, plus the two children she raised after her sister passed away).

Luz (Light), the tenacious leader

"En la vida, se gana o se aprende; nunca se pierde," translated as, "In life, you win or you learn; you never lose." Luz is an elementary school principal with 19 years of principalship experience. She is between the ages of 56–65, married, and has three children and seven grandchildren, with one on the way.

Findings: Navigating becoming

I ended up getting married at 20 years old. I had about two years here at Southern University. I remember my mom telling me, "Te voy a dejar que te cases, pero vas acabar escuela (I am going to let you get married but you are going to finish school)."
—Dolores, participant

Emergent themes across the participant data revealed the clash between cultural expectations and societal barriers juxtaposed against the indomitable personal goals of these five Latina principals. These leaders demonstrated individual resilient behaviors which shaped them both as Latinas and as leaders. The findings below reveal evidence of the overlapping oppressive forces Latina leaders face as evidenced in the extant literature (Mendez-Morse, 2004). With their identities shaped by often opposing forces contextualized in the systemic and societal impediments that sought to bury them, these unique, successful Latina

leaders amid naivety and overwhelming self-doubt, shared their stories and voices willingly. Significantly, while these Latina leaders' experiences spanned several decades, *cuanto más cambian las cosas, más se quedan igual*. That is, the more things change, the more things stay the same.

The invulnerable Latina

The participants proudly shared their racial and ethnic identities. Esperanza identified as Mexican American/Hispanic, and stated, "Well, it's part of, that's what I am. You know my whole family; we have roots, of course, in Mexico. There's always that connection." Milagros has always identified as Hispanic/Latina. Vida identified too as Hispanic, Mexican American. "It means to me that I am not embarrassed of my heritage, that I'm a proud Latina from Mexican descended parents," Vida said when asked what that identity meant to her. Dolores shared that she was very proud of her heritage, stating that, "My grandparents lived in and were born in Mexico and migrated over here, and of course, my parents were born here in the U.S., but I always have felt very proud of my heritage. You know, *soy Mexicana*; I will die a *Mexicana*."

These women also shared aspects of their cultures that at times clashed. As in the section introductory quote by Dolores, while marriage and family were important, these Latina leaders had families and parents who also ensured they were educated. The impact of multiple expectations both culturally and educationally caused challenges, but it also forged the strong identities of these atypical Latina leaders who rose to leadership roles. Their voices here lend insight to how they were able to *become* and act *invulnerably*, resisting a multitude of barriers that sought to devour them mentally, physically, and professionally.

Evident in the lives of all five principals was the choice to be resilient in working through all their struggles. All five approached their challenges and shortcomings head on and decided to work hard to overcome them. For example, Esperanza shared her experience from childhood about not saying anything about her home life to the school authorities, because it would not have been good for her. Similarly, Esperanza understood that children in her care carry that weight. Esperan-

za said, "I was always in trouble, and then somehow, they figured out I was a GT student that was really smart." Esperanza said, "I tell my story to kids. I tell my story to teachers, and I tell them, and this is my why. And this is why I'm going to push you to be a better teacher, because school was my saving grace." Luz, too, shared her story of resiliency forged from a negative comment meant to ridicule her. "I married at 16. I was a high school dropout. Basically, I was following that same culture of poverty…My only option was to go work in the fields. But, I never gave up…I went from dropout to doctor."

Even when life got in the way, when Dolores shared the passing of her sister and how that was a very difficult time, including taking on her sister's two daughters, ensuring they finished school, and dealing with her own cancer battle, she told herself, "I have to work. I have to go to school…If I had stayed home, I would have given up, and I didn't want to give up." Luz shared of her family, "We were migrants. My father was a truck driver. So, we would migrate to Idaho, to Oregon, to Utah. And so, I used to go there all the time just to go work in the fields, but now I go there on vacation." Similarly, Vida believes that "every individual is their own obstacle or their own success it all depends on [their] commitment, [their] determination, and [their] attitude." Vida shared that instead of feeling sorry for herself, she took her troublesome times and found the positive. "If I've struggled, it's been because of my own fault, my own mindset about myself, my size, that I've struggled with since I was a little girl, but I've never let that stop me from becoming what I want to become. I cannot let it define who I am."

Latina as leader

Soy lo suficiente? Am I enough?
—Esperanza, participant

When asked if Latinas lead differently than men, Esperanza stated without hesitation, "Women lead differently than men, definitely yes…Most of the principals I've worked for, with the exception of Ms. Kerry, were males, and yeah, they lead differently. I've always said that. You know, women just get things done. They do.

Esperanza further elaborated that all of those males that she worked for had highly valued her. "When [one] got the job, I was the first person he called. He was crying and he said 'I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for you,' because I just ran the school for him." The five principals all spoke of having a strong but soft and sensible leadership style. All spoke of wanting to work in their leadership capacities for the students and staff. While each of the principals had a different leadership style or approach, each was successful in her own way. For example, Esperanza stated that her leadership style "is a servant leadership and [doesn't] like the top-down type of approach," while Milagros stated that she was "more of a situational leader and depending on the situation…whether it be a student or a staff, my decisions are made."

Vida stated that as a principal, she considers herself a transformational leader. "I believe in giving people opportunities for growth, being a good listener, letting them help me…It means that I have to be open-minded and listen to everybody's input." Dolores, on the other hand, emphasized that transparency is key when leading a campus, stating, "I am who I am, and you know what you're going to get. I always feel that that's the only way to be, is transparent with your staff." Finally, Luz spoke about being a tenacious but compassionate leader, especially when staff had family commitments that needed to be addressed. "We have to do what we have to do at work, but family comes first. If somebody is having an issue with a family member, they know that they can come to me and I'm going to understand." Luz went on to explain that she's a good listener, tough but fair, consistent, and courageous. "When I have to have those tough conversations, I'm going to do that, and that doesn't mean I'm angry with you. It just means this is what's right. And we're going to talk about it."

For these Latina leaders, no matter their leadership approach, it was evident that their work was their passion.

Barriers

Barriers faced by these Latina leaders could be broadly categorized as relative to cultural expectations or systemic constraints. Cultural expectations relative to gender, familial, and even religious parameters

shaped the responses of these Latina leaders. Layered onto these cultural expectations as named, were also further challenges such as instability in family dynamics or life in the context of poverty.

Cultural expectations (and tensions)
Me voy a casar con este gringo." (I am going to marry this white boy).
                                                                                    —Dolores, participant

Through all the participants' interviews, cultural pride was evident in every testimony and at the core of their identities. However, the Latino culture is a double-edged sword. As much as it has helped to forge these women into the leaders they have become, the Latina/o cultural and familial expectations have also placed great weight on their shoulders that they must navigate and manage every day.

The concept of familism, or *la familia*, and the importance of the family, is often deeply rooted in Latino culture, especially in the RGV, as evident with the five principals. The concept of family is not just the immediate family but also includes extended family. Families provide great support and a strong foundational upbringing; however, the attachment an individual feels to their family can also be a barrier. Milagros shared that because she has had a supportive family, she has been able to continue her education. The downside for her, though, was that supportive family also kept her from experiencing life outside of her hometown. Dolores remembers her greatest years being those where they migrated. "I think we were very close at the time." She also explained that family included your grandparents. "A lot of my values, my personality, as far as how I am and who I am, was probably based on the traditions that we had, because we were very tight as a unit."

Vida shared that she owes everything she has accomplished to her parents. "My parents are my greatest teachers, and so they're the most important motivators in my life." Dolores said, "My love of learning came from him, and my risk taking and my determined attitude comes from my mom. So, I'm a balance between the two." Esperanza, too, shared that her role model as a child was her grandmother: "I never wanted to disappoint her. I always wanted to make sure I made her

proud and everything I did was always with her in mind." Participants also noted that holiday celebrations were important, as was participation in religious rituals attached to those holidays, which sometimes collided with educational goals of these emerging Latina leaders.

In addition to the at times contradicting benefits and tensions of familial expectations, discrimination in various forms amplified the stress on these Latina leaders.

La opresión y discriminación **(Oppression/discrimination).** These Latina leaders shared multiple forms of discrimination, including language discrimination and even cultural behaviors in which females in Hispanic culture did not support rising women. Sadly, Hispanic culture at times chides those who break cultural expectations via subtle and not-so-subtle messaging. For example, early in her interview, Dolores said that she was married to an Anglo and had been married for 38 years. Dolores spoke of the racism and prejudice she endured in her biracial marriage and how she used her bilingualism to her advantage, "because I think a lot of people in Ohio were not bilingual. I remember feeling so lucky, because everybody had told me, 'You're not going to find a job.'"

Esperanza brought up a prevalent barrier in that "women don't tend to build each other up…I always say, 'This world's hard enough for us; like, we don't have to be breaking each other down.'" As the researcher, when I thanked Vida for her participation in this research, she immediately said, "I'm supportive because it's important that we support each other as women," which led the researcher to conclude Vida didn't believe women supported one another enough. Milagros elaborated that *teoría del cangrejo,* or crab theory, is the common adage indicative of intercultural oppression.

Home life. For all of these Latina leaders, their home lives as children were wanting in some way, whether instability of family dynamics or poverty as a way of life, with these contexts leaving their mark on these Latina leaders. The absence of safety and security, or *la seguridad,* was a daily challenge for Esperanza, who shared part of her childhood upbringing:

> I always felt like I had a really bad upbringing. My dad was an
> alcoholic…he wasn't really there, and then my mom wasn't a good
> mom. She was a hustler. I guess you could say she was a hard
> worker, too. But not affectionate or loving or anything like that.

Esperanza's lack of well-being as a child even caused her to question her
existence. "Growing up, I felt very helpless. I remember having a point
in my life where I questioned, 'Why am I even alive?' I just felt that
there was no point to life." The trauma she experienced closed her off to
everyone. "When you grow up with trauma, it makes you a certain way,
and then you don't really trust."

Both Milagos and Vida, on the other hand, grew up rich in love but
in abject poverty. Dolores also shared that amidst their poor upbringing,
family remained most important.

> I think my parents were very hard on us. We did not grow up with
> all the luxuries. We lived in a two-room house; my mom had five
> children. We were seven of us. We shared beds. We slept on sofas.
> Growing up as a family, we were very tight.

Luz shared her insight on the cycle of poverty as well. Although these
five women did not have the luxuries in life, they all depicted their
backgrounds as ones they would not change. They learned to work to
overcome conditions in search of a better life. Thus, these Latina leaders
were shaped by the cultural barriers they encountered, defining them
as resilient women able to carve out identities for themselves as school
leaders. Yet, as if the cultural dynamics were not challenging enough,
systemic barriers further suppressed their ascension into leadership
roles.

Systemic barriers

It wasn't until we solidified ourselves at the [high school] that people
started seeing it was two women, we had some of the best scores in the
state, that's when people were like, maybe they do know what they're
doing.

<div align="right">

—Esperanza, participant

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***Dominación masculina* (Male domination/Dominant culture).**
When asked about obstacles that hinder some Latinas from obtaining principal or leadership roles, Esperanza shared that the role of a female is difficult, and one must work very hard to try to get to a man's level. "As bad as it sounds, it's a man's world, right? And you always have to work extra hard just to show that you can be at that level. Being a Latina, being a woman, makes it hard." Esperanza also adds that female principals face different barriers than males. "Because you know it's okay for the male to be working long hours and working 'til whatever time. But, it's not okay for women to do that."

Milagros shared a similar sentiment of a lack of support and respect for females in positions of leadership if a female gets to such a role. "I can see it right now as a principal. It's different the way the parents talk to my male counselor than they do to me. We (women) have to kind of like earn the respect. It's not an automatic thing just because of our title."

Vida sees the role of principal as controlled by males. " Our role— and I live it—is dominated by males. Right now in my school district, there are like six males that are principals and only three females. I think that's part of the culture in our area here."

Dolores shared her viewpoint on males getting preference over female principals. "But I do know that women are seen differently sometimes. I remember having some teachers, I think, who didn't like women to run them." Dolores felt that she has been affected in her role as principal more by gender than by race. She also spoke of the privilege men receive if they do something wrong. "I do also think when women do something wrong, I think they're chastised a little differently than from men."

Luz felt that Latina women are strong individuals who can accomplish and attain many roles, short of the superintendency. "The only limit is the superintendency. I don't know that there's that respect, more so for the gender. I don't know how the board will perceive them (women). I don't know if they'll take them seriously."

The overwhelming masculine presence was divulged by the participants in the beliefs, ways of thinking, and roles in the school. Addition-

ally, that male presence is significant in representation in the workplace. Esperanza states, "Out of the four high schools, there's only one female principal, and at the middle school level there's only one female principal." Milagros stated, "Across the valley, yes, but again, that goes back to our culture. But across the United States, I would say no. Because if you look at, for example in Texas, we start heading up north and we start seeing different races." Milagros goes on to say that she has read research studies that essentialize the female superintendent as a victory, as if it's something that shouldn't be common. "I do believe that we're underrepresented."

Vida stated, "I know right here (referring to RGV) we're (Latina principals) the majority. But just moving three hours from here, we're not represented like that." Dolores said that although she has seen more women as principals, "There's more elementary principal ladies than there are in the secondary." Luz shares a similar thought: "Nationally, no; in the Valley, yes. Just look around the elementaries, middle schools, and at the moment, not the high schools." She indicated that there used to be more females in high school principalships, but she sees the trend shifting back to a more male-dominated role.

La política **(politics).** The ever-present political forces were a strong component felt by several of the participants, either through their own experiences or those of others. Milagros explained that she was hired as a teacher because another teacher had left the position. Vida shared that a lot goes into getting a position that sometimes combines personality and politics, which cannot be ignored. Although Dolores understands the "political game" that she believed existed, her strong work ethic, she believed, would open the doors for her to a higher leadership position.

> I did not become an assistant principal probably until my 12th time that I applied. I know things are very political, but I really felt that if I was going to get a job, it was because of what I had done and what I was doing.

Even when it wasn't political, the implication was there. For example, Esperanza shared, "You always have to work extra hard just to show that you can be at that level." She explained that she was eventually told by

others that people thought she was too young, and they questioned "who she knew" that she was getting to apply for these principal jobs so soon. Dolores shared an experience of her getting to a point in her life where she needed a challenge and then was moved shortly afterward to another position. Because she was reassigned, self-doubt set in. Dolores grew somber and lamented, "I remember feeling not so much hurt, but thinking, like, 'What did I do wrong? Why? Why am I getting reassigned?' Or, were 'politics' involved?" Such experiences no doubt shaped the uncertainty these Latina leaders encountered continuously, yet, still they thrived.

Paying it forward

All five participants had experienced mentorship and high school programs such as Educational Talent Search (a federally funded early intervention outreach program) to support them in their upward trajectories. Knowing the challenges through which they each had come, the participants all felt the need to give back to their communities and people they served. They shared different ways in which they pay it forward.

Esperanza shared that she is a person who shares and gives back and tries to help people in need. Being a spokesperson for the VAMOS Scholarship (Valley Alliance for Mentors for Opportunities and Scholarships) board has allowed Esperanza to connect people to college. "So, the last time I had to talk to the VAMOS board, I brought up…How about doing a second chance scholarship?" Esperanza told them the story of herself as a secretary getting pregnant while in college and defaulting on her loans. Esperanza now uses her connections as a VAMOS scholar for the betterment of others. "VAMOS was very important to me getting to where I am at; I don't know how else I would have done it." She tells her story when they get new board members so that they know what their organization is like, who it is helping, and why it's so important. Through those talks, she's networked with different people. "I've gotten people to help my campus through financial donations, sending my kids to the Vipers game (a professional basketball team in the RGV), or sending the mascots over to my school events."

Milagros also professed her passion for wanting to build future leaders, just the way she was built to be a leader:

> I want to make sure the way somebody encouraged me to become a leader, the way somebody heard me along the way and said I had something important to say, I want to be able to do that for them.

Paying it forward for Vida is holding her staff accountable for doing the best for ALL students. There is no negotiation on her part about this. Luz pays it forward by strongly supporting literacy efforts in any way she can. She knows literacy can change lives forever and improve the generations to come. Luz shared, "I became a teacher because somebody taught me to read. That opened up doors for me. Literacy can open or close doors. So, I want to give that back."

Significance of the study

This researcher is a Latina who has forged her own leadership identity through life experiences, both positive and negative, and has used those experiences to inform her work in her current role as a school principal. This study rawly revealed multiple cultural and societal injustices that exist and persist for Latinas in obtaining educational leadership positions even in the 21st Century. The contributions of these Latina leaders and their response to those injustices have been evidenced through their willingness to boldly share their very personal leadership testimonios via their pláticas. Their stories in turn will support the recruitment and retention of future Latina leaders.

As a double minority researcher that has come into her own as a Latina leader, it is her fervent hope that emerging and aspiring Latina leaders have the support they need in becoming the role models and mentors that not only our Latina/o children direly need, not only in South Texas, which serves some of the neediest children living on the Texas-Mexico border, but in fact, across our nation.

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11

El viaje: *Latina scholars utilizing storytelling to document educational experiences in higher education*

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Abstract

Latinas in higher education and professional careers still struggle to be seen, heard, or taken seriously in their professional spaces. While Latinas have been making strides in education, there are still many struggles Latinas face daily, yet seldomly share outside the confidence of their famílias *or personal safe spaces. For example, career-driven advances within leadership positions and other stages are elusive. As female researchers and scholars in higher education who just happen to be first-generation college graduates and business entrepreneurs, this chapter explains the importance of narrative storytelling from two Latinas' perspectives. It details how narrative can be utilized in academic and generalized spaces for others to gain understanding about these experiences, as well as contribute to academic literature.*

Introduction

It is not easy to speak about experiences that are so personal, emotional, or even triggering; however, there is truth and rawness within personal narratives as a style of storytelling that benefits communities of individuals. Latina scholars face numerous challenges as graduate students and practicing researcher scholars. And while Latinas have made incredible strides in higher education and educational attainment, many Latinas have experienced profound challenges and hardship while juggling familial and cultural obligations to reach these achievements. For multiple reasons, those experiences and challenges are often unspoken or unheard of outside Latina scholar culture. Yet, the emerging generation of Latina scholars is acting on and sharing their experiences related to sexism, ageism, culture, and female rivalry in the form of research stemming from narrative inquiry or scholarly storytelling. Narrative inquiry is a form of qualitative research recognized and utilized to create realistic scenes of personal or professional experiences by using thick descriptive examples of real case experiences (Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk, 2007; Butina, 2015). For example, many of these Latina women have experienced challenges as graduate students because of their gender, age, or ethnicity. Aguirre-Covarrubias et al. (2015) & Contreras Aguirre et al. (2020) explain the idea of Latina success as overcoming competitiveness and oppression. This is another reason storytelling has become increasingly important among women of color and minority groups to share experiences as they continue to expand their careers and leadership abilities.

Even entering the third decade of the 21st Century, there is an alarmingly low female scholar population in which only 3% of college faculty self-identify as Latina (Pew Research Center, 2021). Yet, 82% of Hispanics that believe that having a college degree helps their overall well-being living in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2021). While attainment of those degrees has proven to be a window to new and/or better career and economic opportunities, it is still a path many Latinas juggle in addition to numerous personal obligations (i.e., spouse, children, careers, and extended family). The expectation of what a graduate degree can do for a Latina is endless, but the academic expec-

tations can become overwhelming, dreadful, and stress-inducing. Seeing mirror images like us are hard to come by in academia as students or even future faculty members. As academic scholars reaching this level of education, we have recognized the positive and negative effects of influential mentoring, peer-to-peer support, and the value that comes from sharing our experiences via Latina storytelling and thus contributing to the research literature.

This chapter will cover how storytelling can profoundly illuminate the stories of graduate students and their experiences in higher education, professional roles, and personal life. By constructing narratives in such a way that they are scholarly and personable, participants can share their unique backgrounds, including cultural concepts of Latina lifestyles such as community, education, and career. These narrative constructions of those ideas, themes, and outcomes depict the positive and negative effects needed in research literature. Forming experiential research and constructivist methodology challenges the status quo of quantitative research styles, which only show a generalized perception of an experience or outcome (Butina, 2015; Creswell, 2014; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Examples of participant narratives flesh out the chapter and detail how narrative can be written clearly, vulnerably, and in a scholarly manner.

Theoretical framework

Experiential learning is relevant when used to look at research using narrative inquiry. We reflect on Kolb's (1984) cycle of learning, which explains the process of gaining knowledge, using activity and critical reflection as a part of telling a story, and how this opens a large discussion of research analysis and synthesis. Second, we also reflect on how Latina scholars also unconsciously use constructivist theory throughout their time as doctoral students, candidates, and research scholars because there is often a lack of representation or individuals who can relate to what we experience (Contreras Aguirre et al., 2020). By using this theory, we authors were able to construct richer knowledge, understanding, and background of one another to better support our research and tell each other's story.

Experiential learning is a relevant way to look at research through narrative inquiry, as this approach is grounded in experience (Kolb, 1984). Kolb's (1984) cycle of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation is naturally a part of Latinas' experience in their academic journeys. It is through the concrete experience of family, culture, and lack of representation in academia that the pursuit of scholarly excellence becomes standard practice. By reflective observation, we have found that scholars can learn how to navigate both worlds of being Latina and an academic. Reflecting on the written and unwritten rules of academia can better inform abstract conceptualization, which are the things that cannot be seen but are often emotionally felt (Kolb, 1984). As the representation of Latinas in academia is low, this limits mentorship opportunities for Latina scholars who want to connect with someone who looks like them (Pew Research Center, 2021).

By using Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle, Latina scholars unconsciously use constructivist theory throughout their time as doctoral students, candidates, and research scholars. The academic journey comes with many highs and lows that previous life experiences do not account for. Having made it to the doctoral level of education implies that for many, it is not the first time they are the only ones in certain rooms (Gardner, 2008). We as doctoral students are continuously having to find our footing and learn as we navigate the world of academia.

Through these structures we can critically analyze, think, and synthesize narrative inquiries that detail the experiences we live through in academic, personal, and professional arenas. While it is not easy, it is an incredibly detailed style of storytelling in the scholarly form that takes strength and resilience compared to what traditional research forms suggest are considered "scholarly."

Relevant literature

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2021) advises that women account for 47% of the employed population over the age of 16; of that, only 18% identify as Hispanic or Latino/a. In higher education, full-time academic faculty members of Black or Hispanic descent make up 3% of the total

faculty population, and if broken down by gender, Hispanic females make up less than 1% of full-time professor positions in the United States (NCES, 2020, p. 1). Even with the lack of Hispanic female representation, this has not deterred us as Latina scholars from pursuing doctoral degrees.

Hispanic community challenges

Hispanic culture is a vast mix of individuals from Mexican, Puerto Rican, Central or South American, Cuban, and other cultures in which decedents recognize Spanish heritage or origins (U.S. Census, 2020). Our communities and families are a unique blend of Spanish dialects, foods, dance, and religion, which vary in each region mentioned. Sadly, however, it is a culture faced with many social injustices, educational flaws, and socioeconomic hardships. In the United States, there is a higher percentage of Hispanics living at or below the poverty line than non-Hispanic whites (Lisotto & Martin, 2021, p. 19). These socioeconomic hardships were only amplified by the recent global COVID-19 pandemic, as 19% of Hispanics in the United States were not covered by health insurance (Lisotto & Martin, 2021, p. 19). We acknowledge that this statistic could be challenged by others in the Hispanic community as inaccurate or lower than the actuality. In addition, 24% of Hispanics work in the service industry, and Hispanics also experience food insecurities and have a higher prevalence to type 2 diabetes, among other illnesses, further increasing the vulnerability of this community to COVID-19 (Lisotto & Martin, 2021, pp. 19-20). Despite these challenges, the Hispanic community remains strong in its cultural identity and familial roots.

Education level of Hispanic female students

When it comes to education in the United States, 82% of Hispanics stated that having a college degree helped their overall living situation and well-being (Pew Research Center, 2021). While education is proven to be an open window to new or better careers and economic opportunities (Behnke, et al. 2019), it is a path many Latinas juggle, in addition to numerous personal obligations (i.e., spouse, children, careers, and

extended family). The perception of what a graduate degree can do for a Latina is endless, but the academic, personal, and professional expectations can become overwhelming and stress-inducing. As Latinas in the doctoral program, it is difficult to find representation in faculty, as there only 3% of scholars self-identified Latinas (Pew Research, 2021).

The Honorable Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor (2001), said, "I would hope that a wise Latina woman with the richness of her experiences would more often than not reach a better conclusion than a white male who hasn't lived that life." She, too, reflects on the idea of experience in her statement, of which many Latina scholars have had similar circumstances proving their journeys can be very different from those of their white peers; it is a sentiment Latinas have privately and sometimes publicly shared through our storytelling. Research from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2021) advises that women account for 47% of the employed population over the age of 16; of that, only 18% identify as Hispanic or Latino/a. However, Black or Hispanic descent make up 6% of the total full-time faculty population in higher education, and if broken down by gender , Hispanic females hold less than 1% of full-time professor positions in the United States (NCES, 2020, para.1), leaving gaps in mentorship opportunities, including coaching, social networking, and academic peer inclusion in and out of the classroom (Martinez Thorne, 1996; Liao & Sanchez, 2019). These authors' unique experiences have come together for a greater success model with the influence of narrative inquiry to show academic empowerment within the embodiment of our Hispanic community and culture as women.

As mentioned, Hispanic culture has a unique blend of dialect, food, dance, and religion unique to each region/location. Yet, the United States has a higher percentage of Hispanic people living at or below the poverty line than non-Hispanic whites (Lisotto & Martin, 2021). While these combinations of insecurities and prevalences continue to plague Hispanic communities, the community members remain strong in their identities and familial roots (Garcia Coll et al., 2009).

Impact of community and culture

Family, respect, religion, and gender roles are important values or standards held in many Hispanic households that are influential in the doctoral journey (Corona et al., 2016). Though every educational journey is different, common themes continue to emerge for Hispanic/Latina women as they struggle with living in between the worlds of culture and academia. The five themes that emerged in a 2020 testimonial study of Latina doctoral students include the value of family and how the value of family impacts mental health, navigating the ivory tower, education as resistance, and healing (Ramos & Torres-Fernandez, 2020). The theme of the family played the role of a scale, balancing support for taking the brave step of education and the judgment for daring to step out of cultural gender roles (Ramos & Torres-Fernandez, 2020). Participants explained "the strength needed to push doors of opportunity, open through resisting the sociopolitical rhetoric of others" (Ramos & Torres-Fernandez, 2020, p. 385).

Community and culture play an influential role in the journey of completing a doctoral degree that is filled with highs, lows, and many twists and turns. Sadly, Latino is still a culture with many social injustices, educational flaws, and socioeconomic hardships. The perception of what a graduate degree can do is deeply embedded from an early age, as parents remind their children of the need to do better (Cross et al., 2019). The weight of upholding expectations in all areas—academic, personal, and professional—can become overwhelming and stress-inducing. The dream of pushing through and making the next generation better is a force that pushes Latinas to thrive academically.

Methodology

Constructing a narrative inquiry in many ways can be viewed as an opposite, flipped, or inside-out approach to a traditional research inquiry; it is the counter-narrative of research (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Yet, the traditional steps of research inquiry are a part of narrative storytelling. Both quantitative and qualitative research starts with raw data, and most importantly, a participant who is the foundational piece of the study and essentially leads the researcher and audience

to the answer to a question (Saldaña, 2015). In the case of qualitative research, using narrative inquiry gives the opportunity to make deeper connections with audiences and expand on what quantitative data or percentages generalize to their audiences. When we think of constructing a narrative inquiry, in our case as emerging Latina scholars within a doctoral program, there are certain aspects and key concepts of Latinas as the author/main participants' journey that are imperative to include in storytelling. This is because our journeys to complete doctoral degrees are filled with extreme highs and lows, plus many twists and turns. A Latina scholar's journey is nothing less, but a vastly different experience from those of her peers.

The utilization of narrative storytelling by other Latinas on doctoral journeys allows for the gap of Latina scholars to begin to be filled. The narrative stories allow Latinas who are considering the doctoral journey to see themselves in the women before them.

Testimonios background

Values such as family, respect, religion, and gender roles are influential in the doctoral journey and are held in high regard in many Hispanic households (Corona et al., 2016). Though every educational journey is different, common themes continue to emerge for Hispanic/Latina women as they struggle with living in between the worlds of culture and academia. In a study by Ramos & Torres-Fernandez (2020), five themes emerged in that testimonial study. Those themes included: skin tone, financial freedom, and living in two realms of the world. Of those themes, the value of family emerged as the most important among Latina doctoral students According to the participants, family provided the strength needed to push doors of opportunity open through resisting sociopolitical rhetoric (Ramos & Torres-Fernandez, 2020).

Our stories (examples of a personal narrative inquiry)

We have included two individual personal narratives detailing experiences in our own journeys as Latina doctoral students. As first-generation doctoral candidates, our journeys have continued to evolve and have swayed between positive and negative experiences. These

reflective, emotional, yet strong testimonies using narrative inquiry as a method to tell these higher education experiences are raw and unapologetic examples of how we, Latina women, still struggle with imposter syndrome, sexism, racism, differential colorism, socioeconomic remembrances, and often a total lack of respect as female research scholars. These are our *testimonios* in short form.

Testimonio **I.** I am a woman who has always been immersed in my Puerto Rican culture. I grew up a first-generation mainland Puerto Rican female, which has never been a walk in the *parque*. The experience of my identity is one influenced by salsa music and *pique* on our breakfast table - "normal" things in my *abuelita*'s haven, where my family found refuge. While my physical features are light and Eurocentric, the olive tone in my pigmentation is confusing to some and questionable to others. I am lucky; I have not experienced the extreme racial injustices of others in my culture who find their pigmentation a few shades different. Taíno, African, and Spanish run in my blood; our culture is alive yet hanging on by a thread. The Taíno culture is still very much alive with the people of Puerto Rico. This "colony" of land is our connection; it embodies us and has its own soul. As I look at Puerto Rico, I feel ways of knowing that we as humans are connected through our surviving land. My work ethic connects me to colonialism, while the indigenous side of surviving and "keeping your family alive" is harbored in my bloodline. *El Taíno* found ways to survive and adapt; I, too, have used their strength not to be the "statistic" I was once told I would become. The influences of mi abuela and mi madre are generational struggles I will not carry forward. As I forge my own way through a doctoral program meant for the "man's" world, colorless and dated, you find me, the young girl who was surrounded by struggles, but with a dream. A dream has carried me to be more, do more, and help more! The chains of oppression, egocentrism, racism, colonialism, sexism, and ageism are my drive to succeed in education and life. I resist these by using my gifts to teach financial literacy, reminding women of color that they have power, they should know their worth, and they are able contributors to society. I am educated despite blatant racism my eyes could not recog-

nize as a young girl. I use my Taína Puerto Rican strength to transcend the statistical influences that have surrounded the females in my family for generations. I use myself as the strongest weapon; I must change my destiny. I do not see nor fit the "box" created for me. I see me a Latina, a Tainá, and "*erudita*" of knowledge. *En mí*, I see *mi madre* and *mi abuelíta* y *mis amigas*.

Testimonio **II.** Raised on the west side of San Antonio, the *s* instead of a *z* in my maiden name is a very important identifier to this Latina with a "torn identity." My maternal grandfather often referencing back to our Spanish lineage, hence the s on my maiden last name. Our ancestors came from Spain through Mexico into Texas. It is not uncommon that once in Mexico, future generations replaced the *s* with a *z*, identifying themselves as a native Mexican and not of Spanish descent. As a 4th generation Texan American, yes, I identify as a Texan first.

My identity was seated in the historical context of the familiarity of San Antonio; still, I dared to venture out, to expand my worldview. I've always been fully aware that if I do not work hard, I will wind up "back there." I'm torn between finding myself in two worlds, leaving my home to be confronted with "bad feedback," such as people thinking that I think I am better than they are while also being said to have married into a different world of "bougie" and yet still not belonging. The deeply-seated root and generational drive for wanting a better circumstance or more opportunities has run deep. These dreams to succeed were originally held by my maternal grandfather, who uprooted my family to pursue the American dream, which I still hold "reverent and close to my heart." Like my futuristic grandfather, I never look back, I look and learn. I pursue a doctorate for "better opportunities in my career and life." Yet, my doctoral journey is fogged by imposter syndrome. I am not a "stupid Mexican." A racist encounter in my early 20s remains the fire that ignited my desire to never have someone call me stupid again. My second racist encounter happened while shopping. I was mistaken for an employee by an Anglo woman with two young impressionable children. When I told her I did not work there, she stated, "You look like you should," and walked away with a grim smirk on her face. I always find

these encounters funny, as the olive color of my skin would not necessarily reveal I am Mexican, Puerto Rican, or even Anglo. These experiences became specks in the rearview, as women like Tía Rita showed me. Tía Rita, my third cousin, was educated, strikingly beautiful, and wealthy. She, too, had made it out of society's "box" and gave off the impression she was free. Education for me meant freedom and access to living comfortably. Though I saw freedom in my Tía Rita, I also saw freedom in my grandparents. Although they never left the west side of San Antonio, they had freedom through their hard work and multiple retirement pensions. They lived a simple and satisfying life with the same 1972 Suburban. Even having changed to my husband's Anglo-sounding name from my Hispanic name ending in s, my grandpa's work ethic still drives me. It is the Anglo name that, unfortunately, gives me a bit more respect. Though not dark, my olive pigmentation still plays a decisive role in society. My ancestry and bloodline are guides, healers, and protectors in my journey. I look to my ancestors for guidance and believe the younger generation also has knowledge. Disturbingly, in the last two years of my doctoral journey, I have experienced invisibility and microaggressions. As my Hispanic-serving doctoral institution has a predominately white board, the shift to silence has occurred. This shift is a prime example of how colonialism and imperialism are reshaping my institution from a primarily Hispanic community to a white impressionist. To resist colonialism, we must remember, "We cannot do the big things until we do small things." Focus on "meaningful research" that "actually makes a difference." As older generations pass away, it is important to keep cultural traditions alive; like the smell of warm tortillas as you walk through the door, speaking Spanish, and bringing our ancestors' dreams to fruition.

Discussion

As previously mentioned, several themes emerged from these *testimonios*. These themes reflect what we, the authors, have personally experienced and see as the commonalities between our journeys and how those themes have continued to play a part in our lives.

While neither of us has a dark pigmentation to our skin, we both have experienced how having a lighter complexion influences the treatment we receive in and outside of our cultures. Skin tone, or *colorism*, in Hispanic culture does play a part in how individuals—men and women—are treated among other Hispanics (Hunter, 2007). This is seen in how we both identify as light olive complected women. Both sharing these features which are questioned by outsiders of the Hispanic community as different or lesser than (Fraizer, 1957; Hunter, 2007; Painter, 2016). Within our separate communities, we are seen in two ways. First, lighter-complected Hispanic women are sometimes labeled as prettier than *morenas* (brown-skin Hispanic females) by their own culture. Second, it then transcribes into grounds of competition between *wetas* (a white women or slang for a lighter complected Hispanic women) and *morenas*, or specifically, *Taíno* in Puerto Rican culture. This happens for no reason other than a cultural label and perception of skin tone equaling one's potential worth.

Within our separate communities, we are seen in a couple of ways. Lighter-complected Hispanic women are sometimes labeled as prettier than *morenas* (brown-skinned Hispanic females) by their own internal culture. That context then transcribes into grounds of competition between *wetas* (a white women or slang for a lighter-complected Hispanic women) and *morenas*, or specifically, *Taíno* in Puerto Rican culture. This happens for no reason other than a cultural label and perception of skin tone equaling one's potential worth.

First, *financial freedom is seen through our personal sacrifices*. We have each had substantial financial barriers playing a role in how we viewed and pursued education and how we saw education as a way out in our future endeavors. Second, *we Latinas live in two realms of reality*. We are Latinas within our first realm of cultural identity and tradition, raised to focus on family values and be the primary emotional providers of our families. This started extremely early in our lives as adolescents and continued to grow throughout our lifetimes. Finally, our cultural identity outside of our families, and the umbrella of Hispanic culture, is a continuous battle of sexism, racism, and colonialism still playing a part in the gender roles we have in higher education, career, and

our personal obligations. For example, this includes how we act in the classroom—subtle and quiet—versus in our personal spaces, strong and vocal. These differences are often because we are simply seen by skin tone, gender, and education.

Implications

There are visible and invisible barriers for Latinas who pursue higher education, specifically graduate or doctoral degrees. These various experiences have different implications or outcomes resulting from the decisions or paths taken to be successful on this journey. There is an implication of personal drive, sacrifice, and determination seen through each of our journeys. Each of us has seen our individual challenges and has pursued them head on, despite fear or the chance of a negative outcome. Finally, personal determination has motivated us as we have embedded needs for accomplishing goals and exercising internal and external control over our own destiny (Meyers et al., 2022).

Significance

Narrative storytelling is an essential part of explaining Hispanic culture and how Latina women are perceived in and out of their various roles, including pursuing doctoral degrees (Wu, 2022; Cohen, 2019; Salinas et al., 2016). Storytelling and revelations about lived experiences such as these illustrate and illuminate the often-painful differences in our experiences as educated Latinas. From a practical perspective, it is crucial that we persist and pursue, even though we are few; we serve as examples of Latinas who are successful in completing their doctoral degrees and building careers outside of the general norms of Hispanic expectations and traditional customs.

Conclusion

Becoming *doctora* is a combination and transcendence of connecting our two worlds, academia and culture. The inequities of social injustice, prejudice, and those stereotypes are generational curses from which we have chosen to break free. The indigenous ways of knowing are felt through the spirits of our ancestors, to whom fewer opportunities were

afforded. We are two women who have worked harder than some to be in the competitive academic ring. We were supposed to be a statistic or written-off because of our sex, race, pigment, or socioeconomics of our cultural identities. We identify differently but serve as examples to other Latinos like us. In future studies, there is still significant work to be done within Latina academic scholarship. Society has taught women we are not meant to succeed past our gender expectations, fulfilling traditional roles. We Latinas have joined the resistance to the larger sociopolitical climate and rhetoric against minorities in the United States to push those doors open for ourselves and others (Ramos & Torres-Fernandez, 2020). This is done in several ways: being vulnerable, being profoundly honest, engaging in scholarly personal storytelling, emphasizing our experiences, and painting vivid experiences for audiences who consume this knowledge through the words we print. While storytelling is not easy, it is a process of self-reflexivity and inner strength, which takes time, patience, courage, and practice.

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Latina superintendents in rural South Texas attributing their success to social and cultural capital

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Abstract

Cultural dismantling of K–12 leadership ideologies that limit the Latina/o student experience must be realized (Rodriguez et al., 2016). The power of the presence of Latinas in leadership as role models is critical (Quiocho & Rios, 2000). While some Latina superintendents lead schools, most of which are rural, nationally, Latina superintendents are not serving districts where a majority of Latino/a students attend. This study explored the intersection of how Latina social capital and rural community cultural capital influenced the success of these Latina leaders (Murphy, 2015). Dominant themes in the study were: a) Support in the rural superintendency is crucial for success; b) The Latina leaders' strong cultural and familial ties enabled them to navigate the superintendency with determination and fortitude in rural places; c) Latina superintendent navigation of barriers in the superintendency are positively influenced by servant leadership with culture as capital leading to overt support for the superintendent; and, d) Student success in rural communities is directly related to the presence of the superintendent in the student's educational career through actions and deeds.

Researcher's positionality

One might assume that I, as an Anglo-Saxon female whose ethnic make-up is predominantly English and Irish, would not be privileged to share the voices of Latina superintendents. However, that potential limitation or assumption would not have afforded the possibilities of conducting this study. I grew up in a rural community in Southwest Michigan whose inhabitants were predominantly African American. My mother came from a crop-picking family who traveled from Arkansas to Michigan throughout her early years. She began school in the 5th grade because my grandfather was instructed to do so, or he would be jailed. She grew and learned in rural communities in two states.

My father has a much different narrative. His biological father passed away when he was five, and my grandmother married a Mexican National. Throughout his formative years, they would travel to and from Mexico to protect his stepfather from the border patrol deporting him. One day, my father and his younger siblings were placed in an orphanage in the Rio Grande Valley as my grandmother and her husband went back to Mexico. He eventually ended up living in Monterey, Mexico. He remained there until around age 14. At that time, he hitchhiked to the Valley and on to Michigan, where he was told that his mother and stepfather resided. My Dad's story includes swimming across the Rio Grande River. My Dad spoke of how the border patrol destroyed his home and deported his stepfather.

In my home life, I was an Anglo female raised in an African American community by a traditional Anglo female and an Anglo male with Hispanic influence on his cultural experiences. Thus, as a transient among cultures, none of which are entirely my own, I desired to illuminate the voice of the Latina, for she too melds cultural nuances that are not seen but felt deep within the framework of who she is. Her impact, how she leads, and how she assimilates cultural knowledge into a form of leadership to impact the students she serves demanded to be better understood.

Introduction and context

Rodriguez (2019) found that Latina females in rural South Texas work in areas with a culturally similar population and yet often fail to ascend to superintendent positions even in predominantly Latina/o communities. The heritage in which most Latinas lived and grew up did not traditionally support a female's move into leadership, and instead favored the male as head of household and community leader (Castillo et al., 2021). The impact of this culture of familism, coupled with the good daughter dilemma, has impacted family support of Latinas' ascension in receiving higher education (Villarreal, 2017). Latina superintendents who have *made it* fight for equity in educational opportunity for all students, yet they also understand that the significant disparity among student populations, as well as the biases Latinx populations and other individuals of color encounter in the educational leadership field, must be navigated one step at a time. Navigating these various barriers results in an extended length of time for the female of color to ascend into educational leadership and the superintendency to gain the same level of leadership as their white colleagues (Rodriguez, 2019).

While teaching is a clear entry point into the workforce for women, barriers continue to exist for females and especially women of color who seek to be educational leaders. Rather than viewing Latino/a students as a "Latina/o issue," cultural dismantling of K–12 leadership ideologies that limit the Latina/o student experience must be realized. (Rodriguez et al., 2016). Historically, even when Latina women have chosen to work in marginalized communities as teachers, they still nationally represented only 8.7% of female educators in 2014 who were Latina (Gandara, 2015). As of February 2018, 25% of students enrolled in K–12 schools identified as Latina/o; yet only 8% of their teachers, 4% of their board members, and 2% of their senior leaders identified as Latina/o (Fernandez, 2019). Noteworthy is understanding that the Latina population as a group is diverse, while 80% of all Latinas come from the Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Central American subgroups and make up the most significant portion of Latinas in rural South Texas (Gandara, 2015).

A diverse array of educational leaders should be valued and acknowledged for the varied forms of social capital they bring as skill sets into the superintendency (Rodriguez, 2019; Spillane et al., 2003). Understanding the impact that social capital can have on an institution and the leadership within is integral to the success of the United States' educational system. Latina leaders who began as underserved students in their own K–12 education bring the insight of their oppressive experiences and feelings of marginalization to their own leadership and are thus called to acknowledge and advocate for students of color. Castillo et al. (2021) found that the Latina leader has endured the hardships of educational leadership because she wants to create an environment that promotes equity for all students, often based on her own inequitable experiences.

Allred et al. (2017) highlighted and explored the anomaly of a plethora of Latina superintendents in leadership in rural South Texas. Convoluting the ascension of females into leadership roles includes the conundrum that females generally are not assertive in the selection of their leadership roles and often showed a complacent attitude toward their next professional step (Munoz et al., 2014). Allred et al. (2017) concurred and found that most females, including Latinas that she interviewed, had not initiated application for the superintendent positions they held. Females prepared and sought educational credentials, and they aspired, but they did not apply; they waited to be asked (Allred et al., 2017).

Understanding how social and cultural capital act as tools for the Latina leader provides a fertile opportunity to improve Latina visibility in leadership roles, thus providing role models for Latina/o children via those positions. The power of the presence of Latinas in leadership as role models is critical (Quiocho & Rios, 2000).

Latinas in the rural superintendency

Through the Latina leader's desire to provide an educational environment that is based on equity and opportunity, she has led in rural spaces from a place of shared identity (Vaughn, 2011; Ortiz, 2001). She sees herself in the students served and aimed to provide a different experi-

ence motivated by her own experiences of prejudice and marginalization (Castillo et al., 2021). Additionally, the rural superintendent holds family outcomes in high regard and desires to nurture their impact rather than move to an area with better compensation (Williams et al., 2019). The relationships built within their leadership are crucial for the Latina superintendent to mitigate roadblocks to the success of their superintendency (Palladino et al., 2016).

Latina leaders as change agents

Castillo (2016) discovered that the Latina superintendents who tend to gravitate toward rural communities are themselves products of rural communities. The opportunity to capture the students' regard through a community enriched through family connectedness is crucial. Castillo et al. (2021) found that female administrators who make it to the superintendent position are more likely to become superintendents in rural districts. Latina superintendents seek to create an environment that cares about the school community members, enriching relationships between the families and school. This formation of bonding social capital is what the Latina superintendent in rural South Texas utilized in the successful navigation of her superintendency (Castillo et al., 2021). The proactive leadership model the Latina leader utilized through the immersion of her community to change is key to success in the superintendency (Palladino et al., 2016).

Maxwell et al. (2013) found that equity-oriented superintendents who act as change agents model behaviors as described in Skrla et al. (2009), such as possessing an equity attitude, acknowledging assets, demonstrating persistence, and maintaining a coherent focus, among others (p. 5). Maxwell et al. (2014) explored resilience in rural superintendents, finding that those social justice superintendents found size and relationships as both attractions and challenges to that work in rural communities. Similarly, rural Latina superintendents capitalize on the benefits of leading in small communities and the relationships that support their success.

Rural superintendents' community efficacy

Rural communities have a deep connection to the land and their surroundings and have a definite sense of place (Bauch, 2001). The importance of social relationships and connectedness promotes achievement and sustainability within the rural superintendency (Ortiz, 2001). Budge (2006) isolated six habits of the place, including "connectedness, development of identity and culture, interdependence with the land, spirituality, ideology, and politics, and activism and civic engagement" (p.3). all of which are especially relevant to rural schools. He also stated that rural people do not exclusively experience a sense of place; however, the concept appeared to be more pervasive in the literature on rural schools and communities than urban and suburban places. This strong connection to place is contrasted against the prejudice that focuses on rural people and rural life.

Castillo (2016) determined that the strength of the Latina superintendent in the rural community is that she leads from a sense of community efficacy. Castillo (2016) proffered that the Latina female felt that the rural environment allowed her to be both a leader within the school community and a leader within her family. Through understanding the kinship culture in the rural community (Ortiz, 2001) and the inner workings of this form of social capital, community efficacy deepens in the rural educational environment. The importance of social relationships and connectedness provides opportunities for the achievements of a rural superintendent (Ortiz, 2001).

Relationships are key to social capital. Relationships can make or break a school leader and community. However, as Donnelly & Linn (2019) contended, leadership is a mindset. Walls & Kemper (2019) found that when social capital can be used as a tool for the advocacy of students and teachers at a school, including through service, the school community can continue to strengthen. Service is a viable social capital component for the female superintendent. The Latina leader is characterized by having a servant framework in which her success is framed (Skrla, 2000). The desires to impact learners' outcomes that the female superintendent brings is a source of rich connectedness to the superintendency (Allred et al., 2017).

The Latina educational leader continued fighting racialized ideologies of her identity as a Latina. The intersectionality of the varying components impacts the opportunities accessible to Latina females as leaders (Murakami et al., 2018). Researchers have found that Latinas' personal experiences shape how the leader guides her district (Murakami et al., 2018; Czop Assaf & O'Donnell Lussier, 2020). Through this robust understanding of her own cultural identity and the influence of her cultural identity in the role of the Latina leader, she fully understood how to develop the school's culture.

Problem and purpose

While Ortiz (2001) found some Latinas were successfully using social capital to ascend into and retain superintendent positions, Latinas are not represented with parity to the school populations they could be serving in superintendent positions nationally (Allred et al. 2017). The need is becoming even more critical as demographics continue to shift. For example, by 2060, one-third of the female population leading the United States will be Latina (Gandara, 2015). Over 50 percent of the student body within Texas are Latina/o (Gandara, 2015).

Davies & Rizk (2018) concluded and recommended that intersectionality of social and cultural capital needed to be studied in greater depth to ascertain the inner workings of successful Latina leaders. This study sought to explore Latina superintendents' perceptions of the importance of social and cultural capital impacts on their successful careers as rural superintendents.

Methodology

Fleshing out participants' perceptions of how social and cultural capital intersect with the positionality of their leadership role created the impetus for this qualitative case study gleaning the lived experiences of three rural South Texas Latina superintendents (Patton, 2015). The researcher's focus for the sampling strategy was to select female respondents, delineating each Latina female's contribution to the robust nature of the data (Patton, 2015).

Participants

The researcher utilized Texas Education Agency's Texas Valley and South Texas Valley listing of superintendents. The 85 school districts in these regions were then categorized utilizing the National Center for Education Statistics' (NCES, 2022) district type, and of the 12 categories reviewed, six of them in rural and town classifications were included for the study. The categorization of rural and the three categories encompassed included:

- Rural-remote districts more than 10, but less than 35 miles from an urbanized area
- Rural-distant districts, greater than five miles and less than or equal to 25 miles from an urban cluster; and,
- Town classification, inclusive of the 3 subcategories, encompassed town-distant districts which are located between 10 and/or equal to 35 miles from an urbanized cluster. (NCES, 2022)

From these remaining 53 districts, districts led by male superintendents were excluded from the participant pool. Out of the remaining districts, 16 were led by female superintendents, and all these districts were placed in the participant pool. Throughout this process, districts categorized as charter were excluded, as TEA does not provide categorization of the town structure.

Initial introductory emails were sent with a cultural identity survey attached. During the season of COVID-19, few superintendents responded to these initial surveys. This process yielded six study participants, all hailing from Texas Valley. Anecdotal notes were retained following each participant interview resulting in robust opportunities for connections.

Procedures

The research was approved via Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi's Institutional Review Board procedures. Data was collected utilizing speech-to-text technology, both face-to-face through a virtual platform and through verbal communication over the telephone. Interviews were transcribed verbatim through multiple reviews of each interview question.

Question sequencing for the initial cultural identity questions was consistent, but the latter questions flowed naturally through the rhythm

of the respondent. Silent probing was utilized as appropriate, as for this research on social and cultural capital's impacts on the superintendency, that silence at times afforded an opportunity for each respondent to gather their thoughts and continue the answer (Bernard, 2006).

Data analysis

Each interview was coded manually as a single case-study, and once all six interviews were coded, each question from each participant was included in an additional document to be analyzed for additional codes. Relative to Saldaña's (2016) reference to coding as art, themes emerged and intersected among research questions. Throughout the coding analysis, the researcher went back to the original transcriptions to ensure the wording and data was captured exactly as the respondent provided. Two corrections were made through this check for accuracy to ensure trustworthiness of the data. Through the process of coding, an additional subset of data was captured from the transcription system utilized through the recording process. Through this robust process, the words of the Latina superintendent emerged and provided depth to the cultural and social capital impacts influencing the success of their superintendency.

Trustworthiness and credibility

The researcher, as a white female understood her truth, personal biases, and potential barriers that could potentially impact the trustworthiness and credibility of the research in telling the emerging story of the Latina superintendent. The opportunities to receive peer feedback via robust discussion and member checking with participants throughout the analytic process offered the researcher clarity on areas of rumination as Lincoln & Guba (1985) outlined; peer debriefing provided an opportunity for the researcher to ensure the emergent data were grounded.

Upon cross analysis for coding and themes, a deeper understanding of the Latinas' successes in the superintendency and the cultural and social capital impacts emerged. Additionally, barriers to the superintendency and potential nuances in the positions these Latina superintendents held as rural superintendents surfaced, as well with the uniqueness

of the rural context, further amplifying importance these superintendents attributed to social and cultural capital.

Findings

It is through the words of these assertive, compassionate, fierce leaders that the rich understanding of the social and cultural capital values impacting the superintendency in rural school districts in south Texas was heard. The in-depth nature of research in rural places in Texas Valley and South Texas Valley regions limited the participant pool, so furthering the category to town-distant enabled additional respondents to be queried for participation. Table 1 provides detailed personal and geographic data for the study's participants.

Table 1
Participant demographics

Name	Cultures celebrated	Cultural identity	Age	School district category	Years in education
Patricia Vera	Mexican American	Mexican	Did not identify	Town-distant	28
Alicia Chavarria	Hispanic Latina Mexican American	Mexican Tejana Chicana	Did not identify	Rural-remote	10+
Melissa Llamas	Hispanic	Hispanic	50s	Town-distant	32
Dr. Maria Hurtado	Latina white	Mexican	50s	Town-distant	-
Dr. Esperanza Trevino	Mexican	Latina	60s	Retired	40+
Veronica Hernandez	Mexican American	Mexican American	40s	Rural-distant	23
Stephanie Thornton	-	Hispanic	-	-	-

Profile of participants
Participants who met the criteria, including being an acting or former Latinx superintendent, were invited to participate in the study. For all potential participants, a cultural identity survey was provided via email, which enabled them to respond, as willing, to provide more in-depth information about their cultural identity. Four of the six participants completed this survey identifying themselves as Latina superintendents. Two participants responded through their answers on cultural identity during the participant interview. All six participants met the criteria to participate in the research. One potential participant completed her cultural identity survey but emailed the researcher that she was not Latina and could not participate. All the participants were wives and mothers. Several shared the strong influence of their fathers upon their leadership. Each served in the South Texas Valley or Texas Valley regions of rural South Texas.

Emergent themes

A multi-case study utilizing a systematic approach to the qualitative research methodology was conducted while allowing for the emergence of themes across the participant data. The themes contribute to the knowledge that: a) Support in the rural superintendency is crucial for success; b) The Latina leader's strong cultural and familial ties enabled them to navigate the superintendency with determination and fortitude in rural places; c) Latina superintendent navigation of barriers in the superintendency are positively influenced by both servant leadership as well as cultural capital; and, d) Student educational success in rural communities is directly related to the presence of the Latina superintendent's leadership. The following section contains the results of the analysis of the data on Latina leaders and their social and cultural capital impacts in the superintendency.

Support in the superintendency
Support within the superintendency was a theme highlighted by all six participants. Support encompassed support from family, professional relationships, and peers in the superintendency. The Latina superinten-

dent utilized the collegial support of professional relationships, community connections, and mentor opportunities to build upon her skillset for the success of her district. She further called on the characters of a strong Latinx foundation cultural component to strengthen her abilities as a superintendent. Both Veronica Hernandez and Maria Hurtado cited the significant impact of their families upon their leadership. Dr. Alicia Chavarria expressed that while the support of her family was crucial, it was important to also make time for her own and extended families in return.

Superintendent familial support is one subtheme of support, but professional relationships also emerged as a subtheme. Mentorship was highlighted by the Latina superintendents; as Dr. Chavarria notes, "It is important to have mentors for different things." Veronica Hernandez shared that a mentor was supportive and gave her "the ability to, you know, kind of go and make my mark." Veronica Hernandez also shared that developing relationships with the board and board members who best know the community, especially at the onset of assuming the superintendency, is crucial. Melissa Llamas concurred, noting that her school board was phenomenal. Patricia Vera spoke to the longevity of support she has experienced in the superintendency. Long-standing relationships of support enable the Latina superintendent to have a space for her leadership. Finally, having a network of Latina superintendents has been significant to Melissa Llamas, who shared that, she "works very closely with…the ladies on 77…that I can turn to for any situation that I'm dealing with. And I'll offer my experience to them too." These Latina superintendents noted that they often rely upon their Education Service Center, as voiced by Veronica Hernandez: "People at the region service center that you build relationships again…unofficial mentors."

Servant leadership

The Latina superintendent leads through active engagement in her district. She utilizes social capital as a tool for success. Dr. Esperanza Trevino said visibility at school events is critical, "You just be calm… that's the thing with small districts. You wear your school colors, and you use your school suburban, and you're always positive." Patricia

Vera captured the essence of support through her actions: "I try to go around…I go to all the games." Melissa Llamas highlighted how the role of superintendent is also the public relations department: "I think you have to be a people person. You have to have good PR skills."

This element of service started prior to the superintendency, but she carries her experiences and teachings into this new role. Veronica Hernandez noted that, "You have that vantage point from a teacher lens and moving into central administration, then working with other administrators, fostering and building those relationships." Dr. Maria Hurtado captured the essence of her district through set times where she interacts and build collegiality through doing table talks at each campus. Dr. Alicia Chavarria summed up her impact: "I'm here to make sure that my service to make children's lives better is done before anything else." In rural districts, the desire to impact comes through the service mentality, as evidenced by Patricia Vera's leadership: "I've gone into the cafeteria and cleaned up the cafeteria, doing sweeping and so forth at lunchtime…sometimes there's no one to delegate to!"

Culture as capital
Cultural strengths of the Latina superintendents were found throughout the participant interviews. Veronica Hernandez said it well: "You know, for everybody, their life experiences mold them into who they are, and they bring that to the table in all of the interactions they have with other people." As Dr. Esperanza Trevino emphasized, "You get to tell your story; that's your legacy." Dr. Maria Hurtado voiced that her "godmother" was the influential person who welcomed her into the teaching field. Such influences of the past and the teachings of their childhoods that allowed these Latina superintendents to utilize their culture as a form of capital. Patricia Vera conveyed, "I go back to my dad and what he instilled in me." She continued, "I think I'm a little bit different because I'm more about making the job I do as a service, and not about me, or it's not about me, right? It's about what the legacy I'm going to leave in making this a better community." Both Dr. Trevino and Veronica Hernandez understood the need of speaking their mind, voicing the importance of "…having a strong sense of self, a strong sense of confidence."

Faith was also emphasized by the participants. Dr. Maria Hurtado said, "I believe God is surrounding me with a lot of great angels." Dr. Alicia Chavarria encouraged others to keep their faith while they traverse the superintendency. Through this activation of spirituality, a key cultural component of the Latina culture, the Latina superintendents successfully handled the challenges coming their way in the superintendency.

Capacity of rural leaders and social capital

The sense of community was evident in all aspects of the participants' work, as Patricia Vera relayed, "You know everybody, you know all staff members. You know, I mean, I know everybody. I know the custodian, teachers, the teacher aides. I know the students. Building the social capital of connections is pivotal in the success of the superintendent. Both Veronica Hernandez and Dr. Alicia Chavarria shared that small communities facilitate communication.

She said the community becomes a family, and "students invite you to their graduation parties, and it's like family because it's so small. But I think the other benefits are, um, when you need them to come together, they will."

Generations remain in these tight-knit rural communities, and superintendents can be involved in the familial aspects of the community she serves. Dr. Alicia Chavarria noted the size of the student pool: "… It's the same students; they don't have a big pool of students to choose from." Dr. Maria Hurtado captured this essence: "Um, you can really get to know the families, um, you know that they have siblings. Um, you know different campuses." Knowing the families and understanding who they are as members of your school community enables the Latina superintendent to build social capital." Veronica Hernandez said, "There's a lack of bureaucracy in smaller rural districts. Um, because you're not having to sort through different departments." Dr. Melissa Llamas exemplified the connection to the community, saying, "I try to participate in our chamber of commerce," and she further illustrated, "…but just helping out everybody you possibly can when you can when you can do it, help." Dr. Alicia Chavarria captured the realities of rural

superintendency: "You're going to learn how to do everything. You're going to know every program."

The Latina superintendent makes time in these rural spaces to celebrate the community. Melissa Llamas expressed the importance of understanding the wealth of human capital that is within the school district in rural places is essential for the viability of the district. Veronica Hernandez points out the challenge within a small district and how to mitigate those challenges, noting that you must roll up your sleeves because you don't have the teams to do it.

Dr. Maria Hurtado elaborated on the essence of the rural places and explained that the Latina superintendent cannot do everything by herself.

> You're not going to be able to do it all by yourself, you know; you've got to have your support system your network of people which is your family, and uh, just a handful of maybe of best friends that you know that know you outside work, because you need that outlet.

The Latina's ability to lead in tight spaces, lacking spaces, and stagnant spaces demonstrates the tenacity she has as the superintendent. Dr. Hurtado noted that, "Gossip is prevalent, and you really have to be mindful of the fact that everybody knows everybody you talk to is related to or knows the person you may be concerned about." Dr. Esperanza Trevino felt similarly about the power of gossip when she stated, "You cannot go anywhere. And you have to be careful what you do… and if you have dinner, just be careful where you go…" Dr. Hurtado elaborated, "It's just those few that can become poison through gossip." Understanding that as the voice and with the goal in mind to create a growth mindset, the difficulty to navigate these situations is resolutely impacted by the Latina superintendent, as found by Dr. Maria Hurtado: "Talk to me. I'll either tell them how it is…they may like it. They may not like it. You know, but I will justify things if there's something that they're concerned with."

The depth of support of the students served is highlighted by Dr. Alicia Chavarria: "If I didn't pay it out of my pocket, the coaches, or the board members…I mean everyone is pitching in for these kids." Dr.

Maria Hurtado also exemplified how she connected with the students she served, such as "talking about the tradition that all of us have in Christmas time when we eat tamales."

Latina leadership

The Latina leaders' "strong sense of self" and openness to new opportunities emerged as a significant theme. Dr. Maria Hurtado exclaimed, "So, I think I take pride in knowing that, you know, Hispanics can do it too." This sense of ownership in the superintendency allows encouragement to flow, per Veronica Hernandez, "to encourage females other female leaders, and help them, you know…attain that leadership goal or superintendent position."

Understanding what skills were needed to lead in the superintendency, Veronica Hernandez encouraged others "to hone their craft." Patricia Vera stated, "but I think if you stand firm on what you believe in, and you make your presence known, uh, others will come to respect you." The spaces for the Latina are encouraging, as Dr. Alicia Chavarria highlighted when she attended the statewide superintendents' conference, noting that, "This year it seemed like there were a lot of Latinas there. Like the makeup was different." Dr. Alicia Chavarria noted that there seem to be varying requirements when a female wants to become the superintendent. Interview committees will say things like,

> Oh, but you haven't been assistant superintendent before, or you've never been a principal. So, a female has to go through all the different steps of leadership where a man can move from a teacher to a principal, never in between…wasn't an assistant principal, went from a principal to a deputy superintendent.

Dr. Esperanza Trevino had a very different mindset. She relayed, "You know, I am a Latina. And I wanted to be a PhD in a white university. I wanted to compete in a white area…compete in a white university. From the desire to become educated to the desire to lead, Dr. Esperanza Trevino noted that the perception is that women don't compete. Veronica Hernandez also agreed with the mindset that females are seen differently: "…An unfair um, perception that females are somehow have to be nicer or softer or kinder than their male counterparts." Through

her words of guidance, Dr. Maria Hurtado encouraged Latinas in the superintendency to "stay organized or you will get lost." Additionally, she relayed, "um, do not let people see that you're stressed or fearful uh in public, because they will eat you alive, they will uh try to bring you down and harp on that."

Dr. Esperanza Trevino concluded by saying, "Just do it…do it, but it's not going to be easy…It's very difficult. It was for me, but if you want to do that, you go girl. You go for it!"

Latinas' barriers to the superintendency

The barriers Latina superintendency candidates encounter begin early in life. Many of those barriers relate to familial obligations or societal influences on Latinas and their own perceptions of access to the role of superintendent. Dr. Alicia Chavarria shared words her mother spoke to her when she was excited about college and the many facets of opportunity college had to offer her: "She said, 'You're crazy. You're not ever going to do that in college, you're going to go get a degree and that's it.'" The dream for the Latina female was to be that of a mother, a leader in the household raising children, and bettering the world through her maternal actions. Dr. Maria Hurtado expressed her guidance for aspiring Latina superintendency candidates, "…so, organize your time where you are. Then it takes away the guilt…" Veronica Hernandez concurred, "I think that when we think about obligations, and, and families, there should be equity there." Dr. Alicia Chavarria said that her opportunity to follow her career path was a balance of family and career in partnership with her spouse, saying, "I don't know if I could have done that if we were both working full-time, So, I didn't do the superintendency until he retired." That statement as well revealed the sacrifices women make delaying their career aspirations.

Although overt discrimination for being a Latina and a female was not discussed by any participants, the subtle nuances of discrimination were felt. Dr. Maria Hurtado spoke of the undercurrents at play in the superintendency, "There's still a lot of men that don't take women as seriously (sic-in leadership roles), because they want to please other men." Appearances seem to be significant in what is still a male arena.

Dr. Alicia Chavarria shared that it's really disheartening to get called for an interview only to find out your only purpose was to support the appearance of a diverse pool of applicants.

The challenges begin prior to the application for the superintendency. Dr. Esperanza Trevino had endured countless barriers in her life, including being classified as "mentally retarded." Often, she placed barriers on herself imposed by societal influences. Dr. Alicia Chavarria said, "…let them tell you no, don't tell yourself no. Don't close your own door. If you think you're the right person, then apply, but don't close that door for yourself." Melissa Llamas relayed,

> So, I did not want it (sic- the job). I was not interested. I was helping our school district as an assistant superintendent, and I was pretty much pushed down the superintendency road. I've been very successful and have been at it for 20 years.

Veronica Hernandez also relayed that the superintendency was not in her immediate aspirations,

> And if somebody would have asked me three years ago. Are you going to be a superintendent for years? I would have said of course not, you know, it wasn't something that I was thinking of, or that I thought was attainable at this point.

Although these superintendent positions were not initially sought by several of the Latina participants, they had sage advice for future Latina leaders navigating their path to the superintendency. Veronica Hernandez said, "…You are tasked with a duty to make some very difficult decisions, and if you don't have a strong ethical standing in knowing how to navigate those decisions, it's going to be difficult."

Discussion

Castillo et al. (2021) found that when Latinas become superintendents, it is frequently in rural places not only in recognition of the opportunity, but also in light of these leaders' commitment to make a direct impact on students and families within their district. By creating equitable experiences for students, these Latina superintendents became change agents for students, serving as advocates in support of their educational careers. Developing social capital in leadership, as well as understanding how

to effectively use their social capital, was integral to the Latina superintendents' success in this study as previously noted in the literature from Pearrow et al., (2016) & Krile et al. (2006).

Further, the intersectionality of social and cultural capital was a tool these Latina leaders used to engender change. The participants spoke of their rural communities as families, yet families that sometimes do not appreciate or support change. Maria Hurtado described the status quo in her community of families, who had not left the community in years. Initiatives such as college readiness required these Latina leaders to stretch the mindset of their communities to see a world beyond its rural confines. As previously shared by Mishra (2020), true also was the ability to make social connections, which in turn created cultural wealth for these Latina leaders in South Texas rural districts as well.

Castillo (2016) found that often rural superintendents are products of the rural education themselves. This research study supported this finding. As Dr. Maria Hurtado summarized, she saw herself in her students and the potential within. Through these Latina superintendents understanding the cultural nuances of the community and school community served, they worked to develop community efficacy (Bauch, 2001; Budge, 2006; Castillo, 2016; Castillo et al., 2021). This research supported the finding that the superintendents utilized both social and cultural capital as tools to successfully navigate the superintendency, thus creating a collaborative network in which families and the school community worked together for the betterment of their community at-large. Whether it was events like Dr. Chavarria's creation of the honking parades to ensure that the community is involved in school outcomes or Melissa Llamas making herself available to sit on community committees, these actions revealed that the culture of the community was respected by these Latina leaders, and this reciprocal respect brought cohesive support to the school district.

The research findings support the depth these rural leaders exemplified to embed themselves into the lives of their students. Rather than a more punitive approach, Dr. Maria Hurtado has gathered male students with disciplinary infractions and hosted impromptu tamales talks about Christmas traditions to build bonding capital with them. Making such

social connections confirms the extant research around the connection of student success to how leadership supports the diverse populations served. Finally, participant data revealed that the Latina leaders' knowledge of social ties and cultural wealth and the ability of that capital to impact the school community was crucial to their success in their leadership roles (Rodela & Rodriguez-Mojica, 2019; Davies & Rizk, 2018; Murakami et al., 2018).

Implications for further research

Through systematic analysis of research conducted on females and females of color, particularly Latinas, as in this study, researchers can delve into the varying areas of impact cultural wealth promotes. These leaders sought to gain a deeper understanding of race and racism, allowing researchers to see the unspoken subordination Latina leaders endure and how these Latina leaders used their social and cultural capital as well as work ethic to be successful.

The lens to determine cultural capital wealth has been from a Euro-centric, male-centric viewpoint. This study affords insight into the Latina leaders' lens on cultural capital wealth and illuminates those voices. As research continues highlighting Latina superintendents in other areas of the country, more benefits will be gained regarding understanding of barriers to the superintendency for these marginalized leaders.

An additional area for research delves into the cultural values impacting the Latina superintendent through the patriarchal and matriarchal lens. Efforts to understand and mitigate patriarchal and matriarchal influences on the upbringing of young Latinas is crucial. Role models such as Latina leaders can help shape the rural communities' outreach to the larger family and ensure educational opportunity. This opportunity for bridging social capital is imperative for the future (Krile, 2006).

Finally, gender bias with regard to leadership is an additional area of potential study. Gaining a deeper understanding of both male and female expressions and understandings of gender will enable research to better impact educational leadership preparation programs.

A deeper understanding of structural criticisms within the higher education system must afford reframing of the current issues for future

educators in the United States (Davies & Rizk, 2018). Gandara (2015) found that the opportunity for educational leaders is even bleaker, with only 4% of all Latinas obtaining a master's or doctoral degree in 2013. Davies & Rizk (2018) attest that these barriers to equal opportunity for females and females of color be interrogated. Reform must begin with a transparent analysis of the politicized and racialized inequity impacting females and females of color in their quest to the superintendency (Montoya & Kew, 2020).

The voices of these Latina superintendents continue to inform the literature and expand the conversation that began decades ago when Skrla (2000) attested that the superintendency is the most hierarchical executive position in the United States. The networking and social capital that support the ascension that privilege traditional leaders into these positions continues to bear disruption. There is more work to be done.

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Activar

13

We see us. You see us.
Embracing our Latinadad

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Call to action

This *CEDER Journal* special issue "*Las Voces Nuevas*: *Emerging Scholarship on Latinas in Education*" highlights an increasingly important need to emphasize and give voice to the empowerment of Latina educational leaders. The Latinx population reached 62.1 million in 2020, which continues the "geographic spread of Hispanics" in the United States (Passel, Lopez, & Cohn, 2022, para. 1). According to the National Center for Education Statistics [NCES] (2023a; 2023b), the Latinx population were awarded 18% of bachelor's degrees, 9% of master's degrees, and 8% of doctoral degrees in 2020–2021. In the same academic year, 18% of all degrees were awarded in the field of education (2023b). The shifting demographics and ongoing degree attainment in education suggests that the Latinx population remains invested in education throughout the PK–20 continuum. Population estimates for Texas, more specifically, suggest that the Latinx population comprised 40.2% of the state's more than 30 million residents in July 2022 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). The ongoing growth of Latinx populations suggests a turning of the "structural" tide for the demographics of the state.

The continued commitment of *nuestra comunidad* in PK–20 education also likely means that our educational leadership will experience a compositional shift of leadership, specifically Latinas.

This meticulously curated *CEDER Yearbook* comprised of empirical research provides a platform where *Las Voces Nuevas* are given a theorizing space—a space often denied (Yosso, 2005) to Latinas in the academic world. As our *colegas* and *comadres* Martinez and Méndez-Morse note in the Foreword, Latinas' ways of knowing must become commonplace not just in practice but in theory as well. Us Latinas do indeed occupy theorizing and leadership space in PK-20. The influential spheres in which we operate are immeasurable (Saltman, 2018) and long overdue for rightful recognition, particularly in a time where there is opposition and fear of CRT, DEI, and other forms of epistemological frameworks that critically seek to lay bare the faulty premise of meritocracy. Our existence, *nuestras experiencias*, are evidence of our resistance and resilience as we advocate for a more equitable society. This is what informs our Call to Action, an opportunity to embrace our *conciencia*, which "requires a clear awareness of how exclusion affects Latin[a]s both individually and collectively" (Bordas, 2023, p.75). *Un claro conciencia* means that as Latinas, we must dismantle white privilege and unapologetically center our cultural identity in how we choose to lead (Bordas, 2023). Be the *chingonas* that we know we are.

La comunidad as cultural wealth

Traditional theorizing space emerged a deficit-framed lens of the Latinx community and often relegated Latinas to domestic terms. Freire (2000) argues that these oppressive systems operate self-sufficiently as we, in turn, choose to consume and believe the "problematic" view of our *comunidad*. More bluntly, we give hegemonic structures permission to oppress and disenfranchise us (Freire, 2000; Johnson, 2018; Saltman, 2018). As Latina leaders, *la oportunidad* lies in the reality that we need to re-write the narratives of our *comunidad* from an asset-based lens that embraces our inherent community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). Yosso argues that there are various forms of capital, such as familial, aspirational, and linguistic, to name only a few, that are inherent assets

of Communities of Color. The role of *familia* for Latinas throughout their educational journeys has been long documented in research (See Banda & Flowers, 2022; Bordas, 2023; Llamas & Morgan Consoli, 2012; Rodriguez, Pilcher, & Garcia-Tellez, 2019) as integral to their success. Even if Latinas, members of our *comunidad*, are first-generation, they bring forth immense power that capitalizes on the support of their *familías*. Their aspirations—*las esperanzas*—are for the *familía*, for the *comunidad*. *Nuestra conciencia* must see the value and wealth in our communities. We must learn to see the value and wealth in *nosotras mismas*.

Latinas as chingona educational leaders
Globally, women comprised approximately 31% of leadership roles and 46% of educational leadership roles in 2022 (World Economic Forum, 2022). Further disaggregation suggests that despite accounting for 25% of the U.S. population, the Latinx population accounted for only 2% of senior education leaders in 2018 (Fernandez, 2018). *Las experiencias* and *conciencia* of cultural assets serve as catalysts for how Latinas inform their leadership style (Conde-Brooks, 2020; Espinosa, 2015). Research suggests that unique characteristics of Latina leadership exist; these characteristics inform our cultural scripts as leaders (Bonilla-Rodriguez, 2011; Bordas, 2023; Conde-Brooks, 2020; Espinosa, 2015). Among these characteristics are *personalismo*, which promotes *confianza*, to empower *colectivismo* for action, which continues to strengthen and capitalize on our assets as a *comunidad*. The term *chingona* itself seeks to reclaim the power in being a badass, an unruly woman who has the *ganas* to do what it takes to be a good force in the world (Zaragoza-Petty, 2022). Evidence of these *chingonas* is found within scope of this journal, from the authors and those who participated in their empirical studies. WE EXIST. It is time to embrace our *Latinidad*.

Poderosas in our advocacy for equitable educational policies
While much can be said about the inequitable policies that govern our behavior (Fowler, 2013) within an educational space, we want to focus specifically on policy that assaults our linguistic capital found within the

Latinx *comunidad*. More importantly, we need to recognize how *poderosas* we are in advocating for equitable policies that seek to dismantle hegemonic structures that do not value bilingual education (Flores, 2016). Language remains a central component in the sense of belonging, warranted for the persistence and success of linguistically marginalized populations (Bazner & Lopez, 2022). Staunch supporters of bilingual education note the need for bilingual and teacher preparation programs to be more additive rather than subtractive, which supports existing and emerging research (Flores, 2016; Carrizales, Greenlees, & Lara, 2022; Zuniga, 2022). Such policies that govern programs should seek to develop a new race-radical vision of bilingual education that engages in the struggles of the *Latinidad* so that it re-positions the Latinx population as "agents rather than the silent objects of knowledge formations and institutional practices" (Ferguson, 2012, p. 232). This autonomy in our agency—specifically as Latina leaders—provides an opportunity for us to not only to operate from an asset-based lens and to be more than *chingonas* but to be *poderosas* in how we problematize and dismantle policy that does not support bilingual education, specifically and inequitably policies, generally.

To be *chingonas*, *poderosas en comunidad con nuestra gente y familia* is what many Latinas already do, in many spaces. We see us. You see us. *Miramos las posibilidades en nosotras mismas?* This call to action encourages Latinas to know our own power and to capitalize on the assets of our *Latinidad* to re-imagine what advocacy for an equitable education system entails, not as spectators, but as key players needed to *avanzar la comunidad con orgullo. Trabajamos juntos para avanzar.* To work collectively and dedicate our life to positively impact our sphere of influence is a commitment to a better tomorrow. For us. For our family. For our *comunidad*. For our future generations. As faculty, we are *afortunada/os* to know Latina scholar-practitioners, strong Latina leaders who are committed to equity in educational practice. Among the countless scholars, Dr. Rose Mary Zuniga—the first author of this call to action and the scholar to whom this journal is dedicated—was awarded her EdD posthumously after she passed away unexpectedly in June 2022. She epitomized servant and transformational leadership daily as she

served Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi in various student affairs capacities and was also involved in advising student organizations and advocating for social justice, specifically the need to hold policy makers and elected officials accountable to increase equity for English Language Learners (ELLs). Dr. Zuniga was a crucial actor in encouraging single mothers to be pursue education. Fondly, we can recount countless times when she would readily have thoughtful gifts for our children, frequent questions about "How are the baby girls doing?," share her wisdom and counsel about life, and hold newborn babies in class so that their parents could be engaged in group discussions. Along with countless others, she embodied the Latina chingona unapologetically aware of our cultural assets. She was la poderosa, who paved the way for the "baton," as Martinez and Méndez-Morse note in this volume's foreword, to be passed to emerging scholars and future generations. Our existence, as Latina education leaders, is the resistance.

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