NUESTRA VOZ: A CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF LATINA SCHOOL
LEADERS

by
Angelica Maria Ramsey
Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The population of Latina/o students in public school across the United States is ever-increasing. This fast-growing population suffers from high dropout rates and academic underachievement. This epidemic of underachievement is alarming, as today's Latina/o student will be tomorrow's workforce. There is no time like the present to increase the number of Latina principals in high schools throughout the United States. The purpose of this critical ethnographic study was to understand the experiences of Latina principals in both established and burgeoning Latina/o communities in raising Latina/o achievement. Key findings included: (a) strong ethnic ties and identity, (b) similar stories of ascending to the principalship, (c) their desire to make a difference in the lives of the children they served, (d) internal and external obstacles faced, (e) experiences of discrimination, and (f) championing the causes of equity and student success for all with a social justice agenda. The skill set that made Latinas particularly effective campus principals included: (a) being bilingual, (b) serving as role models, and (c) a desire to serve underserved populations.

Keywords: Critical ethnography, Latina principals, Critical Race Theory (CRT), Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit); social justice; achievement gap; female principals.

Dedication

This manuscript is dedicated to my family for their consummate love and support. To my late parents, Joseph P. Tirado and Rogelia P. Tirado, for it was their fortitude, work ethic, and unyielding belief in the merit of education that has led me to this accomplishment. I continue to strive to make them proud.

To my husband, Daryton, who has modeled for me that love is patient; love is kind. Thank you for being supportive and patient as I spent weekends, evenings, and holidays in front of a laptop. You continue to inspire me with our hours of discourse on the state of education today. You make me a better person every day!

To my brother Albert who, despite our differences in opinion, always communicated that he was proud of his little sister. And to Vanessa, who provided the motivation in my quest to be a positive role model for the next generation.

Lastly, I dedicate this manuscript to all of the students of Socorro High School and Eastlake High School who motivated me to be a social justice advocate. Thank you!

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No accomplishment is done alone. First of all, I must thank God for His blessings every step of the way.

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I would like to thank Mrs. Dimas, my bilingual aide at Pulliam Elementary, for putting in extra hours to help me learn English and for teaching me kindness. I have never forgotten you. I would like to thank Dr. Larry Meredith, retired professor of Religious Studies at the University of the Pacific (UOP). Dr. Meredith, you inspired me to continue my studies regardless of my personal and financial struggles. Dr. Knight, president of Pacific Union College, who while still a professor at UOP, brought home the point that people of color have a responsibility to the next generation and who challenged me always to "Do the right thing."

Last, but not least, I am very grateful to the 10 Latina principals who participated in the study. I hope others are as inspired by your work as I am.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Abbreviations

CRT – Critical Race Theory

LatCrit – Latino Critical Race Theory

TEA – Texas Education Agency

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The population of Latina/o children in public schools across the United States is increasing (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). Concurrently, Latina/o students continue to be adversely affected by the academic achievement gap, underachieving in comparison to their White and Asian peers (Cavazos et al., 2010). One manner of combating the achievement gap is to increase the amount of culturally responsive school leaders. This ethnography studied 10 Latina high school principals in the southwest to understand their experiences and struggles in attaining their principalships and also while in their leadership roles.

This chapter consists of eight sections that provide the foundation for the study. The background provides an overview of the demographic shifts occurring in the United, the lack of female and Latina secondary principals, and the theoretical framework of the study. The second section provides insight into my motivation for conducting the study. The next three sections state the problem statement, purpose statement, and significance of study. The remaining three sections provide an overview of the research questions, research plan, and delimitations of the study.

Background

The Latina/o community is burgeoning in the United States, totaling approximately 50.5 million (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Currently, Latina/os make up 16.3% of the total population, making Latina/os the majority group of color (Malott, 2009). The Latina/o population grew over 43% nationally from the 2000 census to the 2010 census (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The rapid growth will continue as it is

estimated that by 2025, about a quarter of the population in the United States will be of Latina/o ethnicity (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011).

Latina/os currently make up about 22% of all public schools' student enrollment in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). That means that almost one out of every four students sitting in classrooms across the country is Latina/o. As the demographic of the U.S. students continues to become more Latina/o, critical issues pertaining to this emerging populace must be addressed.

Cammarota (2006) explained that while the Latina/o community is one of the fastest growing and a highly represented populace of the students served, "Whites still hold all key positions of power" (p. 9). Across the country, the leadership on campuses does not reflect the student population it serves. Latina/os accounted for 5.3% of public school principals nationally in the 2007 school year (Sánchez, Thornton, & Usinger, 2008). At the secondary level, Latina/os accounted for only 4.5% of U.S. public school principals (Battle, 2009). In order for the leadership of the school to mirror the student body, there is a need for a significant increase in the number of Latina/o principals.

Women encounter many barriers to attaining leadership positions at the secondary level (Wrushen & Sherman, 2008). Women accounted for only 28.5% of the secondary public school principal positions in the 2007-2008 school year (Battle, 2009). Latinas face additional obstacles on their professional paths to the principalship. Sperandio (2009) explained that Latina educational leaders have met added struggles in obtaining their positions as they experience not only gender discrimination, but racial and ethnic discrimination as well.

There is no time like the present to increase the number of Latina principals at the secondary level. Latina/o children continue to underperform their peers academically for a variety of reasons, including (a) the lack of high expectations from teachers and administrators, (b) the lack of successful role models, and (c) the lack of support in educational programs (Cavazos et al., 2010; Deitz, 2010; Rivera, Chen, Flores, Blumberg, & Ponterotto, 2007; Vela-Gude et al., 2009). The dropout rate of Latina/o high school students is approximately 21%, which is higher than that of their African American and White peers (Cavazos et al., 2010; Hassinger & Plourde, 2005; National Center for Education Statistics, 2011).

As one of the fastest growing demographic groups in the United States, Latina/os will play a pivotal role in the future of the United States. The approximately 22% of Latina/o students currently sitting in public school classrooms represent tomorrow's labor force. The failure to meet the needs of Latina/o students can have negative repercussions for the United States, "as the job market continues to demand more education and Latina/os continue to make up a larger and larger portion of the workforce" (Gándara, 2010, p. 24).

Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latina/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) were used to examine the experiences unique to the Latina/o community (Pérez Huber, 2010; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). This critical ethnographic study sought to bridge the gap in the literature by allowing Latina principals the opportunity to have their voice heard. It examined (a) the obstacles Latina secondary principals have overcome in obtaining their leadership positions; (b) the skillset Latinas possess to increase the

academic success of Latina/o students; and (c) the impact race, ethnicity and gender have on professional opportunities for Latina principals.

Situation to Self

As a person of color living in the United States, I have always felt a sense of responsibility to others in under-represented and marginalized groups. This is one of the primary reasons I became an educator. As a student, I rarely had the opportunity to interact with teachers or administrators who could serve as role models for me. My educational life and my home life were two completely different spheres that rarely interacted. I often felt that I lived a dual life where I played different parts for my home and public lives. The characters on each side of my two worlds did little to ameliorate that gap.

Neither of my parents had an extensive formal education. While they could not always help me with my studies, they instilled in me a work ethic, they held high expectations, and they were supportive. In a Latina/o household, parental involvement consists of these activities that do not extend past the home. Due to the language barrier, my mother always felt less than welcomed and a bit inferior when she visited one of my schools. By the time I was in middle school, she was so uncomfortable that she stopped going completely.

My teachers and counselors, though well intentioned, always made me feel uncomfortable when they congratulated me for my ability to speak articulately or for an achievement as though intelligence and academic fortitude could not be inherent in a Mexican-American girl in a low social economic status school. I, like my mother, somehow never felt good enough.

I quickly found my sense of purpose as an educator. As an educator of color, I served as a positive, professional role model for the students for whom I worked. I was able to be an adult advocate for all children, including those who historically have been oppressed. During my tenure as a Latina principal, I was able to open the doors of communication with the community as I shared a language and cultural background with them. In essence, I succeeded in bridging the gap between a Eurocentric school system and the majority Latina/o community.

My motivation for conducting this study was to understand the experiences of other Latina principals in the United States better. In order best to comprehend those experiences, I utilized an epistemological approach, for it was important for me to become as close as I could to the participants (Wolcott, 1994). As a critical ethnography, I employed an advocacy paradigm, as I felt the responsibility "to make a difference in the world" (Madison, 2011, p. 97) by assisting in the struggles of a group identified as the "other."

Problem Statement

As the demographic of students in U.S. schools continues to shift, the majority of school leaders remain White (National Center for Education Statistics, 2008). The shifting demographics have seen a rise in the number of Latina/o children attending U.S. public schools. Conversely to the growth in Latina/o enrollment, Latina/o school leaders continue to be an underrepresented group. In the 2007-2008 school year, Latina/os made up approximately 6% of campus principals and represented only nine states (National Center for Education Statistics, 2008). The lack of Latina/o role models for Latina/o children in schools must be addressed (Lalas & Valle, 2007; Rivera et al., 2007). The

15

problem is the underrepresentation of Latina principals to serve as role models and agents of social justice in secondary schools across the United States.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this critical ethnographic study was to understand the experiences of Latina secondary principals in U.S. public schools. Latina secondary principals are generally defined as public school head principals serving at the secondary level who share a cultural background with origins in Mexico, Central America, South America, Spain, the Caribbean, or Puerto Rico, regardless of race.

Significance of the Study

While Latina/os continue to grow in number in the United States, their career development and management is underrepresented in the literature (Hite, 2007). Particular to education, there is a significant gap in the literature on Latina school principals, their obstacles in achieving their positions, and the contribution that they make to Latina/o student achievement. This study allowed for the voices of Latina principals who lead throughout the United States to be heard. The phenomenon of a Latina principal is important to understand for two reasons. First, the lack of Latina/o role models for Latina/o children in schools must be addressed (Lalas & Valle, 2007; Rivera et al., 2007). Second, Latinas have a skill set that allows them to address the needs of the minority students on their campus (Hein, 2003; J. E. Johnson & Uline, 2006).

There is a moral and ethical responsibility for educators to meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of all students (Hassinger & Plourde, 2005; Rayner, 2009). Students deserve to have culturally responsive leaders to meet the needs of all students (L. Johnson, 2006). Gardiner and Enomoto (2006) stated, "school principals have a

critical role" (p. 561), as they set the tone for their campuses for equity and social justice.

As Latina/o children make up approximately 22% of school age children in the United

States, they need Latina/o principals to serve as advocates for social justice on their

campuses (Gándara, 2010; Zarrugh, 2008). While the Latina/o community is one of the

fastest growing and a highly represented populace of the students served, Whites

continue to hold key positions of power. It is imperative that schools have culturally,

linguistically, and socially adept leaders to raise the achievement of Latina/o students

(Hein, 2003).

The Latina/o population in public schools continues to grow and be underserved.

This is not a Latina/o problem, but a national problem, as "Latinos are inextricably bound

up with the future of the United States" (Gándara, 2010, p. 27). This has serious

implications for the United States as it is producing a large subset of the population that is

undereducated and ill-equipped to enter the workforce.

There is a significant gap in the literature on the perspectives of Latina leaders.

While there have been studies on the perspectives of African American principals serving

the needs of diverse student bodies, there is a lack of literature on the experiences of

Latinas (Brooks & Jean-Marie, 2007; Peters, 2010). This study is significant as it

afforded Latina principals the opportunity to share their perceptions on their ascent to the

principalship and their opinions of their role as social justice advocates.

Research Questions

Documenting the career paths of Latina principals in both predominately Latina/o

and burgeoning Latina/o communities, I have focused on (a) personal background

information; (b) the obstacles Latina principals have encountered in their professional

careers; and (c) the role they feel their race, ethnicity, and gender have played in their professional attainment. I framed my central question to understand the experiences of Latina principals in obtaining their position, as there is a gap in the literature on the subject. As this is a critical ethnography, it is important to understand the experiences of the culture-sharing group (J. Thomas, 1993; Wolcott, 2008). The following questions guided this study:

Research Question 1: *What were the experiences and obstacles Latina secondary principals encountered in obtaining their leadership positions?*

Research Question 2: *What impact did race, ethnicity, and gender have on professional opportunities for Latina principals?*

Research Question 3: *What were the qualities or characteristics Latinas believed made them effective principals?*

Research Plan

I conducted a critical ethnographic study. An ethnographic approach was a valid design, as I sought to study a culture-sharing group, Latina principals (J. Thomas, 1993; Wolcott, 2008). The literature supported the use of an ethnographic approach to study Latina/os (Cammarota, 2006; López, 2008). Through observation, interviews and surveys, and questionnaires, I sought to identify obstacles Latinas have encountered in attaining a secondary principal position (Kvale, 1996; Patton, 1990).

Delimitations

I delimited participation to Latina head principals who currently serve in that capacity at a public high school in the 48 continental United States. For the purposes of this study, a participant was considered Latina if she has at least one parent whose

18

ethnicity is Latina/o and who also self identifies as being Latina. I delimited participation to secondary principals for several reasons. Women have not historically held principalships at the secondary level. I sought to learn from women in leadership positions who are considered trailblazers. At the secondary level, principals are accountable not only for assessment scores, but also for completion rates. Also, the campus principal has the sole responsibility of ensuring that the school climate is one in which all students can be successful. As a critical ethnographic study, I utilized purposive sampling in order to elicit rich data from Latina principals throughout the United States.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter presents a review of literature in relation to this study's critical focus. The chapter is divided into two sections: the theoretical framework and the review of the literature. The theoretical framework that arches over the study is CRT. In particular, LatCrit was used as the framework and instrument to analyze the data and combat the historical binary viewpoint of race theory. LatCrit studies how the ideas of race, ethnicity, power, and discrimination affect Latina/os.

The review of literature is divided into seven major sections: (a) demographic shifts in the United States, (b) a discussion on the difference between race and ethnicity, (c) the lack of Latina/o achievement in U.S. schools, (d) the importance of Latina leadership, (e) a Latina's ability to serve the Latina/o community, (f) relevant issues that Latinas face in achieving the principalship, and (g) the gender and cultural roles with which Latinas must contend while advancing professionally. The themes that emerged through the literature provided the impetus for the creation of the research questions and the study's focus. The literature review also exposed areas in which there are gaps in the literature.

Theoretical Framework

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

The perspectives of Latina principals in U.S. public schools have been underreported in the literature. Their silenced voice, like those of other disenfranchised groups, is an example of the systematic racism that is endemic in public institutions of

power-like school systems (Stovall, 2006). In this study, CRT promoted "the voices and narrative of people of color" (Stovall, 2006, p. 244).

CRT was used to examine the racism and oppressive systems in place in U.S. public schools for people of color. Kohli (2009) explained that the framework for CRT was developed in the 1970s in the legal profession "to highlight race, racism, and its intersections with other forms of oppression" (p. 237). Legal scholars such as Bell, Crenshaw, and Delgado created a framework based on their experiences in the American judicial system (Kohli, 2009). CRT brings to light the struggles that people of color have encountered in American institutions of power due to racism and discrimination (Stovall, 2006).

One of the most influential systems in the United States is its public educational system, as most children are educated within it. The American education system is one such arena that manifests racist and oppressive systems that lead to the underperformance of students of color (Gatimu, 2009; Rodriguez-Valls, 2009; Stovall, 2006). Rodriguez-Valls (2009) indicated that most schools fail to embrace the diversity on their campuses. Children of color are subjected to the dominant culture in policy, curriculum, and even the decision-making authorities. It becomes the expectation of the mainstream establishment that students of color assimilate.

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

this study as the school's principal acts as the Chief Executive Officer for his or her campus.

Latina/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit)

An emerging subset of CRT, namely LatCrit, was used in this study. This was timely due to the demographic shifts occurring in the United States showing the exponential increase of Latina/os across the nation (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010; Wainer, 2006). Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) clearly explained the need for a LatCrit framework in education by providing five themes: (a) the centrality of race and racism and intersectionality with other forms of subordination, (b) the challenge to dominant ideology, (c) the commitment to social justice, (d) the centrality of experiential knowledge, and (e) the interdisciplinary perspective. CRT allows for the capacity to study critically how oppression intersects within the lives of people of color. LatCrit "examines experiences unique to the Latina/o community" (Pérez Huber, 2010, p. 77). These unique experiences include, but are not limited to, language and immigration status.

Issues of racism against Latina/os are not new in education. Eight years prior to the historic *Brown v. Board of Topeka* (1954) case that ended the segregation in American public schools, there was *Méndez v. Westminster* (1946). In *Méndez*, a group of 5,000 Mexican and Mexican-American parents fought the segregation of Mexican-American students in Orange County, California (Dotson-Blake, Foster, & Gressard, 2009). The Méndez case abolished segregation for students of Mexican descent in California and set a powerful precedent for the Brown case.

Racist ideology and practices continue to occur into the 21st century. While legal segregation is no longer the practice, Latina/o students are subjected to racism and discrimination in their neighborhood schools. Schick (2010) explained that institutional racism is the notion of white supremacy that permeates institutions such as our school systems. The very school employees tasked with their wellbeing perpetrate racist and discriminatory practices. Wainer (2006) conducted a case study that found that Latina/o students felt overtly unwelcomed in Southern schools by all levels of school personnel. Vela-Gude et al. (2009) found that Latina/o students felt that school officials not only had low expectations of them, but also counseled them out of high school. These studies agree that the "struggle for equity in education for Latinas/os has not ended" (Davila & de Bradley, 2010, p. 40).

There are also pedagogical systems and processes inherent in the system that cause harm to Latina/o students. Gatimu (2009) articulated that the lack of culturally relevant curriculum and critical pedagogies often play a role in the under-education of students of color. The exclusion of a culturally diverse curriculum prevents students of color from seeing themselves in the curriculum. Thus, it perpetuates the idea of otherness, which is oppressive.

Culturally unaware educators fail to implement critical pedagogies that could support Latina/o achievement. Sox (2009) explained that teacher education programs in the South do not offer certification in bilingual education or second language acquisition strategies. This systemic omission of a program to meet the needs of Latina/o students exhibits a racist agenda.

Latina/o students are not receiving a quality education within the school day. Adding to the problem of the under-education of Latina/os is that Latina/o students are largely segregated in schools with below par resources. Stovall (2006) explained, "Latina/o communities in the U.S. are plagued with under-resourced schools" (p. 251).

Dotson-Blake, Foster, and Gressard (2009) explained that the discourse on the "role of culture and race in education continues to be conceptualized primarily in terms of Black and White concerns" (p. 230). LatCrit provides a framework that illustrates how the racial and ethnic discourse can transition from a binary discourse to one that includes the struggles of Latina/os in the United States (Davila & de Bradley, 2010; Pérez Huber, 2010; Valencia, 2005).

LatCrit was used to analyze the centrality of the Latina principals' ethnic identity and their commitment to social justice. For the Latina principals in the study, ethnic identity and gender played a major role in their lives. Personally, it (a) shaped their views of family and gender roles, (b) provided them a strong work ethic, and (c) instilled a sense of responsibility to the greater community. Professionally, the Latina principals faced the obstacles of (a) balancing their home and work lives, (b) sexism and discrimination, (c) balancing biculturalism, and (d) maintenance of perseverance.

Review of the Literature

The review of literature served as a critical review of the pertinent issues pertaining to the study. The review of literature is composed of seven sections. The first examines the demographic shifts occurring nationally that have made the Latina/o population a viable population to study (Malott, 2009; Wainer, 2006). The second explains that being Latina/o is an ethnicity and distinct from the historical categories of

race. The third speaks to the alarming underachievement of Latina/o students that has been well documented over the past decade (Cavazos et al., 2010; Hassinger & Plourde, 2005; National Center for Education Statistics, 2011; Wilkins & Kuperminc, 2010). The fourth explicates the need for Latinas in campus leadership positions. The fifth explains the skill set that Latinas have to mitigate low achievement and engage community involvement (Sperandio, 2009). The sixth elucidates the challenges Latinas encounter on their road to attaining the principalship. The chapter ends with a review of literature on the gender and cultural roles with which Latinas must contend while pursuing and attaining the principalship.

United States Demographic Shifts

The United States is steadily becoming more Latina/o every year. According the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), more than half of the growth in the United States from the 2000 census to the 2010 census was due to the increase in the Latina/o population. The Latina/o population grew by more than 43% from 2000 to 2010 nationwide, and by more than 300% in areas of the South (Malott, 2009; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010; Wainer, 2006). On the other hand, the population of non-Hispanic people in the United States grew by about one percent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

The drastic shift in the American population has especially affected the American public school system as the new demographic is also very young in age. The population of school children in U.S. public schools that are identified as Latina/o is currently 22% and growing (Irizarry & Donaldson, 2012; National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). This means that almost one out of every four children enrolled in public schools across the United States is Latina/o.

Across the country, schools are seeing an increase of Latina/o students like never before. The affected public educational systems are ill-prepared to meet the needs of their growing Latina/o population (Colomer & Harklau, 2009; Sox, 2009). Wainer (2006) went a step further by stating that the demographic shifts left the school system "unable or uninterested in reacting to the change" (p. 130).

A primary divide between schools and Latina/os is language. Colomer and Harklau (2009) addressed the language divide that exists between the new Latina/o student and the school. Many incoming students are English Learners (ELs) who must be provided effective pedagogy in order to learn a new language while contending with new content. This disconnect hinders student growth, as there is a lack of teachers trained in second language acquisition strategies. In fact, many teacher preparation programs across the South do not yet offer bilingual education or English as a Second Language programs (Sox, 2009).

An addition, there is a lack of bilingual staff members to communicate effectively with Latina/o parents (Colomer & Harklau, 2009). This leads to a wall impeding effective communication of expectations by both parties. Parents who have not been schooled in the United States are left with little to no avenue of communication, which alienates Latina/o parent parental involvement (Waterman, 2008). Schools, in turn, believe that Latina/o parents are indifferent to the formal education of their children (Ryan, Casas, Kelly-Vance, Ryalls, & Nero, 2010). Lieshoff (2007) stated that the inability to communicate has led to a perceived values gap between schools and Latina/o parents that does not actually exist.

Sox (2009) stated that school officials have at times further widened the language divide. She explained that because nine Southern states have legislated English as the official language, school administrators restricted the use of Spanish even outside the classroom. A regulation against the use of a student's native language by an authority figure communicates that the educational institution does not value the student's language. This is an example of an institutional policy with a racist undertone that can negatively affect the achievement of Latina/o students through marginalization.

The ethnic mismatch between school personnel and the students they serve may lead to the dismissal of the cultural capital that Latina/o students bring. Having culturally cognizant staff can mitigate this. Monkman, Ronald, and Théramène (2005) studied a first-grade bilingual teacher who acknowledged and celebrated the cultural capital students brought with them to school. The authors noted that this Latina teacher successfully understood and valued her students' cultural capital. Yet, she is in a minority across the United States, whose educational personnel at all levels are still predominately White.

The recent rise in Latina/os has occurred in many U.S. regions that historically had a more dichotomous demographic. Zarrugh (2008) explained that the "dramatic growth in diverse Latino populations" in Virginia changed the landscape to one of a multicultural community (p. 20). This change in the landscape of the United States is referred to as the browning or the Latinization of America (Irizarry & Donaldson, 2012; Zarrugh, 2008). Sox (2009) pointed out that the states of Georgia, Alabama, North Carolina, and Tennessee have the nation's highest Latina/o dropout rates. The rapid

27

demographic shifts have caused school systems to operate in a reactionary role, leaving their Latina/o students behind.

Wainer (2006) completed a comparative case study in communities throughout the South to explore the new challenges that the influx of Latina/o students created in public schools. He focused his study in what he described as "The New Latino South", speaking specifically of "Arkansas, Georgia, and North Carolina" (p. 131). The Latina/o students in school today will be America's workforce tomorrow. Wainer explained that the migration and immigration patterns of Latina/os in the American South have transformed the area economically and socially so that "education is more important to securing the social wellbeing and economic development than it has ever been" (p. 132).

While the demographics of Latina/os in the United States continue to increase, very little research has been done on how school leaders are dealing with this population. There is also a gap in the literature on how principals of color, Latinas in particular, are dealing with the shift in demographics in order to increase Latina/o student achievement. This study adds to the literature by allowing voices from the field to share their experiences as they navigate through the demographics.

Race vs. Ethnicity

According to Mukhopadhyay and Henze (2003), race is not a scientifically valid category, for the traits used to divide humans are superficial at best, including skin color and hair texture. The concept of race causes divisions, while justifying "political, economic, and social inequity" (Stovall, 2006, p. 247). The scientific constructs used to identify and categorize people into different racial groups are not accurate. Race instead symbolizes the socially constructed differences in people (López, 2008).

Ethnicity, on the other hand, refers to the cultural traits of a people, such as their language, shared heritage, food, and customs (López, 2008). Ethnicity speaks to the shared experiences of a group of people. While there are a variety of commonalities for Latina/os, three strong attributes that unite are (a) the Spanish language; (b) the influence of family; and (c) the quest for a better life.

The power of language is immense. For Latina/os, Spanish is more than a language. It is a symbolic and functional tie to the homeland. It is a conduit for (a) retaining oral traditions and histories, (b) generational communication, and (c) music and the media arts. Espinoza-Herold (2007) conducted an ethnographic study to analyze the power of *dichos*, proverbs in Spanish, that "reveal beliefs and values shared by most individuals in the community" (p. 264). The researcher found that the use of Spanish was significant for Latina/os, for it allowed for the transmittal of discourse across generations and in varied contexts.

Espinoza (2010) explained the cultural value of *familismo* as having a "strong identification and attachment to family, both nuclear and extended, and requires members to prioritize family over individual interests" (p. 318). Latina/os are shaped in large part by the values they receive from their family. These family instilled values include (a) a dedication to family, (b) defined gender roles, and (c) persistence (Durant, 2011; Hite, 2007).

The literature on Latina/os, like other groups of immigrants, revolves around the quest for a better life (Durant, 2011). Immigrants leave behind native lands in search of a better quality of life in the United States. For many Latina/o families, the goals, dreams and aspirations for betterment fall on the shoulders of their children (Waterman, 2008).

Latina/o parents understand and rely on the power of education to bring about the better life for their families (Durant, 2011; Espinoza-Herold, 2007; Gloria & Castellanos, 2012).

Hilton, Brown, and Elder (2007) pointed out that what is key in the distinction between race and ethnicity is "how individuals themselves process their group membership" (p. 593). A vital component of ethnic identity is that the individual must identify him- or herself as a part of the group. Malott (2009) explained that "labels influence how individuals understand themselves, how others understand them, and how groups and subgroups relate to one another" (p. 179).

Cultural identity can be affected by generational category. Marin and Marin (1991) categorized Latina/os born in Mexico, Central America, South America, Spain, the Caribbean, or Puerto Rico and who immigrate to the United States as first generation. Second generation Latina/os are those born in the United States of parents born in the aforementioned Latin American countries. Third generation constitutes American-born Latina/os whose parents also were born in the United States.

While there is a set of common elements that bind the Latina/o culture, there is also diversity due to the various countries that compose Latin America. As a part of that diversity, Latina/os come in all skin colors. Therefore, Latina/os can identify as being White or Black. It was not until the 2000 Census that the federal government made a distinction between race and ethnicity by asking if one was "Spanish/Hispanic/Latino" (Hilton, Brown, & Elder, 2007, p. 589). This omission caused the Latina/o population's data to be invisible. The lack of information about Latina/os added to the gap in the literature on Latina/os. For the remainder of this study, the terms Hispanic and Latina/o

are used interchangeably to define a group of people who share a cultural background with origins in Mexico, Central America, South America, Spain, the Caribbean, or Puerto Rico.

Latina/o Achievement in U.S. Schools

Bartolomé (2004) explained that education is "believed to be the great equalizer and thus the key for subordinated students to enter into a better life" (p. 114). Yet, the American dream of bettering one's life through educational attainment is still not a reality for all students. For Latina/os, the system in which they are educated continues to make that better life an elusive dream.

According to Verba, Burns, and Schlozman (2003) Latina/os start their educational careers with an educational deficit that continues to increase in the current system. One manner in which Latina/o children are affected negatively is socio-economic status (SES). Gándara (2010) stated that Latina/o children are "more than twice as likely to be poor as white children" (p. 26). Children that come from low SES homes enter school with a literacy and math deficit that only widens (Gándara, 2010).

First and second generation Latina/o students do not have parents who can help them navigate the American educational system. Niemeyer, Wong, and Westerhaus (2009) found that Latina/o students often faced the environmental barriers of parents who lacked an extensive formal education or having at least one parent who did not speak English. These barriers leave young Latina/os depending on school personnel as the primary source for traversing the system.

Ochoa and Cadiero-Kaplan (2004) boldly characterized the current academic achievement of Latina/o students as "alarming" (p. 29). The sustained educational

achievement gap between students of color and their White counterparts is not contested

within the discourse of American public education (Gándara, 2010; McNeil, Coppola,

Radigan, & Heilig, 2008; Ochoa & Cadiero-Kaplan, 2004). Gándara (2010) used data on

(a) kindergarten math and reading scores, (b) high school dropout rates, and (c) college

completion rates to conclude that Latina/os are still disproportionately suffering from the

achievement gap.

Gándara (2010) asserted, "Latinos are the least educated of all major ethnic

groups" (p. 24). McNeil, Coppola, Radigan, and Heilig (2008) studied a Texas school

district and found that Latina/o students had the highest dropout rates and ninth-grade

retention rates among all races and ethnicities. Nationally, the drop-out rate of Latina/o

high school students is approximately 21%, which is higher than that of their African

American and Caucasian peers (Cavazos et al., 2010; Hassinger & Plourde, 2005;

National Center for Education Statistics, 2011; Wilkins & Kuperminc, 2010). A precise

percentage is a topic of debate, as each state has an intricate formula for calculating

dropouts. Arguably, a more accurate percentage of Latina/o dropouts is between 40%

and 50% (McNeil et al., 2008; Wilkins & Kuperminc, 2010).

While there are external factors for the gap, there are internal factors to the

educational system that inhibit student success for all that must be mitigated. The

educational system, as a whole, needs to reevaluate its broken system, for it continues to

leave Latina/o students behind. For Latina/os, the achievement gap is perpetuated by (a)

the lack of academic rigor, (b) low expectations, (c) the practice of tracking, (d) the

negation of their cultural capital, (e) racism, and (f) the failure of schools to meet with

linguistic needs of students (Cammarota, 2006; Gándara, 2010; Ochoa & Cadiero-Kaplan, 2004).

High school Latina/os are not afforded the access to a rigorous curriculum in preparation for postsecondary attainment (Ochoa & Cadiero-Kaplan, 2004). Latina/o students are underrepresented in college preparatory classes, such as AP and Honors, due to racial and ethnic discrimination (Solórzano & Ornelas, 2002). Schoolteachers, counselors, and administrators make subjective decisions that place Latina/o students in non-college preparatory curriculum tracks (Cammarota, 2004; Cavazos et al., 2010; Farkas, 2003). This opportunity gap perpetuates the lack of achievement in high school and higher education. This is of significant importance, as more than a high school diploma is needed to be successful in our technologically advanced, global economy (Zhou, 2003).

Deitz (2010) explained that a major cause of the high Latina/o dropout rate in the United States is the low expectations teachers and schools have of Latina/o students. Latina/o students are diverted into lower achievement tracks that make the already obstacle-riddled road to a postsecondary education even more difficult. Solórzano and Ornelas (2002) explained that school-imposed barriers caused educational inequities. These inequities have life-long implications as they limit or inhibit postsecondary success for Latina/os, thus impeding the American dream.

The disparity in the numbers of Latina school leaders has negative consequences for Latina/o students. Non-Latina/o school personnel are dismissive of the cultural capital Latina/o students possess, assigning them a second-class status (Monkman, Ronald, & Théramène, 2005; Ochoa & Cadiero-Kaplan, 2004). This lack of belonging

propagates the feeling of otherness. This has severe consequences for student achievement, as students do not feel a part of the school culture.

Institutional racism is a major factor in the mis-education of Latina/os. Policies for the education of EL students throughout the United States vary from state to state and are often insufficient (Sox, 2009). Students are left without the tools to acquire the second language effectively, leading to underachievement.

There is a widespread omission of the history and contributions of Latina/os and other underrepresented groups in the curriculum (Aveling, 2007; Kohli, 2009). Gatimu (2009) called for the need to incorporate a multicultural curriculum in order to diversify the Eurocentric curriculum that continues to oppress students from disenfranchised groups. The lack of a viable and relevant curriculum that is representative of the student body negatively affects the academic performance of Latina/os.

The stereotype that Latina/os are cognitively inferior in a societal construct has made its way into the school system (Cammarota, 2004, 2006; C. S. Smith & Hung, 2008; Wilkins & Kuperminc, 2010). This deficit thinking is held by both school personnel and by students. The deficit-thinking model creates an inequitable learning environment that harms achievement for students of color (Garcia & Guerra, 2004).

Cammarota (2004) studied the negative effects the stereotype threat had on Latina/o student achievement. Students in the study reported that a significant predictor for their achievement was the beliefs that staff had about their aptitude. Most students interviewed stated that school staff held a negative opinion about their intelligence and academic capacity.

School personnel must take the responsibility of the influence they have on student success seriously. Castillo, Conoley, Cepeda, Ivy, and Archuleta (2009) found that the influence of school faculty and staff was one of the top three most significant factors in the academic success or failure for the Mexican American students. Cammarota (2006) collected data from Latina/o students that found students experienced a racist ideology by school staff that affected dropout rates. Latina/o students experience overt and covert acts of racism and discrimination in U.S. public schools. Due to the mismatch between the ethnicity of school personnel and students, the subjective measures of perception, expectations, and perceived behaviors may add to the achievement gap (Farkas, 2003).

The under-education of Latina/os in the United States is alarming. Hein (2003) stated, "underachieving and undereducated, this population's intellectual contribution to the nation overall is compromised" (p. 109). de los Santos and Cuamea (2010) explained that the Latina/o population in the United States, "which is projected to represent 1 in 5 Americans by 2030, could potentially become the workforce that will drive the economy in years to come" (p. 91). The future of our nation may be in peril, as a large percentage of the future workforce will lack a formal education to compete in the global economy.

The Importance of Latina Leadership

Campus principals play an instrumental role in student achievement (Day, 2007; Jean-Marie, 2008; Ramalho, Garza, & Merchant, 2010; Rammer, 2007). Day (2007) claimed that "school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning" (p. 15). Campus principals set the mission, goals, and high expectations

35

for student success on their respective campus. Effective leaders create the culture and school environment to ensure that all students achieve.

Ramalho, Garza, and Merchant (2010) explained, "school achievement is increasingly linked to the practices of school administrators" (p. 52). A strong leader has a student-centered vision, can effectively implement strategic systems, and consistently monitors for fidelity. An effective teacher can positively affect the lives of his or her 180 students per year. The sphere of influence for a principal is exponential. An effective principal influences and affects the entire student body, all of the faculty and staff, and members of the community.

Due to increased state and federal accountability, the definition of an effective principal now encapsulates being a strong instructional leader (Day, 2007). The principal being solely a manager is no longer viable in the American education system. Principals must be well versed in curriculum and instruction and create an environment of high scholastic expectation throughout their campuses (Rammer, 2007).

This has become more important as our nation moves to a more rigorous course of study at the high school level to ensure that students graduate with the knowledge and skills to be successful in college (Haycock, 2010). Currently, 46 of the 50 states have adopted the Common Core State Standards. The implementation of the Common Core State Standards will begin in the 2012-2013 school year in several states (Anderson, Harrison, & Lewis, 2012). It is imperative that this new, more rigorous curriculum does not turn into another opportunity loss for Latina/o students.

Principals play a pivotal role in creating school cultures that value diversity, leading to increased minority student achievement (Gardiner, Canfield-Davis, &

Anderson, 2008; Ross & Berger, 2009). Tolerance for differences is insufficient, as tolerance is passive. Principals must actively advocate for all students by cultivating a school environment that is inclusive. This includes making certain that the environment of the school meets not only the academic, but also the emotional and social needs of students (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006). It is imperative that all schools have effective leaders who not only believe that all children can learn, but promote a campus culture that reflect the practices that ensure it (Sperandio, 2009).

The definition of what an effective school leader encapsulates continues to evolve. Leadership solely through the authority of power is an antiquated notion. Effective school principals are instructional leaders who collaborate, empower stakeholders, and establish a positive culture and climate (James, Mann, & Creasy, 2007; Pounder, 2006; Robinson, 2008; N. Thomas, 2007). A leader must rely on his or her authority of influence in order to move forward his or her agenda of student achievement.

Collaboration and empowerment of stakeholders is a key for stakeholders to take ownership of initiatives (N. Thomas, 2007). James, Mann, and Creasy (2007) found that collaborating and distributing leadership strengthened their schools as a whole. This distributed and collaborative leadership extends to teachers, staff, parents, and students. Effective principals possess the skill to bring together all stakeholders in a common vision.

While there is a lack of literature on the characteristics of Latina principals, the literature on female principals showed that women possessed the aforementioned traits that lead to effective leadership. Fennell (2005) found that the female participants of his study were collaborative visionaries and were strong in the area of curriculum and

37

instruction. Brunner and Kim (2010) found that women display transformative

leadership tendencies with a "preference for collaboration" (p. 278).

As the demographics of the nation and its public schools continue to change,

school systems must employ critical educators that promote a social justice agenda

(Cooper, 2009; J. E. Johnson & Uline, 2006). Jean-Marie (2008) studied female

principals and found that the participants became principals in order to impact the

educational system with a social justice agenda. To carry out a social justice agenda,

school leaders "must hold a critical consciousness about power, privilege, and inequities

in society and in schools" (McKenzie et al., 2008). A critical educator can help combat

overt racism inherent in our educational system, as well as the more covert institutional

racism that exists, such as exclusionary curricular patterns and colorblind practices

(Aveling, 2007).

Leading schools with an ever more diverse population demands leaders to create a

climate conducive to educating the whole child (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006). Culturally

proficient leadership provides for all students on a campus to feel safe and welcome

immaterial of their backgrounds. School principals who are culturally proficient are

dedicated to serving all students with formal and informal curriculums that are respectful

of various backgrounds (Gerhart, Harris, & Mixon, 2011).

While the literature explains the necessity for socially conscious leaders, there is a

lack of minority leaders to take on this role in schools throughout the United States

(Peters, 2010). As the student population continues to become more diverse, the same

cannot be said for school leadership as, "90 percent of principals are White" (Sánchez et

al., 2008, p. 2). Latina/o students lack an adult advocate at the highest leadership position on their campus to pursue a social justice agenda.

Latina/os and other students of color often complete their studies in a system that is almost devoid of their history, cultural accomplishments, or traditions. Kohli (2009) explained that the American education system "promoting White cultural values and perspectives in the absence of the culture and perspectives of Communities of Color is a subtle, but powerful, form of racism" (p. 241). Latina/o children rarely see images of themselves in the schoolhouse in which they spend up the majority of their day. Due to the lack of Latina/o principals, Latina/o students are denied access to a role model for success in educational leadership.

Latina/o students often lack encouragement from faculty and staff in high school. Irizarry & Donaldson (2012) found in their cross case analysis of pre-service and in-service teachers that Latina/os felt a strong responsibility to enter the educational field in order to correct some the injustices perpetrated against them. In particular, they wanted to be the strong adult advocates that they never had. Cammarota (2006) found that Latina/o students felt that "very few, if any, teachers, administrators, and counselors demonstrated genuine caring and concern for their students" (p. 5).

Latina principals can relate to the barriers to Latina/o student academic success and can create school climates that produce equity for all children, increasing the achievement chances of Latina/o students (Cammarota, 2006). Kohli (2009) explained that currently many educators "are blind to the way White history, culture and values are prioritized, or the stereotypes they carry about Students of Color" (p. 243). A leader that

shares the same culture as the school's populace becomes an adult advocate for the otherwise marginalized student.

Lalas & Valle (2007) found that the personal attention and support available from minority educators help build self-esteem and academic advancement for students of color. Students are able to have role models who not only understand their struggles, but also are in a position to bring about positive changes. Gándara (2010) explained that Latina/o student attainment is associated to students' ability to feel attached to their campuses. Latinas are able to make an impact immediately as role models and champions for Latina/o students. Minority leaders have the "opportunities to employ the understanding gained from their own… ethnic experiences to the benefit of the whole school community" (Sperandio, 2009, p. 82). While some progress has been made in hiring minority leaders in order to mirror the students served more closely, "few studies exist on women in secondary principalship roles and on minority women leaders" (Wrushen & Sherman, 2008, p. 458).

Latina leaders can benefit aspiring Latina leaders who may otherwise lack mentorship opportunities. While mentoring is vital to the professional development of leaders, Latinas have historically had less access to mentoring. Peters (2010) explained that mentorship opportunities for women in school leadership have been limited. Quilantan & Menchaca-Ochoa (2004) found in their study of Latina superintendents that while mentoring opportunities were scarce, when Latinas had access to a mentor, it was a critical factor in their professional attainment.

Méndez-Morse (2004) conducted a qualitative study of Mexican-American educational leaders and mentoring. She found that there was a significant need for

mentoring for aspiring Latina leaders. As Latinas, there were few prospects of being formally mentored by members of their professional organization. Magdaleno (2006) wrote, "implementing and sustaining a same race administrator mentoring support program that improves the probability of success for future Latina and Latino educational leaders is essential" (p. 13).

This study adds to the literature on Latina leaders as agents of social justice for Latina/o student achievement. The study also serves as a call for action as there remains a significant gap in the hiring of Latina school leaders.

Serving the Latina/o Community

Parental and community involvement are important keys for student success. The research overwhelmingly states that American public schools do not do enough to foster a home and school collaborative for Latina/o students (de la Piedra, Munter, & Girón, 2006; Lieshoff, 2007; Waterman, 2008). Waterman (2008) explained that schools do not effectively engage Latina/o parents. In fact, he argued that "parent involvement programs in schools often reflect deficit views of immigrant parents" which leads to "benevolent racism" (p. 145).

Culturally unaware educators adopt a deficit model view of Latina/o parents and students, negating the rich cultural capital they contribute (de la Piedra et al., 2006). This view denies the high value Latina/o parents have of education and instead permits school staff to think of Latina/o parents as apathetic to their students' academic attainment (Ryan et al., 2010). Educational leaders must be culturally competent in order to "bridge the cultures" (Lieshoff, 2007, p. 134) of the Eurocentric American schoolhouse and the Latina/o culture.

41

The traditional definition of parental engagement insists that parents participate in activities within the school (J. Smith, Stern, & Shatrova, 2008). Waterman (2008) conducted an ethnographic study of Mexican immigrant mothers and found that their view of parental involvement was much broader. Latina mothers in the study included the support they provided their children at home as part of parental engagement. Latina/o parents engage in the education of their children by (a) emphasizing the importance of their studies, (b) teaching the values of respect and good behavior, (c) instilling a strong work ethic, and (d) preparing them to be resilient (Durant, 2011; Waterman, 2008).

Durant (2011) studied immigrant Latina mothers and found that there was a difference between the belief system and values of the school and those of the Latina participants. J. Smith, Stern and Shatrova (2008) stated that Latina/o parents were averse to questioning decisions made by the school. School personnel were seen as authority figures to be trusted. To question their decision-making would be disrespectful. School leaders need to understand the cultural belief systems of Latina/o families in order to serve the Latina/o community best.

J. Smith et al. (2008) found that the following factors obstructed Latina/o parental involvement: (a) ineffective communication and lack of bilingual services, (b) lack of encouragement to increase parental involvement, and (c) the language barrier. Lieshoff (2007) found that Latina/o families "felt disconnected to schools" (p. 140). It is imperative that each school is staffed with a leader who understands the importance of communicating with parents in their native language and who engages actively in encouraging parental involvement (Sperandio, 2009).

Successful school leaders also reach out to the community they serve to create effective partnerships. Day (2007) explained that effective principals "combine their work within the school with a commitment to and skills in working with a range of parents and other stakeholders" (p. 19). A Latina principal who is bilingual will be able to overcome the language barrier by communicating to Spanish-speaking parents. Latina principals share a cultural background and possibly a language needed to increase parental involvement (de la Piedra et al., 2006; Lieshoff, 2007). This will stop the current feeling that Latina/o parents expressed in Worthy's (2006) study of "being shut out of aspects of their children's lives because of their inability to understand or speak English" (p. 144).

Latina/o educators feel a sense of responsibility to work in underserved communities. Irizarry and Donaldson (2012) studied pre-service Latina/o teachers who they found were motivated to return to "schools like those they had attended to address systemic injustices in their own educational backgrounds" (p. 167). Méndez-Morse's (2004) study of Latina school administrators found that Latinas entered the realm of administration due to their desire to make a difference in the lives of Latina/o students in response to their personal experiences. Latinas see themselves as agents of change and transformation to influence the educational careers of the Latina/o students that have come after them positively.

Confronting Issues of Aspiring Latina Leaders

While Latina/os continue to grow in population, they are still an "emerging political and social force in American society" (Mladenka, 1989, p. 391). McCray and Beachum (2010) surveyed 126 secondary principals in a southeastern state to study how

race and gender of school principals influenced their perceptions of multicultural education. While there are an ever-expanding number of Latina/o students enrolling in schools across the south, no respondents identified themselves as Latina/o.

Due to the educational achievement gap in K-12 schooling, Latina/os lag far behind other groups in achieving postsecondary degrees. According to Santiago (2011), only 19% of Hispanics over the age of 25 had achieved a college degree by 2008. In order to become a school leader in a United States public school, Latinas need to attain both an undergraduate and a graduate degree. In addition, leaders typically need both a state teaching certificate and an administrative certification. The educational barrier for Latina/os is immense (Gándara, 2010).

Another barrier to aspiring leaders is that potential employers hold negative stereotypes of Latina/os. Garcia and Guerra (2004) explained that deficit thinking permeates not just schools and teachers, but society as a whole. Hiring managers and superintendents thus may have negative beliefs about the intelligence and aptitude of Latina leadership candidates. Magdaleno (2006) explained that after "years of lower expectations and the continued presence of a career 'glass ceiling', Latina and Latino educational leaders frequently find it difficult to ascend to, and sustain positions at subsequent levels of school administration" (pp. 12-13).

Latinas struggle to gain secondary principalships due in part to the lack of opportunities, as "women have had limited access to positions of school leadership, particularly at the middle school, secondary, and district levels" (Peters, 2010, p. 112). One particular barrier that women encounter on their quest towards the principalship is the lack of professional networking opportunities. The "good ole boys network" is often

closed off to women as they, "are not invited to attend the outside 'networking events,' (e.g., sporting event, golf, and/or poker game)" (McGee, 2010, p. 14). Sánchez and Thornton (2010) explained that the lack of women and minority secondary principals continues to exist, as White males now dictate the field by having control of employment decisions.

Latinas have additional hurdles to climb, as they are also exposed to racism and discrimination. Cammarota (2006) explained that racism is embedded into the American psyche to believe "that people of color naturally possess intellectual capabilities inferior to those of Whites" (p. 4). Guiliano, Levine, and Leonard (2011) found "a general pattern of own race bias" (p. 27) in hiring, evaluations, dismissals, and promotions which is discriminatory to people of color. When they do reach the leadership position, they supervise and lead in manners that differ from the dominant archetype of leadership that leads to their work being criticized (Fennell, 2005). Reed and Evans (2008) stated, "the complexities of race-based and gender-based assumptions permeate other leadership arenas… including school leadership" (p. 478).

Gender and Cultural Roles of Women

Latina secondary principals are members of a small sorority in administrative positions historically held by men (Brunner & Kim, 2010; Giese, Slate, Brown, & Tejeda-Delgado, 2009). Latina school leaders are twice disenfranchised, as women and as a part of an ethnic minority (Quilantan & Menchaca-Ochoa, 2004). To obtain their positions, Latinas must overcome the gender roles ingrained within both the American and the Latina/o cultures. Suarez-McCrink (2002) stated, "a minority woman must walk between two worlds – the one framed by the stereotypical traditions of the White-

dominant culture and the one in which her ethnicity is rooted as part of an all-encompassing ethos" (p. 240).

Latinas must efficaciously navigate the two cultures that they live in, American and Latina/o in order to be successful. Hite (2007) referred to this successful straddling of the American culture and the Latina/o culture as being bicultural. Biculturalism occurs when individuals traverse and engage in activities of two lived cultures effectively (Keefe & Padilla, 1987). The duality of living within two cultures can add to the obstacles Latinas face.

Latinas suffer the effects of cultural norms in both the American ethos and the Latina/o ethos. While women working outside of the home are commonplace within the American culture, leadership has traditionally been seen as a male role (O. Reyes, Kobus, & Gillock, 1999). In the traditional Latina/o culture, men are seen as the breadwinners and women hold the role of caregiver and homemaker (Cammarota, 2004; Valentine, 2006). Latina women are raised with specific gender roles that include the belief that Latinas should be "docile and passive" (Quilantan & Menchaca-Ochoa, 2004, p. 124). At the high school level, the hours of a principal extend far past the school day. Principals are expected to attend (a) athletic events, (b) visual and performing arts performances, (c) parent meetings, (d) board meetings, (e) club sponsored events, (f) various banquets, and (g) school dances. These long hours impede the ability to complete traditional home duties, such as cooking, cleaning, and attending to children. Latina leaders then must navigate two cultural constructs of women's work both in and outside of the home (Hofman, 2010).

Some barriers to the principalship for Latinas are self-imposed due to cultural and societal pressures. McGee (2010) studied female administrators in Florida to explore self-imposed barriers to obtaining an administrative position. The most common barrier was "choosing to raise their children first and find balance between career and family responsibilities" (McGee, 2010, p. 10). Women succumb to the societal norm that they must choose between their own families and a career and do not seek to climb the career ladder.

In addition to the tradition struggle to balance work and family life seen in gender research, Latinas are faced with the cultural value of *familiasmo* (Espinoza, 2010). *Familiasmo* is the strong connection and attachment to family, both nuclear and extended, in the Latina/o culture. This deference to the family becomes a barrier to Latinas when they place the needs of the family before their own professional aspirations (Hite, 2007). This strong familial tie makes it difficult for Latinas to devote themselves fully to their academic endeavors.

An area in which the family becomes a barrier is opportunities to attain higher education. Living outside of the home to attend college is still an emerging practice for Latinas. Gloria and Castellanos (2012) studied first-generation Latina college students and found that families categorized their leaving the home for college as abandonment or disloyalty. Espinoza-Herold's (2007) case study was of a 27-year-old Latina graduate student who still lived at home with her parents. This limits the schools many Latinas can attend to those that are geographically viable for commuting.

Latinas who attend institutions of higher education away from their families find it difficult to balance their family and school commitments. They are expected to (a)

maintain daily contact with home, (b) visit often, and (c) meet the needs of the family when necessary (Espinoza, 2010; Gloria & Castellanos, 2012; Hite, 2007). Espinoza (2010) found that Latina college students are indoctrinated with the belief that as Latinas, they should "always prioritize family needs above [their] own individual needs" (p. 319).

As women, Latinas face additional obstacles on their path to the principalship. Female administrators struggle to balance their own authentic leadership style and society's vision of leadership and authority figures. Sperandio (2009) studied female participants in an urban school leadership preparation program to learn how gender and ethnicity affected their ability in "gaining recognition as effective leaders" (p. 69). The participants in this study felt that gender roles played a large part in how female administrators were deemed as effective in so much that they felt a "need to put on some sort of mask while in the administrative role" (Sperandio, 2009, p. 88).

In 2008, Wrushen and Sherman's study spoke to "the lack of women's voices in the literature on educational leadership, particularly those of minority women" (p. 460) as their impetus for their personal narrative study. Female leaders comprehended the "societal perceptions of women leaders" (Wrushen & Sherman, 2008, p. 462) and voiced frustration at having to earn respect over years that "had been a sure bet for many of their male counterparts" (p. 463).

Giese, Slate, Brown, and Tejeda-Delgado (2009) studied 56 female high school principals in Texas, noting the complexities of their ever-changing job responsibilities as they cope as females. Fennell (2005) further explained how women manage to "blend their roles as care-givers with those of visionary leaders" (p. 150). Despite the increase

of women in campus administrative positions, there is a lack of research on their

experiences (Giese et al., 2009).

Summary

Through the lens of both CRT and LatCrit, the experiences of Latina leaders were

examined to see if the themes of social justice, gender and racial identity, and educational

equity arise. With the emerging demographic shifts, there is no time like the present to

provide students effective leaders that (a) mirror their student body, (b) stand as role

models, (c) increase parental involvement, and (d) seek to end the achievement gap. To

this end, it was of the utmost importance to understand the experiences of Latina school

leaders. The gross under-education of Latina/o students in public schools is alarming for

a country that will rely on the Latina/o populace as a major contributor to the impending

workforce. The literature supports the need for Latina leadership and the skill set that

they bring forth as effective leaders.

This study provided a platform for current Latina high school principals to share

their stories of the various issues they encountered on their way to achieving the

principalship. They also shared the skill set they believe they have to better the lives of

Latina/o students. Each Latina had the opportunity to share her experiences, her triumphs

and her disappointments. The Latina principals' voices ceased to be silenced. As a

critical ethnography, an advocate paradigm was utilized to add to the literature where

there is currently a gap. This study is a call to action for public school districts across the

United States actively to recruit and retain high quality Latina instructional leaders.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this ethnographic study was to discover the obstacles Latina principals have encountered in attaining their current leadership position in U.S. public schools by listening to their stories. Latinas are underrepresented in the role of principal in comparison to the large numbers of Latina/o students served (Gardiner, Canfield-Davis, & Anderson, 2008). There is a need for an increase of Latina principals in secondary schools in the United States to serve as advocates for the Latina/o students currently being undereducated and left behind (Gardiner et al., 2008).

A critical ethnographic study was chosen to learn from Latina secondary principals the meaning of their experiences as public high school principals. Using the tenets of LatCrit, I framed my guiding questions to study the experiences of Latina secondary principals.

Research Question 1: *What were the experiences and obstacles Latina secondary principals encountered in obtaining their leadership positions?*

Research Question 2: *What impact did race, ethnicity, and gender have on professional opportunities for Latina principals?*

Research Question 3: *What were the qualities or characteristics Latinas believed made them effective principals?*

This chapter provides an in-depth overview of the methodology of the study: (a) research design, (b) researcher's role, (c) participants, (d) site, (e) data collection procedures, (f) data analysis, (g) credibility, and (h) ethical issues.

Design

A qualitative research design was selected in order to "study selected issues in depth and detail" (Patton, 1990, p. 13). An ethnographic approach was carefully chosen after pondering on "what to tell and how to tell it" (Van Maanen, 2011, p. 25). The focus of my study is Latina secondary principals in the United States, who are the culture-sharing group I will examine for "patterns of behavior, beliefs, and language" (Creswell, 2007, p. 68).

In particular, I selected a critical ethnographic study to provide the participants a sounding board in order to elicit a call for action for the recruitment and retention of Latina principals in U.S. public schools (Patton, 1990). Critical ethnography has been described as "conventional ethnography with a political purpose" (J. Thomas, 1993, p. 4).

Critical ethnographic studies are grounded in empirical research (J. Thomas, 1993). Empirical research on Latina/os in America stipulates that while Latina/os are quickly becoming the largest minority ethnic group in the United States, educational equity has not been achieved. Latina/o children seldom see themselves in the faces of the teachers and leaders that serve them. Latina/o children rarely have Latina leaders that have the cultural, social, and linguistic ability to meet their needs. Using LatCrit, I provided for the participants to share their experiences within the educational system that should be "an avenue for success and opportunity" but can also "simultaneously be detrimental, divisive, and disadvantaging spaces for students and communities of color" (Alemán, 2009, p. 291).

Participants

Purposeful sampling was used to select "information-rich cases for study in depth" (Patton, 1990, p. 169). In this case, I sought out a sample of 10 Latina secondary head principals in public schools throughout the 48 continental United States. Purposive sampling was used "in a few cases for intensive study" (Bernard, 2000, p. 176). All participants met the criterion of having at least one parent of Latina/o ethnicity and who identified themselves as Latina to be included in the sample. This critical sample was important to this study in order to understand what is happening to this culture-sharing group (Patton, 1990).

To achieve the sample size, I used the snowball or chain method to locate participants who not only met the criteria but also had a rich story to contribute (Patton, 1990). I began by reaching out to principals that were in my professional network. I quickly secured three participants. I asked each principal if they could recommend any other potential participants. This led me to four additional principals in the study. I then asked assistant superintendent colleagues for their assistance for potential participants. I reached out to the potential participants, securing the last three principals for the study. The sample included Latina principals in both historically predominant Latina/o communities and in burgeoning Latina/o communities.

Each principal was asked demographic questions about (a) her ethnic and cultural background, (b) her professional journey to the principalship, and (c) her role in raising Latina/o achievement. Basic demographic and professional information collected from the survey is displayed in Tables 1 and 2. All participants selected the pseudonym of their choice. Information pertaining to each principal's campus, including (a) total

population percentage, (b) Latina/o population percentage, (c) free/reduced lunch

percentage, and (d) federal accountability program improvement status is displayed in

Table 3.

Table 1

Demographic Information

Name	Ethnicity	Age	Marital Status	Age(s) of Children
Anna	Mexican	38	Married	N/A
Faith	Mexican	46	Married	N/A
Ruby	Mexican	55	Married	27, 16, 14
Jackie	Mexican	52	Married	25, 20
Mary A.	Mexican	35	Married	10, 9
Brenda	Mexican	43	Single	17, 12, 10
Sandra	Mexican	31	Single	N/A
Maria	Mexican	50	Widowed	28, 20
Mary	Salvadorian	43	Single	N/A
Goots	Mexican	60	Married	35, 30

Table 2

Professional Information

	Total Years in Position			
Name	Education	Teacher	Principal	HS Principal
Anna	16	7	1	1
Faith	24	16	4	1.25
Ruby	31	4	1	1
Jackie	30	12	10	10
Mary A.	14	7	0.25	0.25
Brenda	20	11	5	2
Sandra	10	4	6	2
Maria	20	14	6	6
Mary	16	7	3	3
Goots	35	12	18	8

Table 3

Campus Information

Principal	Population	Latina/o	Free/Reduced Lunch	PI Status
Anna	276	95%	75%	Year 1
Faith	2860	91%	60%	Year 1
Ruby	414	99%	100%	Year 1
Jackie	2800	88%	74%	N/A
Mary A.	1100	97%	97%	Year 1
Brenda	1900	94%	82%	N/A
Sandra	370	86%	75%	N/A
Maria	2400	70%	70%	Year 5
Mary	1890	7%	6%	N/A
Goots	162	70%	60%	Year 2

Setting

The setting for this study was public schools within the 48 continental United States. Due to monetary and time constraints, I chose not to select any participants that resided and led schools in Hawaii, Alaska, Puerto Rico, or any other U.S. territories. All Latina principals selected for the study were current principals at public high school campuses.

The 10 Latina principals studied came from seven different cities in two states in the Southwest, representing nine different school districts. Using purposive sampling, I

included Latinas that lead a variety of campus types, including (a) large comprehensive, (b) charter, (c) early college, (d) alternative, and (e) small rural campuses. Latina principals in this study served in both historically predominant Latina/o communities and in burgeoning Latina/o communities in seven different cities in the Southwest. All Latina principals and their schools received pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. Principals were allowed to create the pseudonyms for both their schools and themselves.

Table 4

Participants by Setting

Name	Location	Setting	School Type
Anna	Texas	Rural	Early College
Faith	Texas	Urban	Large Comprehensive
Ruby	Texas	Rural	Small
Jackie	Texas	Urban	Large Comprehensive
Mary A.	Texas	Rural	Comprehensive
Brenda	Texas	Urban	Comprehensive
Sandra	California	Urban	Charter
Maria	California	Urban	Comprehensive
Mary	California	Suburban	Comprehensive
Goots	California	Suburban	Continuation

Procedures

IRB Approval

IRB approval was sought after the recommendation from my dissertation chairperson. At that time, I completed and submitted an expedited review application form. I selected the expedited review as the study that I proposed (a) did not impose more than a minimal risk to the participants; (b) included research based on group behavior and characteristics; (c) included surveys, questionnaires, and interviews; and (d) included the collection of recordings in the forms of voice, digital video, and images.

Eliciting Participants

In order to obtain the 10 participants, I utilized a snowball or chain method. I began the process by asking three principals who were past colleagues to participate. Other potential participants emerged as I began the data collection phase. I then asked three assistant superintendents with whom I either currently work or have worked with in the past for prospective participants.

Gathering Data

After IRB approval was attained, data collection began with each participant. Participants were asked to complete demographic sheets via email prior to the site visit. Site visits were conducted at each participant's school or at a school activity. Face-to-face interviews were conducted at their respective schools. I spent approximately 2.5 hours at each school site or school-related activity conducting observations and taking field notes.

Recording Procedures

All interviews were digitally recorded to facilitate transcription. Each interview was professionally transcribed shortly after their completion. All participants were emailed a copy of the transcription for review in order to ensure accuracy. All digital recordings, scanned field notes, and transcriptions were maintained in password-protected devices. Hard copies of notes, observations, and field notes were kept in a locked file cabinet.

The Researcher's Role

I am a Latina who is currently employed as a cabinet-level administrator in a Northern California county office of education. Immediately preceding my current

employment, I served as a public secondary principal in the American Southwest. The school I led was in a suburb of a large southwestern border city in Texas. The Latina/o population of the campus was 93%. This closely followed the district's population of Latina/os of 91%. All district campuses were identified as Title I campus-wide schools due to the large number of students coded economically disadvantaged. The campus and school district are Texas Education Agency (TEA) Recognized due to performance.

I did not have a typical ascension to the principalship compared to other Latinas. I was a teacher recruited for leadership positions on my campus as early as my first year. As a first-year teacher, I was the teacher representative of the campus's Language Proficiency Assessment Committee (LPAC). At the end of my second year in the classroom, I was offered a department head position. In my third year in the classroom, I was a member of (a) the school site based management team, (b) the attendance committee, and (c) the district-wide management team. I had also completed approximately 200 hours of administrative internship hours.

The summer after my fifth year in the classroom, I was invited by the school principal to interview and was promoted into the assistant principalship. As a first-year assistant principal, I was a part of a team that initiated a school-wide reform effort to improve a campus that was in year four of program improvement status. While the standards continued to rise, the campus met Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) the first year and was distinguished as a Texas Education Agency (TEA) Recognized campus. The campus achieved a Recognized status the second year and lost its school improvement status. In year three, the campus received an Exemplary status from TEA.

In the spring of that third year as an assistant principal, I was encouraged by our superintendent of schools to apply for the principalship. The position was for the district's fifth comprehensive high school, which was to open the following school year. I was hired in late January of 2010 and opened the campus in August of 2010. In its first year, the campus received a TEA Recognized status due to the high student performance.

Having been a Latina secondary principal, I was part of the culture-sharing group that was studied. This positioned me as in insider during the data collection phase. I felt that Latina principals felt more at ease with me as I not only shared their ethnic and cultural background, but also understood their daily work lives having walked in their shoes.

I was born in Richmond, California, located in the east bay area, to a Mexican-born mother and a Mexican American father. We relocated to the city of Pico Rivera, located in the greater Los Angeles area, when I was four. After about two years of living in Los Angeles, my family and I relocated to Stockton in California's central valley. Despite the diverse ethnic and cultural background of students in the Stockton Unified School District, I rarely came across Latina/o educators outside of bilingual classrooms. It was not until my senior year in high school that I encountered a Latino principal. Prior to that, I never imagined that being a school principal was a profession to which I could aspire.

Like many children of color, I grew up in two very distinct worlds. The first was a private world that consisted of our home life, in which being Mexican was a source of pride. I often watched Mexican *novelas* with my mother in the evenings and sang aloud to her favorite Mexican radio station while completing chores. The second was the

outside world, to which I did my best to adapt, while never feeling quite good enough for it.

At a young age, I understood that the official language of school and the outside world was English. At home, my mother often scolded my brother and me for not speaking in Spanish, for she felt we were being offensive by speaking in a language she did not understand. At home my name was Angelica Maria with a silent "g." At school, I was Angelica pronounced with a "j" and the omission of my middle name because it was too ethnic. As I am light-skinned, I was easily able to navigate both worlds most of the time.

Racial and ethnic discrimination are a part of growing up as a minority in the United States. I have personally experienced several discriminatory incidents. The majority of these events occurred while I was a part of a larger group. Due to my European features, lack of an accent, and academic determination, I was sheltered from many more. I feel a sense of responsibility as a person of color to promote a social justice agenda. Therefore, I selected a critical ethnographic study in order to provide an opportunity for Latina principals to speak about their experiences and the obstacles they have encountered in their professional careers in obtaining and sustaining the principalship.

It was important for me to understand my role as an interpreter in the study. I advocated for my group through the voices of the participants of my study (J. Thomas, 1993). In ethnography, "being an insider has obvious advantages" (Wolcott, 2008, p. 144). As a former Latina principal, I was able to gain access and trust that someone from outside the culture-sharing group might not have. In observations, my participation was

that of an inside observer. As an insider, I was able to "discover things no one else has ever really paid attention to" (Patton, 1990, p. 204).

Data Collection

All data collection occurred after Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was attained from Liberty University. In addition, all participants received and signed an informed consent form prior to any data collection.

A variety of data collection tools were utilized in this study to include: (a) surveys, (b) interviews, and (c) observations. Protocols used for each data collection tool can be found in Tables 2, 3 and 4. The various forms of data allowed me to understand the experiences and challenges Latina leaders face better.

Surveys/Questionnaires

Data collection in ethnography also necessitates the use of some quantitative measures and surveys (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). Following the completion of the consent form, I sent out a basic questionnaire (see Table 5) to collect demographic information on the participant electronically in order to respect the time of the participant. I generated the demographic survey and used it to ensure that the participant met the criteria to participate in the study. In addition, the survey provided background information on each participant. It included (a) ethnic identification, (b) age, (c) total years in education, (d) total years as a principal, (e) a timeline for ascension to the principalship, (f) marital status, (g) number and ages of children if applicable, (h) first language spoken, and (i) campus information.

Table 5

Demographic Survey

_____

Personal Information
_____

Your confidentiality is of the utmost importance to me. To that end, I am asking that you create the pseudonym of your choice that does not provide any identifiable information on the line provided. _____

Please provide a pseudonym for your campus that does not provide any identifiable information on the line provided. _____

Please state your ethnic background on your paternal side. _____
On your maternal side _____

Age _____

Please provide your marital status _____

Please provide the number and ages of your children, if applicable
_____

Was English your first language? ____If it was not, what was your first language?_____

_____

Professional Information
_____

Total years in education _____ How many years as a classroom teacher? _____

Total years as a principal _____ At the high school level _____

Current campus total population _____

Campus ethnic breakdown _____

Percentage of students who qualify for a free or reduced lunch? _____

Program improvement status of campus _____
_____

Interviews

The interview is an essential part of the qualitative research design as the researcher becomes the primary research instrument (Wolcott, 2008). Each face-to-face interview lasted approximately three quarters of an hour. Kvale (1996) explained that the purpose of qualitative research interviewing "is to describe and understand the central themes the subjects experience and live toward" (p. 29). Using purposive sampling, each of the participants selected was interviewed face-to-face.

The in-depth interview process was the source for data collection to answer the research questions. While the interview questions were to be posed in English, some Spanish and Spanglish was interjected. As a Spanish-speaking Latina, participants felt free to communicate to me in both languages. As this study is a critical ethnography, I not only studied a culture-sharing group, but also provided its members with an opportunity through the interview process to express the emancipatory rhetoric that is usually stifled (Kvale, 1996).

Spanglish occurs when a person is able to code switch instantly to produce phrases or sentences that fuse both English and Spanish freely. Examples of code switching can be found in the narratives of Jackie and Mary A. Jackie explains the impact being bilingual and Latina have had on community relations when she code switches, "I think that maybe some of the guard that they have is dissipated when they realize that *es gente* [is my people]." Mary A. easily transverses between English and Spanish while speaking about family pressures and balancing her personal and professional duties:

I try and balance my time as much as I can, but it's a cultural thing, really, that

people, *tias* [aunts], *tios* [uncles], they will make comments like, "*Tuviste hijas* [You had

daughters] so that they can stay with your mom."

To maintain focus, a semi-structured open-ended interview was used (Patton,

1990; Wolcott, 2008). The interview guide posed introductory and follow-up questions

based on the research study's guiding questions (Kvale, 1996; Patton, 1990). The semi-

structured approach provided the flexibility needed in the qualitative interviews, which

were deep and probing in nature (Kvale, 1996).

Interviews occurred in the field and face-to-face. All interviews were audio

recorded using a digital recording device and transcribed. Spanish interview portions

were transcribed in Spanish and translated into English in order to preserve the cogency

of the data, while providing consistency in English. Prior to the interviews, the interview

questions were sent electronically to all participants days in advance. This allowed them

the time to reflect prior to the actual interview.

The interview protocol questions were grounded in the research. As themes in the

literature were identified, the participant interview questions were divided into three

categories: (a) biographical, (b) professional, and (c) social justice. They are displayed in

Table 6.

Table 6

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

_____

Questions

_____

Biographical Information

1. Please share with me your name (pseudonym), age, and current professional position.

2. Where were you born? If outside of U.S., at what age did you come to the U.S.?

3. Please share with me your ethnic background and how you believe it has shaped you.

4. Please tell me what language(s) were spoken in your home. What language(s) do you

consider yourself proficient in?

_____

Professional Information

5. Please tell me about your school, including information about your student population

and accountability status.

6. Please share with me why you chose education as a profession.

7. Please share with me your career path to the principalship.

8. Can you share your professional aspirations and the steps you have taken to attain your

goal?

9. Have there been any obstacles in reaching your goal? If so, can you share them?

10. Did ethnic background, race, or gender have any impact on your professional growth

and attainment?

_____

Social Justice Information

11. Please share your practices for helping mitigate the achievement gap.

12. What part, if any, does your ethnic background play in that?

13. What part, if any, does your gender play in that?

14. Do you believe that other Latinas feel the same about this? Different? Why?

15. How do you believe your role as campus principal has impacted your campus? How has it impacted Latino student achievement? How has impacted parental involvement?

16. What advice would you give to other Latinas who aspire to be campus leaders?

_____

The purpose for the demographic questions was to establish the ethnicity and national origin of each participant. While each principal was Latina, Latina/os are not a homogenous group. Questions 1-4 were written in order to ascertain the ethnic group with which each participant identified and how they believe being a part of that group has shaped their personal and professional lives (Gushue, Clarke, Pantzer, & Scanlan, 2006). Malott (2009) explained, "labels influence how individuals understand themselves" (p. 179).

The second set of questions was related to the professional lives of the Latina principals. The first question was written to ascertain the type of school the Latina governs. The demographic make-up of the campus is important to appreciate the student body she serves. Principals play a pivotal role in creating school cultures that value diversity, leading to increased minority student achievement (Gardiner et al., 2008; Ross & Berger, 2009).

Questions 6, 7, and 8 were written to explore the participants' career choices. Research on Social-Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) on Latina/os has shown that ethnicity has had an effect on career aspirations, including perceived barriers (Flores & O'Brien, 2002; Gushue et al., 2006; Ojeda & Flores, 2008; Rivera et al., 2007).

Questions 9 and 10 were formulated in order to learn of any internal and external perceived barriers and obstacles the principals encountered in their career ascension to the principalship. The questions aimed to glean the adversity faced and perseverance in goal attainment seen as resiliency (Cammarota, 2004; Coleman & Campbell-Stephens, 2010; Hassinger & Plourde, 2005). Wright and Masten (2005) defined resilience as the ability to adapt to past and present adversity. Question 6 was posed to learn what role being a Latina has played in their ability to succeed given that research has found that culture plays a pivotal role in resilience (Cavazos et al., 2010; J. A. Reyes & Elias, 2011). Question 10 also aimed to reveal a gap in the literature on the role ethnicity plays in influencing the work experiences of Latina/os (Romero, 2004).

The questions in the last section were formulated in order to learn how Latina principals propel a social justice agenda on their campuses. It has been well documented that African American and Latina/o students underperform as compared to their White peers (Deitz, 2010; Garcia & Bayer, 2005; Lalas & Valle, 2007; McNeil et al., 2008). The first question in this section speaks of the achievement gap that students of color encounter in U.S. public schools and the specific tasks, systems, and practices that each principal has implemented to ameliorate that gap. Jean-Marie's (2008) study of female principals found that the participants became principals in order to impact the educational system with a social justice agenda. L. Johnson (2006) conducted a historical case study of an effective African American female principal and her role as social activist in order to be culturally responsive to the students she served. While this pertained to an African American female principal, the tenet of culturally responsible leadership can be applied to Latina principals. Questions 12 through14, therefore, were posed in order to discover

if being Latina female played a role in having a social justice agenda and if participants believe that this trait is an anomaly or is shared among Latinas.

School principals play a large role in the academic achievement of students (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Garza, Reyes & Trueba, 2004; Ramalho, Garza, & Merchant, 2009). Principals must be prepared to serve Latina/o students in order to ensure that they achieve (Monkman et al., 2005; Ramalho et al., 2009; Wilkins & Kuperminc, 2010). One of the many barriers to Latina/o student success is the lack of school and parental partnerships (Hein, 2003). Latina principals share a cultural background and possibly a language needed to increase parental involvement (de la Piedra et al., 2006; Lieshoff, 2007; J. Smith et al., 2008). Latina principals can relate to the barriers of Latina/o student academic success and can create school climates that produce equity for all children, increasing the achievement chances of Latina/o students (Cammarota, 2006; Normore, Rodriguez, & Wynne, 2007). Therefore, Question 15 was framed in order to learn of the effect each principal believes she has had on her learning community and if she believes that her ethnicity and gender have played a role in her professional decision-making and impact.

Observations

On or about the same day as the face-to-face interviews, I conducted observations in the field by visiting the campus or a school activity of each participant (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010; Wolcott, 2008). The observations were scheduled with each participant and lasted approximately two and a half hours. During the observations, I was a participant as an outside observer (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). During the fieldwork, I took field notes using an observational protocol (see Table 7) to record notes.

To ensure the accuracy of field notes, each entry stated the date, time, and place of observation. In order to record the maximum amount of information possible within the time constraints, notes contained shorthand, abbreviations, and symbols. Verbal and nonverbal communication of all participants, those they encountered, and elements of the environment were observed and recorded.

The observation protocol included a designated area for any sketches necessary, descriptive notes, and reflective notes (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). All field notes, including analytic notes and memos, were kept in the field journal (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995).

Table 7

Observation Protocol

Descriptive Notes	*Reflective Notes*
Area to Sketch	

Data Analysis

As Wolcott (2008) stated, "the purpose of qualitative inquiry is to produce findings" (p. 371). Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) explained that in ethnography the analysis of data is an ongoing progression throughout the research process. I completed

the analysis process through the use of (a) chunking data into large conceptual categories, (b) finding initial themes, and (c) interpretation (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010).

Transcription of recorded audio was completed two weeks after each interview. Written transcripts were e-mailed to each principal to check for accuracy. Changes were made to the transcript of one principal during the member check process. No other requests were made. The analysis and interpretation of data was e-mailed to each principal for accuracy checks as well. No changes were made as a result of the member checks.

Large Conceptual Categories

Coding and logging data as a manner of arriving at large conceptual categories is the first step in the analysis in ethnography (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010; Madison, 2011). Coding took place for demographic surveys, interview transcripts, observation field notes after each was complete. Coding is providing a shorthand system in order to recover explicit pieces of data easily (Merriam, 2009). Open coding was the first step, as the researcher is "being open to anything possible at this point" (Merriam, 2009, p. 178) by coding all information that may be useful later in the process.

In vivo coding was the second step utilized to keep the language and perspectives of the participants (Saldaña, 2009). In vivo coding refers to using the participants' own words in the coding process. In vivo coding allowed me to provide a vehicle to the otherwise marginalized voices of my Latina participants by using their own testimonies. As most participants answered questions in a combination of English and Spanish, the Spanish was transcribed, and then translated into English.

73

As the process evolved and I coded more interview transcripts, observation field notes, and documents, categories began to be formed as patterns emerged (Merriam, 2009). According to Merriam (2009), categories should (a) answer research questions, (b) be exhaustive, and (c) be mutually extensive.

Finding Initial Themes

Merriam (2009) explained the process of additional ordering of data in order to find initial themes by (a) examining specific topics within clusters, (b) comparing and contrasting topics within that cluster, (c) continuing to examine and note topics within each cluster, (d) discovering overlapping topics, and (e) making adjustments for comparisons and contrasts across clusters to create themes (see Appendix E).

Interpretation

Themes began to emerge during the coding process that extended to the interpretation of the analysis section. LeCompte and Schensul (2010) explained, "results are facts, but the facts must be interpreted, or given meaning" (p. 220). This led me to infer from the data and personalize it to assess how the research experience affected me (Wolcott, 1994). I positioned myself in the research and structured my interpretations. The concluding step in the interpretation process was to reach conclusions about what it means to be a Latina principal, what shared experiences participants had, and how their experiences fit in a larger context (Wolcott, 2008).

<p style="text-align:center;">Credibility</p>

Increasing the credibility of the study was accomplished through careful attention to the study's construction, data collection procedures, analyses, interpretation, and the presentation of findings (Merriam, 1998). The three methods I included for increasing

the reliability of the study were (a) member checking, (b) reflexivity, and (c) triangulation.

Member Checks

All participant interviews were transcribed within two weeks after each was completed. The transcript of each interview was shared with each respective participant via e-mail to ensure accuracy. Any inaccuracies participants reported were corrected within a week. Participants were also provided the opportunity to review the analyses, understandings, and inferences at the completion of the analysis in order to judge the accuracy of the information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998). This process increased the fidelity of the study because it ensured that the information deduced from the culture-sharing group was accurate.

Reflexivity

As the researcher and a participant observer in the study I was aware of and shared biases as a former Latina principal. I situated my own experiences and myself in my research forthright in order to be more revealing (Wolcott, 1994). My self-exposure is evidence of my accountability to tell an unbiased story of the participants' studied.

Triangulation

I used a variety of sources and methods to corroborate my data and data analyses (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990). I made use of (a) semi-structured individual interviews, (b) surveys and (c) observations to gather data. This "comparing and cross-checking the consistency of information derived at different times and by different means" (Patton, 1990, p. 467) allowed me to validate my information.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues within studies with human subjects are extremely important. In order to ensure the protection of all participants, this study employed (a) confidentiality, (b) informed consent forms, (c) a high level of security, and (d) researcher ethics.

Confidentiality of all participants is of the utmost importance (Patton, 1990). All participants' names, school names, and school district names were changed and replaced with pseudonyms to mask confidential demographic information that could identify participants. Participants were allowed to select their own pseudonyms for themselves and their schools.

All participants were asked to complete an informed consent form. These forms were scanned and kept electronically using a laptop that is password protected. Hard copies were kept filed in a locked file cabinet to which only the researcher had access.

All original digital audio and visual recordings were transferred to a computer that was kept secure using a password-protected platform. The files were locked and password protected as an added precaution.

My personal ethical position is that no one should benefit at the expense of others. Currently, I believe that Latinas are a marginalized voice in America due to racial, ethnic, and gender discrimination. This belief plays an important role in my research as I learn from the experiences of Latina principals and their obstacles in attaining and maintaining school principal positions.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Introduction

Latina/os currently make up about 22% of all public schools' student enrollment in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). That means that almost one out of every four students sitting in classrooms across the country is Latina/o. As the demographic of the US students continues to become more Latina/o, critical issues pertaining to this emerging populace must be addressed.

Across the country, the leadership on campuses does not reflect the student population it serves. Latina/os accounted for only 4.5% of all secondary U.S. public school principals (Battle, 2009). In order for the leadership of the school to mirror the student body, there is a need for a significant increase in the amount of Latina/o principals. As a critical ethnographic study, this study serves as a call of action to ameliorate the underrepresentation of Latinas as high school principals.

The purpose of this chapter is to present the qualitative data findings collected to understand the experiences of Latina principals in both established and burgeoning Latina/o communities. Data analyzed included survey information, field notes, and the one-on-one interviews that allowed the participants' voices to be heard. The semi-structured interview protocol was designed to elicit rich information from participants to answer the three research questions.

Research Question 1: *What were the experiences and obstacles Latina secondary principals encountered in obtaining their leadership positions?*

Research Question 2: *What impact did race, ethnicity, and gender have on professional opportunities for Latina principals?*

Research Question 3: *What were the qualities or characteristics Latinas believed made them effective principals?*

Data Analysis

Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) explained that in ethnography, the analysis of data is an ongoing progression throughout the research process. I completed the analysis process through the use of (a) chunking data into large conceptual categories, (b) finding initial themes, and (c) interpretation (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010).

Data Findings

Qualitative procedures for reporting, analyzing and interpreting the data were used. The triangulation of data increased the dependability and reliability of the study's methodology. In vivo coding selected from each principal's transcribed interview was used to explain the experiences of Latina secondary principals.

The Principals

Purposive sampling was used "in a few cases for intensive study" (Bernard, 2000, p. 176). All participants met the criterion of having at least one parent of Latina/o ethnicity and identifying themselves as Latina to be included in the sample. This critical sample was important to this study in order to understand what is happening to this culture-sharing group (Patton, 1990).

Anna. Anna is 38 years old, born and raised in a close-knit family along the U.S. and Mexican border in the Southwest. Anna self-identifies as Hispanic, the daughter of Mexican nationals. She is a second generation American, being the first generation to be born in the United States.

Anna is in her first year as the principal of a college high school in the Southwest. She has been an educator for 16 years, serving as a high school special education teacher and assistant principal prior to her principalship. Prior to this position, she was an assistant principal at another early college high school in the region.

Anna is a petite lady with a soft voice. She moves around her campus with ease, grace, and confidence. From interactions observed, faculty and staff respect her. She speaks and acts with a mantra of putting the needs of students above the needs of the adults.

Faith. Faith is a 46 year old Latina born and raised in a Texas border city. She is second generation on her maternal side and third generation on her paternal side. Her mother was born in Mexico, while her father was born in the United States from Mexican parents.

Faith is the principal of a large comprehensive high school in a middle class neighborhood. She taught English as a Second Language at the secondary level for 16 years prior to becoming an administrator. She served as a high school assistant principal and middle school principal prior to her current position.

I observed her to be a thoughtful leader, speaking about creating a network of colleagues and mentors to help guide her. Faith has a welcoming demeanor. The interactions I observed included exchanges with students, staff and the district superintendent. She was equally respectful, open and pleasant with all stakeholders.

Ruby. Ruby is the 51 year old daughter of a Mexican mother and Apache Indian father. She was born and raised in a Texas community that borders Mexico. Like Faith,

she is second generation on her maternal side and third generation on her paternal side. She is the youngest of 11 children and the only member of her family to attend college.

Ruby began her career in education as an administrative assistant. She was a Career and Technology Teacher for four years at the high school campus in which she had previously served as head secretary. She was quickly promoted to an assistant principalship at a K-8 campus and then a high school. Currently, she serves as the principal of a small rural high school.

Ruby prides herself on being a servant leader. Her enthusiasm and genuine passion to serve her children made her seem larger than her diminutive frame. Students were naturally drawn to her, coming up to shake her hand and speak to her during my time on her campus.

Jackie. Jackie is a 52 year old Mexican-American principal from Texas. She too is second generation on her maternal side and third generation on her paternal side. Her mother was born and raised in Mexico, while her father is Mexican-American.

Jackie is currently the principal of a large urban high school in Texas. She worked as a high school English teacher for 12 years prior to seeking a leadership role. She then served as a secondary assistant principal for eight years before opening her comprehensive high school 10 years ago.

A breast cancer survivor, Jackie's fervor for life is evident with her expressive speech and mannerisms. Observing a Friday night football game, her energy and excitement was evident. She is an extremely intelligent woman who has been offered various central office positions, but thrives in her interactions with students on a daily basis.

Mary A. Mary A. is a 35 year old Mexican-American principal who lives and works in Texas. The eldest daughter, she is a second generation American on both sides of her family tree. She has resided in border cities all of her life, the first five years being on the Mexican side of the fence. The family then permanently relocated to the border city in the United States.

She is a first year principal of a rural high school surrounded by agricultural fields. The high school serves as the community center for the local population. Prior to her principalship, she spent seven years as a high school classroom teacher, one year as an at-risk coordinator and six years as an assistant principal at a comprehensive high school.

Mary A. exudes passion for education. Her hands move rapidly as she articulated all of the interventions she was putting in place to ensure student success. During a meeting with her assistant principals, she pounded on the table as she stressed that the administrative team needed to be the model of hard work and accountability for the campus and surrounding community.

Brenda. Brenda is a 43 year old Latina principal in Texas. She is a second generation Mexican-American. Both of her parents came to the United States from Mexico.

Brenda's high school sits less than five miles away from an international port of entry with Mexico. It is a high performing comprehensive high school primarily consisting of Latina/o students. This is her second tenure at the school, where she previously served as an assistant principal.

She is a seasoned educator with 20 years of experience as a (a) high school social studies teacher, (b) instructional specialist, (c) high school assistant principal, (d) middle school principal, and (e) high school principal. She emanates confidence in her position. At the homecoming pep rally, she was at ease with almost 1900 students seated in the bleachers of the football stadium while she calmly attended to an issue by a sideline.

Sandra. Sandra was the youngest principal in the study at 31 years old. She is a self- described Chicana principal of a small charter school in California. She is a second generation Mexican-American on both her maternal and paternal sides. While she was born in a border city in Texas, she was raised in California.

The charter school is located in an urban setting in a densely populated city in California. Sandra has spent her entire career in charter school organizations. She taught middle school for four years prior to becoming a principal intern and secondary assistant principal. She was a founding charter middle school principal for four years and is in her second year as a high school principal.

Maria. Maria is a 50 year old Latina principal in California. Born of parents from Mexico, she is second generation Mexican-American. While she was born and raised primarily in California, she lived in Mexico while her mother completed her Ph.D.

Maria is the principal of a large urban high school in Northern California. With 20 years of experience, she has served as a high school English teacher and high school assistant principal. She is in her fourth year as principal of her campus.

Maria has a strong belief in equity that is present in all of her actions. I observed her working on an student information report that most principals would delegate out.

She apologized for giving me her back while she worked on it and explained that it was important for her to understand her student data in order to make the best decisions.

Mary. Mary is a 43 year old Salvadorian principal in Northern California. Mary is the only participant that is first generation, born in El Salvador. She immigrated to the United States when she was four years old.

Mary is the principal of one of highest performing high schools in California and the nation. Her campus is located in an affluent area near a prestigious university. Prior to her principalship, she taught high school social studies for seven years and served as an assistant principal for six years.

Mary models a culture of respect on her campus. In her interactions with students, she addressed them by their names, praised them, and attended to their needs. The students, in turn, were very respectful of her. Her openness and genuine nature come across as much as does her passion for education. She is very energetic, using her hands while speaking about the virtues of her campus.

Goots. Goots is a 60 year old principal of a continuation school in California. She was born in Southern California, the product of two Mexican born parents. While she was raised in Southern California, she moved north in adulthood.

Her campus is a small continuation high school for students who were not successful in traditional high school setting. It is located in an agricultural area in Northern California. For many, this high school is their last opportunity to achieve a high school diploma.

Goots has 35 total years of experience in education. She was a classroom teacher 12 years in both New York and California. She has spent 23 years as an administrator,

serving as an assistant principal for five years and then 10 years as a principal in other settings prior to becoming a high school principal. She is dedicated and voracious about educational equity work. For the last eight years, she has devoted herself to graduating her high needs students, most who are poor and Latina/o. Her speech became impassioned when speaking about the efforts her campus has taken to increase student graduation rates.

Research Question 1: Experiences and Obstacles

Research question one read: *What were the experiences and obstacles Latina secondary principals encountered in obtaining their leadership positions?* From reviewing the data, three large conceptual categories emerged: (a) Latina/o ethnic identity, (b) professional trajectories, and (c) obstacles. Within each category, several themes emerged. The themes within Latina/o ethnic identity that surfaced included (a) the duality of growing up a Latina in the United States, (b) values and beliefs in cultural upbringing, and (c) an awareness of being other. The themes within professional trajectories of principals comprised of (a) mentors, (b) the desire to impact on student success, and (c) being a viable alternative to status quo. The obstacles of Latina principals were divided between research questions one and two. For research question one, the themes included access to higher education and internal obstacles.

Latina/o Ethnic Identity

Ethnicity refers to the cultural traits of a people, such as their language, shared heritage, food, and customs (López, 2008). The Latina principals in this study were asked about their ethnic background and how they believed it had shaped them. Nine of the Latina principals were second-generation Latinas, being the first American born

generation. Mary was born in San Salvador, El Salvador and immigrated to the United States at the age of four. All others descended from at least one parent born in Mexico. All 10 principals grew up bilingual in both Spanish and English.

Three themes emerged within the larger conceptual category. The first was the duality of growing up a Latina in the United States. The second was values and beliefs they gleaned from their upbringing in a Latina/o household. The third was an awareness of being other.

The duality of growing up a Latina. Participants spoke about the duality of being a person of color growing up in the United States. They successfully straddled both worlds, sharing their bicultural experiences. The principals spoke about the use of Spanish in the home while the outside world used English. Their tie to their home language was shared by all of the principals in relation to how their culture shaped them.

Being bicultural. The Latina principals shared their common experiences about growing up in Latina in America. Anna spoke about growing up on the border:

I have been raised with a dual language, with a dual perspective considering two different cultures, the American culture and the Mexican culture. And then the blend that we have in the border, which is its own culture, are really taking from, you know, from two. And so I think it's given me sensitivity towards the plight of people.

Mary spoke about the duality of being Latina in the United States:

My culture is – it's who I am. I, literally, as a kid, felt like I was in two worlds, whether it be in the predominant or to the dominant American culture, and then of

course, at home, I was a *Salvadoreña*, meaning that I – my first language was Spanish. It was not English, so I'm an EL learner.

Brenda shared her belief that growing up Latina shaped her upbringing:

Culturally, socially, academically, in all levels, I think the background that your parents provide you with, or the background you come with, it makes you who you are to a certain degree.

Being bilingual. All principals considered themselves bilingual and identified Spanish was their first language. Faith said, "Spanish was my first language. My mother speaks Spanish. My father speaks both." Mary shared that she remains a predominately Spanish speaker in her home stating, "I am a fluent Spanish speaker, and obviously I learned English. My parents obviously also speak Spanish. English was their second language as well. At home, I speak Spanish. I'd say 60-40, but the predominant is *Español.*" Anna spoke about being a dual language learner and living in two distinct language worlds, "For the most part, at my house growing up we spoke Spanish, and it wasn't until I started school… that we started to really pick up English."

Both Anna and Goots expressed gratitude to their parents for ensuring they maintained their home language as they saw Spanish as the vessel to continuing the culture. Anna said, "And I think that we were very fortunate that my parents wanted us to learn English and to learn Spanish correctly, and so at home it was nothing but Spanish."

Goots shared:

When I started school, I could not speak English. We were not allowed to speak English at home. My parents – at the dinner table, we had to speak Spanish,

which now, I thank them so much. So, because of that, I am able to be proficient in both languages. I can read. I can write. And that would not have happened if my parents were not very, very firm on continuing our background.

Jackie shared that Spanish was also her first language:

Initially [I only spoke] Spanish. My mother, because she had recently come from Mexico, didn't really speak English. From what she tells me, I grew up speaking Spanish, watching Spanish TV, singing Spanish songs. Consequently, when I started school, I qualified for Head Start Program because I didn't speak English.

Mary A. spoke about her status as a Limited English Proficient student:

Spanish was my first language, and in fact, I still lived, I lived in Juarez, Mexico 'til I was five years old, and then my mom actually brought me over. I did kinder and pre-kinder here in the United States, but I was always ESL, like a LEP student, until I exited the program in the sixth grade.

Brenda shared that while fluent in both language, both shared the guilt as being more comfortable in English as an adult:

I think I'm fluent in both [Spanish and English]. I'm more comfortable in English. I hate to say, because home language being Spanish, but because of the use and the level of fluency, even at home, you tend to use one more than the other.

Latina/o values and beliefs. The principals felt a strong personal connection to their ethnic background and were aware of how their distinct Latina values and beliefs shaped their lives. Several spoke to the importance of family, with a particular emphasis

on the cultural belief that families come before all. The Latina principals felt that working hard and perseverance were cultural traits handed down generationally.

Importance of family. Ruby spoke to her upbringing and the importance of family in the Latina/o culture:

I believe I was raised to see things in a humble way where your family background, your ethics as far as taking care of your family was important, which it still stands with me because I still take care of my 91 year-old mom. I lost my father at the age of 14, so it's been something that family has helped me move up.

Mary spoke about the importance of family as a cornerstone of her Latina upbringing:

The overriding thing that made me was my family. And my mom would always remind us *la familia, la familia, la familia.* So, it was always about family.

Value of hard work. She spoke about the value of hard work being instilled at a young age by her parents:

I think a lot of what I am is a result of how I was raised. Both of my parents were very hard-working. I essentially grew up very poor. I didn't know that I was poor until I went to college. It was just a horrifying revelation, but I really suffered none at all as a result of it. Consequently, my career in education has been one valuing education and just working very, very hard because I saw my parents work very hard.

Mary A. spoke to the value of being hard-working in a Latina/o household, growing up in poverty, the desire to achieve a better life:

I feel that I'm a very down-to-earth person, and I think that my background –

having to learn English and just seeing my parents working at factories and

having those difficult jobs and always working, and there was little money. We

were okay, but certainly not like to go out to eat and all this, to splurge kind of

stuff. So growing up, it just felt like you know what? I'm going to go to school;

I'm going to do this, and then I'm going to buy all those things for myself when I

get my degree.

Value of giving back. Brenda explained how the cultural value of giving back to

the community was instilled in her at an early age:

The idea, it comes from background again, of giving back to the community, the

idea of a commitment to go beyond yourself. One of my older brothers was a

teacher, not only a teacher that believed in giving back but showed us how. He

was a teacher in Chihuahua who went to the Sierra, who taught there for a year,

then came back and instead of teaching in a metropolitan area, which was Juarez,

he decided to teach in the valley.

Sandra also spoke about the cultural value of assisting others that she learned

from her maternal role models:

What I learned in school about being proud of who I am and the language that I

speak was really foundational to me. And then on top of that, my mother and my

grandmother were very big on this idea of helping other people because our

people needed help. And the way they would explain that to us as kids was that,

you know, they worked really hard to make a better life for us and that they

wanted something better for us, and when we achieved whatever better was, that
it was our job to help other people.

Cultural pride. They communicated a strong sense of ethnic and cultural pride
which started with an appreciation of the Spanish language:

I had the good fortune of being in a really successful dual immersion school, and I
was in that program from kindergarten thru the eighth grade. I never saw myself
as different because my teachers were all women of color. They were these, you
know, really old school Chicana activists who had marched with Cesar Chavez
and, you know, would teach us about those kinds of things in our classes.

Awareness of being the other. The participants shared their experiences of
being a minority, the other, in the United States. They acknowledged comprehending
their disenfranchised status at a young age. This led to the desire to be resilient and help
others that may follow. Faith spoke about her ethnic identity and the awareness of being
a member of a disenfranchised group, "I think that the idea that we were as Hispanics
always lagging behind was always in the back of my mind and made me continue, made
me go to school, made me do one step further." Sandra also had the awareness of being a
part of a disenfranchised group and what actions she needed to take in order to persevere:

My mom always worked in convalescent homes and so she would take us on the
weekends to help, you know, to entertain the residents. And my grandmother
worked in hotels for year, and she would take us on weekends, and we would help
her make beds and things like that… [my stepdad] would take us to the restaurant
on the weekends once we got old enough, and we would bus tables and pour
water and things like that. And they did all those things because they wanted us

to see that while it was the profession that they had and the majority of the people

that they worked with looked like us, they didn't want us to want to have those

jobs so they wanted us to, you know, know how hard it was so that we would

actually concentrate on school.

Several of the principals spoke their cognizance early in their lives that being

Latina/o made them different. This sense of being the other led to pride and

perseverance. Maria shared how the Chicano movement of the 1960s shaped her

identity, "Both [parents] came here in the sixties, so they both became very involved in

the Chicano movement and the civil rights movement. So every part of my history has to

do with their social activism."

Goots shared her pride in her culture and of the discrimination she faced when

enrolled in a private all-girls school on the other side of town:

So, it has shaped me to feel very proud.… I went through elementary and junior

high feeling that we were the best. It wasn't until I went to high school that it was

the first time I realized that being Latina was not a good thing.

Professional Trajectory

Within the larger conceptual theme of professional trajectory, several subthemes

emerged during the interviews. The Latina principals were asked why they sought out

the principalship. The themes that emerged were (a) mentors encouraged them, (b) the

desire to have a larger impact on student success, and (c) the quest of being a viable

alternative to the models of leadership they saw.

The role of mentors. Magdaleno (2006) explained the importance of a same-

race mentor in achieving senior educational leadership positions. Several participants

had access to a fellow Latino/a mentor that encouraged them to pursue educational administration. Informal mentors in the professional lives of seven out of the 10 participants guided their decision to seek the principalship.

Anna's principal approached her to administer a grant, placing her in a leadership position. This led her to think about returning to school and becoming an instructional leader:

> Well, during the time I was there [the School Age Parent Center], there was an opportunity to write a grant, and so the principal approached me and I, 22 by that time I think, 25 maybe, but she said, "I think that – look at this. And I think if we write this grant it's going to be a great benefit for our population."
>
> So I came out of my role, my teaching assignment, to manage the grant in the school, and so it was like a pseudo, it wasn't an administrative position at all, but we were so little that I was able to come into the classrooms, talk about the program, implement the program, work with the teachers to have these different components of the program developed, and well, I just loved that job too. So you know, little by little these different things were happening that were leading me into a different direction.
>
> And so I think I was very blessed to be able to have like a training ground that was low stakes, that was very supportive, that was very different.

Faith encountered a mentor who believed in her leadership capacity while she was a classroom teacher. He provided her the opportunity to be a teacher leader. He continued to provide encouragement for her that led to her pursuing a secondary principal position:

I think the principalship was never something that I aimed to do. I think a lot of

where I am today has to do with the people that I came across during my course

as a teacher. One of them was an administrator that I had at one of the high

schools who approached me about leading the department as a department chair,

and that's where I got my first opportunity at leadership. And it was the same

person that encouraged me to go into my mid-management degree and the same

person who encouraged me to apply for those positions.

Jackie encountered two mentors who encouraged her to seek educational

leadership roles. She shared that she did not seek the educational profession to become a

principal:

I really had no desire to be a principal. As soon as a started teaching, I got my

master's degree and I got it in Literature. My husband was very upset with me

because he said, "What can you do with that"? I just said, "Just read more

books." Maybe about four or five years after I got my master's degree, I saw one

of my professors, and he said, "You can easily get certified in Administration

because you already have a master's degree. You just need to make up the

difference."

My immediate supervisor – the assistant principal at the school that I was

working at – was promoted to a principalship here in the district. He came to me

one day and he said, "I see that you have your administration credentials. Would

you like to come with me as an assistant principal?"

Brenda attributed her success in part to the mentors she encountered as a classroom teacher, instructional specialist, assistant principal, and middle-school principal. She spoke to the mentors that assisted her:

> I've associated myself with mentors that could guide me through the process… because I was being groomed. I don't know anybody that has worked under great leaders like B and L. I mean, these were true campus leaders that were guiding a district.

Sandra was sought out for a leadership position on her charter school campus as a lead teacher and then as a principal. She shared information on a support team that allowed her to step in and learn educational leadership by creating a position of principal intern:

> So people sought me out, and then it just became a series of mutual conversations. After two years in the classroom, our lead teacher moved on, our departmental lead teacher moved on. And so, I applied for that lead teacher position.
>
> He [the charter CEO] created this principal intern position – this was at a time when there was actually money in the budget – and I got to learn and really learn in real time how to be a principal to really decide if I wanted to be [one]. So, I took over the school while the principal was on maternity leave, and then I went back to my middle school and high school as an assistant principal.

Mary had the fortune of having several mentors who assisted her on her professional journey. The first was a college professor that suggested to her to a career in education. Later her principal provided the guidance and learning opportunities to grow her leadership skills. She explained:

My professor in my MPA program, I told her what I was doing and she asked me, "Have you thought about teaching in a high school?" And I was like, "Oh no!" I was like, "Teacher, high school? I don't know about that." And she's, "No, no, no, I think you could really do that. I mean, look at what you're doing already." She was the dean of the School of Ed and Leadership, but she also taught in the other programs. And so she literally just sat me down and said, "Here's the application, you will apply."

Mary went on to finish her master's and teach high school social studies. She spoke about encountering a second mentor at her school site that provided her the encouragement to become a leader by providing her with leadership opportunities and inspiration:

The message I received from my then principal was to develop leadership at all levels and you didn't have to have a title after your name. And that really resonated with me. So there were a lot of opportunities for me to learn about school-wide issues. And it was good for me because it got me out of my four walls, because it's really easy to stay insular. I forget that there's a bigger organization.

Because of my first principal and giving me all those opportunities at school-wide leadership at the site council, starting as the dean and groomed for the chairmanship or what they call your instruction supervisors, starting to go to conferences and just other meetings. I'm working with people across the district – curriculum planning, meetings at student leadership and all that, and the other

thing I got to do is go on walkthrough visits, which was such an incredible

learning and all that.

I was fortunate my first year. That group was special to me, and I'm still

very close to them and, you know, they're my—some are friends and some are

probably mentors.

While Goots was a classroom teacher, she had a Latina principal approach her to

discuss the principalship. That encounter was the first time she considered a career

outside of the classroom. She also had a conversation with the superintendent of schools

that gave her the confidence to complete her Administrative Services Credential. She

shared:

I was a teacher. I looked around and a Latina principal came to me and said,

"Have you ever thought of going into administration?" I said, "No, I never

thought, no way, I never thought." And she goes, "You should think about it.

You should think about it." I said, "Okay."

So, an assistant principalship was opening up at my school. And I went

for it. I didn't have my administrative credentials. I went for it. The girl and me

were finalists. But the superintendent told me, of course, Goots, you scored very

high. You need to go to school. You need to get your administrative credential,

and you need to try this again. I thought, "Dang, maybe there's something to

this," you know. "And you're telling me that I have to go to school?" Like, oh

my God, this is wonderful! So, again, I went, got my administrative credential

and started applying for positions.

The desire to have an impact and serve. Latina principals in this study explained that their desire to become principals was closely tied to the effect they wanted to have on the students they would serve. Principals spoke about the desire to serve their students, while improving their lives. The campus principalship provided for the opportunity to make a larger impact on the success of students than they would have had if they had remained classroom teachers.

Larger impact. Anna shared that after being in a role that allowed her to grow her leadership skills, she began thinking about the reason she wanted to become a principal:

> I really started to think more seriously about influencing and affecting something bigger than just a classroom.

> If I have ideas that I think are going to be able to produce an environment that is going to be successful and it's outside of one classroom, then this is the next logical step.

Faith also voiced her desire to make a greater impact on students outside of her classroom:

> And so that's when I decided I'm going to try this to see if I could impact that population, and not just my kids in class, but a greater number. And so I went into the assistant principal position, and the reason I went into the principal position was because I felt that there were certain things that I had seen that I felt I could do differently and impact in a more positive way. And so, when the opportunity came up, I applied for a position, and I was given the opportunity to be principal.

Brenda shared how she questioned herself on how she could make a larger impact after years as a classroom teacher and a magnet school lead teacher:

And I thought I need to go beyond my desk if I want to help kids… so, that was the reason [for seeking the principalship], so I wanted to do more than I was able to do in the classroom for kids, not just my 112 magnet kids. How do I help the rest of the kids?

Sandra shared how she communicated her desire to become a leader on her campus to her principal in order to assist more than the students in her classroom:

I said to my principal, "You know, I feel like I want to be a leader because I don't just – I know the kids in my classroom are important, but I want to do more than just for the kids in my classroom."

While working on administrative duties while still a teacher, Mary saw administration as a matter of having a larger positive impact on teachers and students. As a principal, she has continued to ensure that she helps the people on her campus. She explained:

But more importantly, I loved the fact that I can help more students and help teachers. So that was the part that intrigued me the most. And what I learned later was the part that's hard is balancing out the instructional leadership, which is where you help people, and the minutiae of managing the school, because you still have to make everything work.

Desire to serve. Ruby spoke about her desire to make a difference in the lives of the students she serves:

And I came with high hopes of making a difference with kids and helping them

get a better life and make sure they graduated.…

And, you know, I have always felt myself to be a servant leader. I'm here

to serve.

Desire to be a viable alternative. Another factor in the decision-making for the

principals in seeking the principalship was what they perceived as a lack of qualified

candidates to assist students achieve. They encountered roadblocks to progress in the

leadership they had experienced. They chose to enter the realm of leadership to become a

viable alternative to the status quo. Brenda saw the examples of the principals around

here and felt that she could do the job just as well or better. She shared:

I think a little bit out of frustration, comes down to, I'm just going to say it, to a

bad experience with a bad assistant principal, where you go and say, "Oh my

God, if he can do the job, I can do it better," or the too many nos. Being a part of

an academy and going to the principal or assistant principal and not understanding

the big picture.

Maria was an associate principal at her current campus. The school was low-

performing and combatting a culture of low expectations when the principal position

became open. She explained how she pondered the possibilities for the position and

decided to apply:

So what ended up happening here was, I know that as an associate principal, and

I'm a strong believer in my – that position as an instructional leader in educational

development. To me, that's the most important role at a school, and I knew –

knowing that what I knew about my school, this school, at that time, I knew that if

the leader of the school didn't believe what I believed in, I would have a hard time, because I knew I would be asked to do some things I didn't believe in for kids. And I kind of reached through my resources in my head and thought, "Well, who is going to be the principal of this school? And would I be okay with that?" So, what I realized was that I wasn't going to be moved and I realized that I would either have to quit or step up. So, at that time, the decision was for me to step up.

Goots saw the inequities in the system for people of color and observed that the leadership did little to change the status quo. She explained:

So, all the way along is I'm going to gain all these credentials I'm seeing the disparities between the different subgroups, and most of them are brown. So I said, "I could be a principal. Look at this guy not doing half of what he should be doing."

Obstacles

A common theme for all participants was the existence of obstacles. The Latina principals interviewed cited a variety of obstacles on their paths to attaining the principalship. While most obstacles were external, there were internal obstacles that they had to overcome in order to meet their career goals. In achieving the principalship, the leaders encountered an obstacle early on in accessing higher education. Several principals noted internal obstacles, including disbelief about their abilities and capabilities.

Access to higher education. Latinas face several obstacles in accessing higher education. Financial hardships were felt by the principals as they navigated a college

degree. First generation Latina/o parents cannot assist their children in a system with which they are unfamiliar. The Latinas felt that they were ill-prepared for college due to a lack of preparation and knowledge in high school. Goots shared the financial struggles in attaining higher education, both an undergraduate degree and then a graduate degree to become a school administrator, "The only obstacles I saw were financial, going to college… to afford going to higher education. Yeah, because after you get your BA, then you need to go back and get your administrative credential."

Anna grew up in poverty that led her to juggle full-time employment while attending university. She explained:

> I come from a very humble environment, poverty, that kind of thing, and nothing wrong with that, you know.
>
> So as a result of that as soon as I was done—actually during high school, I started to work, but as soon as I was done with high school I had to take a full time job, a forty-hour-a-week job. There was just no other way. And I knew that I wanted to continue school, I knew that that was going to limit the amount of time that I could go to school. So that was an obstacle.
>
> During the times when things were hard, maybe there was no gas money, and so how was I going to get to school? And so if I didn't get to school then, you're not going to be able to keep your scholarship, your financial aid, and so on and so forth. And so those were always issues and obstacles that needed to be overcome.

Ruby also shared how she struggled financially as she returned to school after a divorce and the birth of her child:

Well, it's taking some sacrifice, of course. You know, making sure I got an education, getting school loans. The steps were taken little by little. I didn't get there right away. I didn't actually start my career as a professional until I was 40 years old.

So I struggled with the obstacles as far as getting to where I needed. Once I started going to school, the obstacle was working full-time, going to school at night, staying up until the wee hours of the night studying, reading, doing everything I had to do and then getting up the next day, getting my daughter ready, going to work, you know, dropping her off.

So a lot of it has been a big learning experience, but my obstacles more than anything have been—some of them financial. Some of them were, you know, not being able to do what I wanted to because I didn't have the resources or even, you know, somebody to watch my kid when she was younger.

Mary A. was the product of first-generation parents who did not have an understanding of the American education system. She explained how this became an obstacle as she was limited in her participation in extracurricular activities in high school that would have made her competitive in the college application process.

When I got to high school, my parents they didn't know what being in extracurricular activities entailed. They were kind of afraid, as a matter of fact, holding me back from doing anything because they felt like I was going to go wild. That's the misconception a lot of parents currently have here in this community as well.

102

Being the first born, again, my parents let go of me little by little, but they

always really stood in the way of me fully participating in everything. By the

time I figured it out on my own that, "Oh, this is so neat!" I was already a senior.

You know, by then, I wanted to do Honor Society, student council, I wanted so

many other things but it was already my senior year.

While college was the expectation in her household, her parents lacked the

knowledge of the infrastructure of higher education to assist her in navigating the system.

She explained:

So, when I graduated and I went to college—because that's the thing with my

parents, it was always like, "You're going to go to school. When you're done

with high school, we don't know how you're going to register or what you're

supposed to do. We don't even know how we are going to pay or anything, but

you're going."

Internal obstacles. When asked about obstacles that reaching their goal of the

principalship, the Latina principals spoke about internal obstacles with which they

struggled. Principals struggled to juggle their professional aspirations and familial

obligations. They also struggled with the idea that they had the skill set or experience to

be "ready" to serve as a high school principal.

Ruby shared her decision to postpone her education in order to care for her young

daughter:

And I became a high school secretary to a principal. And once I was there, a

teacher started to tell me that I should go back to school. I had started but went

through a divorce, so I had to stop and make sure my daughter was a little older. She was only six, so I went back to school when she was a sophomore.

Upon reflecting on her professional aspirations, Brenda shared that despite having been a successful high school assistant principal and middle school principal, she felt that she was not ready to be a high school principal:

In my mind, I wasn't ready to be a high school principal. I had only been at the middle school for two years, but had it been any other campus than this one, I probably would have said no. I don't know; that's what I'd say.

Maria had a self-imposed belief that in order to be successful in leadership, one needed to have time in each position along the career ladder. She explicated:

And I remember telling my principal that my concern wasn't the opportunity. It was that I really, really believe that as an educator, you have to go through roles within the system so you don't have gaps in your knowledge. And I think that being a teacher and then teacher-leader and some type of coordinator, some type of director, moving as an AP in some capacity builds up what you can do and your skill set as a principal.

The Latina principals shared a variety of commonalities in answer to research question one. Three large conceptual categories emerged in response to research question one: (a) Latina/o ethnic identity, (b) professional trajectory, and (c) obstacles. The themes within Latina/o ethnic identity that surfaced included (a) the duality of growing up a Latina in the United States, (b) values and beliefs in cultural upbringing, and (c) an awareness of being other. The themes within professional trajectories of principals comprised of (a) mentors, (b) the desire to impact on student success, and (c)

being a viable alternative to status quo. The themes within obstacles included access to higher education and internal obstacles.

Research Question 2: Impact of Race, Ethnicity and Gender on Professional Opportunities

Research question two read: *What impact did race, ethnicity, and gender have on professional opportunities for Latina principals?* From reviewing the data, the principals encountered a variety of obstacles due to their race, ethnicity and gender that impacted their professional opportunities. Themes included (a) gender and ethnic roles prior to attaining principalship, (b) gender, ethnic and racial discrimination, (c) the pressure of *familismo*, (d) and underachieving campuses with resistant staff.

Obstacles

Ethnic, race, and gender issues continued for these leaders after ascension to the principalship. Ethnic stereotypes, barriers, and racism did not cease after becoming a principal. Sexism and issues of gender roles also continued as obstacles for the Latina leaders.

A new set of obstacles arose for the leaders after attaining their positions. They also overwhelmingly found themselves leading schools lacking in high expectations for all students, leading to lower student achievement and resistance and dysfunction from the other adults in the building.

Gender and ethnic roles. As Latinas, these high school principals are twice disenfranchised, as women and as a part of an ethnic minority (Quilantan & Menchaca-Ochoa, 2004). To obtain their positions, they had to overcome the gender roles ingrained within both the American and the Latina/o cultures.

In the home. Ruby expressed the struggle for her to continue her education as a single Latina mother:

First of all, my first obstacle was you know, I had been going to school and my divorce, of course, stopped me. I didn't want to leave my daughter. Being a single parent and raising her on a secretarial salary was difficult. I remember times when I didn't even have money to buy a Coke.

And I knew my ex-husband did that to me exactly because he told me, "I'm not going to take care of our daughter while you go to school." And so I had no other choice. By the time I got out of college at ten o'clock at night, I couldn't sleep, my little 6 year old without her warm bath, without her doing her homework, without her, you know, making sure she had a warm meal. I just couldn't see myself doing that, so yeah, I saw that, the machismo and, you know what? You're a chick, so stay home pregnant and, you know, you get your mediocre little secretarial job and stay there because that's where you should stay.

Mary A. elaborated on the pressures and obstacles she saw in her gender role as a wife and mother:

You know, the obstacles, of course, are always being a woman, the pregnancies, your children. You have to take days off. Then, of course, if you're married, that could either make it or break it. I mean, you have to have a very supportive husband that's not macho, like, "Come home at this time. Where's my food? Iron my clothes," because that's just not going to happen, you know.

Professionally. Mary A. spoke to the obstacles that she perceived were inherent in being female and a mother in achieving a secondary principal position:

106

I always felt that men are favored because of the amount of time that it requires you to be a principal at the secondary level. I always felt that committees and people are—maybe it's just me, but I always felt that men are favored because they can leave the house early in the morning. They can just go in at the drop of a hat. They can show up. And so I always felt that that was a disadvantage in my case.

Ruby also experienced gender and ethnic biases in hiring practices and even as far back as her own schooling. She shared, "It seems like men sometimes would always get some of the positions before women, especially, you know, a Latina woman."

And even in schooling, you know, you feel it because—I always felt sometimes that, "Oh, you're a Latina, you're Mexican." You're looked at a little bit lower, especially if you're a Mexican woman. Sometimes, you know, Mexican men themselves put Mexican women or Latinas down because they think they're macho, they think they're all buff.

Mary A. spoke about the obstacles her ethnic identity posed for her as she strived for the high school principalship:

Honestly, in our race, I think that women are not supposed to be that smart or that successful, especially not this young. I think that a lot of women think that, you know what, I'm a bad mother. And you do feel guilty a lot of times. One of the things I can share with you is that my girls have always been—I have a ten-year-old and a nine-year-old right now. When they were one and two, they spent a lot of time with my mom. One, two, and three—a lot of time with my mother; she's the one that helped me raise them so that I could go to work.

Brenda saw attaining a high school principal position in her district as a challenge. She explained, "I think that we're comfortable certainly with a middle school principal for a female. I think that's a very comfortable way of seeing people. But for high school principals, that's tough—in our district, especially."

Sandra echoed the sentiments of the other Latinas in feeling that her gender was seen as an obstacle to her professional career. She was accused of being emotional about her work because of her gender. She shared:

> I can recall a lot of instances where I've had to be in an environment where it's predominantly male leaders, and I think there is… you know, there may be that underlying sense of, "Well, she's just being emotional about it because she's a woman."

Mary shared her experiences as an assistant principal when parents would question her authority because of her ethnicity. Due to her being Latina, parents dismissed her decision-making and position of authority. She elaborated:

> I was reminded of my ethnicity and race, if you will, as an AP when parents would address me in a very different way or they would question my decisions. And they would automatically go over my head or didn't believe that I was the final arbitrator of the decision. And just the feeling I got in the words that people used was like, "Wow, okay." And I was reminded that some people would automatically see me as less, which was not— that was not generally what I faced growing up because I was raised in a diverse area.

Mary also shared her feelings that her ethnic background would be an obstacle in a different part of the United States that was not as diverse as the community that she currently serves:

And I really wondered about that [the role her ethnicity would play] when I started tossing my hat in the ring for several things. I think it did help that it was here when I started in terms of diversity.

Obstacles in the position. The obstacles and struggles did not end once the Latinas achieved their leadership positions. Each spoke about the obstacles they encountered coming into the high school principalship. The struggles they shared included (a) gender, ethnic, and racial discrimination; (b) the pressure of *familismo*; and (c) underachieving campuses with resistant staff.

Gender, ethnic, and racial discrimination. Jackie experienced gender discrimination amongst her male peers at principals' meetings. She expressed her need to prove her worth as a female high school principal:

When I was hired in this district, I was the first female high school principal. That's pretty incredible in such a progressive district! I think that when you go to meetings that [are] generally filled with old football coaches as administrators and you walk in, you have to prove yourself that you can handle those meetings with the boys. Because the high school principalship was always not just a man's world, it was a white man's world, so to have a little Hispanic lady come in, it's like, "What does she know?"

Mary shared how she noticed that she was treated differently as a woman leader than her male peers:

And I think that when I took this position, what became most evident was that as a woman; I never realized how differently you were treated. So what came to the forefront in this position was the fact that I'm a woman, and that principals that are male were able to say and sometimes do certain things that I couldn't. And then, even the way that people interacted with me was different than if I were male.

She also shared that while racial or ethnic issues exist, they are not addressed aloud:

So I think my ethnicity at this level of the game where I am at, nobody wants to say it's a factor. But when push comes to shove, the issues that you do have with my philosophy are ingrained in my ethnicity. But you won't dare say it. So that's what I have noticed.

Sandra shared a story of her direct supervisor making discriminatory remarks to her about gender and her inability to think strategically:

In my last school, the executive director and I—it was a one-school charter management organization, so it was basically the ED and myself, and he was… he and I would just, you know, have a lot of discussions about our philosophies and our approach to the work. And a lot came down to, "I need you to stop being so emotional about it. I need you to be strategic about it." That was his—that was his feedback that I would get from him a lot. But they're based on, you know, I—that was just him and that was his approach to things, and so… but he would make the link back to, "Stop being such a girl about it. I need you to be strategic about this."

Maria shared a similar story of having sexist comments made towards her:

And then what becomes is somehow this feisty Latina, and I'm pretty calm and quiet. So men would say that. And they wouldn't say that to me, of course, but they would say it after. Actually, they didn't think that there was anything wrong with saying it to me. You know, somebody came in here saying, they said to me, "Well, I'm married to a feisty Italian and I sleep with her every day, so it's not about that Latina."

She also shared an experience of being treated differently due to her gender:

Being a woman, some of the challenges of coming up in my office only two days into it, "You're the principal; what are you going to do about it now?" And throwing something on my desk and teaching people how to talk to each other. So, I don't know how many times I had to say, "We're professionals. We don't speak to each other like that."

Brenda has encountered gender obstacles that are highlighted in the Latina/o community. She also spoke about her personal struggles between the cultural gender roles she was raised to believe in and the image of feminism she projects as the principal. She commented:

I think especially in [retracted], especially in our area, it's still cultural, it is still not perceived that it's okay for us [females] to be aggressive, it's not okay for us to question.

I tell people, and we were laughing about this, that I'm a very different person at home than here [at work]. At home I serve my man at the table, I pick up, I put it in the sink. Here I teach our girls to be independent, to do what they

111

need to. I'm biting my lip because my child wants to go away for college, and that's not an option. At least it wasn't an option for me, but it's tough to leave your background and your traditions of the stand-behind-the-scenes person.

I think that was has helped me to kind of put that aside, the role, and I tell people when they tell me how, "You're so confident when you get out there," or "You're not embarrassed to take a picture," and "You're not embarrassed to speak on something at a spare moment." I said, "I don't have a say-so. I'm not – whatever, I am the principal of this school."

The pressure of familismo. Brenda also shared how her family continues to subject her to a more traditional female role in her Latina household:

I think that there's a sense of duality that it's hard to leave the traditions that you were taught, the traditions and the ideas that men should lead and you should follow. It's hard you know; it's hard to do both and to give respect to what you were taught, because sometimes you feel like you're disrespecting a tradition, to a certain degree. But I know that even though comments are made by my brothers, because of who I am and what I do, they respect me. They may not like it sometimes, and the may remind me, "*No estas en tu escuela*" [you are not at your school], because they don't want the principal to be talking, they want their little sister, who is Hispanic, who should be picking up after big brother, that is the duality of our life.

Ruby also encountered obstacles since achieving the principalship. She faced *familismo* obstacles through a lack of support and added pressures. She shared:

I've gotten it from my siblings where they'll tell me, "Oh well, yeah, just because

you think you're a career woman," you know, "you don't have time for this; you

don't have time for that." And it's like, "I'm working." And it's amazing, you

know, how many slaps I got from even my own family members that now, I'm

the one with the longest working hours and in fact, all my siblings are now retired

because I'm the youngest of 11. So, they're older. They're all 60 and above. So,

they're all not working any more, but yet I'm the one that runs around taking my

mom to the doctor, getting her prescriptions, getting her medication, taking care

of her financially, and with her diabetes and her illnesses. And instead of my own

family pushing me up sometimes, I felt like they bring me back down.

Mary A. also shared her experience of *familismo* being an obstacle after achieving

the principalship:

I try and balance my time as much as I can, but it's a cultural thing, really, that

people, *tias* [aunts], *tios* [uncles], they will make comments like, "*Tuviste hijas*

[You had daughters] so that they can stay with your mom." My in-laws, my

father-in-law, he has since passed, but he happened to be one of those real

Mexican macho type, like to the tenth degree, and he made several comments to

my husband about me working all the time and this and the other.

Underachieving campuses with resistant staff. Maria became the principal of a

campus with many challenges due to high administrative turnover, low student

achievement, and dysfunction. She explained:

This school was a school where two years before the faculty was divided. They

were going to move into—they were positioning themselves to move as a charter

113

school away from the district. So let alone that there were 18 administrative

changes in three years before I got here. I knew I was coming into a situation that

there was inconsistency in leadership and that we were falling lower and lower in

performance.

So I immediately walked into a situation of a lot of resistance and

dysfunction. And to lead through resistance and dysfunction is very different

from leading in another setting.

Anna came into an early college high school that did not have the success of

another early college high school where she served as an assistant principal. The

percentage of students graduating with their associate's degree was about 15% below

other schools. She shared that the school's state and federal accountability status was a

challenge:

But for me that was a challenge, and that was something that I felt if it worked

for this population, if we've set it up at this other place and it works this way, then

certainly it can work for this population and we can do the things that need to get

done here in order to have them achieve at those high standards.

Our accountability status, we are not where we need to be, and so when I

got here our state accountability was academically acceptable, where in the

previous year it had been recognized. That is not an acceptable accountability

status for an early college at all, and so there was a lot of work that needed to be

done in order for us to be able to get out of that accountability status. And so

working with the students, working with the faculty in the – we've tried really

hard in the one year that I have been here to lift that, but the old saying is

sometimes you have to take a step back to take two steps forward. So we were also in year one for federal accountability for AYP.

She encountered a faculty and staff that had a different opinion on helping student achievement as she shared the practice of identifying the strengths and weaknesses of every student and provided intervention strategically:

So you identify that this one needs this and this one, and now what we are going to do to be able to support them? And some of the attitudes that I found were very detached. I did this, this is what this one needs, or this is what I did, and that's it, the rest is on them. And so the part where you say, well, there's more to it than just that, what environment are we going to create to be able to support, remediate, enrich, what are those things? If you don't have faculty that really believe that, then it doesn't work, it doesn't work.

Faith had served as a middle-school principal prior to being named high-school principal. She immediately saw that she inherited an unhealthy culture at the high-school campus. She shared:

I think the obstacles have come once I've been in that position and thinking that it wasn't the job I thought it would be. And so that's where I kind of have had a hiccup, I guess, and I've had to redirect my thinking in terms of the principalship.

I think for the campus I'm in right now, it's a huge culture shock that I even have them look at data. Because before, it was – whatever we do is best practice even if it's watch my kids while I have a Starbucks run, that's best practice. But for us, it's been about sitting down, looking at the data, understanding, helping them understand it.

The second research question addressed the impact race, ethnicity, and gender had on the professional opportunities for Latina principals. After reviewing the data, the principals encountered a variety of obstacles. Themes included (a) gender and ethnic roles prior to attaining principalship, (b) gender, ethnic and racial discrimination, (c) the pressure of *familismo*, (d) underachieving campuses with resistant staff, and (e) the lack of Latina/o mentors.

Research Question 3: Latina Principal Qualities for Effectiveness

Research question three read: *What were the qualities or characteristics Latinas believed made them effective principals?* From reviewing the data, the Latina principals saw themselves as advocates for social justice, utilizing a variety of tools to eliminate the achievement gap. Many shared that they lead their school with empathy and a motherly instinct. Latina principals proudly served as role models of success for the next generation.

Advocates for Social Justice

The fourth major theme that emerged was that each Latina saw herself as an advocate of social justice in her school. No matter the demographics, geographic setting, or accountability rating of the campus, the Latinas championed the causes of equity and student success for all. The Latinas in this study shared that a school leader with a social justice agenda worked tirelessly to eliminate the achievement gap. This is of tremendous importance, as there is a lack of representation of minorities in the school principalship, leaving Latina/o students without an adult advocate at the highest leadership position on their campus to pursue a social justice agenda (Sánchez et al., 2008).

Elimination of the achievement gap. Gándara (2010) asserted, "Latinos are the least educated of all major ethnic groups" (p. 24). It is not contested that Latina/o students still suffer from the achievement gap. Campus leadership must actively work towards ending the achievement gap by setting the mission, goals, and holding high expectations for student success. Effective leaders cultivate a culture and school environment to ensure all students achieve.

Data driven. Anna shared her strategy of looking at data down to the level of each student in order to create individual intervention plans. She also stated the importance of human capital in creating a campus culture that is viable for closing the achievement gap:

And one of the things that we've been able to do here is really identify, because we're so little, really identify the strengths, the weaknesses, the needs of every single kid, every single kid. And once you're able to do that then you know this one needs this, this one needs that. And so as we're looking at trends and we're looking at well how can we group them together to be able to serve them, it makes it easier to be able to do that.

Ruby expressed her use of data in order to make sound instructional decisions. She stated:

I think in the school it's just making sure that the kids are served, that we're placing them where they need to be so that they can get the most out of their education so that we can move them ahead.

Faith approached combatting the achievement gap through the use of data as well. She shared her strategy:

You know, one of the things that I have found that has been different at the campus I'm at is to look at data, not to assume or not to continue to move based on prior achievement, or not move based on prior achievements. For me, it's about understanding who the kids are, what they bring, what they need, and then looking at my staff and identifying what weaknesses they have in meeting the needs of those kids and providing relevant staff development that's going to address that. And it's going to bring the needs of my kids and the strengths of my teachers together, but it doesn't come about if there's not the awareness that it needs to happen, the awareness of where we are.

Sandra also discussed the use of data on her campus to raise student achievement:

I think that in the short term, my presence has helped teachers see that they're not serving our kids in adequate ways, looking at our subgroup performance, looking at individual subject area performance. I don't know. I feel like I brought a real critical eye to that and it was not a very popular thing to do, so. But, I know long-term, it's raising, definitely raising the bar for quality for all kids, not just Latino kids.

Mary explained that decisions on her campus are based on a variety of data points:

We're working in conjunction with the national equity project. Secondly, one of the ways that we wanted to start with was that whole idea of who are kids who are successful here and who are not? What are their attributes when they are being successful? What are the attributes when they're not successful? And so we're beginning with focal student strategy.

We've also, as a school, shifted our practice in terms of a lot of professional development and more importantly, observations, so most of our teachers aside from maybe a few are really comfortable with having people observe. And we want—now, we're formalizing those discussions and that collaboration around students, and focusing on that. And so that, to me, is very important.

Cultivating a culture of caring. Anna shared the importance of having effective teachers, "Another thing that we're doing to help mitigate the achievement gap is finding quality people, because yes, you can be in a small setting, but if no one cares then it doesn't work."

Faith went on to explain her impact on Latina/o student achievement:

I can tell you that student achievement, the teachers are more aware of the needs of the kids. At the beginning of the year, we asked them to identify all of their special needs kids, all of their ELLs, all of their LEP kids and they focused on it, because they would say all you need to do is push a button on Eduphoria and you have that report. And for me, it wasn't about that. It was about you telling me who your kids are and get me that information and turn it into me.

Maria spoke passionately about her mission of eliminating the achievement gap:

Well, I think that for me, that's everything that I'm about. And the minute that my staff here said that they – one of the things that they said they wanted to work on was closing the achievement gap, which isn't what our practices and policies demonstrated.

She shared a story of a meeting that took place between members of her

leadership team that spoke to the core of her actions on equity and student achievement:

There was one instance where I heard—I wasn't there but I heard, that my

associate principal was with two teacher leaders and they were looking at the

schedule and they were trying to solve the problem and they looked at it. "What

are we going to do?" and they went back and forth, back and forth. And then

somebody said, "Well, what would Maria do?" and then they said, "She'd do the

right thing." I hear that a lot when people who work with me describe what I do.

While Mary is the principal of one of the highest-achieving high schools in the

nation, she still strives to ameliorate the gaps that exist. She shared:

We do have opportunity gaps. Several. It's a mindset, to begin with. You have

to believe that all kids are able to achieve. And that is at the heart of who I am

and my core, that everyone – you know, I mean, just the idea that only, you know,

30 years ago, my mom growing up in a farm and not even a town or village, it's

just an area, you know, you go on to nursing school and get a scholarship to the

capital since she'd go to university. And then me, being born in a developing

nation, would become the principal of one of the top public high schools in the

U.S. It's quite amazing to me.

So it's a belief that all kids can achieve, that all kids can do. And then

getting that mindset of, you know, work around mindset, and more importantly,

that it's not fixed. It's a growth mind set. It's very important to me because that

is at the core of what we do. And if you don't believe that, then what are you

120

doing in education? So that the first thing, developing that culture in that

environment.

Sandra spoke about meeting the social and emotional needs of the students that

she serves:

A philosophy behind really addressing the achievement gap for students of color

is addressing the social and emotional needs of students and not ignoring the

things that go on outside of school while not making excuses for our kids. And

that's hard, but I think there is the logistical part of our work and there's the

science behind our work as educators. But there is also the art, and the art is

having students feel cared about, having students feel acknowledged that their life

experience and what they bring to the table is important.

Goots also shared her strong conviction in cultivating Latina/o student success:

The staff knows that I have my soapbox that I can get on. But I always tell them,

you know, that thing is that if my Latino kids do well, so will the other kids do

well. If we focus on these kids moving up, they're just going to push everybody

else up.

Interventions. Ruby articulated her strategies for eliminating the achievement

gap as ensuring that the needs of her students were met:

For instance, one of the classes that I make sure that I wanted to get for

those kids was that reading class that helped them get up a little higher in their

levels.

A lot of tutoring, we're getting ready to start the tutoring program with a

meeting we're having, plus Saturday school.

121

Goots shared the interventions in place at her alternative high school campus to assist with credit recovery and the state's high school exit exam:

And afternoon homework club support classes, CAHSSE workshops. Yeah, we need to get these kids graduated. I don't care if you get all of your credits and you don't pass the CAHSSE. No, we need to help you get on that stage and we need—because some of these kids won't go the extra step to get what they need, sad to say. So, we're going to put in a means. So, it's a part of their curriculum, part of their everyday. We need to do all strategies, all the interventions during their school day.

Mentoring. Ruby plays the role of mentor with her students, battling the cultural divide while providing encouragement to complete their high-school studies. As she is a principal at a school with a large percentage of students on free and reduced lunch, many students work to help support their families. She shared how she champions the cause of high school graduation:

One of my biggest obstacles too was about my kids come from a lot of Hispanic families, a lot of them really Mexican families, and they think it's more important to go to work than to finish their education. But I even tell them, you know, "How long are you going to stay working at McDonalds before you get tired and you can't work anywhere else because you don't even have a diploma?" So, you know, I talk to them, you know, "You've got to finish this as much as...." I have kids wanting to leave school when they only need a semester to graduate and I try my best to keep them here, even if I have to put them in to do some of their coursework on the computer, just anything to just try and keep them here.

Jackie mentors her students as well. She motivates her ELs using her personal

narrative to encourage them. She shared:

I tell my story a lot. Every year, I go to the ESL classes and I always tell them

that I had to learn to speak English. Of course, they immediately say, "*No es*

cierto [It isn't true]." It's like, "Okay, never mind that you just called me a liar."

They can't believe that their principal at one point didn't speak English. They

asked me, "How did you learn to speak it so well?" I just said, "I'm not sure. I

think I just practiced a lot. I did a lot of reading. There were a lot of things I was

doing."

And I encourage them to continue with their education, because in

[retracted], in school, they tend to pigeonhole you and you got to work hard to

climb out of that. Otherwise, you'll stay there forever. I constantly tell them,

"You need to keep reading. You can't always be labeled no matter what."

I think, especially in a community where a lot of kids are considered

economically disadvantaged, I think mom and dad don't always talk to them

about opportunities.

High expectations. Mary A. expressed that her method of eliminating the

achievement gap began with holding high expectations and creating a college readiness

culture at her campus:

The kids I feel at this campus are at a disadvantage. Again, when they don't

know the English, when the community doesn't have a lot of economic growth,

there are gaps in achievement. My goal has always been college readiness, and I

think that's how I kind of closed the gap, because by the time they get to high school, it's really late.

When I came in, I evaluated the situation. One of the things that I want to work on is the college readiness component and having the students see beyond graduation at the high school.

The gap here really is the college readiness. Yes, we have issues with reading and math or whatever, but if you really want to talk about the gap in education, it's that the students here, with the courses we offer, the rigor in the courses is not there. What does it look like? Well, offering those courses, having the students already know where they're going, having them take meaningful electives that are going to help them. All of that is where I think that I need to do the most work. And I don't focus on minimum standards like passing TAKS and passing with a 70, because sometimes when you focus so much on that, that becomes your expectation.

Brenda shared Mary A.'s beliefs that raising expectations and creating a viable college culture were effective strategies to combat the Latina/o achievement gap:

I run my school as if I have a child in every grad level, the opportunity that I would want my child to have is the opportunity that I would want every child to have. One of the things that I wanted, and it kind of worked out – how, God knows, but one of the things that I wanted and the previous principal, Mr. L. and I were working on, is making this campus a place where kids can walk out of here with 18 to 20 credits of college courses.

We have Princeton Review working with is to improve our SAT scores.

We base it on data; kids at the 9th, 10th, and 11th grade take the PSAT. It is paid

by the district. We use the data to place kids in those classes so that we have the

opportunity for those scores to be up.

Goots shared her belief that battling the achievement gap begins with believing

that success is attainable for all students, and holding the same expectations for all:

So, many of these kids don't know that they already have it in them. They don't

even know.

When you believe, you achieve. When we started showing these students

how much they knew already, how much we needed for them to show who they

really were, they showed us who they really were.

Latina Leadership

The fifth theme that emerged from the study was the rich skill set that the Latinas

felt made them effective high school principals. Latina principals approached their work

using multiple lenses in order to increase student outcomes. They believed that the work

was positively affected due to their gender and ethnic background. Consequently, there

was a call to action to increase the number of Latina secondary principals that came from

the Latinas interviewed.

Being a female leader. The Latina sorority of principals communicated that they

felt being female was an advantage for their students. Many shared that they lead their

school with empathy and a motherly instinct. Others expressed that being female allowed

them to think and act in a manner different from a male principal, which positively

affected students, especially female students. They proudly served as role models of success for the next generation.

   Champions for girls. Anna saw herself as a champion for the girls on her campus. She commented:

   Certainly, I'm looking to the girls to make sure that they have opportunities in the things we know are crucial, math and science. And so I think maybe my gender tends to look for those other females that might not be aware of the strengths that they really have or the opportunities that are really out there for them.

   Faith shared her practice of noting gender equity while on walkthrough visits in teacher classrooms:

   When I go into a walkthrough, I make note of how many questions go to girls and how many questions go to boys.

   I'm more cognizant of treating all kids equally and are you treating them equally because they're male and female, and there has to be a balance there.

   Jackie shared an innovative approach to impact Latina achievement positively during one of the school's intersession breaks:

   We just had a week with an academy that we have here. We handpicked the most troubled kids on campus. It can be an exciting week with this group of kids, and I did talk to the girls. Most of them had been selected not just because they were failing in their classes and had attendance problems. They were fighters and whatnot. I talked to the girls about how they carry themselves and how people think about them. I asked them, "Do you think that the administrators on this campus argue with each other?" They said, "No," because to them if you argue

126

with another person, it should therefore lead into a fight. The revelation that they came to that you can disagree with someone without coming to blows was startling. I told them, "Girls, we're already behind the eight ball. One, we're women. We're Latinas. Already people are categorizing us. They're looking for our tattoos and our hidden cigarettes. We need to show them that we are decent women nonetheless."

Mary A. and her entire leadership team are female. She spoke about the impact her gender has in her leadership. She too takes on the responsibility of mentoring her female students:

I have three female assistant principals. The four of us are very caring. We are very task-oriented. We're very competitive. We're all mothers. I just feel that as a woman, you tend to have that motherly responsibility. A lot of the times when students want to talk to you or whatnot, you feel like that motherly – I don't know how to explain it. You automatically care because they're children and you think about, "If that's my child, how would I want the principal to be treating her?"

A lot of it is like personal. You think about your own kids. You think about yourself when you were a student, and especially my female students. I'm like a preacher. The other time I was in the cosmetology classroom and they were doing my manicure because they wanted to show me that they can do manicures or whatever. While they were doing it, I was talking to them and telling them, "You know, girls? This is a good job too. You know what? Because you're in the career technology, if this is what you want to do, you can have your own

business, you can do this," just kind of like always talking to kids in the cafeteria and always motivating students.

Brenda also shared her thoughts on being a role model for your female students:

I am the principal of this school, and for that reason I need to be sure that the kids know that, at all times, including our girls, especially our girls, because they need to make sure that they see themselves on this side of the desk.

And I always tell anyone who listens, any of the kids, if you ask them, I provide the same opportunity I would want my own child to have and it's the same thing here. If I want them to see me as a role model, especially as a strong female, then I need to show that and I try.

Sandra counsels her female students from her experiences facing the challenges of poverty, crime, racism, and sexism. She explained:

I also think that I have a very particular affinity for having open conversation with the young ladies here at school about why it's important for them to conduct themselves in a certain way or why it's important for them to speak in a certain way, because not only do they have poverty and crime and all these other things against them, right, but there's all these isms that they have to deal with, and then on top of that is the sexism piece that they sometimes don't even know or think about.

So, I think that being a woman definitely makes me want to kind of protect them in a motherly way but also being very – it also makes me want to be very upfront with the female students that I work with because I think they need

to understand. I feel like they need to understand that there's a lot more stacked against them.

Gender specific skills. Anna believed that as a female, she had a particular skill set that made her an effective school leader. She explained:

Well, I think that I have impacted my campus by bringing a lot more organization, at least that way. But I've also impacted by asking teachers, by asking our staff to look at their curriculums, to make their curriculums more rigorous, more student-centered, to be more flexible and understanding, interactive, engaging. But I think that certainly the organization for sure, hands down, because that has been something that has been very commented.

Faith also addressed the skill set that makes her an asset to her high school:

I came in with systems. I came in with expectations. And I never looked back. It was, you know, we talk a lot about when you go into a campus, get to know your people, establish relationships, and all that stuff. And I know it's important.

And although they resented it, hated it, I can tell you that they did it. And everything that I tell them, I always say that every decision that comes from my office is going to be student-centered. And whatever is best for the students is the decision that I'm going to make.

Mary A. explained her belief that being a woman allowed to be more successful at multitasking. She shared:

I think that being a woman, you can multitask. I think it makes you very successful at the high-school level because you know how to multitask, you know how to calm situations down, you know how to delegate. I think I'm very good at

that. I know who I can delegate what to and what I have to do myself. I'm very rarely in my office. I'm always in the classrooms, always talking to students. I just feel that the more visible I am, the better. The kids, they react to you. When the kids know that you're doing that, that you care about them, you've got their support.

Brenda spoke to how having a female principal has impacted her campus:

I think I should mention, you know, having a woman's side, the woman's touch to a certain degree. They have had three very strong male principals. And again, I don't take anything away from them because they were amazing. But I like knowing the kids' names. I like knowing what goes on in their lives, in their social life, their personal life. Maybe it's, again, the female side. I'm into social media because of it, I have a Twitter account, I have an Instagram account, I don't have a Facebook completely with the kids because that's dangerous, but I do follow, and at least our areas of social media to be interested.

I watch things that I know the kids would have an interest in because I want to connect with them. And I don't do it superficially, or I don't do it because I want to show off; I truly do it because I want to understand them.

It's important to make that connection and I think also the female side. I tell, when somebody's in pain, I cry. I don't know, I can't stop it, I can't do anything about that, I blame my mother for it. And you know what? I learned the first year that it's okay. It's not always the best thing, but they'll respect you for it because it makes you human. I've cried with kids here when their life is horrible and I've cried when their life is wonderful and I think a male principal,

130

especially a non-Hispanic, can give that, that *cariño* [affection] that you give to kids. That comes with your culture.

Motherly instinct. Ruby spoke to the motherly instinct she feels towards her students:

I think that motherly instinct in me. And all the kids are my *mijos* [sons] and *mijas* [daughters] you know. And I think that they feel that, I don't know, maybe as a woman and a Hispanic woman that maybe resembles or sounds like their mother where they feel like, "Hey Miss." Sometimes they'll even tell me, "Ah Miss, you sound like my mom." And I'll tell them, "Well see? You know, you're with me all day, so I am your mom."

And it's funny because sometimes the kids will call me mom, you know. They'll forget I'm the principal. "Mom, oh no, Miss Ruby." So, I'll say, "It's okay. I am your mom. I'm your mom for eight hours a day, you know, or if you staying a little longer then I'm still your mom."

On another instance, she conveyed stories about the close maternal relationships she has with students on her campus:

There was a day when a student came in and said, "Miss, just give me a hug so that I can get my day going." And I'm like, "You know what? You give me a hug so that I can get my day going because mine wouldn't start without yours." You know, that sort of thing, I get so emotional [wipes a tear away], but those are the kind of things that – they hit the heart.

I have this little boy that's in a wheelchair that just has one arm, no legs, and missing one arm, and when I'm having a bad day, I look at him and I'll say,

"You know what [name retracted]? You give me a hug because your smile

make[s] me know that things can get better every day."

Sandra shared her belief that her gender positively affects all the students on her

campus due to her motherly instinct:

I think there's a certain element of mothering that comes from being a woman,

and not every woman is, you know. And I didn't really tap into that side of

myself until a few years ago. As a teacher, I didn't feel very motherly. As a

principal, I definitely felt that switch.

Maria shared that her gender has played a role in how she views students, both

when she was a teacher and now as a principal. She also shared how her personal life as

the mother of two has left its imprint on her profession:

I think that in all honesty, my gender plays a role in the fact of what I have

noticed as an educator. Because when you're an educator in the classroom,

you['re] realizing who you speak to, who migrates to you, who doesn't.

The other thing that I noticed was that if a girl had an issue with me,

typically that girl was the girl that I was at that age and they didn't know it. So, I

would look at it a little bit differently. And I think that the fact that I'm a mother

of two boys and they both have different last names—one is a Lopez and one is a

Thompson; one looks like a kid that would come to this school and the other one

is extreme sportiest and plays water polo and rides a skateboard and listens to

Linkin Park, and the other one, you know. So having those two boys and even

saying after school, "Okay, I'll take you to 7-11 and get a Slurpee," and I park at

7-11 and they both get out, and to watch one be treated differently than the other

from the way they look and they're both mine. So, I think that comes more from being a mother, and as a woman, I would say.

While not a mother herself, Mary saw herself as the mother and matriarch of her high school. It is her priority to protect her students and keep them safe:

Again that whole idea of family; I mean, when I tell the kids that I'm here for them, not only legally I'm here, I am your mom when I'm here. I am your legal person because I am responsible for you. And I take that very seriously.

Our high school unfortunately has had lawsuits. We're still at the end of a suicide contagion. And I take that to heart. Now, obviously, I can't share what I know about the students with the community. But we have to make sure that we let them know that they're safe. So for me, it's about safety. Academics of course, but it is always about safety. So that, to me, totally plays into my growing up, my religious background, the way I was raised in terms of family, and also as a woman.

You know, I know it's a stereotype, but I think that as a woman I can definitely talk to kids and I am seen as a safe person to talk to. I'm a nurturer by nature, so when I talk to kids, I talk to them, yes, I'm still Miss Mary or Miss M, as they call me. I can't obviously divorce myself from that so as a woman, the whole nurturing aspect, and I love that.

As stated by most Latina principals, Goots articulated that she sees her students as her own children and treats them as such:

I'm a mom and I call them my babies. You're my *mijo* [son] now, my *mija* [daughter]. And for some of these kids, that's what they need. They need a mom.

They need a Mexican mom. But a Mexican mom like my mom, hmm – not a mom that they're going to walk over, you know. They need someone that knows that—you know what – she's going to be okay with me. They come and tell me things that they didn't even tell their parents, which is kind of scary. "Can you come with me to my house to tell my mom that I'm pregnant?" Like, "*Ayay*, so there we go."

Being a Latina leader. Principals play a pivotal role in creating school cultures that value diversity, leading to increased minority student achievement (Gardiner et al., 2008; Ross & Berger, 2009). The Latinas in this study were cognizant that their ethnicity positively affected their campuses. Latina principals communicated a skill set that made them successful, including: (a) being bilingual, (b) serving the Latina/o community, and (c) connecting to the Latina/o community, and (d) serving as a model of Latina/o success.

Bilingual leaders. Anna explained that her ability to speak Spanish aids parental and community relations, reversing the disenfranchisement of the Latina/o community she serves:

By virtue of being a Spanish speaker, I was able to impact that area [parental involvement] significantly, because before I got here, in the previous administration, it was English only, and so the Spanish speakers never understood what was going on. They never felt informed, not in the loop, things like that.

Parents can speak to us. We understand and we can communicate back to them, and then they feel, "Oh, I get it. I know what's going on." And that is going to translate to then our community. They will be able to speak about what goes on here.

134

Faith became the first Latina to serve at her high school, located in a community that is predominately Latina/o. She spoke about the importance of communicating with the Spanish-speaking community:

One of the things in bringing on a new team was the awareness, the realization that my team has to reflect the community. And so, I have a diverse group, and part of that was the need to be able to communicate with our Spanish-speaking community, which we have a good number. And so now that I am a Spanish speaker and two of my administrators are, and then I'm looking to bringing another one in that would be bilingual, the door has opened up for them to come in. And so whereas before – and one of the parents mentioned that when they had tried coming in last year, that although they had conversation and they met, they never felt that they understood what they were requesting because of the language barrier.

Ruby shared how being Latina and speaking Spanish has allowed her parents to see her and the schoolhouse as more accessible:

I think just like parents, they just want to – I don't know, they want to belong. They want to be heard. They have their concerns, so I think that – and I've gotten compliments sometimes in a while, "At least we can talk to you. The other man never understood us… he really didn't have an open-door policy where we can just come in and talk to you, you know. You're always available, and when you're not, you call us back."

And you know my Spanish sometimes is I call it *mocho* [broken] because there are some words that they say that I just cannot figure out.

135

Parental involvement in this district has been pretty decent because people come in for the parent chats. Parents here are still very – the Latino parents I would say more than anything are still very interested in *la maestro* [the teacher]. What does the *maestro* have to say? What does the *directora* [principal] have to say? How is my kid behaving? You know, whether they will come in and see a teacher about academics, they will come in and ask about behavior. So I think that they feel it's important for them to feel comfortable coming in. So I think that's where I also developed a lot of the good rapport.

Jackie also spoke of the importance of being bi-literate in achieving Latina/o parental involvement:

My husband is Anglo, so my last name throws them off a little bit. They're so pleased when they find out that I can speak Spanish. I think that maybe some of the guard that they have is dissipated when they realize that *es gente* [is my people]. Sometimes they don't always like what I have to say to them, but it's all in your approach. I think that I do believe that their guard goes down when they realize that I'm Hispanic; then suddenly I'm a human once again.

Sandra also spoke about speaking to parents on a daily basis, and the importance of speaking to them in their native language:

I speak to them in Spanish. But you know, I feel a little more comfortable and I can speak to them in a way that I will joke around. I don't use formal Spanish with the families… just colloquialisms a lot.

Maria stated that she believed that her presence as a Latina had positively impacted her campus due to her ability to communicate in Spanish and her unyielding advocacy for her historically disenfranchised students:

I think that it immediately impacted students and the community because I speak Spanish. And I came at a time when my associate principals were also Spanish speakers and Latinos. I think that was embraced because 70% of those families were Latinos and the school was known as a Vietnamese/Asian school. So when you saw things that were of benefit to students, you would see a group of Asian students receiving those things. If you saw things that were punitive, things that weren't right, there were Hispanic students who were being, kind of, encountered with that. So I think the mere fact of what I look like and who I am was one thing for the community immediately.

Mary spoke about the trust and comfort level parents and students feel at knowing that she is a Latina who also speaks Spanish:

They're surprised when they meet me that I am [Latina]. They're surprised when, you know, that she speaks Spanish. I'm like, "Yeah, I speak Spanish. Hablo Español." And I think they can trust the fact that because you have that in, if you will, that they feel a little more comfort and say, "Oh yeah, you can talk to Ms. M."

Goots shared that speaking Spanish and being Latina has allowed her to serve an otherwise disenfranchised population effectively:

You get these parents who are disenfranchised from the schools. They don't come to schools because there's nobody that will speak to them. So they come in

tip toeing and they come around the corner, "*¿Habla Español? ¿Habla Español?* [Do you speak Spanish? Do you speak Spanish?]"

Serving the community. Anna believed that by virtue of being Latina, she is a leader that seeks to work for students and communities that need her most. She explained:

I mean the part that I think makes a difference is that I'm very interested in helping other people. I'm very interested in helping our community. And this community is an impoverished community. And the part of the reason why I decided to come here is that this zip code, this area it has a lot of meanings. And I felt like we've already experienced a lot of success and set up a terrific program for this community, for this group of people out here.

Anna spoke about how her ideals of caring for people were shaped by her ethnic background:

I think my Hispanic community, or my family in my community, was always very close-knit, and people in my family wanted to help each other. And so I also lived in an extended family, and so you can't help but – and so some of those things that I think I learned, grandma's living with you and now your aunt is living with you, and that's just the way it is, I think in some way I'm replicating those same point or another have all come through my house. And currently we still have two of my sisters there with her kids, and it's fine.

So I think that I have to say that it came from home. And I was going to say too the ethnic background I think in thinking about what does our city need? What does our community need? I live in this community.

138

But now, even before, I really felt like these guys need a chance too and they need quality people that are going to help them, that are going to put something out there that is achievable and that will help them help their communities and their families.

Faith spoke about a risk she took in order to provide a voice to the Latina/o community:

In fact, I had one parent come in who was part of my parent superintendent's advisory council who was only Spanish-speaking, and so I took a risk in doing that. But why not be a representative? What is the district doing to address the needs of the community members? And so she went and then she came to see me, and she thanked me for the opportunity. And she says, "I don't think that in the last few years I would have been given the opportunity because that was not the focus. That was not the need." I tell you, that was kind of a risky thing to do, but she represents our community. She represents my kids.

Ruby explained that being representative of her community has allowed parents to feel comfortable coming onto the campus to speak with her:

I even have parents that come in and just talk to me about different things, you know, where they feel comfortable, you know, just – a perfect example is I had a little girl who is suicidal, and me and the parents had a lengthy conversation about what was going on with her, what was going on with them. So therefore, well, I thought, you know, get a counseling degree too, but it was interesting that it's been so good that after that conference, they've come in two or three times after

that just to talk – to talk about their daughter, to talk about her progress, to talk about her academics, to talk about themselves.

Connecting to the community. Mary A. shared that being Latina has equated to an almost automatic connection between her and parents and students:

Believe it or not, you always hear the comments of whenever there's a school that is highly populated with Hispanic people, the community and the students, when it's somebody that's White or Black or something and the majority of the kids are not, there's a hard time connecting to that person because it's a race thing. You automatically assume that if the person's White or Black, they don't speak Spanish, so then there's already the distress that you're like, "No, you know what? You don't speak my language therefore I probably can't trust him or her," et cetera, et cetera. But, I think that being Hispanic and being in this particular community, people automatically make a connection with you, and that's just how it is.

Brenda shared that her perspective of being Latina has changed the way parents engage on her campus:

I think it [being a Latina principal] has changed the concept of what parental involvement was and what they expected to do. I think that when they first – again, it has helped that I brought a lot of these parents from the middle schools. They kind of followed me over here, and that has helped. But, I don't ever use my parents, unless we have to, and unless I'm doing it with them, to clean or to do something that you hire other people to do. They're part of monitoring, they're part of – they help at the store selling stuff. I have a large booster parent program

140

in band and athletics and they run the fundraising, they run the buses for chaperones, they run most of the stuff, and we don't worry about it as much.

We want them to be able to do more. We also provide them with – we have parent academies where we bring from family management to economic information.

Sandra spoke about her ability to speak to her Latina/o parents in a more familiar, less formal manner that has led to increased parental involvement:

But I think with parents I'm able to have this feeling of levity, almost. And you know, just almost, you know, being able to joke and kid but really just come back to the seriousness of things. I think my presence here in particular had allowed families who were not – and this is just my sample from, you know, families that are currently seniors who have been here for four years. Parents who were not involved before feel more involved now. I don't reach out to the parents I know are going to show up because I know they're going to show up. I reach out to the mom that sits in the parking lot and brings her kid lunch, or the mom who's, you know, scurrying to drop her kid off before she goes to work. You know, because there's certain parents who are just constant fixtures, and that doesn't mean that I exclude those parents, but I know that I can count on them.

I have food at meetings all the time. I call… we have this auto dialer. I don't call all 345 or all 300 homes, you know, but little things like when I first got here, I spoke to parents and they made mention of certain things like any kind of message from the school would always go out from the secretary. So, things to

help parents feel comfortable – I give them all my cell phone number. Every time

a parent comes in the office, I give them a business card.

Mary- You know, I've had a couple of parents say, "So nice to see a

Latina as a principal." I'm like, "Well, thank you very much", you know.

Model of Latina success. Mary explained the importance of being a role model

to Latina/o students:

You know, I think obviously my role is overt because I'm the principal. I think in

other ways, it's symbolic. It's not that I'm a figurehead, but symbolic in the sense

of who I am as a woman. I think that's important for all kids to see. I think that it

is important that they know I'm a Latina, and I always – you know, they know

that I am.

But I think that it's important for them to see me or see other people, not

just Latinos and other ethnicities, but in terms of the power structure. I think

that's important.

Actually, one of my teachers told me, "You know, the students are afraid

of coming to talk to you lately." "Why?" "Well, it's not that you're not

approachable." I'm like, "Okay, so why not come talk to me?" And she's like,

"Well, it's because she really admires you for what you do and you're a Latina."

You know, I'm like, "Well, that's sweet, but she should come by you know. And

my door is always open, and that's the reason why I keep talking all the time."

So, in a sense, it's very important to me that I am in that role. So part of

me does feel that I'm in a role model situation. I don't see it as a burden. I really

don't.

Call to action. Now is the time to increase the number of Latina principals in the

United States. Across the country, the leadership on campuses does not reflect the

student population it serves. Latina/os accounted for 5.3% of public school principals

nationally in the 2007 school year (Sánchez et al., 2008). At the secondary level,

Latina/os accounted for only 4.5% of U.S. public school principals (Battle, 2009).

The Latina principals expressed the desire to increase the number of Latina

leaders nationwide. They provided advice for feature leaders and advocated for

increasing mentoring opportunities to recruit and retain Latinas in educational leadership.

Cultural capital and social justice advocates. Anna shared that Latina principals

were necessary to assist in mitigating some of the social issues Latina/os face because

they have the cultural capital to understand their student's struggles:

I live the same culture. I know, I watch the same programs, I watch the same

novelas, so I feel connected. I feel connected and I feel that I understand —when

they ask me a question I know where it's coming from.

For many of them, they don't know my history, they don't know my

background, but when students come to me or when parents do come to me and

they ask for certain things, I understand, "Oh, they don't have money for this."

And they don't have to say it, but I've lived it, I know. And, so I guess maybe

beyond the language, the culture, I think that's something that if you can do it,

that would be a way to really connect with your constituency, with your

community, with the people you serve.

Role models of Latina professionalism. Faith explained that more Latinas were

needed in schools in order to provide more positive role models for Latinas:

The girls look at you differently. The girls see a role model in you. They see

someone that looks like themselves.

And so I think it's very – as women, as Hispanic women, it's an

obligation, I think, that we need to continue pushing ourselves forward so that we

can become role models to others, so that we can meet the needs of our

community in this world that constantly changes. And we need to be represented

and our voice needs to be heard. And only we can speak for who we are and what

we bring and what experiences have molded us. And so it's an obligation. It's

almost like a God-given gift. Go, you know, make the change. And as a woman

and as a Latina, you have that obligation to make change. And so we do it. We

encourage people to do it.

Jackie also felt it important for Latinas to attain leadership positions in order to

serve as professional role models for the next generation. She explained:

However, I do believe that as a group, we do need to show that we are

professional people. We can do it. We can hang with the rest of them, as the kids

say. There's so many wonderful examples out there – politicians, Susana

Martinez, I went to high school with Susana. I was so, so proud to know her.

Sandra Cisneros. There are wonderful authors out there. Both of these ladies,

their careers were dominated by men, and yet people are now discovering, "Hey,

you know what? These girls got it going on." Yes, they do.

Importance of having mentors. Sandra shared advice for aspiring Latina leaders,

emphasizing the importance of the role of mentors:

144

I think the other piece of advice that I would give is to surround yourself with

people who understand what you may be going through, or at least have your

inner circle people that may not be identical to you, but people that you can count

on either from a professional standpoint, you know, having professional mentors.

Mary echoed Vanessa's advice for Latinas pursuing the principalship to seek out

mentors:

I would say this to anybody, but even more so for Latinos and Latinas, "Make

sure you got a good group of mentors, people that you can go to, you can ask

questions, whether it be everything from what's the best restaurant in town to

what do you think about this?, where you can bounce ideas. So you have that

close professional mentor role. I think that's really, really important. And

because that way, you can – people that you feel can give you good advice, you

know."

Goots was willing to be a mentor for other Latinas aspiring to be campus leaders.

She explained:

I hope there's a bunch of us that would be… I would be so willing to work with

anybody because somebody tapped me on the shoulder, and that person helped

me a lot. I think we need a support group for us to get together and share because

it's not going to be easy, but it's so well worth it.

The data showed that the Latina principals believed they possessed unique

qualities or characteristics that made them effective principals. Both gender and ethnicity

played a role in their success as campus leader. The principals experienced the high

school principalship as (a) advocates for social justice, (b) mothers, (c) women, and (d) Latinas and believed that their respective campuses were better for it.

Summary

This chapter outlined the findings from the qualitative data collected to understand the experiences of Latina principals in both established and burgeoning Latina/o communities. Data analyzed included survey information, field notes, and the one-on-one interview that allowed the participants voices to be heard.

Open and in vivo coding, as well as interpretation was completed from all data collected in the field leading to the five large conceptual categories and themes that emerged answering the three research questions, including (a) Latina/o ethnic identity, (b) professional trajectories, (c) obstacles, (d) advocates for social justice, and (e) Latina leadership skills.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Introduction

The Latina/o population in the United States continues to rise (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). This translates into a bourgeoning population of school-aged Latina/o in U.S. public schools (Malott, 2009). While the diversity of classrooms is changing, campus leadership has remained mostly White (Cammarota, 2006).

Second only to the classroom teacher, a school principal has the most significant impact of student success (Day, 2007). Due to this influence, it is imperative to increase the amount of Latina/o principals throughout the United States. This study provided voice to 10 Latinas who shared their experiences as high school principals.

This chapter is structured into seven sections. An overview of core terms is provided for clarity. The summary of finding provides an overview of the study's data findings. The discussion section delivers an in-depth review of the findings to the three research questions in light of the relevant literature. The implications section provides a discussion of how this study's data can be used to shape policy and practice in hiring of Latina secondary principals. All limitations of the study are then presented. Recommendations for future research are articulated. Lastly, the chapter ends with a succinct conclusion and a call to action.

Definition of Core Terms

Critical Race Theory (CRT): A conceptual framework used to examine and to understand how race and racism affects students and communities of color (Irizarry & Donaldson, 2012).

Familiasmo: A Latina/o cultural value which underscores the strong connection to the nuclear and extended family (Espinoza, 2010).

Latina/o: A person who shares a cultural background with origins in Mexico, Central America, South America, Spain, the Caribbean, and/or Puerto Rico, regardless of race.

Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit): A branch of CRT that is specific to the experiences or race, racism and ethnicity of the Latina/o community (Pérez Huber, 2010).

Summary of Findings

Latina high school principals are in a small minority of secondary school leaders in the United States. Through the lens of both CRT and LatCrit, the experiences of Latina leaders were studied, documented, and analyzed. The experience and obstacles of the principals in this study provide the foundation for strong, passionate leadership. As females and as Latinas, they experienced discrimination that did not end when they achieved their positions. These struggles and their self-described motherly instincts created advocates for equity and social justice on their campuses.

The purpose of this critical ethnographic study was to understand the experience of this culture-sharing group. Through the use of qualitative procedures and analysis, this study answered the following research questions:

Research Question 1: *What were the experiences and obstacles Latina secondary principals encountered in obtaining their leadership positions?*

Research Question 2: *What impact did race, ethnicity, and gender have on professional opportunities for Latina principals?*

Research Question 3: *What were the qualities or characteristics Latinas believed made them effective principals?*

The experiences of the 10 Latina high school principals that participated were analyzed through the interview process, observation, and survey information. These rich data were categorized into the following five conceptual categories based on the three research questions: (a) Latina/o ethnic identity, (b) professional trajectory, (c) obstacles, (d) advocates for social justice, and (e) Latina leadership skills. Themes within each category were identified and explored using in vivo testimony.

The voices of the Latina principals were used to provide a voice to a historically disenfranchised group. The narratives may serve aspiring Latina/o leaders to in their pursuit of the principalship. On a systemic level, the data from the study may help guide teacher preparation programs, school districts, and state educational agencies implement policies to recruit, prepare, hire, and/or retain underrepresented Latina secondary principals throughout the United States.

The narratives of the principals conveyed their strong ethnic ties and identity, which they attributed to being the foundation for their success. They shared similar stories of ascending to the principalship, including the importance of mentors to offer encouragement. They shared their desire to make a difference in the lives of the children they served and ensure that all students reached their highest potential.

The principals shared a variety of obstacles on their path to becoming principals and within the high school principalship. Obstacles experienced were both internal and external in nature. Principals faced hardships in accessing higher education. Several principals struggled with balancing their personal and professional lives. Many told

similar stories of the discrimination they faced as Latina females navigating the system as women and as women of color.

The Latinas championed the causes of equity and student success for all, immaterial of the demographics, geographic setting, or accountability rating of their respective campuses. Having empathy due to common experience, the principals actively and aggressively sought solutions to raise Latina/o student achievement. The principals served with a social justice agenda, working tirelessly to eliminate the achievement gap, promoting a safe and viable educational setting, and providing leadership and mentorship for all stakeholders.

The participants identified a set of skills that they believed made Latinas particularly effective campus principals. The ability to communicate in Spanish exponentially increased parent and community involvement. Due to the demographic shifts, Latinas served as images of success for the many Latina/o students on their campus. Furthermore, Latinas had a desire to serve underserved populations, willing to face the challenges associated with leading campuses with high needs.

Discussion of Findings

Research Question 1: Experiences and Obstacles

Latina/o Ethnic Identity. All principals in this study self-identified as Latinas. The research states that ethnicity encompasses the cultural traits of a people, such as their language, shared heritage, food, and customs (López, 2008). A question included in the interview protocol asked the principals to identify not only their ethnic background, but also how they believed it had shaped them. They provided narratives about their strong ties to their ethnic and cultural background. In particular, they shared how being Latina

has shaped their lives, including being bilingual, their cultural and ethnic values and beliefs, and the importance of *familia*.

In this study, CRT promoted "the voices and narrative of people of color" (Stovall, 2006, p. 244). CRT allowed for the capacity for critical study of how oppression intersects within the lives of people of color. LatCrit "examines experiences unique to the Latina/o community" (Pérez Huber, 2010, p. 77). For the participants, these unique experiences included language, their shared heritage, experiences of racism, and discrimination.

The duality of growing up a Latina. The Latina principals spoke about the duality of being a person of color growing up in the United States, navigating two distinct worlds at once. Hite (2007) referred to this successful straddling of the American culture and the Latina/o culture as being bicultural. They shared how cultural norms in their Latina/o households differed from American mainstream ones. They understood and embraced the dual nature of their existence and have found success in both worlds.

All 10 principals shared that Spanish was their first language and that they believed themselves to be proficient in it. For Latina/os, Spanish is more than a language; it is a tangible tie to the homeland. Espinoza-Herold (2007) conducted an ethnographic study to analyze the power of *dichos*, proverbs in Spanish that the "reveal beliefs and values shared by most individuals in the community" (p. 264). The researcher found that the use of Spanish was significant for Latina/os, for it allowed for the transmittal of discourse across generations and in varied contexts. The principals in this study echoed the same sentiment. Spanish allowed them to remain attached to their heritage and to communicate across generations.

Latina/o values and beliefs. The principals felt a strong personal connection to their ethnic background and were aware of how their distinct Latina values and beliefs shaped their lives. Several spoke to the importance of family, with a particular emphasize on the cultural belief that *familia* comes before all. Espinoza (2010) explained the cultural value of *familismo* as having a "strong identification and attachment to family, both nuclear and extended, [that] requires members to prioritize family over individual interests" (p. 318). Mary summed it up best when she stated, "The overriding thing that made me was my family. And my mom would always remind us *la familia, la familia, la familia*. So, it was always about family."

The Latina principals felt that working hard and perseverance were cultural traits handed down generationally. Latina/os are shaped in large part by the values they receive from their family. These family-instilled values include (a) a dedication to family, (b) defined gender roles, and (c) persistence (Durant, 2011; Hite, 2007).

Awareness of being the other. The participants shared their experiences of being a minority, the other, in the United States. There is a widespread omission of the history and contributions of Latina/os and other underrepresented groups in the curriculum (Aveling, 2007; Kohli, 2009). Several principals acknowledged comprehending their disenfranchised status at a young age. This led to the desire to be resilient and help others that may follow. Wright and Masten (2005) defined resilience as the ability to adapt to past and present adversity.

Faith shared her awareness of being a member of a disenfranchised group and how that experience made her strive to be better, "I think that the idea that we were as

152

Hispanics always lagging behind was always in the back of my mind and made me continue, made me go to school, made me do one step further."

Professional Trajectory

The Latina principals were asked why they sought out the principalship. Professional trajectory was the second large conceptual theme that emerged. The subthemes that emerged were (a) mentors encouraged them, (b) the desire to have a larger impact on student success, and (c) the quest of being a viable alternative to the models of leadership they saw.

The role of mentors. Quilantan and Menchaca-Ochoa (2004) found in their study of Latina superintendents that when Latinas had access to a mentor, it was a critical factor in their professional attainment. While that study was on Latina superintendents, the same held true in this study. Informal mentors in the professional lives of seven out of the 10 participants guided their decision to seek the principalship.

The desire to have an impact and serve. Latina principals in this study explained that their desire to become principals was closely tied to the effect they wanted to have on the students they would serve. Principals spoke about the desire to serve their students, while improving their lives. Castillo et al. (2009) found that the influence of school faculty and staff was one of the top three most significant factors in the academic success or failure for Mexican American students.

The principals understood that moving into administration was their opportunity to make a larger impact on the success of students. Méndez-Morse's (2004) study of Latina school administrators found that Latinas entered the realm of administration due to their desire to make a difference in the lives of Latina/o students in response to their

personal experiences. Ruby spoke about her desire to make a difference in the lives of the students she serves, "And I came with high hopes of making a difference with kids and helping them get a better life and make sure they graduated."

Desire to be a viable alternative. Another factor in the decision-making for the principals in seeking the principalship was what they perceived as a lack of qualified candidates to assist students achieve. As the student population continues to become more diverse, the same cannot be said for school leadership, as "90 percent of principals are White" (Sánchez et al., 2008, p. 2). Latina/o students lack an adult advocate at the highest leadership position on their campus to pursue a social justice agenda.

Obstacles

A common theme for all participants was the existence of barriers. The Latina principals interviewed cited a variety of barriers on their paths to attaining the principalship. While most obstacles were external, there were internal barriers that they had to overcome in order to meet their career goals. In achieving the principalship, the leaders encountered an obstacle early on in accessing higher education. Several principals noted internal barriers, including disbelief about their abilities and capabilities.

Access to higher education. Latinas face several obstacles in accessing higher education. Financial hardships were felt by the principals as they navigated a college degree. First generation Latina/o parents cannot assist their children in a system with which they are unfamiliar. This study mirrored the results of Niemeyer et al. (2009) that found Latina/o students often faced the environmental barriers of parents who lacked an extensive formal education or having at least one parent who did not speak English.

The Latinas felt that they were ill-prepared for college due to a lack of preparation and knowledge in high school. They echoed the sentiments found that Latina/o students are underrepresented in college preparatory classes such as AP and Honors due to racial and ethnic discrimination (Solórzano & Ornelas, 2002). This disparity in college preparation left them feeling unprepared for the rigors of college classes.

Internal obstacles. When asked about obstacles to reaching their goal of the principalship, the Latina principals spoke about internal obstacles with which they struggled. Principals struggled to juggle their professional aspirations and familial obligations. They also struggled with the idea that they had the skill set or experience to be "ready" to serve as a high school principal.

This study echoed McGee (2010), who studied female administrators in Florida to explore self-imposed barriers to obtaining an administrative position. The most common barrier was "choosing to raise their children first and find balance between career and family responsibilities" (McGee, 2010, p. 10).

Research Question 2: Impact of Race, Ethnicity and Gender on Professional Opportunities

Obstacles

A new set of obstacles arose for the leaders after attaining their positions. They also overwhelmingly found themselves leading schools lacking in high expectations for all students, leading to lower student achievement and resistance and dysfunction from the other adults in the building.

Gender and ethnic roles. As Latinas, these high school principals are twice disenfranchised, as women and as a part of an ethnic minority (Quilantan & Menchaca-

155

Ochoa, 2004). To obtain their positions, they had to overcome the gender roles ingrained within both the American and the Latina/o cultures.

Latinas suffer the effects of cultural norms in both the American ethos and the Latina/o ethos. While women working outside of the home are commonplace within the American culture, leadership has traditionally been seen as a male role (O. Reyes et al., 1999). In the traditional Latina/o culture, men are seen as the breadwinners and women hold the role of caregiver and homemaker (Cammarota, 2004; Valentine, 2006). Latina women are raised with specific gender roles that include the belief that Latinas should be "docile and passive" (Quilantan & Menchaca-Ochoa, 2004, p. 124).

Obstacles in the position. The obstacles and struggles did not end once the Latinas achieved their leadership positions. Each spoke about the obstacles they encountered coming into the high school principalship. The struggles they shared included (a) gender, ethnic, and racial discrimination; (b) the pressure of *familismo*; and (c) underachieving campuses with resistant staff.

Latinas have additional hurdles to climb as they are also exposed to racism and discrimination. Cammarota (2006) explained that racism is embedded into the American psyche to believe "that people of color naturally possess intellectual capabilities inferior to those of Whites" (p. 4). Guiliano et al. (2011) found "a general pattern of own race bias" (p. 27) in hiring, evaluations, dismissals, and promotions which is discriminatory to people of color. When they do reach the leadership position, they supervise and lead in manners that differ from the dominant archetype of leadership, which leads to their work being criticized (Fennell, 2005). Reed and Evans (2008) stated, "the complexities of

156

race-based and gender-based assumptions permeate other leadership arenas… including school leadership" (p. 478).

Latinas are faced with the cultural value of *familiasmo* (Espinoza, 2010). *Familiasmo* is the strong connection and attachment to family, both nuclear and extended, in the Latina/o culture. This deference to the family becomes a barrier to Latinas when they place the needs of the family before their own professional aspirations (Hite, 2007). This strong familial tie makes it difficult for Latinas to devote themselves fully to their academic endeavors.

Cammarota (2004) studied the negative effects the stereotype threat had on Latina/o student achievement. Students in the study reported that a significant predictor for their achievement was the beliefs that staff had about their aptitude. Most students interviewed stated that school staff held a negative opinion about their intelligence and academic capacity. This was a major obstacle that some of the principals faced when taking the principal position in their schools.

Research Question 3: Latina Principal Qualities for Effectiveness Advocates for Social Justice

The fourth major theme that emerged was that each Latina saw herself as an advocate of social justice in her school. No matter the demographics, geographic setting, or accountability rating of the campus, the Latinas championed the causes of equity and student success for all. The Latinas in this study shared that a school leader with a social justice agenda worked tirelessly to eliminate the achievement gap. This is of tremendous importance as there is a lack of representation of minorities in the school principalship

leaving Latina/o students without an adult advocate at the highest leadership position on their campus to pursue a social justice agenda (Sánchez et al., 2008).

Elimination of the achievement gap. Gándara (2010) asserted, "Latinos are the least educated of all major ethnic groups" (p. 24). It is not contested that Latina/o students still suffer from the achievement gap. Campus leadership must actively work towards ending the achievement gap.

Campus principals set the mission, goals, and high expectations for student success on their respective campus. Castillo et al. (2009) found that the influence of school faculty and staff was one of the top three most significant factors in the academic success or failure for Mexican American students. Effective leaders create the culture and school environment to ensure that all students achieve. The Latinas in this study spoke to an exhaustive list of strategies to end the achievement gap. They were passionate about ending the achievement gap that plagues Latina/o students across the United States.

The ethnic mismatch between school personnel and the students they serve may lead to the dismissal of the cultural capital that Latina/o students bring. Having a Latina principal decreased the chance that the school leader perceived Latina/o students from a deficit model. The results of this study mirrored those of Monkman et al. (2005), who studied a first-grade bilingual teacher who acknowledged and celebrated the cultural capital students brought with them to school. The authors noted that this Latina teacher successfully understood and valued her students' cultural capital. The same held true for principals in this study. Sandra spoke acknowledging the capital students bring to school

with them, "The art is having students feel cared about, having students feel acknowledged that their life experience and what they bring to the table is important."

Latina Leadership

The fifth theme that emerged from the study was the rich skill set that the Latinas felt made them effective high school principals. Latina principals approached their work using multiple lenses in order to increase student outcomes. They believed that their work was positively affected due to their gender and ethnic background. Consequently, there was a call to action to increase the number of Latina secondary principals that came from the Latinas interviewed.

Being a female leader. The Latina sorority of principals communicated that they felt being female was an advantage for their students. Many shared that they lead their school with empathy and a motherly instinct. Others expressed that being female allowed them to think and act in a manner different from a male principal that positively affected students, especially female students. The Latinas in this study worked hard to ensure that their campuses were educating the whole child. This included making certain that the environment of the school meets not only the academic, but also the emotional and social needs of students (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006). Fennell (2005) further explained how women manage to "blend their roles as care-givers with those of visionary leaders" (p. 150).

Being a Latina leader. Principals play a pivotal role in creating school cultures that value diversity, leading to increased minority student achievement (Gardiner et al., 2008; Ross & Berger, 2009). The Latinas in this study were cognizant that their ethnicity positively affected their campuses. Latina principals communicated a skill set that made

159

them successful, including (a) being bilingual, (b) a desire to assist an underserved population, and (c) serving as role models for students and the community.

Many of the principals proudly detailed the increase in parental involvement since their arrival as principal. Parents felt at ease knowing that a fellow Latina led the school. The principals attributed this increase to their shared language and ability to communicate with their Latina/o parents in their native language (de la Piedra et al., 2006; Lieshoff, 2007).

Méndez-Morse's (2004) study of Latina school administrators found that Latinas entered the realm of administration due to their desire to make a difference in the lives of Latina/o students in response to their personal experiences. The Latina principals saw themselves as agents of change with the responsibility positively to influence the educational careers of the Latina/o students that have come after them.

Lalas and Valle (2007) found that the personal attention and support available from minority educators helped build self-esteem and academic advancement for students of color. The students on the participating campuses had a positive role model who looked like them, had a shared background, understood their struggle, and had overcome similar obstacles.

Call to action. There is no time like the present to increase the number of Latina principals in the United States. Across the country, the leadership on campuses does not reflect the student population it serves. Latina/os accounted for 5.3% of public school principals nationally in the 2007 school year (Sánchez et al., 2008). At the secondary level, Latina/os accounted for only 4.5% of U.S. public school principals (Battle, 2009).

The Latina principals expressed the desire to increase the number of Latina leaders nationwide. They provided advice for future leaders and advocated for increasing mentoring opportunities to recruit and retain Latinas in educational leadership.

There is a moral obligation for all students to have access to an equal education. Presently, the education that many Latina/o students encounter is one full of deficits. They encounter schoolhouses and personnel ill-equipped or unwilling to ensure their success. Latina/o students face inadequate EL programs. They are relegated to less rigorous courses of study or pushed out.

Students deserve to have culturally responsive leaders to meet the needs of all students (L. Johnson, 2006). Gardiner and Enomoto (2006) stated, "school principals have a critical role" (p. 561), as they set the tone for their campuses for equity and social justice. As Latina/o children make up approximately 22% of school age children in the United States, they need Latina/o principals to serve as advocates for social justice on their campuses (Gándara, 2010; Zarrugh, 2008). While the Latina/o community is one of the fastest growing and a highly represented populace of the students served, Whites continue to hold most key positions of power. It is imperative that schools have culturally, linguistically, and socially adept leaders to raise the achievement of Latina/o students (Hein, 2003).

Implications

This study has shown that Latina leaders have a skill set to ameliorate the achievement gap for Latina/o students, and ensure that tomorrow's workforce will be well prepared. The disparity in the numbers of Latina school leaders has negative consequences for Latina/o students. Non-Latina/o school personnel are dismissive of the

161

cultural capital Latina/o students possess, assigning them a second-class status

(Monkman, Ronald, & Théramène, 2005; Ochoa & Cadiero-Kaplan, 2004). This lack of

belonging propagates the feeling of otherness. The number of Latina instructional

leaders must be exponentially increased in order to mirror the student populace. The data

from this study provides guidance to administrator preparation programs, school districts,

and state educational agencies to implement policies and practices to recruit, prepare,

hire, and retain underrepresented Latina secondary principals throughout the United

States.

Administrator Preparation Programs

As the populace of the nation and its public schools continue to become more

diverse, school systems must employ critical educators that promote a social justice and

equity (Cooper, 2009; J. E. Johnson & Uline, 2006). In order to become a school

administrator in most states, candidates must possess a valid administrative credential.

Administrator preparation programs must devote their energies on preparing critical

leaders with a social justice and equity agenda. To carry out a social justice agenda,

school leaders "must hold a critical consciousness about power, privilege, and inequities

in society and in schools" (McKenzie et al., 2008).

School Districts

Brown (2007) explained that culturally responsive educators are a necessity in

order to serve students in the 21st century with the demographic changes that have been

sweeping our nation. Lalas & Valle (2007) found that the personal attention and support

available from minority educators help build self-esteem and academic advancement for

students of color. Students are able to have role models who not only understand their struggles, but also are in a position to bring about positive changes.

While some progress has been made in hiring minority leaders, at the secondary level, Latina/os accounted for only 4.5% of U.S. public school principals (Battle, 2009). Local school districts must take the lead in staffing campuses with campus leaders that are critical educators. Local school boards, in conjunction with their superintendents, should review hiring policies make the recruiting, training, and retaining Latina secondary principals is a priority.

School districts should invest in mentoring programs for both aspiring and current Latina principals. While mentoring is vital to the professional development of leaders, Latinas have historically had less access to mentoring. Méndez-Morse (2004) conducted a qualitative study of Mexican-American educational leaders and mentoring. She found that there was a significant need for mentoring for aspiring Latina leaders. Mentoring opportunities for current principals will also assist them in overcoming the various obstacles they face.

State Educational Agencies

State educational agencies need to promote the recruitment of critical educators in their respective states. While the literature explains the necessity for socially conscious leaders, there is a lack of minority leaders to take on this role in schools throughout the United States (Peters, 2010). As the student population continues to become more diverse, the same cannot be said for school leadership as, "90 percent of principals are White" (Sánchez et al., 2008, p. 2). The state should (a) partner with traditional and Latina/o-focused teacher and administrator associations, (b) promote administrator

preparation programs with an emphasis on social justice, (c) create policies that to increase alternative administrator preparation programs, and (d) provide financial assistance via grants for Latinas to enter leadership.

Study Limitations

The first limitation of this study was the subjectivity of the researcher (Patton, 1990). As critical ethnography "begins its scientific enterprise from a set of value-laden premises" (J. Thomas, 1993, p. 20), researchers need to ensure they do not affect the research process. Having been a Latina principal, I was cognizant to remain as objective as possible and while ensuring the high standard of rigor in both my data collection and my data analysis. The second limitation of this study was the population that was sampled. As the sample was 10 Latina secondary principals from the Southwest, it is difficult to generalize any conclusions to other underrepresented groups. Another limitation is that some of the interviews were conducted in a combination of English and Spanish during code switching. The Spanish was preserved and also translated into English. It is possible that some nuances were lost in the translation. Lastly, due to time and financial constraints, I spent a limited amount of time in the field with each participant.

Recommendations for Further Research

While Latinas continue to grow in number in the United States, their career development and management is underrepresented in the literature (Hite, 2007). Particular to education, there is a significant gap in the literature on Latina school principals, their obstacles in achieving their positions, their experiences in the position,

and the contribution that they make to Latina/o student achievement. This study allowed for the voices of Latina principals who lead throughout the United States to be heard.

While this research study was not constructed to learn of the resilience of the Latina principals, resiliency came up during various interviews. The first recommendation for future research would be to explore the resilience of Latina leaders qualitatively. This study also suggested the important balance that women leaders must find between their personal and professional lives. The second recommendation would be qualitative research on the balance of work and family.

This research study brought forward the importance of having a Latina leader on campuses with large population of Latina/o students. In order to study the relationship between Latina/o students and a Latina leader, there are three additional recommendations for future research. A quantitative causal research on Latina principals and Latina/o student achievement using a variety of measures would be helpful to measure if Latina leadership leads to increased student performance. Secondly, qualitative research on the student perspective and experience with Latina leadership would expand on the impact Latina principals have on the educational experience of Latina/o high school students. Since principals are responsible for the education of all the children in their care, it might also be useful to see what effect Latina principals have on students of other ethnicities.

Finally, future research on how to recruit, train, and maintain Latina educational leaders into the profession is recommended. This research would be instrumental to universities, state education agencies, and local school boards. In a profession that is made up of a majority of women, men still attain more leadership positions. As the

demographics continue to shift, there continue to be more opportunities to counsel Latinas into educational leadership.

Conclusion

Now is the time to increase the number of Latina high school principals across the United States. Latina/o children continue to underperform their peers academically. As one of the fastest growing demographic groups in the United States, Latina/os will play a pivotal role in the future of the United States. The approximately 22% of Latina/o students currently sitting in public school classrooms represent tomorrow's labor force. The failure to meet the needs of Latina/o students can have negative repercussions for the economy of the United States. The under-education of such a prominent portion of the population will adversely limit the number of skilled workers needed to stimulate the economy.

CRT and LatCrit were used as the conceptual framework to examine the experiences unique to the Latina principals. This critical ethnographic study sought to bridge the gap in the literature by allowing Latina principals the opportunity to have their voices heard. It examined (a) the obstacles Latina secondary principals have overcome in obtaining their leadership positions; (b) the skill set Latinas possess to increase the academic success of Latina/o students; and (c) the impact race, ethnicity, and gender have on professional opportunities for Latina principals.

The experiences of the 10 Latina high school principals that participated were analyzed through the interview process, observation, and survey information. These rich data were categorized into the following five conceptual categories: (a) Latina/o ethnic identity, (b) professional trajectory, (c) obstacles, (d) advocates for social justice, and (e)

166

Latina leadership skills to provide answers to the three research questions. The voices of the Latina principals were used to provide a voice to a historically disenfranchised group. The narratives may serve aspiring Latina/o leaders in their pursuit of the principalship. Each interview told the personal and professional experiences of the 10 strong Latina leaders across the Southwest.

It has been 67 years since the historical and pivotal *Méndez v. Westminster* case. Yet, Latina/o students in California and across the nation are still receiving a less than first class public education. This study has shown that Latina leaders have a skill set to mitigate the achievement gap and ensure that tomorrow's workforce will be prepared. On a systemic level, the data from the study may help guide administrator preparation programs, school districts, and state educational agencies implement policies to recruit, prepare, hire, and/or retain underrepresented Latina secondary principals throughout the United States.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Consent Form

NUESTRA VOZ: AN ETHNOGRPAHIC STUDY OF LATINA SCHOOL LEADERS

Angelica Maria Ramsey
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of Latina principals in U.S. public schools. You were selected as a possible participant because you are currently a Latina serving as secondary principal in a U.S. public school. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Angelica M. Ramsey, School of Education.

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of Latina secondary principals in U.S. public schools. This study is significant, for it will afford Latina principals the opportunity to share their perceptions on their ascent to the principalship, and their opinions of their role as social justice advocates. I am seeking the assistance of 10 Latina secondary principals nationwide who would be willing to participate during October 2012.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:
Participate in a face-to-face interview of approximately an hour; complete an online demographic sheet of 12 questions; and be observed performing normal job duties for approximately 2-3 hours.

In this study, I will ask you a variety of questions while visiting with you at your work site. Our conversations will be audio recorded to ensure accuracy. Your responses will be completely anonymous and held in strict confidence. Your name, the name of your school and district will be replaced with the pseudonyms of your choice.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

The risks are no more than the participant would encounter in everyday life.

The data, analyses, and results will be shared with you upon completion. This may be of direct benefit to you. There may be a direct benefit to society as the Latina/o community is burgeoning throughout the United States. Yet, Latina/os continue to be underrepresented as public school principals nationally. This study will afford Latina principals the chance to share their experiences in attaining the principalship and the unique skill set they have to ameliorate the achievement gap.

Compensation:
You will receive no payment for your participation.

Confidentiality:
The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only I will have access to the records.

All participants' names, school names, and the school district name are to be changed and replaced with pseudonyms to mask confidential demographic information that could identify participants. All original, digital audio recordings will be transferred to a computer that will be kept secure using a password encrypted computer. Any subsequent CD recordings made from originals will be stored in a locked file cabinet. After the three-year time period passes, all data will be deleted from internal and external memory sources. All hard copies will be shredded.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships. You may also withdraw from the study at any time. In the case that you chose to withdraw, all audio recordings and transcripts of conversations will be destroyed.

Contacts and Questions:
The researcher conducting this study is Angelica M. Ramsey. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact me at amtirado@liberty.edu. You may also address questions to Dr. Jose Puga at (956) 543-3224 or via e-mail at mjapuga@liberty.edu

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Fernando Garzon, Chair, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1582, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at fgarzon@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:
I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐   Please check-giving consent to audio recording of interview.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator:_____ Date: _____

IRB Code Numbers: 1407

IRB Expiration Date: 10/1/13

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Biographical Information

1. Please share with me your name (pseudonym), age, and current professional position.

2. Where were you born? If outside of the U.S., at what age did you come to the U.S.?

3. Please share with me your ethnic background and how you believe it has shaped you.

4. Please tell me what language(s) were spoken in your home. What language(s) do you consider yourself proficient in?

Professional Information

5. Please tell me about your school, including information about your student population and accountability status.

6. Please share with me why you chose education as a profession.

7. Why did you seek out the principalship?

8. Can you share your professional aspirations and the steps you have taken to attain your goal?

9. Have there been any obstacles in reaching your goal? If so, can you share them?

10. Did ethnic background, race, or gender have any impact on your professional growth and attainment?

Social Justice Information

11. Please share your practices for helping mitigate the achievement gap.

12. What part, if any, does your ethnic background play in that?

13. What part, if any, does your gender play in that?

14. Do you believe that other Latinas feel the same about this? Different? Why?

15. How do you believe your role as campus principal has impacted your campus? How has it impacted Latino student achievement? How has impacted parental involvement?

16. What advice would you give to other Latinas that aspire to be campus leaders?

APPENDIX C: OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Descriptive Notes	*Reflective Notes*
Area to Sketch	

APPENDIX D: DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

Personal Information

Your confidentiality is of the utmost importance to me. To that end, I am asking that you create the pseudonym of your choice that does not provide any identifiable information on the line provided. _____

Please provide a pseudonym for your campus that does not provide any identifiable information on the line provided. _____

Please state your ethnic background on your paternal side. _____
On your maternal side _____

Age _____

Please provide your marital status _____

Please provide the number and ages of your children, if applicable
_____

Was English your first language? ____If it was not, what was your first language?_____

Professional Information

Total years in education _____ How many years as a classroom teacher? _____

Total years as a principal _____ At the high school level _____

Current campus total population _____

Campus ethnic breakdown _____

Percentage of students who qualify for a free or reduced lunch? _____

Program improvement status of campus _____

APPENDIX E: INITIAL THEMES

Initial Themes

Personal	Professional	Obstacles
Strong ethnic ties	Mentor	Work and family obligations
Duality	Desire to serve	Racism and discrimination
Importance of family	Desire to have larger impact	Educational Choices
Desire to overcome adversity	Felt lucky to have job	Need to prove themselves
Value of hard work	Recruited for administration	Family pressures
Desire to succeed	Being a role model	Higher education struggles
Feeling of obligation	Motherly instincts	Low student performance
	Championing for girls	Gender leadership stereotypes
	Increased parental involvement	
	Cultural sensitivity	

APPENDIX F: IRB

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The Graduate School at Liberty University

October 1, 2012

Angelica M. Ramsey
IRB Approval 1407.100112: Nuestra Voz: A Critical Ethnographic Study of Latina
School Leaders

Dear Angelica,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the
Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. If data collection
proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to
human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms
for these cases were attached to your approval email. Thank you for your
cooperation with the IRB and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.
Professor, IRB Chair
Counseling

(434) 592-4054

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