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"TAKING OUR SEAT AT THE TABLE": A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF THE EXPERIENCES OF SEVEN LATINA ADMINISTRATIVE LEADERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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"TAKING OUR SEAT AT THE TABLE": A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF THE EXPERIENCES OF SEVEN LATINx ADMINISTRATIVE LEADERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A Dissertation
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education
in
Educational Leadership

by
Sharon Pierce
June 2017
"TAKING OUR SEAT AT THE TABLE": A NARRATIVE INQUIRY
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Approved by:
Dr. Enrique Murillo, Jr., Committee Chair, Education
Dr. Edna Martinez, Committee Member
Dr. Alexandru Roman, Committee Member
ABSTRACT

Currently, Latinas are the fastest growing population in the United States and comprise one-fifth of the female population (Roach, 2015). It is estimated that by the year 2060 Latinas will make up one-third of the females in the US (Roach, 2015). Gandara (2015) suggests there are several potential barriers that are holding back Latinas from academic and professional success. There are several critical factors that could explain why Latinas are underachieving: family obligations, work obligations, affordability, systemic barriers, lack of information and lack of role models and mentors (Espinoza, 2015, Gandara, 2008; Nunez & Murakami-Ramalho, 2012). This narrative inquiry examined the personal and professional lived experiences of Latina administrative leaders in higher education to gain a deeper understanding of how they navigated their educational and leadership trajectories. The primary conclusion of this study is the need to continue diversifying leadership roles in higher education. The participants in this study support previous findings that suggest that their firsthand experience and their support networks serve as catalysts along their educational and leadership trajectories (Espinoza, 2015; Gándara, 2015; González, 2007). In addition, their stories can provide critical information to not only serve the Latina student population and other under-served students in higher education, but can also help propel and influence women in non-leadership roles to new heights.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I want to thank my savior, Jesus Christ for giving me the grace to not only begin this educational journey eleven years ago but to finish it as well. He has kept me and guided me along the way. My scripture throughout my journey has been Philippians 4:13 – “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

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Muchisimas gracias!
DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my amazing husband, Adam, the love of my life. I could not have completed this journey without your unconditional love. You believed in me when I did not believe in my own abilities. Your words of encouragement kept me when I was on the verge of quitting. We have faced many challenges and sacrifices together through this eleven year educational journey, so this accomplishment is not mine along but ours. Together, with God’s guidance and grace, we made it. We are all done! Thank you for loving me, supporting me, and for always being there when I needed you the most. You helped make my dream a reality. I love you, Adam.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The Latina/o population is currently the largest and fastest growing minority group in the United States (Roach, 2015). In California, one in two children under the age of 18 are Latina/o (Roach, 2015), and the California Latino population is expected to exceed 31 million by the year 2050 (Lopez & Krogstad, 2015). More specifically, in 2015, Latinas accounted for one in five women in the U.S., and it is estimated that by the year 2060 Latinas will constitute one-third of females (Gándara, 2015). This rapid change in U.S. demographics presents a special challenge to the educational system.

For instance, in public schools, one in four females identified themselves as Latina (Gándara, 2015). From 1996 to 2010, in the largest higher education system in California, twice as many Latina students (from 165,595 to 323,424) enrolled into the California Community College (CCC) system (Ethnicity Snapshots Graph, 2011). During that same period, bachelor’s degrees earned by Latinas also more than doubled from 6,309 degrees to 13,149 degrees in California. While these achievements may be seen as a success for the Latina community, the underlying questions is: how, if at all, are institutions of higher education meeting the needs of the growing Latina population? Specifically, do institutions of higher education provide Latina students with positive role models?
Previous research suggest that this is not the case. Researchers have shown that there is a significant underrepresentation of Latinas in junior to senior faculty ranks and administrative leaderships roles in higher education (Garza, 1993; Leon & Nevarez, 2007; Medina & Luna, 2000; Nunez & Murakami-Ramalho, 2012; Santos & Acevedo-Gil, 2013). The few Latinas in faculty and leadership roles are usually concentrated in certain institutional settings such as community colleges. For instance, although Latina college presidents increased from 2.2 percent to 4.6 percent from 1986 to 2006, this increase occurred primarily in community colleges (King & Gomez, 2008). An explanation for this discrepancy could be that many minority faculty may not be adequately prepared for senior faculty and leadership opportunities, and may prefer institutions focused on teaching, such as community colleges, rather than those focused on research, such as universities (Glazer-Raymo, 1999). Furthermore, Latinas continue to face challenges in obtaining such positions as most are employed in non-tenured tracks positions as adjunct faculty (Lopez-Mulnix, Wolverton, & Zaki, 2011).

The lack of adequately prepared and underrepresented faculty can have significant ramifications for students (Ponjuan, 2011). Researchers have found that Latina/o faculty members make positive contributions by engaging students, enhancing campus pluralism, and conducting research geared towards racial issues (Ponjuan, 2011). Hurtado (2001) suggested that faculty of color provide symbols of professional success and create diverse educational learning
experiences for students. Providing students with diversity in a multiplicity of roles is extremely beneficial for students as they can visualize their own success.

Ultimately, the responsibility of diversifying the professoriate falls on those in administrative leadership roles, and significant change can also come through efforts of senior colleagues who are tenured, full professors by creating mentoring opportunities that provide support in navigating the tenure process (Ponjuan, 2011). Furthermore, a doctorate could provide access to obtaining administrative leadership roles in higher education (Haro & Lara, 2003).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2011-2012 females made up 51.4 percent of doctoral degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions (Digest of Education Statistics, 2013). However, Latinas represent a small fraction of the Ph.D. degrees conferred in the nation’s universities annually, as they only represent less than 2 percent of doctoral degrees awarded to women (Gandara, 2015). Moreover, research suggests that there continues to be a dramatic underrepresentation of Latina/o faculty members in higher education despite the increasing number of Latina/o students nationwide (Garza, 1993; Ponjuan, 2011).

Statement of the Problem

Research suggests there are significant benefits to students when they can racially identify with their teacher (Dee, 2004; Egalite, Kisida, & Winters, 2015). Students of color can benefit from own-race teachers as they provide positive role models, mentors, and advocates (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, &
Allen, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1992; Pitts, 2007; Valverde, 2004). In addition, same-sex, same-race role models have the potential to play a pivotal role in the academic success of Latina students (Medina & Luna, 2000).

In 2010, the U.S. Department of Education launched a national campaign focusing on teacher recruitment. Part of the recruitment focused on attracting African American and Hispanic teachers. While more than 35 percent of students in the United States identified as Black or Hispanic, less than 15 percent of teachers identified as teachers of color (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Unfortunately, the United States Department of Education’s campaign to practice targeted faculty recruitments is limited to the K-12 education system. Similar national-level initiatives for institutions of higher education are non-existent, so the problem of underrepresentation of Latina/o role models in institutions of higher education is expected to continue.

As established, in the United States, there is a low number of women in academic leadership positions at colleges and universities (Nunez & Murakami-Ramalho, 2012). Leon and Jackson (2009) define academic leadership roles as positions of president, provost vice president, deans, department chairs, and directors. These administrative leadership positions are typically in three specialty areas: academic affairs, student affairs, and administrative affairs (Leon & Jackson, 2009). According to the American Council of Education, in 2011 women held a mere 27% of the college and university presidencies (Johnson, 2016). Yet, the National Center for Education Statistics reported women make
up around 57 percent of the student population in higher education and have for about two decades (Digest of Education Statistics, 2016). As for Latinas, their share of the presidency was 3.8% in 2012 (Cook, 2012). In the same year, Latinas made up 41.7% of the student population enrolled in degree-granting postsecondary institutions (Digest of Education Statistics, 2016). There is clearly a gap between academic leadership diversity in institutions of higher education campuses and the student populations they serve, which indicates a greater need for a more representative and diverse academic administrative leadership.

Furthermore, increasing Latina administrators, faculty, and staff in community colleges and universities are important to ensure the success of current and future Latina students (Nunez & Murakami-Ramalho, 2012; Ponjuan, 2011). It is imperative that Latina students see leaders who look like them. They need to see real-life examples of Latinas in higher education leadership roles to recognize the full spectrum of academic and career possibilities.

Latinas continue to make up a small percentage of leaders in higher education administrative roles (Aleman, 2000; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Nunez et al., 2012). Research suggest that those women already in academic administrative leadership positions can serve as role models and mentors for aspiring Latina faculty members looking for leadership opportunities (Gonzalez, 2007; Gutierrez et al., 2002). As stated by Guramatunhu-Mudiwa (2008), women in general have the potential to make a difference by sharing information, being an advocate for women leadership, being a role model, and mentoring other women. Given this
opportunity, women in leadership roles “can make a big difference in increasing number of women qualified or strong in leadership positions in higher education” (Guramatunhu-Mudiwa, 2008, p. 33).

This foundational understanding that women, specifically Latinas, in leadership have the power to influence a new generation of leaders is the reason a great deal can be learned through the narratives shared by current Latina leaders. Their stories can provide critical information to not only better serve the Latina student population, and other underserved students in higher education, but can also help propel and influence women in non-leadership roles to new heights. Many Latinas are considered first generation college students and have the first-hand experience of navigating the complexities of higher education (Haro & Lara, 2003; Maes, 2010; Tovar, 2015). “Latinas are the linchpin of the next generation” (Gándara, 2015, p. 6). It is important that institutions of higher education in the United States become serious about acknowledging the importance of Latina administrators and the strengths they possess.

While research on Latinas in higher education exists, it is limited and narrowly focused on the Presidency and community colleges (de los Santos, Jr. & Vega, 2008; Gutierrez, Castaneda, & Katsinas, 2002; King & Gomez, 2008; Montas-Hunter, 2012; Munoz, 2010; Nidiffer, 2009; Rivera, 2010; Seltzer, 2016). Additional studies need to focus on a wider scope of administrative leadership roles in an effort to show the important role Latinas play in higher education (Murakami-Ramalho, Nunez, & Cuero, 2010). Furthermore, most studies focus
on a particular phenomenon, such as barriers experienced by Latina administrators (Curry, 2000; Elmuti, Jia, & Davis, 2009). However, there is a dearth in the literature of stories of Latina academic administrative leaders in their entirety. These stories need to be told organically and in their own words. Murakami-Ramalho et al. (2010) state the perspectives of Hispanic females are critical for institutions in understanding how to engage, recruit, support, and retain Latina talent.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this narrative inquiry study was to capture the stories and lived experiences of Latina females in administrative leadership roles within higher education. A great deal can be learned through the narratives shared by these women. This study examined the barriers and catalysts experienced by Latinas in achieving administrative roles in higher education to gain insight into the lessons they learned and struggles they endured. There is a need to provide a platform for Latinas to promulgate their stories of their educational journey in their own words, and represent experiences of cultural wealth and resilience that contributes to a larger body of knowledge for a wider audience.

There has been noteworthy research focused on women in leadership roles in education, but minimal research has focused on the stories and lived experiences of Latina leaders in higher education (Guramatunhu-Mudiwa, 2008; Murakami-Ramalho, Nunez, & Cuero, 2010; Ponjuan, 2011). This study filled the gap in current educational leadership literature by focusing on the stories and
lived experiences of Latinas in administrative leadership roles in three different institutional settings: community colleges, public universities, and private universities. Furthermore, the study explores barriers, catalysts, events, and influences experienced throughout their leadership journey.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the personal and professional experiences of Latinas in higher education administrative leadership roles of Presidents, Provosts, Chancellors, Vice Presidents, and Deans?

2. What pivotal moments did they experience along their educational journey?

3. How have their experiences shaped their approach to leadership?

Rationale of the Study

The rationale for this narrative inquiry study is to expand on the current research on Latinas in administrative leadership roles in higher education beyond what is currently understood. Though numerous studies have focused on women in general (Airini, Conner, McPherson, Midson, & Wilson, 2011; Eagly, 2007; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Longman & Anderson, 2016; Madsen, 2012), few have looked primarily at the experiences of Latinas in administrative leadership roles in community colleges, public universities, as well as private universities. Providing a platform for their voices to be heard could ultimately benefit the academic and professional success of future Latinas in higher education settings.
Leaving out or discounting their voices can be detrimental to Latina/o students pursuing higher education. This study provided a space for their stories to be told through their unique perspectives of their journey through the educational pipeline and beyond.

Assumptions

For the purpose of this study, there are numerous assumptions presented. First, based on the literature reviewed, there is a need for more representation of Hispanic women in administrative leadership roles in higher education which corresponds to the growing number of Latina/o students enrolling. Based on this information, Latina administrative leaders in higher education would recognize and understand the barriers experienced by other Latina women in higher education, whether faculty or student.

It is assumed that those participating in the study provided a truthful and accurate representation of their experiences both personally and professionally. In addition, it is assumed that the data is accurately representative of the participants’ experience.

Definitions of Key Terms

Defining terminology for this qualitative research study is important in understanding the findings and perspectives of Latina voices. Definitions are as follows:
Administrative Leadership Role: The term administrative leadership role was chosen to identify leadership positions in higher education such as the roles of President, Chancellor, Provost, Vice-President, and Deans.

Barriers: Obstacles faced by the Hispanic female leaders in their ascension to their administrative roles in higher education.

Catalysts: a person or thing that provokes or speeds significant change or action (Merriam-Webster, 2017).

Hispanic: “Refers to people whose origin is Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Spanish-speaking Central or South American countries, or other Hispanic/Latino, regardless of race” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012, p. 1). For the purpose of this study, the researcher will use the terms Hispanic and Latina interchangeably.

Intersectionality: refers to the ways in which multiple identities (e.g., gender, race, class) intersect within the constructs of power systems (Crenshaw, 1991).

Latino: The racial term “Latino” was chosen to be inclusive of all ethnic backgrounds that identify with the Latino identity and as a male. In Spanish, the “o” gives the word a masculine identity (Cuello, 1996).

Latina: The racial term “Latina” was chosen to be inclusive of all ethnic backgrounds that identify with the Latino identity and as a female. In Spanish, the (a) gives the word a feminine identity (Cuello, 1996).

Latina/o: Refers to the racial term for the Latino/a male and female community as a whole.
Overview of the Study

There is a significant disparity in the number of Latinas in administrative leadership roles in relation to the growing numbers of Latina/o students in higher education. The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to explore the personal and professional lived experiences of Latina leaders in administrative positions in higher education. Their personal and professional lives were examined to understand how their leadership approach was cultivated and developed. The study examined how role models, mentors, and support networks played a role in their leadership trajectory. It also examines, from the perspective of the Latina leaders, the barriers and catalysts experienced in occupying their administrative roles in higher education to gain insight into the lessons and strategies to cultivate aspiring Hispanic female leaders.

Narratives shared in this study will provide those in higher education leadership roles crucial insights on how to cultivate and utilize the talents of Latinas in higher education. Furthermore, it can provide a better understanding on how to recruit, retain, and promote the next generation of Latina leaders. It also has the potential to provide a roadmap or a visualization for others seeking leadership roles in higher education, particularly, Latinas.

Chapter two provides a comprehensive literature review that discussed the historical backgrounds of Latinas in the United States as it relates to their educational pathways, and discuss the perceived barriers and catalysts experienced by Latinas in pursuing an advanced education. Lastly, chapter two
concludes with the gaps in existing literature related to Latinas in administrative leadership roles.

Chapter three describes how the literature reviewed guided the conceptual framework of applied critical leadership coupled with pivotal moments theory and how it impacted the research methodology, research questions, interview questions, how the data was collected, and how the data will be analyzed or restoryed.

Chapter four presents the data collected from the Latina administrative leaders in higher education. This chapter provides a summary of their personal and professional experiences through their leadership journey and the pivotal moments they experienced and how it shaped their approach to leadership along with sage advice for future Latina leaders.

Finally, chapter five provides an overview of the study, including the implications of the study, the conclusions of the researcher, and recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Even though Hispanic females are the largest growing population in the United States, they currently have the lowest educational attainment level of any group (Canul, 2003; Espinoza, 2015; Liu, 2011; Schhneider, Martinez, & Owens, 2006). There are several critical factors that could explain why the fastest growing population in our nation is underachieving: family obligations, work obligations, affordability, systemic barriers, lack of information and lack of role models and mentors which create serious barriers for Latina/o students in their pursuit of higher education (Espinoza, 2015, Gandara, 2008; Nunez & Murakami-Ramalho, 2012).

The rapidly growing Latino population has resulted in an increase in Latina/os enrolling in institutions of higher education therefore, imperative that individuals in leadership positions reflect the students they serve (Leon & Nevarez, 2007). Phelps, Taber, and Smith (1998) argue that:

Presidents of a minority racial, ethnic, or gender group may also provide inspiring role models for students, employees, and community residents; add important voices to dialogues concerning personnel issues, including staff development, curriculum changes, teaching excellence, and student
success; and promote community relationships and commitments, enriching all associated with the college and its community. (p. 3)

This suggests that Latina/o administrators not only can serve as role models and mentors but also have the personal knowledge and insight due to their shared backgrounds to assist in creating policies that focus on the barriers experienced by Latina/o students (Leon & Nevarez, 2007).

Although there is an increase in Latinos in administrative roles, there continues to be a lack of Latina leaders in administrative roles in higher education (Catalyst, 2010; de los Santos & Vega, 2008). Despite significant advances that have been made, Latinas are still not afforded with the same opportunities for advancement as their Latino counterparts or other female groups in higher education (Aguirre, 2000; Aleman, 2000; Gandara, 2015, Turner, 2002; Turner, 2011). Research suggests that Latinas still lack adequate support networks, mentoring opportunities, role models, and resources (Aleman, 2000; Calasanti & Smith, 2002; Gandara, 2015; Turner, 2002, Turner, 2011).

The following sections will provide relevant literature related to Latina administrative leaders in higher education. The literature review is organized into the following six sections: Latinas in the United States, the educational pipeline for Latinas (preschool to higher education experiences), the educational leadership pipeline for Latinas, female leadership, Latina leadership, and a summary of findings and current gaps in literature regarding Latina leaders in higher education.
Latinas in the United States

The Hispanic population is currently the largest and fastest growing minority group in the United States, and in California, one in two children under the age of 18 are Latina/o (Roach, 2015). In the United States, Latinas represent one in five women in the general population, but one in four females among school-age children (Gándara, 2015). As stated by Mendoza (2013), Latinas have broken down barriers and have overcome negative stereotypes by becoming artists, scientists, entertainers, activists, authors, athletes, and educators. “They have followed their passions, expressed creativity, developed cures, stirred up controversy, stood up against the majority, fought for the underdog, and even died for their beliefs” (Mendoza, 2013, p.vii). Historically, Latinas have blazed their own trail in many avenues of life (Mendoza, 2013).

As the population growth of Latina/os in the United States continues, businesses are realizing the importance of identifying strategies to recruit, retain, and develop Latina professionals (Davila, 2012; Rodriguez, 2008; Sullivan, 2007). Because of this, the Hispanic workforce has more than doubled from 1990 to 2014 from 10.7 million to 25.4 million workers (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). During the same period, the number of Latinas in the workforce has also more than doubled from 7.3 percent to 14.7 percent (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). Latina representation has increased significantly in areas such as law, medicine, and management up by 40 percent (Gándara, 2015).
Educated U.S. born Latinas achieve 21 percent more professional and managerial positions than Latino men (Gilroy, 2006, 2007), yet despite the strides made by Hispanic females over their Hispanic male counterparts, they are still earning less in the labor market. In 2015, the Obama Administration reported the pay gap was the greatest between Latina women, who are estimated to earn 56 cents for every dollar earned by a white non-Hispanic man (Your Right to Equal Pay, 2015). When Latinas enter the workforce, they typically earn less than other female ethnic groups, as well as Latinos (Gonzalez-Figueroa & Young, 2005). As the Latina population continues to grow, their contributions to the workforce need to be viewed as an opportunity for a competitive advantage in the business sector (Rodriguez, 2008). This workforce segment has the potential to carry over into administrative leadership roles in higher education as many bypass the traditional faculty ranks (Blanco & de la Rosa, 2008; King & Gomez, 2008).

Policymakers have started to focus on the educational attainment of the Latina/o population in an effort to prepare students for high-demand, high-paying jobs to bolster state economies (Bautsch, 2011). From 2003 to 2013, Latinas saw a significant increase of more than 14 percent in their high school graduation rates. At the same time, Latinas have progressively improved their college degree attainment by roughly .5 percentage points each year (Gándara, 2015). Investing in the education of Latina/os can have a direct effect on the labor market, especially in states like California where more than 50 percent of
students are Latina/o (Bautsch, 2011). The educational outcomes of Latina/o students are vital to the direction of the American workforce, the business sector, society, and state economies (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015).

Despite the progress made over the last decade, Latinas face numerous obstacles such as poverty and lack of healthcare. In the United States, one in four Latinas lives below the poverty line and more than 50 percent live near the poverty level (Gándara, 2015). According to the 2012 U.S. Census, Latinas across the United States encounter more disadvantages in educational opportunities, income compensation, and leadership opportunities than any other ethnic group (Werschkul, Williams, Caiazza, & Shaw, 2004). These statistics represent the barriers and lack of opportunities faced by Latinas in the United States.

Access to a quality education is paramount to the future success of Latinas in the United States. Rodriguez et al. (2000) identified two types of interrelated barriers faced by Latinas in higher education. The first are barriers that exist prior to entering college, such as low socioeconomic status, cultural stereotyping, gender bias. Secondly, those experienced upon entering college which include lack of college knowledge, lack of educational preparation, lack of financial resources, family obligations, and alienation (Rodriguez, Guido-DiBrito, Torres, & Talbot, 2000). The educational outcomes of Latinas will not only have a lasting impact on the Latino communities but can have an impact on the
American workforce, the business sector, social programs, and the United States economy (Mora, 2015).

**Educational Pipeline for Latinas**

To better understand the lived experiences and leadership approaches of Latina administrative leaders in higher education, it is necessary to provide a larger context of their journey through the educational pipeline (Solorzano & Solorzano, 1995). Carter and Wilson (1997) defined the educational pipeline as a system of education from kindergarten through graduate school and has reported the pipeline is leaky for Latinos.

Yosso and Solórzano (2006) describe the K-12 educational pipeline for Hispanic students as illustrated in Figure 1. They provide a snapshot of the educational barriers faced by Hispanic students in hopes of providing recommendations aimed at fixing the leaks with the educational pipeline. Their research explained that out of every 100 elementary students, only 46 will graduate high school. Of those 46 high school graduates, 26 students enroll in college: 17 attend a community college and nine will enroll in a 4-year institution. One student out of the 17 community college enrollees will transfer to a 4-year institution. From the original 26 students who enrolled in either a 2-year or 4-year institution, only eight will graduate with a bachelor’s degree, two will earn a graduate or professional degree, and .2 students will graduate with a doctoral
degree (Yosso & Solorzano, 2006). In figure 1, there is evidence of a “leaky” pipeline for Latino students (Yosso & Solorzano, 2006, p. 1).

Figure 1. The Chicana and Chicano Educational Pipeline
More recently, Covarrubias (2011) provided an updated analysis of the Chicana/o Educational Pipeline that was originally presented by Daniel Solórzano in 2005. A quantitative intersectional analysis was utilized to allow for the disaggregation of the data. Covarrubias provided an analysis based on 2009 U.S. Census data that provided an overview of the impact of race, gender class, and status of citizenship. Figure 2 is disaggregated by gender, which provides further detail of Latinas within the educational pipeline.

Figure 2. The Chicana/o Educational Pipeline
Covarrubias’ (2011) analysis based on gender, revealed that Latinas outperformed their male counterparts, yet the high school push-out rate for Latinas was 46 percent compared to 45 percent for Latinos. This indicates a leak in the educational pipeline for Latinas as they transition out of high school. Though a quantitative method approach provides a snapshot of the educational pipeline for Latina/o students, a more in-depth analysis is needed that focuses on the possible barriers experienced by Latinas. This can be captured through a qualitative approach of detailed narratives or a sharing of their actual stories.

Despite the growing demographics of Latinas in the United States, there continues to be a disparity amongst Latinas in the K-20 educational pipeline. This is often referred to as the “leaky” pipeline (Yosso & Solorzano, 2006, p. 1) where Latinas lack access to early childhood education, lack economic and social resources, attend poorly funded k-12 schools with limited honors, advanced placement, and/or gifted and talented programs, and face the impact of high-stakes testing (Cerna, Perez, & Saenz, 2009; Maes, 2010; Rodriguez & Arellano, 2016; Rodriguez, Martinez, & Valle, 2016; Schneider, Martinez, & Owens, 2006). Rodriguez and Oseguera (2016) identify the test-prep pedagogy culture that emerged from the No Child Left Behind movement as a detriment to Latina/o students as it reduces learning to testing. In addition, Medina and Luna (2000) state Latinas never reach their full academic potential due to inappropriate placements and inaccurate assessments. For many of these students, they begin their educational experience at a severe disadvantage.
These obstacles lead to Latina students to being channeled into trade schools or 2-year institutions creating further barriers for advanced degree opportunities (Maes, 2010; Yosso & Solórzano, 2006). Though a disproportionate number of Latinas enter two-year institutions, those who enter 4-year institutions or successfully transfer, are sometimes met with cultural, racial, and gender biases that inhibit academic success, such as the feelings of alienation and disconnectedness when entering institutions of higher education due to lack of experience and or contacts (Medina & Luna, 2000; Saunders & Serna, 2004; Stern, 2009). The key is to provide Latina students adequate opportunities and support to be part of an effective educational pipeline.

Early Childhood Education

Let the race for the future begin. But let’s do everything in our power to ensure that every child in America begins at the same starting line. (U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, 2013, p. 1).

During the State of the Union address in 2013, President Obama addressed the need to expand quality preschool for every child in the United States. In 2014, President Obama again advocated for early childhood education during the White House Summit on Early Education where he pledged over $1 billion to be invested to create greater access for all children (Early Learning, 2016). In the last decade, there has been a tremendous amount of attention focusing on the need for early childhood education. An increase in standardized preschool curriculums and the introduction of testing of 4-year-olds
are morphing early childhood education as part of the educational pipeline (Valdez & Franquiz, 2010). These efforts are critical because the “opportunity to develop a child’s full potential and shape key academic, social, and cognitive skills” can have a direct result on future successes academically and in life (Early Learning, 2016, p. 1).

Young Latina/o children as a group are experiencing the most significant programmatic changes because of policy initiatives geared towards early childhood education (Valdez & Franquiz, 2010; Schneider, Martinez, & Owens, 2006). For instance, as stated by the U.S. Department of Education, Hispanic children make up more than 22 percent of all pre-k-12 public school students; however, less than half of those eligible are enrolled in early childhood education programs (Early Learning: Access to High Quality Early Learning Program, 2016). Therefore, it is imperative that early childhood education decisions include the potential impact they can have on Latina/o students across the United States. Latina/os are also the youngest segment in the United States, particularly in states such as California, where one in two children under the age of 18 years old are Latina/o (Roach, 2015; Valdez & Franquiz, 2010).

Several factors contribute to this disparity amongst Latina/o children. These include factors such as living in poverty, parents with low levels of formal education, fewer resources and lack of knowledge regarding early childhood education programs (Gandara, 2008; Schhneider, Martinez, & Owens, 2006). It is important to note that there is a misconception that Latina/o parents do not
value education (Brown, Santiago, & Lopez, 2010). Researchers have found that Latina/o parents indeed care about education as many came to the United States in hopes of accessing a better education for their children (Brown et al., 2010). Therefore, it is important to provide adequate resources for parents early in the education of their children because there is not only an educational gap but an information gap for Latina/o students. The early childhood educational experiences of Latina/o children can have significant implications for their future academic success and how they fair in the educational pipeline (Valdez & Franquiz, 2010; Schneieder, Martinez, & Owens, 2006).

**Elementary and Middle School**

Medina and Luna (2000) conducted a phenomenological study focusing on the personal and professional lives of three Latina professors in higher education. Through a series of in-depth interviews, they found the Latina professors had early experiences of feeling inadequate, racism, and humiliation as early as elementary school that were carried into high school. “In the first grade, Latinas were the majority. By the twelfth grade, Hispanics were in a very small minority” (Participant, as quoted by Medina & Luna, 2000, p. 55).

One participant, Gabriella, expressed her earliest elementary school memory of feeling inadequate because the teacher refused to read a poem she had written, stating Gabriella could not write (Medina & Luna, 2000). Another participant, Alicia, expressed how she was humiliated through spankings she received from her teacher for poor work. Medina and Luna (2000) identified
similar barriers and catalysts that shaped the women’s educational experiences and their leadership approaches. Though the study only provided narratives for three participants, it expounded on the need for positive experiences as early as elementary school.

**High School and College Experiences**

According to the Pew Research Center, high school dropout rates among Latina/os dropped to 12 percent in 2014 versus 32 percent in 2000 as seen in Figure 3 (Krogstad, 2016).

![Figure 3. Source: U.S. Census Bureau October Current Population Survey](image-url)
Regardless of the significant strides made by Latina/os, their dropout rates are still higher than other minority groups, like blacks (7 percent), whites (5 percent), and Asians (1 percent) (Krogstad, 2016).

Rodriguez and Oseguera (2016) reported that Latina/o students possess a great deal of cultural wealth due to their home and community experiences but are often overlooked within the classroom/school/institutional walls. These students continue to face numerous disparities in terms of opportunities and positive outcomes in comparison to White students. Furthermore, Rodriguez and Oseguera identified best practices that had the potential to create a strong and positive educational k-20 pipeline for Latina/os. They suggest a paradigm shift from focusing on student deficits to redirecting the focus to Latina/o students’ strengths. One example provided was an assembly of several hundred students where the author highlighted the educational trajectories of other Latina/os who had experienced professional, educational, and personal success. Another example consisted of large posters representing local professionals from the community that modeled excellence and were shared with various stakeholders, which included students. The modeling of excellence was reflected by the demographics of the Latina/o students, where many originated from the students’ own local community. Rodriguez and Oseguera also suggested the importance of mentoring relationships for Latina/o students, as the student-adult relationship can be the only source of social capital to open the doors of higher education and career choice, which has the potential to create a pivotal moment for the student.
In addition, Gandara (2008) pointed out the need for teachers that come from the same communities as their students who better understand the barriers experienced by Latina/o students. When Latina/o students can see themselves reflected in successful adults who look like them, it contributes to their overall success and college adjustment.

In 2016, the California Department of Education (CDE) reported various statistics about California’s public schools for the 2015-2016 school year. The student and school data included the ethnicity distribution of public schools for the 2015-2016 school year and the ethnicity distribution of public school teachers for the previous school year, 2014-2015. As reported, Hispanic or Latino students made up 54 percent of the student population, which included 3,360,562 students (California Department of Education, 2016). In contrast, White students made up 24% (or 1,500,932) of the student population.

Moreover, the California Department of Education (2016) reported on the ethnic distribution of public school teachers for the 2014-2015 school year. Latina/o teachers accounted for 54,989 teachers and their White peers accounted for 191,686 teachers. Figure 4 provides a visual representation of the ethnic makeup of the student to teacher ratio.
Researchers have shown that students who share racial and/or gender characteristics with their teachers tend to report a higher level of academic success, positive role modeling, and better student-teacher communication (Dee, 2004; Espinoza, 2011; Ponjuan, 2011). Historically, Latinas have been the least represented minority group in higher education (Catalyst, 2003; Cerna, Perez, & Saenz, 2009; Gandara, 2008; Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005). Yet, more recent data has shown that Latinas are enrolling in higher education in greater numbers despite the challenges they face (Gándara, 2015; Krogstad, 2016). It was also reported that 35 percent of Latina/os ages of 18 to 24 were enrolled in a
two-year college or four-year university, which was a 22 percent increase since 1993 (Krogstrad, 2016). That increase resulted in more than 2.3 million Latina/o students enrolling into higher education.

Research has shown that Latino parents and children realize the importance of postsecondary education and have high educational aspirations (Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005; Liu, 2011; Schneider, Martinez, & Owens, 2006; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Unmuth, 2012). In the most recent election, Krogstad (2016) reported that 83 percent of Hispanics cited education as one of their top concerns in the election. Due to various systemic barriers experienced by Latina/o students, these high expectations do not necessarily translate into a reality of postsecondary matriculation (Schneider, Martinez, & Owens, 2006).

A significant number of Latinas enroll into two-year community colleges, which serves as a point of entry to higher education (Gutierrez, Castaneda, & Katsinas, 2002; Hurtado & Kamimura, 2003; Tovar, 2015). From 2003 to 2013, there was an 8 percent increase in Latinas earning associate’s degrees (Gandara, 2015). The Pew Research Center reported that 48 percent of Latina/o students enroll in a public 2-year college and 52 percent attend 4 year universities (Krogstad, 2016). Though there is a significant increase in Latina/o students attending 4 year universities, it was reported that in 2014, students from the ages of 25 to 29 represented just 15 percent of students who earned a bachelor’s degree or higher. In 2013, Latinas had the lowest percentage of graduate degrees with only 4 percent compared to all other women groups.
(Gandara, 2015). This was a 50 percent increase in comparison to only 2 percent of Latinas with graduate degrees in 2003.

Solorzano (2005) identified completion of course requirements and obtaining advanced degrees as challenges faced by Latinas enrolling in four-year universities. According to the Pew Research Center, Latina/os reported the need to obtain a job to help support their families as a top reason for not enrolling in higher education, compared to 39 percent of White students (Krogstad, 2016). Lack of funding, lack of college knowledge, lack of family support, lack of mentors and role models, cultural and gender stereotyping, immigration status, and a sense of being a cultural misfit are barriers faced by Latinas entering higher education (Aguirre, 2000; Espinoza, 2010; Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005; Turner, 2011).

Unmuth (2012) reported many Latinas are “expected to take on additional duties as caregivers, such as helping watch younger children or aid elderly family members” (p. 20). In addition, for many Latinas, the expectation of living with their parents until they get married makes it difficult to go away for college (Unmuth, 2012). Latinas face daunting challenges along the educational pipeline. It is vital that those in leadership roles in higher education acknowledge the barriers and provide support and assistance to the Latina student population.
In 1995, Haro (1995) stated “It is essential for Latinos to begin questioning their limited numbers in leadership roles in higher education. Why are so few in senior-level academic executive jobs?” (p. 189). The question remains relevant today. With the lack of Latina faculty on campuses in the United States, it is important that those in leadership positions in higher education “commit themselves to the equitable education of all individuals – including women, ethnic/racial minorities, and the poor” (Medina & Luna, 2000, p. 47). Therefore, it is imperative that institutions of higher education seek a diverse faculty that reflect their student populations, particularly institutions with high minority percentages (Medina & Luna, 2000).

Murakami-Ramalho et al. (2010) stated that there is clearly an influx of Latina/o students enrolling in institutions of higher education; however, Latina/o faculty have not experienced similar growth. According to the National Center of Education Statistics, in the fall of 2013 Hispanics made up only 5 percent of full-time faculty in degree-granting postsecondary institutions nationwide (Digest of Education Statistics, 2014). These statistical images between student and faculty demographics signify a real need for a reexamination of current university practices and policies with regard to educational equity for diverse student populations to have faculty representative of that diversity (Ponjuan, 2011; Medina & Luna, 2000).

In higher education, women play a critical role as their perspectives can provide a range of various socioeconomic and racial backgrounds that are limited
in a homogeneous setting (Lennon, 2013). Gandara (2013) stated that the education of a Hispanic mothers was one of the most significant factors for both Latina and Latino educational success. “If the cycle of under-education is to be broken for the Latino population, it is highly dependent on changing the fortunes of young women,” states Gandara, et al. (2013, p. 5).

Additionally, Medina and Luna (2000) identified the influence of a mother or a significant female as playing a critical role in the success of Latina students. It is imperative for Latina/o educational leaders in the K-20 educational pipeline to utilize culturally responsive approaches to leadership in order to create environments where Latina/o students can be successful in their pursuit of learning (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Ponjuan, 2011; Valle & Rodríguez, 2012; Santamaria & Santamaria, 2016). “In the face of overwhelming amounts of data that document the lack of success of Latina/o faculty and the leaking pipeline to academia, there must emerge new notions of hope, of common purpose and of empowerment” (Delgado-Romero, Flores, Gloria, Arredondo, & Castellanos, 2003, p. 279).

Demographic Trends of Latinas in Higher Education

In 2008, King and Gomez conducted a study of the pathways to the presidency within four institutional settings, including doctorate, masters, baccalaureate, and associate-granting colleges. The study examined the demographic and professional backgrounds of senior administrative leaders that had the potential to lead to a college presidency. The campus human resource
officers at 852 institutions provided information for more than 9,700 individuals in administrative leadership roles. These roles included chiefs of staff, vice presidents, CAOs/provosts, Academic Affair officers, Deans, chief financial officers, chief development officers, chief student affairs, and chief diversity officers (King & Gomez, 2008). The data analysis suggested those in administrative leadership roles were younger and more likely to be women, than those reflected in the presidency. The survey also revealed there was a difference between women in administrative leadership roles (45 percent) versus the presidency (23 percent). Women in administrative roles ranged from 55 percent for chiefs of staff, whereas 31 percent identified as vice presidents. The study proved there has been a significant increase in women overall earning leadership roles but significantly less women of color were representative of that increase.

King and Gomez’s (2008) recommended an increase in African American, Hispanic, and American Indian faculty to potentially increase the demographics of college presidencies. Furthermore, they suggested the need to create mentoring opportunities, leadership development, and overall, strengthen the pipeline for women of color. The researchers further suggested that institutions need to make significant and direct efforts to diversify the presidency “by reaching out to the relatively small pool of current senior administrators, attracting more minority faculty into administrative positions, and increasing the number of minority faculty members so that the pool of individuals who might
someday ascend to a presidency grows” (p. 15). A concern resulting from the study was the need to diversify the pool of administrative leaders to fill vacancies in senior leadership positions as almost 50% of the presidents were recruited from outside the institution. This suggests there is a change in the pathway to the presidency as a good portion are coming from outside academia and not within an institution. Institutions need to be deliberate in their professional development efforts to assist potential diverse candidates within their institutions (Aguirre, 2000).

Santos and Acevedo-Gil (2013) conducted a quantitative study of the demographic trends of full-time tenured faculty and administration at the California State University (CSU) and University of California (UC) systems over a ten-year period from 2001 to 2009. The availability of administrative positions and the methods of filling those positions, along with the benefits of filling the administrative positions with Latina/os was studied. In contrast to the student population of Latina/os in the CSU and UC systems, the tenured and tenure track faculty and administrators were underrepresented in numbers (Santos & Acevedo-Gil, 2013). In 2009, Latina/os represented only 5.01% in the UC system compared to 19.27% Latina/o student population. The authors recommended an increased effort to recruit and retain Latina/o students to pursue doctoral degrees. In addition, the recruitment and retention of Latina/o faculty should be a priority for the institutions represented.
Santos and Acevedo-Gil (2013) suggested that providing mentoring opportunities would be beneficial in preparing faculty of color to fill leadership positions in higher education administrative roles. The analysis of the data provided a clear overview of the demographic trends in California, yet, the study would have been enhanced with narratives from the participants. This would have provided a more in-depth analysis of the barriers experienced by faculty and administration.

**Barrioization**

Barrioization is a term that has been used to describe the cultural landscape of Latinos in urban diseconomies (Herzog, 2004). Herzog explained:

The idea of barrioization cannot be traced to any single decision or conspiracy of actors, but, rather, to an unspoken theme that unified all of the built-environment decisions made by powerful actors in the history of southwestern urban development. (p. 104)

Herzog argued that barrioization was due to external pressures that segregated Latinos to less desirable areas of cities such as Los Angeles, San Diego, and cities in the Southwest. He stated Latinos experienced economic pressures that included high rent and high land values, and low paying jobs and or lack of employment opportunities that were all out of their control (Herzog, 2004).

Barrioization in higher education can be identified as the issue of location, representation, and treatment of Latina/o faculty in universities due to systemic issues of institutional racism (Aguirre, 2000; Garza, 1993; Martinez, 1999).
Latina/o faculty are seen primarily in areas such as Chicano/Latino studies, bilingual studies, diversity offices, student services, and ethnic studies and are expected to serve on committees that address diversity and cultural issues (Calasanti & Smith, 2002; Garza, 1993; King & Gomez, 2008; Ponjuan, 2011). Literature reveals that if one works in areas such as Hispanic studies, bilingual studies, or equal opportunity programs, the classification becomes that of a Hispanic `box' which from an advancement standpoint, is very hard to break out of (Martinez, 1999; Medina & Luna, 2000). Latina/o faculty are more likely to have additional responsibilities in terms of serving on committees in comparison to their peers (Medina & Luna, 2000; Ponjuan, 2011). Also, faculty must do a certain amount of research and publications to be promoted, yet their research is often discounted as “brown-on-brown” driven research (Calasanti & Smith, 2002, p. 15; Medina & Luna, 2000, pg. 49), and less likely to be published in some social science journals (Ponjuan, 2011). Garza (1993) viewed this treatment as the basis that has led to the “barrioization” of the Latina/o professoriate.

As stated by Hurtado and Kamimura (2003), a similar effect of barrioization can be seen regarding high ranking positions held by women in higher education. Johnson (2016) stated it is more likely these women have served as senior executive officers in academic affairs or student services, whereas their male counterparts were more likely to have come from outside higher education, were non-faculty members, or held various other campus executive roles (Johnson, 2016).
In addition, Latinas have been segregated to particular disciplines within academia (Aguirre, 2000). In 2008, Blanco and de la Rosa examined descriptive data of Hispanics in accounting education and the accounting profession in general (Blanco & de la Rosa, 2008). They identified a lack of effectiveness in the recruiting, retaining and training of a diverse student population, as well as a lack of diverse faculty within schools of business. Di Meglio (2004) conducted a survey that revealed why women are not pursuing MBA degrees despite their great strides in business. The findings showed that only 30% of women are entering the top business schools in the United States. The study also identified the number one factor discouraging women from pursuing a degree in business, which is lack of role models in senior management positions (Di Meglio, 2004).

With the ongoing demographic shift in the United States and most notably in states like California, it is critical that academic disciplines across academia have adequate representation of Latina/o faculty. It is important that leadership in higher education create opportunities for minority students to explore a variety of academic disciplines.

**Educational Leadership Barriers**

“Latina faculty, students, administrators, and staff must continue to challenge stereotypes while struggling to retain positive self-identity, provide support for their families, and counter the racism, sexism, and anti-immigration sentiments they face daily” (Turner, 2011, p. 5). Additional workload, family obligations, lack of support networks and lack of educational pathway knowledge
are just a few burdens faced by female faculty members in higher education. Despite the significant advances that have been made, Latinas still lack adequate support networks, mentoring opportunities, role models, and resources (Aleman, 2000; Nunez, Murakami, & Gonzalez, 2012; Ponjuan, 2011; Turner, 2002).

**Limited Role Models and Mentors.** Empirical studies have supported the vital role mentoring can have in one's educational journey and career (Gonzalez-Figueroa & Young, 2005; Nunez, Murakami, & Gonzalez, 2012). Yet, women of color and women in general, tend to lack such opportunities in academia (Gonzalez-Figueroa & Young, 2005; Rendon, 1991). Mentoring can be defined as a relationship consisting of an experienced person providing support and direction to a person less experienced (Kram, 1988). Kram (1988) identified two types of mentoring: career support and psychosocial support. The first, career support is a sponsoring of another individual who could be a protégé among those in power positions (Kram, 1988). Psychosocial support would be the aspect of mentoring related to encouragement, listening, and the creation of a relationship. The lack of mentoring opportunities for Latina women can create barriers to their success in academia and their careers. It is critical for Latinas in administrative leadership roles to mentor those who aspire to leadership roles (Garcia, 2009).

Research suggests that Latina/o administrators can provide mentoring opportunities for Latina/o faculty to enter a pathway to administrative leadership.
roles (Gutierrez, Castaneda, & Katsinas, 2002; Ponjuan, 2011; Salas, Aragon, Alandejani, & Timpson, 2014; Sedlacek & Fuertes, 1993). Lack of such opportunities can create significant barriers for faculty seeking administrative roles. The literature reveals female faculty members not only lack role models in higher education but also face additional burdens in their attempt to mentor other faculty members and or students (Madsen, 2012; Ponjuan, 2011). In institutions that lack Latina/o administration and faculty, students are not afforded the opportunities for positive and successful role models and mentors who reflect who they are (Hurtado & Kamimura, 2003). Institutions of higher education need to evaluate and develop mentoring policies to support and encourage Latina faculty.

Family Expectations. Family obligations, duties, and role expectations for Latinas can create significant barriers as they progress through the educational pipeline and ultimately, in their leadership roles (Espinoza, 2010; Maes, 2010; Rodriguez, Guido-DeBrito, Torres, & Talbot, 2000). “One of the most pervasive values in the Latino culture is the importance of the family, including the extended family” (Skogrand, Hatch, & Singh, 2005, p. 1). Numerous studies have shown Latina students experience a greater amount of stress in pursuing higher education than their Latino counterparts (Espinoza, 2015; Maes, 2010; Sy, 2006). Espinoza (2010) refers to this as the good daughter dilemma where Latinas feel pressured to be a good daughter through the various roles they play in the family. These roles include but are not limited to language brokering, living
at home until they marry, staying close to home to help, and assisting with siblings (Espinoza, 2011; Medina & Luna, 2000).

For instance, Espinoza (2010) conducted a qualitative study where fifteen Latina doctoral graduate students were interviewed regarding the demands of school and family obligations. Interview questions included their childhood experiences and their current relationship as a student with their families. The need to place family before school presented itself in several of the interviews. One interviewee, Rosa, felt institutions of higher education did not understand or legitimize how Latinas feel regarding their family obligations. Attending family events played a significant role in Rosa’s life regardless of her educational aspirations.

Maybe you can think of graduate school in terms of like a culture clash, right where you’ve got this American individualism thing where you’re supposed to care about yourself and do what you can to move yourself forward in school, and family kind of disappears from that, as well as family obligations and needs. I think grad school is very, I feel like grad school fits into that right, you’re kind of seen as an individual and you’re not supposed to have too many outside forces pulling at you, but then I’ve also got this family obligation, and I don’t feel it’s a bad thing to say its obligation, I mean it’s a good thing right, because we support each other, but I feel like this pull between doing what most Americans do and just doing what I need to do to get ahead, and then also at the same time
dealing with something that’s been instilled in me always, you know your family comes first and they’re very important. (p. 326).

Though an easier decision for Rosa to put family first, many of the other students interviewed felt a struggle to balance family and school work. The findings concluded that family expectations and obligations were potential barriers in their academic success and that institutions of higher education need to find ways to support Latinas. Recommendations for support included improvement of outreach services to better inform Latina students of what is available in way of support services. Secondly, creating mentoring opportunities to assist Latina students can provide positive role models and connectedness at an institutional level. Providing Latina students with Latina mentors can create opportunities to share strategies for success (Espinoza, 2010).

In a study related to female faculty members, Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2004) interviewed 29 women faculty from research universities regarding the complex roles they faced in way of family obligations. They found that women faculty had to balance the timing of having children and obtaining tenure-track positions (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004). Armenti (2004) conducted a qualitative study with 19 women professors in Canada regarding the maternal decisions they faced with their demanding working schedules. Through a series of interviews, the women professors shared how they carefully planned the birth of their children around the end of the spring quarters resulting in May babies while others stated they waited post-tenure to have children (Armenti, 2004). Though
the two previous studies focused on women in general, the studies describe the Latina experience.

**Potential Systemic Barriers.** In the United States, for many Hispanic children their educational disadvantages stem from their lack of economic and social resources (Gandara, 2015; Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005). Some of the obstacles include lack of a quality early childhood education, a lack of resources for family needs, poor parental communication (Aleman, 2009), classroom overcrowding (Zalaquett, 2005), and inadequate exposure to extracurricular activities and academic development opportunities (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Ponjuan, 2011; Zalaquett & Lopez; 2006). Additionally, Latino students face poor academic advising, attend poorly funded k-12 schools with limited honors, advanced placement, and/or gifted and talented programs, and face the impact of high-stakes testing (Cerna, Perez, & Saenz, 2009; Rodriguez & Arellano, 2016; Rodriguez, Martinez, & Valle, 2016; Schhnieder, Martinez, & Owens, 2006). Medina and Luna (2000) argue that Latinas never reach their full academic potential due to inappropriate placements and inaccurate assessments. Solorzano (2005) contends that these systemic barriers appear to be the standard in institutions of higher education and affect Latina/os throughout the educational pipeline.

For Latinas, the lack of role models, the lack of mentoring opportunities and support networks, coupled with the ongoing systemic issues along their
educational journey are only magnified with the scarce numbers of Latina women in leadership roles in higher education.

**Educational Leadership Catalysts**

The Merriam-Webster (2017) dictionary defines a catalyst as a person or thing that provides or speeds significant change or action. The literature is replete with findings of the barriers experienced by Latinas in higher education, whereas, there is less to be said about the catalysts that prompted their successes within the educational leadership pipeline. Research has identified a cadre of catalysts in the leadership trajectory for Latinas that include, but are not limited to, role model and mentors, family support, and the spirituality of Latinas (Canul, 2003; Espinoza, 2011; Gándara, 1995; González-Figueroa & Young, 2005; Montas-Hunter, 2012; Vela, Castro, Cavazos, & González, 2015).

**Role Models and Mentors.** “Successful mentorships are often the key catalyst for career and personal development” (Carvin, 2009, p. 48). Educational research has shown a correlation between academic success and opportunities provided by supportive relationships with a myriad number of individuals across key areas such as family, community, school, and work (Ream, 2010; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999; Valverde, 2004). Ethnicity, gender, and social class play an integral part of building support networks in higher education (Margolis & Romero, 1998). An individual’s personal characteristics will affect who is included in their support networks through the ability to identify with those individuals. Griffin (2012) found that minority faculty benefit by having similar
race leadership by mimicking the positive characteristics of their mentors and can follow a similar path to success.

Gonzalez-Figueroa and Young (2005) conducted a study exploring the mentoring experiences of professional Latina women. Approximately 305 Latina women were surveyed regarding their attitudes towards mentoring relationships in relation to ethnic identity, gender, and perceptions of professional Latina women. The findings revealed some of the women had been mentored throughout their careers by non-Hispanic mentors. Though they found these relationships useful, they preferred being mentored by those of the same ethnicity (Gonzalez-Figueroa & Young, 2005). They viewed the cultural understanding by mentors of the same ethnicity as a benefit to the mentoring relationship. The study also revealed Latina women in higher ranking positions were less likely to be mentored. They concluded that additional research is needed to look at career-related mentors and receiving formal and informal mentoring for Latina women.

Additionally, Salas, Aragon, Alandejani, and Timposon (2014) conducted a phenomenological study seeking to capture the lived experiences of 17 first-year students participating in a mentoring program. In the study, three key factors contributed to the success of Latina/o student in college: cultural social integration, validation, and sense of belonging. The process of validation came through the student’s ability to interact in and out of the class with faculty, other students, tutors, advisers, and mentors. Participants shared their positive
experiences with being able to identify with their mentee and feel a sense of belonging.

Similarly, Montas-Hunter (2012) conducted a phenomenological study on self-efficacy and Latina leaders in higher education and one of the findings was the importance of role models. The study focused on the experiences of eight Latina leaders in higher education and how their perception of self-efficacy contributed to their leadership roles. One participant stated, “I have a Latina president who has been a wonderful role model and friend. She is very demanding but sets the stage for us all of us” (Montas-Hunter, 2012, p. 326). In fact, fifty-eight percent of the participants stated the importance of having role models or being a role model for others. They recognized mentoring as a support network that enhanced their ability to lead. Seven of the eight Latinas felt a great sense of responsibility to provide mentoring opportunities. One participant spoke to this point as follows:

Although I see myself as a Latina first, being a Latina gives me the added responsibility of being an advocate and spokesperson for the Hispanic community. I am seen as a role model, a responsibility I take very seriously. (Montas-Hunter, 2012, p. 327).

In sum, all eight participants attributed their mentoring experiences, their support networks and academic experiences as key factors that impacted their leadership pathway.
Furthermore, the concept of mentoring others has also played a key role in the success of Latinas in higher education. In 2010, a group of women professors of educational leadership provided personal narratives of their experiences to provide strategies for young women faculty in higher education. The concept of action-oriented mentoring was an important strategy to increase the number of women in faculty positions. Action-oriented mentoring was a way of paying it forward by matching up graduate students and faculty members inside and outside of their programs (Sherman, Beaty, Crum, & Peters, 2010). The authors discussed the importance of going beyond simply recruiting and preparing women to become faculty but providing ongoing formal and informal mentoring to ensure success once a faculty position has been secured.

Family Support. There is a growing body of literature that indicates family support as a significant catalyst to the education success of Latinas as existing research connects family support (Espinoza, 2011). Studies have shown strong family connections as a key indicator for academic success among Latina/os, as well as providing a sense of well-being (Gandara, 1995; Espinoza, 2011; Mendez-Morse, 2004). Montas-Hunter (2012) conducted a phenomenological study examining the self-efficacy of eight Latina leaders in higher education. The study revealed the importance of support networks, primarily family members who provided encouragement and support to Latina leaders in higher education (Montas-Hunter, 2012). One participant stated,
My family is my core, and they have always been behind me. I come from a very traditional immigrant family, and I am the firstborn and only girl. I have gone beyond any box that was defined for me in my core family, but they have been there every step of the way. I talk with them about what I do, and I expose them to my work. They will be there in the front row cheering for me if I become a college president. I know that. (p. 329)

Studies have shown strong family connections as a key indicator for academic success among Latina/os, as well as providing a sense of well-being (Gandara, 1995; Espinoza, 2011; Mendez-Morse, 2004; Montas-Hunter, 2012). The level of family support can have a direct effect on the success of Latinas in higher education.

This can be seen in a study conducted by Espinoza (2011) where 15 Latina doctoral students were interviewed on ways in which they balanced the demands of family and school in maintaining their status as the good daughter with the family structure. The cultural concept of *familismo* was identified as one that emphasizes loyalty, reciprocity, and solidarity (Espinoza, 2011). Espinoza (2011) stated “The double-edged sword Latinas with a strong sense of *familismo* face is that their connections to family, which undoubtedly compete with school, gives them a sense of belonging which they draw on to do well academically” (p. 319). The Latina students were interviewed and asked questions regarding their childhood experiences and their current family relationships. The findings resulted in two different groups: the integrators, and the separators (Espinoza,
The separators managed to keep family and school separate to minimize tension or conflict. Whereas, the integrators communicated extensively with family and kept open lines of communication regarding their school experiences. In doing so, the integrators enlisted the support of their family and depended on that support to succeed.

Furthermore, a growing body of research indicates the influence of a mother or a mother-like individual to have played a significant role in the success of Latinas. As seen in Medina and Luna’s (2000) phenomenological study, there was a strong correlation between Latina’s academic achievements and the support of their mother towards their education goals. The three participants contributed the strong influence of their mother or a mother image (comrade) to their overall building of their abilities and success (Medina & Luna, 2000). In addition, Mendez-Morse (2004) conducted a study of six Latina educational leaders to identify the motivational factors and support networks in pursuing their educational careers. The study identified parental support as a significant factor for Latinas achieving their educational and career goals, with mothers playing a far more important role. Though these mothers have limited education themselves, they played an active role in the academic success of their daughters. In another study, Mendez-Morse (2014) identified a distant family member such as an aunt, a female sister or female cousin, as support in seeking postsecondary education. These family members provided critical information in way of support services, college admissions, but most importantly were inspired
by the example of their own educational journey in higher education (Mendez-Morse, 2014). With limited Latina role models in higher education, Latinas have utilized the support of strong women in their lives.

Another significant source of support for Latina leaders has been contributed by their spouses, who not only provide the flexibility to pursue higher education, but many will take on additional responsibilities to ensure their wives have ample time to focus on their educational and professional endeavors (Carranza, 1988; Maes, 2010; Mendez-Morse, 2000; Montas-Hunter, 2012). In addition, Espinoza (2015) identified Latinos as significant support for Latinas due to the cultural change among Latino men. The stereotypical macho gender role is becoming a thing of the past, according to Espinoza (2015).

Many of the women I interviewed were encouraged and supported by fathers, brothers, uncles, boyfriends, and domestic partners to excel in school. This finding shows that Latino men embrace the changing role of women as strong and educated. Latino men also seem to have a more egalitarian view of gender roles in both relationships and families. This is why we are seeing increasing numbers of Latinas in leadership positions and at the forefront of activism and social change in their communities. (p. 2).

More recently, the literature has shown a shift in Hispanic men playing a more supportive role in the academic success of Latinas (Espinoza, 2015).
Latina leaders depend heavily on the support and connection with family and others to provide balance in navigating their obligations, which acts as a catalyst for their academic and career successes.

**Spirituality.** “Our spiritual beliefs do influence our comportment in many aspects of our lives, including our jobs” (Canul, 2003, p. 173). Spirituality can be defined as an individual’s “awareness and perceptions of closeness to God or a higher power as well as connection to the universe” (Vela, Castro, Cavazos, Cavazos, & González, 2015, p. 173). Research has shown Latinas lean on their own sense of spirituality and find strength from it in their leadership roles (Canul, 2003; Gonzalez, 2009; Vela et al., 2015).

A 1999 study focused on Latina leadership and the connection it had to spirituality. Rodriguez was primarily interested in the ways in which their spirituality informed their style of leadership. Most of the Latina women interviewed credited their church, primarily the Roman Catholic church, as being highly instrumental in their development as leaders (Rodriguez, 1999). Rodriguez defined spirituality in the broadest sense, “…as the whole of our deepest religious beliefs, convictions, and patterns of thought, emotion, and behavior in respect to what is ultimate” or God, spirit, one’s work, or family (Rodriguez, 1999, p. 138). As Rodriguez points out, for many Latinas the role of spirituality plays a significant role in the way they lead and their commitment to service. Furthermore, he suggests that spirituality was considered a catalyst in career path to serve others.
Furthermore, Castellanos and Gloria (2007) viewed spirituality as part of a strength-based practice when examining the successes of undergraduate Latina students in higher education. The presence of espiritualidad (spirituality) provides a feeling of connection to a higher power that interconnects them with *familia* (family) and brings meaning and purpose (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007).

**Women Leadership**

Women have always held a myriad of leadership roles through the years. Studies have found there are distinct differences in leadership styles between men and women (Curry, 2000; Book, 2000; Helgensen, 1990). Women in leadership roles have a history of experiencing challenges versus their male counterparts, as leadership has been viewed as a masculine enterprise (Carli & Eagly, 2001).

Kezar (2000) conducted a study of 40 faculty members and administrators at a small community college. She examined how leadership is interpreted differently based on gender, race, and role in the institution. She stated, “women’s leadership is associated with a more participatory, relational, and interpersonal style as well as with different types of power and influence strategies that emphasize reciprocity and collectivity” (p. 7). Leadership styles are often associated with gender stereotypes and common perceptions of gender traits (Henderson, 2004; Lukaka, 2015). Male leaders are viewed as having task-oriented and transactional leadership styles (Lukaka, 2015; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001), whereas female leaders are often viewed as having
more transformational and participatory leadership styles (Elmuti, Jia, & Davis, 2009).

In addition, Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, and van Engen (2001) conducted a meta-analysis of 45 studies looking primarily at the issues of gender and how it relates to leadership styles. The results indicated that women experience more barriers than their male counterparts, while greater emphasis is placed on their leadership styles, perhaps because leadership styles often use male leadership characteristics as baselines. In summary, behaviors of female leaders were viewed as more interpersonal, democratic, and closely related to the transformational leadership style. As for the male leaders, their leadership style leaned more to the transactional and task-oriented characteristics.

Women leaders often take on the role of “super woman” as the need to juggle various roles in their quest for leadership such as maintaining primary responsibility for child rearing, household duties, elder care, and family obligations. In addition, women of color experience additional constraints as they not only have to deal with the issue of gender but also with race and ethnicity (Amey & Eddy, 2002; Ponjuan, 2011; Garza, 1993).

Latina Leadership

Hispanic women continue to occupy a small percentage of leadership roles in the United States (Catalyst, 2003). In 2012, about 73 percent of Fortune 500 companies had a least one women executive officer yet; not one was a Latina (Rosario, 2012). Though there is ample research highlighting the impact
and contributions made by women in leadership roles, there is a limited amount of scholarship focusing on Latina leadership (Mendez-Morse, 2004). For example, Hite (2007) found there is an abundance of gender research in professional positions but are limited to White women and are exclusionary of minority women in the same positions. As of 2008, only 16 percent of senior administrators in institutions of higher education were minorities (Montas-Hunter, 2012). In 2003, only 91 Hispanics were presidents or chancellors of higher education institutions and of that 91, 15 were female (Montas-Hunter, 2012). Due to the small numbers of Latinas represented in leadership roles, there is an additional burden placed on them to represent Latinas in general.

A small number of studies have been done on the leadership styles of Latinas, and those in higher education. Some characteristics of Latina leaders include: integrity, hard-working and work ethic, service (Aguirre, 2000; Catalyst, 2003; Johnson, 2016). These characteristics have led to Latinas being associated with servant leadership that are consistent with Greenleaf’s servant leadership style, such as putting their followers first by empowering them to develop to their full capacities, strong ethical standards, and being sensitive to the personal concerns of others (Northouse, 2013).

The need for Latina leadership in higher education is even more critical than in years past. A review of the literature focusing on women leadership and Hispanic women have revealed the need for further study to provide greater detail about the process of gaining knowledge from the personal and professional
experiences of Hispanic women in leadership roles. A significant challenge in the study of Latina leadership is the lack of reporting on the numbers of Latinas in administrative roles in higher education (Gandara, 1995).

Applied Critical Leadership

“Whether you welcome, resist, or are indifferent to changes, Latino individuals, groups, and concerns will contribute to the shaping of our common future within your lifetime and even more within that of your children” (Cuello, 1996, p. 1). Institutions of higher education, and especially universities, are known to be resistant to change (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004). Applied critical leaders do not only influence others but they also promote change within institutions. The core of applied critical leadership (ACL) is change. Educational leaders who apply ACL make a difference by choosing change as opposed to educational leaders who choose to change with the growing challenges facing education in the United States (Santamaria & Santamaria, 2012). Santamaria and Santamaría (2012) posit that educational leaders can “choose change as a modus operandi, adapting, flexing, morphing, and moving fluidly within a given context or circumstance” (p. 10).

Research has shown the need for culturally relevant leadership strategies and practices within educational settings for Latina/os (Santamaria, 2014). The applied critical leadership model can provide a unique perspective from other frameworks within the educational leadership field. Applied critical leadership can be viewed as a form of funds of knowledge through a multicultural lens
where leaders draw from their identities through a strength-based perspective (Santamaria, 2014). “Latina applied critical leaders blend traditional leadership practice with their personal and professional ‘funds of knowledge’ rooted in their raced and gendered realities and experiences with schooling and then apply that hybridized knowledge to their leadership practice” (Santamaria & Santamaria, 2012, p. 22). Santamaria and Santamaria (2012) concluded,

Latina critical leaders exhibit fresh, innovative ways of leading to meet increasingly challenging needs and choose change as their primary leadership outcome, based on their adaptive experiences—rather than waiting to react to a failing system. These leaders also express a moral and ethical obligation to lead being “called” to serve in a leadership capacity. (p. 25)

Applied critical leadership theory proposes nine characteristics that set apart an ACL leader from other leaders. These characteristics can be seen in meetings, in the classroom, or mentoring students, or in any other opportunity provided to influence conversation where a strengths-based perspective can be provided relevant to people of color (Santamaria & Santamaria, 2012).

The theory of applied critical leadership is comprised of transformative leadership principles realized through the application of critical pedagogy, which is viewed through a critical race theory lens. It poses the question of how identity enhances one’s ability to see alternative perspectives to provide effective leadership (Santamaria & Santamaria, 2012). Figure 5 provides the theoretical
Santamaria and Santamaria (2012) discuss the importance of considering multiple voices in leadership approach to move away from deficit-based thinking to a model that is strengths-based. ACL considers the perspectives of those possibly missing in the conversation and those who benefit from the actions of ACL leaders. In this study, the conversation of Hispanic female administrative leader in higher education is missing. Providing a platform for their voices could
ultimately benefit the academic and professional success of future Latinas in higher education settings. Leaving out or discounting their voices could also be detrimental to Latina/o students pursuing higher education.

Pivotal Moments Theory

Currently there are limited educational studies regarding academic and professional pivotal moments in the lives of Latina/os and their paths to leadership positions in higher education. Pivotal moments can have a direct influence on a person’s ability to perform a task (Buss, 1979).

A study conducted by Dahlvig & Longman (2010) looked at the defining moments experienced by women in Christian higher education. They interviewed 16 emerging leaders regarding their personal and professional journeys. They identified the concept of a defining moment that has the potential to significantly change the direction of one’s life. Three primary themes emerged from the interview transcriptions in response the questions of identifying the most defining moment on their leadership journey. The themes identified were: someone speaking potential into their lives; a counterstory to leadership; and a significant event where the women viewed themselves as a leader (Dahlvig & Longman, 2010). The participants were able to identify specific pivotal moments through their leadership journey that shifted the trajectory of not only their self-perceptions but their life journey as well.
Summary

The need for diverse leadership is particularly important to the success of the next generation of Latina students, faculty, and leaders. Institutions of higher education must make considerable changes in the professional development opportunities for Latina faculty to expose other Latinas to administrative roles in higher education and provide much needed role models and mentoring.

The literature shows there is an overwhelming lack of attention to Latina leadership and particularly, administrative leadership positions in higher education beyond the presidency. The literature reveals a narrow focus on institution settings when conducting research on Latina/os in higher education. A focus on community college, public four-year universities, and private four-year universities would offer a wider range of transferability to a broader audience. In addition, the literature shows limited research design and methodologies when conducting research on Latinas in higher educational leadership roles, significantly phenomenological studies.

The literature suggests Latina administrative leadership is an extremely significant thread of research to continue. Educational leaders need to improve the recruitment, retention, and promotion of Latina faculty members.

The next chapter describes how the literature reviewed and the conceptual framework of applied critical leadership, and pivotal moments impacted the research design, methodology, research questions, interview questions, and how the data was collected and analyzed. In addition, the
positionality of the researcher, conceptual framework, delimitations, limitations, and chapter summary are included.
CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to explore the lives of Latina leaders in administrative positions in higher education. Their personal and professional lives were examined to see how their leadership approach was cultivated and developed. Their narratives provided insight into how their experiences, rooted in their race and gender, shaped their approach to leadership. The study examined how role models, mentors, and support networks played an integral role in their leadership trajectory. It examined, from the perspective of Latinas, the barriers, and catalysts they experienced in occupying their administrative roles in higher education.

The following research questions served as a guide for this study:

1. What are the personal and professional experiences of Latinas in higher education administrative leadership roles of Presidents, Provosts, Chancellors, Vice Presidents, and Deans?
2. What pivotal moments did they experience along their educational journey?
3. How have their experiences shaped their approach to leadership?

In this chapter, the purposes of using narrative inquiry as the research design will be explained. Subsequently, the research setting, selection of participants, data collection, and interview protocol will also be discussed. The
process of data analysis will be described along with trustworthiness of the data, followed by a summary of the relevant points of the chapter.

Research Design

Qualitative Research

A qualitative research approach was appropriate for this study as it captures the lived experiences of participants in their natural setting (Creswell, 2013). According to Glesne (2006) “Qualitative research methods are used to understand some social phenomena from the perspective of those involved, to contextualize issues in their socio-cultural milieu, and sometimes to transform or change social conditions” (p. 4). Qualitative methodology includes the voice of the participants, reflexivity of the researcher, description, and interpretation of the problem and how it can contribute to the overall literature (Creswell, 2013). This approach acknowledges that critical information lies within the data collected; and through interactions, discussion, and interpretation with the participants, the researcher in turn can identify themes and patterns to better understand human behavior (Creswell, 2013).

As the topic of this study focuses on exploring the lived experiences of several Latina leaders in higher education, a narrative research approach is best suited. Reyes and Rios (2005) stated the use of narratives are beneficial in researching Latinas in higher education settings because it:

…gives voice to a silenced discourse that is often concealed for fear of appearing weak, confrontational, self-pitying, or unscholarly or fear of
numerous other labels that restrain Latina academics and others from discussing issues that need to be examined (p. 378).

Furthermore, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) state qualitative narrative inquiry is useful in empowering participants to share their stories and provide a platform for their voices to be heard. The inclusion of narratives is compelling, provides validation and seeks to find resonance for other Latina/os in higher education (Reyes & Rios, 2005).

In qualitative studies, the researcher is the primary tool from which data is collected, analyzed, interpreted, and presented (Creswell, 2013). As the researcher, I used my race, ethnicity, and professional experience in education to build rapport with the participants, and gain their trust, which afforded me solidarity.

Research Methodology

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is a way of forming meaningful connections to life stories. Delgado-Romero et al. (2003) identified the narrative approach to be best suited to identify barriers and enablers in an academic setting. It is a way to gain access to an individual’s personal experiences through a narrative structure (Kramp, 2004). Creswell (2013) defined the method of narrative research as a collection of stories, sharing individuals lived experiences, and providing meaning of those experiences in a chronological manner. Chase (2003) adds that narratives are structured in such a way to have a beginning, middle, and ending
with the purpose of answering a question. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) described narratives as a way of providing the participant’s background and restorying their experiences so the reader can gain an understanding of their lived experiences. Narrative stories can be collected through a myriad of ways such as interviews, observations, document analysis, archives, as well as photos (Creswell, 2013). Narrative inquiry is not limited to just spoken word and takes into consideration many forms of input.

Narrative inquiry is applicable to this study as it focuses on the personal and professional lived experiences of the Latina participants. Johnson-Bailey (2004) stated that the narrative approach is most successful when dealing with research focusing on critical race theories because of its focus on collaborating with the participant, especially women of color.

**Research Setting**

Three different institutional settings were chosen as they typically determine pathways in higher education. The research settings included community colleges, public universities, and private universities across California. Also, given the disparagingly low numbers of Latinas in leadership positions, broadening the scope of potential participants was another important factor in choosing three institutional settings rather than a single institution.

**Selection of Participants**

Given the small number of Latinas in leadership roles in higher education, a small group of Latinas were purposefully recruited for the study. According to
Patton (2002), the credibility of the small sample size would not be affected as it provided rich and in-depth experiences that are correlated to the research questions and the purpose of the study was to gain transferability and to generalize experiences.

The use of purposeful sampling was beneficial as the study focused on exploring the personal and professional experiences to better understand the leadership approaches of Hispanic female leaders in higher education. According to Merriam (1998), purposeful sampling “is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 61).

The research participants needed to meet the following criteria:

1. Self-identified, Hispanic or Latina Origin (regardless of race)
2. Female
3. Hold an administrative leadership position in higher education (president, provost, chancellor, vice president, or deans)

“It is difficult to study Latinas in higher education administration because they are not counted” (Grady, 2003, p. 478). Currently, there is not a list identifying Latinas in these leadership roles in higher education. Since this population is considered a hard to reach or hidden population, snowball sampling was employed as a way of recruiting possible research participants. Glesne (2016) described snowball sampling as obtaining possible recruits from other individuals who know they meet the research criteria. This was achieved through
personal contacts in higher education as well as participants that suggested other colleagues they felt met the criteria. Merriam (2009) suggested snowball sampling as a form of purposeful sampling.

In addition, the use of maximum variation sampling was used as the technique of purposeful sampling for institution type. Seidman (2013) suggests maximum variation sampling allows for the “widest possibility for readers of the study to connect to what they are reading” (p. 56). Since the participants were recruited from community colleges, four-year public universities, and private four-year universities in California, maximum variation sampling provided a wider range of transferability to the readers.

For the purpose of the study, participants were asked to provide a pseudonym for the purposes of confidentiality. Six of the seven participants provided an alias and one was provided for the participant that did not respond. Four of the participants were from community colleges, two were from four-year public universities, and one was from a private four-year university. Two of the participants earned a Doctorate in Educational Leadership (Ed.D.), two earned a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.), and three participants earned a Master of Business Administration (M.B.A.). Additionally, one of the participants is currently enrolled in a Ph.D. program. The highest degree earned by each participant was not reported as it could possibly identify the participants. The reported demographic information for the participants is displayed below in Table 1.
Table 1. Summary of Demographic Information by Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Reported Ethnicity</th>
<th>Years Employed in Higher Education</th>
<th>Current Leadership Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Luna</td>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Dean of Student Engagement and Enrollment Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Dean of Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria Teresa</td>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Associate Vice President for Student Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maggie</td>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>President</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ana</td>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>Chicana</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Dean of Institutional Effectiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>Chicana</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Vice Chancellor for Planning and Budget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexandria</td>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Vice President of Student Services</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All seven of the participants identified themselves as first generation college graduates. All seven of the participants are married, while only three of the participants have children.

A review of the Informed Consent form and a brief summary of the study was done prior to each interview. Each participant had the opportunity to ask questions prior to the start of the interview and the audio recording process.

Informed Consent. Ethical considerations are an important factor in qualitative studies as the interview process includes personal information about the participant.
(Seidman, 2013). Prior to the data collection process, the study was submitted for review to the Institutional Review Board of the California State University, San Bernardino, California, to ensure “that appropriate steps are taken to protect the rights and welfare of humans participating as subjects in research” (Institutional Review Board, 2015, para. 1). A complete application was submitted along with an Informed Consent form (see Appendix A) as attachments for review. In addition to the original IRB application (see Appendix C), an IRB modification letter (see Appendix D) was requested and approved to include a short demographic questionnaire (see Appendix B).

To ensure the participant’s rights to privacy were followed, the IRB approved Informed Consent form was provided to each participant. The Informed Consent form (see Appendix A) was provided to individuals expressing a desire to participate in the study. By signing and dating the Informed Consent form, participants acknowledged that they read and understood the purpose of the study, the parameters of the study, the expectations of the participants and that they were at least 18 years of age or older. The participants were informed that participation was completely voluntary. Participants were informed they were free to withdraw at any time.

Data Collection Methods

Once IRB application (see Appendix C) was approved, an email was sent to each potential candidate introducing the researcher, purpose of the study, and a request to participate in the study. If the participant agreed to participate, then
a follow up email was sent, which included an informed consent form and a request for their curriculum vita. The curriculum vita served as a map to follow each participant’s educational trajectory into leadership. After the initial IRB application (see Appendix C) was approved, a modification request to include a short demographic questionnaire (Appendix B) was submitted and approved. Participants were asked to fill out the demographic questionnaire as part of the study. This questionnaire was used primarily for descriptive purposes as well as part of the triangulation of data to compare to their curriculum vitae to gain a broader understanding of their experiences.

I contacted twelve potential participants. Nine participants responded to my email with interest in participating in the study. One participant emailed me the day of her interview to say she was unable to participate due to an illness. She did not respond to a follow up request to reschedule her interview. One potential participant responded to the request for an interview with excitement for the study but she no longer worked in an administrative position and therefore, did not meet the criteria. She did provide the name of a potential participant who was contacted and agreed to participate. Seven participants were interviewed at the conclusion of the data collection period.

The primary source of data collected was gathered during the interviews conducted with the participants. Interviews were audio recorded using two devices to ensure workability. The researcher also maintained a journal to annotate field notes and reflections throughout the study. Other data collected
included public documents such as biographies provided by the institution, curricula vitae, media releases, and or special publications related to the participants of the study. Other data was not collected prior to the interview in an effort to limit researcher bias before the first phase of data analysis, which was the transcription process.

Data was secured on the researcher’s computer and backed up on a portable hard drive. The portable hard drive was placed in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher’s office where it will be kept for seven years. All interview transcriptions and field notes will be kept in the same locked filing cabinet for seven years in researcher’s office before being destroyed. The audio recordings were locked in a file cabinet in the researcher’s office during the transcription period. The process took approximately one week to transcribe the audio recordings. After each interview, an attempt was made to transcribe the audio recording. This provided an opportunity to reflect on each interview and provide additional notes in my research journal. This provided the first phase of data analysis. The audio recordings were erased as soon as information had been transcribed. Any computer data and hard drive data will be deleted and emptied from the trash bins on the researcher’s computer after a five-year period.

**Interview Protocol**

According to Clandinin (2013) interviewees will share their stories to provide a portal into their lived experiences and make sense of those experiences. Face to face interviews were conducted at a mutually agreed upon
location with each participant. All participants preferred their office at their respective institutions. Interviews took place from March 20, 2017 through March 29, 2017. Semi-structured interviews began with a grand tour question (Spradley, 1979) along with follow up probing questions were asked. Polkinghorne (1995) suggests that asking the interviewee to tell how something happened will solicit the natural generating of a storyline. The semi-structured interview process allowed the participants to share their stories from their perspective, and level of comfort, revealing as much information as they wished (Leech, 2002). The use of semi-structured interviews allowed for more specific topics to be discussed in an effort to make data collection more systematic (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). The topics discussed were 1) personal and professional experiences through their leadership trajectory; 2) barriers and catalysts along their journey; 3) support networks; 4) leadership approach; 5) identity as a Latina; and 6) advice to others seeking leadership roles. The use of the semi-structured interview format allowed for some consistency from one interview to the next.

Interviews were scheduled for 60 to 90 minutes, depending on the time available per participant. This approach provided participants time to reflect and reconstruct their experiences. According to Seidman (2013), an hour provides a standard unit of time creating a “watch the clock” (p. 23), while two hours is considered too for an interview. The interviews averaged from 44 minutes to 87 minutes in length.
McNamara’s (2005) guideline of eight principles for conducting research interviews was used to create the interview protocol for the study. The interview protocol included: a setting with little distraction, the purpose of the interview, the issue of confidentiality, the format of the interview, how long the interview would last, provide contact information, allow for pre/post questions, and permission to record the interview (McNamara, 2005). In addition, permission to contact them for further clarification was requested for member checking.

The way the interviews were conducted was done in a purposeful manner. As stated by Maya Angelou, “I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel” (Angelou, 2017, p. 1). Numerous techniques were used for asking questions for the semi-structured interviews. In an effort to solicit detailed and depth in the interview, the following illustrates the techniques used as suggested by Leech (2006). These techniques were used to gain rapport with the participant. This was done by putting participants at ease by being professional, friendly, providing a brief explanation of the study, and a reminder to participants that their identity would remain anonymous. The order in which I asked questions was important to the flow of the interview. A grand tour question (Spradley, 1979) was asked first to put the participants at ease to talk about their lived experiences. Intently listening during the interview allowed me the opportunity to briefly state an answer that needed further clarification and give the participant the opportunity to speak freely without being interrupted.
It was important for the interviews to feel more like a conversation rather than a structured interview. Five out of the seven respondents stated that I made them feel comfortable and that I was easy to talk to. In addition, four of the seven participants asked for me to share my own personal educational journey with them. I believe this also conveyed their interest in the study and level of comfort during the interview.

Transcription

After all the interviews were completed, each interview was transcribed verbatim, word for word from the audio recordings instead of outsourcing the transcription to a third-party transcription service. According to Halcomb and Davidson (2006):

…it can be beneficial for researchers to transcribe their own interview data, given that they have first had knowledge from their involvement in the interview process, expertise in the interview subject, and the advantage of having participated in both verbal and nonverbal exchanges with the participant (p. 40).

In addition, Patai (1988) adds that verbatim transcription is important as it acknowledges the words themselves. Though a researcher’s consciousness plays a vital role in the interpretation of the interview data, it is critical that the consciousness interacts “with the words of the participant recorded as fully and as accurately as possible” (Seidman, 2013, p. 117). The interviews were transcribed using Microsoft Word with the aid of a transcription pedal and Dragon
NaturallySpeaking, a transcription software. The use of Dragon NaturallySpeaking was only used for two out of the seven interview transcripts as it became cumbersome to listen to the interview and then repeat the words into the Dragon NaturallySpeaking software. I found that more time was taken to correct the transcripts. Each transcription was reviewed numerous times for accuracy. Transcription and editing took approximately 6 hours for each participant. All identifying markers were edited to maintain anonymity.

**Research Journal**

A reflection journal was kept throughout the study to annotate notes that captured extraneous information that was not directly obtained from interview responses such as the interview location, the initial greeting, body language, and participant’s demeanor. Ryan and Bernard (2003) state field notes act as a kind of theme filter as the researcher chooses the data this important or not important to them. The research journal assisted in the data analysis process as it allowed me to take notes of important aspects of the interview as it was taking place.

**Data Analysis**

According to Wellington (2000), there is no formal process established to analyze qualitative data; however, he does suggest general principles and guidelines should be adhered to for a systematic and reflective analysis process. Wellington (2000) suggests the following three general steps: immersion, reflecting, and taking apart the data. This provided a starting point for the data analysis of this study. I began with immersing myself in the data.
interviews, I kept a research journal to make notes during and after each interview. Following each interview, I attempted to transcribe the audio recording verbatim. Once the transcription was completed, I listened to the audio recordings and reviewed the typed transcriptions several times for accuracy. Once I was satisfied with the accuracy of the transcriptions, I sent each transcription to the participants for the process of member checking. During this time, I began the analysis of the data by reading over each transcribed interview several times making notes along the margins. I used different colored highlighters to mark emerging themes that I felt correlated to the research questions and the literature review. In addition, I cut out snippets of their narratives and laid them out to form a storyline as several of the participants did not share their stories in a chronological manner.

The next step was the reflection process. This process includes a period where the researcher “stands back” to allow for a fresh look at the data (Wellington, 2000, p. 135). As the researcher, I found this period extremely helpful as the data began overlapping and it began feeling messy. This allowed for me to come back to the data and see it with fresh eyes. The third step was to analyze the data. This involved taking the data apart into components or manageable pieces. As there is no formal process established for analyzing narrative data, I chose to analyze the data by employing Polkinghorne’s (1995) narrative analysis technique.
Polkinghorne’s (1995) narrative analysis technique allows researchers to collect snippets of events and happening to arrange a story. “The result of a narrative analysis is an explanation that is retrospective, having linked past events together to account for how a final outcome might have come about” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 16). As this study looked at the personal and professional experiences of Latina administrative leaders in higher education, it was important to develop a storyline of their journey to their current destinations of leadership. The use of narrative analysis was employed in analyzing the data to retell their stories. The process of narrative smoothing was used to remove any information that was not pertinent to the development of the story (Spence, 1986). In an effort to capture the personal and professional experiences of the Latina leaders, aligning the analysis of the data with the literature review and research questions were imperative in understanding their journeys.

Furthermore, narrative analysis was used to move the individual stories to common elements across the multiple stories to highlight similarities amongst the lived experiences of the Latina administrative leaders to gain better understanding collectively. Their collective voice is presented in chapter five as part of the recommendations and conclusion of the study.

“The result of a narrative analysis is an explanation that is retrospective, having linked past events together to account for how a final outcome might have come about” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 16). The purpose of the analysis of the
data was to capture the impact of their experiences, individually and collectively, and to gain understanding of those experiences.

**Trustworthiness**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) offer trustworthiness as an alternative to the traditional validity and reliability in judging research. It was important for the data collected to be trustworthy. Polkinghorne (1988) states that trustworthiness can portray credibility, authenticity, confirmability, and transferability through the examination of field notes, transcripts, and member checking. The aforementioned member checks allowed participants an opportunity to review the recorded data and provide feedback for clarity, accuracy, and or to expand on a particular issue of the transcript. This was done after each interview was transcribed and reviewed by the researcher, then participants were sent an email after their interviews were transcribed for member checking. An explanation of member checking and a timeline was provided in the Informed Consent form as well. The participants were provided one week to email back the transcripts with any corrections, comments, and clarifications. Six of the seven participants sent back approval of the transcripts within the one week timeline. I followed up two additional times via email with the participant who did not respond to the member checking email. After three weeks, I proceeded with the analysis of that participant. Two of the participants provided minor clarification of their transcripts.
A criticism of qualitative studies focuses on the issue of validity based upon the role of the researcher in the collection and analysis of the data (Glesne, 2006). Triangulation of the data was conducted by means of analyzing the narratives, member checks, research journal, and the participant’s curriculum vita to allow the data sources to converge with one another. Credibility is also addressed by providing a thick, rich description of the data through narratives (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Creswell and Miller (2000) state the purpose of providing a thick description is aimed at creating authenticity by providing “statements that produce for the readers the feeling that they have experienced, or could experience, the events being described in a study” (p. 129). Critical friend examination was conducted by asking the researcher’s committee member to review and comment on transcription summaries (Gordon, 2006).

In addition, the researcher’s positionality is particularly critical to enhance trustworthiness in the practice of qualitative research (Clandinin, 2013). A hallmark of narrative inquiry is the importance that the researcher brackets his or her own personal experiences to keep their own biases in check through the research process. More than positionality, my narrative representation is my own educational journey along with the barriers and catalysts I experienced.

Positionality of the Researcher

One of the greatest accomplishments in my life has been earning a college degree. Being a first-generation college student has proven to be both rewarding and challenging. My mother came from Mexico at the age of nine and
struggled in school until she was eventually pulled out in her junior year to work the fields to help support her family. The simple act of graduating from high school was all she asked of me and my siblings. The conversation of going to college was never brought up in our home. College was something "other" kids did. The contentment of graduating from high school was enough, or so I thought until I had my own children.

When my daughter was 12 years old, she had a class project and wanted to know what type of degree I had earned. I cringed. I stated I had a Ph.D. in mothering, Master in Finance, and Bachelor in Culinary Arts. I knew I wanted more for my children than what I had experienced, and the only way I knew to encourage them was by example. I took my first college course at the age of thirty-five and I had to learn the hard way how to navigate through my college experience. As I worked through class schedules, graduation plans, finances, and time management issues, it gave me a new resolve to be supportive of my own children.

Being a first-generation college student, I lacked not only role models in my life but also role models that looked like me. Though I was of mixed-race, all my life I have identified as Hispanic. We grew up in a small city that was predominately White. There was a small group of students that I could identify with throughout my k-12 educational journey. Over the course of seven years, I would complete an associate’s degree, a bachelor’s degree, and a master’s degree and not once did I have a professor that I could identify with. Though I
had a few female professors, I never had one that was of Hispanic or Latin
descent. It would not be until my first year of my doctoral program that I would
experience having someone I could identify with; my first Latina professor was
Dr. Nancy Acevedo-Gil. Although I had attended Hispanic Serving Institutions, I
naively expected the faculty and leadership to reflect their student population--it
was simply not the case.

Self in Relation to Others

In the last year of my undergraduate studies, I had a professor by the
name of Dr. David Baker for a leadership course. He was not only a phenomenal
teacher but he saw value in all his students regardless of race, age, gender, etc.
Later in my doctoral program, I would recognize Dr. Baker as having the tenants
of an applied critical leader, which was his ability to view others from a strength-
based perspective regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender. ACL considers the
perspectives of those possibly missing in the conversation and those who benefit
from the actions of ACL leaders.

Santamaria and Santamaria (2012) identified two types of applied critical
leaders. The first type of critical leader is one who is part of a historically
oppressed group and the second, those who choose to “assume and look
through a Critical Race Theory (CRT) lens to more effectively lead in the face of
educational inequity” (Santamaria & Santamaria, 2012, p. 6). Right before I
graduated, I had a meeting with Dr. Baker where I could share my educational
journey with him up until that point. I shared with him my reasoning for going to
college at the age of 35 and the numerous barriers I had experienced along the way. He asked me if I would continue my journey in higher education. As we spoke further, he commented on my leadership abilities and said I would make a great professor. This is where the seed of furthering my education was planted. I had never really thought about going beyond an undergraduate degree. He challenged me to be the change I wanted to see and be the Hispanic female leader that was lacking in higher education, particularly in the Department of Public Administration. He encouraged me to get my masters with the goal of obtaining a doctorate degree. I left that meeting determined to be a role model not only for my daughter but also for other students who felt limited by their barriers in their pursuit of higher education. I earned my master’s degree in three quarters with a 3.9 GPA to be able to apply for the doctoral program at California State University in San Bernardino.

When I started the doctoral program, I wanted to focus on first generation college students and the struggles they faced as well as the level of hope experienced by low socioeconomic status students. As my journey has progressed, my research interests have focused on the importance of being a role model to others, especially my children. After much soul searching and discussion, my dissertation has come to focus on Latina administrative leaders in higher education and the important role they play in nurturing and cultivating underrepresented students. I wanted to know how they developed their leadership approaches and what part did others play in cultivating their
leadership approaches. And, how are they in turn cultivating and nurturing others who aspire to be leaders? These questions parallel my own life experiences in reaching and developing my approach to leadership and the desire to support others. The process of developing a literature review was an eye-opening experience as there is a shortage of literature on Latina leaders in higher education. As I started developing my research questions, I realized the importance of capturing the stories of Latinas who were in administrative leadership positions such as President, Vice Presidents, Chancellors, Provosts, and Deans. It was more than simply identifying the colleges and universities they graduated from and or the degrees they hold. What I needed was their personal and professional experiences from the beginning. What was it like growing up? What were the barriers they experienced and how did they overcome those barriers? What coping mechanisms did they employ? How can others find resonance in their stories? What were the catalysts that provided encouragement and direction? How was their leadership developed? Who were their role models, mentors, and support networks? What I learned from the literature review process was Latina leaders in higher education experience a great deal more obstacles than their male counterparts and often more than other females in general.

From Self to System

My desire is that my research and study will assist aspiring leaders in their educational journeys and career paths. The information gathered may also
provide universities insights on how to cultivate and utilize the talents of Latina staff, faculty, and administrators to address the lack of educational attainment of Latinas within their institutional walls. In regard to Hispanic Serving Institutions, I ask the question, “Are these institutions serving or just enrolling Hispanic students?” This can be accomplished by institutions developing programs that promote mentoring opportunities and develop support networks for faculty and students. It can also provide understanding on how to recruit, retain, and promote the next generation of Latina leaders.

**Conceptual Framework**

*By bringing in our own approaches and methodologies, we transform that theorizing space* (Anzaldúa, 1990, p. xxv).

According to Ravitch and Riggan (2012) “the conceptual framework of your study [is] the systems of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that supports and informs your research” (p. 8). It is a way of situating your own knowledge through the experience and expertise of others through a critical lens (Ravitch & Riggan, 2012).

Research on Latinas in higher education has primarily focused on critical race theory (CRT) and Latino critical race theory (LatCrit). Research is very limited on utilizing applied critical leadership (ACL) along with pivotal moments as part of a conceptual framework for research on Latina leaders in higher education, yet applying the ACL helped me gain a better understanding of the
role identity and how pivotal moments can contribute to the academic success of Latina administrative leaders in higher education.

**Applied Critical Leadership**

Applied critical leadership theory guided the questions regarding personal and professional experiences, experienced barriers and catalysts, along with leadership approaches through the influence of identity. The theory of applied critical leadership is comprised of transformative leadership principles realized through the application of critical pedagogy, which is viewed through a critical race theory lens (Santamaria & Santamaria, 2012). It poses the question of how identity enhances one’s ability to see alternative perspectives to provide effective leadership (Santamaria & Santamaria, 2012).

**Pivotal Moments Theory**

Pivotal moments theory guided the questions regarding the personal, educational, and professional experiences influenced by role models and mentors and how the pivotal moments experienced shaped the leadership approaches of Latina leaders in higher education. Espinoza (2011) defined a pivotal moment as, “a significant academic intervention initiated by a college educated adult who intentionally reaches out to a student to provide the student with educational guidance and support” (p. 33).

**Delimitations**

According to Simon and Goes (2013) delimitations are defined boundaries within a study that are exclusionary and inclusionary in the decision process in
the development of a study. The research problem highlighted the significant underrepresentation of Latinas in administrative leadership roles in higher education. Therefore, participants were limited to women of Latina heritage. No other gender, ethnicity, or racial groups were included in this study. Furthermore, the leadership positions that were selected for the study were defined as Presidents, Provosts, Chancellors, Vice Presidents, and Deans of community colleges, public and private four-year universities. The participants were selected from a small region in California.

Limitations

Lunenburg and Irby (2009) define limitations as, “…factors that may have an effect on the interpretation of the findings” (p. 133). Limitations for this study included the potential scarcity of potential participants based on the criteria set forth in the study. Additionally, the stories they shared are in their own words and rely on how they best remember their life events (Connelly, 2013; Kramp, 2004).

Applied critical leadership theory is an emergent leadership theory that takes the experiences of people of color and put their experiences, characteristics, and actions into words. A small number of studies have utilized ACL as a stand-alone theoretical framework or part of a conceptual framework; therefore, this is limited research on its application. In addition, the use of pivotal moments theory as described by Espinoza (2011) limits the experiences to an academic intervention initiated by a college educated adult only.
Summary

According to Connelly and Clandinin (1990) narrative researchers seek ways to understand the lived experiences of research participants through the process of restorying. The purpose of this narrative study was to share the stories of Latina leaders in administrative positions in higher education. As a researcher, I attempted to retell the stories of seven Latina administrative leaders in higher education in effort to gain insight in their personal and professional lives as they progressed through their leadership trajectory. Their narratives allowed for a storyline to be developed on how their leadership approach was cultivated and shaped through their unique life experiences in their own words. In addition, their support structures such as family members, role models, mentors, and personal resiliency contributed to their educational and leadership successes. Their experienced catalysts and barriers were shared to gain an understanding into the lessons and strategies used along their journey in ultimately obtaining their current leadership roles in higher education.

This chapter presented the conceptual framework of the study, the qualitative research design, and the methodology. This narrative inquiry was guided by the conceptual framework of applied critical leadership (Santamaria & Santamaria, 2012) and the theory of pivotal moments (Espinoza, 2012), which guided the research questions and to semi-structured interview questions to capture the lived experiences of Latina administrative leaders in higher education. Narrative inquiry allowed for the participants voices to be amplified,
individually and collectively, which may have otherwise been silenced (Trahar, 2013).
CHAPTER FOUR
PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS

The intent of this chapter is to present the findings of the research conducted on the personal and professional lives of Latina administrative leaders in higher education. By utilizing narrative inquiry, I attempted to capture each Latina’s story through the use of storytelling (Polkinghorne, 1995; Webster & Mertova, 2007). Furthermore, Santamaria and Santamaria (2012) suggest the use of storytelling when utilizing applied critical leadership as a theoretical framework. Reporting on each individual’s story honored their unique journeys. A great deal can be learned through the stories shared by these women. By examining the experiences through their educational trajectory, insight can be gained on how they navigated potential barriers and how pivotal moments served as catalysts. As stated by Yoder-Wise and Kowalski (2003), two key reasons for creating stories are to examine the cause and effect of choice and looking for what worked through contributing factors. This narrative inquiry study provided a platform for the Latina administrative leaders to share their stories in such a way that highlights their resiliency and honors their experiences in their own words. The narratives of seven Latina administrative leaders in higher education will be interpreted through the three research questions.

1. What are the personal and professional experiences of Latinas in higher education administrative leadership roles of Presidents,
Results of the Study

This study explored the lives of seven Latina administrative leaders in higher education. Each narrative includes an introduction of the participant, the retelling of their story, their sage advice for others seeking leadership roles in their own words, and summation of their experience. The use of participant’s quotes was used significantly to provide authenticity of their experiences by allowing the reader to truly capture the essence of the lives of the Latina leaders in this study (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) suggest the use of participants’ quotes when presenting the results of interview studies as there is not a standard approach (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Each participant was asked to choose an alias to maintain confidentiality. Six of the seven chose their own pseudonym. At the end of each narrative, I present a summary of their experiences in relation to literature review and the research questions. The following are the narratives of Luna, Emma, Maria Teresa, Maggie, Ana, Mary, and Alexandria, current administrative leaders in higher education.

Luna’s Narrative

Luna was born in Central America and is the eldest of two children. Luna came from a low-socioeconomic status family. Her parents were hardworking
people who started working at very young ages. Her mother dropped out of school after the sixth grade because she had to go to work to help her family. Though her father finished high school in his native Guatemala, he was unable to attend college because he needed to help support his family. Her parents married young and had two children.

Luna recalls her father losing his factory job because of its closure due to the economic downturn in Guatemala. This caused her father to start looking for other options to support his family. She remembered one particular day when she was about five years old. She and her father had gone to the market to buy food. While in the store, she asked her father to buy her a piece of watermelon. He told her he was unable to buy it for her. As Luna shared this story, she became emotional as she recounted the memory of her father being unable to afford the “extra” because of their financial condition.

*After that he figured, “Ok, I cannot afford a piece of watermelon for my daughters so I have to move. I have to look at plan B”. So, he did that…and, [he] looked at other options…he got settled here in LA, west LA and we moved a year after.*

Moving to a new home would have been significant for a six-year-old child, but to move to another country was a monumental transition in Luna’s life. Luna shared that her own children were four and six and she couldn’t imagine them making such a transition. Although she was thankful for the support of extended
family, she was particularly thankful for the sacrifices her mother and father made to ensure she and her sister had a better life.

Luna grew up in Los Angeles, California with her parents and her younger sister. Her father was particularly strict. This meant no boyfriends or mention of boys. He would explain to the girls that their education was paramount to everything else.

*Because at the end of the day, no one can take your education away from you. That is one thing no matter what you do, even if you get married, get divorced, or [it] just doesn’t work out, your education always sticks with you.*

Luna knew from a young age that her father desired for her to get an education, therefore, it became important to her as well.

One of Luna’s favorite things to play was “bank.” She loved going to the bank with her parents. She said she was always drawn to the deposit and withdrawal slips. She would take several home with her and she would play “bank” with them. She had fake money and pretend clients. She looks back now and attributes her love for business to this childhood memory.

As the oldest child, Luna experienced greater responsibilities at a young age. Since her parents did not speak English, Luna was involved in language brokering for her parents. Whether it was assisting in bank transactions or communicating on business calls for her parents, Luna would interpret for her
parents. She saw her task of language brokering as a positive experience because it gave her confidence to speak to others and her desire to help others.

**K-16 Educational Pipeline.** After Luna and her sister arrived in Los Angeles, her father immediately started looking for school options. Her father stressed the importance of a good education. He wanted his girls to have a solid educational foundation for the purpose of attending college.

Luna states she was a product of public school in Los Angeles, California. Luna attended public schools in the LA area from kindergarten through third grade. After the third grade, her father decided he needed to make a change if his daughters were going to go to college. Though her father did not speak English, he began researching schools in the local area. She is not sure how he obtained the necessary information for them to make a school change. Although Luna recalls the family not having access to a computer, Luna’s father was able to find information about magnet schools, as private school was not an option.

Her father and mother decided the girls would attend a magnet school located in Brentwood. This meant Luna and her sister would have to be bussed to the nearby suburb of Brentwood in Los Angeles, California. According to Luna, she and her sister attended a great elementary magnet school until the sixth grade. It was then that her father again started to look for magnet schools closer to home. He found a seventh through twelfth grade blue ribbon school closer to home that boasted of great performing arts, science, and mathematics programs.
As she advanced to high school, Luna recalled wanting to explore career options with her high school counselor, which she found to be “pointless.” The counselor, an older White woman suggested that a private university would be too much money and that there were some “good” public four-year universities but it would be difficult for Luna to gain acceptance. Her counselor advised Luna to attend a nearby community college she could access by public transportation. Thankfully, Luna and her father were determined to find answers. Luna remembers going home to tell her father the advice her counselor had given her.

*My dad said, “I don’t care about the money. I am going to help you get through college if it takes two to three jobs. It doesn’t matter and you are not going to a community college.”* So, he said to go back to her and get a pamphlet on information about other colleges. I remember going back to the counselor’s office and she still didn’t help [me]. She just said there are some college books here and you have to take an exam and do a prep. She gave no other help for the SAT, nothing. *I just started thumbing through everything and I came across some private schools and I knew I wanted to stay within California.*

Luna is very close to her family. She was determined to stay close to home. One thing she did know was that she wanted to study business. Once she settled on three different universities, her father suggested they drive out to the schools. One of the campuses was a small and quiet private university with lots
of green grass. She said when she walked on the campus it felt like home to her.

She felt comfortable there and knew this is where she wanted to study.

*They had a great business program. If I needed to go home, I was only 45 minutes away to an hour. I could get home the same day. The counselors and the admissions staff were all very friendly and helpful.*

*They really embraced the opportunity as we had very limited information. Even though I got into the other schools, I just felt like they gave me what I needed as they were very high touch. They gave me the time and the information I needed. It was very expensive for my parents. Once we did the numbers, my dad was like I can work a night job and a weekend job. He had three jobs and my mom had two jobs at one time. She was just a house keeper and took care of kids as well. Just being able to do that they really helped me with my tuition and costs.*

She knew her parents were sacrificing and working so hard for her to attend the college of her choice. She was very conscientious of her expenses. Wherever she could cut costs she would. This meant buying used books from other classmates or borrowing books, if available. To help out financially, Luna got involved in a work study program on campus in her sophomore year.

Her job was in the admissions department, which included campus tours, open houses, and being a part of student panels. As a bilingual student, Luna was able to communicate with non-English speaking parents. Many of the parents she came in contact were unfamiliar with the college process and some
were hesitant to allow their children to attend college. The parents would express the need for their children to work in an effort to help support their families. Unlike Luna’s parents, many of the Latino parents she came in contact with had a misconception of what it meant to go to college.

They would put mom and dad on the phone and I would share with them my experience about going to school in LA and that it’s possible for your child to go to college. This experience helped me develop a mentoring program.

Luna developed a mentoring program that encouraged high school students to experience college life for a weekend. They would go to classes on Friday with another student and then on Saturday and Sunday, they conducted activities for the high school students to become familiar with a college experience. Luna knew firsthand how valuable these types of programs were to low income, first generation college students.

Her sister was a few years younger than her and she knew the time would come for her sister to attend college. Because of their age difference, Luna realized the sisters would overlap a year, which meant her parents would have to pay tuition for both. She met with a school counselor, who informed her she could graduate early if she attended community college every summer and took classes. Luna began the next summer attending classes during the summer with a goal to graduate early. With a great deal of determination and hard work, Luna was able to graduate in just over three years.
Experience Leading in Higher Education. Upon graduation, Luna continued to work in the admissions department on her campus and she did the bookkeeping for a homeowners association at a complex nearby. She worked those two jobs for a couple of years and then started to feel something was missing. She expressed her job was “too transactional” and this is when she started looking for graduate schools.

She knew to be competitive in the business world, she would need a master’s degree. Luna knew her ability to speak Spanish would be an asset to her so she decided to consider international business degrees. She began working at a private university and just after six months there, she began exploring the school MBA program. She knew the program was exceptional and she applied and was accepted. It was at this time she knew she wanted to look into higher education as a long-term career.

As she continued to work at the university, she became an admissions counselor and worked with students in the recruitment process. As she continued to grow, she moved into the position of an assistant director. Her director provided opportunities for growth that included assisting him in strategizing their outreach and recruitment of international and domestic students for all of their MBA programs. She attributes her growth as a leader to her director. Luna shared he was a phenomenal director and mentor. She feels he was able to see potential in her and he encouraged her to grow in her position.
Once Luna earned her MBA, she continued to explore her options. She knew she wanted to stay in higher education. She loved her current position but she knew the potential for growth was not there.

*I started to see that my director wasn’t going anywhere. I thought, he is retiring from here and there is no way he is going to leave.*

After a year, she started looking at her options elsewhere. She interviewed with a non-profit organization that focused on preschool access in Los Angeles county. She was offered the position and she worked there for two years. It was during this time she became involved with a Hispanic association in the Los Angeles area, which provided her the opportunity to travel. In her traveling to conferences, she met her husband to be. They carried on a long-distance relationship for about eight or nine months before deciding to get married. He was from the San Diego area and she was from the Los Angeles area. They began to explore their career and home options in their respective cities along with the Inland Empire. In searching the Inland Empire area, she came across some small private colleges. She refers to the campuses as “the little piece of gold that was hidden and I found it”. She applied for a position as the Director of Admissions and was offered the position. Ironically, the day she was offered the position was also the same day they found the home they would eventually purchase. She took this as a sign.
All of the stars aligned. That meant that this is the next step. I came here as a director of admissions and took the opportunity and ran with it. It has been an amazing experience the last eight years of my life here.

Her predecessor appreciated Luna’s ability to strategize and create a vision for the institution’s future. She quickly moved into an assistant dean position, which meant she was overseeing admissions and financial aid. With the growth of the institution came additional job duties. They included international processing of students, recruitment, admissions, and financial aid for international students.

For Luna, this translated into focusing on the retention of students as many hear about their institution by word of mouth.

It is a two-year investment. It is a very expensive education. We need to work on that. I then started to really look at the student services piece and that experience while they are here. I proposed a couple of changes. Next you know, now I have student services under me. I am like, “Ok.” He said, “Be careful what you ask for because of your great plan and vision, here you go!” It was under the academic side and then moved it under me. It has been great.

Luna continued to grow as a respected leader within her institution. She moved from assistant dean, to associate dean, and now into her current position, Dean of Student Services. Her current position provides her the opportunity to continue to build on the institution’s enrollment direction.
Our enrollment was small even though it wasn’t necessarily a brand new institution. We are twenty years old. Being able to strategize on how I was going to take this place to the next level, encourage growth, and the enrollment needs and goals…that was huge. When I started, we had about 55 students, which was eight years ago. We had one master’s program and one Ph.D. program. You had to finish the masters to go into the Ph.D. program. And, the Ph.D. program only had a handful of students. And, now eight years later we have over 530 students and the president always jokes, “It’s her fault”. I am like, “That’s right!”

Making a Difference in the Lives of Students. Under Luna’s leadership, her institution’s enrollment continues to grow, both domestically and internationally. She is very proud of her institution and clearly wants to make a difference in the lives of students. She says her ultimate goal is to make a difference in the lives of her students.

We always say we are changing lives. I am changing lives on a daily basis. When I have my students come back and tell me, “I don’t know where I would have been if I had stayed in my country – Peru, Argentina, and Mexico. You’ve changed my life. You gave me an opportunity and [you] saw something in me that no other institution saw.” I get granular and I meet the students.

This is something Luna understands on a personal level. She is reminded of the transition of moving to another country at the age of six years old. Although it
was a difficult time, she said it serves as a reminder of not only the sacrifices that were made on her behalf but the obligation she has to others during similar transitions. Luna was able to reach back to her own experiences and support the students she works with.

To this day, as you mentor students, international students, I always put myself in their shoes because it is a huge transition and at a younger age, you really do need that guidance.

Luna says she is very hands on with her students and in particular, her international students. She travels quite a bit as part of her institution’s recruiting process. She says she chooses to travel because she isn’t going to make her staff do something she is not willing to do.

I am out there traveling and recruiting. Because I need to have a good gauge of what is happening out there. And, I am not going to make my staff do anything that I am not willing to do. I am in the trenches and recruiting as well. I am out there talking to the students and helping them get jobs. I see the results and see the outcomes of our students. They are phenomenal. We have 100% placement within six months of graduation. That is all of them have jobs in the life sciences industry. It is life changing. That is what keeps me going. It is very gratifying. I am finally doing what I want to do.

Luna admits her job can be stressful and it has its challenges but she loves the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of students. She said the good
definitely outweighs the bad.

A Hand’s on Leader. As a leader, Luna appears to be very hands-on and “in the trenches,” as she puts it, with her students and staff. She expressed leadership is about having a vision and the strategy to make it happen. To Luna, leadership is about others and the part you play in transforming lives and her desire to serve others.

If you don’t have a vision or strategy of where you are going, you are not going to be able to lead. And, the ability to delegate. You have to realize when you have too much on your plate and be able to delegate. That was a very hard lesson for me. Not that my way is the only way but it was more, if I didn’t do it, it wasn’t going to get done. I don’t like when people take short cuts to do things. I do not do that. And, I think the hardest part of leadership is the people side. Being a leader, you have to be able to mentor and you have to be able to motivate people. You have to lead by example. I am a true believer that if I am not out there in the trenches, rolling up my sleeves and doing things with my staff, I wouldn’t be such an effective leader. I always get complimented on my leadership style. I am about helping others transform their lives. I believe in mentoring. I have an amazing team and I cannot do what I do without them. It is important to recognize that in them. Leadership is really about leading by example. You can make mistakes but you have to learn from it and go on. I play by the rules. I am also a flexible individual.
Luna’s past experiences have shaped who she is as a leader. Events in her life have provided the foundation for her leadership approach.

*Buy in is important for me as a leader. It has to do with how I was raised. I think another thing that had an impact on me was my mom’s response to my dad moving to United States. Here her husband was leaving for a year and she was able to see the bigger picture. She supported him even when things got tough. She kept it together. And, I don't focus on the negative.*

To Luna, representing a positive perspective provides others optimism and as a leader, giving others hope is important. In addition, spirituality has played a significant role in her approach to leadership.

*Spirituality has definitely played a role in how I lead. As a Catholic, from baptism, first communion, to confirmation, to the sacrament of marriage, my spirituality has always been a part of me. Prayer is a very strong support for me.*

She takes her responsibilities as a leader seriously. She is extremely thankful for the opportunity she has been given to lead. She expressed being a leader is about having a voice at the table and having the ability to make changes for the better.

**The Importance of Support Networks.** Luna’s father played a major role in her leadership trajectory. He instilled in her at a young age the importance of working hard, being resilient, and helping others. His constant support in her
education gave her the tools she needed to not only graduate early but also go on to earn a master’s in business.

*You have to have a little bit of fire and ambition. The ability to say, you can do this! My father is my rock, my hero, my everything…. my dad will always be my number one. He always helps [me] and reassures me.*

*When I am feeling any type of pressure or stress, I just call my dad. I talk to him on a daily basis. They were able to do so much for us and I am so thankful for what they did.*

She feels one of the contributing factors for her own desire to mentor others was the decision her father made to move Central America to the United States when she was six years old. She expressed it as one of the best decisions her father ever made. She felt he was always looking to make their future better and in turn, that is what she wants to do for others.

When parents come to Luna asking if she would recommend their child attend community college, she answers no. Much like her father, Luna feels students should go directly into a four-year university. She feels students will get stuck in the system and have a hard time transferring.

I asked Luna if she currently had any mentors in life. She shared she has colleagues and mentors for different aspects of her life that shape who she is. Individuals like her father, former colleagues, and her priest. She feels they make her a well-rounded leader in her industry. Luna believes that it doesn’t take a specific mentor to help her understand her field, but the experience of
mentoring others has been what has given her direction. In an effort to mentor and support her staff, Luna provides professional development opportunities.

*I stretch them in ways that they are able to have some autonomy to be creative and make decisions. It’s a very collaborative team environment and we thrive in this environment because of the respect, team dynamic, and high touch approach.*

Mentoring others is a big part of Luna’s life. Luna continues by saying her staff are amazing individuals and she is honored to be working alongside them.

**Experienced Barriers.** Luna wishes she could come across her high school counselor and show her where she ended up. Though her negative experience with her counselor could have derailed her desire to attend a four-year university, Luna’s determination along with her father’s tenacity made the situation more of a challenge than a barrier. Luna felt that the same types of issues she encountered in high school are still prevalent today. She stated students are not getting the support, assistance, or advising needed in high school to make critical decisions when it comes to furthering their education. Luna felt one of the key factors in the success of students going on to college are the high school counselors.

*The lack of high school mentoring to college mentoring – it is just not happening. The advising is not happening and kids are just not getting the support nor the recommendations. They are missing the foundation of critical information such as here are the schools and here is the*
information you need to get there. The counselors are not equipped and it seems like the knowledge is just not there. If you are not passionate about changing lives and making a difference, you are not going to do it.

She’s thankful for her father instilling in her at a young age the importance of an education. Luna realizes that many students do not have the support structures she had in place and strives to be that support to the students she serves.

I took this opportunity to ask Luna if she experienced any other barriers along her journey. She thought for a few seconds, and stated none that she could think of that were prominent in her mind. She said she experienced some barriers in transitioning to her current position but she felt those were more on the structure of the position and the availability of the budget. Luna seems to be an extremely positive individual and looks at the optimistic side of things.

She also shared that she uses her faith as a coping mechanism. Luna shared the importance of prayer in her life when she was faced with stressful situations or perceived barriers along her journey.

*Back when we were in high school and college, we would pray on things. We had that hope and that faith that our higher being, regardless of religion, was going to get us through it. God wouldn’t put this in our life if we weren’t able to handle this. That is why I can say I didn’t see certain events as barriers. I think that foundation of hope is very important. We are Catholic. Our children believe in God. It is a conversation we have. They just now it is a part of our life.*
Even though Luna has experienced her fair share of stressful events throughout her life, she attributes her faith in God and the ability to pray on it and “let it go” as a way of dealing with negative situations.

The Importance of Identity. Luna expressed being a Latina has helped her connect with others on many different levels and plays a vital role in the mentoring of Latina/o students.

Latinas are role models. As a Latina, I am able to go in and connect with parents, with significant others, siblings, grandparents, and students.

When I am traveling internationally, I think it benefits me. It is important as a Latina to always be a mentor and you always have to be a role model. It doesn’t matter what position you hold. You have to be able to relate to students.

As a Latina that was not born in this country, she is able to relate to international students on a very person level. She feels her experiences provide her the firsthand knowledge that is vital in supporting this student population.

When students come to America and have to take language exams such as the TEFOL. I can relate to that and they know it. When we get into standardized admissions exams, they are very biased. International and underserved students just don’t do well. And, it is hard to gauge where a student is and I believe they don’t tell us much. When we are reviewing applications, we are doing it holistically. We are not just looking at exams and GPA. We are looking at the overall fit, work experience,
recommendations, and looking at every piece of the application as a whole. We look at everything. Also, being bilingual provides a connection with other countries.

For Luna, being a first-generation college student and being Latina also has shaped her approach to leadership. Through her leadership position, she believes students can see her and visualize their own potential to be successful academically.

**As a Latina and first generation college student, you have to provide people with a positive perspective and show them there is hope.** With students, if they see themselves in leadership roles, they have the opportunity to visualize themselves. Even though students may not want to be dean, they can see themselves in me. Especially, when I tell them my story. I tell them, “This is what I have done and this is why I am here. It was a because of a piece of watermelon”. I tell students, “You can do it! You can attain any goal or dream you have!” Students need to be able to see themselves reflected in others. I have friends who have asked me to come in for their career days. Even though many of those students may not want to be deans, they see me in that leadership role and that is important. I think sometimes students are limited on their career choice because of what they see on T.V. or what jobs their family members may hold. As a dean, I am able to expose them to a different aspect of higher education and a potential career choice.
Luna believes having a diverse leadership in higher education is critical to the success of their students. She feels there a lot more opportunities out there for Latinas than they realize. In addition, Luna feels being a Latina is much more beneficial than it was several years ago as companies and institutions are actively recruiting individuals with diverse backgrounds and experiences.

**Summary of Luna’s Narrative.** Luna knew from a young age that her father desired for her to get a quality education; therefore, it became that she did so. Contrary to the misconception that Latino parents do not value their child’s education, Latino parents do value the education for their children (Brown, Santiago, and Lopez, 2010). Like Luna’s parents, many immigrant parents come to the United States in hopes of accessing a better education for their children (Brown et al., 2010).

Luna’s early childhood and adolescent experiences are in line with what Espinoza (2010) calls the good daughter dilemma. It refers to how Latinas take on multiple roles within the family, like language brokering, assisting with siblings, and taking care of family transactions. Because Luna was very close to her family, she was determined to stay close to home when she decided to go to college. This is a typical role played by “good daughters” when searching for a four-year university (Espinoza, 2010).

Luna’s counselor ill advised her to attend a nearby community college that she could access by public transportation. This lack of guidance and understanding from a high school counselor can be a significant obstacle for
Latino students and deter them from aspiring to attend four-year institutions (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Gándara, 2008; Rodríguez, Rhodes, & Aguirre, 2015; Tovar, 2015). Given her negative experience with her high school’s college counselor, Luna, as well as other researchers, feels Latinas are at risk of being channeled into community college system and not guided to pursue a four-year university-level education (Maes, 2010). Thankfully, Luna and her father set out to find an alternative higher education pathway.

Luna grew up knowing her parents were sacrificing and working so hard for her to attend the college of her choice. She was very conscientious of her expenses, so wherever she could cut costs she would. This meant buying used books from other classmates or borrowing books, if available. As supported in the literature, Latina/o students report feelings of worry and not being comfortable at asking for financial assistance from their family members who are already struggling to make ends meet (Diaz-Strong, Gomez, Luna-Duarte, & Meiners, 2011; Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005; Tovar, 2015). Therefore, typical of the “good daughter,” to help out financially, Luna got involved in a work study program on campus in her sophomore year. This provided her the financial resources to pay for school supplies without taking much needed resources from her family.

Luna recalls that when she was getting ready to apply for college, many of the parents Luna came in contact were unfamiliar with the college process and some were hesitant to allow their children to attend college. The parents would
express the need for their children to work in an effort to help support their families. The financial constraints many Latino families face often leads to a dependency on their children to assist their families financially (Gandara, 2015).

Luna believes there is a misconception of what it means to go to college for many Latino parents. She feels institutions of higher education need to better convey the benefits of their children going to college. Her experience coupled with her leadership role in an institution of higher education, Luna developed a mentoring program that encouraged high school students to experience college life for a weekend. As part of the program, students attend general education classes on Friday with college-mentor student, then on Saturday and Sunday, students participate in activities that expose them to the college experience. Luna understood firsthand how invaluable these types of programs were to low-income, first generation college students. These types of programs have been found to be beneficial to low income, first generation college students, as well as, other programs that provide supplemental instruction, peer mentors, and academic counseling (Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005; Woosley, Sherry, & Shepler, 2011).

Luna uses many of her early experiences to relate to students. She is reminded of the transition of moving to another country at the age of six years old. Though it was a difficult time, she said it serves as a reminder of not only the sacrifices that were made on her behalf but the obligation she has to others in similar circumstances. As supported in the literature, Luna’s first-hand
experiences provides critical knowledge in supporting underrepresented and underserved students (Haro & Lara, 2003; Maes, 2010).

Regarding her approach to leadership, Luna concluded that spirituality played a significant role in her approach to leadership. For many Latinas, spirituality informs their style of leadership and their commitment to serve others (Canul, 2003; Rodriguez, 1999). Luna uses her faith as a coping mechanism. The importance of prayer in her life was evident when she was faced with stressful situations or perceived barriers along her journey. The practice of prayer is a common coping mechanism among Latinos (Gillum & Griffith, 2010).

Luna’s father also played a significant role in her leadership trajectory. At a very young age, he instilled in her the importance of working hard, being resilient, and helping others. His constant support of her education gave her the tools she needed to not only graduate early from college but also go on to earn a master’s in business. While this paternal behavior is not typical in the literature, which typically portrays the mother as the prime advocate for her child's education (Gandara, 2013; Medina & Luna, 2000), Luna attributes much of her success to her father.

Additionally, Luna believes leadership is about others and the part you play in transforming lives and serve others. These characteristics support the notion that Latinas tend to have more transformational and servant leadership styles (Elmuti, Jia, & Davis, 2009; Northouse, 2013).
Furthermore, Luna attributes her growth as a leader to the mentors and role models she has had in her life. Research has identified successful mentorships as a key catalyst for career and personal growth amongst Latinas (Carvin, 2009; Espinoza, 2010). She shared she has colleagues and mentors for different aspects of her life that shape who she is. Individuals like her father, former colleagues, and her priest. She feels they make her a well-rounded leader in her industry. Luna believes that it doesn’t require a specific mentor to help her understand the field she is in, but the experience of mentoring others has been what has given her direction. Luna’s idea of having a well-rounded group of mentors supports the literature of having a cadre of individuals to support various aspects of leadership (Espinoza, 2011; Gandara, 2013; Gonzalez-Figueroa & Young, 2005). In an effort to mentor and support her staff, Luna provides professional development opportunities whenever possible.

Luna feels staying true to your identity is so important not only for yourself but for others as well. Luna expresses being a Latina has helped her connect with others on so many levels and plays a vital role in the mentoring of Latina/o students as suggested in several studies (Gonzalez-Figueroa & Young, 2005; Nunez, Murakami, & Gonzalez, 2012).

Listening to Luna’s story, I could not help but admire her for the dedication and love she has for her family. Her work ethic is something she attributes to her parents, especially her father. She is a very hardworking and driven individual
and her students, staff, and institution are lucky to have someone like her as their Dean of Student Services.

**Emma’s Narrative**

Emma was the youngest of seven children. Both of her parents were born in Mexico. She was born in the United States. Her mother was 40 years old when she had her, which made Emma’s parents older than the rest of her friends’ parents. Emma grew up “very poor” and her family depended on government assistance programs throughout her childhood. As the youngest child, Emma felt there were cultural expectations placed on her by her mother.

*In my particular family, being the youngest was very difficult because when you are the youngest, at least my experience is your mom – in a Latina family, they don’t want to let you go. So, they’re almost even more strict because you are the last baby that they’re going to have.*

Emma continued to share her experiences with her mother. She came from a “very religious family”, which meant going to church three days a week and sometimes four days a week. She felt her mother placed a high priority on their religion. When asked if she was religious, she stated she was not.

She expressed how grateful she was for growing up in the United States because she felt had she not been born in the US, she would have had a very different life. She said her mother would have made sure of it. Even though Emma says her mother was “hard” on her, she realizes now that her mom simply did not know any other way based on her own experiences.
Seeing the difference in what she thought we should be versus what all of her kids did end up doing, I think she's very proud of that. I don't think that she takes that away from us. But, I think she just didn't think it was possible, you know, based on her own experience. She didn't think that that was an option for us.

A story she often shares with her students about her mother’s expectations and the traditional Latina/o role expectations for girls.

Another quick anecdote to kind of give you a full picture of growing up was I came home to tell my mom I had gotten straight A's. I was so excited. To me, it was straight ‘A’s but I had a ‘B’ in P.E. because, well, you know, it wasn't my favorite subject. I said, "Look, I've gotten straight ‘A’s." She looked at me and in a very dismissive tone said, "When I was your age," in Spanish, she said, "Yo solamente recibe deices," which in Mexico, a 10 is an ‘A.’ So, the expectation I felt was pretty low. And, if you're Latina and you go to family gatherings and you’re 18 or older and your family sees you, they wonder "where is your man" and "why don't you have kids yet?"

Growing up, Emma felt there were cultural expectations placed on her. She was expected to help her mother take care of the house, work, and attend church regularly. Her parents were strict and only allowed her to leave the house if she was working or at school. To be able to get out of the house, Emma decided to run for student government and get involved in school.
I ended up running for freshman class president. I won. And, when I came home to tell my mom I was excited. And, she said in a very dismissive tone… in Spanish, "What are you doing getting involved in things like that? You should be at home helping me clean the house."

K-16 Educational Pipeline. Growing up, Emma’s family moved quite a bit because of their financial situation. This meant that Emma attended several different schools, which resulted in an inconsistency her educational experiences. Since Emma’s first language was Spanish, the first school she attended held her back in the first grade. This has an effect on her early on but she later saw that experience as a benefit to her.

Spanish was my first language so I was held back. And, I think that kind of does something to you. And so I think they held me back because I spoke Spanish…they assumed I wouldn’t be able to keep up or learn quickly enough to move on with the other kids. And, that really affected me because all they did was keep teaching me in Spanish. Then the program I was in was called the Late Birds. I mean, it’s like the Early Birds are the kids that speak [English] and they start [early] and then I would come in later. We were actually labeled the Late Birds, which is not a very good name, which I realized later. It affected me a lot in terms of I still felt like I was behind even when I moved onto the next level. I just was confused.
I ended up going to a different school, because we moved a lot and we rented. So, I think the second or third elementary school I went to, they had a different system where if you spoke Spanish they didn’t just put you with all the Spanish-speaking kids and speak Spanish to you all day; they put you at a table at the back still at the back, but a table at the back… they had a teacher's aide who, if you weren't understanding what the teacher was saying she would come and whisper, like kind of translate to you a little bit. That was actually much better. I think I learned much faster that way. I don’t remember it being difficult to pick up English. It was pretty easy. I just think they thought, "Oh, this little kid's speaking Spanish…you’re going to be shuffled over here". I certainly wasn't viewed as the smartest kid.

The expectations placed on her due to the language barrier had an impact on her until she entered into junior high school.

In junior high, I was pretty involved. So, I think I was probably viewed as one of the more academic kids. Then by high school, I was in honors classes and AP classes; I was on the yearbook; I was in student government.

Because her parents were so strict, Emma was determined to get involved in school activities as a way to get out of the house.

I know that me being involved on campus, which was really the product of my parents being so strict…that was how it started. My parents were so
strict [and] the only way I could get out of the house was if I was [at] school or work. And so that really just for me is what guided me and made me think, "This is where I want to be."

She attributes getting involved in school as a way of opening up opportunities to students such as herself. She expressed that it “opened her eyes to the world”.

These activities, this extracurricular stuff, this is what really helps students and it helps them to see the world, because in some cases [they’ve] never traveled before. I mean, before college I had gotten on a plane I think one time my whole life, and it was a small trip from one point in Mexico to another point in Mexico. But when I got to college, I flew to D.C. for a conference. I would’ve never had the money to do that. But I was there for a leadership conference and it was paid for. It was exposure to this whole other world. I was on the Model United Nations team and I competed against other students in New York at the Model U.N.

Additionally, Emma feels these experiences served as a catalyst to where she is today, as a leader and a student advocate.

Once Emma entered into high school, she was taking AP and Honor courses. I asked her how she was made aware of AP and Honor courses. She said she wasn’t sure but somehow, she ended up in an AP English course. After that first class, she took as many AP and Honor courses that were available to her. She reflects back on her experience of being held back.
Honestly, I think it was good the system held me back, because who knows how far behind I would have felt if I had moved on with the rest of the kids. I might have felt really behind. So, I think it was okay being held back. As I got older, I realized that there was, like, a labeling. Right? You were not like the normal kids; you were like a delayed kid, you know. So, I felt that. But I think by junior high and high school I didn't feel any of that. I just got really involved. And I think, to be honest with you, that's kind of what took me to where I am today, is just getting involved on campus, having a community. That is really what made it for me.

Knowing Emma was a first-generation college student, I asked her when she decided she wanted to attend college. Was it an individual or an event that triggered the desire to further her education?

I remember being very afraid of being on government assistance programs, because I saw my parents struggle. Even though they were getting food stamps, my dad was still going to grocery stores and waiting for expired bread. For people don’t know that that actually happens, people go to grocery stores and they wait until they throw out the expired stuff and then they take it home. My dad still did that even when he was working a security-guard job. He still did stuff like that because it wasn’t enough. So, I think I realized how hard it was for my parents. Though I didn't see it too much, because by the time I was old enough to really notice things, I had older brothers and sisters who were pitching in and
helping out. My oldest sister is 55...there's quite an age-gap between us. I think that helped.

I think I knew that there was a huge struggle. And I remember asking [a teacher], "Is it likely that you will have to depend on government assistance programs if you go to college?" Actually, I think I might have been elementary school...I think I was in sixth grade. I can't remember what grade I was in. I might have been older. But basically, she said, "Well, no, the data shows that typically people who are college graduates don't have to use government assistance programs". At that point, I just decided, "I'm going to college. Like, I'm going".

For Emma, going to college was a way of breaking the cycle of poverty she had experienced as a child.

Her involvement in junior high school and high school carried over into her college experience. She knew that for her success came through involvement on campus.

I went to college, I decided, "I'm going to get involved in college, too." So I just joined clubs. I joined student government again in college and I did really well at that. All these activities are really what helped me and I felt like I had a community.

Unfortunately, Emma started feeling forms of discrimination in college that resulted in her not getting involved in certain Latina/o organizations on campus.
I was not involved in those things, only because at that time I felt very discriminated against, I'll say. There was definitely discrimination in terms of how you fit in. You know, how Latina are you? There were people who maybe had darker skin or who had the East L.A. accent but they didn't really speak Spanish, they were considered more Latina than me. [It] didn't matter I spoke Spanish. It didn't matter that my parents were from Mexico. But, there's definitely an expectation of how you behave and what you do. Although, some of my closest friends in college were [considered] underrepresented students, because some were black, some were Latino, some were Asians, just different groups, I just kind of stayed with that student government crowd, the school newspaper.

Though she had numerous Latina friends in college, she felt she didn’t connect because the feelings of not fitting into a particular mold of what others thought a Latina should look like and act like.

Experience Leading in Higher Education. After Emma shared with me her growing up years and how they affected her educational trajectory, I wanted to explore the topic of leadership with her. I asked her if she would share with me what leadership meant to her, personally and professionally.

God, you know, there’s thousands of definitions. I think for me it's just being able to do what's right, even when there's pressure to do something different or to stand down. To be able to stand up for people who can’t stand up for themselves. To give a voice for people who need you to be
that voice for them. So, obviously not being a voice for every single person, but sometimes there are populations that need that voice...to be able to provide that voice through your leadership.

Emma shared that in her previous institution advocating for certain student populations was easier due to the demographics of the area. She is finding at her current institution, which is in a more affluent area, the institutional community and community as a whole have a harder time relating to some student populations.

This is a different environment. So, still being that voice, in the face of that...it's a challenge but it's satisfying. I think what has happened [here] was a lot of people felt or believed that there weren't a lot of students here that needed support. And, it's because they were hiding. And, the minute you give them the place to come or to seek information, a safe -- I hate to say "safe space" because no space is really safe, right, but supported that changes. Another thing that I was working on were resources for homeless and food-insecure students. People have been pretty positive. But, you do get the one or two people that, like, I had one student on student government tell other people on the board that my efforts to bring in a local food pantry to campus was discriminatory. And for the life of me I can't figure out whom it's discriminated against. You could show up with a Louis Vuitton handbag and shoes and I wouldn't tell you to get out of line. I'd say, "Please come forward." Or, I had one professor email me
about, "Why do you have to keep sending us these resources?" And I wrote him back and said, "This was the fourth and final message that went out to the campus community so that you can help your students."

She continued as she related a story of a professor emailing her regarding his concern over the numerous emails he had received concerning student resources. She responded that the purpose of the emails was to simply inform the campus community of the help that is available to students. It was a matter of making "leaders" on campus aware of resources that would benefit their students. Emma feels a deep responsibility to "be that voice when you know there’s a need and going it even though it’s not easy". An Honest Leader. While Emma did not spend much time discussing her leadership trajectory leading to her current position, she did share her approach to leadership extensively.

Leadership for me, it’s contextual. It’s like, what context are you in? So, in the context I’m in right now, which is the dean of students, and I have a staff and I have three departments that report to me. I really believe that my job is to remove obstacles…to be a support system for the people who report to me. If one of my managers says, "I’m really trying to get this project off the ground but these are the three challenges I have," I can say, "No problem. Give me your list and let’s see where we can start…and really start removing those roadblocks." I think that’s first and foremost.
As a leader, Emma believes in being honest and open with her staff, even when it is uncomfortable.

*Secondary, would be to really develop the people that I work with. No telling people they're great if they're not great. And that's the worst part, right, because nobody likes that. So really being honest with people and helping them to develop. I always say an evaluation should never be a surprise. Like, when someone gets their evaluation they should pretty much know what's going to be in it. So really taking the time to be honest. I've had student mentees that I have or people that I work with who say, "Can you please look over my cover letter and resume? I'm going to apply for a job." And I say, "Yeah, no problem," and they get it back with a bunch of red ink and they say, "Wow, I've had three people look at this, and one of them was a vice president, and no one ever said it was [this bad]." I say, "Well, I'm pretty sure they didn't read it". And the reason I say that is not because my edits are magnificent but because there are several typos. I think that sometimes people don't want to say no to you.*

Emma feels spending time with people is invaluable to their overall success, whether that is a student or staff member. In her opinion, leadership is more than just “lip service” but a commitment to serve others and to be honest but never demeaning. For Emma, mentoring others is an act of pouring herself into others and advocating on their behalf, especially for students.
I think for me the advocacy comes whenever it involves students. That's where my advocacy comes in. Staff, there isn't really a whole lot of opportunity. I just try to treat the staff that report to me really well and make sure that they have whatever they need and keep things happy. Like, one of the things they know about me is I say, "Okay, I want to have a potluck every month. What's this month's potluck?" Then they just come up with a theme and it's just once a month where we just kind of hang out and we laugh. And we don't talk about work. So they know that I like that. So, then they'll try and plan it. To me, those are things that I just try and keep a really good, happy environment as much as possible. People still get upset about things and that's okay. For the most part, when they know you're trying and they know you're real -- I mean, people have to know you're real and you're not just fake and smiling. You know, you've got to really mean it. And when you do, people know it and they feel it. I believe that. I know it sounds crazy, but they feel it.

As a leader, Emma believes in being authentic. It builds a team environment and grows a level of trust with staff and students. If her staff and students trust her, Emma says you get the support that is needed to make things happen. Recently, she gave two of her managers additional duties based on her idea of creating food pantries at their respective centers. Her managers believed in her vision because they trusted her. They sent out an email, got donations and before it was all said and done they ran out of food. She sees this a good
problem and realizes she needs to work on the marketing aspect of her vision. Emma has been at her current institution for about a year and is trying to build the trust within in her department.

Getting the support of the staff, the trust of the staff, managers, and faculty [is important] so that when you say something is needed they believe you -- and I feel like I'm starting -- I've only been here about a year now. I'm starting to get that trust from the campus community. So when I say, "We really need this," that people are like, "Okay, let's pitch in and try and make it happen." And I'm becoming the resource person on campus for homeless students or "I've got a student who needs help" or "A student is about to get kicked out of her house. What can we do?" Like, they'll call me.

A Passion for Students. Emma walked over to her desk and she picked up a pamphlet she had put together. It was a student guide for free and low cost resources, food pantries, housing, and healthcare. The guide serves as a resource to inform students what services are available to them. It provides information such as where students can take showers, access to free personal counseling, and a free bus program, which Emma started on campus. In addition, it makes students aware of free medicine available to them at the health center. Emma was very passionate about discussing the goal of the guide with me. Her compassion for students is very evident at this point in our interview. Emma’s love for students is evident. I comment on her advocacy for students
and she replies, “I love students! I love them”. At this point, I was thoroughly convinced at where Emma’s passion for students who are underprivileged and underrepresented.

Identity as a First-Generation College Graduate. As my study focused on Latina leaders and the importance of their presence on college campuses, I asked Emma if she felt her identity as a Latina offered something unique that possibly others could not.

*I can’t say that. What I can say is that what I’ve noticed is that first-generation and underrepresented populations are what I identify with.

One of my friends is Asian and we both had really strict parents. Both of our families struggled financially. I feel just being underrepresented and the [low] socioeconomic status, I think for me, I feel like it gives me a lot of passion. I feel like if I had grown up in an upper middle class neighborhood without having to worry about much or without having to work, I would be a much different person. The passion that I have for students and helping, it just comes from growing up the way I grew up and knowing and seeing firsthand what students go through. Knowing that a student can look put-together with their hair combed but that doesn’t mean everything’s okay. You know, potentially they could be homeless or living out of a sink in bathrooms. So, I think it’s not about being Latina, because there are second- and third- and fourth-generation Latinas. I think it’s about having that first-generation connection. And I don’t want to say that
you have to be first-generation. You could be second-generation and be very connected. But I think there's this very unique experience to having parents who were born in another country and seeing their struggles and their expectations of you and feeling that pressure and then not taking anything for granted, I'll say.

At this point, Emma stopped and said, “I hope I'm not insulting you. Are your parents born here?” I assured her I was not offended. I shared with her my mother was from Mexico and my father was born here and I grew up in a low socioeconomic status home, as well. I asked her to please proceed.

When you have parents who were born in another country and you know their struggles and you saw what they did here -- and, you know, sometimes you hear people complaining about stuff. It's one of the things I tell my husband now. He tells me, too, because sometimes I can complain about stupid things. But, mostly, I have first-world problems.

One of my students, I still keep in touch with her, she was in the car and I was taking her to dinner. And my GPS wasn't working. I was like, "This stupid thing never works. I can't believe it." And she said, "You know, Emma most people, a lot of people don't have GPS." And I said, "I know, it's a first-world problem." But it's that reminder, right? It's what makes me happy because I can appreciate everything so much.
Emma shares that she and her husband have a house in nearby city. She describes the house as small and ‘dumpy’ but says she loves it. She never dreamed some day she would own a home.

I always tell my husband, "I love this house. I never thought we’d have a house. I just think it’s so pretty. I love this house." I think it makes you feel like, "Wow. I grew up with my parents, I had my struggles, my first language was Spanish, school was hard for me, and now I have a home and an awesome job."

Emma continued by sharing her husband is a source of support for her. He encouraged her to continue with her education in her pursuit of a Ph. D. She shared how one of her acquaintances was in doctoral program and ended up getting a divorce. Emma’s perception of the divorce was because they grew apart in their relationship. She expressed the time commitments of a doctoral program are grueling and have the potential to be problematic and stressful on relationships. Emma said she was determined to not allow that in her own relationship and made sure her and her husband had set date nights.

Latinas: A Sisterhood. Throughout her story, I noticed she did not mention anyone in particular as a source of mentoring. I asked her if there were any particular pivotal moments or mentors that contributed to her journey.

And the thing about being Latina, I will say that now that I have a boss who’s Latina, she’s awesome. But she’s the first boss I’ve had that is Latina and that speaks Spanish and whose parents were born in a
different country. I think she was born a different country. She was born in Mexico. It's a very familiar connection. You can have a fulfilling career and not have that, but it's kind of nice to have that. I mean, to have a boss who understands, you know, when I'm having trouble. Or things like she'll tell me stories about her mom and I'll be like, "Oh my God, my mom is just like that." It's a very Latin experience or Latina experience. And we know our mothers love us, but it's a very cultural thing. That's what my mom's mom did to her, and so on and so forth. So she kind of poked at us. But when you do have a boss who comes from a similar background, I think you start to feel kind of like -- I'll call it the sisterhood in that. And there's an added level of trust. Obviously, the person has to, you know, have integrity and all of that stuff. And if they do, there's kind of that added level of connection.

Mentors: They Didn't Look Like Me. As for the mentoring throughout her journey, she shared her mentors had all been men.

I will say that all of my mentors were men. None of them looked like me. None of them had similar backgrounds. And I owe those men a lot because they really encouraged me to kind of keep going, and they saw something on me. But it feels damn good to have someone finally who I can work with, who does serve in that role. So my boss is that to me. She's a mentor to me. And it's been great. I don't want Latinas to feel like if they don't have that then they're not going to get to where they [need to
be] because, no, you don't need that. You will get where you need to be, and you're going to be fine. But get there, because it is going to add that added level of connection for that next group of Latinas coming up, because now that I have that, gosh, it's just so good.

The Future for Latina Leaders. I asked Emma if she would elaborate about the “next group of Latinas coming up” and what she thinks the future holds for Latinas. Although she sees the benefits of having more Latinas in leadership positions, she expressed she doesn’t want others to feel like they have to see someone that looks like them to model success.

But we’re human, and we feel that way, and we want to see that. And, so the more women who do that, the more Latina women who can do that, the more people feel like, “Hey, I can do that. I've seen plenty of examples of that, so I can be in those roles.” And I think it does matter. So now imagine, when we talk about higher education programs, like just in Master’s Degrees and Doctoral programs, women are the majority in those programs. I think when I was getting my doctorate there were two men in my cohort of 20. Two and that was it. So, I feel like if we’re talking about Latina women, I mean, you're going to start to see a lot of Latina women in those groups. And I think it's going to blow up pretty quickly in the next, I'd say in the next five to 10 years you're going to see a lot of it. I didn't get to see that, but it's okay because I'm pretty happy. And I finally got mine. I got my person.
And another thing, too, is being women, I'm going to be honest and say that my best bosses have been men, until now. But the best bosses I had were men. And the three female bosses that I had in my career coming up were horrible. Like, terrible, awful, awful. And it was very hard for me because I felt like I had to come up with excuses. Like, "Well, women don't normally come up through the traditional routes, so maybe they didn't have the training. You know, men tend to get more development, more experience, etc.” And, I was even talking to one of my female managers and she was saying -- she's Latina, also. And she was saying that she felt terrible but all the female bosses she has had have been terrible. She said that she felt bad because when she would go to interview she would think to herself, "I hope my boss is going to be a man. I can't work for a woman."

I think that as a Latina woman, hopefully, we have an edge on that. And, by the way that we grew up, hopefully the compassion that we tend to have, that kind of close-knit family experience that comes from being a first-generation Latina, that would help us naturally to be compassionate and patient and kind of -- I don't want to say "motherly." I'm not a mom. But, you know, kind of just give off that -- let people feel the love, you know. That we care.

As we came to the conclusion of our interview, Emma came back to the subject of the guide she had been working on for students. She proceeded to
share statistics on student homelessness and on the staggering number of food insecure students. You could clearly hear the compassion in her voice as she spoke of students not having enough food, sleeping in their cars, and students couch surfing. I had never heard of the term, couch surfing before and Emma explained it where students will stay the night on someone else’s couch as a temporary solution to being homeless. Emma stated she never had any children but she expressed how she felt a motherly connection to the students she serves. Her love, compassion, empathy, and tenacity to help serve her students is amazing.

**Summary of Emma’s Narrative.** Emma grew up “very poor” and her family depended on government assistance programs throughout her childhood. As stated in the literature, many of the barriers that hold back Latinas are related to poverty (Gandara, 2015; Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005; Schhneider, Martinez, & Owens, 2006). Due to her parent’s economic situation, Emma frequently moved to different schools, which she felt had a negative impact on her academically and socially. Her primary decision to attend college was based on a conversation with an elementary teacher regarding the correlation between postsecondary education and being reliant on government assistance. There is a false assumption that Latina students do not value their education, research demonstrates Latinas do have high aspirations, even when they come from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Gandara, 2015; Gloria, Castellano, & Orozco,
For Emma, going to college was a way of breaking the cycle of poverty she had experienced as a child.

Emma’s experiences of what she called traditional Latina expectations included coming home after school to “help around the house”, “very religious” home life, and her mother’s expectations of what she should do with her life. This is corroborated by research by Espinoza (2010), who found similar results in a sample of Latina students. Another typical finding in the literature that was experienced by Emma is that her parents did not speak English, therefore Emma was expected to interpret for her parents (Espinoza, 2011; Medina & Luna, 2000). Furthermore, her parents were strict and only gave Emma some leeway if she was working or going to school.

In an effort to “get out of the house”, Emma decided to run for student government and got involved in extracurricular activities, which is typical in the literature (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Villarreal & Gonzalez, 2016; Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006). She attributes getting involved in school as a way of opening up opportunities to students such as herself. She expressed that it “opened her eyes to the world.” Through her leadership position in student government, she was given the opportunity to travel, which was something her family could not afford for her to do. Not only did her student government leadership position expose her to new experiences, it helped develop her leadership skills early in life. Early experiences in student government leading to leadership styles in
adult life have been observed in previous research (Zalaquett, Study of successful Latina/o students, 2005).

Emma’s native language was Spanish. Like many Latino students whose first language is Spanish, Emma was held back because of her limited English proficiency in the first grade (Gandara, 2015). There was an assumption by school officials that she would be unable to keep up with the “other” students, academically. The expectations placed on her due to the language barrier had an impact on her until she entered into junior high school. She feels she gained her confidence back by getting into school government. Furthermore, once she entered high school, Emma was able to enroll in AP and honor courses where she continued to excel academically. Although Emma did not attribute a positive experience as a catalyst to entering into college, her experience of being dependent on government assistance acted as a catalyst. She was determined to go to college because she did not want to live in poverty. Emma feels these experiences served as a catalyst to what she is today: a leader and a student advocate.

Emma experienced discrimination in college that resulted in her not getting involved in certain Latina/o organizations on campus. The discrimination came from other Latina/os. Though she had numerous Latina friends in college, she felt she didn’t connect because the feelings of not fitting into a particular mold of what others thought a Latina should look like and act like.
Emma’s attributes her experiences, both positive and negative, to her approach to leadership. Her integrity speaks of her desire to right regardless of who is watching. As a leader, she feels it is important “to stand for people who need you to be that voice for them.” To Emma, leadership is about serving others and helping to transform the lives of her students. Like many other Latinas, Emma’s leadership style leans toward Greenleaf’s servant leadership style, which focuses on strong ethical standards, integrity, and serving others. (Northouse, 2013). In her opinion, leadership is more than just “lip service” but a commitment to serve others and to be honest but never demeaning. When speaking of her leadership role, Emma stated, “It’s important to be at that table,” speaking of the decision-making process in higher education.

Emma is passionate about the students she serves, especially students that are underserved or underrepresented. As with applied critical leadership, Emma’s identity as a low income, first generation Latina enhances her ability to relate with students and staff to provide effective leadership (Santamaria & Santamaria, 2012). Although Emma believes Latinas are important to the leadership of an institution, but she does not want other Latinas to feel limited if they do not have Latinas as role models. She feels Latinas are strong enough “to get where they need to be.” She admits finally having a Latina boss has been “great” and appreciates the cultural connection with her.

All of Emma’s mentors, with the exception of her current Latina boss, have been men. They provided her opportunities to grow and the encouragement to
keep going, despite challenges. Emma said, “I owe those men a lot…” Although Emma says these men did not share similar backgrounds with her, they were able to see potential in her. Furthermore, Emma’s husband has been a source of support for her. He encouraged her to continue her education and took on additional responsibilities while she was in her doctoral program.

Maria Teresa’s Narrative

Maria Teresa was born and raised in Mexico City. She came to the United States at the age of 13 by herself. Her mother and brother were currently living in the US prior to her arriving. She enrolled in a high school located in Los Angeles county that served students from grades eight to twelfth grade. At the time, the school had a specific counseling program for the 8th graders as a support service.

It was in the eighth grade that Maria Teresa would experience what Espinoza (2011) termed a pivotal moment: an academic intervention by a college educated adult who intentionally reaches out to a student to provide educational guidance. Her counselor, Mrs. Acharya (pseudonym) noticed Maria Teresa was excelling in her math classes. Though she was still taking English as a Second Language (ESL) courses, her math skills were more advanced for her age.

She noticed that I was excelling in math and was able to kind of figured out that I actually had advanced math skills. Because in Mexico, they try to cram in as much education as possible into the sixth grade. So, 1st through 6th is where they really cram it in because they know that a lot of
students don’t go beyond 6th grade. There just isn’t that expectation. So, I had more advanced math skills than a lot of my peers. She pulled me out of whatever math class I was in that they had stuck me in and instead put me into -- I want to say it was algebra, like an algebra course. And, I did well. And, then she just took an interest. I think at the time, the high school’s demographics were very low -- underrepresented population. It was predominantly a white campus. But, she took an interest and she said, "Well, you’ve got to start thinking about going to college." College was just never -- I just never thought about college, to be honest. I thought I was going to come here [the United States] and I knew I had to go to school, because otherwise my mom would get in trouble, because you had to send kids to school. We knew that. But my thought was that I would get a job and then be able to help my mom and my younger brother, not really thinking about anything else. But I started to do well in my classes. This counselor helped me to enlist in AP courses and honor courses.

She started to kind of help me to understand the value of education and that it was a better ticket to go than it was to try to get out of high school and get a job.

Experiences in Higher Education. As a first-generation college student, Maria Teresa did not understand the application or admittance process to get into college. She applied for several different school that her counselor and others
presented to her. The selection process was foreign to her but she did understand that she applying to several different colleges would enhance her opportunities of being accepted. Her lack of knowledge of the college process was not the only thing that was a barrier for Maria Teresa.

*What also made it a little bit challenging to navigate was that I was undocumented. So, I couldn't -- at the time, there was no protections the way there is now for DACA students or what we now know as DACA students. And so, by some grace of God, sheer luck, I ended up with an out of state university offering me money because I was a good student. And I also was in track and cross country. So, as a result of Mrs. Acharya (pseudonym) kind of helping me to figure out "you have to go to college," she said to me, "You have to be involved in other things. You have to do other things besides do well in classes." And, so, I got involved in clubs, I did track and cross country because I could run really well. So, when it came time for college, this state university said, "Hey, we'll give you a scholarship."

This opportunity provided Maria Teresa with the necessary funds to be able to attend a university with the hopes of earning a college degree, something she never dreamed would happen. She believes that the knowledge of undocumented students wasn’t as prevalent as it is now. Even though she was an undocumented student, the out of state university provided her some financial assistance through private funding. Another plus for attending an out of state
school was the fact the tuition was cheaper than had she attended a university in California. As an undocumented student, Maria Teresa would have had to pay international student tuition; something she could not afford to do. Though she was provided a partial scholarship, she still had to pay for a portion of tuition.

*I finished in three years because I was paying also for myself. So, while I had a scholarship, it didn’t pay for everything. I had to work two jobs.*

*I worked two jobs, went to school, I finished in three years because I was like, “I can do this three years if I go to summer school and I do this and I do that.” Way cheaper. I found ways to kind of economize.*

Even with a full-time school schedule and working two jobs, Maria Teresa understood the importance of getting involved on campus. Furthermore, it was the beginning of her involvement in student services and advocacy on campus.

*I was very deeply involved. The vice president of student affairs and I had had some exchanges. We had been planning -- I mean, now they’re commonplace -- but we had been planning a Chicano-Latino graduation.*

*There weren’t very many campuses that had those ceremonies or recognitions, and this university certainly didn’t have one. I was very adamant that I think we should have one, because there was a significant Latino population there. And, I was able to get with other student organizations, other people, and I kind of organized some folks to be able to put a proposal together. And, we were pretty insistent. And we fundraised a lot of money for it on our own. And we went to the vice*
president and said, "We need our own graduation. We will still go to the main graduation, but we want an opportunity to celebrate with our families and to celebrate in Spanish and just have it be on our own." And it took a long time for them to accept it. They were pretty adamant that it would segregate the campus, that we had one graduation, that it wasn't needed. We tried to make a case like, "Hey, this is more culturally appropriate for our families." So, we were able to negotiate that, and in the end they said yes.

It was during her involvement on this campus that she would be provided another chance encounter that put her on her leadership journey in higher education.

Through that process, the vice president said, "Have you ever thought about working at a university and working with students like yourself?" I hadn't thought about it. My bachelor's is a Bachelor's in Science. I was studying the biological aging process. Very science-oriented, gerontology, and I loved it and I actually thought that I would -- I was very interested in doing Alzheimer's research in particular for bilingual speakers. So, that's kind of where I was headed. I still sometimes think about that. I'm like, "Oh that sounds so nice." Of course, now there's lots of research on that, but at the time there just wasn't anyone in particular paying-attention to Alzheimer patients who were bilingual and bicultural. But, when he said
that I'm like, "Well, I do like being in the university and I see that there's other students like me."

This sounded appealing to her as she felt she could connect and help other students like herself. She shared that she was the "go to" person when people had questions regarding financial aid, campus resources, and general college information. She attributes this from her own need to navigate the college system. She continued by sharing the additional appeal of the position.

*And the vice president there said, "You need a Master's."* And I was like, "What, I'm not done with school?" He's said, "It's a two-year program, and when you get out they'll help you get a job and you'll get a job." *So, the prospects of that for me were very attractive, because going the science route was five years of for a Ph.D. I knew I would not be able to afford it.*

Though she was passionate about biological aging process, she felt the financial burden would be too much. A burden she says she knew she wouldn’t be able to handle with having to take care of her mother and brother, financially. She weighed her options and felt like she could commit to two years of the additional financial burden and being away from her mom and brother. Five years was just too expensive and too long to be away.

She shared the financial responsibility she felt to take care of her mom and brother. She commented that she and husband still help her mom out some. Not only was she carrying the load of putting herself through college, but the stress of having to send money home to help her family, was a key factor in
many decisions she made from a young age. With the resolve that she could afford to do two years versus five years, she sought direction from the vice president.

So, I did the same thing. I just applied, I asked around, like, "What are the best universities or programs for this Master's in Higher Education?" And he was able to give me some references and some campuses to look at. I applied and I decided on where to go based on money. I mean, that's always just been for me a reality. I ended up at a university on the east coast because, again, kind of like the other university, they paid for me to go to school. They offered me tuition and in lieu of -- you know, I would work for them. So, if I agreed to work for them for two years, they would pay for all my tuition and give me a stipend. I could not turn that down. And I liked the program. I went to visit, I really liked the program, so I guess that worked out really nicely for me.

She continued to share her experiences on her new campus on the east coast. She lived and worked there for two years. She worked in their admissions office and was in charge of recruiting students. She was running the tours and assisting students in the campus as their school choice. Though she acknowledges she loved it and she really enjoyed herself, attending a predominately White campus located on the east coast came with its challenges as a Latina student.
I think at the time there were only 12 of us Latinos on the campus. And so, that was equally as difficult. I think that’s where I really experienced a lot of culture shock. When I came to the United States, I was 13 so by then you kind of have a lot of your identity formed, and language, and all of those pieces. But I don’t think I truly had experienced bias or racism until attending this campus. And it wasn’t the university; it was mostly the surrounding community and being outside of the university that I really experienced that for the first time. My previous university, there’s a significant Latina population. It’s predominantly white but I think it’s more of a traditional-undergraduate program. And the community -- you didn’t feel it as much. It was there. There were experiences that I had there that were like that. But it was here in California, too, so it didn’t feel too, too different. But on the east coast for sure was the first place where I felt that very profoundly. So, I couldn’t wait to get out.

Experience Leading in Higher Education. As soon as her commitment was fulfilled, Maria Teresa went back to California. She applied for a job at a university in the Los Angeles area and was hired as the Associate Director of Student Activities. She worked closely with student organizations, student government, fraternity/sorority life and basically, did a variety of jobs that involved student activities. She worked there for two years when saw a job posting out of state at Northern State University (pseudonym) as a director of student activities and leadership programs. At this point, she felt her mother and brother were
more stable financially and she could leave without the full financial burden being on her. She applied for the position, got hired, and worked there five years. She attributes her time at Northern State University (pseudonym) as the real foundation of her leadership.

I would say that that’s truly where I started my leadership position, because I oversaw a budget of $7.2 million. I had 12 staff members. I oversaw four different functional areas. And so, that’s really where I got kind of my -- I earned my, I guess, chops. Yes, yes, I definitely earned my stripes and badges in terms of management, budget, personnel, union environment, how to be a leader. All of those things. I think that’s really where I started that learning process. I don’t think anyone finishes it. So, I don’t consider, like, "Oh, I’m a leader. I’m done." No, I started my journey really there. Prior to that I think I was just more -- you know, just learning my craft, learning how to work in a university system. But this state university is where I really started that journey of learning how to be a leader.

After five years, her “wonderful” supervisor decided to move onto their next educational opportunity and in turn, Maria Teresa felt the need to leave as well. She went back to California and worked at a university in the Riverside County area as the Assistant Dean of Students for six years. She was responsible for five functional areas, budget, numerous initiatives and a much larger student population. She shared that her experience at this university was
much different than the other two based on the diversity of the student population. It was during this time, she decided to continue her education and earn a doctorate degree.

*I wanted a Doctorate in Education because I love education. One of the things that I guess I didn’t realize when I was doing my science stint is that because of the opportunities that were presented to me in terms of that counselor being able to say, “Hey, you can do this, there is a place for you,” that I felt that for me it was my duty to give back and to be able to identify with those students who were also overlooked by the system or may have fallen through the cracks. So, for me, I wanted to be that champion. I wanted to be their champion and be able to give back to them in that way. I realized, “Well, I’ve got to go back to school,” because opportunities in this profession and particularly in a university -- you have to have a doctorate if you want other doors opened. And so, if I wanted to have a seat at the table where decisions get made about policies or decisions get made about resources and where those resources go, I have to have a doctorate to be at that table.

This new educational journey gave her a renewed perspective on the student experience. She was able to experience first-hand the challenges students faced when entering a college campus for the first time. Though it was a challenging experience, she felt it enhanced her ability to understand student’s needs at a different level.
Maria Teresa’s husband was a tremendous support and encouraged her to attend a private research university in the Los Angeles area.

*I sat down with my husband and we were able to figure out our finances and how much loans would be. And he said, "You know, go. Go back to school. And go back to the school that is very different than a public institution, so you can experience what those students experience." And it was great.*

After completing her doctoral program, she started looking at new opportunities in higher education. She feels like her time at her current campus gave her the confidence she needed in her approach to leadership. She also attributes her confidence in her experience through a doctoral program. She felt it was time to branch out to the next step in her leadership journey.

*And then it also of course helped, I think, that I was going through my doctorate program. And of course, all the readings and everything that you read, and it’s like, "Oh, yeah!" So, I was able to -- yes, "I can apply it here, I can put it here, I can do it." So, that was really good. But I also knew that it’s like, "Okay, I’ve come to the end of the arc of being a director or an assistant dean. And the next level is really a dean of students."

The position of Dean of Students at her current university came open, she applied, and she was offered the position. Her new position was different, in terms of budget and functional areas, and also it was more focused. She felt her
new position offered her a “seat at the table about policies for students”. This was very important to Maria Teresa. The emphasis was not necessarily on the resources she had available but more importantly, it was about policies that could affect students. For three years, she says she enjoyed what she was doing. This past year, the position of associate vice president came available due to a promotion of her predecessor. She was asked to consider applying for the position by her vice president. She took their suggestion seriously and she applied and she was the successful candidate for the position. She currently serves as the Associate Vice President for Student Affairs.

In this position, it’s important to have a seat at that table for both policies, resources, funding for the university, direction of the university. And so for me this is where I feel like, "Okay, I can have a greater impact." I was having an impact before; I know that. But now I'm able to have a greater impact in a different way.

Reflecting back on her experience of racism at the university on the east coast, I asked her how she managed that experience and if she saw it as a barrier.

You know, I think at the time I was really naïve and I didn't. I didn't see it as something that I needed to overcome. It was just more like, "Wow, this is life." And I think for me I didn't expect it. I think the biggest disappointment was that I didn't expect it in an educational setting because I thought, "Well, it's a university and we're supposed to be
educated. We're supposed to be learned." And that's not something educated people do. And then I realized, "Oh, no. You can have --"
because some of strongest incidents came at the hand of faculty. And so, that I think was the biggest disappointment. I mean, whether my faculty or my professors at the other universities thought that, they certainly never voiced it. And so, at the Master's level, I just didn't expect it. But there were some faculty that definitely, I think, had some perspectives about woman of color -- I mean, whether it was because I was a woman and/or because I was a woman of color -- that somehow I didn't belong in a Master's program or had the intellect to be in a Master's program. And so, that I think was the biggest -- that's why I said the biggest disappointment.

Maria Teresa said even with her disappointment, she didn't let it affect her. She reflected back to the beginning of our interview and the challenges she had faced growing up. Due to the adversities she faced, she was and continues to be a resilient person.

I'll say, without getting too much into it, I think that because I had a childhood that was challenging, that I have always been and remain very resilient, very flexible, very like "okay, this is just one more thing to kind of -- this is life, and so you just keep moving." It's all that I've ever known.

Money: A Deciding Factor. Another show of resiliency she shared was her view of finances. Many of the decisions in her educational trajectory were based on a financial need. The first two universities she attended were based
primarily as a good financial decision. Many of peers were choosing colleges based on feelings and not financial needs. This thought process was so foreign to her as every decision she made was based on money.

And so for me, finances and money has been an undercurrent though -- like I said, up until I got to Northern State University (pseudonym), where I was finally able to feel like I had an income that I could support my livelihood but also help my mom more. Because, before, I was helping but it was kind of one of those things where it was like we're both stretched. I'm stretching and I'm making sure that she's covered and my brother. It was mostly about my younger brother, making sure that they had enough for stuff that they needed. But it wasn't until I got to that position that I was able to make an income where I no longer had to be stretched and instead I could help her so she wouldn't be stretched. And so now we were both a little bit better.

Even though finances were challenging at times, she did not see it as a barrier but more as a reality of life. Her financial needs contributed to her skill at being resourceful, which has been a tremendous strength in previous leadership positions as well as her current leadership role. She sees it as a challenge and one she admits she is good at.

Finances…I don't see things as barriers. That's why I was like, "Eh." It's just something that I dealt with. I found ways to -- and that's just who I am as a person. Even my staff or people would tell you that I always try to
find -- I always come up with options for everything. It's like, "Okay, we can do this, we can do this. What about this? What about that?" Yeah, take a little from here. "I'm going to cut this position all together so we can have more support." And it's just a skill, but I think it's an awesome skill. So, I never see it -- I haven't seen the fact that I didn't have enough -- I certainly did not have enough when I was younger, when I came to the United States. We barely had enough. And that probably continued until I finished my Master's. And then I had enough, a little bit more of enough. But ever since then, I've had more than enough.

A Humble Leader. At this point in the interview, I am realizing one of Maria Teresa’s greatest attributes is how humble and genuine she is. Her ability to say she has a skill for finances is not boastful but just a matter a fact. She has chosen to take the bad life has handed her and she’s used it in a positive way. I take this opportunity to ask her to elaborate on how her journey has shaped how she leads and how she would describe herself as a leader.

You know, that's a hard one for me because I don't think of myself in that way. But I know the skills that I use. Absolutely I'm very focused, I'm very disciplined. I'm an extremely good listener. I do feel like I lead from the perspective of, "What's the purpose?" It has to be purpose-driven. It has to be informed. It can't just be like, "We think this is a good idea." It has to be like, "What is the good idea, and why is it a good idea, and how is it going to help our students?" So, for me it's very much about, "How is it
going to help our students?" Because if it's not, then that's not -- it just should not have a home. It should be driven by how it's going to help our students be successful. And at a university level, especially [here] where we have 40,000 students, it's about graduation. So is this program going to help our students get across the finish line, and is it going to help them get across the finish line in four years? I finished in three and it was because of money. People are like, "Oh my god. I can't believe you did it in three." Yeah, money. And so for our students here, some of them are in that same boat. They're working two or three jobs to go to school. They're helping their families. They're raising children. They're raising their siblings. They're helping their grandparents. And so, our students can't afford to be here six years. They can't. So what are we doing to help them do it in four? And it'd be great if they can do it in three, but that's tough. Those days are gone, for a lot of reasons. But I think that a lot of our students can absolutely do it in four. So how do we help them do that? So for me, those are the skills. It's very much about the -- yeah, I bring that skillset to my leadership.

The Importance of Latinas in Higher Education. Maria Teresa is able to relate to her student population on so many levels. She's been in their shoes and knows what it takes to make it in higher education in spite of the challenges. As a Latina administrative leader in higher education, I wanted to know her thoughts on the benefits of having Latinas in leadership roles in higher education.
I think it's immensely important. I really am a believer of, if you can see it, you can be it. No other way around it. I'm trying to think. I don't think -- the only people that I saw in leadership roles that were Latino…during my undergrad were the people who were working in the Chicano resource center, which that's very traditional. But I'm trying to remember if I knew of any, not just Latino, but any other person of color that worked in any of the high leadership positions. And it was -- then, it was all the people who worked in the multicultural centers. Those were the only people of color. And then, funny enough, our president at the university, he was an African American man, physicist, very talented, and very smart. And…his whole cabinet was white. The majority of the faculty were white. And not that that's a bad thing, but you just didn't see those role models. There were very few Chicano-Latino faculty on the campus. Most of them were teaching in ethnic studies. Certainly, I didn't see them in my science courses. I don't ever remember in any of my science courses having a person of color, faculty. When I went to the east coast, that model was replicated. I think there were a few people that taught in the ethnic studies department. There were certainly no folks of color in any sort of leadership position.

So, what we miss out on is the role models. It isn't so much that we need people to be there, but what you miss out on is the role models because you didn't see it. And at North State University (pseudonym), same thing.
I think I was the highest-ranking person of color, as a director. And I think there was maybe two or three other people of color. And these are places that I worked at. So, went I went to my last university, it was the first time -- the vice president there is Latino. And it was the first time that I had encountered that and one of the reasons I went to go work there, actually.

The importance of being able to visualize oneself in the leadership of an organization is important to Maria Teresa. Having a Latino as a vice president at her previous institution was a factor in her decision to apply and take the job of Assistant Dean of Student Services. He was a role model that she could learn from. "He's a vice president. He's been successful at a higher level. So how do you do it? You need somebody to show you how you do it, otherwise I don't know how else." She continues to stress the point that individuals in leadership positions in higher education need to reflect their student populations. She feels her current institution is a good model of reflecting their diverse student population as they have a Latina president. She applauds her ability to stay true to her cultural self and at the same time navigate spaces where you have lead and make tough decisions along the way. As an auditory and observational learner, Maria Teresa feels if she can “see” what a successful Latina in leadership looks like, she can model that and knows that is important to their students to see it as well.

I absolutely think that we need to have more people who represent -- yes, that represent who we are. They have to be in those ranks, otherwise our
students don’t see it. So, what does it say to other young Latinas that may be thinking about this career path if they don’t see anybody that looks like them?

Mentors: A Board of Directors. Since we’re discussing the importance of role models, I asked her if she currently had any mentors or specific role models she looks to. She expressed she has a sort of board of directors she taps into in various ways. Her current supervisor is a mentor and role model. She is able to see her in action on a daily basis and bounce things off of her, as needed. Another mentor is her supervisor from Northern State University. She considers her a dear friend, her biggest cheerleader, and mentor. She points out that this woman is White. When she is facing difficult decisions, it is this woman she calls for that advice. She is very important to her and when it is possible, she spends time with her. Also, she says she has friends and colleagues who she considers a support network.

I’ve got a good network of peers. And we all help to support each other. It’s not a competition. We see it more as, like, "Okay, you know, you’re going to go for this job." So, when my friends knew that I was up for this job, they all helped me. They’re like, "What can I do?" You know, "Here’s some interview tips. Do you want me to do a mock interview with you?" You know, it’s all of those things. And so, we really help to support each other.
Listening to her stories and experiences, I could not help but admire Maria Teresa for her dedication and persistence through it all. Not only is she hardworking and dedicated, she is also very inspiring. Maria Teresa did not let her struggles define her, but rather, used it to drive her goals and ambitions. One thing that stuck out to me about Maria Teresa was how humble and genuine she is. As our interview came to an end, she asked me to share my story with her. I was taken aback that she would be interested in hearing what my goals were and how I got to this point in my life. She provided some specific advice and was very encouraging. One of the last things that caught my attention in her office as we were wrapping up our interview was a small Captain America emblem. For me, growing up on Marvel Comics, Captain America symbolized strength, freedom, and protection. By the end of my interview with Maria Teresa, it was a perfect symbolization of who she was as a leader.

Summary of Maria Teresa’s Narrative. In the eighth grade, Maria Teresa was part of a counseling program geared to assisting eighth graders as they transition into high school. A counselor took note that Maria Teresa was excelling in math classes. Although she was still taking English as a Second Language (ESL) courses, her math skills were more advanced for her age. This academic intervention provided Maria Teresa, what Espinoza (2011) defines as a pivotal moment where a college educated adult intentionally reaches out to a student to provide educational guidance. Maria Teresa attributes this as the catalyst that created a desire to attend college.
When Maria Teresa was finally ready to apply for college, as a first-generation college student, Maria Teresa did not understand the application or admittance process to get into college. Furthermore, she was considered an undocumented student. As with other undocumented immigrant students, immigration status created a significant financial barrier (Gandara, 2015). Because of Maria Teresa’s immigration status, she was unable to qualify for federal financial aid and had to depend on scholarships to help pay for tuition.

Although Maria Teresa received a partial scholarship, she had to work two jobs to help support herself, pay for tuition, and help support her mother and brother. Despite her financial hardship, Maria Teresa graduated in three years. During her graduate studies, she financially took care of her mom. Although she originally wanted to go into biology, she chose education based on being “in school” for two years versus five years. Still to this day, her and her husband assist her mother financially. Many of the decisions in her educational trajectory were based on a financial need. The first two universities she attended were based primarily as a good financial decision. Even though finances were challenging at times, she did not see it as a barrier but more as a reality of life. Her financial needs contributed to her skill at being resourceful, which has been a tremendous strength in previous leadership positions as well as her current leadership role. She sees it as a challenge and one she admits she is good at.

Maria attended graduate school on the east coast at a predominately white campus and called it a “culture shock.” She acknowledged this was her
first time really experiencing bias or racism. Although she acknowledges she loved her time there, attending a predominately White campus located on the east coast came with its challenges as a Latina student. She shared it wasn’t necessarily the university, but primarily the surrounding community where felt the racism and bias. Her perspective on the experience was she didn’t view it as a barrier or something she had to overcome. Due to the adversities she faced growing up, she was and continues to be a resilient person.

Furthering her education was very important to her. After much consideration, she made the decision to earn a doctoral degree. This new educational journey gave her a renewed perspective on the student experience. She was able to experience first-hand the challenges students faced when entering a college campus for the first time. Though it was a challenging experience, she felt it enhanced her ability to understand student’s needs at a different level.

Maria Teresa is able to use her past experiences and her identity as a Latina to relate to the student populations she serves. She believes when it comes to having more Latinas in higher education, “if you can see it, you can be it.” During her educational journey, she did not have one Latina or Latino professor. The only Latinas/os she encountered during her educational trajectories were in multicultural centers or in ethnic studies which aligns concept of barrioization (Aguirre, 2000; Garza, 1993; Martinez, 1999). As was the case with Maria Teresa, without having leaders that reflect the student population,
students miss out on positive role models (Gonzalez, 2007; Gutierrez et al., 2002).

However, Maria Teresa had a support system that played a vital role in her leadership trajectory, in particular her husband. Furthermore, she expressed she has a sort of board of directors she taps into in various ways. One mentor in particular, a previous White female boss, is considered to be her friend, her biggest cheerleader, and mentor. When she is facing difficult decisions, it is this woman she calls for that advice. In addition, she says she has friends and colleagues who she considers part of that vital support network.

Maggie’s Narrative

Maggie was born and raised in a small agricultural community in California near the Arizona border. She was one of five children growing up in a traditionally Hispanic home. She considers herself a second generation American, as her parents were born in the United States. Maggie attended public school throughout her K-12 schooling. She managed to get “pretty good grades” in school, despite her parents not placing a heavy emphasis on her or her siblings’ education. She knows her parents thought school was important but she felt with so many kids in the house there simply was not time to focus on their education. There were the usual homework questions and school supply needs questions but no in-depth conversation regarding the importance of furthering your education after high school.
K-16 Educational Pipeline Experiences. During her high school years, people perceived Maggie to be much smarter than she was. She feels these assumptions were based on her involvement in student government. Her reasons for getting involved in student government initially were the traveling opportunities and an opportunity to get involved in extracurricular activities outside the home. Her parents were very strict so this allowed for her to be involved with her friends.

*I think individuals assumed that I was smarter than what I was. They assumed that I was, you know, top-ten in the class. They had all of these assumptions because I got involved in student government. And the reason I got involved initially in student government was because our family never took real family vacations because we probably couldn't afford it. Five kids. We really never took family vacations. And I knew that getting involved with student government and with a mock trial, I'd get to go to Disneyland. I'd get to go places. I'd get to see different things. And I think that was my motivation, to start with. And my parents let me. They said, "Yeah, if that --" because it was school-related, so therefore it was okay. When I wanted to take weekend trips with my friends, that was out of the question.*

Maggie attributes her desire to go to college to the experiences of “getting involved” in high school. She was determined to attend college right out of high
school. She described her experience, her aspirations, and the challenges she experienced.

I went to a community college. I did apply to four-year schools. The school I really wanted to go to at that time was the University of Arizona, the U of A, because my city is right on the Arizona border. So, there was a lot of influence. And I wanted to be an attorney. I wanted to go to U of A law school. And I don't know quite how that got into my mind, but that's what I wanted to do. But then the realities of out-of-state tuition carried in, and there was just no way we could afford it. And I knew it wouldn't even be right to even ask them to even try to afford that. There'd be no way. So, I went to the local community college, and for me -- you know, in hindsight it's probably the best thing I could've done. I'm not sure I would've made it at a large, four-year institution. I'd have been lost, you know. And then I also realized at the community college, you know, my writing skills weren't all that great. So, I probably wouldn't have made it, just based on my writing ability. It was there I truly learned how to be a student, you know, or I should say how to be a successful student, was at a community college.

I asked Maggie if there were any barriers she experienced during her educational journey. She paused for a moment and said she doesn’t remember any challenges or looming barriers that stand out other than having a lack of knowledge of the services that were available to her in college.
I think had I been aware of all of the services that were available to me, I think it would have made it more comfortable coming through. I'll give you an example: EOPs - Educational Opportunities Programs. I wasn't truly aware of EOPs programs until I was a senior in college. I wasn't really aware of that. You know, financial aid -- I didn't apply for financial aid until I went on to work on my doctorate, because I didn't really know or understand that it would be beneficial. I didn't have a regular counselor that I went to. I opened up the catalog and this was the degree and these are the classes I needed to get done; let's just start checking them off and get through it.

Maggie was able to transfer to a four-year university as an accounting major. After her first accounting class, she realized it “wasn't going to be for” her, so she changed her major to marketing. She earned a bachelor’s degree in marketing and she went on to earn a Masters of Business Administration in marketing.

Experience Leading in Higher Education. During her undergraduate and graduate programs, she worked for a California State University. Her first job in higher education was working in the development office focusing on fundraising for capital campaigns, scholarship programs, and running their telemarketing campaigns. From there, a supervisor in student services asked Maggie if she would be willing to apply for a position within their department. She applied and she was offered the position. Her duties included student transfers, student
admittance process, and overseeing the financial aid for transfer students. It was during this time, a position at her current college campus opened up. She applied for the faculty position but was told she didn't have the right degree. She was told she needed a degree in education and they informed her they would be holding off on the position for another year and half. Maggie took this as an opportunity to continue her education in hopes of reapplying for the position at a later time.

So, I jumped back into another Master’s program. And I finished that program in a year-and-a-half. So as a graduate student I was taking -- I was working full-time at this point and now taking three to four classes, graduate-level programs at that time, because I wanted to finish in order to be eligible to apply. So I had no life for a year-and-a-half. But I finished it. I finished it, I applied, I was fortunate enough to get the position. It was actually labeled as a faculty position here to work with students going into STEM programs and mainly supporting work in the STEM programs, and also to develop a weekend college program for students, for working adults who wanted to get their degrees and transfer to four-year schools. So we did that. I was a faculty member here for just over four years. I got a tremendous amount of experience while I was here. I had a fantastic dean who really let me explore, encouraged -- just gave me just enough rope to where I wouldn't hang myself. So, a lot of opportunity.
Her leadership trajectory would take another turn as she was offered a vice president position at a community college in her hometown. She reminisces of earning tenure on a Friday and leaving for her new management position of vice president the following Monday. She went from faculty member to an administrative position, which is not the typical leadership route in higher education. She proceeded to say, though it worked for her she would not recommend it.

For six years, Maggie provided her leadership to the community college in her hometown but she began to feel she wanted a bigger experience. She recalls this time in her life as a major transition period in her leadership trajectory.

*I was there for six years. And then I wanted a bigger experience, if you will, and a different experience. So, I applied to a community college up in northern California. I didn't know anyone. You know, you take risks, right? I went, I applied, I went through all the processes, and was fortunate enough to get the position. I was there for five years. I had a fantastic experience there. And, then my current position opened up. You know, it's not often in our industry -- and especially the higher you go up -- you get an opportunity to help lead a college in your backyard. Right?

So, this would be in essence my second opportunity to come home, which is rare.

She paused for a moment and then she commenced to speak about her husband and how important he has been on her journey.
You know, my husband still lived here. In a couple days -- well, tomorrow. Tomorrow’s the 26th? Tomorrow I will have been married 18 years. And 10 of those years have been a commuter marriage, because his work and his business are here in our city. We own our home here, investments here, and so on. I was going back and forth on the weekends, and then I'm going in the other direction up north, 400 miles away and kind of going back and forth.

I congratulated her on 18 years of marriage and she expressed the importance of involving your family in your leadership journey as many such relationships do not normally last.

Maggie continued talking about the opportunity she had been given to apply for the position at her current institution. Though she did not get the job she felt it just wasn’t her time. She continued working at a college up in northern California and expressed how supportive the staff was when she did not get the job. Then a year later the position opened up again.

The job opened up again a year later. And so, people were calling, "Are you going to apply again? Are you going to apply again?" And so, you think about that, right? But what I found was I didn't have to give it very much thought. It almost felt natural to do it, to do this. So, I applied. I was again a finalist. I was actually a finalist at two colleges within this district. And I was very fortunate that they offered me this college, which
was my first choice. So, it was an opportunity to come home. And that is in essence my trajectory.

Maggie continued to discuss her less than traditional pathway to her administrative leadership role at a community college. She had shared with me earlier that she could relate to where I was as a doctoral student, which was one of the reasons she was willing to help me through my own journey.

And I think when I talk with students -- because a lot of our students here, they're parents, they're working full-time jobs, they're trying to go to school, they're taking care of family members and so on. And I think when I tell my story -- because I didn't really think I had a story. But then people tell me, "You have a story." So, when I tell the story, and they tell me I'm relatable -- so in some ways I hope it inspires students a little bit, not to quit. So that's what I hope to do.

She went on to say that her experiences have definitely shaped her as a person and a leader, especially working in higher education. She remembers her father telling her “Don’t rely on anyone. Make sure you can make your own living.” Her father’s words have always encouraged her to be self-reliant. On the other hand, her mother’s words of wisdom included the importance of doing what you love and being compassionate of others. Maggie expresses her desire to have a perfect union of the two as it makes her a better leader. Another characteristic Maggie possess is the ability to listen. In addition, she believes her experiences have taught her how to problem solve, which has the potential to
bring people together and solve a problem. “I want to be that bridge that brings people together.”

**Mentors and Role Models.** She continued by describing how provides mentoring for her staff and faculty. As a leader in higher education, Maggie believes in helping others get to where they want to be.

*You know, professional development is extremely important to me. You know, I tell individuals, you know, “Let me see your budgets and I'll tell you where your priorities are.” You look at my budget, you will see that professional development is a priority. And I think that's important. And, you know, I physically cannot mentor the 600-800 faculty and staff that I have here. But I do want them to know that I want them to grow and I want them to -- if they want it, I want them to want more than where they are today. You know, if that's what they want. Some folks are just incredibly happy doing what they do. So, I want to provide them the skills so they can stay updated on what they do so that they remain happy in working that way.*

Maggie sees herself as a role model but acknowledges the importance of role models in her own life.

*I have several mentors, you know, kind of depending on my situation that I find myself in. I talk with my brother a lot, one of my brothers. All of my brothers are older; I have three older brothers. And so, the youngest of the three, Bobby (pseudonym), we're 10-and-a-half months apart. So, you*
would think we think alike, but we don’t. So, I always go to him for the opposite perspective. As part of being a new CEO of the campus, we were offered mentors if we wanted. So, I have another CEO who is a female, not Latina, who serves as a mentor.

Furthermore, Maggie said she believed that as leaders we all stand on the shoulders of others. For her, she was fortunate enough to have several people that "believed" in her and have played an important role throughout her leadership trajectory. A colleague from another campus, Dr. Socorro Martinez (pseudonym) was the first to address Maggie by Dr. Flores and encouraged her to enter a doctoral program. There were others along her journey that made an impact on who she is today as a leader.

But, most of the people I would say in, quote-unquote, "leadership positions" that encouraged me were men. And none -- I'm running through the rolodex in my head. I don't think any of them were Latino men. One gentleman who was the dean here who I told you always let me do what he thought would be important for me to do, he was Iranian. The president, Robert (pseudonym), that I told you about, the president of the college in northern California – he is a great mentor, great friend [and] he's white. And not to say that there haven't been Latinos that I've called upon here and there. But as the constant in my journey, no. They're not there.
Latinas in Higher Education. As she reflected through her journey, she stated the lack of Latina/os in leadership positions is scarce making it difficult for other Latina/os to find role models and mentors they identify with. As we were on the subject of race identity, I asked Maggie how her identity as a Latina has informed her approach to leadership, if at all?

*I think it does. I don't "play the Latina card" or "I'm a woman, therefore --" I don't do that. But I know my role. I'll give you an example. Here at the district, until just very, very recently -- like a couple-months, I was the only woman in an executive role throughout the district. Okay? And, there are only two Latinos, myself, and a male, in the entire district. When this college alone, in terms of the students we serve, is 64-percent Latino population and close to 60-percent female, I represent a lot of students here. And I think it's important that that voice be heard at the table when policies are being made, when decisions are being made, because sometimes in -- through no fault of anyone, because you don't know what you don't know. Sometimes we make decisions or we start talking about the implementation of a practice that could have a negative effect for our underrepresented students. Now, whether it is an actual negative effect or a perceived negative effect -- because perception becomes people's realities very quickly. And so -- not that I always go into every situation through a lens of, "What does this mean for the underserved?" But I do go into every decision-making looking through a lens of equity and "how*
will this affect my campus?” Now, I say it jokingly, but seriously, you know, I don’t have children of my own but I’ve got 17,000 kids and they’re my responsibility. And so, I have to treat them equitably. And I can’t allow other policy or decision-makers to negatively impact that. And that’s the lens that I look through when I’m making decisions. Am I perfect? No, far from it. Far from it.

As the study focused on Latinas in administrative leadership roles, I asked Maggie what benefits she felt Latinas brought the “table” when it comes to the student populations her campus serves and what role do they play.

It is important. And I think if we dive into that a little bit deeper, if we drill down into who the faculty are, I think that you will find that student services faculty members are far more diverse than the instructional faculty members. On a community college campus, librarians, our nurses, our counselors are all considered faculty. And so, I think you will find a very good set of diverse population there: male, female, ethnicity, however you define diversity, you will find on the student services side. On the instruction side, on the academic side, we don’t see that. And I think it is important because I think, as we were talking earlier, it helps when people see themselves as teachers, as educators. As I’m coming through the system, I’m trying to think if I ever had a Latina instructor in all of my courses. And I’m kind of embarrassed to say I don’t think I had any.
And so, when a young woman is coming through or a non-traditional-aged student is coming through and they don't see instructors that look like them, speak like them, or so on, I think it does -- I think either subconsciously, maybe consciously, you think about, "That's not my role. I'm not supposed to do that." And so, I think it's very impactful. I think it's very impactful.

As a leader in higher education, Maggie has a deep sense of responsibility to her students, staff, faculty, and the community at large. She expressed giving students the proper tools to meet or exceed their educational goals is what gives her the strength to lead. She believes there is still much work to be done in higher education, especially for the Latina/o communities. I asked Maggie what advice would she give other Latinas looking for a leadership position in higher education.

As interview came to an end, I thanked Maggie for her time and candidness in discussing her journey as a leader. She asked me what my story was and if I minded sharing it. During the interview, she commented on others seeing her as relatable and I can see why. Maggie was very approachable, down to earth, and easy to talk to. Her college campus is fortunate to have someone like Maggie leading their institution.

**Summary of Maggie’s Narrative.** During her high school years, people perceived Maggie to be much smarter than she was. She feels these assumptions were based on her involvement in student government. Her
reasons for getting involved in student government initially were the traveling opportunities and an opportunity to get involved in extracurricular activities outside the home. Similar to other Latinas, her parents were very strict and expected Maggie to be home “helping” her mother (Espinoza, 2011). Maggie attributes her desire to go to college to the experiences of “getting involved” in high school. Although she wanted to attend a four-year university, she went to a community college instead. She believes that was better based on the fact she felt she wasn’t as prepared for college as she thought she was.

As a first-generation college student, Maggie lacked the college knowledge to receive adequate support services such as counseling services and financial aid information. It was not until her doctoral program that she applied and felt she understood how financial aid really works.

Maggie began her career in higher education while completing her undergraduate degree and worked in various student service departments. In addition, Maggie was part of the faculty at one of her institutions. She went from faculty member to an administrative position, which is not the typical leadership route in higher education. Her current leadership role is president. She acknowledges her less than traditional pathway to the presidency worked for her; however, she would not recommend it.

She went on to say that her experiences have definitely shaped her as a person and a leader, especially working in higher education. Role models, mentors, and mentoring others is important to her approach to leadership. As a
leader, she feels building others up to be leaders is important, creating a supportive climate, and being a good listener are vital. These characteristics coincide with Burns’ (as cited in Northouse, 2013) transformational leadership. Maggie was fortunate enough to have several people that “believed” in her and have played an important role throughout her leadership trajectory. Maggie acknowledged that the majority of those who provided encouragement and mentoring were men.

She feels there is a shortage of potential Latinas in higher education to serve as role models and mentors to others along their educational journeys. As a Latina, she feels it is important for her students to be able to see themselves reflected in who she is. The ability for other Latinas to see themselves represented in the leadership is vital to their educational journeys (Gandara, 2015).

As a leader in higher education, Maggie has a deep sense of responsibility to her students, staff, faculty, and the community at large. She expressed that giving students the proper tools to meet or exceed their educational goals is what gives her the strength to lead. She believes there is still much work to be done in higher education, especially for the Latina/o communities.

Ana’s Narrative

Ana was born in Michoacán, Mexico and she came to the United States when she was almost three years old. She moved around in Southern California for several years primarily due to her father’s occupation as a gardener. At the
age of nine years old, her family moved to a desert city because of the stable and secure job her father found. She lived in the desert city until she turned 18 years old and upon graduation moved to Los Angeles.

As an undocumented child, there was a fear instilled in her and within her family and community of what being undocumented meant. She remembers one story in particular of what that fear was like.

*I remember being four or five years old, having to walk to a grocery store and having to hide, certain blocks, because the men in green suits were around the corner. And so that was very prevalent in my growing up.*

Growing up, Ana had to translate for family members, relatives, and her neighbors. She shares her experiences of language brokering starting at a young age.

*I became the translator for my family at a very young age: I was age six and seven, and I was the spokesperson for my family and my relatives and my neighbors. So those experiences really brought a perspective to my reality. I knew there was something fundamentally wrong when I was the translator for my first-, second-grade class. That was not fair to put that responsibility on a young child. But at the time it was just what I was supposed to do. But I knew that there was something inherently wrong with it. I knew that there should have been an adult, either a teacher or someone to be doing that type of translation. So, those experiences spoke to me. And it stayed with me.*
K-16 Educational Pipeline Experiences. Because of early childhood experiences, Ana excelled academically and by the third grade was identified as a gifted student.

As I progressed, I excelled academically. And I think part of it was because I was thrown in an atmosphere where I had to translate, I had to fill out forms, I had to figure out budgetary needs for the family and for our friends in the neighborhood. So that translated to what we call funds of knowledge. I had all that experience at home in my community, so in the classroom I excelled. I am the second child, and that's also important to know because my older sister -- I have an older sister and a younger brother. My older sister struggled with schooling and my parents really didn't know how to help her. But I benefited from her struggle because when I, two years younger than her -- she was my teacher. She would come home and she would teach me everything she knew.

So, the process of me being that prominent translator and then benefiting from my sister's knowledge allowed me to excel. And I credit that because I was in third/fourth grade already identified as a gifted student. And that was communicated to my parents. My parents were of course proud. And they would trust the schooling system. If they felt that they had opportunities for me, they'd say yes. And they would always say yes to me, not to my sister, which is interesting. Because with my sister, she was older so they were sort of understanding the system. By the time it
was my turn it was sort of, "Oh, we trust the system, so therefore you get to benefit from these opportunities."

Ana continued to excel through middle school and high school. As a gifted student, she took part in AP and honor courses. She became very involved in extracurricular activities: student leadership and government, cross country and track, and the Spanish club. She shared these experiences can play tricks on a person, psychologically. “You are expected to excel, and therefore I'm going to excel.” It was during this time, the opportunity to go a leadership summer camp presented itself. Though her older sister was not allowed to attend a couple years prior, Ana was given permission to go. Ana shared that her parents provided multiple dimensions of support. “To this day, I still speak about it because I know it impacted my sister tremendously in terms of why not me, and why her?” These types of experiences clearly impacted their educational trajectories.

With her parents’ permission, Ana was able to attend a leadership camp that would play an integral role in her educational trajectory as well as her leadership journey. She was 14 years old when she attended the Future Leaders summer camp with 200 of her peers.

All of the staff were college students. So, you would see everybody wearing their UCLA, USC, UC Santa Barbara, all these alphabet soups on the shirts. As a first-generation student myself, I didn't know what that meant. I just knew that they looked amazing. And they would speak
about their experiences in Santa Barbara, San Francisco, and San Diego. And up until that point, the only mention of a college for me was based on my teachers’ experiences.

And it so happened that a lot of my teachers in the desert had gone to [nearby universities] So, in my mind, the way I processed my experience was, "Well, once I graduate from high school I have to go to the nearby university, because that’s what my teachers spoke about. And so, going to the summer camp and seeing, "Well, wait a minute, there’s a plethora of colleges. Wait a minute, now I have options --" and so I think I credit Future Leaders for that particular sort of epiphany of realizing that there’s a lot more that we should know about. And unfortunately, we weren’t always given that opportunity of information.

Ana continued by sharing how a particular speaker, Saul Flores (pseudonym), a prominent leader in the Chicano movement in educational reform, impacted her view of Chicano heritage and history. As he spoke the group, she felt as though he was directly speaking to her. He spoke on the lack of inclusionary curriculum prevalent in schools. She was able to relate it back to an experience she had when she was about seven or eight years old.

And I related to that because I remember being a seven-, eight-year-old and teachers telling us, “The founding fathers.” That didn’t sit well with me. I knew that they were not related to me. So, the sort of connection to who I was not there. And I was critical even as a young child. And so,
fast-forward less than 10 years, to have this man actually speak truth to power and say, "Yes, these were not our founding fathers. We have a longer history. This is not the land that you are taught for it to be. This is the Southwest. This used to be Mexico, and this is the history that we have." And so, I think as a 14-year-old that spoke truth to my experience. And that really pivoted me to want to learn more about my own history.

Ana attributes these early experiences as not only connecting with her own heritage but also the "desire to learn more, to read more, to question more". She went back to her high school a different student; one that was unapologetic, very direct, very critical.

Her high school administrators took note of the changes in Ana that summer. She feels there was a new level of respect from her administrators. She found her voice to question the inequities in activities, avenues of communication, and how the Latino community was simply not being served.

I was more critical about, "Why are we offering these types of activities? Why aren't we offering culturally based activities? Why are we not speaking to parents or having sessions and workshop?" And their answer was always, "Well, we have workshops about college once a year at the beginning of the school year at 5:00." My response, "Well, not all parents are available to come at 5:00, so why are you not offering them at earlier times or later times? And are you offering them in a translated fashion?"
What’s the material? Is it adequately translated?” So that wasn’t typical, for a 15-year-old to engage with administrators at the time.

Ana continued speaking about one administrator, Mr. Smith (pseudonym) pulled her aside to encourage her and the questions she was posing. He encouraged her to take her “experiences to heart”. Through this contact, she began to think about her future and what that would look like.

"What do you want to be when you grow up?” I was like, "Well, in my mind I'm going to be an English teacher." He's like, "No, you're going to do more than that." And to me it's like, "Well, what else can I do?” And he's like, "I think you're going to be some type of an educational administrator at some level." And again, this is at 15-years-old. And I was like, "Well, I don't know what that means." He said, "Well, we'll keep talking." And he was an assistant principal. And so, at that point it was like, "Well, wait a minute, here's an assistant principal that sees something in me -- that I could be his colleague,” which -- I didn't take that for granted.

In turn, Ana and the assistant principal created a relationship of understanding and respect. Unfortunately, she did not have a similar experience with her principal.

And, you know, come my junior year I was then threatening my principal saying, "You know what, I'm going to come back and I'm going to be your boss. So, I'm going to be something else higher than a principal. And I'll
figure what that is, and I'll come back and I'll be your boss." So those were the kinds of relationships that I had as a teenager. And so, I think that speaks to my personality, and it speaks to my leadership trajectory in terms of how I viewed my own education and what I wanted to get out of it. I graduated in the top ten of my class.

Relationships such as these contributed to not only her educational pathway but her leadership trajectory as well. Ana was a determined and driven teenager. Ana was resolute to attend a “respectable” college. She applied for six universities and she was accepted to all six. She was the only “Mexicana” accepted to prestigious university that year from her high school. At the time, Ana says she was unaware of the respect the school carried but did realize it was a difficult school to get into.

I had never gone to this university but I knew at the -- by the time I had been admitted, I knew I had to go there. And I think part of it was also sort of this wanting to prove my principal something about me. And he had gone to a prestigious university. He had gotten his EDD from the university I wanted to attend. So, I figured, "I'm going to go get a PhD…," not knowing what that meant other than that EDD and PhDs are often compared to one another. But even that was powerful knowledge.

Her choice to attend a school in Los Angeles was met with some resistance from her parents. Their limited knowledge of Los Angeles was based on what they had seen on television, primarily the news. Scenes of crime, violence, and
partying was her parent's perception of Los Angeles. To ease her parents' concerns, Ana promised them to study, get a degree, come home and be a teacher or school administrator. Ana and her parents visited the campus for the first time at her orientation of the summer bridge program. The program was geared to first-generation, low income, students of color who were transitioning to the university in the fall. On their way to the campus, they got lost three times. And, once they made it to the campus, they had a difficult time finding the building for the orientation. As she shared the following experience, Ana became visibly bothered by it.

"But I remember once we were actually in the Los Angeles, we pulled over three times and asked for directions. "Can you tell us how to get to Waverly Hall (pseudonym)?" And nobody would answer us. Nobody would help. And that was an eye-opening experience for both my parents and myself, in terms of -- you're going to be in a very isolated space. It wasn't until a young African American -- young man saw that we kept asking and everybody kept ignoring us, and he walked over and he said, "Well, what do you need?" And I said, "I need to go -- we need to find Waverly Hall (pseudonym)." And he showed us how to get there. But that spoke to me, you know. And again, it's going to be an isolated experience. Certainly, it's going to take time to find your support network. And it was just from that one interaction of people not wanting to answer
our "how do we get to this hall?" And so that's essentially what happened.

That was my experience. We're talking 25 years ago.

During her time at the university, there were numerous experiences that “spoke” to Ana regarding her surroundings and different ideologies. One incident in particular, was when her and some friends were coming back to the campus from eating dinner and came upon a KKK meeting on their campus along an area of campus that was called the Rape Trail. She had never experienced anything like this before and it made her aware of the racial hatred others possessed.

Another negative incident was during her freshman year in her dormitory.

I was the only Mexicana on my floor. It so happened -- I don't know if this was done on purpose but, my roommates and I, we were the only women of color on that floor. And so, I shared -- it was three of us in a room. It was a Filipina girl and Native American and myself. Our Native American roommate, she was half Native American, half white. And so, she was part of the sororities, part of all that lifestyle. And I remember I used to have a huge poster on my side of the desk that said, "Si, se puede," with Cesar Chavez and prominent figures, historical figures, picture of my family. But it was very obvious. But it was a huge poster. And I remember I was taking a nap and my roommate who was in the sorority had some friends from down the hall come up in the room. And she was telling them, "You have to be quiet because she's taking a nap." And they saw the poster and reacted to it and said, "How the hell can you share a
room with someone who has a poster like that?" And I remember I woke up because it just startled me. And she literally pushed them out of the room and said, "I don't want you in my room. I don't tolerate that. That's her space. That's who she is, and I respect that. If you can't respect my roommate, then I can't have you here." And so, she's still a very dear, good friend of mine. And she'd turn around and she's like, "I am sorry you had to hear that." And I said, "Well, that's normal. That's just what we get." Like, it happened in my room, but that happens everywhere I go.

As we continued with the interview, Ana shared several more stories of racism, mistreatment, and harassment during her university experience. After the first year of living on campus, Ana decided to move to an apartment within walking distance of the campus. She recalls one day walking to campus by a house of fraternity brothers. They began to throw beer cans at Ana and her friends and yelled at them, "Mexicans, you don't belong here. What do you think you're doing? You should go back to your land." She said turned around and said, "Pick up a damn book and realize this is Mexican land." And after that they didn't do anything. According to Ana, these encounters shaped her as a person. As a Latina coming from a predominately Mexican neighborhood, she knew there would be cultural transitions and cultural shocks but she said she wasn't completely prepared for so many. Her experiences had a profound effect on her.
Life in college was not only challenging because of incidences of racism but academically, she felt she was not properly prepared and it took its toll on Ana.

_I was put on academic probation my first year because academically it was really rigorous. I had taken AP statistics in high school, so I figured, "Well, that's going to prepare me to take statistics in college." But everything we learned the entire year in high school we covered in a week [in college]. That gave me leverage to go back to my high school and demand my principal, like, "What the hell are you teaching us? Everything I learned here was not helpful at all." But this is me telling the principal, "You need to change something if you're really going to prepare your students." And at this point I'm 19 telling this administrator, like, "You need to do something about what you’re actually teaching your students, because you’re not preparing us to excel in college. You say we’re college-ready, but what does that really mean? And so, anyways, those were some of the experiences, that academically I really struggled._

Ana began to feel overwhelmed with the rigorous program, the feelings of isolation, and the high expectations she had for herself. She knew she couldn’t quit. She had received only a partial scholarship to attend college and at this point, she had incurred debt. She continued by recalling how she coped and overcame her fears to continue.
I'm not going to expect my parents to pay this. I'm not going to be able to pay this. And so, in my mind I just didn't understand how financial aid worked. But that was my biggest fear, is "because I don't know how this works I have to stick it through. And I have to figure out a way. And it's going to be possible. And I remember back then I just prayed a whole lot.

I grew up in a very Catholic -- I would say cultural-Catholic home. And so, I prayed. I prayed to La Virgen Guadalupe and I prayed to God. And I said, "You put me on this path. There's a reason why you put me on this path and you put me here. So, you have to give me the strength to carry it through." And so, praying was certainly one way for me to ease my anxiety and fear. And writing. I became a writer. I journaled a lot. I think intuitively I journaled and wrote stories for my daughters. I was 18 and 19 at the time. I actually now have two young daughters. And I had them when I was 30. So, all of those, what, 12-13 years before I even conceived, I was writing to my daughters. And I would just write more advice pieces and consejos and dichos. And it's like, "My mom used to tell me this, and I didn't believe my mom. But guess what? My mom was right! So, if I'm going to tell you something, you best know that mom is right." And so, I became a writer. And that really helped me cope through my transition.

Ana used writing and prayer as coping mechanisms throughout her time at the university. In addition, she said she had “amazing student success support
programs” available to her as an intervention. She applied for the McNair scholarship program but due to the GPA criteria, she was not accepted. Through the interview process, they saw Ana’s desire to be connected in some way. They contacted her back and asked her to become a peer counselor. The director of counseling hired her based on the fact she felt Ana had something to offer and students could relate to her. Ana attributes this experience as a turning point that connected her personal to her professional trajectory. As a peer counselor, it provided Ana the opportunity to become familiar with administrators in higher education.

Ana continued her job as a peer counselor through her fourth-year as an undergraduate student. One of her professors, Dr. Beltran (pseudonym) taught both undergraduate and graduate level courses, and he offered Ana a position as a teaching assistant for his graduate level courses. She was thrilled as it was very uncommon for an undergraduate to be a teaching assistant in a graduate level course. Again, this spoke to Ana about her potential.

So, I think these opportunities spoke to, again, having folks around me who saw potential but whom I could learn from in terms of, well, if this professor thinks I have the capacity to teach at such a young age, there’s something there.

As Ana continued to progress academically, she continued her search for cultural experiences that she could connect with. On the advice of several of her friends, she took a research course with Dr. Velarde (pseudonym). She recalls
the experience as powerful and life changing. She kept hearing others speak about her university as a research institution but she didn’t what they meant. “This is a research institution but yet I have no idea what that means, because in my mind that means I’ll be in a lab coat playing with rats and chemicals because chemistry is what meant to me "research." And, she finds herself in Dr. Velarde’s (pseudonym) class talking about what research is.

So here I am as a fourth-year student in Dr. Velarde’s (pseudonym) class. And he starts talking about, "Well, what kind of support -- how did your parents support you in your own education?" And his whole philosophy was, because we are all part of public schooling or private school, but just the schooling process itself, we’re all educational experts. It's just how you contextualize that experience that you can start collecting data and start speaking to your own experience but also speaking to experiences that speak to others.

As she shared her experiences of language brokering at a young age in the class, he stated, "That's research. You have questions that merit an answer. And once you start collecting answers, you convert -- that is social science". Her love for conducting research was birthed through this experience. She began looking at everything as something that could be observed and translated. She said she was hooked on conducting research.

In the process of taking this class, Ana’s interactions with two teaching assistants, who were Ph.D. students, mentored her through the next phase of her
education. She stated they are still mentors and friends of her to this day. She shared her desire to learn more and understand the experiences of other Chicanos at research institutions. Through their support and guidance, Ana was conducted her first research project by interviewing five Chicanas who were attending the same university at the time and focused on their experiences. This type of mentoring and encouragement set the foundation for future research and her desire to continue in higher education.

Ana was in her fourth year in higher education and she was set to graduate. During this time, her older sister was set to graduate as well. Ana felt some reservations in graduating at the same time as her sister and she wanted to continue the research she was conducting.

*So now we're both -- 2001, we're both ready to graduate. And I decided not to, one, because I didn't want to take that away from her. She's the oldest; she needs to be the first one in our family to graduate from college. And it would allow me to take an extra year to continue doing this research thing I love now. And so, I didn't graduate and I picked up a second major. So, I have two Bachelor's Degrees. So, I doubled. I have comparative literature and then I have Chicano and Chicana studies with the focus on education, just so I can spend my last, fifth year working with Dr. Velarde (pseudonym).*

She was “hooked” on conducting research and she felt the research opportunities were taking her on a journey she didn’t expect. Her interaction with
the two Ph.D. students gave her the role models she needed to pursue a Ph.D. herself. She knew if they could it, she could too. They provided her with candid advice regarding the process. Yet, for Ana, she was determined to go directly to the Ph.D. program. She knew this meant she would have to prove herself in her research.

And so, because I had my decision to stay a fifth year, I said, "Well, that's what I'm going to do. All of the above. I'm going to present, I'm going to try to publish, I'm going to keep doing research. And you tell me what to do and I'll do it." And that's what I did. I stayed that fifth year. That research paper that I did for Dr. Velarde's (pseudonym) class, I presented at the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies. I presented it in Chicago. After that, [my mentor] was done with his PhD so he invited me to be a coauthor of his post-doctoral study which was on the experience of Chicanas developing aspirations to go on to the PhD. So that was his study. And I helped create, essentially -- I was the coauthor, so -- pulling in the literature reviews, the protocol. He did all the interviews. I coded all the transcriptions with him. And so, he literally took me under his wing and said, "This is what a postdoc is going to be like. This is what you're going to be doing for your dissertation. This is what you need to know." So essentially -- blessed. Completely blessed.

During her fifth year, Ana continued conducting research, presenting, and working as a teaching assistant for Dr. Beltran (pseudonym). Ana did not mind
the hard work. She believed she was “truly blessed by having these opportunities” her last year. She knew she was ready to apply for the Ph.D. program, she just needed to be able to convey it on her application. She shared her desire to apply to the Ph.D. program with Dr. Velarde (pseudonym), who was an integral mentor in her life.

“I said, "I'm going to apply to the PhD program here." He's like, "Whoa, whoa, wait a minute. That's not typical." I was like, "But it's been done before!" He's like, "It has been done, but it's going to be very competitive for you to get in directly to the PhD." He said, "To be my student, I can certainly guarantee you a Master's level. I'll guarantee you a spot in the Master's program." I was like, "I don't want a Master's. I want a PhD. I'll get the Master's along the way. I want to secure a spot in the PhD program." And he said, "All I can tell you is, if that's what you want to do, apply. But I can't guarantee you admission." I was like, "That's fine, but I'm going to apply anyways."

In addition, Dr. Beltran (pseudonym) was encouraging her to go directly into the Ph.D. program as he felt she was wasting her time with a masters first. He expressed to her that he believed she had what it would take to make it in a Ph.D. program. He wrote a strong letter of support on her behalf. She attributes his support as a catalyst along her journey. He gave her confidence in herself. She applied to three prestigious universities in California. One school accepted her application for a Ph.D. program, while a second one gave her an opportunity
to be admitted into a masters program. Her university was the last university she
needed to hear from. She shared her experienced with such emotion. It was
almost as if though she was reliving the experience all over again.

*Dr. Velarde (pseudonym) calls me in to tell me about my admission process. So of course, I wasn’t expecting -- so I walk in and he said,
“Well, I have to tell you something.” I was like, “Okay. What happened?”
He’s like, “This is about your admission process.” I’m like, “Okay. What happened?” He’s like, tears in his eyes, “You got in. You got into the PhD.” And of course, I was tearing. I was like, “What? This whole time you’re saying to me, like, you --” He’s like, “You proved me wrong and you proved everybody wrong. You’re the top candidate. So, you got in.” So of course, I started crying. And he held it together. And I held it together.
And the first person I told was Manuel, [my mentor]. He knew I had met with him, that I was meeting with Dr. Velarde (pseudonym), so he was waiting for me at the coffee shop right outside of the education school.
And he was nervous. So, he just looked at me and he’s like, “Well, what happened?” I was like, “I got in.” And he started crying! So of course, he started crying, I started crying, and he’s like, “This is what you do. You’ve worked so hard to earn that admission.” And so, sure, it was.

**Graduate School Experiences.** Ana graduated in June of 2002 and she began the Ph.D. program the same year in September. Ana continued by
sharing the negative experiences she encountered with white faculty in her Ph.D. program.

*I had a lot of white faculty who wanted to take me and say, "You're in the wrong class. This is a doctoral program." I was like, "I know, that's why I'm here. Pull out a chair. Sit down." Another faculty say, "Well, are you sure you're ready for this?" "Well, are you sure you're ready for me? That's the other question you should be asking yourself." And this is me in front of a class asking them these questions. I had another Chicana faculty who was apologizing to her white students for making them uncomfortable, talking about race. And I'd yell, "What the hell's wrong with you? Why are you apologizing? Why are you apologizing?" "You are the faculty member. Your role is to talk about race and racism and education. And if you're making them uncomfortable, be it!" I'm like, "Where's my apology when I walk out this classroom and they make me uncomfortable? Should I ask them, 'Apologize, because you make me uncomfortable'?" So, I became that student. I became that loud student, not very different than that six-year-old translating for other people's needs. So, I mean, all of that really shaped who I am personally.

Ana experienced faculty members who discounted her voice in their classes. She feels part of that was not only because she was “Mexican” but also because of her age. As a young Ph.D. student, she finally had to come to the conclusion that others would not be able to get over her race, gender, and age and she just
needed to accept that. Fortunately, Ana had a support network who continued to encourage her through her doctoral program.

As Ana progressed through her program, her desire to advocate for low income, first-generation students of color, became her focus and passion. “And given my own personal experience, I unapologetically wanted to focus on Latino students and especially Chicano students”. She felt a connection and the ability to relate with those students because of her own experiences. She began looking at the systemic issues she had faced during her own educational journey. There were clearly issues of access for the student population she was focusing on in her research.

*So, when we look at public education in terms of level-of-access, we don’t have enough access at the four-years. And so, my own agenda or my own alliance is that public schooling is a social apparatus. And so, when we’re filtering students of color into the community college sector, my question then is, ”What are we doing in that sector? What are we doing to make sure that we are adequately counseling, mentoring, educating, teaching students so that they understand where they are in terms of a system.” It’s a system.*

*So, looking at the three-public school system, we as a community -- larger proportion -- we are the community college system. We hold high aspirations to transfer. 75 to 80 percent aspire to transfer. But only 13 percent of them actually transfer. There’s something fundamentally wrong*
with that system. And so that's really some of the questions -- one of the main questions through my own research, is understanding the experience of students at the community college sector. And so, in my own research I said, "Well, what happens at the end of that pipeline?"

The end of the educational pipeline Ana was focusing on was a Ph.D. Leaning on her own challenges and experiences, Ana began questioning what happens at this graduate level for Latina/o students who start their journey at a community college. Ana is clearly passionate about her research. I asked her to share her dissertation research with me, if she would.

So, we accessed that data and I quantitatively started doing the runs. And I wanted to learn exactly what it looked like for those who started at the community college. I analyzed from 1990 to 2000 at the time, that 11-year time-frame, how many PhD scholars had started at the community college. It was 1 out of 10 had started at the community college. That in itself spoke volumes of the potential that community colleges can play and should play if they do their work.

And there's a piece of the story that has not been told. So, then I took that data and I said, "What does it look like by different race, ethnicity, and gender?" So, it was 10 percent for African American. It was 19 percent for Native American. I think it was 4 or 5 percent for Asian American. But it was 24.4 percent for Mexican Americans. So, 1 out of 4 Mexican Americans who received a PhD had started their education trajectory at
the community college. And conversely the majority of Latinos who go onto post-secondary education begin at the community college. Is there a correlation or causation? Well, I can't say causation, but certainly there's a correlation here. So that's really what started my entire professional career, was looking at the data, probing the data, asking these questions. And I had been doing this sort of as an external researcher, empirical researcher about what's happening in our community colleges, through all of my research.

Educational Leadership Journey. Though Ana loved “doing research”, she knew if she really wanted to make an impact, she would have to become an administrator. It was about “taking a seat at the table” if she was going to be able to address the systemic issues low socioeconomic students of color face. After Ana graduated with a Ph.D., she began trying to get into the “system” but she was met with rejection repeatedly.

I tried for 15 years. I tried to get into the community college sector. I was always rejected, saying I was too academic; I was a scholar, not a practitioner; I had to go get other administrative experience before I would be considered to be part of an administrator-rank at the community college.

Then came the advice from mentors, friends in the system, and colleagues not to go the faculty route as many would stay in the academic track without an opportunity to be an administrator. She admits she really wanted to teach at the
community college level and she was even credentialed to do but she knew to really have an influence, she would need to go into the system as an administrator. Time and rejection would weigh on Ana's resolve to her initial commitment.

Much to the disappointment of her mentor, Ana decided to become a faculty member at several nearby universities. She taught Chicana and Chicano studies and Educational Policy. She came to the point that she knew she wanted to do more than she was doing.

And I knew that wasn't the lifestyle I wanted. I didn't want to just do research. I didn't want to do just empirical. I needed to get into the practice. I needed to get into the system. I needed to change whatever I could, because I knew it wasn't working.

Nonetheless, Ana is a true believer that “it's all about timing” and she was confident it just wasn't her time yet. She went on to become a compliance officer with the Department of Commerce for three years. It really helped her understand the process of requesting proposals and she was able to develop evaluation tools to monitor how grantees utilize resources. During this time, she was still pursuing an administrative role in high education but she was still being rejected.

Ana decided to take an educational administrative position within a large non-profit organization in Los Angeles. She became the Director of Research and Evaluation for the organization, which provided the opportunity to work “hand
in hand" with the Department of Education. She monitored program design, program deliver, and evaluation of programs. Her work allowed her to continue her advocacy of addressing systemic issues through additional avenues.

*My whole agenda is, "How do we make sure parents and community members are part of that process so that it's not a top-down approach?"

So, I did that for five years. So, I really became an educational administrator.

After five years of working at the non-profit organization, Ana had her first child. Then the birth of her second daughter would bring another major transition period in Ana’s personal and professional life.

*So, I had two young children. It was really my professional intersecting with my personal. My husband and I were alone in L.A. raising these two young children, and it was a lot. It was overwhelming. We decided to move closer to home. So, we moved to Riverside. That would allow me to be sort of in between, close to my parents and close to work. And then two weeks into our new [arrangement] living here in Riverside, a position opened up to be Dean of Institutional Effectiveness [here]. As a result of SSSP and student equity, now colleges are opening up a new branch to really look at "are we effective in doing the work that we need to do? And specifically, are we effective in supporting students of color, first-generation, low-income students?"* So again, it's timing. *It was all about timing.*
Ana applied for the position and she expected to be rejected once again for an administrative leadership role.

So, I applied with the expectation that I would probably get rejected again, because it was my 15th year trying to get into the system. But I think because of the context of the student equity initiatives, they needed somebody like myself. And so, I applied and they responded. And so, I've been here since July. I'm going on my first official year as a community college administrator, after so many years.

This brings us to her current position as a dean at a community college. She shares her position is new at the college and there have been challenges in the transition process for the institution. Ana takes her responsibilities seriously and wants to be respected for the work she does.

So now it's more of a transition to help the college understand that this institution is not institutional research. This position is institutional effectiveness. So, I will use data to speak to processes. So, it's been quite a task. So, I remind folks, because they want to sort of put me in the "oh, you're IR. Just give us the data." "No, no, that's not my job. My job is to certainly use data, but to guide you in conversations on how to use data and how to make sure that these data is certainly data-driven processes. So, if I don't understand your processes, it's not going to make sense to anybody."
As the only Chicana administrator in the entire district, she realizes the incredible opportunity she’s been given to make real change happen. She feels at the same time, she is dealing with a culture shift in an organization that is new to the position and new to having a diverse administrative staff.

*I think it’s one of the most incredible opportunities I’ve had. I mean, all of the experiences I’ve had certainly have prepared me to be in this position. But I’m in a position where it’s new, so it’s more of a culture shift. So, I’m having to remind folks what this position is about. But I’m still dealing with the fact that I’m young. And so, I’m young and I’m the only Chicana administrator in the entire district. And so, we’ve made progress, but we still have a lot more room to grow.*

Ana proceeds by sharing a recent incident she feels is a direct result of being young and a Chicana.

*I'm the only Chicana with a PhD, serving as an administrator. And just last Friday I met -- I've seen and I've met...the chancellor of the district. But he was here for a Cesar Chavez scholarship breakfast. And I introduced myself because I was going to be the MC. So, I introduced myself and he looked at me, he's like, "I feel like I should know you." I was like, "Well, I think you should. And you will get to know me." I was like, "But I am the only Chicana doctorate that you have on your administrative board." He's like, "Is that right?" I'm like, "Yeah, that is right." And I was like, "One of the reasons why you don't know this is because I have never been given a*
formal introduction to the college," which speaks to politics of processes. I was like, "But don't worry, I'm going to have a formal introduction today."

And so, he's like, "Oh, okay. Well, should I apologize for that?" I'm like, "Well, don't apologize to me. You should apologize to your students that don't know who I am and I'm here." And he just sort of kind of changed the subject all of a sudden. He's like, "Well, you know --" Sure.

Ana goes on to say that Latinas are far and few in between when it comes to administrative leadership roles in higher education. Those in current leadership positions do not know how to "deal" with Latinas in these roles because they have never had to, as perceived by Ana.

The Importance of Latinas in Higher Education. As this topic segued into another interview question, I took the opportunity to ask Ana why she felt Latinas in administrative leadership roles were so important.

*Well, I think it's very important. It's critically important to be able to have Latinas in administrative positions. And there's a lot of work on the process of visualization. Patricia Gandara spoke about "when you see someone in a certain position, then you yourself as either a child, college student, as a graduate student, or whatever the case may be -- or even those who are not in formal schooling -- I can see myself in those positions." You know, I spoke earlier about a lot of the mentors I had were men. All but one woman. They're all men. However, I did have one Chicana mentor who was Abby Martinez (pseudonym), also an*
educational expert in bilingual education. And she herself was -- she had this dual role where she was an administrator and she was faculty. She would talk to me about how challenging it was because it's a male-dominated field and how she was subject to misogyny and sexist remarks. And it got so toxic that she just precluded herself and stayed with academic and faculty teaching.

So, I know that there's a lot of those situations happening. Even here, there's a lot of -- unfortunately we do live in a society where women -- systematically we're paid less for the work that we do. We are not valued at the same level that men are. You can call me Dr. Flores all you want -- four, five, 40 times -- and it happened just last Friday during our Cesar Chavez event. And five minutes later people would forget the fact that I have this experience or I have this title and call me Ana. Like, they don't care that I have my doctorate degree. But if I were older or if I were a man, I don't think that would be the case. So, I think when it comes to what the role is, or do we need -- I think we do need a cohort of so many Latinas in administrative positions to challenge these ideologies, to challenge these misogynistic systems.

So, one, for our own sanity, that we have other colleagues in these administrative ranks; but also, because it's the need that we have. I mean, as you noted yourself, the growth of Latino students across the table, of young women more so, they need to see themselves in these
positions. But they also need to understand the politics of what these positions mean.

Furthermore, Ana continued with the question of what does it mean to be a Latina administrator. Ana sees not only the Latina “classification” as important but also the consciousness of what does that mean to be Latina.

So, for me it’s critically important that we do have Latinas in administrative positions but that they’re conscious and they’re critical about what that role means in terms of advocacy for other Latino students -- for students as a whole, but especially for students who may have experience with multiple levels of marginalization and being historically underserved. I think if you have that perspective then you’re going to do amazing work. If you’re removed from that, it’s not going to help us any one bit.

Role Models and Mentoring. Having this viewpoint, I wanted to know as a Latina, how Ana is a role model and mentor to others. She shares that she is only 40 years old, which means that many times she is as young or as old as those she is mentoring.

I think my mentoring is different because I’m so close in age with them [students]. Likewise, with faculty. And there’s a wave of new faculty coming in and they’re also young. And so, I think age is a big factor in the way I mentor, or at least the way they receive my mentoring. So again, by going back to how it’s connected to my teaching, I want to hear from them. I want to hear their experiences. I want to see what they’re aspiring to
accomplish. And I often tell my staff, "You’re here. You’re not going to be here forever. So how can we leverage my experience or my connections to support your own trajectory?" Just like I had mentors who within a year took me through, 200 miles-per-hour in terms of the research process. But what can I do for staff who want to get to the administrative rank, or what can I do with faculty who want to get tenure track training or mentoring? How can I be any support? Let me know what I can do. Even making connections, you know, whether it being you want to go onto grad school. Okay, what programs do you want to go to? So, I’m doing informal mentoring, coaching, teaching of what graduate school means. We have a lot of staff members who don’t know the difference between a Master’s and a PhD and an EDD. I’m doing that coaching informally. Let’s half the alphabet soup talk. What’s the difference between those degrees and what do you want to do? And what’s that degree that’s going to help you get there? Then people assume they need an EDD versus a PhD. And what are the pros and cons? Let’s talk about that. And so, I do some of that mentoring as well at this level, especially because, like your question posed, we need more folks -- we need more Latinas, we need more folks of colors to be in administrative ranks. I want to make sure folks understand what that means and what it’s going to take for them to get into these particular positions. So that’s one way, certainly, that I do.
I asked Ana if she currently has role models or mentors in her life and do they support her as a leader. She shared in the administrative ranks, she does not currently have a mentor. She feels her mentors have all been on the faculty side of things. Her new position is a new space and experience for her. She realizes that she is new to the role and acknowledges the politics behind the role.

*I have on my side sort of mentoring through the process have always been the faculty mentors that I’ve had. This is a new space for me. This is a new area. I know that I’ve gone to a few conferences and I’ve had colleagues or siblings of colleagues who’ve said, "Call me whenever you need something, because this is not an easy route. It’s not an easy job." And I’d say I haven’t reached out. I think part of it is because I’m so focused on -- I’m still new.*

As a new leader in higher education, I asked Ana what advice she would give other Latinas looking for a leadership position in higher education.

As our interview came to an end, I asked Ana if there was anything else she feels would be beneficial to my study. She said as she felt the topic of my study is an ongoing story that needs to be rewritten. She had the following to say.

*I think we have various generations of cohorts of women who are either faculty positions or administrative positions. So, I think when I read your study and the focus of your questions I felt, one, humbled that you were taking the time to introduce me. But then also knowing the fact that it’s*
another generation of administrators that need to document their experiences and really see how it's shifted, if it has at all, from previous literatures. And I would bet to say that it has changed. We live in this new century now. And the new waves of technology and social media, and just access to education and access to information, it's quite different even than when I was finalizing my aspiration to not go into academia but go into administrative ranks. Completely different. And so, I think that that's exciting, knowing that you're doing this research, moving forward, and how we can all benefit from "what do we need to do to make sure that we are not only supporting Latinas to get into administrative rank, but keeping them there?"

Our interview came to an end and I turned off the recorders. Ana asked me if I had any questions regarding research and I took the opportunity to glean as much information as I could in the short time we had left. Ana had a wealth of information and I was extremely thankful she took the time to answer my questions. I appreciated Ana’s patience and interest in my study.

Summary of Ana’s Narrative. Family responsibilities, such as language brokering can have an impact on Latina/o students (Gandara, 2015). Ana served as her family and community interpreter from as far back as six years old. Having to interpret for her family, she realized there was something fundamentally wrong with placing such a responsibility on a child. Furthermore,
as an undocumented student in the US, Ana experienced anxiety as young as four years old because of the fear of being deported.

Because of early childhood experiences, Ana excelled academically and by the third grade was identified as a gifted student. She attributes her early academic success to the responsibilities placed on her at a young age. Her parents trusted the school system, partially because they saw Ana excelling.

Ana became very involved in extracurricular activities: student leadership and government, cross country and track, and the Spanish club. She shared these experiences can play tricks on a person, psychologically. Ana felt the pressure to excel because of the expectations place on her by others. Extracurricular activities can provide key experiences for Latinas along their educational trajectories (Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006). Ana was able to attend a leadership camp that acted as an educational, personal, and cultural catalyst. As a first-generation college students, the leadership camp exposed her to culturally rich experiences that would shape her approach to leadership. Ana attributes these early experiences as not only connecting with her own heritage but also the “desire to learn more, to read more, to question more”.

Ana experienced a pivotal moment with her high school administrator that encouraged her to think of her future career goals. This experience is what started Ana’s leadership trajectory into higher education as he suggested she would be “some type of educational administrator.” In contrast, her experience
with the high school principal was the opposite as he attempted to suppress her questions regarding the need for diversity in her high school.

Ana's educational aspirations were high. She was determined to attend a "respectable" college. Attending the college of her choice meant she would have to move in order to attend; however, Latino parents tend to expect their daughters to live at home until they get married (Espinoza, 2011). Based on their limited knowledge of the city where the college was located, their fears were based on what they had seen on television. As part of her transition into college, Ana participated in a summer bridge program that was geared to first-generation, low income students of color. Programs like these provide students with the necessary tools to be successful along their educational trajectories (Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005; Woosley, Sherry, & Shepler, 2011).

As is common with Latina/o students, Ana experienced numerous incidents of racial and gender discrimination at her institution (Ponjuan, 2011). Ana shared several stories of racism, mistreatment, and harassment during her university experience. These encounters shaped her as a person and leadership approach. As a Latina coming from a predominately Mexican neighborhood, she was not prepared for the cultural shocks and feels they had a profound effect on her and how she leads. Latinas faced explicit discrimination based on their ethnicity.

Furthermore, academically she was not prepared and it took its toll on Ana. Even though she took AP and honor courses in high school, she was not
able to keep up. She was placed on academic probation after her first year. Latinas much like Ana feel overwhelmed with college courses as they were not properly prepared in high school. Ana used prayer as a coping mechanism to deal with the stress, which is common among Latinas (Gillum & Griffith, 2010). In addition, Ana used journaling to cope with the stress she was dealing with.

As Ana progressed through her program, her desire to advocate for low income, first- generation students of color became her focus and passion. “And given my own personal experience, I unapologetically wanted to focus on Latino students and especially Chicano students”. She felt a connection and the ability to relate with those students because of her own experiences. She began looking at the systemic issues she had faced during her own educational journey. There were clearly issues of access for the student population she was focusing on in her research.

Ana knew that if she really wanted to make an impact, she would have to become an administrator. She needed to “take a seat at the table” when it came to addressing the systemic issues low socioeconomic students of color face. After Ana graduated with a Ph.D., she began trying to get into the “system” but she was met with rejection over and over again. As a faculty member, she experienced barriers in her quest to get into administration. She was told she was “too academic” and that did not have administrative experience.

There is a dearth of Latinas in leadership roles in higher education. Currently, Ana is the only “Chicana” in her entire district. She feels the weight of
the incredible opportunity she has to make a difference through her experiences. She feels it is important to be able to have Latinas in administrative positions as students are able to visualize themselves in leadership roles (Gandara, 2015).

Mentors and role models played a key role in Ana’s educational and leadership trajectories. Peer mentoring provided her first experience with research. This type of mentoring and encouragement set the foundation for future research and her desire to continue in higher education. Several Latino professors served as mentors and role models. She attributes her academic successes to their leadership and mentoring. She was able to see herself reflected through them and their support served as a catalyst. Furthermore, her mentors have been primarily men except for one Latina. As for mentoring and leading others, Ana is able to apply her personal and professional experiences along her educational and leadership trajectories to inform her approach to working with others (Santamaria & Santamaria, 2012).

Mary’s Narrative

Mary was the daughter of a single mother, a Mexican immigrant with a sixth-grade education. Her mother moved to the United States when she was about 23 years old. Given her limited education, Mary says her mother was a big advocate of education. She had always wanted to go to school, but in Mexico education was not free. Her mother’s parents could only afford for their daughter to attend the sixth grade.
Mary grew up in the San Diego area about seven miles from the Mexican border. Her family lived in Tijuana, Mexico but her mom felt it was important for her and her children to live in the United States because she wanted her sons and daughter to have access to the high-quality education available in the states.

**The K-16 Educational Pipeline.** Mary’s mother was very supportive of her education. Once she started junior high, her mother was not able to personally assist her with her studies anymore because of her limited education. Her mother made sure she was supportive in other ways.

*And so, she was always very supportive of my studies. And even though, you know, after starting in junior high/high school she couldn’t really help me anymore, she always was super supportive, taking me to the library, kind of making sure I was in the right free programs that we could get into to prepare me for college.*

Mary did well academically in junior high school as well as high school. Her participation in leadership activities, such as class treasurer in seventh grade helped her realize she enjoyed the accounting aspect of leadership and that she was good with money. These types of experiences were important foundational pieces to her future leadership trajectory.

*Yeah…seventh grade. I was always, like, class treasurer. I liked being in leadership and I liked being in charge of the money. And for that it’s because I feel like I understand the world in numbers. So, thinking about "how do you best deploy your resources to achieve your goals" is kind of*
something that's always been a part of me. And that's why I think it's --
that's the piece that appeals to me most about running an organization, is
thinking about "how do you deploy your resources strategically."

 Academically, Mary excelled not only in junior high school but in high
school as well. She managed to receive a full scholarship to a prestigious private
university in Southern California. She laughs at the memory of why she
accepted the scholarship.

I managed to get a full scholarship. So, I ended up going there which is
funny because I just didn't know any better. [They] had offered me $500
more than another institution I wanted to go to. And it seemed like so
much money back then. So even though I didn't feel the right cultural felt -
- I mean, [the university] is very upper middle class, not much diversity, at
least back when I was there. I think they've done better on the diversity
front now. But when I was there, not so much. There were, like, five Pell
Grant kids including myself. And so, it was hard to fit in there. But I will
say that it was one of the highest quality college educations I could have
gotten. And so, because it was so small -- it was only 250 people per
class. And so, I received a lot of individualized attention from my
professors that helped me focus my career about what I wanted.

Educational Leadership Journey. After she graduated from the university,
she took a job working as a CPA for a large corporation. Her real aspiration was
to be a CFO as she “liked numbers” and she “liked managing”. She continued by
sharing how her desire to run an organization led her to the next opportunity along her leadership trajectory.

So, thinking about "how do you best deploy your resources to achieve your goals" is kind of something that's always been a part of me. And that's why I think it's -- that's the piece that appeals to me most about running an organization, is thinking about "how do you deploy your resources strategically." And so, after a few years of doing accounting I knew I needed to basically do something more proactive. So, to -- being a CFO is both the accounting piece, but it's also the very proactive financing piece. And I had been lucky and -- you know, I had never heard of business school until one of my professors had me have lunch with his son to talk to me about, like, "Well, maybe you should consider business school one day." And so, after a few years, I remember being like, "Maybe I should consider business school."

She recalls a negative incident with a colleague, who was also applying to business school with Mary.

And I actually had a few classmates, you know, kind of colleagues that were going to apply with me. And actually, I remember this very -- I still remember this moment. One of my colleagues was like, "Well, it's going to be easier for you to get in because you're a woman and you're Latina. And it's easier for you to get into business school." And I'm like, "No, it's
not because I got straight A's in college and my GMAT score is so much higher than yours. No reason. That's not -- I guess not a relevant --"

Mary comes across an extremely driven person and one that does not get sidetracked easily or focuses on other’s negativity. Nonetheless, Mary applied and she was accepted into a prestigious business school. She spent two years there and incurred a large amount of debt. She was determined to pay off her debt so she could continue her leadership journey.

I became an investment banker because that was the both an ability to learn about financing but the only way I could possibly pay back those loans, because my family wasn’t going to help me. And so, I spent almost four years at [an investment bank]. And then in 2009 my former boss [there] became the CFO of a large educational system. And so, at that point I had finally pretty much finished paying off my loans at that point, and I could now be more free to do something I really wanted to do. And I had obviously always been very passionate about education.

Mary applied for the position and was given the job of chief of staff and Director of Strategic Initiatives. This position would lead her to her current position after four years.

And so, I applied for a position and basically got to work as his chief of staff and director of strategic initiatives. And I led a lot of operational-efficiency type projects at the system-wide level, trying to -- it was right during the budget cuts, as you remember, '09-'10. And so, we were trying
to figure out, "How do we save money so that our quality doesn't get deteriorated?" And so, I did things like run the pension-reform project. I worked on liquidity, kind of a change in how we're doing our asset management so that we can make more money off our investments. And we ended up -- after we made the move, we actually made $100 million more a year in investments, which was amazing because we needed it because we had just been cut so much, right? And so, lots of really cool, exciting things that I did at the system-wide level. But I always wanted to work at the campus and understand it at the more operational level. And so, after about four years, this opportunity came up. And I applied for it and I got it. And I've been here ever since.

Challenges Along the Way. I congratulated Mary on her tremendous accomplishments. She was very humble in her response of a thank you. I asked Mary what type of challenges or barriers she experienced along her journey. She responded very matter a fact.

Well, I think not so much barriers but things to be aware of is that there's always perceptions, right? I remember interviewing for this position and the recruiter asking my references whether they thought I had enough gravitas to do this type of job. And that's where you really need good sponsors, because the sponsor was like, "Exactly tell me what you mean by the word gravitas. Do you mean is she articulate? Do you mean is she intelligent? Do you mean does she present well? Or do you mean is she
an old, white man? Because if that's what you mean, then no, obviously. But if you mean the other three things, then yes.” But you have to have sponsors that are willing to go to bat for you that way, right, and to call people out when there's basically frankly underlying -- what I would call bias. And that happens to me quite a bit now.

In addition, she says the fact that she looks so young has been somewhat of challenge for her.

You know, people think they're being -- I don't know if they think they're being complimentary but they're like, "You look like a student." I get comments like that all the time. Nobody else in leadership gets those comments. Right? I don't think they're appropriate comments for someone in a leadership position. Or sometimes I'll walk into a room and everyone's waiting for me to get there, and yet if I don't know the -- like, if it's a stranger, they won't acknowledge me coming in, because they won't make the connection that they were waiting for me. So that kind of stuff happens all the time. And again, it's not so much a barrier. But I would say it's something you have to be very cognizant of, right? And I'll obviously handle it in a very diplomatic way. And you have to kind of know that that's going to happen so that you don't react in a negative way.

Mary spoke of sponsors and the importance of those sponsors in her life. Difference between Role Models, Mentors, and Sponsors. I asked her if there were any significant individuals who played a vital role in her journey.
I would say the boss I had at the investment bank. I'd been working with him since 2005. And I worked with him all the way until 2013. And he was both my -- well, I remember I actually cold-called him asking if I could do an internship. And since then he supported me getting an internship in New York, he supported me working at his San Francisco office, he supported me moving into higher education, and he supported me all through my path to leadership. And he was always about professional development. Like, "What experiences can I give you that will prepare you to be a leader?" Right? So, he played a very instrumental role.

Mary shares that her boss at the investment bank is her main mentor, but she does have others who she considers as sponsors. She shares the difference between a mentor and sponsor.

You know, he’s my main mentor. I have sponsors and I think there’s a big difference between mentors and sponsors. And I always tell people, and I’ve told other women when I do leadership things, I always say, "Never share your vulnerabilities or your insecurities with your sponsors. Your sponsors need to know you’re a rock star, because they need to sell you. Your mentors are the ones you go to with issues and things that you’re struggle with. And you’d better not mix those two up," because the sponsor is like -- for example, Mark Wiley (pseudonym) is a CFO. He’s a sponsor, right? So, if I ever needed a reference he could say, "Well, here’s all the wonderful things Mary did.” He doesn’t need to know all the
things I struggled with, right? Find other people for that. Don't use up your sponsors for those sort of things. And I think sometimes people mix those up.

She continues by sharing the importance of mentors and role models in leadership positions.

I would also say -- and so I also have mentors that I collect that don't even know they're necessarily my mentors. But for example, like, there is a Vice Chancellor of Planning and Budget, who's been a vice chancellor for 15 years, you know, do I talk to her all the time? Probably not. Maybe once every three months. But if I ever have a question, an issue, something that I do want to bounce of something, something I am insecure about, I can reach out to her. And I know she understands my position here. But it's not actually on campus. So again, looking for people – and then there is our Vice Chancellor of Business Administration. He's a mentor in that I really admire his leadership style. And I see what he does effectively compared to other people, and I pick that up. So, does he even know he's a mentor of mine? Probably not. But I consider him more of a role model. So that's why I'm saying I don't necessarily call someone a mentor. I feel like I compartmentalize all the things I think I need and then find people to fit those niches.
Mary mentioned her current boss and how much she admires his leadership style. I asked her what exactly she admires and looks to emulate in his leadership style.

*He's super collaborative and likes to engage a lot of people in the decision-making process so that they feel ownership. And I've seen how effective that can be. And so, we've partnered on a lot of things to do those types of things together on this campus. But he's so good at framing those situations for other people. And that's something, again, that -- I was more of a direct, blunt person. And I see by always putting people first in the way you frame things makes it easier for everyone to be like, "Oh, now I get my part." And he did the ownership piece. And I see him doing that very effectively, and so I've taken that on myself.*

**A Passionate and Empathetic Leader.** Mary continues by sharing how she provides mentoring for others and how her experiences have shaped how she leads. Professional development is an important aspect of how she empowers her staff to grow professionally and personally.

*There's a little bit of a fear in higher ed., or at least here that "oh, if somebody leaves they're not loyal" or that they can't express what their long-term goals are. And so, what I've really changed in my area is to...talk very openly with everyone about what their future career goals are. And it doesn't matter whether they're inside my organization or outside my organization. I want to know what their long-term goals are so*
I can help them achieve them, right, because I had someone like that for me. And if I hadn't, I wouldn't have been able to get a leadership position like this so early in my career. It was because I was very focused. And I think, look, a lot of people say, "Oh, well, I never thought I would be this. It just kind of happened." And I don't think it -- it doesn't just happen, to get a leadership position at age 34. You have to plan for that in seventh grade. Seventh grade, right? And I think people are scared to say that, I think, sometimes.

As a leader, Mary believes in open lines of communication. Her goal is to serve others in a way that will benefit them in their long-term goals. She desires for people to excel, even if that means leaving her department or institution. She wants to provide others the same mentoring and leadership she received along her leadership journey.

And so, I'm very open with people. It's like, "Yes, I planned out my career since a very young age, and there's nothing wrong with that." You know? And I want to help other people do that. And so, I talk to them about my paths, so they're thinking about what they want to do. And maybe their long-term goal is five, 10 years away. That's okay because it takes a long time to get prepared for leadership positions. And if your supervisors know what your goals are, they can help put you in projects that will help you gain the skills you need. And so, I definitely brought that to my leadership style. I have very open, candid conversations with my staff.
about leadership, what they want to develop. And in fact, they’ll come to me and say, "Hey, there’s a position over here. Do you think that would be good for my personal growth?" et cetera. So, they’re all really open about positions they’re looking at and considering, and I think that’s because that’s the type of -- I want to create that open dialogue. I don’t want them to feel scared that they can’t come to me until they’ve already made the decision not leave, because then I can’t advise them whether I think that’s a good position for them or not. And they know that whatever advice I give them, it’s going to be advice for them, not advice for my organization. And if you put them first, they’ve grown so much in the three years I’ve been here. So that’s one thing.

As an empathic leader, Mary is able to bring her personal experiences to her position. This allows for her to make decisions based on what is beneficial for student; students she can relate to because of her own experiences.

The other thing, I think, is also just bringing my personal experience. And I think it’s so important in higher education, and especially in the finance field, because I don’t think there’s enough Latinas in finance. And the truth is I’m making the major decisions and helping facilitate decisions on how we spend resources. And if you don’t have someone that understands that $500 could swing a student’s decision on where to go to college because they can’t possibly think of how they would get that $500 otherwise, and you don’t fundamentally understand that, especially for
low-income kids, how do you make decisions that are going to be beneficial for them. Right? Like, you have to be able to walk in their shoes and be empathetic. And I think that because of how I grew up -- you know, my family still only makes $20,000 a year. Luckily, they have me, that I can help supplement now. But, you know, they still live in National City and they still have all those experiences. And so, I feel like I'm not that far away from our own students’ experiences. Right? Where it's like, "Oh, you don't understand my life." And I think only by understanding other people's lives can you help lead any organization.

Mary’s ability to identify with her students is something that is at the forefront of her mind in all the decisions she makes. Since my study focused on Latinas, I asked Mary how her identity as a Latina has shaped her approach to leadership, if at all?

You know, I have to say before coming here I was more hesitant on talking about it. And I don't know why. I think it was just -- it may be the Bay Area. It's just not something that seemed like I should be bringing up. I don't know. Maybe it was just my own mental headspace. But coming here, I saw that there were a lot of people that looked up to me because I was a Latina. And so therefore I needed to be more open about my own experiences and be a leader that they could be proud of, because other people on campus, whether it was -- you know, our students are 40-percent Latino and 60-percent first-generation. And knowing that they
have a leader that is one of them is important. And same thing for staff. I've had staff come up to me and be like, "We're so happy that there's a Latina leader." And so, because I know that they're kind of looking up to what I'm doing, I feel like I have to even more represent Latinas in a positive way and be open about it. Like, it's okay to tell people -- it took me a long time to be able to just openly say, "I'm first-generation Latina and this is my story." It just maybe was something I evolved into. But now I think it's really important to share, because it gives other people -- like, "Oh, well, if she did it, I could do it too." You know?

The Importance of Diverse Leadership. Mary continued by saying it is important to have diverse representation in leadership positions and those leaders should reflect the populations that are served. She recalls a negative incident in regard to the issue of students’ reasons for attending college.

I remember this conversation with -- I won't mention names, but -- a group of senior leaders. And we're talking about new students and the residential campus. And they said, "Well, you know, students come to campus -- students come to college because they want to drink beer and be in frats." And I was like, "Well, that's not my experience. And let me tell you what I think is the reason people come to college from my community." And so that's why I think it's important, because, again, the voices of -- people make decisions based on their worldviews. And worldviews are very much shaped by how you grew up. And that's why I
think it’s important to have a diversity of worldviews at the table, because as we’re making decisions on everything from what kind of things we expand, what kind of capital infrastructure we put in place, what types of outreach programs we need to put in place, if people have no experience with the Latino community -- you know, there are, I think, significant cultural differences in ways people grow up that if you didn’t know that, you wouldn’t -- for example, the importance of parents in making decisions like this, right? I remember being on the Girl Scout board, and we couldn’t recruit Latina girls up in the Bay Area. Couldn’t recruit them. And it was because they always recruit just the girls. And when they switched to inviting the parents and having the parents participate in what it would mean to be a Girl Scout, all of a sudden, our Latina applicants skyrocketed. And so, my point is there are -- if you don’t understand those dynamics, how can you be beneficial to your organization?

As we concluded, I thanked Mary for her time and asked her where she found her strength to lead? Her response was short and concise: the mission.

The mission. For me, I can’t work somewhere where I don’t 100-percent believe in the mission, because that’s where I found my real strength.

When I think about -- every dollar I spend, I think about, "Will a student be upset that I spent their tuition this way?" That drives you every single day to lead effectively. You’ve got to believe in your mission.
As I thanked Mary again, she asked what my story was. I was taken aback as I knew we were short on time but here she wanted to hear my story. I gave her the condensed version and she said if I ever need anything, to please contact her and she would be happy to help. I believed her. My impression of Mary was she was not only a humble individual but a genuine person. I walked out of Mary’s office that day with a high level of respect for her as a person but more importantly as a true leader.

**Summary of Mary’s Narrative.** Like many other immigrant mothers, Mary’s mother moved to the US from Mexico seeking better educational opportunities for her children (Brown et al., 2010). As a single mother, this meant leaving the security of her family to move to another country for the sake of her children. Although her mother did not have a formal education, she ensured Mary was supported in other ways, such as taking her to the library, getting the support services needed, and ensuring Mary was prepared for college.

Her participation in leadership activities, such as class treasurer in seventh grade helped her realize she enjoyed the accounting aspect of leadership and that she was good with money (Villarreal & Gonzalez, 2016). These types of experiences were important foundational pieces to her future leadership trajectory (Villarreal & Gonzalez, 2016). Research as shown participation in extracurricular activities increases the academic successes of Latinas (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007, Villarreal & González, 2016; Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006).
Although Mary did not discuss in depth the financial hardship her family faced while growing up, she did say they were not financially secure. Due to Mary’s high academics in high school, she received a full scholarship to a prestigious private university. Although she wanted to attend a different school, finances played a key role in her decision. Based on $500 more in scholarships, Mary chose a school that was not a cultural fit for her. For her graduate degree, Mary incurred a large amount of debt and was determined to pay it off. Like Mary, Latina/o students tend to shy away from incurring debt in college (Cunningham & Santiago, 2008).

Mary spoke at length regarding role models, mentors, and sponsors in her life. She sees the three as distinctly different. She shared there are individuals in her life that are role models that she looks to as way of emulating their successes. These individuals may or may not be aware that Mary views them as role models. Her main mentor, a previous male boss has been a tremendous support to Mary throughout her leadership trajectory. He has taken the time to help her develop her potential as a leader. He has supported her all through her path to leadership. “Your mentors are the ones you go to with issues and things that you're struggling with.” Then there are sponsors, which, according to Mary, should never know your vulnerabilities, only your strengths. “Never share your vulnerabilities or your insecurities with your sponsors. Your sponsors need to know you’re a rockstar, because they need to sell you.” She felt sponsors can provide Latinas with additional support through networking. She feels keeping
mentors and sponsors separate is vital to your success as a leader. Providing opportunities for mentoring Latinas has the potential to serve as a catalyst throughout their educational and leadership trajectories.

In turn, Mary believes in “giving back” and provides mentoring to others. In her leadership role, she provides professional development opportunities as an important aspect of how she empowers her staff to grow professionally and personally. She wants to provide others the same mentoring and leadership she received along her leadership journey. As a leader, Mary is able to bring her personal experiences to her position. This allows for her to make decisions based on what is beneficial for students and her staff. In addition, Mary believes leadership is about empathy and playing a part in transforming lives. These characteristics support the notion that Latinas tend to have more transformational leadership styles (Elmuti, Jia, & Davis, 2009; Northouse, 2013).

Mary believes it is important to have diverse representation in leadership positions and that those leaders should reflect the populations they serve. As for the Latina/o population, having people in leadership positions is important because they feel supported and understood. As a first-generation Latina, she believes her “story” can speak to the students she serves and provide resonance with others seeking leadership roles.

**Alexandria’s Narrative**

Alexandria was born in Mexico and brought the United States at the age of three years along with her sister. Not much afterwards, her mother remarried
and they could not afford to keep her and sister here in the United States so they
sent the girls back to live in Mexico with a great aunt. She attended first through
third grades in Guadalajara, Mexico. After the third grade, she was sent back to
the United States to live with her mother and stepfather. She was considered
academically behind in the fourth grade compared to her peers, primarily
because of language difficulties.

**K-16 Educational Pipeline Experiences.** Over the next two years,
Alexandria began excelling in school and she was able to skip the seventh grade.
She continued to excel through junior high school and high school in Los Angeles
County. During high school, because of how strict her step-father was,
Alexandria was not allowed to get involved in clubs or stay after school for
extracurricular activities. She was expected to go home right away and be
“helpful” at home. Despite these expectations, Alexandria knew she wanted to
attend college once she graduated from high school.

The summer prior to starting at a local Cal State University, Alexandria
participated in a summer bridge program through the Educational Opportunity
Program (EOP) at a community college near her home. That fall, she began
taking classes at the Cal State and excelled her first year. Working full time and
going to school full time became taxing and challenging on Alexandria. Her
grades suffered her sophomore year because of the overwhelming burden of her
situation coupled with the cultural expectations of helping her family.
I was receiving financial aid. My financial aid checks were really going to help my family, to help my parents pay for rent and so on. I mean, they saw me getting these checks and it was kind of like, "Hey, you need to help your family," not really I think understanding the intent of those checks were to help pay for my tuition and books and all that. And so, I was working full-time and it just caught up to me. I just, you know, couldn't handle juggling both.

She was placed on academic probation and was required to start meeting with an assigned counselor to monitor her progress. Fortunately, Alexandria’s counselor was able to provide the academic support she needed but she also provided her advice she said she wasn’t ready to hear.

*We did journaling and writing and just different projects. And I think through my journaling she saw some of the things that I was struggling with in my home life. And she sat me down and said, "Look, you were doing really well last year. You obviously have the potential. You're not doing well this year. What's going on? Based on your writing, based on your journal --" and then I'd share a couple of things that were going on at home. And she said, "If you want to be successful -- you have the potential to obtain your education and go far. But if you want to be successful you're going to have to leave your home, because you're not going to be able to accomplish your goals if you stay there."*
Alexandria went on to say, growing up she was raised in a very strict home, particularly by her step-father. She feels he just wasn’t ready to be a dad so early on. He worked manual labor jobs in the construction field and only had an eighth-grade education. Her mother was only able to finish the third grade. Looking back, Alexandria says she doesn’t fault them but she felt they were not equipped to know how to support a daughter, the oldest daughter going to college. Because of cultural expectations within the Latino family, Alexandria felt she needed to help her family first and as the oldest, it was her responsibility to do so. As a first-generation college student, her family could not understand or support Alexandria’s desire for higher education.

They just were not equipped to understand what it's like to go to college: that you have to stay late at the library, that you have to meet up with your groups, that you have to do group projects, that you need money for books, that you need money for the bus or those kinds of things and that you’re trying to juggle these two huge things, working full-time and going to school part-time, and still be a good daughter.

The expectations of being a “good daughter” proved too much for Alexandria and she ended up receiving an academic leave from the university she was attending. In addition, prior to her leaving college, her step-father was saying things like, “You can go to college but you have to become a [medical] doctor” and "Oh, psychology, what are you going to do with that? What are you
going to do with that? No, you're going to be a doctor.” She shared her frustration with her situation and the next step in her life after her dismissal.

So, I chose biology as my major, which was another catastrophe because -- not because I wasn’t smart but just it wasn’t my passion. I wanted to do psychology. So, all those things just did not help support my situation.

So, after I got academic-dismissed, I was pretty devastated. And I knew I had to support myself so I got a full-time job working in a medical office, still thinking that that’s the field I want to go into. So, I went and started working at a medical office. And the doctor there was kind of trying to take me under their wing. And it seemed interesting to me but it just wasn’t what I wanted to do. So, I just thought, "Okay, this isn't working out either.

I just have to do something different."

The United States Marine Corps. Alexandria knew she needed to take drastic measures to get direction in her life. And, as much as she did not want to admit, her counselor was right about leaving her home. She decided to join the Marine Corps. Everything happened so quickly after she decided to enlist. She told her recruiter that she wanted to have a job that would allow her to attend college at night as she still wanted to pursue higher education. She was sent to San Diego, California for a physical exam and the ASVAB exam, which measures “developed abilities and helps predict future academic and occupational success in the military” (ASVAB, 2017). While she was there testing, her recruiter pulled her aside to speak with her.
And he says, "Hey, I have good news and I have bad news. The good news is I got the job you want," because I qualified. I had really high scores. I wanted a job kind of like an office job that I knew it would be a day job and that I could then go to school at night. I had the job that -- "I got the job for you that you want." I was like, "Oh, great. What is it?" "Oh, it's in administration or legal. But you'll be essentially working in an office." I thought, "Okay, that sounds cool. I'll take it." He says, "The bad news is, you have to leave tomorrow."… I felt like such a failure, being academically dismissed. And I just felt in this place of kind of, like, "What's here for me?" And maybe my counselor was right, because I remember when she first told me "you need to leave your home" I felt very insulted by that. I felt, "You don't know me. How do you know what I need to do? You don't know my family. You don't know my situation."

But fast-forward several months later, it completely made sense. And so, I just thought, "What am I here for?"

When she initially told her mother what she was doing, her mother’s reaction was "Oh, yeah, she’s joining the Marines," but didn’t really think, "What does that mean?" Now, she was having to call her mom and tell her she would be leaving within 24 hours.

So, I had to call from there, I had to call my mom and say, "Hey, I'm doing this, I need you to pack some things for me. This is a list of stuff I need, and I need you to bring them to me." I think she was in shock and didn’t
have enough time to process, which I think is probably the best way. I mean, everything happens for a reason. But I just felt in that moment like, "I have nothing to lose. What am I staying here for? I can't go to school."

Alexandria felt she had “nothing to lose” and everything to gain by joining the Marines. She left the next day for boot camp in South Carolina. Though there was a boot camp located a couple of hours away from her home in California, it was only for men. During her time with the Marine Corps, she could continue her quest for high education.

So, got to South Carolina, went through boot camp. Amazing experience. I mean, you really do walk out of there feeling like there’s nothing you can't accomplish. But then I got stationed in North Carolina. I really thought I was going to get sent back to the West Coast and be close to my family, so that was a shock. But as I got to know the area, then I started taking classes there at night, like I originally intended, one class at a time, one class at a time. Then I got moved to Mare Island naval shipyard in Northern California. It's closed down. And, the bases have education centers on-campus. So, the military does encourage you -- the opportunity is there to take classes. So, on the base, [at] the education center, they had [classes] at the nearby community college. And then they offered evening classes at the local high school. And that's where I was taking my classes. And then they had four-year universities like
University of Illinois, Embry Riddle. I mean, a lot of the private universities are on the bases.

And I was going to go to a community college to continue taking classes. But Bernard University (pseudonym) was there, and it was very familiar to me because I grew up in Orange County. I grew up in Orange, Santa Ana. So, I was very familiar with Bernard University (pseudonym). So, I started talking to the director there, and then she helped me. And then, again, I was stationed at Mare Island and then I finished my day job of working in the office. I'd either go straight to the education center in my uniform or I could go change. I had a child by this time, with my ex-husband. We were balancing that. But it was very convenient because the classes were there and it was an accelerated program. Each class met every nine weeks, I think it was. I was doing one class at a time, one class at a time.

The Making of a Leader. Alexandria continued by sharing her experiences while in the Marine Corp and how they shaped her as a leader.

I was in the Marine Corps for seven-and-a-half years on active duty. Then I did five years after that. The leadership traits and principles that I learned as I moved up in rank, and the responsibilities that I held, are so valuable to me that it's how -- I mean, I fall back on those almost every day. I went up to a staff sergeant, which is an E6, because I was enlisted. To be an officer you have to have a degree. So that's how you
differentiate. So, enlisted people are usually -- you need a high school diploma or GED to get in as an enlisted. And then you move up in rank. The highest that you can go is E9. And so being a staff sergeant was considered pretty high. And then you have the officers, and those are those who have a four-year degree, and some even have Master's. To move up in the officers' ranks they encourage a Master's Degree. So, I was enlisted and still continued.

Experience Leading in Higher Education. Alexandria had originally planned to make the Marine Corps her career but then she was given order to go to Japan, unaccompanied, meaning she would not be able to take her son with her. He was getting ready to start kindergarten, and she felt she just couldn't do that to him or herself. She decided to leave active duty. When she got out, she was offered a job at Bernard University (pseudonym) through the director she had met while taking classes. She was offered a job as an administrative assistant, which meant she would be able to get a tuition discount. Though she had already been accepted to San Diego State University, the persistence of the director swayed her decision to go with Bernard University (pseudonym). She attributes this decision as the catalyst to her career in higher education.

Furthermore, the director continued to encourage her to finish her degree by providing the incentive of promotion to assistant director. True to her word, the director promoted her once she earned her bachelor’s degree in psychology. Her goal was to be a therapist. Again, her director provided another promotion
incentive if she earned her master's degree. While she was earning her master's
degree, she participated in an internship at Southern Community College
(pseudonym) in the Puente Program.

*I did an internship for my Master's program at Southern Community
College (pseudonym) in the Puente program. And that's -- and then I'd
done some therapy stuff, observations. And I just thought, "I don't think I
can do this." I mean, I thought I could do it, I just -- the calling to me was
at Southern Community College (pseudonym), because I so many
students in the Puente program that just reminded me so much of me.
And I just thought, "If I can make a difference, if I can work with these
students and I can make a difference and, you know, share what I've
learned in my path, that's what I want to do. I want to make a difference in
that population." So that's how I landed really in higher education.

During this time, she had remarried and moved her family back to Orange
County to be closer to their families. She also stayed in the reserves for the
Marine Corps. Upon earning her master's degree, she was promoted to program
director at Bernard University (pseudonym). She managed two master level
programs: Master's in Career Counseling and Master's in Human Resources.
Her job duties consisted of not only coordinating the program but advising the
students as well.

As Alexandria progressed in her career in higher education, she felt a pull
towards working with students at a community college level. Two of her students
at Bernard University (pseudonym) introduced her to a dean at a nearby community college. Fortunately, this college needed someone for adjunct counseling work. She applied for the part-time position and was hired. Eventually, it turned into counseling with part-time teaching. These opportunities provided her the chance to finally work in a community college. She continued working her job at Bernard University (pseudonym), while doing her adjunct work at the community college. The dean of the community college went to Alexandria and encouraged her to apply for their EOPS coordinator. She knew she was getting ready to make an important decision in her leadership trajectory.

And it was kind of like that fork on the road. Do I want to stay on the counseling track and just do full-time counseling, or do I want to manage a program? And I applied for the coordinator position and I got that job. And that's how I started getting all these different leadership roles. And so, I was there as a program coordinator. Then the president of that college moved here to my [current institution]. And then a year later he recruited me to apply here to be the director of the EOPS Care and Calworks.

So, I did that here for three years, and then the dean of students position opened up. And the same president talked to me and said, "I think you should apply for this position." He never made any guarantees like, "It's yours." We have huge committees. And so, you have to get through it yourself, through all those hoops. And it's going to be very competitive.
So, I got the dean position. And then five years after that I was promoted to executive dean. And then almost two years ago, because I haven't been in this job for two years yet, I was promoted to vice president. Less than two years ago.

**Challenges Along the Way.** Alexandria was very thankful for the opportunities she has been given. I asked her if there were any challenges that she felt she had to overcome during her journey. She thought for a few seconds and stated that Marine Corps had given her a high level of confidence that it made her “very driven and focused” but she did share a few negative incidents of racial and gender bias while in the Marine Corps.

*When I first got to Cherry Point -- well, when I went to boot camp, this woman asked me what I was. I had no idea what she meant by that. Later it clicked. "Oh, she means what's my ethnicity." But when I got to Cherry Point, North Carolina -- so you’re basically in a dorm with all these women. And you’re assigned to a room with two or three other women. And I checked in late that night, I remember. And these two white women who happened to be both pregnant at the time looked up at me and they were kind of stunned that I was walking through the door. I went to bed, showed up to my job the next day. Came back that day after 5:00 to find the room had been rearranged in a way so that the wall lockers were blocking -- so there was this distinct separation between where my bed was and their beds. So, I thought, "Okay, that's super weird." I’m from*
California, diversity -- you know? I was like, "This is really weird." I just didn't even think anything of it.

Still, in my head I'm processing about "I'm here, I'm in this new place," trying to figure out my way around the base. You know, it's just a lot going on. But as time progressed they were just really blatantly racist. And I remember that I was there -- I mean, there was just so many things that occurred. You know, and I remember months after being there I remember going to my boss, the master sergeant, and saying, "You either get me out of that room or I'm going to kill those women." And when I shared with him what was going on he said -- by the next day, they moved me. And later on when I was leaving there, when I was moving to my next station I said, "You know, that happened really fast. Why? How did that happen?" He said, "The look you had on your face. I believed that you were going to do something to them." And I said -- he said, "But after you explained all the things that were going on, it made sense." And he was black.

Another barrier, I experienced in the Marine Corps in my experience there was that as a woman you have to work so much harder to gain the respect from the men. So, when I was at Cherry Point, my first duty station, I worked in an office. And a lot of the women do wind up in the administrative types of work in the Marine Corps. And back then a lot of the fields that are open today were not open to women, because I went in
the Marine Corps in 1985. So, it's before Desert Storm. But a lot of the fields that are open now to women were not open then. So that was fine because I knew what I wanted when I went in. I knew I wanted an office job because I knew I wanted to go to school. That was really my goal for going in the Marine Corps. So, in that environment, it wasn't that bad because, like I said, there was a pretty good balance. And I worked at one of the headquarters offices, so my boss was pretty high up. And you still had to -- you're still working with men, but still it was just a different atmosphere.

So, when I got stationed at Mare Island, that was Marine Corps security forces. And the responsibility at that particular -- in that battalion was to train Marines. It's a school to train Marines to become Marine Corps security forces, meaning that they would be on ships protecting special weapons, or they would be on bases protecting special weapons. And back then you really didn't talk about special weapons. So, they're trained to protect -- that's the purpose of the school. So, there was three things that were taught: physical security, antiterrorism, and small-arms instruction, because as a security guard you carry a .45 so you have to be well-trained on that.

And so that was the role of that school. I worked in the administration office, but still maybe there were -- I don't know, if I say 10 women, it's probably too much in comparison to the class of men that we were
bringing through. And our job was to do the administrative part of it, because, again, I was with the headquarters office. So, this was before Desert Storm. And then they started talking about opening some of these fields to women that were not open. And they needed someone to volunteer to go through the school. So, I volunteered. And I volunteered and I went through the school. And that's where the challenge of proving yourself.

In a male dominated field, being a woman in the field was demanding but to be the first women to go through the school proved challenging. Alexandria shared her experience of the being the first women to go through the program with a sense of pride but humble at the same time.

I was the first and the only, for quite some time. But I'll get back to that. So, I'm the only female and it's a class of 30 men. Well, 29 men, one woman. And all the instructors are men. Everyone is a man, you know. So, having to keep up with the physical part of it was -- you know, the academic part, because you have to memorize a lot of things, that was not hard. I think for me it was increasing my level of physicality and strength to be able to keep up with them, because if I didn't keep up with them I was going to lose their respect. And I know by the time I graduated I completely gained their respect. And so, then I graduated from that class and I was supposed to be the honor award, and then they didn't give it to
Because some of the men complained that the only reason I was getting it was because I was a woman, which -- whatever.

After she finished the program, she was asked to become an instructor. She was put through the training and became the first woman instructor for the program. This posed another challenge for her as a female. Here she oversaw thirty men and was attempting to be supportive in the best way she could.

So, one of the challenges that I experienced at the beginning was that I was trying to be supportive and coaching -- I thought it was a coaching kind of style that I was utilizing. And the feedback that I got was that they saw me as kind of this motherly, nice person. And so that didn't play well with the leader that I was trying to be and what I was trying to demonstrate. So, then I had to change my approach. And I don't mean that I had to become cruel or anything like that, I just had to become more firm, more assertive in the way I dealt with these men.

Experiences like these would continue to shape Alexandria’s approach to leadership throughout her journey. Also, during this time, there were other instructors who were not as welcoming for her to be there as a female. Luckily, her supervisors and commanding officer were supportive and “looked out” for her. Eventually, she feels she gained the respect of her fellow instructors and even said she considered them like her brothers.

A Strong Leader. She mentioned her journey really has shaped who she is as a leader. The Marine Corps played a significant role in shaping her as a
leader. In addition, individuals she has worked with over the years have made an impact on her approach to leadership. Some of the experiences were negative in nature.

So, there's 14 leadership traits that a Marine is supposed to uphold and possess. For example, judgment, justice, integrity, initiative, dedication. I'm not going to name them all. Loyalty, enthusiasm. There's all these that you're supposed to -- as a non-commissioned officer as you move up, you're supposed to uphold those. And then principles are -- there's 11. And so, for example, lead by example, know your job, look out for your men. I'm paraphrasing. But those kinds of things that you can apply to any environment. So, those are things that I think gave me a really solid foundation.

But also, I've also learned from people that I have reported to of what not to do, because -- you know, I had one particular boss that I just thought, "I never want to make anyone feel the way he just made that person feel," or "I never want to treat anyone the way he just treated that person," or even the way he treated me. I think for me, though, he had respect for me because of my military background. He never really messed with me, but he did with other people. And so, I learned a lot of what not to do or how not to be an effective leader.

Being an effective leader is important to Alexandria and she is very conscientious of how she treats others. As I was waiting in Alexandria’s office, a
student came in to see if she was available. When she saw the student, she came out and the student clearly was thankful and happy to see her. From my perspective, I felt Alexandria genuinely cared what the student had to say. I brought this incident up to Alexandria at this point and her if she could share how she provides mentoring for students, staff, and faculty in her current position.

Well, I think, you know, I try to make myself as available as possible. Unfortunately, the higher you go up and the more you’re being pulled in different directions, it’s a little more challenging to do that. But my assistant, knows that if a student needs to see me, like Jessica (pseudonym), that she has the latitude to be able to accommodate people’s schedules. Or I’ll say, "I ran into so-and-so, I asked them to -- let’s meet for lunch for or let’s -- can you please squeeze her into my -- I just want to check in and see how she’s doing or how he’s doing." But I just try to make myself available going back to just falling in love with my community college experience and seeing those students.

She asked me if I was familiar with the Puente Program at community colleges. Though I had heard a few other participants mention it, I asked her to elaborate.

It really started in the UC system. But it’s a community college initiative as well where it’s a cohort of students who are first-generation, usually Latino students, and usually need developmental English classes. So, they are part of a learning community and they have a counselor assigned. And not every community college has it, so we don’t have it here. We have
other programs at my other institutions. And so, a counselor and a professor, English instructor, work together in a learning community and a cohort. And then they also pair those students with a mentor and then they host different events throughout the year. But, you know, I was attracted to that because these were the first-generation Latino students that I saw myself in them.

Alexandria shared her desire to give back to others as so many had done for her along the way. She appreciated that people saw potential in her even when she didn’t see it in herself. She wants to be that person for others. As for her staff and faculty, she puts a high value on professional development. This includes various trainings to assist faculty and staff in understanding the student experience.

And then I did a training myself on -- it's called Student Support Redefined. In the community college, there was a study by this RP group. And they interviewed students in terms of what could help them be successful or what made a difference in their success in community college. I mean, I'm really, really summarizing it but -- so I took that. But what it is, is that regardless of who we are and what role we play at the college -- whether you're a faculty member whose teaching the English class, or you're the academic counselor who's helping them transfer, or you're the financial aid technician at the counter, or you're the campus safety person patrolling the parking lots or patrolling the campus, or you're
the facilities person who’s helping keep the buildings clean -- regardless of who you are, each one of us has a role to play in the success of our students. And so, going over and above and extending a helping hand -- instead of just referring a student to another office, take the time to point out where that office is, or take the time to find out a little bit more about the student. Ask them intrusive questions -- did you decide on a major yet; have you been utilizing tutoring services -- so that we're giving students that information as opposed to having them seek it out. So that's the training that we did at the beginning of the academic year.

And then we just did another one on -- I had everyone including the counselors go through an application process. We had them in the lab. And I said, "You're a student. You're a transfer student. You're a this, you're a that. Start from the beginning. Fill out the application." And it's also to help us identify any obstacles that a person -- because, you know, if I can't figure out how to do step A, B, and C, how are we expecting our students to do that? So, I guess that was a long-winded way of saying professional development.

If someone comes to me and says, "There's this workshop I'd like to attend," "Okay, how is this going to improve services for our students?"

"Well, it's going to do A, B, and C." "Okay, do it." Or there's the workshop on modifying such-and-such, or there's a workshop on Title IX, or there's a
workshop on this new initiative that's coming out. As long as it's going to benefit our students in some way, then I'm in support of it.

Role Models, Mentors, and Peers

As our interview continued, the topic shifted to the importance of mentors along one’s leadership journey. While she was in the Marine Corps, her Commanding Office played a significant role in her leadership. He always made sure she was treated fairly. Not necessarily nicer or better, but always treated fairly. She says he was very supportive of her. Another key individual was her director at Bernard University (pseudonym). She would push her to excel and further her education and career. She saw potential in Alexandria, which made a significant difference in her life. In addition, the president who recommended she apply at her current institution also played a critical role for Alexandria and still does to this day. She shared a recent conversation with him.

As a matter of fact, he just emailed me a couple of weeks ago and said, "Hey, this president position is open. It's time for you to start looking at that." And I said, "Whoa, I haven't even been in this job for two years." But he had told me when I got this job -- because he helped me kind of prepare for the interview for the VP position. And he's always encouraging me. He encouraged me tremendously… "You've got to get your doctorate. You've got to get your doctorate." And I kept saying, "Yeah, it's just not the right time. It's just not the right time." It was one excuse after the other of why. I wanted to, but there was always a reason
why I couldn't. And then when I became the dean he said, "You've got to get your doctorate." "Okay, I'm ready." You know, then I went for the doctorate. But that's the kind of person he, where he's always looking out for you.

So, when I got this job and I called him to tell him I got the job offer, that I was accepting the position, he said, "Okay. So, you start in this position in August. Two years from August we need to start looking at you president positions." And so, it hasn't been two years yet. But here he sends me an email saying, "Here, this position opened right down the street from you. It's the one you've been waiting for. You need to go for it." And I replied and I said, "No, I think it's too soon. I'm not ready. I still feel I need this, this, and that." So, then I didn't hear from him and I thought, "Oh, God. I hope I didn't offend him." I even went back and reread my email. And then two days later I get another email from him saying, "Okay, I understand why you're saying that. So, it sounds like you want to work on A, B, and C. So here are some of the things you can do to work on that."

She clearly holds this gentleman in high esteem and her level of respect was evident. Alexandria states, "This man is the picture of being a mentor". She continued by mentioning another man who is more of a peer mentor. Though the two have gone up for the same role in the past, she regards him as someone she can confide in and trust.
And right now, there's this other gentleman who I love dearly who I met a long time ago. And we just remained connected. He's actually the reason why I didn't apply for that president position, because I know he's going to get the president position at this particular college. I just know when I'm ready. I'm not ready right now. I haven't been in this role for two years. I have so much to do and I have so much to learn, and I don't feel that I should just throw my name in there just to throw my name in there. It has to be the right thing for me. You know, it has to be the right fit, it has to be the right time…I think working in higher education, especially in the student services side of the house, it's a helping profession. So, by nature, right, it comes very naturally to want to help each other, want to help support each other.

So, this individual...he started out as a peer mentor at my previous institution and now he's the interim president. So, see, there's no...it's not a competition. And they love him. And I would love to work for him. We just met on Saturday for coffee because we've been trying to connect since December and he's someone that I feel like I can trust and confide in. And we've never said, "Oh, I'm your mentee. You're my mentor," but it's been that kind of a relationship that has really evolved. And it's good to have someone outside of this college that you can talk to and just vent.
In addition, Alexandria said her current superintendent whose leadership style is different than her own, has been a mentor to her. She tends to push her outside of her comfort zone and encourages her follow her instincts.

Identity: A Leader First

As the study focused on Latinas in leadership positions, I asked Alexandria if she believes that her identity as a Latina informed her approach to leadership.

_I guess I don’t -- and this probably goes back to my, again, Marine Corps experience. I don’t think that I really identify myself as a Latina leader. I just -- I’m a leader. And it’s not because I’m not proud of my heritage. I am. I just feel that regardless of what ethnicity or nationality you are, you treat people with respect, you treat people with integrity, you -- I think one of the most important things I learned about integrity and being honest is that the moment people lose trust in you, they lose trust in your leadership. And it takes a lot to regain that. Building rapport, building relationships, I think is critical because if people trust you -- you know, there are sometimes that I have to have difficult conversations with people. And they may be difficult conversations, but they’re going to know that I’m being genuine and that I’m telling them for -- you know, that it’s for a reason. I’m not doing it to be mean, I’m not doing it to be hurtful. It’s just that we need to figure out a better way of approaching whatever is going on._
And so, I think that to me it’s been more about that, rather than -- I think one of the things that also shaped my work ethic from a very young age is the fact that my mom worked so hard. She was a seamstress, worked for the L.A. garment district for many years and then when we moved to Orange County continued that work. And I just remember her staying up until 1:00, 2:00 in the morning at home. I remember helping her, you know, sometimes not doing my homework but staying up to help her finish a job so that she could get paid so that we could have groceries for that Friday or that weekend or whatever. So, watching her just really break her back, hunched over the sewing machine -- and even remembering at 13 how much my back would hurt from helping her, I think that that's how you learn strong work ethic.

And she would always tell me, "This is why you have to go to school." And she had a third-grade education and she was married to someone who didn’t treat her very nicely. So, all those things shape your life. She would start -- I think she so wanted to go to school. And she would sign up for classes, and that would last one or two weeks. And then he would either get jealous or upset, and then that was the end of that. Or he would buy her a car so she could start to take driving lessons; that would last for a couple of weeks and then -- it was your typical cycle of an abusive relationship.
So, you know, I think for me it was like, "I will never be dependent on a man." And I will not put up with that. I mean, those were the things that shape you, right?

That being said, I know that I have a responsibility. I know that people or students see me as a role model. And I think that that's a huge responsibility that I need to uphold, because even though I may not have seen myself that way -- especially when I became vice president at this institution. If you look at our cabinet, I'm the only person of color. So, this community is very conservative, but the neighboring community is very low socioeconomic -- high Latina -- this college has changed tremendously from when I first started here. When I first started here I think we were a little bit over 25-26 percent Hispanic. And then we became a Hispanic-serving institution. Now we're at 60 percent.

So, while I say that, I am very aware of my responsibility. I am very aware of how people see me. And I am very aware of the impression that it can leave on people.

As she finished her giving advice, she said she wanted to add something regarding her “White” last name as I had mentioned it earlier when I was looking for potential participants and assuming someone was not eligible.

One thing I will mention, now that you mention the whole Thomas (pseudonym) thing is from my own people who have -- if there's been negativity, it's been from them, meaning that I have been asked why I
didn’t keep my maiden name, why I didn’t hyphenate to keep my Sanchez, make it Sanchez-Thomas so that it’s very clear that I’m Latina. Because when people see my last name, they assume blond hair and blue eyes. And that has happened, where the dean of counseling has blond hair and blue eyes, and we’ll both walk into a room and they’re expecting to meet with me. And they’ll go to shake her hand, thinking that she’s Alexandria Thomas. But it’s been from my own culture that I get a lot of that, or that I’m a sell-out because of my last name or that I’m whitewashed. And that hurts.

Alexandria is clearly a strong individual so I asked where she finds her strength to do what she does.

My husband, my daughter, my son, and my mom who is now passed away. My mom passed away during my first year of my EDD program. It was a really tough year. And she got diagnosed with terminal cancer, terminal pancreatic cancer. The summer that I was -- yeah, I had just completed my first year and we were preparing for the comps, the qualitative exams. And on her birthday, I got the call from the doctor that she had terminal pancreatic cancer. And I told her, "Well, I need to take care of you. I’m going to drop out of this program or postpone it." I’d already talked to the program chair and of course they were very supportive. And she said, "No, you need to finish this." I hadn’t talked about that in a long time.
It was evident this was a topic Alexandria was having some difficulty discussing. I told her if she was not comfortable, we could conclude our interview.

It’s okay. But, yeah, so I think she was diagnosed in June and she passed away on September 21st. So, three months later. You know, pancreatic cancer takes people really fast. And then I just poured myself into the program, which is I think how I dealt with my grief instead of grieving. So, it caught up to me later on.

In conclusion, Alexandria shared her view on the importance of being a role model and not taking the opportunity lightly. She takes her role as a mentor and role model very seriously because of what it means to other people, especially for students.

Summary of Alexandria’s Narrative. Alexandria’s experiences growing up coincide with Espinoza’s (2010) good daughter dilemma. Since Latinas have to take on multiple roles within the family, it can potentially make it difficult to participate in activities that promote educational success (Espinoza, 2010). Although Alexandria excelled in high school, because of how strict her step father was, she was not allowed to participate in extracurricular activities or get involved in school clubs. She was expected to go home right away and be “helpful” at home. Despite these expectations, Alexandria was determined to attend college.

Although Alexandria excelled her first year in college, the need to work full time and go to school full time became challenging for her. Her grades suffered
her sophomore year based on the financial burden of supporting herself and her family’s expectations to “help” financially. Furthermore, Alexandria received financial aid but was “expected” to give it to the family as part of the household income. Because of cultural expectations of loyalty within the Latino family, Alexandria felt she needed to help her family first and as the oldest, it was her responsibility to do so. As a first-generation college student, her family could not understand or support Alexandria’s desire for higher education. Like many Latino parents who lack a formal education, her parents were unfamiliar with the financial expectations associated with attending college, nor the financial stress she was under (Gandara, 2008; Schhneider, Martinez, & Owens, 2006).

Alexandria attributes her growth as a leader to her service in the Marine Corps. The leadership traits and principles she gained in the Marine Corps have made her who she is as a leader. The Marine Corps has given her a high level of confidence that it made her “very driven and focused.” Although she was in a male dominated field, she was able gain the respect of others based on her abilities. Through her hard work and strong work ethic, Alexandria was able to prove herself in the face of discrimination. Alexandria’s leadership traits align with more of a transformational leadership style as identified in Latina leadership (Elmuti, Jia, & Davis, 2009; Northhouse, 2013). Bonilla-Rodriguez (2011) identified leadership training and self-confidence as positive influences that helped Latina leaders to stay motivated along their leadership journeys. Being an effective leader is important to Alexandria and she is very conscientious of
how she treats others. She mentioned her journey has shaped who she is as a leader. The Marine Corps played a significant role in shaping her as a leader. In addition, individuals she has worked with over the years have made an impact on her approach to leadership.

Alexandria shared her desire to give back to others as so many had done for her along the way. She appreciated that people saw potential in her even when she didn’t see it in herself. She wants to be that person for others. As for her staff and faculty, she puts a high value on professional development. This includes various trainings to assist faculty and staff in understanding the student experience. While she was in the Marine Corps, her Commanding Office played a significant role in her leadership. He always made sure she was treated fairly. Not necessarily nicer or better, but always treated fairly. She says he was very supportive of her. Another key individual was her director at Bernard University (pseudonym). She would push her to excel and further her education and career. She saw potential in Alexandria, which made a significant difference in her life. In addition, Alexandria’s husband has played a supportive role in her leadership journey taking on additional roles to allow her to stay focused on her career goals.

Alexandria sees herself as a leader first and being Latina enhances her leadership. She is proud of her heritage but believes people should be treated with respect regardless of ethnicity. She feels people should focus on building relationships and trust. She believes the strong work ethic she has is a product
of watching her mother work so hard as a seamstress in the Los Angeles garment district. Additionally, because of the “abusive” relationship her mother was in with her step-father, Alexandria was determined not to be dependent on a man. She feels these experiences shaped who she is and how she leads. She realizes because of her ethnicity, people see her as a role model and she takes that very seriously. She feels the responsibility of making sure is a good role model and mentor not just to the Latina/o community but to all the students she serves.

Summary of Conclusions

In conclusion, chapter four presented the narratives gathered from seven Latina administrative leaders in higher education. It summarized each participant’s personal and professional experiences along their leadership trajectories. As they recounted their stories, they shed light on how they navigated their leadership trajectories, the barriers and catalysts they experienced, and the integral role played by their support networks. Their experiences provided them with the ability to understand, connect, and empathize with a range of individuals and communities. Restorying was used to convey the participant’s experiences and the participant quotes were used profusely to allow the reader to hear each participant’s story in their own words (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).
Chapter five provides a summary of the findings, provide recommendations for educational leaders, implications for policy and practice, future research recommendation, and a conclusion of the study.
CHAPTER FIVE
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This narrative inquiry explored the personal and professional experiences of Latina administrative leaders in higher education. By means of storytelling, this study provided a platform for Latina administrative leaders to share their lived experiences along their educational and leadership trajectories.

A summary of the common elements across the multiple stories are presented to highlight barriers and catalysts amongst the Latina administrative leaders, as well as, a collective of their shared experiences that helped shaped their leadership collectively. Their collective voices provide an overview of what Latinas experience along their educational trajectories. Recommendations for policy, practice, and further research are offered for both the K-20 educational pipeline and the educational leadership pipeline. Overall, conclusions and implications were derived from findings related to each research question.

Discussion of the Findings

The purpose of this narrative study was to report the lived personal and professional experiences of Latinas in administrative leadership roles in higher education, and determine the pivotal moments experienced along their educational journey and how it shaped their approach to leadership. As a Latina and having started my own educational journey in the last eleven years, this study was of particular interest to me because of my own experiences in higher
education. I wanted to better understand why there were so few Latinas in faculty and leadership roles in higher education. Having attended a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), I naively assumed the faculty and leadership reflected the student population.

My assumptions going into the study were that the participants would share significant barriers of racism, gender discrimination, discriminatory institutional politics, lack of support, and lack of role models and mentors, specifically Latinas. Although, consistent with the literature, participants shared few incidents of racism, discrimination, unsupportive institutions, and other barriers (Aleman, 2000; Schhneider, Martinez, & Owens, 2006; Sedlacek & Fuentes, 1993; Turner, 2011), and the majority of the participants did not cite these as particularly defining to their leadership. The majority of the participants shared their experiences in a matter of fact way, and authentically spoke of the experiences as more of an afterthought to the positive experiences they had. Their perspectives of the experience appear to play a role on how they allowed those experiences to negatively affect them.

In addition, five of the seven participants shared that their main mentors were male, primarily White men. As they described their mentoring relationships with these men, it confirmed the tenants of applied critical leadership that regardless of race, these mentors chose to utilize a strength-based model of leadership that empowered the Latinas in a transformational way and their support served as a catalyst along their leadership trajectory (Santamaria &
Furthermore, based on their negative past experiences, four of the seven participants stated they preferred to work under the leadership of a man versus a woman. Given my own experiences, I found this interesting as I have never had the opportunity to work under a woman in a leadership role.

Additionally, four of the seven participants shared it would be “nice” and “beneficial” to have a Latina as a mentor. Three of the seven participants are currently in a position with a Latina as their direct supervisor or leader of their institution. The participants stated, “it’s amazing” and “it feels like a sisterhood” working under the leadership of a Latina. Only one participant shared that they currently have a Latina as a mentor. Several of the participants shared they currently serve as mentors to others in hopes that the next generation of Latina leaders will have a different and positive experience.

This study focused on women in leadership positions, with the criteria that participants self-identified as Hispanic, Latina, or Chicana. I went into the study with the notion that the participants would identify as being a Latina as their primary identity in their leadership role. As with applied critical leadership, it poses the question of how identity of race enhances one’s ability to see alternative perspectives (Santamaria & Santamaria, 2012”). What I discovered was four of the seven stated their primary identity was that shaped their approach to leadership was being low income and first-generation college educated. Furthermore, four of the seven participants identified criticism from other Latina/os more than other races. They shared feels of betrayal and being
hurt by their comments. Some of the comments included they were "not Latina enough", being “whitewashed”, “not being proud of our heritage”, and making negative remarks about not keeping their maiden names. These experiences clearly had a profound effect on them. I found resonance in their stories as I myself have experienced that, primarily with my last name not being Latino related.

Additionally, all of the participants felt there was a greater need for Latinas in higher education, particularly at the faculty and leadership administrative levels. Their own experiences speak of the need as five of the seven participants shared they did not have a Latina/o professor or teacher along their educational trajectory. The participants shared the need for others to see Latinas in leadership roles. The participants shared comments such as, “I really am a believer of, if you can see it, you can be it.” Another participant notes, “When you see someone in a certain position then... I can see myself in those positions.” and “If she did it, I could do it too.” This was consistent with the review of the literature as there is a dearth of Latina/os in faculty and leadership roles in higher education (Calasanti & Smith, 2002; Canul, 2003; Delgado-Romero, Flores, Gloria, Arredondo, & Castellanos, 2003; Haro & Lara, 2003).

As I reviewed the literature for this study, I found a great deal of empirical research focusing on the need to diversify the faculty in higher education (Aguirre, 2000; Canul, 2003; Delgado-Romero, Flores, Gloria, Arredondo, & Castellanos, 2003; Garza, 1993; Haro & Lara, 2003; Hurtado & Kamimura, 2003;
Ponjuan, 2011). In my analysis of participant data, transcripts, and curriculum vitae, I found that only one of the participants was a tenured faculty member in higher education. This study reveals a need to expand on the diversification of roles in higher education to include staff as the majority of research has focused on Latina/os in faculty positions. Although this study only provided seven “voices” in higher education, it warrants further research of the importance of Latina staff in higher education.

Furthermore, the term barrioization of faculty surfaced in the review of the literature where systems in higher education create a funnel or pipeline for Latina/os into areas of student services and student affairs (Aguirre, 2000; Garza, 1993; Martinez, 1999). The results of this study indicated six of the participants work or have worked in some form of student services or student affairs, which is consistent with the literature. However, one participant is a Vice President in Budget and Finance. Interestingly, all participants shared their early desires to “help others” even in their childhood experiences. It could be possible that their experiences with systemic barriers served as the foundation for wanting to help others. Thus, this study would have benefited from a multi-method study to include personal traits.

Lastly, the theory of pivotal moments was part of the conceptual framework for this study. Espinoza (2011) defined a pivotal moment as, “a significant academic intervention initiated by a college educated adult who intentionally reaches out to a student to provide the student with educational
guidance and support” (p. 33). The present study only referred to two pivotal moments as defined by Espinoza (2011). After reviewing the participant’s transcripts, I believe they had additional experiences that were pivotal to their trajectories. The difference was they were not with a “college educated adults”, which begs the question of possibly expanding on the term pivotal moments to include non-college educated adults. These experiences served as a catalyst for several of the participants. For example, Luna shared her experience of her father creating the opportunity for her to attend college. Luna’s father was not a college educated individual but knew the importance of higher education for his daughters. In addition, not all pivotal moments are positive in nature as seen with Emma. Her negative experience of being on government assistance served as a catalyst for her education, by ultimately earning a Ph.D.

Interestingly, every participant commented on the need to be “at the table” as a leader. This symbolization of the table in leadership provided the title of this study as I felt it a summation of their potential to create positive change for not only Latinas in higher education, but students who are underrepresented in general. I recall someone saying once, “If you do not have a seat at the table, then you are probably on the menu.” It is important to have Latinas “at the table” in higher education, as their voice of experience can provide positive change for those who voices are discounted or silenced.

In summary, the narratives of the Latina administrative leaders provided a wealth of insight and information to form meaningful connections for a wide
audience of readers, and in particular, Latinas. By providing their narratives in their entirety, it provides resonance and transferability at a greater capacity as my own analysis does not limit what the reader can gain from their individual narratives. Furthermore, I felt it was important to share their collective narrative as a way of highlighting their experiences as a community of Latinas.

Collective Voices

As the focus of this study was to examine the individual stories of Latina administrative leaders in higher education, the initial analysis focused on the individual experiences as standalone stories. Upon reflection of the individual stories, I began to observe similar experiences across the narratives, some of which supported the literature and some that contradicted the literature. Bernard and Ryan (2010) suggest a theme has developed the more it is repeated. Several overlapping themes emerged from the individual narratives. As I compared the significant themes, I used the research questions as a filter to further analyze into three overarching categories: potential barriers for Latinas, potential catalysts for Latinas, and the sage advice for Latinas. I felt it was important to honor their collective story and share the similar experiences they had along their journeys. Their collective story can provide an overview of what Latinas experience along their educational trajectories.

Potential Barriers for Latinas

After a review of the narratives produced by the seven participants for this study, some common themes emerged along their educational and leadership
trajectories. Though only one participant significantly identified numerous barriers in her story, a closer inspection of the data provided potential barriers for the other six participants. There were three prominent themes in relation to potential barriers, which were financial stress, inadequate educational pipeline, and family expectations. In addition, other barriers such as racism, institutional politics, and "not being Latina enough" were identified as potential barriers but not significant across the participants.

**Financial Stress**

All seven of the participants expressed experiencing financial challenges along their educational trajectories. And as their stories developed, many of the financial struggles they had growing up allowed them to view the world through a different lens. Because of their experiences, all participants felt they could relate with students dealing with financial stressors in their lives. As with the tenants of applied critical leadership, the participants could see alternative perspectives and practice effective leadership based on their past experiences. Even though Mary did not mention experiencing financial difficulties growing up, she did mention that one of the deciding factors for choosing a specific university was that they offered her $500 more in scholarship. Luna’s parents worked two and three jobs to pay for college: therefore, she felt the need to graduate in three years because of the added expense to her parents. In addition, she was very cognizant of the money she spent on books and other activities during college.
Similarly, Emma’s experiences of watching her parents struggle financially was hard to watch and one reason she wanted to go to college was to avoid relying on government assistance. For Maria Teresa, financial concerns were a deciding factor where she would go to college as she supported her mother and brother. Like Luna, Maria Teresa graduated in three years based on financial need. Ana was not granted a full scholarship and felt the weight of taking out student loans since her parents were unable to assist her financially. Alexandria had to work a fulltime job while going to school full time, which caused a great deal of personal stress. Because of this, Alexandria joined the Marine Corps to finish school.

Additionally, all participants identified themselves as having financial difficulties growing up and expressed that they needed greater financial support while in college. Although several shared they received some financial aid, several participants like Maria Teresa and Alexandria had to work multiple jobs during college to support themselves. In addition, Maria Teresa and Mary, both from a single parent household, shared they financially contributed to their families as well during college. Not only were the participants having to navigate a college setting they were unfamiliar with, but they had to manage their time and the stress of multiple responsibilities. Several of the participants were put on academic probation the first year because of the financial stress coupled with the academic stress.

Inadequate Educational Pipeline
All participants shared their experiences pertaining to issues within the educational pipeline for Latina/os, primarily in the K-12 system. Yosso and Solorzano (2006) identified the educational pipeline for Latina/os as a “broken pipeline” (p. 1). More recently, Covarrubias (2011) provided a disaggregated analysis based on gender, which provides a more detailed look at Latinas along the educational pipeline. The issues include a lack of economic and social resources, such that students attending poorly funded k-12 school with limited honors and advanced placement courses, are ill-advised in high school, and are inappropriately placed and are inaccurately assessed (Cerna, Perez, & Saenz, 2009; Maes, 2010; Rodríguez, Martinez, & Valle, 2016). As a result, Latinas find themselves ill prepared academically for the challenges in college.

Several of the participants were subjected to ill-advised counseling in high school. In Luna’s case for example, Luna’s counselor suggested she attend a community college as a four-year university would be difficult to get into. Additionally, Luna was not provided with the necessary information to prepare for college, such as the SAT testing. Maggie also stated she was not properly informed on the process to get into college. Several of the participants stated they were in advanced placement (AP) and honor courses, but only one of the participants remembers how she got into those classes, while the other ones felt “lucky” to have been placed in advanced placement and honor courses. Although Ana was placed in AP courses, she felt they did not adequately prepare
her for college math. In addition, Maggie was not “prepared” for college as she felt her writing skills were not up to par for college writing.

Several of the participants were held back a grade in elementary school based on the participants perceived lack of knowledge due to Spanish being their first language. Additionally, Emma experienced inconsistency in her English as a Second Language classes as she moved to different schools.

As first-generation college-goers, all participants stated they relied on information from others on how to prepare and participate in higher education. The information they received was limited and incomplete and typically did not target their parents. In turn, the lack of parental inclusion creates a potential information gap as the parents are unfamiliar with the college process (Gandara, 2008; Schneider, Martinez, & Owens, 2006). As with applied critical leadership, several of the participants viewed educating the parents as a way of empowering them to assist their children through their educational journey.

The narratives shared in this study can provide critical information to not only better serve the Latina student population but also other underserved students along their educational trajectories. Many Latinas are considered first generation college students and have the first-hand experience with navigating the complexities of secondary education and into higher education (Haro & Lara, 2003; Maes, 2010; Tovar, 2015).

Family Expectations
The participants in this study all shared forms of family expectations they experienced throughout their educational trajectory. Although a few of them spoke negatively about the expectations, most of them did not. “One of the most pervasive values in the Latino culture is the importance of the family, including the extended family” (Skogrand, Hatch, & Singh, 2005, p. 1). Research has shown that family obligations and role expectations for Latinas have the potential to act as a barrier for Latinas as they progress through their educational trajectories, ultimately affecting their ability to secure leadership positions (Espinoza, 2010; Maes, 2010; Rodriguez, Guido-DeBrito, Torres, & Talbot, 2000).

Several studies have revealed that Latinas have greater levels of stress in pursuing higher education in comparison to their Latino counterparts (Espinoza, 2015; Maes, 2010; Sy, 2006). Espinoza (2010) refers to this as the good daughter dilemma where Latinas feel pressured to be a good daughter through the various roles they play in the family. Although Luna did not consider her family expectations as a negative, they did affect where she chose to go to college because she wanted to stay close to home. In addition, Ana chose a college closer to home so she could help her parents. Several of the participants had to assist their families financially and most participants still provide financial support to their parents. Five of the participants stated they grew up in a very strict home and many of them were required to come home right after school to help out around the house. Furthermore, two of the participants shared
experiences of extended family members asking, “where is your man” and “why don’t you have kids yet?”

Part of the role that many Latinas play for their parents is language brokering or interpreting for their parents as many do not speak English (Espinoza, 2011). Five of the seven participants shared they interpreted for their parents growing up. Several of the participants said at the time they felt the weight of having to be an “adult” so young. Role expectations for Latinas included but are not limited to language brokering, living at home until they marry, staying close to home to help, and assisting with siblings (Espinoza, 2010; Medina & Luna, 2000).

Potential Catalysts for Latinas

In interviewing the seven participants for this study, the majority readily shared their positive experiences that served as a catalyst along their educational and leadership trajectories. As for the catalysts identified, there were far more similarities of themes across the narratives of the Latina administrative leaders. The catalysts served as pivotal moments during their trajectories. The major catalysts included: support networks (spouses, family, role models, and mentors), spirituality, and having a passion to serve others.

Support Networks

All participants within the study spoke of the importance of support networks in their life. This included spouses, family members, role models, mentors, and sponsors throughout their educational and leadership trajectories.
This corroborates with previous research on the importance of support networks for Latinas (Espinoza, 2011; Gandara, 1995; Montas-Hunter, 2012; Vela, Castro, Cavazos, & González, 2015).

Several of the participants mentioned the support of their spouses as a primary catalyst to their leadership success. Furthermore, several of their spouses encouraged them to continue their education and earn doctorate degrees and were willing to take on additional responsibilities to ensure the participants could focus on their educational goals. Luna recognizes that her primary source of support has been her father. She stated, “His support makes me want to support others.” The results of this study adds to the growing body of literature that indicates family support as a significant catalyst to the education success of Latinas (Espinoza, 2011). Numerous studies have shown the support of a spouse and family connections are key indicators for academic success (Gandara, 1995; Espinoza, 2011; Mendez-Morse, 2004).

Role models and mentoring were also considered catalysts across all of the participants. They attributed these supportive relationships to their educational and leadership successes. Mary shared she has several models that she looks to that may not even realize they are serving as a role model to her. Additionally, Maria Teresa shared how she feels about having Latina leaders in role model positions.
So, what we miss out on is the role models. It isn't so much that we need people to be there, but what you miss out on is the role models because you didn't see it.

Mentoring can be defined as a relationship consisting of an experienced person providing support and direction to a person less experienced (Kram, 1988). As stated previously, many of the participants were and continue to be mentored by men. Emma shared that her mentors were men and she stated, “they didn't look like me.” Gonzalez-Figueroa and Young (2005) conducted a study exploring the mentoring experiences of approximately 305 professional Latina women. The study revealed four of the seven women preferred being mentored by those with the same ethnicity as they shared a cultural background. Currently, only one participant is being mentored by another Latina, although several shared it would be “nice” to have a Latina mentor. The participants all recognized mentoring as a support network that enhanced their ability to lead in higher education. As for their approach to leadership, six of the seven participants felt a great sense of responsibility to provide mentoring opportunities as a way of “paying back” for the opportunities they were given. Luna stated, “I am about helping others transform their lives. I believe in mentoring.” Alexandria shared her desire to give back to others as so many had done for her along the way.

Mary spoke extensively of sponsors and the importance of sponsors in her life, which was not mentioned by the other participants. She shared the following
I have sponsors and I think there's a big difference between mentors and sponsors. And I always tell people, and I've told other women when I do leadership things, I always say, "Never share your vulnerabilities or your insecurities with your sponsors. Your sponsors need to know you're a rock star, because they need to sell you. Your mentors are the ones you go to with issues and things that you're struggle with. And you'd better not mix those two up."

Mary's definition of the difference between mentoring and sponsoring serves as a perfect distinction between the two. Kram (1988) identified sponsoring as a career support where one is considered a protege among someone in a power position. Whereas, Kram (1988) identifies mentoring as a psychosocial support related to encouragement, listening, and a relationship. The participants in this study could have benefited from the additional support a sponsor could provide.

Latinas continue to make up a small percentage of leaders in higher education administrative roles (Aleman, 2000; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Nunez et al., 2012). The participants in this study are a representation of the role Latinas can play in providing positive role models for students and the potential of mentoring those seeking leadership positions as previously stated in the literature (Gonzalez, 2007; Gutiérrez et al., 2002).

Spirituality

As part of their upbringing and cultural experiences, several of the Latinas reflected on their spiritual influences. They referred to God, being Catholic, being
Christian, prayer, and attending church as being a central part of who they are and the character they have developed. Several of the participants used prayer as a coping mechanism when they felt overwhelmed by stressful events. Luna mentioned whenever she is stressed she will “pray on it” and go forward. As stated by Canul (2003) spirituality influences not only the personal lives of Latina/os but influences their approach to leadership. In addition, Latinas find strength through their spiritual beliefs in their leadership roles (Canul, 2003; Rodriguez, 1999). Their spirituality can be seen as a strengths-based practice, which informs their leadership approach and their commitment to serve others.

**Passion to Help Others**

A theme across all seven narratives was their passion to help and serve others. The participants shared that having a passion for students and the work they do is foundational to their success. Emma shared, “The passion that I have for students and helping, it just comes from growing up the way I grew up and knowing and seeing firsthand what students go through.” Several of the participants shared that to be successful in higher education you must have a personal commitment and desire to serve others.

The participants shared the importance of making a difference in the lives of the students they serve. Luna said her ultimate goal is to make a difference in the lives of her students. Luna had this to say about her goal.

We always say we are changing lives. I am changing lives on a daily basis. When I have my students come back and tell me, “I don’t know
where I would have been if I had stayed in my country – Peru, Argentina, and Mexico. You’ve changed my life. You gave me an opportunity and [you] saw something in me that no other institution saw.” I tell students, “You can do it! You can attain any goal or dream you have!”

As part of the advice Emma provided she shared how important it is to find what you are passionate about and that it makes all the difference if you are good at your job. She feels passion to see her students succeeds is what keeps her going at her institution. Mary spoke of her passion to help others in the form of where she finds their strength, which is in the “mission” of helping others succeed.

The participants believed in the importance of helping others and having a passion for what you do as a key element to a successful leadership. This corroborates with several studies focusing on the leadership characteristics of Latinas and how they lean towards a Greenleaf’s servant leadership style (Northouse, 2013).

Sage Advice for Latinas

At the end of each interview, the participants were asked if they had any advice for other Latinas considering leadership positions in higher education. The following are verbatim responses of their advice as recorded during participant interviews.
Luna’s Sage Advice

1. Find a mentor. *I think having a mentor is very important. Because sometimes you just feel like giving up and you do not know how to navigate certain things. Having a mentor provides the support you need.*

2. Develop transferrable skills. *Having transferrable skills is also important. Things like being analytical, having good customer service skills and just being a team player are things you can take into any job.*

3. Find what makes you unique. *What makes you unique from all of the other applicants? You need to find that. It could be just your story. You need to be able to connect with whoever is going to be able to open up that door for the next step. And, in higher education, it gets down to who you know and who will be willing to open up that door for you.*

4. Know what the education requirements are. *Another thing to do when looking at higher education, is determine what education is needed for the position? Does it require a master or a Ph.D. degree? I always try to encourage others to look at what the requirements are for the position you want and just move backwards.*

5. Ask for more. *Also, always ask for more and do not settle for what is been given to you. I have been one that is always looking for ways to make things a better experience for our students. Even though I didn’t have experience in student services, I did have the experience of providing customer service. Make yourself valuable.*
6. Serve others. *Be that person that is willing to mentor and help others.* I am about helping others.

7. Develop soft skills. *Another important thing are soft skills.* You have to be a good person. *Manners are important.* Bottom-line is you are a good human being with good intentions. No one can train someone on soft skills. *Everything else you can learn or be trained on.*

8. Remain open to change. You have to be open to new ideas and change. *People do not like change.* I get that it is uncomfortable.

Emma’s Sage Advice


2. Be passionate. So, *figure out kind of what is your passion.* And that sounds so cliché because everybody says it and I heard it all the way through college. *But really, what is your passion? And go there. Do that. Because that’s really what’s going to make you good at your job.* I feel like that’s what makes me good at my job. I love my job.

3. Develop yourself. *Make sure that we develop ourselves really well, that we learn what we need to learn so that we are really good managers and bosses.* I think that at least with my generation, women did not have a good reputation coming up.

Maria Teresa’s Sage Advice
1. Get an education. Get an education. That hasn’t changed. You still need a Bachelor’s, you still need a Master’s, and you will need a Doctorate. So, that can’t change. You’ve got to do that.

2. Find role models and mentors. Seek out role models and seek out mentors. Find others that are doing the thing that you want to do and talk to them. Learn from them.

3. Do your job well. And then do your job well, because the worst thing that we do is not do that. I know that my boss at Northern State University took a big risk in hiring me, because I was young, I wasn't necessarily experienced, and I was a person of color. So, I felt like if I didn’t do a good job for her and I didn’t demonstrate that I could do it, they were never going to hire another Latina. It just was not going to happen, because in that state it's not diverse at all. It’s still predominantly white. And so, for me, I am very conscious of the fact that I have to do a really good job and a better job. It's like, "Do your job really well so that they will want to hire somebody that looks like you again." Realize you are representing a community.

Maggie’s Sage Advice

1. Be authentic. Be the most authentic "you" you can be, because it's hard work and you’re judged a little differently. So, you have to be -- you have to know yourself and be strong from within. You know, those sound kind of cliché a little bit, but sometimes I see folks coming up and they want to be so perfect, and they want to have the perfect image. And sooner or later, they trip. And then they are
seen as not authentic. Who is that real person? Is it the person that was here for four months, or is it the person that showed up yesterday? Because there’s two different people. So, I think you have to be real and be yourself.

2. Do the work. Do the work. Do the work. Don’t skimp, don’t take shortcuts, don’t rely on others. Because when you skimp, you take shortcuts, you rely on others, yes, the work gets done. But the outside world really knows who did it. And so, do the work.

3. Be ready and include your family. And be ready for -- if you’re moving "up" up, know how to bring your family or loved ones with you. Otherwise, like many of my colleagues, you know, divorced or [have] troubled family lives because the work is demanding. It’s very demanding. And I think you have to realize that. And get ready for the publicness of it. I think presidents, CEOs, we are in essence unelected public officials.

Ana’s Sage Advice

1. Understand what a position requires. Really understand what those positions require. And not just in terms of require by degrees, because I know I’ve seen a lot of students both from community college to undergraduate and graduate students assume, "Well, I just need an EDD and I’ll become an administrator." It’s more than that. And I think the advice I would give anybody is to really understand what it is you are aspiring to do. Don’t get caught up with the title. Like, "I’m going to be president by the time I’m 50." Understand what it’s going to take for you to become that president. Understand what it means for
you to become a vice president before you become president. Understand what that means. And understand not only the responsibilities that you have in that particular position but understand the responsibility you have to your overall community once you have those titles.

2. Stay connected to the experience of students. The politics between having a Latina faculty or having a Latina administrator doesn't mean anything if they're not connected to the experience of students who continue to be marginalized. They need to have faculty of color mentor them and show them the ropes. White faculty could do that as well. But it's just really knowing how not to be patronizing, and knowing how to ensure that their experiences come to fruition. But rather, can I remove the race lens and just talk about what's required to be a faculty, a successful faculty, and eliminate the "of color," "woman." But what does that mean? Same thing for administrative ranks: what does it mean to be a successful administrator? What does it mean to be a successful, in this case, dean? But it's about being cautious and critical about what that means not only to your position but the impact to the community as a whole.

Mary's Sage Advice

1. Become the best at your functional role. That's the only thing that's going to push you forward.

2. Create networks. Network with people that you think are really great, and don't be afraid to reach out to them for a coffee, a lunch. Even if it's people you don't know that well, but let's say that you think they're a great leader. So, when I
was a chief of staff, I would sometimes go to meetings with all the vice
chancellors. And so, again, I was getting exposure at that level about how the
vice chancellors operated. But when they would come up to Oakland I would ask
the vice chancellors, "Can I have coffee with you? Can I have lunch with you?"
And I got to know all of them. And so, what opportunities came up, they knew
who I was. They knew me, what I stood for, what I had done. Just make sure
you go out of your way to go meet and get to know people that you think are also
doing great things in their career.

3. People’s opinions do not matter. Don’t try to change other people’s
opinions of you. If I spent all my time upset about the fact that people ignore me
when I walk in the room, I wouldn’t be effective. It’s like, I remember telling my
staff member -- because my staff member wanted to do a -- she wanted to do a
leadership -- like, there was a program she wanted to do for professional
development. And she wrote, on the reasons, "Because I want people to see me
differently." And I was like, "It’s not about other people seeing you differently. It’s
about you seeing yourself differently." And it doesn’t -- you will never change
other people’s opinions. And the least amount of energy you spend on other
people and more focused on what you yourself want to accomplish, the better off
you’ll be. That would be my last piece of advice.
Alexandria’s Sage Advice

1. Develop support networks. *I think developing a network of relationships, making those connections, even though this process I think you’re probably meeting quite a few people.*

2. Ask for help. *Don’t be afraid to ask people about their career path or their story. I think people like talking about themselves if they know it’s going to help others.*

3. Visualize your success. *Another thing I really encourage people to do, is to visualize. I remember when this building opened five years ago. And I remember walking through-- because this for a while was the superintendent president's office, while the admin building was under renovation. And I remember walking in here for a meeting and thinking, "This is going to be my office." And I look back at the time and I think, "Wow, that was pretty arrogant." But no. I remember thinking, "This is going to be my office. I will be in this office." "That's going to be my desk. That's going to be my chair. And this is going to be my office."

4. Education is powerful. *In terms of moving up, you know, that whole fear of success is something that I think I came across. And then also the theory of -- I'm sure you're familiar with imposter syndrome, imposter theory. That's something that I really had to overcome. And what really helped me just knock that obstacle out of the way was getting my doctorate. The Master's Degree was awesome, but in higher education it's not a requirement to have a doctorate to be*
a VP but it's preferred. And because of the ability of Cal States being able to offer those doctorates in educational leadership, I think more of us have had the opportunity to obtain them. So that's going to be I think something that really empowers an individual to feel like you do you have a voice and your voice does mean something at that table. I gained -- again, I think I already had this, but it's that whole imposter syndrome of "they're going to figure out that I'm really not that smart. They're going to figure out --" you know, having that dream that they're going to take away my Master's Degree. You know, having those issues. Education is powerful.

5. Surround yourself with a support system. And surrounding yourself with a support system. If it wasn't for my family and my husband, my daughter, my sons -- you know, even going for the doctorate, I remember us sitting down -- my daughter was in junior high school -- and saying, "I'm going to do this thing. This is what it's going to mean. This means I'm not going to be as available. Are we all on-board with this?" And I remember my husband being a little nervous about it. Not that he wasn't supportive. I could tell he was nervous, like, "What does this mean?"

All participants were more than willing to share their advice to those seeking leadership roles in higher education. There were several overlapping pieces of advice across the participants. The first was having a strong support system, which included family, mentors, and role models. Secondly, the importance of working hard and doing your job well. This includes developing
yourself as a leader and knowing what your strengths are. Additionally, staying focused, being passionate, and remaining authentic as a persona and leader were also important pieces of advice.

Recommendations for Educational Leaders

The following recommendations are presented based on the narratives of seven Latina leaders in higher education. Drawing from their personal experiences throughout their educational journey, the recommendations have the potential to address the needs of not only Latina students in higher education, but also other underserved and underrepresented students. I provide four main recommendations for educational leaders based on the findings of this study.

1. There is a need to increase formal and informal mentoring opportunities for students, staff, and faculty. In addition, as presented by a participant, Mary encouraged sponsoring opportunities among staff and faculty with those in leadership roles. Establishing mentoring programs in the secondary education system that continues into higher education would be beneficial for Latina/o students. Furthermore, leadership in higher education should encourage mentorships and make it a priority throughout their institutions. This would provide Latinas the opportunity to find strength in a mentoring community, feel connected, and find the support they need to be successful.

2. There is a need to implement strategies across the k-12 educational pipeline to help support Latina/o students. As Maria Teresa discussed,
a counseling support program starting in middle school provided a pivotal moment that changed her educational trajectory prior to entering high school. In addition, educating and providing support to counseling staff at the high school level to properly disseminate information regarding A-G requirements, access to AP and Honor courses, and supporting and encouraging Latina/o students to go to college.

3. At the higher education level, implementation of programs that adequately provide support throughout their college experience. This would include ongoing counseling and advising, career support, and mentoring opportunities for Latina/o students. Additionally, implement programs geared to first generation Latina/o student by providing these students with role models who can relate to their own experiences. Such as, highlighting faculty that are considered first-generation college educated. Furthermore, providing these students the chance to meet with these faculty members to create mentoring opportunities or simply the visualization of positive role models they can relate to. In addition, ensure proper dissemination of college information to not only students, but parents as well since parents help to guide the educational choices of their children. It is important that outreach efforts are targeted to Latino communities to better understand requirements, but also to address misconceptions of the system.
4. Provide appropriate financial assistance to students throughout their higher education experience. For the majority of the participants in this study, the stress of financial constraints was paramount. In addition, the financial aid system needs to be easier to navigate for Latina/o students and their parents.

The results of the study will be useful for institutions to support and retain Latina/o students. The narratives presented can assist counselors, high school and college counselors, and support services to better understand Latina/o experiences they may not have experienced themselves.

In addition, the results of the study can provide transferability of information to Latina/o students who are seeking supportive structures in their quest to succeed in higher education. It will also provide critical information to families to know how to better prepare and support their children through college.

Recommendations for Future Research

The following recommendations are being presented based on the narratives of the seven Latina administrative leaders and some of the questions that arose from the study. I have made three primary recommendations that need further exploration to build on the current study and previous research on Latinas in higher education.

1. Examining the specific characteristics of mentor relationships to determine if similar gender and/or ethnicity between mentors and their mentees determine successful mentoring relationships.
2. Exploring the leadership characteristics of Latina administrative leaders in higher education and how they align with applied critical leadership? And, examine in what ways their traits enhance their ability to lead in higher education.

3. Expanding on the concept of pivotal moments to include experiences with non-college educated individuals and how negative experiences can also serve as pivotal moments.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there is a need to continue diversifying leadership roles in higher education. The Latina administrative leaders contributed firsthand knowledge based on personal experiences that have the potential to create policies designed to improve not just Latina/o students, but also underserved student groups.

This narrative study adds to the limited literature on Latinas in administrative leadership roles in higher education. The participants in the study provided insight on how they navigated their educational and leadership trajectories providing others with strategies and transferability of experience within their own trajectories. The participants spoke about the importance of role models and mentoring as a vital component to the success of others.

Although some of the participants shared challenging experiences, six of the seven maintained a positive outlook and did not allow the challenges to define their leadership. Additionally, when asked to share specific barriers along
their journeys, the participants had a difficult time recalling specific incidents they found to be challenging. This speaks to their resilient nature as individuals and more importantly, as leaders.

Narratives shared in this study can provide those who hold higher education leadership roles crucial insights on how to cultivate and utilize the talents of Latinas in higher education. Furthermore, it can provide a better understanding on how Latinas navigate the educational pipeline and what strategies were beneficial in their quest for higher education. It also has the potential to provide a roadmap or a visualization for others seeking leadership roles in higher education; particularly, Latinas. Their stories can provide critical information to not only better serve the Latina student population, and other underserved students in higher education, but can also help propel and influence women in non-leadership roles to new heights.
APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT FORM
Appendix A

“LATINA LEADERSHIP IN HIGHER EDUCATION”

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

You are being asked to take part in a research study to gain a better understanding of the role identity and how pivotal moments can contribute to the academic success of Latina administrative leaders in higher education. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study.

What the study is about:
The purpose of this qualitative narrative study is to share the stories of Latina leaders in administrative positions in higher education. Their personal and professional lives will be examined to understand how their leadership approach was cultivated and developed. The study will examine how role models, mentors, and support networks played a role in their leadership trajectory. It will also examine, from the perspective of Latinas, the barriers and catalysts experienced in occupying their administrative roles in higher education to gain insight into the lessons and strategies learned to cultivate aspiring Hispanic female leaders.

What we will ask you to do:
If you agree to be in this study, you will participate in one in-depth interview. The interview will include questions about your personal and professional life experiences and how they relate to your current administrative leadership role in higher education. Interviews will be scheduled for approximately 60 minutes. With your permission, I would also like to audio record the interview.

Once the interviews have all been transcribed, I will provide each participant a copy of their own transcribed interview. This form of member checking will allow for an opportunity for you to review the transcription for clarity and accuracy. I will send an email with the attached transcription and provide one week from the email for participants to respond.

Risks and benefits:
There is minimal risk for participants involved in this narrative inquiry study. Participants may experience discomfort in sharing their stories regarding their leadership trajectory. Participants may withdraw from the study at any time with no repercussions.

The study is beneficial as it has the potential to guide future policy and practices within higher education to enhance the numbers of Latinas in faculty and leadership positions of influence. The study can provide those in higher education leadership roles crucial insights on how to cultivate and utilize the talents of Latinas in higher education. It can provide understanding on how to recruit, retain, and promote the next generation of Latina leaders.

909.537.5651 • fax: 909.537.7656 • http://edd.csusb.edu
5500 UNIVERSITY PARKWAY, SAN BERNARDINO, CA 92407-2393

The California State University • Fullerton • Chico • Dominguez Hills • East Bay • Fresno • Fullerton • Humboldt • Long Beach • Los Angeles Maritime Academy • Monterey Bay • Northridge • Pomona • Sacramento • San Bernardino • San Diego • San Francisco • San Jose • San Luis Obispo • San Marcos • Sonoma • Stanislaus
Compensation:
There is no compensation for participating in this study.

Your answers will be confidential.
The records of this study will be kept private. Any form of report we make public will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you, your institution, or individuals mentioned. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only the researcher will have access to the records. If I audio-record the interview, I will destroy the audio recording after it has been transcribed, which I anticipate will be within two weeks of its recording.

Taking part is voluntary:
Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer. If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time.

If you have questions:
The research contact person is Dr. Enrique Murillo. If you have questions later, you may contact him at emurillo@csusb.edu or (909) 537-5932. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) by calling 909-537-7688.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study. By signing this consent, I am stating I am at least 18 years of age.

Your Signature __________________________ Date __________________________

Your Name (printed) __________________________

In addition to agreeing to participate, I also consent to having the interview audio-recorded.

Your Signature __________________________ Date __________________________

Your Name (printed) __________________________

This consent form will be kept by the researcher for at least five years beyond the end of the study.
APPENDIX B

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE
Demographic Questionnaire
Latinas in Leadership

1. What is your age group?
   a. 18-25
   b. 26-35
   c. 36-45
   d. 46-55
   e. 56-65
   f. 66 or older
   g. Decline to answer

2. Regarding your ethnicity, which do you most identify with?
   a. Hispanic
   b. Latina
   c. Chicana
   d. Other - Please specify: ______________________
   e. Decline to answer

3. Are you a first-generation college student?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Decline to answer

4. What is the highest degree you have completed?
   _________________________________________________

5. How many years have you been employed in higher education? ________

6. How many years have been in leadership administrative roles? _________

7. What type of leadership training have you received, if any?
   _________________________________________________

8. Please identify any religious affiliation or spiritual beliefs, if any.
   _________________________________________________

Questionnaire created by Sharon Pierce
APPENDIX C

IRB APPROVAL LETTER
March 20, 2017

CSUSB INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Expedited Review
IRB# FY2017-150
Status: Approved

Mrs. Sharon Pierce and Prof. Enrique Murillo
College of Education - Doctoral Studies Program
California State University, San Bernardino
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, California 92407

Dear Mrs. Pierce and Prof. Murillo

Your application to use human subjects, titled “Latina Leadership” has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The informed consent document you submitted is the official version for your study and cannot be changed without prior IRB approval. A change in your informed consent (no matter how minor the change) requires resubmission of your protocol as amended using the IRB Cayuse system protocol change form. Your application is approved for one year from March 20, 2017 through March 19, 2018. Please note the Cayuse IRB system will notify you when your protocol is up for renewal and ensure you file it before your protocol study end date.

Your responsibilities as the researcher/investigator reporting to the IRB Committee include the following 4 requirements as mandated by the Code of Federal Regulations 45 CFR 46 listed below. Please note that the protocol change form and renewal form are located on the IRB website under the forms menu. Failure to notify the IRB of the above may result in disciplinary action. You are required to keep copies of the informed consent forms and data for at least three years. Please notify the IRB Research Compliance Officer for any of the following:

1) Submit a protocol change form if any changes (no matter how minor) are proposed in your research protocol for review and approval of the IRB before implemented in your research,
2) If any unanticipated/adverse events are experienced by subjects during your research,
3) To apply for renewal and continuing review of your protocol one month prior to the protocols end date,
4) When your project has ended by emailing the IRB Research Compliance Officer.

The CSUSB IRB has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This approval notice does not replace any departmental or additional approvals which may be required. If you have any questions regarding the IRB decision, please contact Michael Gillespie, the IRB Compliance Officer. Mr. Michael Gillespie can be reached by phone at (909) 537-7586, by fax at (909) 537-7328, or by email at mgillesp@csus.edu. Please include your application approval identification number (listed at the top) in all correspondence.

Best of luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Caroline Vickers

Caroline Vickers, Ph.D., IRB Chair
CSUSB Institutional Review Board
CV/MC
APPENDIX D

IRB MODIFICATION LETTER
April 04, 2017

CSUSB INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Protocol Change/Modification
IRB# FY2017-130
Status: Approved

Mrs. Sharon Pierce and Prof. Enrique Murillo
College of Education - Doctoral Studies Program
California State University, San Bernardino
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, California 92407

Dear Mrs. Pierce and Prof. Murillo:

The protocol change to your application to use human subjects, titled “Latina Leadership” has been reviewed and approved by the Chair of the Institutional Review Board (IRB). A change in your informed consent requires resubmission of your protocol as amended.

You are required to notify the IRB if minor/major changes are proposed to be made in your research prospectus/protocol, if any unanticipated adverse events are experienced by subjects during your research, and when your project has ended. If your project lasts longer than one year, you (the investigator/researcher) are required renew your protocol through the Cayuse IRB system. Failure to notify the IRB of the above may result in disciplinary action. You are required to keep copies of the informed consent forms and data for at least three years.

If you have any questions regarding the IRB decision, please contact Michael Gillespie, Research Compliance Officer. Mr. Gillespie can be reached by phone at (909) 537-7588, by fax at (909) 537-7028, or by email at mgillesp@csusb.edu. Please include your application identification number (above) in all correspondence.

Best of luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Caroline Vickers

Caroline Vickers, Ph.D., IRB Chair
CSUSB Institutional Review Board
CVMG
REFERENCES


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