

BREAKING THE GLASS CEILING IN THE SUPRENTENDENCY:
LA LUCHA OF LATINA SUPERINTENDENTS IN TEXAS

by

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DEDICATION

*To my family and friends, who encouraged me throughout this endeavor,
I am sincerely grateful and could not have completed this journey without your support.*

*To my husband and son—John and Jordan—thank you for the many years of
encouragement as I pursued advanced degrees.*

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ABSTRACT

Women, and people who identify with marginalized groups, are familiar with the term glass ceiling—that invisible and seemingly impenetrable barrier that blocks them from succeeding to a higher or highest level of management. In education, it seemed that women were making great progress in the struggle for equality. But even today, the gap between men and women in the superintendency is disturbing, particularly in the area of Latinas attaining the superintendency position.

U.S. public schools have historically had an abundance of women who, as teachers, had an impact on the lives of children. Despite women's presence in the classroom, women are underrepresented professionals in the superintendency. Researchers have noted the strengths women bring to the position of superintendent, such as current academic preparation, knowledge in curriculum and instruction, and ability to work with diverse groups. The Latino population is the fastest growing minority in the United States, but Latinas represent only 1% of the women in the superintendency. This scarcity of Latinas in top executive positions of school districts raises concerns of inclusion, representation, and equity.

This research was a phenomenological study on 3 Latinas who broke the glass ceiling and succeeded in attaining a superintendent position in a Texas public school district. The context for conducting this study is guided by a major question and subquestions:

1. What are the conditions and relations that foster Latinas to aspire to and eventually become a superintendent?

- a. What are the sociohistorical and life experiences of Latina superintendents prior to attaining the superintendency?
- b. What structures and processes are in place within the community and educational systems to foster the success of Latinas as they ascend to the superintendency?
- c. How have race, ethnicity, and gender affected the pursuit of attaining the superintendency?

This study explored the phenomenon of underrepresentation of Latinas in the superintendency and uncovered, through the qualitative research, the conditions that contributed to the ascension of the three Latinas to the superintendency. Even though they worked in districts that ranged from small to large, from rural to urban areas, and despite their differences geographically in the state of Texas, demographically, and politically, their views about the superintendency were strikingly similar.

CHAPTER I

THE UNDERREPRESENTED PROFESSIONAL: WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A LATINA SUPERINTENDENT

Women, and people who identify with marginalized groups, are familiar with the term glass ceiling—that invisible and seemingly impenetrable barrier that blocks them from succeeding to a higher or highest level of management. In education, it seems that women are making great progress in the struggle for equality, but even with the abundance with women in the education field, the gap between men and women in the superintendency is disturbing, particularly in the area of Latinas attaining the superintendency position (Ramsey, 2013a; Ramsey, 2013b).

Public schools in the United States have historically employed large numbers of women who, as teachers, made an impact on the lives of children. Despite their ubiquity in the classroom setting, women are rarely encountered in the role of top-level district administrators. Prior to the 1970s, the superintendency was thought of in characteristically male terms (Grogan, 2000). The adoption of Title IX in 1972 caused a change in attitudes, assumptions, behavior, and understanding about how gender stereotypes limit educational opportunities for women. Women have always known that gender is a poor predictor of one's proficiency, capability, or intelligence. Ten years later, Wilson (1980) still characterized the most successful superintendent as “male, Anglo-Saxon, middle-aged, Republican, intelligent, and a good student, but not gifted” (p. 20). There have been changes for the areas of leadership and management in public schools. However, what still holds true about public education is that, while women dominate the field, Latinas hold few leadership positions.

In the 21st century, women remain abundantly represented in the teaching profession and train in record numbers to become school administrators (Glass, 1992, 2000; Glass, Björk, & Brunner, 2000; Grogan, 1994) but in, “public schools, women teach, men manage” (Skrla, Reyes, & Scheurich, 2000, p. 45). Although women occupy most of the teaching positions in the United States, they are vastly underrepresented in the superintendency (Blount, 1998; Glass, 1996; Glass, Björk, & Brunner, 2000; Skrla, Reyes, & Scheurich, 2000). The numbers are even more dismal when studying Latinas in the superintendency (Ramsey, 2013a; Ramsey, 2013b).

The goal of this study was to create a space for Latina superintendents to voice their success and challenges they faced throughout their ascension to the superintendency. The small percentage of Latinas in the superintendency is cause for concern, and there is a need to outline those characteristics that are evidence of the conditions and relations that foster Latinas to ascend to the position of public school district superintendent. It is those variables (i.e., issues of educational leadership, gender, experiences, and ethnicity) that intersect and identify Latinas who have ascended to the superintendency. Identifying those variables and characteristics will highlight success stories and enable more Latinas to ascend to the chair of superintendency.

Statement of the Problem

Latinas, similar to White men and women who currently dominate the superintendency, bring strengths to the position of superintendent, such as current academic preparation, knowledge in curriculum and instruction, and ability to work with diverse groups. However, even with all these qualifications, Latinas represent only 1% of the women in the superintendency. The Latino population is the fastest growing minority

in the United States, and the scarcity of Latinas in top administrative positions in school districts raises concerns of inclusion, representation, and equity. Méndez-Morse (2000) viewed this phenomenon as “exclusion and neglect and [as negating] the contributions of Latina leaders” (p. 584). As Méndez-Morse (2000) notes:

Researchers rarely include minority women in their research. This shortcoming is attributed to two possible reasons, one of which is that there are so few researchers studying Latinas, and the reality that there are so few Latinas in the superintendency to study. (p. 583)

Because of this shortcoming, there is a need to identify those characteristics are evidence of the conditions and relations that foster Latinas to ascend to the position of public school district superintendent. The study gathered information by sharing in *pláticas* with three Latinas to understand how they were able to attain this prominent position. This study focuses on uncovering the phenomenon of the underrepresentation of Latinas in the superintendency through Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. The analysis will allow me to look into detail at how the participant makes sense of major transitions in her life.

Research Questions

Using the framework rooted in Latina(o) critical race theory, organizational and career mobility, and politics of “fit”, the goal is to uncover and understand the phenomenon related to the underrepresentation of Latinas in the superintendency. The context for conducting this study was guided by the major question and subquestions:

1. What are the conditions and relations that foster Latinas to aspire to and eventually become a superintendent?

- a. What are the sociohistorical and life experiences of Latina superintendents prior to attaining the superintendency?
- b. What structures and processes are in place within the community and educational systems to foster the success of Latinas as they ascend to the superintendency?
- c. How have race, ethnicity, and gender affected the pursuit of attaining the superintendency?

Background to the Study

In 1909 Ella Flagg Young, the first female public school superintendent of Chicago, predicted that because education was a woman's natural profession more women than men would inevitably lead educational systems (Blount, 1998). The history of the superintendency indicates the majority of superintendents leading public schools in the United States are white men; women and marginalized groups continue to be underrepresented in this role. A few scholars have attempted to address the underrepresentation of women in the superintendency (Blount, 1998; Brunner, 1999; Glass, 2000; Glass, Björk, & Brunner, 2000; Skrla, Reyes, & Scheurich, 2000). Blount (1998), for example, found that women held 9–11% of all superintendencies from 1910 to 1950, and then declined dramatically to 3% during the period of 1950 to 1970. From 1970 to 1990, there was a modest increase of female superintendents to 5%. Other scholars zeroed in on the lack of women of color in the superintendency (Bell & Chase, 1994; Shakeshaft, 1999).

Ninety years after Mrs. Young made her prediction the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) commissioned a study that investigated the state of the

superintendency. The 2000 Study of the American School Superintendency revealed that the top executive position was still held almost exclusively by Anglo men (Glass, Björk, & Brunner, 2000; Grogan & Brunner, 2005a), leading the office of school superintendent to be referred to as the most male-dominated position in school districts (Skrla, 1998; Skrla, Reyes, & Scheurich, 2000). According to the 2000 Study of the American School Superintendency, women occupied only 13% of the superintendencies in the United States (Glass, Björk, & Brunner, 2000). These editorials and statistics fall short of the prediction made by Young, who wrote when opportunities for women in public education appeared to be much brighter. By 2003, a national survey (as cited in Grogan & Brunner, 2005a) found that the percentage of female superintendents had increased to 18%.

In light of the expanding Latina(o) population and the number of women serving as educators in the United States, Latina(o) administrators—and women in general—are underrepresented in the superintendency. Findings reported in both the 2000 and 2005 national AASA studies, indicated Latinas represented only 1% of the women in the superintendency (Glass, Björk, & Brunner, 2000; Grogan & Brunner, 2005a). Grogan and Brunner (2005a) reported they were surprised by the small percentage of Latinas in the superintendency, given then-current population trends in the United States. The Associated Press credited Latinos with driving the population growth in the United States, estimated to be approaching 300 million (Ohlemacher, 2006). Almost half of the population increase in the United States is attributed to the Latino population (Ohlemacher, 2006), yet this presence was not reflected in the superintendency. In short, Latinas' ability to enter the superintendency is not keeping pace with the surge in Latino population.

In the state of Texas, the male dominance in administration in the field of education is specifically unusual because women have made up over three-fourths or 76% of all regular classroom teachers; more than half of the female teachers work in early childhood and elementary schools (Ramsey, 2013a). According to the data, the number of Hispanic/Latino regular classroom teachers has steadily increased from 21% in 2007 - 2008 to 24.31% in 2011 – 2012 (Ramsey, 2013a; Ramsey, 2013b); however, the shortage of proportional representation of Latinas at the secondary levels; the group from which school administrators and ultimately superintendents are drawn, combined with an even greater lack of representation by people of color makes the future for Latinas even more distressing.

Although there has been an increase in the number of women principals from 36% to 61% within a 10 year span (Ramsey, 2013a; Ramsey, 2013b), little change has taken place in superintendent positions even though the number of women who earned a superintendent certification during the 2011-2013 school was more than that of men. For the 2011 – 2012 school year, The Texas Education Agency (TEA) reported the majority of the superintendents in the Texas public school system are male, while they comprise only 23% of the classroom teachers. Of the 1170 superintendents in Texas, 90% are male and 10% are female and 1.4% are women of color, of which Latinas comprise 1% (Ramsey, 2013a).

There is a body of research dedicated to women in the superintendency; however, most of research has focused on studying women as a group within which ethnicity and race are not considered. Findings of those studies cannot be used to easily explain the underrepresentation of minority women, specifically Latinas, in the superintendency. Few

studies have been dedicated specifically to the study of Latina public school superintendents. Méndez-Morse (2000) reported information on Latinas is scarce because researchers have not attempted to investigate and collect data on expectations for Latinas.

This study contributes to the body of knowledge and fills the gaps in the literature by investigating Latinas and the conditions and experiences of Latina superintendents in the state of Texas through *pláticas*. Through the *plática*, I am able to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of her world. Given the increasing size of the Latino student population in Texas and elsewhere throughout the United States, it is imperative to hear the voices and success stories of these Latinas.

Theoretical Framework

Latina(o) Critical Race Theory

Latina(o) critical race theory, as an extension of critical theory, was a foundational component of the framework for this study. Latina(o) critical race theory is a unique framework developed to examine and explain inequalities in the Latino population. Solorzano and Bernal (2001) affirmed that Latina(o) critical race theory focuses on issues “often ignored by critical race theorists such as language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, identity, phenotype, and sexuality” (p. 311). Critical race theory covered under the broad definition of critical theory, which focuses on issues related to social justice and racial equality (Villalpando, 2004).

Latina(o) critical race theory has five central essential themes (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001; Villalpando, 2004). According to the first theme, race and racism are interconnected with class, gender, language, and immigration status and cannot be considered in isolation. Oppression of Latinos cannot be attributed to one specific reason

when multiple reasons could be contributing to the problem. The second theme challenges conventional claims of equal opportunity, meritocracy, objectivity, color-blindness, and race neutrality. By pushing organizations to investigate the policies and practices that have caused Latinos to be disadvantaged, future opportunities will be enhanced. The third theme is committed to social justice and strives for equality. Empowering underrepresented minority groups and eliminating racism and sexism will help to erase racial inequalities. The fourth theme recognizes that practical knowledge of minority groups creates an awareness and understanding of racial inequalities. Knowledge obtained from the lived experiences of Latinas who succeeded in their quest to attain the position of public school district superintendent helps to provide an understanding of the racism, discrimination, and forms of oppression this population encountered. The fourth theme, juxtaposed with identity theory, advocates that practice and policy continue to be examined through a historical lens.

Latina(o) critical race theory is fundamental to this study because it provides a framework for looking at issues in K-12 public school districts and analyzes racial barriers for minority groups (Villalpando, 2004). Latina(o) critical race theory was developed to investigate issues of social justice and is focused on the experiences and multidimensional identities with those of Latino descent (Villalpando, 2004). For the purposes of this study, it provided the framework for examining the ascension of Latinas into the superintendency.

Organizational and Career Mobility

Two models of mobility are explored in this study: organizational mobility and career mobility. Organizational mobility has been described by scholars to explain the

underrepresentation of women in the superintendency, such as the differences between career aspirations and achievements of men and women as an effect of the limited opportunities for women that accompany systemic gender bias (Schmuck, 1999; Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996). The model explains how organizational structures and practices in education discriminate against women as leaders (Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996).

Although scholars may have replicated and adjusted portions of the organizational mobility model for their own purposes most have relied heavily on Kanter's (1977) work in toto. This model has been used to describe individual and organization behaviors as factors that affect organizational mobility. Kanter identified several factors that influence mobility within an organization, including (a) finding opportunities to be noticed by others, (b) developing strong alliances with those who have power, and (c) identifying person who could provide entrance into the group from which managers are chosen. This model provides a framework for exploring the importance of mentors in accessing the superintendency.

Riehl and Byrd's (1997) model of career mobility identifies three additional sources of influence that affect organizational advancement. The first takes into consideration a person's individual identity, which includes personal values, ambitions, abilities, work history, and concurrent responsibilities. The second source that affects career mobility relates to role models, recruitment policies, and screening procedures. The final source relates to the broader context of sex role stereotypes and socialization process. The Riehl and Byrd model further recognizes that gender is a factor in career development because both genders react differently to situations that ultimately determine advancement within the organization. This framework is supported by three

propositions. First, women have not been socialized to aspire to administrative roles or to prepare for them. Second, school systems are principally managed by men and are structured to exclude women from administrative positions because of their recruitment and selection process. Lastly, male dominance result in tacit and explicit forms of discrimination confining women to lower level positions in work both inside and outside the home (Riehl & Byrd, 1997). Each of these propositions offers an explanation for the underrepresentation of women in upper level administrative positions. In essence, the propositions project that, when all other factors are equal, men are more likely to achieve organizational and career mobility than are women (Riehl & Byrd, 1997).

Politics of Fit

Some scholars have focused on leadership in terms of administrators' interpretations and reactions to various aspects of school culture (Marshall & Oliva, 2006). Others have examined the role school leaders' play in affirming cultural and social structures within communities (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000). These efforts recognized the existence of both subtle and overt forms of control that shape the definitions of leadership and therefore who fits as a leader (Tooms, Lugg, & Bogotch, 2010). According to Duke and Iwanicki (1992), the word "fit" is rooted in organizational sense making by a school community and is more than a matter of behavioral competence. Duke and Iwanicki theorized that the notion of fit refers to the leader's interactions with members of the school community and could be triangulated with school culture and community expectations of leadership for personnel decisions to be judged by perceived efficacy and desirability of a school leader.

Tooms et al. (2010) broadened Duke and Iwanicki's (1992) notion of fit. According to Tooms et al. (2010), fit is best understood as perception or attribution "when all other qualifications are considered equal" (p. 98). Fit, then, is described as a notion of attributes and perceptions in two ways. First, a poststructural stance assumes that fit can best be understood as a combination of the many relative intersections of role, identity, and relationships. Second, fit can be viewed as a symbolic cultural icon of public school leadership. Tooms et al. explored three critical elements that work in tandem to create perceptions of individuals, roles, and expectations. The elements of social constructionism, hegemony, and identity theory underlie how the labels and politics of fit are used in practice.

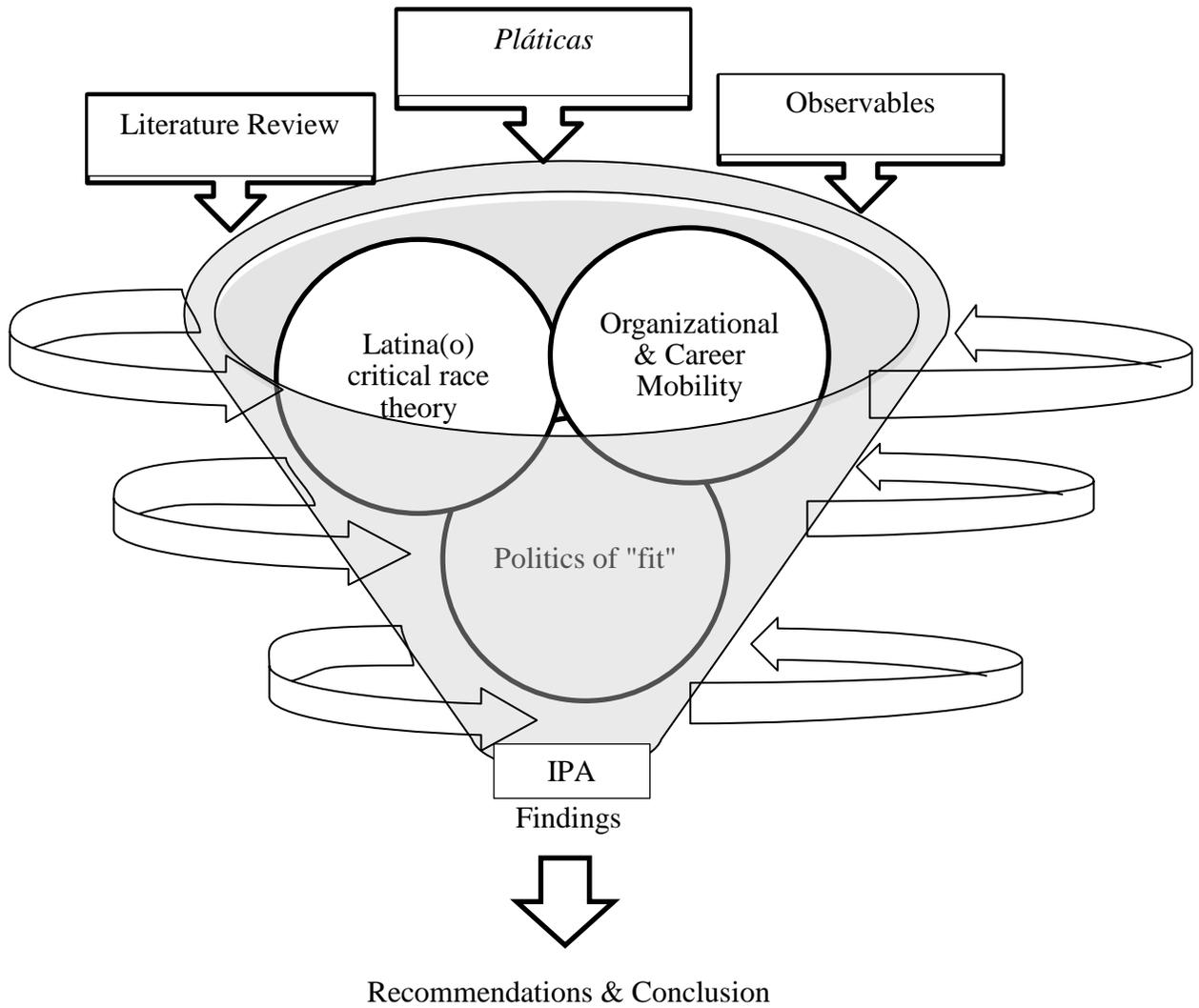
The politics of fit is relevant to this study because the school board and community construct their own identity as they look for a superintendent to fill a position. When a school board member tells a reporter that a superintendent is a "great fit," the board member is creating a statement of opinion that is interpreted as fact (or reality): the superintendent is a good leader because he or she has behaved in a way that is suitable for the position as defined by those who hired him or her. Researchers concerned with school leadership in the United States have noted that screening decisions are influenced by factors such as age, gender, and ethnicity of candidates (Hernandez, 2007; Newton, 2006; Valverde, 1980; I. P. Young & Fox, 2002). As Tooms et al. (2010) noted, "within such a pool of candidates, an applicant can be deemed as the wrong, or the best, fit because of some nuance in his or her identity or image" (p. 114). Often, the selection criteria for leadership position within an educational organization do not rest on

degree or pedigree in a group of equally qualified candidates (Hernandez, 2007; Oritz, 1982; Tallerico & Blount, 2004; Tooms, 2007).

Conceptual Framework

Using the framework rooted in Latina(o) critical race theory, organizational and career mobility, and politics of “fit”, the research was employed to reveal the constructs that support the advancement of Latinas to the superintendency through the literature review, *pláticas*, and observables (see Figure 1.1). These theories were used as the foundation for this research. They provided support for the proposed study by presenting known relationships among variables and setting defined limits.

Figure 1.1 Conceptual Framework



My Narrative: School Years, Mother, Educator, and Leader

I was born in a border town during the summer of 1968, twenty years after the Delgado vs Bastrop Independent School District case (1948). I came of age alongside the dramatic growth of the Latino population in the United States and the inequities in Texas public schools for Mexican Americans. I knew Mexico was just a stone's throw away from our home; however, I had little understanding of the long and rich history of Latinos

in the United States. Growing up in an English speaking Latino family with a father who was in law enforcement and a stay at home mother afforded me a sense of privilege, compared to my friends who had parents who had to work multiple jobs and spoke only Spanish. All I knew growing up was my two sisters and our close knit extended family. I had friends, but was never allowed to socialize beyond school; my closest friends were my cousins.

Throughout my life I received support and encouragement from my parents, extended family, teachers, coaches, and other school personal; however, the how and why of my heritage or how Latinos became part of the United States was never explained or mentioned in the curriculum. It was as if Latinos didn't exist in history. I was a girl with brown eyes, brown hair, and brown skin who was considered one of the smart students because I happen to speak English. As children we joked around by saying *la migra* was coming to get certain students because we knew they were from Mexico; a phrase my paternal grandmother was never fond of and always reprimanded.

Reflecting on my journey, I realize attending the same parochial school, from elementary through high school, allowed me to experience the obvious privilege's, such as small teacher to student ratios and a family atmosphere, but it also exposed me to male and female teachers with a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds. This section highlights main events from my elementary years to present.

School Years

My first experience with education was when my parents enrolled me in a parochial school managed by the Servants of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Poor. I still remember our school mission by memory, "Our principal purpose, as servants of God, is

to serve the poor and underprivileged people wherever they may be found.” I along with my friends and classmates recited this every morning after the pledge of allegiance; a mission that still resonates deep in my soul. Two of my early roles models, Sister Maria and Sister Grace were great exemplars in education that typified the educational philosophy of this organization. They believed education should be based on love, modesty, creating an environment of freedom, self-expression, and friendship to cultivate human-Christian values. After 13 years of living, breathing, and experiencing this philosophy it automatically became my own life philosophy.

My first teacher was a nun who was petite in stature and always wore a finely pressed black habit with one piece of jewelry on her left hand. As a young girl, I remember questioning my teacher about the dull golden ring she wore on her left index finger. She avoided my question for several months, until one day she told me she was married to god. The concept of being married to God was out of my scope of understanding as a kindergartener; however, that was when I first started to realize the convent situated behind our school was only for women. As I continued on through the years, I was intrigued by the women, all nuns, who lived in the convent had different roles and responsibilities in the organizational structure of the school. Our principal, who was also a nun, had a remarkable talent of summoning a students’ attention with an intense gaze, as well also making someone feel at ease at the time of need. The caring nature of the teachers, some who belonged to the sacred order and others were lay people, all had high expectations and it was evident throughout my elementary years. It was the support system that allowed me to become student focused on learning as well as helping out my fellow students, especially those who knew little to no English.

When I was 10 years old and in the fourth grade year when I experienced an event which changed my world and ultimately made me who I am today. I remember the day my father asked me to sit on the olive green couch one evening. My father, who I adored and respected because of his kind and giving nature and not to mention his 6'4" stature, told me he was leaving and planning on divorcing my mother. I did not comprehend what he was saying, as I did not know anyone who had gotten a divorce. There was no conversation, I just sat there and stared at him for a while. As he got up, my eyes followed him as he walked out the door; internally, I knew our lives would never be the same. My mother was no longer a stay at home mother; she had to find a job to support a family with 4 young children. My mother somehow managed to continue our life as normal as possible. I continued in parochial school and kept my parent's divorce a secret. I consciously made an effort to avoid being home and my life would be forever changed. Although we did not have to leave the home we knew, our living situation was awkward for my mother as we lived next door to my paternal grandparents. I admired my mother's strength for living through the awkwardness for the benefit of her children.

Living next to my grandparents' did come with benefits. I knew, regardless of the time I arrived home, there was always something to eat at their home, as well as knowing someone was always home to look out for us while my mother was at work. The drawbacks were more emotional as I can still hear my grandmother telling me, "*sin madre, sin padre, sin perro que les ladre.*" I still don't quite understand why my grandmother would tell me I didn't have a mother, father, or a barking dog...and after a while I did not allow it to phase me. I tried to avoid any conversation around the topic of my parents. It was my grandmother who served as a catalyst and motivated me to prove

her wrong. I took it as a personal challenge to become someone she would be proud of regardless of my parents' situation. My grandfather on the other hand was my biggest cheerleader. He would want to look at my report card every grading period and give me five dollars for every "A" I earned.

I immersed myself in school events and studies; I ultimately found my calling by participating in athletics. The coaches and players became part of my extended family. I was involved in every single sporting opportunity available on my campus throughout my elementary, middle and high school career. I viewed my coach as my surrogate parent who monitored and took care of me for 7 years. The atmosphere I was exposed to throughout high school was one that encompassed a great support system from teachers, counselors, and classmates, especially when it came to continuing our education beyond high school. Failure was not an option for me in any arena. I graduated in the top 10%, in a graduating class of 33 students, and decided to leave my home town to pursue higher education at The University of Texas at Austin.

As a freshman in such a large university, I felt like a fish out of water. I immediately found comfort in the gym and did not have a problem making new friends. I excelled in academics, but I missed the comforts of home; I found myself driving home at least every other weekend to spend time with high school friends. Although I had made plans to return to Austin for my sophomore year, I decided the best course of action for me was to attend the local university in my hometown. It was like I had never left. The expectations were now self-directed because my mother and brother had moved out of state.

At the age of 23, I had a beautiful baby boy. From that point forward my son became my world and everything I did or accomplished was for him. Although I did not have a rough upbringing, I wanted him to have more than what I had growing up. I vowed to always be involved in my son's life and to be a good role model. I finished school for him and received a Bachelor's degree and teaching certification.

Educator and Leader

I entered the education field as a 6th grade teacher in a public school. My goal was to create a classroom environment with high expectations and student empowerment just like I had experienced. I reflected on the type of education I received throughout my young life and decided my classroom would go beyond the textbooks. Regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender, I knew before a student could feel empowered, they needed to know their history and be proud of their family traditions, culture, and gender.

Throughout my teaching career, I established a climate of trust and pride for every accomplishment, as small as it appears to others; I made it into a big deal. Teaching in predominantly low socio-economic campuses did not limit the experiences I gave to my students. My expectation for myself was to educate and facilitate life for the students who walked through my door every single year, similar to what I had experienced.

After five years in the classroom, I was selected to participate in a principalship cohort by my principal. I, along with 14 other colleagues, was allowed to work as an assistant principal for half the day and attend educational administrative classes the other half. My passion continued after the left classroom and is an impetus for what I do today. I started as an elementary assistant principal and quickly realized, and was given the opportunity to move to the secondary level.

I worked closely with other administrators, teachers, students, parents, and unfortunately the district's police department to create a better environment for our students. As an administrator, I saw the devastating effects low expectations can have on Latinas. The majority of the Latinas I worked with were more concerned about boyfriends and friends, than they were about education. Many of these young ladies would either drop out of high school before reaching their junior year or end up pregnant. Although systems were put in place to help young mothers continue school, the reality is the majority failed to finish high school due to family obligations and they found it easier to stay home.

My work as an administrator situated me in the position to see how schools operate from a deficit point of view. Although I did not have the capability of controlling what every teacher or student did, I realized the connection and motivation for student success and high expectations came from building relationships with students. I knew my work in education could not stop at the assistant principal level in order to implement a healthy systemic change in education. I systematically planned my next job opportunity to get me to my ultimate goal of superintendent of a public school district. During this time my mentors were the two high school principals I worked under. I was able to gather their input regarding my professional aspirations, as well as learning the do's and do not's of a campus principal.

I received my first principalship at a middle school in a small, affluent school district; coincidentally I was admitted to the doctoral program within the same year. I remained in the district for 3 years and continually looked for opportunities in larger surrounding districts.

A year and a half later, I am now the principal of a large and diverse comprehensive high school in central Texas. As I reflect on my journey, I could not be where I am today, without the conditions, life experiences, mentors, and support structures that I encountered throughout my life. This was the stimulus for conducting this research.

Summary

In chapter one, I introduce the study detailing the need that served as the motivation to consider further research. Leadership in the superintendent role, in and of itself, is a phenomenon. It calls for a person—a leader—to effectuate productive and meaningful results for an organization, regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender. The study of the superintendency is a topic of interest to for people in the education field and with the responsibility of leading a district or campus of any size. This chapter serves as an introduction to a study that seeks to uncover how being Latina intersects with the variables inherent in upbringing, gender, and ethnicity when a Latina pursues the superintendency. Chapter two offers a review of salient literature and includes: The history of women in public education, the modern superintendency, barriers to the superintendency for women, and Latinas in the superintendency. Chapter three, the methodology, details the study design, collection of observables, and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Chapter four introduces the three Latinas; their narratives are presented using their own words. Chapter five provides an analysis of the participants' perspectives within the structure of the framework and research questions. Finally, chapter six highlights central aspects of the learning that took place as a result of the study. I briefly summarize the findings and present the study tensions and challenges,

implications and recommendations for school improvement, Latina perspective on
implications for practice, recommendations for future research, and concluding thoughts.

CHAPTER II

WOMEN IN THE SUPERINTENDENCY: A ROAD LESS TRAVELED

The present chapter provides a review of the literature relevant to Latinas in the superintendency and is divided into four sections: Women in public education, the modern superintendency, barriers to the superintendency, and Latina representation in the superintendency. First, women in public education section briefly suggests that despite the predominately female profession, women still continue to be underrepresented professionals in the superintendency. Second, the section on the modern superintendency looks at the evolving role of the superintendency and the complexity of roles and access. Third, barriers to the superintendency explores the unique barriers women administrators encounter as they ascend to the superintendency. Lastly, Latina representation in the superintendency identifies roadblocks that pertain specifically to Latinas and the underrepresentation in the superintendency. Finally, a discussion on the gaps in the literature is provided.

History of Women in Public Education

In the early 19th century, men were predominately employed as teachers in public education (Spring, 2001); as school populations increased, additional teachers were needed. To respond to the need for additional teachers, school districts expanded their recruitment efforts to include women as teachers in their schools (Spring, 2001). By the end of the 19th century, teaching became a “natural profession for women” (Blount, 1998, p. 18). Despite earning lower wages than their male counterparts, the teaching profession offered multiple advantages to women: (a) justification for obtaining an education, (b) the ability to live independently of their families, (c) social independence

without the need to marry, (d) the ability to manage their own space, and (e) the ability to contribute to society (Blount, 1998; Spring, 2001). As women began to dominate the teaching force, men's interest in remaining in the profession waned. Men pursued other career opportunities in higher education and business, becoming professors and business executives. Teaching thus shifted from an almost exclusively male profession to a predominately female profession (Spring, 2001; Tallerico & Blount, 2004). By the late 19th century, women occupied 70% of all teaching positions. Thirty years later, women occupy 86% of the positions and men held only 14% of all positions, including administrative positions (Blount, 1998).

Women's suffrage in the turn of the 20th century triggered the appearance of women in administrative roles. Some women were hesitant to participate in politics but they realized the value and importance of political power. Women's groups organized to support women's candidacy for the elected position of superintendency, and the right to vote provided enterprising women with a newly found political constituency (Blount, 1998). Suffrage activists openly campaigned and were successful at electing women to the superintendency. Blount (1998) reported that in 1910, women occupied 9% of the roles of superintendent, increasing to 11% in 1930. This period in history is referred to as the "golden age of women administrators" (Tallerico & Blount, 2004, p. 643). Since then, the decline in numbers of women in the superintendency has been attributed to several factors: (a) a shift in focus for women's groups, (b) a change in the public school superintendent selection process, and (c) new educational requirements for administrators (Blount, 1998).

Soon after full suffrage was enacted, some women's groups were dissolved and began to shift focus (Blount, 1998). Many women's organizations that had been formed to promote women's right to vote disbanded once this objective was realized. For others, a new responsibility emerged: educating women on their new role as voting citizens.

Some women's groups directed their attention to supporting the work of educators, a profession dominated by women. In the past, women administrators and public school superintendents were effective at establishing close ties with their teachers; over time, the political nature of administration put female administrators at odds with teacher organizations (Blount, 1998). This schism alienated support networks that had helped women ascend to top executive positions. Thus, the decline of women in the superintendency was partly attributed to the dissolution of some women's groups and restructuring of the new era in education: teaching versus administration (Blount, 1998; Tallerico & Blount, 2004).

Women determined to occupy the superintendency were successful at acquiring broad-based support from female constituencies (Blount, 1998). Their success became an open victory for achieving equal rights and women became optimistic they could eventually direct the course of public education. In the mid-18th century, while women celebrated their ascent into positions of power, formal associations of school superintendents, most of whom were men, began advocating for a change in the public school superintendent selection process (Blount, 1998). The superintendency was an elected position and public school superintendent groups held that it had become too political. Male power networks became responsible for appointing candidates, and without access to these power networks, women could no longer compete successfully

for the position (Blount, 1998). As Tyack and Hansot (1982) expressed the situation, “even the most ambitious and effective female leaders often needed men to front for their activities and to persuade males to grant the resources of money and power they required to pursue their work” (p. 63). Dating back to the 19th century, men have received most of the credit for creating and running public education (Tyack & Hansot, 1982).

As the need to hire more school administrators increased, efforts to set higher standards for those pursuing administration emerged. Prior to these requirements, teachers were afforded many opportunities for upward mobility. By 1930, many states mandated school administrators to satisfy compulsory credential and training requirements separate from those of teachers (Tallerico & Blount, 2004). The reentry of many World War II veterans into the workforce changed the social landscape of education (Blount, 1998). Heavy recruitment efforts by school districts to lure men back into the teaching profession and school administration were successful. Whereas a decade before, men left the teaching profession, dissatisfied with low wages and attracted by better jobs elsewhere, improved salaries and prestige became incentives for men to actively pursue careers in educational administration (Spring, 2001).

Universities and colleges experienced an increase in enrollment due to the benefits of the G.I. Bill (Spring, 2001). As a result, colleges and universities limited admittance of women into administrative training programs by setting low quotas for female enrollment (Blount, 1998; Tallerico & Blount, 2004). New requirements for the completion of administrative training programs and education requirements limited opportunities for women to rise through the teaching ranks into administrative positions (Blount, 1998). In the history of the women in public education, a startling matter is the

absence of the history of Latinas. Of particular note is the absence of any substantial work or information of Latina educators.

The Modern Superintendency

Changing Roles in the Superintendency

Over the last 150 years, the expectations of a superintendent have increased in terms of complexity and demand. The role of superintendency has changed and developed as needs arose throughout the years. The modern superintendent's roles and responsibilities have much to do with the focus on accountability and have undoubtedly led to changes in the day-to-day responsibilities of superintendents. Candoli (1995) summarized the role of the modern superintendent thusly:

The superintendent of schools is the chief executive office of the school system appointed by and directly responsible to the Board of Education for the discharge of his or her responsibilities. The superintendent acts in accordance with the policies, rules, and regulations established by the board and the laws and regulations of the state and federal government. Lastly, the administration of the entire school system is delegated to the superintendent. (p. 29)

Glass (2000) remarked a widespread concern for the quality of schools has led to a revamping of school districts in an effort to improve the quality of public education. Although it is difficult to neatly delineate the different incarnations of the superintendency, there are some readily recognizable periods that are useful as points of reference. These are outlined by Kowalski and Strouder (2005) in the following manner.

Superintendent as scholar. From the onset of its creation, the primary focus of the position was the implementation of a state curriculum and that of supervising

teachers. Normative standards were employed and superintendents were viewed as master teachers. Superintendents dedicated much of their time to the supervising of instruction and ensuring curricular uniformity.

Superintendent as manager. As the country began to move from an agricultural to an industrial society, the role of the superintendent also evolved. Large school districts sprung up and school districts began to focus on resource management. The position had been transformed into a manager who could improve operations by concentrating on time and efficiency.

Superintendent as democratic leader. Scarcity of resources forced superintendents to engage in political activities. Prior to this transition, politically inclined superintendents were viewed as unprofessional. This transition saw rise to the notion that the superintendent needed to bring together policymakers, employees, and taxpayers to support initiatives of the district.

Superintendent as scientist. This period encouraged superintendents to emphasize predictability and scientific certainty in their research and practice. The intent was to re-create the normative standards for the profession. Superintendents were expected to apply scientific inquiry to the problems and decisions they encountered in their jobs, and they were expected to have the expertise necessary to deal with social and institutional problems such as poverty, racism, gender discrimination, crime, and violence.

Superintendent as communicator. The ability to serve a school administrator has been viewed as a skill, something that is done when assuming a role or position. As the superintendency began to evolve, the ability to communicate was no longer seen as a

skill but as a pervasive role characterization. The atmosphere in which the superintendent worked required the individual to move away from an isolationist or closed organizational climate and to work collaboratively with principals, parents, and other stakeholders.

Women and the Superintendency

The AASA study of the superintendency reported 95% of the public school superintendents in the United States were White and 87% are men (Glass, Björk, & Brunner, 2000), supporting the claim that the superintendency was a White male-dominated position. During a 10-year period, the percentage of female public school superintendents increased from 6% to 13%, while marginalized people in the superintendency increased from 4% to 5%. At first glance, these findings seem encouraging. However, with women occupying the vast majority of the teaching positions in public schools, it is highly suspect that they are underrepresented in administration (Blount, 1998; Grogan, 1994), particularly when one considers that more than 50% of graduate students enrolled in educational administration were women (Glass, 2000). In 2006, the number of women earning a superintendent certification was 162 (48.2% of certifications awarded), as compared to 174 of men (51.8%; Ramsay, 2011). Four years later, in 2010, the numbers were not promising for women: women accounted for 68 (42.2%) of the superintendent certifications, as compared to 93 (57.8%) for men (Ramsay, 2011). The decrease in women attaining a superintendent certification translates into fewer women aspiring to become public school superintendents.

Barriers to the Superintendency for Women

In the 21st century, women are still represented in the greater numbers, as compared to men, in the teaching profession and continue to be vastly underrepresented professionals in the superintendency (Skrla, Reyes, & Scheurich, 2000). The literature review identified six barriers: (a) academic, (b) administrative career paths, (c) hiring process, (d) gender discrimination and biases, (e) sponsors and mentors, and (f) school boards.

Often, these barriers were controlled by a person or persons with varying degrees of power, referred to as gatekeepers and some were more subtle and related to gender biases (Tallerico, 2000). Derrington and Sharratt (2008) replicated their own study, performed 15 years earlier, and found perceived barriers were the same but the importance respondents placed on certain barriers had changed (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1 Top Three Barriers

1993	2008
1. Sex role stereotyping	1. Barriers to securing the position often self-imposed (i.e., academics, career paths)
2. Sex discrimination	2. “Good old boys” network helps men, not women (i.e., gender discrimination, race & gender biases)
3. Lack of role models/mentors to guide women into superintendency	3. School board not well-informed regarding qualifications of female candidates (i.e., hiring process)

The study by Derrington and Sharratt highlights the 3 barriers for women in the superintendency. Number one on their list is the self-imposed barrier that most women face which includes academic and administrative career path choices.

Academic

The first roadblock to the superintendency encountered by some women was found in higher education. Literature revealed that academic preparation programs did not adequately encourage and prepare women to make their mark in educational administration (Grogan, 1994; Skrla, Reyes, & Scheurich, 2000). Scholars reported university preparation programs covertly discouraged women from the superintendency by failing to openly discuss gender issues that frequently restrict careers in educational administration (Skrla, 1998; Skrla, Reyes, & Scheurich, 2000). To gain insight into such academic barriers, Sharp, Malone, Walter, and Supley (2000) mailed questionnaires to 118 female public school superintendents in Illinois, Indiana, and Texas. The participants were asked whether their universities adequately prepared them to enter administration through the discussion of gender issues. Of those who responded, 71% ($n = 118$) indicated that gender issues were never discussed in any of their courses or coursework.

Skrla, Reyes, & Scheurich (2000) conducted a case study of three female former public school superintendents to explore barriers and constraints for women. Study participants stated that their university programs were virtually silent on gender issues. One study participant was already in her first superintendency when she completed coursework to obtain her credentials. She stated that instead of offering their support,

several professors openly expressed disbelief that she was already a public school superintendent.

Researchers have argued that the failure of universities to encourage women to the position and address gender issues in coursework negatively influences women (Skrla, Reyes, & Scheurich, 2000; Glass, Björk, & Brunner, 2000). The literature implied academic preparatory programs prevent and discourage women from pursuing the superintendency (Glass, Björk, & Brunner, 2000; Skrla, 1998; Skrla, Reyes, & Scheurich, 2000). In many cases, the university was the first point of contact for women preparing for and considering a role in educational administration. Ultimately the accessibility and convenience of the program determined if women continued their education.

Administrative Career Paths

Administrative paths taken by women during their career can create self-imposed barriers to the superintendency. The literature revealed that the most direct route to the superintendency was through a high school principalship (Glass, 1992; Glass, Björk, & Brunner, 2000; Young & McLeod, 2001). Wolverton and Macdonald (2001) conducted a study of public school superintendents in the Northwest to explore the most common path to the superintendency. They reported 60% of the male public school superintendents and 25% of the female public school superintendents held a high school principalship prior to becoming a public school superintendent. On a related note, women were underrepresented professionals in high school principalships (Sharp et al., 2000; Young & McLeod, 2001), causing women to be placed at a greater disadvantage. Male dominance in the high school principalship forced many women to follow a different

administrative career path to the superintendency (Glass, 1992; Glass, Björk, & Brunner, 2000; Young & McLeod, 2001).

Studies have shown women typically spent more time in the classroom than did their male counterparts before pursuing administrative work (Glass, 2000; Glass, Björk, & Brunner, 2000; Young & McLeod, 2001). They began their careers as elementary school teachers, accepted positions as elementary school principals, and moved to other central office administrative positions. Sharp et al. (2000) reported that most women tend to gravitate to central office positions in the area of curriculum and instruction because of their years of teaching experience. All these experiences, while important, often limited opportunities for women to achieve an appointment to the superintendency. Tallerico (2000) summarized how the administrative paths taken by women affect career mobility:

The gates are typically open widest for candidates with prior experience as a public school superintendent, assistant public school superintendent, and high school principal . . . (while on the contrary) the gates are more likely to be closed or opened only partially to applicants whose experience consists primarily of elementary principalships and other educational administrative roles. (Tallerico, 2000, p. 29)

Because women typically progressed through the administrative hierarchy differently from their male counterparts, their chosen paths limited access to the superintendency (Glass, 1992; Glass, Björk, & Brunner, 2000; Tallerico, 2000; Young & McLeod, 2001; Wolverton & Macdonald, 2001).

Hiring Process

One of the most important responsibilities given to a school board is the appointment of its public school superintendent (Ortiz, 1999; Tallerico, 2000). Due to the magnitude of this responsibility and limited experience in hiring a superintendent, school boards frequently rely on the help of experts to facilitate the search. These experts, typically referred to as search consultants, often employ methods that ultimately control whether women are appointed to the superintendency (Ortiz, 2000). Search consultants frequently controlled the direction of the search, which included developing the application process, interview process, and the final selection process (Chase & Bell, 1990; Ortiz, 2000; Tallerico, 1999b). In some cases, school boards rely on the expertise of search consultants to assist with screening application and conducting interviews. Because search consultants exerted tacit and explicit control over the hiring process, they were known to prevent women from entering the arena for initial consideration (Chase & Bell, 1994; Ortiz, 2000; Tallerico, 2000).

Johnson's (1996) study of 12 newly appointed public school superintendents revealed that candidates who appeared to work well with people, exhibited confidence, and were compatible with the image of the community were most often appointed to the position. Some of the literature pointed to school boards choosing candidates that were a good fit with the community (Johnson, 1996; Ortiz, 2001; Tallerico 2000). Johnson's study reported that while "assessing a candidate on the basis of class, race, or ethnicity, search committee members wondered privately whether a prospective public school superintendent could become one of us" (1996, p. 46). The selection of a candidate that fits into the community may be a way to mask ingrained biases. Another participant in

the study stated that fit was actually a code word for biases: “If there are not a real lot of brown faces among the school children in a district, I might as well not even apply” (Johnson, 1996, p. 91). Johnson (1996) summed up the succession process by stating that, ultimately, “the selection process proved to be far more intuitive than rational—and far more unpredictable” (p. 30). Other researchers contended that because most school boards were dominated by men, they were more likely to hire public school superintendents who were just like them—men (Marietti & Stout, 1994; Ortiz, 2001; Tallerico, 2000).

Ortiz (1999) collected data to study the selection process of 12 Hispanic female superintendents located in southwestern school districts. It was reported that the order in which information on the candidate was revealed during the interview process had a significant impact on the final selection. In this study, it was vital for these women to showcase their career accomplishments and skills during the interview while ensuring that negative information was not revealed prior to or during the interview. It was also noted that, “an applicant with a Spanish surname in the interview process is perceived as the school district not being as desirable as others” (Ortiz, 1999, p. 98), a concern that supports the perception that Latinas(os) are typically hired in districts that need to be improved or are located within low socioeconomic communities. Ortiz (1999) reported that nine of the Hispanic female study participants reiterated that their appointment to the superintendency was attributed to someone who knew them personally and vouched for their qualifications. Notable skills and characteristics of the successful women in this study included (a) being selected from suburban and urban areas; (b) being capable of dealing with the political and technical arenas; (c) having developed personal support connections; (d) understanding the interdependence between symbolic and professional

expectations; and (e) had acquired a “subtle political profile” (p. 100). In addition, Ortiz’s study revealed that Hispanic females were more likely to be appointed to districts that were in trouble or in need of change. Ortiz (1999) stated,

Unlike the appointment of White males to the superintendency, the appointment of Hispanic females has both symbolic and political overtones. The appointment is problematic for both, because the position of the superintendent is affected in two major ways when it is assumed by a Hispanic female. First, it serves as a symbol for the school board and community, and second, it challenges the existing school organization structure. (Ortiz, 1999, p. 98)

According to nationwide data obtained in the 10-year AASA (2000) study of the superintendency, inside candidates had a 32% chance of being promoted within their own district, down from 36% in 1992 (Glass, Björk, & Brunner, 2000). Given the reduced frequency with which school boards were willing to consider inside candidates, it was probable that the board would be interested in looking at outside candidates (Tallerico, 2000) and hiring a search consultant to assist with the search (Johnson, 1996).

Once school board members agreed on skills and traits, search consultants actively located and recruited candidates for the position. The consultant, with input from the school board, conducted initial reference checking to gain insight into the potential candidate (Tallerico, 2000). Search consultants contended initial reference checks helped to minimize the risks associated with the hiring process. Inquiries made in local and state power networks determined a candidate’s desirability for the position (Tallerico, 2000). This practice often excluded those who were not associated with those networks and

those who were not connected to other key state informants. It was at this point in the succession process that women were often stopped from consideration.

Tallerico (2000) conducted a study on the hiring practices of one state specific to employing public school superintendents. Data were collected over the course of two years; 75 interviews were conducted with search consultants, school board members, and recent applicants for the superintendency. Tallerico (2000) revealed that female and minority applicants were excluded from consideration because the search consultant actively recruited experienced superintendents and high school principals for the position. Tallerico (2000) also found ample evidence that women were excluded from the application process because of gender stereotyping. A search consultant in Tallerico's study (2000) voiced his perspective and lack of concern regarding affirmative action: "I won't just put women or minorities into the finalist pool. I'm always going to go with the best qualified" (Tallerico, 2000, p. 33). Glass (2000) reported that many school boards excluded women from consideration for the superintendency by requiring applicants to possess administrative experience in business and finance, skills typically characteristic of male applicants. A search consultant in Tallerico's study (2000) revealed, "You learn what's important to that board. What they mean by what's on the paper. It's sort of the hidden criteria" (Tallerico, 2000, p. 26). Therefore, simply reviewing the job description and brochure for each superintendent search revealed whether the school board was open to hiring a woman for the position.

Some search consultants opt to interview potential applicant whom they were considering for the position prior to a scheduled interview with the school board (Tallerico, 2000). Participants in Tallerico's (2000) study revealed that their interview

with the search consultants were crucial to the final selection. One board member made this statement regarding that interview: “They make or break candidates” (Tallerico, 2000, p. 35). In some instances, the 12 top candidates were identified and the school board or search committee identified five or six candidates who would be interviewed for the position (Tallerico, 2000).

In a study by Tallerico (2000) the female participants made several references to the importance of making connections with school board members. One headhunter stated,

It comes down to what kinds of personalities can get along. . . . A school board member stated, “Of all the candidates you see, you’re trying to figure out, who will I be able to work with? Who will I be able to just pick up the phone and call? Who am I most at ease with?” (Tallerico, 2000, p. 36)

The school board has the final authority and responsibility for the selection of its public school superintendent. School boards that employ search consultants relinquish some of that authority. Consultants actively engage in recruiting candidates to make the pool look better—experienced superintendents, prestigious university degrees, state superintendent of the year winners, and so forth (Stellar, 2010). A good mix of candidates helps to stretch the perspective of the board. The best consultants also attempt to steer school boards toward particular candidates who will be impressive and who might be a good fit with the needs of the school district (Stellar, 2010). Tallerico (2000) reported that regardless of whether the school board was charged with the final decision, “it makes that choice primarily by interviewing a small number of candidates, after relying on its search

consultant to eliminate almost 90% of those who apply” (p. 66). The school board considered a number of factors before selecting one candidate over another.

Gender Discrimination and Biases

At the beginning of the search, some board members have already visualized their public school superintendent as a married man with children (Tallerico, 2000). Because the superintendency is a male-dominated position, gender negatively influences prospective employers before and after the decision is made to appoint a woman to the position. Many women are conflicted by family responsibilities and the perceived gender roles held by others in the community. These conflicts create gender barriers for women considering the superintendency. Researchers reported that gender negatively influences biases towards female public school superintendents (Glass, Björk, & Brunner, 2000; Skrla, Reyes, & Scheurich, 2000). Glass (2000) and Glass, Björk, & Brunner (2000) reported that the average public school superintendent must be willing to dedicate more than 50 hours per week to the job. Society typically characterizes women as mothers and wives; assumptions are often made about their ability to devote the necessary time to the position.

Researchers revealed that women themselves were conflicted about their family obligations, which affected their decision to pursue and accept the superintendency (Sharp et al., 2000). Grogan (1994) conducted a qualitative study of 27 women aspiring to the superintendency. Many women in this study were torn between their career and other roles they held outside of their career. They reported anxiety about the image they held for themselves as mothers and the expectations of society that they should be more committed to the needs of their own children.

Women who struggled with their roles as mothers and wives often opted to place their careers on hold until their children were much older or had left the home. These assumptions are implied in the study conducted by Sharp et al. (2000). Sharp et al. found that 65% of the study participants did not have school-age children during their superintendency. Societal norms expect women to be nurturing mothers and wives, and these expectations create gender barriers for many women. There was also evidence in the literature that tensions arise due to perceived gender traits held by others. Skrla, Reyes, & Scheurich (2000) reported,

Although the women rejected the stereotypical constructions of femininity as applying to themselves, others with, whom they came in contact in their professional roles, such as board members, administrators, teachers, parents, and community members, often had expectation of these women based on cultural expectations for appropriately feminine behavior. (p. 70)

Brunner (2000b) conducted a qualitative study of 12 female public school superintendents and reported similar findings. One study participant reported that she experienced negative body language when she spoke, causing her to routinely hide her emotions. Both Brunner (2000b) and Skrla, Reyes, & Scheurich (2000) reported that women were conflicted about how others expected them to act in certain situations. The literature suggested gender stereotyping was a valid concern for women and a cause for many to reject the superintendency altogether (Brunner, 2000b; Glass, 2000; Sharp et al., 2001; Skrla, Reyes, & Scheurich, 2000). What this suggestion implies is that some women did not apply for superintendent positions because of their gender.

Another body of research focused on gender and relationships with the community and school board. Some participants in studies reported their professional competency was questioned because of their gender (Skrla, Reyes, & Scheurich, 2000; Tallerico, 2000). Women typically obtained most of their administrative experience as elementary school principals and although the position of public school superintendent required knowledge in school budgeting, women were assumed to be lacking knowledge in business and finance (Glass, 2000; Glass, Björk, & Brunner, 2000). McCabe and Dobberteen (1998) reported that because of these assumptions, women frequently took steps to obtain additional education, training, and experience in school business to counteract that perception.

Communities uneasy about hiring women to the superintendency were more likely to question their competency and decision making (Skrla, Reyes, & Scheurich, 2000). Study participants reported that although they were successful at improving student achievement, balancing their budgets, and passing bond elections, because they were women, they faced challenges to their competency (Skrla, Reyes, & Scheurich, 2000). Tallerico (2000) reported that female public school superintendents in their study were also questioned about their knowledge base because of gender. Study participants reported that it was assumed they had little knowledge about sports, facilities, and transportation. Surprisingly, no one ever seemed to question the limited knowledge of their male counterparts: “Would a male public school superintendent be criticized for not knowing how to organize a reading curriculum?” (Tallerico, 2000). The literature cited several examples of women who were subjected to forms of gender discrimination and gender bias. Several scholars remarked that women are conflicted by their gender roles

and the roles society expects women to assume (Bell, 1988; Brunner, 1998; Grogan, 1996; Tallerico, 1999a; Tallerico, 1999b). These societal expectations are discriminatory and become barriers to the superintendency.

Mentors

The literature revealed women enlisted the help of mentors to maneuver their way into the superintendency (Méndez-Morse, 2000; Méndez-Morse, 2004; Ortiz, 2000; Young & McLeod, 2001). Sharp et al. (2000) found that 54% of the female public school superintendents in their study believed that the lack of influential sponsors was a barrier to their achieving the coveted role of superintendent. In addition, these women frequently solicited help from influential administrators or professors to successfully influence school boards to hire them as public school superintendents.

McCabe and Dobberteen (1998) conducted a study to identify barriers to the superintendency. Survey data were collected from female public school superintendents across the United States. Respondents stated that to access the superintendency, they had to align themselves with powerful and influential peers. In addition, these women indicated that men were instrumental in introducing and sponsoring them into existing power networks. Young and McLeod (2001) conducted a qualitative study to explore the career aspirations and experiences of 20 female educational administrators. The participants in the study reported that their decision to enter educational administration was strongly influenced by endorsements and support from other administrators.

School Boards

School boards were responsible for hiring the public school superintendent and were the final barrier for women entering the superintendency. A review of the literature

reported men far outnumber women on local school boards and could influence hiring practices (Glass, 2000; Glass, Björk, & Brunner, 2000; Sharp et al., 2000). The literature also cited gender conflicts women have experienced with school board members (Skrla, Reyes, & Scheurich, 2000). In several studies, female public school superintendents recounted instances in which school board members attempted to intimidate and bully. Skrla (1998) conducted a qualitative case study of three female former superintendents. One participant reported, “Two of the newer board members called me personally, and I’ve never been talked to like that in my whole life—they wouldn’t have done that to a man. They call(ed) me names . . . they thought they could do that to a women because they are bigger and know all those words” (Skrla, 1998, p. 10). Skrla, Reyes, & Scheurich (2000) recounted the opinions of one woman, who stated, “I think that some people wanted me in the role because (they thought) I would do what I was told because I was a woman . . . I think I was perceived as weak” (Skrla, Reyes, & Scheurich, 2000, p. 59). Literature contained several examples in which school board members assumed women could be easily directed simply because they were women.

The leadership style of most public school superintendents was described as authoritative, assertive, and direct—characteristics often labeled as masculine traits (Brunner, 2000b). Brunner (2000a) noted that school boards adopt a traditional view of their public school superintendent and are more accepting of the characteristics that are the most desirable. That said, the literature also revealed that these same characteristics were perceived as undesirable in women (Brunner, 2000a).

Brunner (2000a) reported school boards evaluated women negatively if they were decisive, assertive, or direct. The women in Brunner’s study disclosed that they had to be

openly conscious of their leadership style because a direct and assertive style was perceived as unacceptable. One participant said, “Women can’t be directive, or before long they are called bitches. So if women want to stay in power, they have to find a way to circumvent by using a softer style” (Brunner, 2000a, p. 94). In summary, the literature suggested that women learned early in their administrative careers that they would be negatively perceived by others if they exhibited assertive and direct leadership styles.

Latinas in the Superintendency

Data regarding Latinas and the superintendency clearly indicate underrepresentation in this role. In the 2000 AASA superintendency study, public school superintendents who identify with a marginalized group increased by only 2% in a 10-year period (Glass, Björk, & Brunner, 2000), substantiating the claim that marginalized groups are drastically underrepresented professionals in the superintendency. The largest concentration of minority public school superintendents (25%) was found in the Southwest region of the United States, and in areas of large minority student populations. Glass, Björk, & Brunner (2000) reported that 95% of the male public school superintendents were White and 92% of the female public school superintendents were White. These statistics suggest that the superintendency was, at least at the time Glass, Björk, & Brunner’s study was completed, dominated by both White men and White women.

Although the Latino culture is growing in the United States, Latinas are represented in only 1% of the superintendencies. The literature on Latinas in education and in the superintendency is scant. Only a few researchers, such as Flora Ida Ortiz

(1982), who was the first Latina professor of educational administration in the United States, and Sylvia Méndez-Morse are the two most frequently cited Latina scholars.

Cultural Expectations

The traditional depiction of Latinas is easily found in the literature. Méndez-Morse (2000) stated Latinas have been stereotyped into three general areas: “relations with men, prevalence of domestic roles and responsibilities, and subsequently, limitations for work outside of the home and education” (p. 585). Several Latina participants in Magdaleno’s (2004) study reported they were raised in a culture that discouraged women from acquiring higher education. One participant reported that her mother tried to influence her decision to enroll at the university, “*Mija* [daughter], why do you need to go to school? You know, just raise babies, and you know make your husband happy and that kind of stuff” (Magdaleno, 2004, p. 55). Another participant stated programs should be designed to improve how Latinos perceive and treat Latina public school superintendents: “Many males have not yet learned how to let go of the ingrained beliefs that women’s work is in the home” (Magdaleno, 2004, p. 95). Gardiner, Grogan, and Enomoto (1999) reported that some of the Hispanic women in their study discussed their conflict between traditional roles and expectations. One Hispanic participant reported that role conflicts often originated from the spouse and parents and related to expectations of wife and daughter. These women felt pressure to assume all responsibilities traditionally expected of a wife and mother.

Not all Latinas have encountered problems with traditional gender expectations. A Hispanic participant in the study conducted by Gardiner et al. (1999) reported that her husband was willing to assume more home and family responsibilities to allow her to

devote time to her career. Several inconsistencies regarding gender expectation for Latinas can be found in the literature and few researchers have captured the difficulties Latinas may be experiencing with regards to family responsibilities and work responsibilities. Méndez-Morse (2000) reported information was scarce because researchers have not attempted to research and collect data about gender expectations for Latinas. It is clear that more studies are needed in this area.

Lack of Mentors

Gonzalez-Figueroa and Young (2005) stated although more Latina women occupy political offices and are business owners, lack of career mentoring intensified the isolation of these positions. The literature emphasized the importance of mentoring minority women into leadership roles in education. Enomoto, Gardiner, and Grogan (2000) conducted a qualitative study in three states to explore issues of race, gender, and mentoring relationships in educational leadership roles. Fourteen of the study participants were African American women and four were Hispanic women. These women believed that having multiple mentors, including White men, could help them gain access to power networks. Finally, they recognized the importance of mentoring their own ethnicity because many do not possess the “class background to see possibilities for oneself as a leader” (Enomoto, Gardiner, & Grogan, 2000, p. 567). They stated that more opportunities to be mentored were needed for minority women to overcome feelings of inadequacy.

Méndez-Morse (2004) conducted a qualitative study of six Latina educational leaders to explore and identify the role models and mentors who had been influential in their lives. Méndez-Morse found that mentorship and sponsorship would benefit Latinas,

but it is nearly impossible to find Latina mentors. Most likely, Latinas' mentors or sponsors will be White men, which is unfortunate because mentors play an important role in placing Latinas. Participants in this study named their mothers as their most significant mentor. Méndez-Morse (2004) reported that due to the absence of formal mentoring relationships, "women assembled or constructed a mentor from varied sources that collectively met their specific needs and priorities" (p. 565). Magdeleno (2004) interviewed 22 Latino and Latina public school superintendents in California to determine how they accessed the superintendency and reported Latina public school superintendents stated that formal mentoring programs to teach new and experienced administrators the complex skills and knowledge to manage a school district are needed.

Latinas maneuvered their way into the superintendency by locating mentors from the dominant culture. Latina administrators in Ortiz's (2000) study accessed power networks by locating a "dominant culture cross-race mentor" (p. 29). Ortiz (2000) reported White male sponsors were able to assist Hispanic women in securing more favorable contracts with the school board. Magdaleno (2004) concluded that educational leadership will not improve for Latino and Latina leaders unless they develop their own network of influential decision makers.

Ethnic Discrimination

Ortiz's (1982) study of socialization processes that applied to individuals establishing careers in public institutions is still referenced by many scholars. In subsequent work, Ortiz (1999) found in her study of 12 Hispanic female superintendents that they were matched with school districts for particular reasons. They were more likely to be hired in districts where there was a high Hispanic population, high turnover among

staff, financial trouble, a history of difficult relations with the Hispanic community, and difficulty filling the superintendent job. In Ortiz's (1999) study, a community leader stated that "if there is a Spanish surname on the superintendent interview list, you can bet there are problems in the district" (p. 92).

Grogan and Brunner (2005a) similarly found that women of color were twice as likely to be chosen over White women in districts where school reform was needed and where their political skills would be put to a challenge almost immediately. Glass, Björk, & Brunner (2000) encountered similar conditions for minority female superintendents and found that minority women are often hired to positions in school districts that lack resources and are marked by turmoil. In addition, minority superintendents are often confined to primarily minority student districts. As Glass, Björk, & Brunner (2000) remarked, they found "relatively few minority superintendents serving majority districts" (p. 106). These same researchers stated that minority superintendents believe that discriminatory hiring practices exist and are a major problem for them.

Individually or in combination, these negative factors contribute to the low number of minority superintendents. Gardiner et al. (1999) reported that minority women faced dual conflicts because they were both female and minority. They often contended with assumptions that they were given promotions because of their ethnicity rather than their ability. Minority women in the study by Gardiner et al. were constantly questioned and challenged because of their ethnicity. Some were victims of subtle discrimination and reported that they were undermined by parents of students who questioned their decisions and took their concerns to nonminority superiors. Tallerico (2000) reported that entrance to the superintendency was often dependent upon interviews with board members and

headhunters. Key decision makers were typically nonminority men; therefore, hiring often favored male nonminority candidates.

Ethnic Gender Stereotyping

Another challenge Latinas face is ethnic gender stereotyping (Gardiner et al., 2000; Ortiz, 1982, Quilantán & Menchaca-Ochoa, 2004). Quilantán and Menchaca-Ochoa (2004) found that the Latinas in their study had to overcome biases associated with being a Hispanic female in the superintendency: “They looked different, and they were cognizant of the sex-role stereotypes that existed in their communities” (p. 127). Quilantán and Menchaca-Ochoa (2004) categorically stated, “The number of Hispanic women who achieve senior-level administrative positions, such as the superintendency, is disproportionate to the number of Hispanic women employed in these school systems” (p. 124).

Méndez-Morse (2000) also addressed how potential employers’ beliefs in stereotypes such as male domination, the need to maintain the home, and raise the children further serve to limit a Latina’s options. The author proposed that these negative stereotypes cause potential employers to avoid the possibility of performance issues and, subsequently, to not consider Latinas as serious candidates (Méndez-Morse, 2000). Méndez-Morse (2000) contradicted stereotypes of Latina leaders by identifying historical descriptions of women in various roles in which they have been successful and have not adhered to what some view as a typical or expected Latina stereotype. She stated, “Latina superintendents can be considered not as atypical but rather as women who are representatives of leaders who are hidden because of stereotype that is seldom questioned” (Méndez-Morse, 2000, p. 595).

Gaps in Literature

This literature review examines research and scholarship focused on the superintendency and Latina representation within the superintendency. Concerns about the missing voices of Latinas in the education field emerge in the literature in the 2000's and continues to be a recurring theme among scholars. This gap reveals the need for ongoing research to document the voices, experiences, and knowledge of Latinas to support and improve the educational opportunities for Latinas. More research is needed in regard to the underrepresentation of Latinas in the superintendency. Although each of the major sections may stand alone, taken together, they provide the framework of the critical factors and skills necessary for developing leaders, specifically Latina superintendents of public school systems. It is clear that the proportion of Latina superintendents has not increased in public schools at the same rate as their White female counterparts. The contribution of the Latina's culture and gender provide a focus for an examination of their relationships to effective leadership.

Summary

The chapter outlined a review of literature relevant to the study. The literature was discussed in four sections: Women in public education, the modern superintendency, women and the superintendency, and Latinas in the superintendency. The gaps in the literature is identified by the lack of research that specifically studies Latinas, as well as emphasizing the need for Latinas to document their voices, experience, and knowledge to support and improve the educational opportunities for Latinas. In the following chapter, I provide a detailed description of the methodology for this study.

CHAPTER III

PLÁTICAS, METHOD, AND STUDY DESIGN

This dissertation follows a qualitative case study methodology for observable collection and analysis, as well as for writing study findings (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). Qualitative research makes allowances for more creative and in-depth inquiry into many and varied social phenomena (Mertens, 2005). Hoepfl (1997) suggests that qualitative researchers seek illumination, understanding, and extrapolation to similar situations. This qualitative case study seeks to outline descriptions of a particular aspect of a phenomenon utilizing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA); in this case it seeks to understand the underrepresentation of Latinas in the superintendency. The goal of IPA is to uncover the conditions and relations that fostered the three Latinas in this study to aspire to and eventually become a superintendent by trying to make sense of the meanings of events and experiences of each participant.

Using the framework rooted in Latina(o) critical race theory, organizational and career mobility, and politics of “fit”, the research was employed to reveal the constructs that support the advancement of Latinas to the superintendency through the literature review, *pláticas*, and observables. The context for conducting this study is to understand the Latinas’ attainment of the superintendency utilizing the following major question and subquestions:

1. What are the conditions and relations that foster Latinas to aspire to and eventually become a superintendent?
 - a. What are the sociohistorical and life experiences of Latina superintendents prior to attaining the superintendency?

- b. What structures and processes are in place within the community and educational systems to foster the success of Latinas as they ascend to the superintendency?
- c. How have race, ethnicity, and gender affected the pursuit of attaining the superintendency?

Nature of Study

This research is a qualitative case study that utilizes interpretative phenomenological analysis I in attempting to uncover and understand personal experiences; it involves detailed examination of the participants' life-world (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) explores the participants' life-narrative accounts and psychological themes in detail by making sense of their personal and social world (McAdams, 2012). This qualitative research approach collects observables from the *pláticas*, observations, or verbal interactions and focuses on the participants' meanings and interpretations (Holloway & Wheeler, 1995).

This approach emphasizes a process with an active role for the researcher. As the researcher, I am attempting to get close to the participants' personal world to take, in Conrad's (1987) words, an insider's perspective. The fact that I am Latina is a benefit to this study, as I can relate to similar or like cultural aspects. This is required in order to makes sense of that other personal world through a process of interpretative activity. Therefore, a two-stage interpretation process, or a double hermeneutic, is involved. The participants are trying to makes sense of their world as I am trying to make sense of the participants trying to makes sense of their world.

Qualitative research tools are used to collect relevant observables from which to gain in-depth knowledge and insight into each participant's life experiences, behaviors, and motivations. This study was ideally suited to be a qualitative research project because it used in-depth interviews and detailed narrative analysis to depict a holistic portrayal of individuals' experiences. This study is subjective in nature and involves a small, purposeful population size.

Setting

This study takes place within the state of Texas which currently has 1170 public school districts (Ramsey, 2013a). The three Latina participants lived within a 350-mile radius of each other. The locations of the participants are located between Central and South Texas.

Population

The selection process for identifying the three Latinas involved mixed purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002). The two types of purposeful samplings that are utilized in this study are intensity sampling and criterions sampling. As Patton (2002) describes "intensity sampling" selects participants with information-rich cases to "elucidate the phenomenon of interest" (p. 234) and "criterion sampling" selects all cases that meet some criterion. Mixed purposeful sampling relies on the selection of people who could provide information-rich cases for in-depth study (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2003). Much like gathering a team of experts in any field to review and analyze a particular issue, based on expertise, experience, and competence, the mixed purposeful sample is identified with participants whose role in the phenomenon will offer their information-rich perspective. The participants for this study are selected using the following intensity and criteria:

- female gender;
- ethnicity of Hispanic or Latin American descent;
- serving or had served as a superintendent in a Texas public school system;
- geographic location within Texas; and
- willingness to participate in this study.

Participant selection began with a review of the 2011 list of public school superintendents in Texas. This list was obtained from the Texas Education Agency and state associations of school administrators. From the general list, Latina superintendents selected for invitation to participate in this study were identified by researching each participant's website, networking, educational peers, and community (e.g., business, parents) leaders with knowledge of Latina superintendents in their particular region.

Participants were selected from a pool of 17 Latinas who were initially identified as currently serving or having served as a public school superintendent in Texas at the time of the study. Five potential participants were then identified and initially chosen based on investigative research of these individuals fitting the mixed purposeful sampling criteria. Next, potential participants were sent an invitational letter requesting their participation in the study. The letter contained the following information: (a) a brief description of the research project, (b) the rationale for her selection in the study, (c) an explanation of observables collection methodologies, and (d) a request to participate in an interview. After receiving their written acknowledgement, three final participants were selected based on a 350-mile radius from one another. Upon contacting these potential participants, two were unable to commit to the time constraints of this study. Ultimately, three Latina superintendents agreed to participate. Out of the three participants, two were

currently serving superintendents at the time of the study and the third participant had previously served as superintendent and was employed at the time of the study as a consultant. The participants had 18 years of combined superintendency experience in a total of five different school districts. After the selection, the participants were contacted via telephone to inform them of their selection. Initial conversations set the foundation to establish a relationship with the respective participants.

Observables Collection

The observable sources for this study include: *pláticas*, documents, and researcher's journal. These sources assisted in documenting the voices and experiences of the three Latina superintendents in the study.

Pláticas

I conducted one 120 minute, face-to-face *plática* with each participant that focused on hearing each participant's voice as she shared her upbringing, experiences, and her meaning of those experiences. For this study, *plática* was defined as an intimate conversation and intellectual dialogue (Bohm, 1996; Guajardo & Guajardo, 2006; Guajardo & Guajardo, 2007). The *pláticas* allowed the participants and me to engage in a reciprocal dialogue where initial questions are modified in light of the participants' responses, and I was able to probe interesting and important areas which arose (Smith & Osborn, 2003; Guajardo & Guajardo, 2007). Because this was reciprocal in nature, the participant's learned as much about me as I learned about them.

The *pláticas* were guided by an organically structured format that allowed me to acquire the same observables from each participant, while allowing the latitude to naturally explore broader issues and perspectives that surfaced (Newman & Benz, 1998).

Newman and Benz (1998) reported, “Through probes, follow-up questions, and attention to nonverbal cues, the researcher is able to enhance the data collected” (p. 68). The initial questions were uniform and guided by the participant. In addition, this structure allowed for simple retrieval of each participant’s answers to the same questions (Patton, 2002).

The *pláticas* were conversational in nature and focused on the participants’ perspectives (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2007). The *plática* protocol followed a phenomenological approach designed to ask questions related to understanding the participants’ perspectives on experiences, perceptions, leadership, and ascension to the superintendency (Patton, 2002). The *pláticas* were audio recorded with the consent of each participant to verify personal experiences and how those experiences affected the nature of the participants’ professional goals, aspirations, and achievements. This approach allowed Latina superintendents to describe their own experiences in an open-ended manner and nonthreatening venue. A verbatim transcript of each *plática* was transcribed and used for analysis.

Documents

Review of documents included the formal and informal processes the participants collected throughout their lifetime and during the ascension to the superintendency. The formal processes included documents such as educational and employment information, photos, newspaper clippings, interviews, certificates, and anything the participant deemed important in her life. The informal processes included events they experienced to become a superintendent of schools, such as networking and mentoring. Each participant provided the following documents: Superintendent job description and superintendent job

posting. Two out of the three participants provided newspaper clippings regarding community and district history prior to their appointment.

Researcher's Journal

I maintained an electronic journal to document the collection process, field notes, and each step that was taken to analyze the information. This journal provided a place to write and document questions during and after the *pláticas*, e-mails, or phone conversations. It was also used to document the development, consolidation, and evolution of the study, as well as filtering the information for the organization and making meaning of the work.

All observables were processed, analyzed, and interpreted to identify major emergent themes. The process of triangulation was used to corroborate evidence gathered from different individuals, types of observables, or methods of observables collection (Creswell, 2003). This process involved analyzing each data source (e.g., transcriptions, recordings, journal entries) to uncover evidence supporting a recurring theme. This practice ensured the observables derived from this study were accurate because the information drew from individuals, multiple sources of information, and observable collection processes.

Analysis

In this study, I was interested in learning about the participants' psychological realm and their interpretation of their life experiences. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) served as the philosophical underpinning to analyze the narratives of the three Latina superintendents. The goal of this qualitative study was to uncover the beliefs and constructs that are made, manifested, or suggested during the participant's

conversation (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Analysis for this study is accomplished in three stages.

First, the organization of each participant's observables and transcript was assigned to an individual folder in a binder that included all relevant information to that participant, such the signed consent form, transcripts from the initial interview, field notes, and copies of documents provided by the participant. The word-perfect transcripts from the respective voice recordings of each *plática* were transcribed by the researcher and printed onto letter size paper and kept in a binder, as well as saved as a computer file. Each participant's folder was structured in identical order that allowed for easy recovery of the observables. Throughout the collection stage, the information was evaluated and managed to check for discrepancies that would not be included in the study.

Second, content analysis was utilized as the primary source to identify core meaning through patterns or themes (Patton, 2002). Each transcript, in isolation and in order of the interview, was subjected to the following to find convergence and divergence in the observables. First, the respective voice recordings were transcribed by the researcher within 5-10 days of the interview. In order to provide the thick description, the researcher kept in her possession the voice recorder containing the interview recordings. I was able to readily listen to each *plática* and develop an appreciation for the subtleties and nuances present by the respective participants' tone of voice and inflections. Repeated listening of the voice recordings of interviews and reviewing the copies of transcripts provided me the opportunity to critically interpret the observables and produce a thick description of the phenomenon that was studied. Second, each transcript was read a number of times, with the right margin used to annotate interesting, significant, or

similar responses. Third, after the initial notes, the transcript was reread and the left margin was utilized to document emerging themes. Fourth, the themes from the transcript were listed on separate sheets of paper based on the order of the interviews. Fifth, the researcher then looked at the 3 separate sheets of paper for connections between the themes which were emerging. As the themes emerged, they were checked in the transcript to make sure the connections were the actual words of the participant. Finally, the sheets of paper from the 3 transcripts were then analyzed and compared for convergence and divergence in the observables.

Third, a matrix was produced of the themes that captured most strongly the participants' concerns on the topic. The matrix lists the theoretical frameworks and the research question and subquestions. The themes, which supported each sub-theme, and an identifier was added to each instance to aid the organization of the analysis and facilitate finding in the original source (transcripts). The identifier indicated where in the transcript instances of each theme can be found by listing key words from the particular extract plus the page number of the transcript.

In addition, discussions with peers transpired to allow me the opportunity to verbally articulate thoughts and ideas regarding emerging themes. In essence, persistent reflection was an opportunity to think out loud and have someone not intimately familiar with the details of the interview transcripts respond to my thoughts and ideas, as per emerging themes and ideas. I can document the procedures for checking and rechecking the observables throughout the study. This study assured conformability by way of voice recordings of each interview, verbatim transcripts of the recordings, and my electronic

journal. These mechanisms allowed the means for the observables to be traced to its original source.

Ethical Considerations

Before I began the study, I followed the procedures required for ethical research (Patton, 2002) and submitted a request for approval from Texas State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Once the participants' were identified, I emailed and reviewed the consent form prior to scheduling the *plática*; I informed each participant that they could discontinue participation in the study at any time. Prior to the *plática*, I gave each participant a copy of the consent form (See Appendix B). For this case study, protecting the participants' identity was of great importance because so few Latinas have been or currently are superintendents. I assigned pseudonyms to the Latina superintendents to protect their identity and respect their privacy. All observables collected were carefully documented using the assigned pseudonyms. Anonymity in regards to participants' identity per transcript, emerging themes and coding was maintained during all peer debriefing activities.

The member checks strategy, "which is the most important criterion in establishing credibility" (Mertens, 2005, p. 255) was employed to validate the themes with the participants. The themes were developed from the observables collected and analyzed gathered throughout the research stage. Transcripts of the *pláticas* and a draft of the respective research report was shared with each participant, and follow-up phone conversations and emails took place to allow the participants to verify and clarify the researcher's perspectives, as well as those of the respective participants.

As stated in the IRB, there was very little risk associated with participating in the study; however, I always kept in mind, and monitored, that through the very nature of *pláticas*, participants could become emotional due to reflecting and recalling of uncomfortable memories that they experienced in the past, such as a life changing event or racism.

Summary

This study represents an opportunity to add to the research of Latinas in education. Latinas, past and present, have experiences and stories that need to be told, documented, and researched. I am confident the narrative accounts of these three Latinas will be significant for current and future generations in order to implement systemic change in the different levels of education. The life-narrative account of these Latinas gave a glimpse of the Latina cultural perspective and epitomizes the cultural congruence and incongruence they experienced.

This chapter focused on describing the methods that were used in analyzing the phenomenological study of the life-narrative accounts of three Latina participants. I described my process of observables collection and analysis, as well as the steps taken to conduct ethical research. The next chapter presents study findings by profiling each participant using her own words.

CHAPTER IV

PROFILES OF THREE LATINA SUPERINTENDENTS

This chapter presents the profiles of the three Latina superintendents who participated in this study. Much like gathering a team of experts in any field to review and analyze a particular issue, based on expertise, experience, and competence, these participants represent the phenomenon. The following pages provide a glimpse into the background and personal and professional beliefs of Patricia Soto-Smith, Claudia Gutierrez, and Leticia Zavala. First, the demographic observables, as illustrated in table 4.1 and 4.2, provide personal and administrative information of the participants. Table 4.3, illustrates the respective school district information. Next, the participants' profiles are meant to be biographical in nature, analyzed through interpretative phenomenological analysis, and written in first person, to provide the reader a background from which to better understand and situate the three participants.

Demographic Information

The primary purpose of this section is to provide descriptive quantifiable statistics related to each participant. The personal and administrative demographics obtained for each study participant are represented in Table 4.1 and Table 4.2. The personal and administrative observables highlight the following parallels among the 3 participants. First, they are within a 10 year age span from each other. Second, none of them identified their race/ethnicity as "Latina", but the 3 participants do use "Hispanic" as either the primary or secondary race/ethnicity. Third, they have been married only once. Fourth, they earned their administrative experience at the elementary level. Finally, they earned their doctorate. Curiously, I inquired about their respective dissertation topics, and they

each had chosen a topic in curriculum and instruction. The differences in the observables are the following: 2 out of the 3 participants identified themselves as “Chicana/Hispanic”, 2 out of the 3 are still married, 2 out of 3 have children, and 2 out of the 3 have served in more than one school district.

Table 4.1 Personal Demographics

Participant*	Age	Degree	Marital status	Race/ ethnicity	Children (<i>n</i>)
Patricia Soto-Smith	60s	Ph.D.	Married	Hispanic American	1
Claudia Gutierrez	50s	Ph.D.	Divorced	Chicana/ Hispanic	2
Leticia Zavala	60s	Ed.D.	Married	Chicana/ Hispanic	0

Note. * Pseudonyms are used to maintain the confidentiality of participants.

Table 4.2 Administrative Experience

Participant*	Administrative level experience	Experience in Years	
		As superintendent	In education
Dr. Patricia Soto-Smith	Elementary	7	35
Dr. Claudia Gutierrez	Elementary	3	23
Dr. Leticia Zavala	Elementary	8	25

Note. * Pseudonyms are used to maintain the confidentiality of participants.

The district demographic observable, represented in Table 4.3 describes the respective school districts each participant served as superintendent. The district’s observables, identified the similarities and differences between the school districts, and if Latina superintendents are predisposed to getting hired in primarily low socio-economic, high Latino population school districts. According to the district observables, the three participants were hired in predominantly Latino public school district, and they also had the majority of students identified as qualifying for the free and reduced lunch program.

Table 4.3 District Demographics

Participant*	Years as Sup.	District size	Latino %	Free and Reduced %
Dr. Patricia Soto-Smith				
District 1	5	2,800	90	95
District 2	2	4,500	88	90
Dr. Claudia Gutierrez	3	> 1,000	95	100
Dr. Leticia Zavala				
District 1	4	6,000	76	70
District 2	4	12,000	80	65

Note. * Pseudonyms are used to maintain the confidentiality of participants.

Participants' Profiles

In this section, I have purposely chosen a first-person writing style, which allows me to introduce each participant using detailed interpretative phenomenological analysis to depict a holistic portrayal of individuals' experiences. The profile for each participant includes first impressions, self-identification of ethnicity, and a review of their family and career history. Each participant profile concludes with a brief description of their respective appointment to the superintendency, as reported by the participant.

Patricia Soto-Smith

I contacted Dr. Patricia Soto-Smith, who at the time of the research was employed as a curriculum consultant, in early May. She quickly agreed to be part of my research and requested that we meet at her home. I arrived a few hours ahead of schedule for our interview and decided to drive around the town before heading to Soto-Smith's home. The town's main street was speckled with mom-and-pop stores, selling everything from groceries to furniture. I sought and quickly located the landmark that typifies all small towns . . . the local high school. The main building was small and run down, but was surrounded by a few upgraded buildings, evidence of a recent bond having been passed.

The football stadium displayed banners on the surrounding chain link fence as proof of the winning history of the school team. The high school was surrounded by modest homes that had nicely manicured lawns. Some residents still had signs highlighting their high school athlete. As I drove to Soto-Smith's home, I crossed the train tracks and found myself in the less affluent part of town; the homes were smaller and the lawns were not as green, but still maintained. A noticeable change was the local business signage, which was now predominantly in Spanish . . . *lavandería*¹ and *panadería*².

Upon my arrival at Soto-Smith's home, I noticed she was waiting for me on a swing on her front porch. She greeted me warmly with an *abrazo*³ and a kiss on the cheek, as if we had been long-time friends. We formally introduced ourselves and she escorted me into her home. Soto-Smith was an elegant woman, tall in stature, and dressed in business casual attire. She had a light complexion, short greyish hair, and wore glasses. Before we started the *plática*, she asked questions about my doctoral program, my family, and my aspirations. She seemed very interested in me and stated I reminded her of Sandra, her daughter because of my long black hair and tall stature. I shared my history with Soto-Smith and showed her pictures of my husband and son. The reflection into my background by Soto-Smith indicates she was attempting to find out about me just as much as I was trying to find out about her life.

Soto-Smith then proudly gave me a tour of the home she had grown up in many years earlier. Family pictures were readily visible and proudly displayed in the family room. Soto-Smith's life and that of her family had been meticulously chronicled on the walls of this modest home. The photos which lined the hallway wall started in black and

¹ Laundry mat

² Bakery

³ Hug

white and end in color. As we walked down the hallway, Soto-Smith made it a point to share the name of all the people in the photos.

As we started our *plática*, I noted that Soto-Smith had a commanding voice and boisterous laugh. Her hands were animated as she spoke. Soto-Smith was born in a midsize, centrally located Texas city. Her mother's parents had immigrated to the United States from France when they were young children. Her father's family was from Mexico. Soto-Smith noted that there were strong European and Mexican ties in her family. Both sides of the family were proud of their ancestry. As she remarked:

My maternal grandmother would talk to me about her parents, her dad wearing a cloak and dagger and all that kind of stuff, which I thought was kind of neat because it kind of romanticizes it just a little bit (laughter) . . . especially with her accent. I always thought of them as good bedtime stories. My paternal grandmother spoke only Spanish. I don't remember how I learned Spanish or when I started to understand her, but I did. *Abuelita*⁴, as we called her, would tell us scary stories, such as *La Llorona*⁵ to prevent us from playing far from the house.

Even though Soto-Smith's European ancestry influenced her family because her maternal grandparents lived in the same house with her family, she self-identified herself as a Hispanic American and felt a stronger bond to her Mexican or Hispanic family:

It wasn't until I got older, did I realize I had been called Chicana, Latina, Hispanic . . . whatever, and I don't really care what I was called by others, but I prefer to call myself Hispanic American or Spanish American. My father's family referred

⁴ Grandmother

⁵ The crying lady

to me as *güera*⁶. It must have been because of my light hair and green eyes. I didn't look like any of my siblings . . . they inherited my father's genes, and I looked like my mom.

Soto-Smith explained that her family rarely ever ate the traditional Mexican food most Hispanic people ate in the surrounding community. She said,

My mother or maternal grandmother never made menudo or tamales, we never made anything like that. It was always more European rice and fish and things like that because my mother's mother was the cook. So I don't know if that was a kind of insolence. I don't ever remember our kitchen in our house smelling like homemade tortillas like my abuelitas house or my friends' kitchens did. All of my friends had someone who made tortillas, beans, and chile . . . that kind of stuff but we rarely did. So it was kind of a different atmosphere, I guess.

Soto-Smith grew up in a trilingual household. Her paternal grandparents were native Spanish speakers and spoke little to no English and her maternal grandparents were native French speakers and were proficient in English. Her mother was fluent in speaking and reading English and French. Her father was fluent in Spanish; however, he did not consider himself bilingual because he spoke very poor English:

He really didn't care about his verbal communication skills in English because he had lots of friends in all realms of society. I used to get embarrassed, and I am embarrassed to say that I got embarrassed by some of the things that he would say when he tried to speak English.

⁶ Blonde

Soto-Smith elaborated that her father was a great role model. He was a hard-working man and did not care that his grammar was not perfect because he could still work and communicate:

My dad only had a third-grade education and worked 12 hour days and still had the time to serve in several political positions in our community. He took the skills that he had and made the best of them. He was the only man I knew that [*sic*] could sit down and do any crossword puzzle in ink, in a matter of literally minutes, and do it correctly. So he had the command of the language, the written language, but not spoken, so it was always kind of a mystery to me. He was a great man, and every day I lived my life to make him proud.

Soto-Smith is the second of five children and has an older sister and three younger brothers. The children were primarily raised by their parents, and an extended family that was comprised of their paternal and maternal grandparents. They were brought up to value education and to believe there was nothing they could not accomplish, whether it was winning a competition or becoming doctor. Her mother completed high school and her father did not go beyond third grade. These educational limitations did not deter from her parents' belief and support of education. From her earliest childhood, Soto-Smith recalled her parents always bought books to read to their children, or for her and her siblings to read on their own. The daily newspaper and current issues of numerous magazines were always present in their home. Soto-Smith recalled that learning came easy for her and that she was a stellar student, all along receiving academic accolades. Soto-Smith readily admitted that throughout her elementary years, she was considered the

“teacher’s pet” by her peers and made it a practice to play *escuelita*⁷ with her younger brothers at home. Although Soto-Smith does not remember having discussions with her parents about education beyond high school, she does remember hearing her older sister and her friends talk about going away to college.

At the age of 15, Soto-Smith had a tragic event in her young life. Soto-Smith’s father died in an accident. Soto-Smith recalls the day she received the news:

I was in high school, in my English class when the principal came to get me. The first thought that came through my head, was that I was in trouble. He took me to his office and both my grandfathers were sitting in his office. I didn’t know what to think all I saw were tears coming from their eyes. The principal had to give me the news. I didn’t believe him...I didn’t believe him (sigh).

The unexpected passing of her father caused Soto-Smith’s mother to find a job that would be able to support a family of 5 children. Fortunately, the family had support of both sets of grandparents, especially that of her maternal grandparents. Even after her father passed away, her mother and her grandparents continued to stress the importance of education by following the same routine her father had done for years before:

I remember my dad, and later my mother and grandparents, asking me every day to show them an assignment that had been graded by my teacher, and every day I had to show them something. If I didn’t, they would ask me to read the Bible and I would have to write a summary of the passage.

After her father’s passing Soto-Smith recalls spending more time at school, either helping teachers, participating in student clubs, or studying in the library. During her senior year, Soto-Smith was counseled by one of her teachers to apply to one of the most

⁷ School

prestigious universities in the nation. Soto-Smith was accepted and received a full scholarship to Columbia. Because Soto-Smith still had her 3 younger brothers at home, her mother suggested that the ancillary expenses associated with going away to college were more than the family could afford. Soto-Smith recalls:

Although I wanted to go to Columbia, I knew it would be difficult for my family, not only financially, but also because I would have had to move away from the family. That would be hard. After my father's death, my mother became even more protective. My brothers' couldn't even play outside without supervision. I actually was more disappointed because I felt like I was letting my teacher down as opposed to my family.

After graduation, Soto-Smith did not attend Columbia. Her mother counseled her to seek enrollment into one of the local colleges. Soto-Smith attended the same college her sister did and received her bachelor's degree in education. It was during that time she met the man she would eventually marry:

I knew as soon as I met John Smith that he would be the man I would marry.

Although he was White, he reminded me of my dad. He had a kind demeanor and kind eyes. Somehow he also radiated a strong confidence. My dad pushed me and supported me in a different way than my mother. I saw the same motivation and support from him.

Soto-Smith decided to hyphenate her last name because she felt with her maiden name of Soto it was inherently known, or at least inferred, that it was of Spanish descent, and associated with the Hispanic culture:

If you happen to have blonde hair with green eyes and the last name of Smith people might not associate you with the Hispanic culture. The last name of Smith removes me from the culture I grew up in . . . in some people's eyes. I am proud of my Spanish surname and heritage. I am proud to be my father's daughter.

Soto-Smith started teaching English at the local high school as soon as she graduated from college. Soto-Smith wanted to make a difference in her community beyond being a teacher. In addition, to teaching Soto-Smith was involved in city politics and wanted to improve K-12 education in her community. During the 21 years of teaching, besides being a teacher, Soto-Smith held the titles of Dean of English and Department Chair. Soto-Smith's professional and personal life was very demanding. She had a child, was involved in city politics, and took part in several district and campus based curriculum committees. Because of her demonstrated leadership skills, Soto-Smith was encouraged to go back to school at the urging of her principal. She did earn her Master's degree, along with a principal and superintendent certification. Soto-Smith applied for several administrative positions after she obtained her principal certification, but was unsuccessful at acquiring a position.

One day in April, Soto-Smith saw a superintendent vacancy notice for a public school district in the local newspaper. She met all the minimum requirements and with the support of her husband requested an application packet. The position had been in a small rural school district with 2,800 students. The free or reduced lunch population in the district was 95% and the student population was approximately 90% Latino. The district had experienced four superintendents in five years.

The school district had been receiving, as Soto-Smith remarked, “a lot of negative publicity in the local papers due to the actions of the school board.” The school board had also been reprimanded for violations of the Open Meeting Act:

I knew that it was not going to be an easy job. I didn’t realize how hard, but I knew that it was going to be a difficult job and I thought, well if I last long, fine. If I don’t, well, I thought I would give it my best and just go for it.

The school board had been without a superintendent for 3-4 months and had hired a search consultant to conduct the search and serve as interim superintendent. The search firm narrowed the applicant pool and two applicants were invited to interview for the position: Dr. Soto-Smith and a Latino superintendent. The day interviews had been scheduled, the Latino withdrew his name from consideration without divulging a reason.

The five-member school board, whose membership had included two Latinas and three Latinos, took turns asking questions about budget, construction, and curriculum. Soto-Smith explained, “I did my homework,” adding that she thought the school board was impressed with her knowledge about the district. On the same day she was interviewed, the school board offered her the position.

Soto-Smith admitted she had been a bit nervous about accepting the position because of her lack of prior experience in administration. Ultimately, she believed that her experience in education and city politics was a good educational fit for this school district; in addition, she had impressed the school board. Soto-Smith freely admitted that nothing could have prepared her for what she was soon to experience in the superintendency.

During the first year, she attempted to get community input to develop the district plan and felt her political background would come in handy. These type of efforts, according to the literature, recognize the existence of both subtle and overt forms of control that shape the definitions of leadership, and therefore, those who fit as a leader (Toom, Lugg & Bogotch, 2010). According to Soto-Smith, although she felt she was a good fit for the district, the difficulties that ensued were attributed to the school board president's aversion to relinquishing control of running the district and funds. Soto-Smith reported that school board meetings had become contentious:

I had one board member who threw a writing tablet at me and told me that he couldn't work with me at all because I was too stubborn . . . I had one that [*sic*] grabbed my finger and said, "Don't you point at me." I had another one that quit because he said I was just impossible, and so it was really exciting.

Within approximately one year from Soto-Smith's date of hire, the majority of the school board members had resigned. Soto-Smith recalled, "I got five new board members that were absolutely marvelous, just fabulous." During the tenure of the new school board many projects were completed. Soto-Smith remained in her first superintendency for five years. During the interview, I uncovered that Soto-Smith had also been appointed to a second superintendency.

Soto-Smith explained that after she had completed five years in her first superintendency, she resigned at the end of her contract to accept an associate superintendent position in a neighboring community. Soto-Smith felt that she could serve the neighboring community in a supportive capacity, as opposed to taking a leadership role, due to her having to take care of her elderly mother. Five months after she had

accepted the position, the school board had appointed her interim superintendent for a few months and later appointed her to the superintendency.

During the early months of her appointment, Soto-Smith uncovered once again concerns with members of the school board. She made several attempts to correct these problems, however, the school board refused to change their practices. Soto-Smith stated that soon after she brought these problems to their attention, her relationship with the school board began to deteriorate. Two years later, the school board terminated her employment with the district at the end of her contract. Soto-Smith is uncertain whether she would apply for another superintendency, saying,

I am content doing what I am doing now . . . and that is giving back to my community without having to wake up in the morning worrying about who I am going to make angry today. Don't get me wrong, I loved being a superintendent, but at my age, I have learned to leave that political game behind and let young folks take the lead.

Soto-Smith attributes her breaking the glass ceiling in the superintendency to several factors. First, the strong family support and values provided by her parents and her extended family. Although Soto-Smith grew up in bi-racial family setting, both parents and grandparents shared the same philosophy of supporting the family. According to Soto-Smith, "This created an atmosphere where I did not want to let any of them down. I always had to do my best. They had high standards because we represented the family." The family support was evident throughout the *plática*. After she got married it continued with her husband. Second, Soto-Smith was exposed to different cultures from an early age that required her to assimilate into each culture at a young age. This was an

advantage because it helped her recognize the differences in cultures, especially when Soto-Smith had to begin navigating the political elements in her community. Although Soto-Smith did not state she was raised in believing there were traditional gender roles for men and women, it was evident from the conversation that all the children were raised to be independent and were supported in their individual talents. Third, Soto-Smith readily admits the untimely passing of her father allowed her to see her mother in a different light because she became head of the household. It was during this time that her mother and grandmother ultimately became her first mentors. They both were strong women who displayed a hardworking work ethic regardless of the obstacles they encountered. In addition, it was at that time Soto-Smith spent more time at school which created a stronger bond with some of her teachers. Finally, if it would not have been for Soto-Smith's principal who identified her leadership skills and encouraged her to go back to school, Soto-Smith admits she might have never gone back to school to earn her Master's degree, let alone a doctorate.

Claudia Gutierrez

I spoke to Gutierrez over the phone in mid-May. She agreed to participate in the research only if I could accommodate her request to meet in June. I gladly agreed and we met in June, after the school year had ended. We met for the first time when I arrived at her office building to conduct the interview. As I entered the small, unassuming building, we exchanged formal introductions. She introduced me to her office staff and walked me around the hallways. Gutierrez was proud of her staff as she highlighted the photos hanging in the lobby. In addition, she pointed out student art work that was prominently displayed in hallways and offices. Her office was decorated in bright colors. Several

trinkets from students were displayed on her desk. Although this was her office, it did not feel like an office, the student work created an atmosphere similar to that of a classroom, in which a teacher proudly displays the work of her students.

Gutierrez was small in stature and exuded self-confidence. Her dark hair had streaks of grey and was pulled back in a sleek bun. She had a medium to dark complexion. She spoke with a slight accent and occasionally inserted Spanish words into her speech.

Before we started the formal interview, she shared with me a problem she encountered with one of her principals. Knowing I was a high school principal, she sought my advice. I could see she was visibly upset about the situation. We talked about several solutions she might consider. I detected, based on her mannerisms and comments, she was genuinely appreciative of my feedback and possibly testing my knowledge and trust. After she thanked me multiple times, we started the *plática*.

Gutierrez had been raised by two parents, both of whom were native Spanish speakers and eventually became bilingual. Her mother stayed at home to care for the children and did not learn to speak English until she was older. Her father felt it was important for his family to maintain their Mexican culture and traditions in everything they did, from eating dinner together as a family every evening to *celebrandó con fiestas*⁸. Gutierrez was the youngest of six children, 2 sisters and 3 brothers, and the most vocal of the siblings. Her father had worked for the railroad company and did not live at home during the week. He believed that his sons should go get an education to support the family and the daughters should get married and stay home:

⁸ Celebrating with parties

Although my parents valued education and felt educators walked on water, they weren't involved in my education, nor my sisters'. They expected my sisters and me to find a *novio*⁹, graduate from high school, get married, and have babies. Our priorities were to learn how to cook and clean, while my brothers focused on school work and were able to play sports. Because of this belief, I felt I needed to prove my parents that a girl could do more than cook and clean . . . Unlike my sisters who seemed content, I wanted to go to college. I guess I was considered the black sheep of my family.

Gutierrez self-identified as Chicana rather than Latina because of her Mexican descent. It was her opinion that the term Latina/o best describes someone from Latin America. She was raised in a predominately Mexican community in Texas. At home, she spoke Spanish and transitioned to English at school or when talking to her friends. During her childhood, she had little interaction with the White culture. As she explained, "It was a culture shock when I first went to college . . . where the majority of the people were White . . . White students, White professors. You know what I mean?"

Gutierrez's parents raised her to appreciate all cultures even though she was raised in a Mexican community. She explained,

The way I was raised was never in the sense of looking at color. It was not until high school that I began to notice people were prejudiced. Even from Mexican people. I encountered some counselors who said, "You're not going to go anywhere because you're Hispanic." So, that was my second slap in the face because it was not what I was capable of doing but because of my race and my color.

⁹ Boyfriend

Gutierrez added there were few differences between cultures: “We are all so similar . . . there is that stigma of the variance of degree of color in your skin, which makes it extremely interesting to me as to why we are so prejudiced in that manner.”

The family culture of women not attending college was predominantly conveyed by her father. Gutierrez knew that if she were to follow in her brothers footsteps she would have to convince her father of her plans:

I thought I had a bit of influence on my *papa* because I was the *neña* (baby of the family). I had to talk to him every time he was home, which wasn't very often, and let him know this is what I wanted to do. In high school, I knew I didn't want to get married. I did know that I wanted to get my bachelor's and become the first girl in my family to go to college.

Gutierrez's motivation to go to college and make a living came from *consejos*¹⁰ from her mother, when her father was not around:

I remember from a young age my mother telling me I was her smartest baby. I learned to walk and talk before any of my other brothers and sisters. Every morning as she brushed my hair, she would share her dreams she had as a young girl. I don't think my father knew or knows my mother wanted to be a nurse before she got married. She always suggested for me to go into the medical field so I can help people, and I wouldn't have rely on anyone for money or for things that I wanted.

While in her junior year in high school, Gutierrez encountered a counselor who dissuaded her from going to college and advised her to listen to her parents. If it had not been for the assistance of a different high school counselor who convinced Gutierrez to

¹⁰ Advice

look at going to college because of her high SAT scores, she probably would have given up. Gutierrez, with the help of the counselor, researched numerous college financial aid programs that provided grants and scholarships for Hispanic students who wanted to attend college. Gutierrez admits she wanted to leave home and experience life outside of her community. She applied to several out-of-state universities. She did not know why she applied to The Ohio State University, but she did and was accepted. Because of her outstanding academic performance, she was offered a full scholarship, but her father would not allow her to accept the offer. In response to her father's refusal to allow her to accept the scholarship, Gutierrez did not enroll in college after she graduated from high school, but went to work full-time and became engaged to be married. Her fiancé was her high school sweetheart. During Gutierrez's early married years, one of her brothers lived with her and her husband. The brother was in college, and Gutierrez often helped him with his studies. On one occasion, Gutierrez's husband suggested that she should enroll in college:

At that time, we didn't have any children, so it was easy to get back into the routine of going to school. I applied for grants to help with tuition costs. I continued working and enrolled only as a part-time student. It would take me 10 years and two children to complete my bachelor's degree.

At the age of 38 and after several years as a teacher, Gutierrez found herself divorced and the custodial parent of her two children. During that time, she had earned her master's degree at the urging of her principal, who Gutierrez identified as one of her mentors, and the convenience of it being paid for by the district. Gutierrez never felt the desire to enter the administrative realm; however, her colleagues suggested she begin

applying. Soon after her divorce, Gutierrez accepted her first administrative position of assistant principal. That position had required her to relocate, so she informed her ex-husband that he needed to assume responsibility for the care of their two children:

Although it is uncommon for a Mexican mother to leave her children with their father, it was a good decision. He was a great father, plus my parents would also be able to watch over them. Selfishly, I wanted to prove to my father and ex-husband that I could make it on my own. I guess I was tired of the stereotype that I had to depend on a man to support me. A *consejo* my mother told me from very young.

During this time, Gutierrez had the great fortune once again to be surrounded by forward-thinking people at her new district. For the second time in her profession, she was encouraged to earn her doctorate by her principal. She, along with her principal, applied to and was accepted into a curriculum and instruction doctoral program. She was progressing in her studies when one of her professors suggested she consider the superintendency program offered by the university:

I had no aspirations to be a superintendent, but was counseled by a professor. The essence of good leadership was the same despite the program. I did pursue it, was admitted, and transferred into the superintendency program.

Upon completion of her doctoral coursework, she returned to the community in which she had grown up to work as an administrator. Gutierrez served as a K-12 principal in a district where the free or reduced lunch population was 100% and the Latino student population was more than 95%. It had been her intention to return to her home community, become the principal, and remain in that position until she retired.

During her fourth year as principal, the superintendent announced his retirement. Several school board members inquired whether she would be interested in applying for the position. Gutierrez explained,

I didn't think I was ready. I didn't know at that time if I wanted to be a superintendent; however, my father became my biggest cheerleader. We had a long conversation late one night and he brought the job opportunity into perspective when he asked, "*Mija, porque tienes miedo. Sabes lo que tienes que hacer.*" I was afraid, but I also knew what I had to do. My father knew how hard I had worked, and he was finally able to see me . . . my strength . . . *mi poder.*

Gutierrez realized this is one-time opportunity. As she reflected on what she was afraid of, Gutierrez recognized that it was the fear of failure. She was afraid of letting her parents and her children down:

I was afraid of letting my mother down, because somehow I felt she was living vicariously through me, especially after my divorce. I could see it in her eyes, she had so much more to offer but something held her back. I never figured it out. Was it my father or something intrinsic? I was also afraid that I would lose my father's respect for everything that I had accomplished up to this point in my life. I didn't want him to see me as a failure if I wasn't successful. And finally, my fear for my children. They had been through so much, and I didn't know how they would respond especially since I hadn't been there as the primary care giver for several years and now I had the potential of leading the district in which they attended school. I had a lot to think about.

The school board persisted with their inquiries and Gutierrez had agonized over the decision. She said, “I kept thinking about it and praying and saying I don’t know if I can do this (laughter). I think I prayed the rosary almost every night.” Gutierrez recalls that even at a young age, when she had doubts or wanted comfort she turned to spiritual guidance; A facet that continues on today in her life.

Gutierrez met with the school board to consider the possibility of applying for the position based on her analysis on being the right fit for the district. The superintendent, board president, and a female school board member met in a local restaurant. They reviewed their expectations for the superintendency role. She said,

It was scary because they talked about different things that needed to be accomplished. They couldn’t finish construction; they had to pass the bond so we were all going to have to work on that, and I’d never done that. Now, what do I know about construction? That was scary.

After the initial meeting with the board, Gutierrez agreed to interview for the position. The interview committee was composed of the school board members, three of whom were Latino retired teachers and two Latinas, one parent and one retired teacher. In addition, the board president was Latino. Gutierrez recalled that the interview had seemed informal and felt more like a *plática* than an interview. During the interview, the school board reviewed the changes that were needed, including their desire to remove a few of the top-level people in the district from their respective positions. At the conclusion of the interview, the school board had offered her the position. Gutierrez knew her acceptance of the superintendency would result in a steep learning curve, but she was up

for the challenge, especially since the school district had experienced four superintendents in six years.

Throughout our *plática*, Gutierrez spoke about her experiences as superintendent, and she relayed that the school board frequently listened too much to the community:

They'll come in and say, "We've got to change this because a community member is upset about this." My typical response was, "Well, have the community member come in and talk to me. We'll see what we can work out."

The community member never comes . . . I don't know if this really is the community, the parents, or it's a board member.

Gutierrez made it clear that she was frustrated with the inability of the school board to openly discuss issues without disguising them as community concerns.

Gutierrez attributes her breaking the glass ceiling in the superintendency to several factors. First, she acknowledges that growing up in a very traditional household, with traditional gender roles, gave her the self-imposed drive to break the mold from that of her mother and sisters. Although her mother gave her *consejos*¹¹, Gutierrez does not recall her mother ever publicly encouraging her to go against her father's wishes. In addition, her father had the expectation of all his children finishing high school. Second, she was exposed mentors as a young adult, in the form of her older brothers who had the opportunity of attending college and a counselor who helped her realize there were opportunities for her at the college level. Third, the support and encouragement she received of her now ex-spouse and colleagues to pursue her dreams and continue with her education. Finally, Gutierrez still wonders what would have happened if she would have given up her dreams of going to college after speaking to the first high school counselor.

¹¹ Advice

One can assume several reasons for the counselors response, Gutierrez interpreted it as a counselor who did not care about the future of students and did not expand further regarding race or ethnicity.

Leticia Zavala

Zavala was contacted in late May and agreed to an interview on a Saturday morning in her office. When I arrived, she greeted me with a firm handshake and a semi-*abrazo*¹². She gave me a tour of her two-story office building complex, as she reviewed the districts demographics. Upon entering her office, I noticed her three diplomas mounted proudly on the wall behind her desk, as were various awards and certificates. Her office décor and furniture were contemporary and was very spacious. On her desk there was a black and white photo of her and her husband, along with a small notebook positioned in the middle of the desk. The desk and shelves were void of any ancillary papers.

Zavala was of medium stature and had a self-confidence that was immediately noticeable. She had short brown hair, medium complexion, and wore glasses. She expressed herself with deliberate self-assurance and was soft spoken.

Zavala was born in Texas but when she was an infant her father and mother moved the family to Mexico to live closer to her maternal grandparents. Zavala, along with her siblings, were raised in Mexico until she was 9 years old and in the fourth grade. Zavala is the eldest of five children. When she was 9 years old, her family moved back to a small west Texas town with a population of 300 people. The family moved in with her paternal grandparents. Zavala reflects on the move,

I remember my parents being very excited that we were moving back to Texas, I

¹² Hug

think they were saying that because we, the children, didn't want to move. I was going to miss my *buela y buelo*¹³ (grandmother and grandfather) and my friends. Once my parents told us we were moving, *papi*¹⁴ spoke a little more English to us. It didn't help.

Zavala, and her siblings, attended the local public schools, but "local" for the community included a 20-mile bus ride each way between home and school. Zavala acknowledges she encountered problems when she entered the Texas public school system as a 5th grader:

It was a horrible experience. I felt misunderstood and it seemed the harder I tried, the more it seemed like I was behind compared to my classmates, even though I was in an ESL classroom. The teacher rarely, if ever, spoke or taught in Spanish. In México, I was at the top of my class. In Texas, I was at the bottom and children can be mean if you are perceived as different. I was different because I did not speak *inglés*¹⁵ very well, and when I did speak I had an accent.

Zavala was retained in 5th grade because of her lack of grasping the English language. This was a life altering experience for her because she was not accustomed to being seen as a failure. It wasn't until she was in high school that she started speaking English fluently. She enrolled in a class that visited elementary schools to tutor students. It was at that time that she realized her goal was to make a difference for students who are English language learners.

¹³ Grandmother and grandfather

¹⁴ Dad

¹⁵ English

When they moved to Texas, Zavala was given the opportunity to operate farm and ranch equipment because she was the eldest child, which served to give her a confidence to believe there were no limits to what she could do. As she explained,

I aspired to do whatever I put my mind to do, regardless of my gender . . . especially because of my gender. I heard it several times growing up, what I could and couldn't do because I was a girl. I never heard that from my dad, but I heard it from other people.

Zavala's cultural heritage, values, and family support came in the shape of religious and spiritual obligations. The family was very involved with the Catholic community, both in Mexico and Texas, and made it a point to volunteer their services on a daily basis. Zavala remembers attending mass on Wednesdays and Sundays as well as participating in the church youth groups throughout the week. The family hosted prayer circles on Saturday nights and Sunday dinners for the congregation. Zavala recalls,

Our house always had people from the church. My mother took pride in hosting parties or prayer groups or just having *café*¹⁶ with the ladies. I was raised to be part of our community and to make a difference. I don't know how my parents did it but they worked long hours, raised a family, and dedicated their life to serving the church.

Zavala self-identified as a Chicana first and a Hispanic second. She rarely referred to herself as Latina. She offered the following explanation:

As a Chicana, I consider myself to be more active because through the years we had to struggle for equality and fair treatment, so in my own way, I was involved in many of the movements for La Raza for Chicanos. I don't view it as a

¹⁶ Coffee

derogatory term. In terms of Hispanic, of course to me that is more of a political statement, a political language that has been adopted here in the United States to identify all of those who come from a Hispanic background. So they could be from any Spanish-speaking country throughout the world, so that brings us together with that common language. However, our cultures are very different but it is the common language that brings us together. Then Latina, even though that is used very much in the media, I don't use that on a regular basis to identify myself. I view it more as commercialization.

Zavala stated her mother served as her first mentor and had the greatest impact on her life because she had been the first Chicana woman that she knew of to cross the railroad tracks to get a job. According to Zavala, the Mexicans had resided on the north side of town, while the Whites resided on the south side of town. Her mother essentially broke the ethnic barrier in her community by finding better employment in a café across the railroad tracks. She described her mother as an activist in her time and her father as lighter skinned and having a charming personality. He was connected with the White side of town because of his skin color.

Upon graduation from high school, she attended a nearby university, and because of her love of writing and the English language, she majored in journalism. While in college, she married and her focus shifted. She transferred to a different college and ultimately earned a bachelor's degree in English and pursued a teaching career. Zavala was raised to value service and give back to her community, to make a difference in the community. This value of giving back, coupled with her personal academic experience, influenced her conscious decision to return to her community and teach at her alma

mater. Zavala had received excellent grades especially after her being retained in 5th grade and felt she was a good student, but in college, she struggled. She realized that her peers were better prepared. She vowed to return to her home community, to be a teacher, and to do all she could to ensure this would not happen to another student from her home town.

During her teaching tenure, there was high principal turnover. She was convinced that it was incumbent upon her to provide the necessary consistency for the students. She said,

I accepted any charge from my administrators, and completed each task with pride. It was then when my principal suggested I return to school and pursue a master's degree. In the midst of a very hectic work life, I enrolled in a weekend master's program. The rest is history.

Zavala became assistant principal and then principal of a middle school campus and worked in that capacity for 8 years. She later transitioned to a central office job as an assistant director for elementary schools in a district of 44,000 students.

Zavala saw the webpage posting that had announced the superintendent vacancy, noting that the school board had been conducting a nationwide search. The previous superintendent had resigned after serving 11 years in the position. Zavala had been aware of the state of the district. She offered the following comments:

The community was basically torn in half . . . some . . . were still supporting the previous superintendent. The community was upset with the board and everybody had an opinion as to how it should have been handled or could have been handled differently. So even though this district had gone through all of this turmoil, I felt

like I can help this situation to heal because of my training, my background, all the experience that I've had. I could be of help.

Zavala's background in education, as well as the experience she was exposed to at a young age for helping families in need through the church helped convince her she could help this community.

Zavala, along with two other candidates, were vying for the position of superintendent. The second candidate was a White man who had a master's degree in school administration and had served in four administrative positions in the last 12 years. The third candidate was also a White male administrator and former high school principal. Zavala had researched the district in preparation for the interview.

A search consultant had been hired by the school board to organize the search and obtain public input. The composition of the five-member board had been as follows: two Latinos, two White men, and one White woman. Zavala explained that the selection process had been "very intense." It lasted three days and included an evening to meet the board, a community forum, a day to interview with four individual committees (community, teachers, administration, and noncertified staff), and finally a formal interview with the school board.

The day Zavala had arrived for the interview; she contacted the local newspaper and invited the education reporter to tour the district and city. Her invitation had been planned to continue her research on the district. As she explained, "I felt that if I could begin to find out more of the undercurrents, that it was going to be someone from outside the district that's going to be able to give me that information." After Zavala had reflected on the information, she felt well prepared to interview. Candidates were rotated

from room to room as each committee asked questions according to their particular area of interest. All candidates were present at the community forum and afforded an opportunity to answer questions. At the conclusion of the forum, the audience was allowed to question the candidates. Zavala explained,

I think this (session) was key for me. I really think that's where I was probably able to shine and show that I was the best candidate for the position. I could answer the questions off the floor, off the cuff, no matter what that was, and I was speaking from my heart and not trying to answer what I thought they wanted to hear. I knew if there's a match, it's a match; but if there's not, then I don't need to be here.

After completing four years in her first superintendency, she submitted her resignation and accepted a position as associate superintendent in another district. After two years in the new position, the superintendent retired from the district. Zavala applied for the position and was appointed to her second superintendency. She told me she was perfectly happy in her current position, although there may be ups and downs.

Zavala attributes her breaking the glass ceiling in the superintendency to several factors. First, the family support, in the form of mentorship from her mother, and spiritual values that was provided by her parents and her extended family, which included the congregation, was invaluable to her achieving her goals. The family support was evident throughout the *plática*. Second, Zavala was raised in two different cultures. The Mexican culture while in Mexico and then the American culture in Texas. The biggest challenge, which then turned into the catalyst for her success was her self-directed motivation to learn English. Third, although Zavala was not raised believing there were traditional

gender roles for men and women within her family, it was evident that she saw others positioned in traditional roles. Third, Zavala readily admits her father and mother planted the confidence in her by allowing her non-traditional choices and exposing her to a variety of people. Finally, Zavala had a self-imposed responsibility to assist her community which intrinsically motivated her to pursue various degrees and professional positions.

Chapter Discussion

As we shared in the *pláticas*, these Latinas trusted me enough to openly and honestly share their success and challenges they experienced throughout their life. The profiles link the three Latina superintendents, and me, by identifying descriptors they shared as relevant in their life. One of the most prominent descriptors was of cultural congruence and incongruence. The more exposure Latinas have to the American culture through education, the more they begin to challenge traditional social institutions that contribute to their marginalized status, such as their expected roles in the home to education or job inequality. For instance, Gutierrez spoke of suffering of a triple form of oppression, in that she suffered from racism because she is part of an oppressed nationality, exploitation of the working class, and her inferior position because she is female. The three participants shared that although a high school education was important; the expectation of each of them continuing on with higher education was not a priority and seemed more self-directed.

Another characteristic shared by the three Latina superintendents is that of leadership opportunities they faced as they journeyed from childhood to their work of educating students in Texas. The personal experiences of the participants, including my experiences, offer valuable insights on the impact of family and childhood experiences on

their lives. Incremental changes, day-to-day events, specific events or crises are predictors for leadership development. The socialization the participants were exposed to throughout their life was regarded as by a blend of nurturance and discipline. The sense of work and intrinsic confidence developed during the formative years possibly created the foundation for the drive to achieve and excel which became evident in the early years of their professional pursuits. According to Sahgal & Pathak (2007), “The values and convictions that have steered leaders through their life journey include respect for people (regardless of class, money, or status) adaptability, contentment, sacrificing to achieve, and a strong sense of duty, hard work, education, compassion, and integrity” (p. 57). The personal experiences of the participants in this study resonate with the literature. The seeds of their leadership were planted in their life experience within their families and throughout their childhood.

The *pláticas* brought to the forefront the conditions and relations that fostered these participants to become superintendent of schools. Through different examples and stories, these Latinas credit the characteristics of their family support, external support, leadership opportunities, and self-motivation. The three Latinas reported being aware of the limitations that the educational institution and society impose on them as people; however, this fact did not stop them from becoming who they are today. Research also supports the need for Latinas to tell their story and provide mentorship and sponsorship to the future generation of Latinas (Méndez-Morse, 2000). Soto-Smith, Gutierrez, Zavala, and I are aware of this need, and we must keep doing our best to set the example for the young generation of Latinas, as will be describe in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS AND EMERGENT THEMES

The epistemological stance for this study is rooted in Latina(o) critical race theory, organizational and career mobility, and politics of “fit”. This framework takes into account the following themes the Latinas shared throughout the observable collection stage: congruence/incongruence, family support, prejudice and racism, personal attributes, racism, initial stages of leadership, family role models/mentors, life as education, post-secondary roadblocks, post-secondary mentors and networking, personal attributes, and experience in education. This chapter is arranged with each framework serving as a header. Table 5.1 provides a preview of the findings highlighted in the chapter.

5.1 Sifting Through the Findings

	Latina(o) Critical Race Theory	Organizational & Career Mobility	Politics of “Fit”
What are the sociohistorical and life experiences of Latinas prior to attaining the superintendency?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cultural congruence 2. Cultural incongruence 3. Missing stories of success 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Experienced initial stages of leadership 2. Family role models/mentorship 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Personal attributes 2. Refined skills and talents
What structures and processes are in place within the community and educational systems to foster the success of Latinas as they ascend to the superintendency?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Family supported education up to high school 2. Map individual life beyond high school 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Experienced life as education 2. Encountered roadblocks to post-secondary education 3. Only access points were difficult organization conditions 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Experienced in curriculum 2. Visionary 3. Incorporates all student groups
How have race, ethnicity, and gender affected the pursuit of attaining the superintendency?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prejudice and racism are present in educational systems and the workplace 2. Tension with traditional gender roles 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mentors are needed at the university level and in the field 2. Networking for feedback 3. Gender stereotypes prevalent 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Appointed to unstable school districts 2. Skilled to navigate the political and social aspects of the position

Findings for Research Question 1

Latina(o) Critical Race Theory

This theory assisted in identifying the context because it focused on examining and explaining inequalities in the Latino population. Solorzano and Bernal (2001) affirmed that Latina(o) critical race theory focuses on issues “often ignored by critical race theorists such as language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, identity, phenotype, and

sexuality” (p. 311). As I investigated the sociohistorical and life experiences of the three Latina participants, the theme that emerged was the cultural congruence and incongruence. The participants often referred to their culture growing up as they spoke about their sociohistorical and life experiences. Culture is a concept that continues to be defined and debated in the literature of many academic and professional disciplines; however, there is emerging consensus that culture has three main characteristics: 1) culture emerges in interactions between humans and environments, 2) culture consists of shared elements, and 3) culture is transmitted across time periods and generations (Triandis, 2007). For this research cultural congruence is based on the definition of culture and cultural analysis as espoused by Schein (1992), “Cultural analysis is the encountering and deciphering of shared basic assumptions” (p. 58). Schein’s definition of culture includes the concept of a pattern of shared assumptions that is considered valid enough to be taught to new members or to generations (Schein, 1992). It includes three basic elements: artifacts, espoused values, and assumptions.

Latinas are exposed to cultural congruence and incongruence from an early age. In order to understand the congruence and incongruence, it is first important to bring about the realization of the Latinas’ traditional upbringing, which may include subliminal or overt oppression due to espoused values or assumptions, such as traditional gender roles. The more exposure Latinas have to the American culture through socialization and education, the more they begin to challenge traditional cultural congruence that may contribute to their oppression from job inequality, educational expectations, gender expectations, and their role in the home. As the expectation for young adults to go to

college continues by educational systems, the expectation that it may be in contradiction to some cultures is exacerbated.

The participants in this study expressed they understand that the cultural values and expectations they receive at home are incongruent to those they receive while attending school.

According to Gutierrez,

Latinas suffer from what is a triple form of oppression, in that they suffer racism because they are a part of an oppressed nationality, as victims of the exploitation of the working class, and their relegated inferior position of their sex.

Latinas begin to question the perceived double standard between men and women, which manifests in education and the cultural expectations in which some women are raised.

Within the Latino culture, women are expected to be the primary caregiver, housekeeper, and remain inconspicuous. Latinas have, to some extent, perpetuated support for the traditional female role of self-sacrifice, passivity, and dependence (Gil & Vazquez, 1996). This contributes to the backward ideology that is designed to keep Latinas oppressed. At any rate, these traditional roles of the Latino American culture are significant because of the cultural incongruence experienced by Latinas, particularly when juxtaposed to the mission of K – 12 education.

Organizational and career mobility

Riehl and Byrd's (1997) model of career mobility takes into consideration a person's identity, which includes personal values, ambitions, work history, and concurrent responsibilities. This model further recognizes that gender is a factor in development because genders react differently to situations that ultimately determine

advancement within the family organization. The two themes that emerged for this subquestion are the initial stage of leadership and family role models/mentorship.

The initial stage of leadership was highlighted when the participants were exposed to or given a role at a young age in which they felt their strength and were comfortable in that role. Incremental changes, day-to-day events, specific events or crises are predictors for leadership development. The socialization the participants were exposed to throughout their life was regarded as by a blend of nurturance and discipline. The sense of work and intrinsic confidence developed during the formative years possibly created the foundation for the drive to achieve and excel which became evident in the early years of their professional pursuits. According to Sahgal & Pathak (2007), “The values and convictions that have steered leaders through their life journey include respect for people adaptability, contentment, sacrificing to achieve, and a strong sense of duty, hard work, education, compassion, and integrity” (p. 57). The personal experiences of the participants in this study resonate with the literature. The seeds of their leadership were planted in their life experience within their families and throughout their childhood.

When telling her story, Soto-Smith shared,

I was very lucky that I had my extended relatives, one being my maternal grandparents living with us. My grandmother was a big influence in my life, especially after my father passed away . . . and definitely a very good storyteller. She would just fill my mind with ideas and stories so, you know, I just loved being around her because she would tell me all kinds of stories and she would invent things. The key thing was to always teach me a lesson. There was moral to every story she told me. I learned about values and character and all that through

them. I think the work ethic I got from them, from my community, from my extended family, and of course, my grandmother and parents. It was always about want to give back and make a difference.

As an example of her values coming from her family, Gutierrez, was recounting her father's influence on her life, she recalled a time when she was contemplating dropping out of school. She offered,

My father made it very clear of what he wanted for all his children. Although he didn't expect his daughters to continue beyond high school, he did expect us to finish high school. I went through a rebellious stage during my sophomore year, and I told my father I was dropping out of high school. He took me to the fields and said if I dropped out, I would have to work in the fields. Even though he pampered me, he never really made it easy for me to get away with things. Dad and I had a very close relationship. So that kind of woke me up. I forgot about dropping out, because I knew what was expected of me.

Zavala discussed what she considered the most significant part of her childhood, as she was recounting her parents' influence on her:

The most significant part of my childhood is that my parents always believed in education, in a good education. My mother has since passed away, but education was always a very strong focus for my parents. I think that is the most significant part of my childhood. My parents always stressed finishing high school.

All three participants had a strong family support system and role models within the family. Each participant spoke of the impact their spouses, family, extended family, role models/mentors, and loved ones have had on their lives. The participants offered

numerous examples of how their family and spouse have supported them along their professional journey. Even though some have hit minor setbacks, the overall impact of family support is evident in their respective stories.

Soto-Smith spoke of husband who, from the moment they met, was supportive and encouraging of her, including his providing childcare for their daughter when she was not available:

I cannot express in words, how valuable it is to have a supportive family growing up, and I guess sometimes that might be expected; however, when someone gets married it truly must be a partnership. I remember during the weekends that I was busy working, continuing my education, and all those late nights, my husband would be home with our baby or he would be with me. You have to have that supportive spouse that [sic] will help you through it. He would be changing diapers and feeding our daughter while I was studying or preparing something for work.

Soto-Smith cited another example of the support she received from her spouse. The district in which Soto-Smith first became superintendent required her to relocate. Initially, her husband remained behind, but within a short period, he moved to join Soto-Smith and their child:

I knew I ran the risk of having to relocate for a position and as a wife and mother. That was one of my biggest worries. When the time came for us to have that conversation, my husband did not hesitate to say, “if we have to move . . . we move.”

Gutierrez did not attend college immediately upon graduating from high school. She credited her husband with providing the impetus for her to attend college. Gutierrez earned her undergraduate degree over the course of 10 years, enrolling in classes during the summers, and working fulltime. It was a continual struggle for her to remain focused on her studies. When her first child was born, something stirred within her:

When I had my first child, something changed. This baby was my baby. I wanted to protect and provide for her. I became more responsible, more diligent, and went more than summers. I went to work, went to school, and took care of my baby. I eventually graduated, and I knew my baby would be proud.

All of the participants eventually moved back to live in the same town with or close to where they grew up. Their strong family ties and cultural background has made them aware that family comes first. Even though two of the three participants were married at the time of this study, all of the participants had been married at one point during their career and credited their husband as a primary support system. The participants, at one time or another, wanted to give up because of stressful situation in their jobs. Their respective husbands helped them focus on what they needed to accomplish. Although having a family may be a barrier for Latinas, as noted in the literature, that was not the case for the participants of this study. The personal leadership experiences and people the participants identify as their role models/mentors offers valuable insights on the impact of family and childhood experiences on their lives.

Politics of “Fit”

The three Latinas in this study were in agreement on the matter of skills and talents they needed to possess. Findings in this study validated the work of Ortiz (1999),

as well as Riehl and Byrd (1997). The participants' personal attributes, which stemmed from their sociohistorical values and life experiences to assist them along their life path both personally and professionally. The participants spoke of self-confidence, commitment, dedication, instructional leadership, political awareness, interpersonal skills, and communication skills.

These skills are essentially the same for every individual; regardless of their race, ethnicity, or gender. These skills and talents are acquired while on the job as one navigates the educational system and moves up the career ladder and obtains the experiences that develop and hone those skills and abilities. Proper preparation at the K-12 and university level, as well as on the job will provide Latinas with the tools to become qualified to apply for the position of superintendent, as well as optimize the individual's ability to be successful.

Findings for Research Question 2

Latina(o) critical race theory

Cultural and community expectations in each participant's life varied regionally, as well as within their respective household. Although a high school education was important for each participant, none of their parents discussed education beyond high school. Ultimately, it was up to each participant to map her life within and beyond high school. Soto-Smith had parents who supported education and made it a priority in their household. Gutierrez was expected to follow her traditional role after high school given to her by her father. Zavala, who was a great student in Mexico, suffered at the hands of education in America due to her limited knowledge of English.

The participants denoted community cultural congruence as it relates to tradition and upbringing. Gil and Vasquez (1996) acknowledged that Latinas are often influenced by heredity and culture. They reported, “In our practice, we see Latinas every day that have been trained from infancy not to compete professionally” (Gil & Vasquez, 1996, p. 112). The commentaries made by the participants mirrored this line of thinking and may be indicative of their internal conflict to abandon childhood norms or traditions that were part of the household. The participants indicated that they learned certain lessons at a young age and that enabled them to become what they wanted or planted the seed of leadership without the constraints of tradition.

The participants expressed that they experienced prejudices within the educational system because they were women of Latino descent and, at times, they are portrayed as lacking ambition and academic intellect, especially at a young age. As a result, some of these participants were subjected to low expectations that they knew were well below what they were capable of achieving. Judgments of this nature can be detrimental to some individuals. In Gutierrez’s case, some of her friends and one of her high school counselors made disparaging remarks regarding her ability to achieve. Zavala experienced prejudices and difficulties in school as a result of what other people believed to be a learning disability. Her reality was a language barrier and not an intellectual barrier. Soto-Smith, while not experiencing the problems that plagued Gutierrez and Zavala, did have firsthand knowledge of Latino students who were misidentified and placed in classes where they did not belong simply because they were culturally different. These were explicitly aware of the prejudices as deterrents in their lives.

Organizational and career mobility

Based on Kanter's (1977) organizational mobility which can be applied to the family organization, each participant shared at least one experience that she considered as life as education. The experiences left indelible marks on their lives and established a fundamental attitude about how they would act. The experiences demonstrate how life can offer opportunities for growth and education upon reflection.

Soto-Smith's father experienced an accident and suddenly died. She was 15 years old at the time. Her father's death dramatically altered her home life, especially her role in the family. While this experience was traumatic, the lessons learned from her father along the way served her well and allowed her to manage the situation. She explained,

My father, however, had an accident and passed away when I was 15. That was a big trauma, because, you know, I was daddy's girl and didn't want to disappoint him. So, yeah, when he passed away, it made me realize that I could not depend on anybody else. I felt for my mom because she didn't really know how to run the household. I had to make sure that I went to school, for him, to make him proud. I'd make sure he was looking at me down from heaven and being proud of me.

Gutierrez spoke about two experiences that were painful and changed her forever. She was a young adult when the first one occurred, but stated it was important in her development as a person and professional. Although it occurred while in high school, Gutierrez did not realize how painful the experience was until a conversation she had with her husband. The conversation took place when she was newly married:

I knew I had more to offer; however, I also knew that I needed to respect my father. So I listened to him and didn't go to college after high school. When my

then-husband recommended I go to college, I realized that he saw something in me that I had buried deep inside of me. I didn't hold it against my father, I know he was thinking of me and he didn't want me to be alone. My husband was supportive, encouraging, and he believed in me. It was like a veil had been lifted and my love and energy for learning came rushing back the day my husband dropped me off to register for classes.

Ironically, the second event for Gutierrez also involved her then-husband and occurred later in their marriage:

I was quite happy, went to work, and things in your life change, and I ended up getting divorced. I was in my late 30s when I got divorced and I had two children. I really needed to rethink my life. I worked all the time. I had to find myself again.

Zavala reflected on an experience that occurred when she was a student in elementary school:

I attended a school in Mexico until the fourth grade. I was a great student and competed in many academic competitions, similar to what we have in the States. When my parents moved us to the United States, I was enrolled in the fifth grade, and I soon noticed I was not at the top level. Our class was always put in groups for reading, and I was always in the lowest performing group because of my English. At the end of the year, I was retained because I didn't know English. It didn't matter that I knew the content in math or science; what mattered was English. You start with a setback, plus you are labeled by students.

Another experience Zavala recounted occurred during her adult years. She emphasized how this experience influenced her personal and professional life. She had been offered a position near her hometown and was prepared to move back and be near her family. This would mean her husband would have to resign from his job and move with her. For the first time in their marriage, he challenged her choice. She stated,

Then he was pulling his way and I was pulling my way. It was a difficult time.

When he gave me an ultimatum, I was devastated. We disagreed for days, and ultimately we stayed. I conceded to his wants. I try not to think of the “what ifs.”

Life would have been different if I would have left my husband for a job.

Zavala later explained that she did not regret her decision and always put her trust in God’s hands.

Politics of “Fit”

As the number of the Latino population continues to grow, teachers, school administrators, and particularly superintendents are viewed as role models for this ever-increasing population of Latino students. Latinos must be able to reach and serve all of the students within their school district, not just those with heritages similar to their own. To be able to satisfy this need, aspiring teachers, administrators, and administrators must be able to equip themselves with those skills and talents that will bring about success, not only for themselves, but also for the students and the community they will serve. Latinas must have curriculum experience, as well being a visionary that looks towards the future and learns from the past.

Throughout the *pláticas*, the participants repeatedly indicated there needed to be a commitment to the upbringing and educational success of all students, not just one

particular race or ethnic group. For example, they indicated that Latina superintendents could not just focus on the needs of one group at the expense of others. Zavala shared that a superintendent had to have a “commitment and dedication to truly being an instructional leader, and to being committed to closing the achievement gap for all students, not just Latino students.” Soto-Smith explained,

I think school boards, and communities, are looking for leaders who can make academic movement within their schools. A lot of districts are dealing with program improvement issues and need to be really knowledgeable as an instructional leader [*sic*], but also to be politically skilled to be able to represent the voice of a school board and to be able to navigate in very complex political climates. I think that you can be a great instructional leader, but if you can’t navigate the politics of a place, you’re not going to be successful.

The same belief was expressed by Gutierrez, who stated,

I think that being Latina brings value, but it isn’t the only thing that school districts should be looking for. They should be looking for that skilled political person, that knowledgeable instructional leader who can help unlock the learning that needs to take place within a school system. I would say really crucial instructional skills, and political skills, and know how to build a team, how to build relationships, how to foster those relationships over time.

If a district is in improvement mode, they need to look for that person, regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender, who is going to be able to move that system for the benefit of all students.

Findings for Research Question 3

Latino (a) critical race theory

Race, ethnicity, and gender can be such a diverse and at times a destructive topic; however, they can also be healthy and constructive. As revealed by the review of literature and observables, prejudice and racism is still prevalent in education and in the workplace. The participants shared how racial and gender issues pertained to them, as well as how they handled race and gender discrimination, both personally and professionally. The participants acknowledged that they each met people who prejudged them based on their appearance, gender, skin color, speech, accent, or cultural background. Soto-Smith's experiences with those issues, though minor because of her light complexion and green eyes, were nevertheless a reality of her workplace. She stated,

For me, it was only ever an issue on occasion with people in a community who might have had their own prejudice on the racial end, especially when I was younger. Things did change when I added my husband's Anglo surname, they weren't always aware of my Hispanic descent, they were probably more discreet. Every once in a while it would come up, you think that way because you are Latina. But I don't think it is an impediment or a barrier, particularly after getting my doctorate. That credential wiped out that barrier for me. Few people have that degree, I think that 1% of all the doctorates are Latino Ph.Ds, so it's just a very small group.

Oppression of Latinos by another race or their own cultural congruence cannot be attributed to one specific reason, such as skin color, primary language, or values, when multiple reasons could be contributing to the problem. By creating an environment in

which individuals and organizations are allowed to have honest and productive dialogue and to investigate the policies and practices that have caused Latinos to be at a disadvantage, future opportunities will be enhanced.

Organizational and career mobility

The need to have mentors at the university level or in the field, as well as networking opportunities was viewed by all three participants as critical components to ascending to the superintendency. Mentoring and networking provides the mentee with valuable information that can change the course of the mentee's career path. Soto-Smith stated,

I don't care if you are Black, Brown, Purple, or Orange. Mentoring is the key part of one moving through the system, but it is as equally as important in keeping your job, once you get through the systems. So I've always had multiple people whom I considered to be mentors that I talk to on a consistent basis. The textbooks we used aren't written to respond to all of the problems we get thrown at us.

Mentors and networking also provide needed guidance early in a person's career, as well as the insights and advice that are critical to making key decisions. This sentiment was shared by Gutierrez:

I think that it is probably one of the most powerful tools we have to increase the representation of Latinas in the superintendency. Latinas really need the feedback of a mentor, at least one strong mentor and usually, along the road, you acquire several mentors at different levels of your experience. But having someone who can be a sounding board for your decisions when you feel that they are critical

political decisions you have to make, who can just be a sounding board for you and have the wisdom of their experience. The thing I really worry about is Latinas jumping into the superintendency that isn't the right one. But a mentor in a protected environment can help with that, and I just think that it is underutilized in terms of filling the gap for Latinas.

Magdaleno (2004) reported in his study that Latinas often maneuvered into the superintendency by finding a "dominant culture cross-race mentor" (p. 29). All of the study participants identified their mentors in the field of education were White males. These results supported the findings in the literature.

Soto-Smith identified a White male associate superintendent as her mentor. She explained, "From the very beginning, the day I was hired as a teacher, I knew he would be someone I could trust. He is the reason why I aspired to become a superintendent." Gutierrez explained that she "selected" multiple male mentors, both White and Latino: "They were people that really cared about people. That is how I selected them, technically telling them to teach me." Zavala stated her mentor was a White man: "He exposed me to a lot of outside organizations and opened doors for me." Findings in this study supported those describe in the literature in that the participants named dominant-culture mentors as influential to their careers.

Mentoring and networking are about the development of relationships. It is not about knowing the right people in the hopes that they will be able to further the mentee's personal goals. It is about extending their own hands and helping those that will follow. This sentiment was summarized by Soto-Smith,

You have a lot of those first, when you are a Latina, you're blazing the trail, and there aren't that many. And you hope that your legacy will be that you will have helped open the doors for a whole lot of others . . . and whether it's a formal program or more informal, you hope you have enough influence that you can open the doors for others, and you can help them when they get there to be successful, because you can be their sound [*sic*] boards in their early careers.

Ultimately, the relationship between mentor and mentee is important in the ascension to the superintendency and during the appointment. It is about reaching a level of comfort and trust, where information and advice can be shared in a safe environment.

As Zavala eloquently stated,

It's really what it's all about in terms of reaching that level, because it is going to be those same relationships that will help you be successful.

Latinas need to recognize their practical knowledge and become advocates for other Latinas in practice and policy.

Politics of “Fit”

The politics of fit provided a framework for the amalgamation of the perceived efficacy and desirability of a school leader with the school culture, community expectations, and school board relationships. The idea of having to prove oneself, because of gender, race, or ethnicity was repeated time and again during the interviews in this study. This sentiment was noted as early as childhood and up to their appointment to the superintendency. Observables collected from the interviews demonstrated that the participants believed they were qualified to assume the leadership of any school district. They wanted it to be known that they did not want to be hired simply on the basis of their

gender, race, or ethnicity. They wanted to lead a school district based on their skills and abilities. They did not want race or ethnicity to be at the top of the qualities that a hiring committee might be looking for their next district leader. The participants felt that the issue of race or ethnicity was more of a matter of having the wrong mindset.

In reality, the workplace is filled with individuals who have their own prejudices. They may overtly or covertly condone discriminatory practices. Although the literature speaks to this issue, remarking that prejudice and racism may account for the lack of Latinas in the superintendency, the observables that informed this research indicate that the prevalence of these situations are growing increasingly rare because Latinas are getting appointments; however, based on the participants in this study the appointments are in unstable, or unsuitable, school districts.

All three participants agreed that being a superintendent is a political position, especially when it comes to the politics of “fit.” The individual must be politically aware of all the stakeholders, regardless of gender, race, or ethnicity. The participants noted that many mistakes can be avoided by being skillful in handling school district politics. As Soto-Smith shared,

Being aware of the political dynamics that often influence how decisions are made is important, and by that mean, having what I call “situational awareness.” Robert Marzano talks about the 21 effective characteristics of effective leaders. I think that situational awareness is really used to know what the political arena is and how you need to get your point across, cognizant of not stepping on all of the land mines that may be around you.

This same belief was shared by the other two participants. Gutierrez indicated that her mentor had provided her with information and counsel so that she could avoid the land mines of the political arenas common to school districts. All of the participants expressed their belief that they were equal to the task. That confidence was probably not enough in the eyes of some. There was a feeling expressed by all the participants that they had to be better than their nonminority or minority male counterparts. Zavala shared,

I would tell you, although less so now, there are fewer and fewer people who are looking for these jobs, but I think you have to be better than the nonethnic minority in order to get one of these jobs. It is a matter of proving oneself . . . all the time.

The participants indicated that it was imperative that Latina administrators not get themselves into a situation where professionally they would be thought of as “Latino administrators.” They stated that being thought of in that way would limit their opportunities professionally and possibly not give them the opportunity to become superintendents. Having the appropriate experiences in a variety of leadership positions can equalize or at least minimize the power struggle. The participants felt that being Latina was a positive, and that they brought more to the table by virtue of their ethnicity. They also noted that being of Latino descent should not be one’s defining characteristic. Gutierrez noted,

I think that one thing that Latina educators and administrators do is make a mistake in getting themselves type-cast in that they can only work in Latino school districts. Big mistake, because then you limit the number of places that you can work. Build your portfolio of diversity, plan your next move.

Gutierrez added that she had purposely set out to be seen as an outstanding educational leader, first and foremost, as well as being Latina. Another sentiment expressed by the participants was the need to obtain a variety of experiences, and not limit oneself professionally to those things that is typically associated with only Latino students, such as bilingual educational and English language learners.

Concluding Thoughts

The information gathered from this study afforded a look into the lives of three successful Latinas who ascended to the position of superintendent of a Texas public school district. The material extrapolated from the *pláticas*, identified the conditions and relations that supported the Latina superintendents as they maneuvered through experiences and challenges both personally and professionally. The research brought to the forefront how these administrators became superintendent of schools, as well as how they viewed themselves in the superintendency. When I started analyzing the transcripts from each *plática* the participants clearly credited their own drive and motivation for their success, just as I did in my narrative. While this reason for success may be true, analysis of the observables revealed that the participants were engrossed with an inordinate amount of support, as well as challenging difficulties, and opportunities for leadership as they journeyed through the educational system, both as a student and as a profession.

CHAPTER VI

THE FUTURE OF LATINAS

The news that Latinos has become the nation's largest minority should no longer be a demographic surprise. The appearance of Latinos on the American scene can no longer be denied— in the nation's vital economic or educational policies, or in politics. Once considered an invisible culture, the Latino population is posed to making its potential impact on America's future all the greater. This study gave voice to 4, which includes mine, successful Latinas involved in education. Each participant, along with me, shared their familial and professional support, educational journey, professional experiences, and recounted certain events that had an impact on their life. There are no clear-cut answers to the Latinas' success in obtaining the superintendency, or administrative position in education, and coincidentally obtaining a doctoral degree; however, as a Latina administrator, I know there are future generations of Latinas who need us as role models. Much like teachers who take the data provided to them from classroom exams, observations, and professional development to inform their instruction, Latinas of all ages learn from their Latina predecessors.

The purpose of this chapter is to highlight four major study findings, tensions and challenges, followed by implications and recommendations for school improvement. Then, I provide the Latina perspective on implications for practice, which includes my personal examples to encourage other Latinas to use this study as a tool to reflect and learn about their personal journeys. The last sections in the chapter outline recommendations for future research, and concluding thoughts.

Highlighting the Findings

In the *pláticas*, the participants shared they encountered multiple challenges and celebrations. Through the qualitative research design of this study four major categories that contributed to the ascension of the three Latinas to the superintendency were uncovered. Even though the Latinas worked in districts that ranged from less than 1,000 students to over 12,000, from rural to urban areas, and despite their differences geographically within the state of Texas, demographically, and politically, their views their lives and about the superintendency were strikingly similar. The Latinas all had to work through cultural congruence and incongruence, identified skills and talents, discussed race, ethnicity, and gender and finally how mentoring and networking made a difference throughout their life. The sociohistorical and life experiences of the participants are integral in the formation of the Latina as a woman, as an individual, and ultimately as a superintendent. The conditions and relations that fostered the three Latinas traveled through different stages based on experiences, both positive and negative, and choices made by cultural congruence and incongruence juxtaposed with individual skills and talent, mentors and networking, and the impact of race, ethnicity, and gender.

Cultural Congruence and Incongruence

As discussed in the literature review and through the observables, Latinas are raised in a culture that has set cultural congruence at times contradict the social norm. This was evident in the *pláticas*. One example was when the participants were not encouraged to receive post-secondary education. The participants had a personal drive and motivation, and they each found a way to break this cultural expectation. Gil and Vasquez (1996) acknowledged that Latinas are often influenced by heredity and culture.

They reported, “In our practice, we see Latinas every day that have been trained from infancy not to compete professionally” (Gil & Vasquez, 1996, p. 112). The commentaries shared by the participants mirrored this line of thinking and may be indicative of their internal conflict to abandon childhood norms or traditions that were part of the household. The participants indicated that they learned certain lessons at a young age and that enabled them to become what they wanted or planted the initial stages of leadership without the constraints of tradition. Not all Latinas have encountered problems with traditional gender expectations. Gardiner et al. (1999) reported that a Latina that had the support of her husband was willing to assume more home and family responsibilities to allow her to devote time to her career.

Skills and Talents

The Latinas were in agreement on the matter of skills and talents. They indicated the skills and talents Latina superintendents needed to possess were essentially those that any and all superintendents should have to successfully staff the position. Findings in this study validated the work of Ortiz (1999), as well as Riehl and Byrd (1997), as well as the different facets the modern superintendent needs to possess. The participants’ personal attributes, which were developed during their upbringing, may have some impact on the decision of school board members to appoint or not to appoint, which supports the politics of “fit.”

The participants spoke of self-confidence, commitment, dedication, instructional leadership, political awareness, interpersonal skills, and communication skills. The participants were in agreement that their personal attributes and skills and talents were

developed during their formative years with the help of their immediate and extended family.

These skills are essentially the same for every individual; regardless of their gender, race, or ethnicity. These skills and talents are acquired while on the job as one moves up the career ladder and obtains the experiences that develop and hone those skills and abilities. Proper preparation, both at the university level, as well as on the job will provide Latinas with the tools to become qualified to apply for the position of superintendent, as well as optimize the individual's ability to be successful.

Mentoring and Networking

This category has the most impact and potential for Latinas as they ascend into a professional position. The need for Latinas to mentors and networking capabilities within their field are paramount. The guidance provided by a veteran administrator or superintendent grants the mentee an opportunity to learn those things that can only be taught from one person to another. Not all the information one needs as a superintendent can be found in a textbook. Some can only be provided by or received through the mentoring process.

Networking needs to be viewed with as much importance as mentoring. Networking is one of those most powerful tools to increase the representation of Latinas in the superintendency. It is through networking with trusted colleagues or organizations that those who aspire to the superintendency can find the right fit. The right school district is realized through the informed advice and feedback from the individual's network circle.

Race and Gender

Data collected from the *pláticas* demonstrated that the Latinas believed they were qualified to assume the leadership of any school district. They wanted it to be known that they did not want to be hired simply on the basis of their race, ethnicity, or gender. They wanted to lead a school district based on their skills and abilities. They did not want race or ethnicity to be at the top of the qualities that a hiring committee might be looking for. The participants felt that the issue of race or ethnicity was more of a matter of having the wrong mindset.

In reality, the workplace is filled with individuals who have their own prejudices. They may overtly or covertly condone discriminatory practices. Although the literature speaks to this issue, remarking prejudice and racism may account for the lack of Latinas in the superintendency, the data that informed this research indicates the prevalence of these situations are growing increasingly rare; however, it is difficult to document if no one is a Latinas.

Race, ethnicity, and gender are variables the participants recognize they cannot hide, explain away, or ignore. The participants acknowledged that they each met people who prejudged them based on their appearance, gender, skin color, speech, accent, or cultural background. Regardless of any type of discrimination the participants faced, the participants were in agreement that at times, discrimination served as an intrinsic motivator. In addition, findings of this study established that Latina mentors at the university level or in the field have an impact on organizational and career mobility of Latinas. The guidance provided by a Latina faculty member, administrator, or superintendent grants the mentee an opportunity to learn those things that can only be

taught from one person to another. Not all the information one needs to ascend to the superintendency can be found in a textbook. Some can only be provided by or received through the mentoring process.

Observables collected from the *pláticas* demonstrated that the participants believed they were qualified to assume the leadership of any school district. They wanted it to be known that they did not want to be hired simply on the basis of their race, gender, or ethnicity. They wanted to lead a school district based on their desire to utilize their skills and abilities to improve the district.

Tensions and Challenges

As I went through the process of identifying Latinas to participate in my study it seemed a little daunting especially after the 9 of the 17 Latinas on my list could not be located. I was able to contact 5 Latinas who agreed to discuss my research prior to making a commitment. Soto-Smith, Gutierrez, and Zavala agreed immediately and extended an invitation to contact them whenever I had a question. The other 2 potential participants felt the study was important; however, they would not have the time to commit to a study. One expressed concern because another student had approached her earlier in the year and failed to follow up after the interview.

Another source of tension was protecting the participants' identity. With so few Latina superintendents in Texas, I did not want to compromise their personal or professional life. The superintendency is a highly political position, and I did not want them to experience any discomfort by participating in my study. Pseudonyms were assigned to all names related to the participants. Districts and city names were not included. In addition,

member checks were arranged so participants could review the document and provide feedback.

The study was rooted in the following frameworks: Latina(o) critical race theory, organizational and career mobility, and politics of “fit,” and provided a lens that takes into account the Latinas’ accession into the superintendency that was helpful in keeping the focus for analyzing the *pláticas*.

Implications and Recommendation for School Improvement

In my literature review there is a clear indication there are gaps in the research and by utilizing the *pláticas*, factors that may contribute to the phenomenon of underrepresentation of Latinas in the superintendency were identified. My research supports these gaps and has identified implications for practice based on the life-narrative inquiry of the three participants by highlighting conditions and relations that contributed to the ascension of the three Latinas to the superintendency.

Correcting the societal mindset of Texas is beyond the scope of this paper, but the problem of underrepresentation of Latinas in the superintendency can improve through a concerted effort from school districts and institutions of higher education. There is a need for the implementation of formal and informal mentoring programs for Latinas, as well as providing for the continued support of aspiring Latina administrators. This can be accomplished at the university level by educating and hiring more Latinas to serve as faculty members, as well as serving as role models and mentors to recruit in the field of education. At the high school level, the K-16 alignment can begin by tapping into high school programs and courses that allows the vertical alignment to post-secondary education and encouraging the student groups who typically have the lowest graduation

rates to enroll in those courses. Based on the researcher's experience, high school graduation rates of Latinas continue to lag behind other populations or they drop-out due to pregnancy. Latinas need to be supported as soon as they enter the public school system regardless of age or grade level. Latinas need to be encouraged to continue their education whether is if for college or career readiness. Latina educators, administrators, superintendents, post-secondary faculty can do much to prepare the way for the next generation of Latinas to reach the highest levels of educational leadership.

Current Latina superintendents serve as role models and can do much good in providing the needed professional opportunities through mentoring and networking processes for the future generation; however, Latinas must also be given the tools, or connections, to be able to cope with cultural congruence and incongruence throughout their life in order to be successful. By providing courses in the teaching field for future educators to be culturally sensitive to cultural congruence and incongruence. Eliminating the obvious factor that some current Latina administrators' lack the desire to be superintendents, the reality is few Latinas have the requisite education to be considered for the position. When Latinas do not have the appropriate and broad professional experiences, they lack the appropriate information and knowledge to be competitive.

Latina Perspective on Implications for Practice

As the participants lived with Latino and American cultural values, they began developing their own perspective and learned how to navigate the juxtaposed cultures. Many different reasons were given for the lack of Latinas in the superintendency. The participants spoke of needing to have mentors, of there not being enough Latinas or Latinos in teaching, as well as in the administrative ranks. They also spoke of more

Latinas needing to develop the desire to become superintendents, as well as some of the inherent difficulties some women may face As Gutierrez explained,

I think that it is going to be slow to change. I think if we look at representation at the state legislature or at anyone leading an organization, like chief financial officers, we are not going to see an equitable distribution of marginalized people in those positions simply because it takes time.

Soto-Smith elaborated on the topic by stating,

We have more today than we've ever had in the ranks and that's really been over the last 15, 20 years that we've grown in Latino teachers and Latino administrators. Perhaps Latinos in those roles haven't imagined for themselves that they can also achieve at those levels, primarily because we don't have a lot of role models. So it's like any profession, whether it's in engineering or the medical field, the more you see yourself and people who look like you the more you can aspire to that. I think we need to be purposeful in grooming administrators.

According to Zavala,

First, we don't have a history of having Latinas go onto college and be up in the profession as our Anglo counterparts. There are few of them coming up the ranks. Second, I don't think as a system we've invested in the development and training, leadership preparation sufficiently to create a pathway for them to accelerate in the career and move up into these important positions.

One of the most notable and recurring themes during the interviews was the belief that there were not enough Latinas serving as educators and administrators who would or could help increase their numbers at the superintendency level.

Throughout the interviews, the participants repeatedly indicated that there needed to be commitment to the progress and educational success of all students, not just Latinos. They indicated that Latina superintendents could not just focus on the needs of one group at the expense of others. Zavala shared that a superintendent had to have a “commitment and dedication to truly being an instructional leader, and to being committed to closing the achievement gap for all students, not just Latino students.” Soto-Smith explained,

I think school boards are looking for leaders who can make academic movement within their schools. A lot of districts are dealing with program improvement issues and need to be really knowledgeable as an instructional leader [*sic*], but also to be politically skilled to be able to represent the voice of a school board and to be able to navigate in very complex political climates. I think that you can be a great instructional leader, but if you can’t navigate the politics of a place, you’re not going to be successful.

The same belief was expressed by Gutierrez, who stated,

The school districts are going to be looking for that skilled political person, that knowledgeable instructional leader who can help unlock the learning that needs to take place within a school system. If a district is in improvement mode, they are looking for that person who is going to be able to move that system. I would say really crucial instructional skills, and political skills, and know how to build a team, how to build relationships, how to foster those relationships over time.

The participants in this study also determined it necessary to find ways of coping with difficult situations to stay on their educational and career path. Latinas in the

superintendency must deal with the constraints of cultural expectations and, as a result, they developed sophisticated coping mechanisms. They learned to live with the conflict that surrounded their expanded gender roles at the expense of their emotional and psychological well-being (Martinez-Thorne, 1995). Learning to cope was necessary because the conflict the participants experienced presented them in the superintendency. Coping with the demands of work and home life can be difficult but sometimes can be easier with a good support system. All three participants shared how a having a supportive family and mentors helped them cope with difficulties they encountered throughout their lives.

Recommendations for Future Research

Several areas for potential future research emerged as a result of this study. Of primary importance is research on comprehensive formal mentorship programs, educational administration, and superintendency programs for aspiring Latina school leaders. For example, an examination of university programs that recruits and prepares educators for school administration careers could inform future scholarship in this area.

A secondary study might be the follow-up longitudinal study of Latina educators who aspire to become administrators and are interested in furthering their administrative career, experiences, and education. Although this study involved participants with doctorates, further research should be conducted to determine if a doctorate facilitates the ascension to the superintendency. Finally, further research could be conducted to investigate the perceptions and selection process of school board members regarding Latinas who apply for the superintendency.

Concluding Thoughts

This research builds on limited scholarship that recognizes and values the importance of Latinas in education. This study reveals how Latinas continue to forge pathways to improve education for future generations. The narratives also offer firsthand accounts and insight to the culture and motivation Latinas embody.

As a Latina mother, educator, and leader, I felt an obligation to document and share the stories of successful Latinas in the superintendency. When I look in the mirror, I still see the girl with brown eyes, brown hair, and brown skin who grew up in a west Texas border town. I may be a little taller and a few more certificates on my wall, but that does not tell people who I am and what I represent. As I continue to strive and be the example of a lifelong learner, it does not matter that I can afford to buy expensive suits or boots. What matters is I am a Latina who works with students, teachers, parents and community, and I am committed to school improvement. As an educational leader, I have a greater impact on Latinas, both teachers and students, by identifying opportunities to empower them through critical and courageous conversations that are not dependent on the status quo. Like the participants in this study, my experience as a Latina student and educator offers a crucial perspective for initiatives and practices needed to improve schools for all students, but most importantly Latinas. If Latinas in education do not feel the need to share their stories or improve the opportunities for future generations, it does not give me the right to remain silent either.

Literature gaps are evident with indicators to which the careers of Latinas in education have been ignored. As a direct beneficiary of my own research, it is my anticipation that it will now assist in providing a means to inform universities'

educational administrative and superintendency programs by identifying an untapped talent pool waiting for the challenge to be future leaders. As well as shining a light on the current and future generation of Latina school leaders, of the leadership skills, and experiences that were of benefit to these participants; the benefits of family and professional mentoring and networking in their pursuit of the school superintendency, and social and cultural barriers that exist at the higher levels of academic career advancement.

It is my desire for this research to provide the current and next generation of Latina school leaders with a powerful message; we are the hope, voice, and role models for the future. We must aspire to be successful and achieve progressively more challenging educational leadership positions. As a Latina school leader, this research is valuable for both my professional and personal growth. I am fortunate to have learned firsthand, from veteran Latina(o) voices from the field of education, the essential components needed to pursue the school district superintendency successfully. Professionally, I was able to enhance my leadership skills by continuing education at university's who are known for social justice. This research affirmed my understanding of how I can serve as a role model and mentor for others through personal interactions, mentorship, recruitment, and networking. We do not change anything about a stereotype by fixating on the injustice of it. We do not break through the glass ceiling by pointing at it as an explanation of our results; however, we can impact those attitudes by managing personal effectiveness. I now feel a greater sense of obligation to become a positive influential role model and a voice of hope, especially for those of ethnically diverse

backgrounds who do not perceive academic and professional success as being attainable.

Personally, I made three new friends.

APPENDIX SECTION

APPENDIX A: DEFINITION OF TERMS

The following definitions and operational terms were used in this study and are presented to facilitate the reader's understanding:

Associate or assistant public school superintendent. A middle-management position in a public school district.

Chicano(a). A cultural and political identity that was popularized during the Chicano movement of the 1960s. These identities are composed of multiple layers and are identities of resistance that are often consciously adopted later in life. The term *Chicana/Chicano* is gender-inclusive and is used to discuss both women and men of Mexican origin and/or other Latinas/Latinos who share a similar political consciousness. Because terms of identification vary according to context and not all Mexican-origin people embrace the cultural and political identity of Chicana/Chicano, it is sometimes used interchangeably with Mexican (Bernal, 2002).

Ethnicity. Used to refer to a person's particular heritage, differentiated from the global term that refers to Latina(o). It is used to refer to an individual's heritage in terms of the particular country of origin.

Hispanic. A term that represents a diverse culture. The U.S. Bureau of Census groups all Latinos under the generic "Hispanic" category to distinguish from those of European ancestry. Governmental agencies in the United States use the term Hispanic to represent Spanish-speaking persons residing in the United States "who either become citizens at birth or emigrated from Mexico, Central or South America, the Caribbean, or Spain" (Gonzalez, Huerta-Macias, & Tinajero, 1998, p. 197).

Latino/a. A pan-ethnic label for persons of Latin American and Mexican/American descent. In this study, Latina(o) and Hispanic are used interchangeably.

Pláticas. Intimate conversations and intellectual dialogue (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2006).

Public school superintendent. The principal chief executive officer of the school district, not those with the title of assistant public school superintendent or associate public school superintendent (Grogan, 2000).

APPENDIX B: EMAIL RECRUITMENT

To: Debra Aceves

From: Debra Aceves

BCC:

Subject: Invitation to participate in a Research Study: Breaking the Glass Ceiling in the Superintendency for Latinas

This email message is an invitation for participation in research that has been approved or declared exempt by the Texas State Institutional Review Board (IRB reference: 2013Q4281).

Dear Superintendent,

I am a Latina Secondary School Principal in Texas and a doctoral student at Texas State University. My dissertation study is designed to explore the perceptions and experiences of Latina superintendents. With only a few Latinas serving as a superintendent of a Texas Public School District, your participation in this study will add to the current body of knowledge while expanding the literature on the issue.

Women occupy the vast majority of teaching positions in public schools, yet are underrepresented professionals in the superintendency. Many researchers have noted the strengths women bring to the position such as current academic preparation, knowledge in curriculum and instruction, and ability to work with diverse groups. However, even with all these qualifications, Latinas represent only 1% of the women in the superintendency. The Latino population is the fastest growing minority in the U.S. and the scarcity of Latinas in the top executive position of a school district raises concern as it relates to inclusion, representation and equity.

If you should decide to participate, this study will require that I interview you for approximately 120 minutes and collect relevant search documents (i.e. search brochure and job description) from you. A follow-up interview may also be required at a later date to clarify questions that may arise during the analysis of the observables. The interviews will occur at a date, time, and location most convenient to you. Information obtained in this study will remain confidential and pseudonyms will be used on transcripts which will remain in my possession. The data will be read and examined by my doctoral dissertation chair and myself. It will be stored in a safe location for three years. If you decide to participate, please take a few minutes to respond to this electronic request. I will follow up with a phone call.

Thank you for your time and help by participating in this very important study. If you have any questions about this study, please do not hesitate to call me. I can be reached at 512.791.0080 or by email at da115@txstate.edu. You can also contact my dissertation chair Dr. Guajardo; his cell phone number is 512-589-4289 and his email is maguajardo@txstate.edu.

Respectfully,

Debra Aceves, Principal

James Madison High School

5005 Stahl Rd.

San Antonio, TX. 78247

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project: Breaking the Glass Ceiling in the Superintendency: La Lucha of Latina Superintendents in Texas

Principal Researcher: Debra Aceves
Doctoral Candidate
Texas State University – San Marcos
Cell Phone: (512) 791-0080
Email address: da1159@txstate.edu

Supervising Professor: Dr. Miguel Guajardo
Office (512) 245-6579
Email address: mg50@txstate.edu

This project 2013Q4281 was approved by the Texas State IRB on April 23, 2013. Pertinent questions or concerns about the research, research participants' rights, and/or research-related injuries to participants should be directed to the IRB chair, Dr. Jon Lasser (512-245-3413 - lasser@txstate.edu) and to Becky Northcut, Director, Research Integrity & Compliance (512-245-2314 - bnorthcut@txstate.edu).

INTRODUCTION: You are being invited to volunteer as a participant in a research project conducted by Debra Aceves, who is a doctoral student at Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas. Ms. Aceves is conducting this study as a partial requirement for her doctoral dissertation.

With only a few Latinas serving as a superintendent of a Texas Public School District, your participation in this study will add to the current body of knowledge while expanding the literature on the issue.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask any questions you have about the study before deciding whether or not to participate. Should you agree to participate, you will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH: This study will explore the views and experiences of Latinas who are currently serving or have served as PreK-12 Texas public school district superintendent. The purpose is to gather comprehensive, systematic, and in-depth information about Latinas, their respective family and culture, personal attributes, skills, and aspirations, as they made their ascension to the role of superintendent in a Texas public school district. This research will be a study of Latinas by a Latina, to research and address the issues impacting Latinas that contribute to the phenomenon of the underrepresentation of Latina superintendents in Texas.

STUDY PROCEDURES: This study will employ a qualitative research design and a case study approach to gather comprehensive in-depth information about each participant. If you volunteer to participate in this study, your engagement will include the following:

- Participate in one interview lasting 120 minutes conducted on one date;
- Participate in a follow-up interview, if needed;
- Provide additional documents related to the study for review by the researcher; and
- The opportunity to review the transcripts for accuracy.

The interview will be guided by the following topics of inquiry, such as life history, experiences, and reflection on life history and experiences. The interview goal is

simply to respectfully invite you to a candid dialogue on the conditions and relations that fostered your aspiration of becoming a superintendent.

Additional documents, such as a timeline that maps your ascension to the superintendency, interview brochures, application materials, and any other information in your possession that describes the succession process, and contextual information about the community and the district may be requested and reviewed. The document review may also include the formal and informal processes you may have undergone in order to obtain the superintendency. The formal processes may include upbringing, having been teachers, school-site coordinators, teacher, assistant principals, principals, and district leadership positions. The informal processes may include experiences you may have undergone in order to become a superintendent of schools, such as networking and mentoring.

STUDY BENEFITS: The participation in this study will help contribute to the knowledge-base concerning Latinas in the education field, Latina superintendents, aspiring Latina superintendents, and the recruitment of Latinas for university educational administration and superintendent programs. Another benefit may also include your acquiring a better understanding of your own development as a Latina superintendent. Analysis of data will employ Latina critical race theory, organization, career mobility, and the politics of fit to reveal the constructs behind the advancement of Latinas to the superintendency.

STUDY RISKS: There are no known psychological or physiological risks associated with participating in this research. In reflecting and talking about your lived experiences as a Latina superintendent, you may consider some questions to be sensitive

or you may become uncomfortable with recalling some experiences or memories. However, participants are not required to respond to any question that they do not feel comfortable answer and no personal identifies will be attached to any questions.

COST AND COMPENSATION TO THE PARTICIPANTS: There is no monetary compensation that will be offered to you, but it is anticipated that by participating in this research, it may expand your awareness of the collective experiences of women with similar career paths and ethnic background.

CONFIDENTIALITY: To ensure confidentiality, any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified will remain confidential. Your name will never appear on any research document or publication of these data. You will be assigned a fictitious name that will be used throughout this study and in the dissertation. All written materials, documents, consent forms, and a master list of the participants' fictitious names will be kept for three years and will be stored in a locked file at the researcher's home. The researcher will have sole access.

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY: You have the right to withdraw from this study at any time and there is no penalty to you.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS: A summary of the results of this research will be supplied to you at no cost, upon request.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT: I have read the above statements and understand what is being asked of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason, without penalty. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project.

I understand that should I have any concerns about my participation in this study, I may call the principal investigator, Debra Aceves at (512) 791-0080 or her dissertation Chair Dr. Miguel A. Guajardo at (512) 589-4289. If I have any concerns about the research or my rights as a participant, I may contact IRB chair, Dr. Jon Lasser at (512) 245-3413 (lasser@txstate.edu) or Becky Northcut, Director of the Office of Research Compliance at Texas State University at (512) 245-2314 (bnorthcut@txstate.edu).

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I volunteer to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Breaking the Glass Ceiling in the Superintendency:
La Lucha of Latina Superintendents in Texas
(Texas State IRB Approval: 2013Q4281)

Introduction

My name is Debra Aceves, and I am a doctoral candidate at Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas. As partial fulfillment of the requirements of my doctoral program, I am conducting research on the lived experiences of current or retired Latina superintendents in Pre-K - 12 Texas public school district. Thank you for volunteering to participate in this study and providing me with your responses.

One interview will be held for this research; however a subsequent interview may be needed. Today's interview will last approximately 120 minutes. As noted in the consent form, all information gathered today and in future interviews will be kept confidential. All identifying information will be changed to protect you. Please remember this interview is voluntary and the interview can be stopped at any time, upon your request.

With your permission, I will tape record this interview session to ensure it is as accurate as possible. I can turn off the recorder at any time upon your request. Do you have any questions for me at this time? With your permission, I will begin the interview

In order to gain insight into this topic, the following questions will be asked:

1. Tell me your:
 - a. Age -
 - b. Years in education -
 - c. Marital status -

- d. Number of children -
 - e. Highest degree earned -
2. Tell me about your upbringing. What is your parents' background and what is your family's educational story?
 3. Tell me about when you decided to pursue a career in education?
 4. Describe that journey to me, highlighting special and/or memorable moments in your life.
 5. What were the most common personal or professional barriers, if any, you experienced in your ascent to the superintendency?
 6. What are the skills and talents a Latina needs to possess in order to be successful?
 7. What would you say is your strongest personal or professional quality? What has helped you to achieve success?
 8. To what degree do you consider gender and/or ethnicity to be a barrier when comes to obtaining a superintendency position?
 9. Are there any preparatory actions that you feel were taken that were different from non-Latinas who have aspired to educational administration?
 10. Do current mentoring programs provide aspiring, as well as sitting Latina superintendents with the skills and tools necessary to successfully ascend to the superintendency?
 11. What do you believe the district was looking for in their superintendent?
 12. Tell me about any mentors or networks in your professional life that have helped you?

13. I would like to gain a better understanding of what may have captured your initial interest in applying for the superintendency. Would you say that anyone in particular helped encourage you to apply for the superintendency?
14. Why do you believe that some Latinas are overlooked for the superintendency?
15. Do you believe it is important to have a Latina/o as superintendent of a predominantly Latino (student population) school district?
16. What is one piece of advice you would give Latinas in the educational field?

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