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Latinas in Higher Education: A Phenomenological Look Into Their Journeys to
Midlevel Leadership

A Dissertation Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree
Doctor of Education in Organizational Change and Administration

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Dr. Robert K. Jabs School of Business

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Latinas in Higher Education: A Phenomenological Look Into Their Journeys to

Midlevel Leadership

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by

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has been approved by the Dr. Robert K Jabs School of Business in partial fulfillment of the
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological research study was to explore the obstacles Latinas overcame to advance into midlevel leadership at their respective higher education institutions. A literature review indicated that Latinas and Latinos are among the fastest growing ethnic groups in the United States. Yet, they need to be more represented in leadership roles in Higher Education to mirror the student demographics. The conceptual framework of authentic leadership and resiliency theory guided this study. I used purposive sampling to recruit seven participants between the ages of 24 and 50, of Latin descent, and who had been in midlevel leadership for at least 1 year. Strategies to address the studies credibility included member checking, verbatim transcription, and detailed data descriptions. The data were analyzed using an open coding system, and findings were identified to capture the participants' lived experiences. The data revealed that Latina midlevel leadership experienced imposter syndrome, gender issues, family obligations, and lack of support from leadership. A key finding from the research results was the importance of completing graduate education for Latinas to advance from staff to midlevel leadership. Finally, two Latinas from the study reported their advancement from staff to midlevel was happenstance, which was an unexpected finding for me. Addressing the obstacles discovered through the study is fundamental to supporting more Latina's advance from staff to midlevel leadership in higher education organizations.

Keywords: Latina, mid-level leadership, staff, obstacles, strategies, higher education, woman, women, resiliency theory, authentic leadership

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I want to start by giving God all the Glory and Praise. God you have carried me through this entire process from the beginning to the end of completing my doctoral program and dissertation—God, you have given me the strength, the words, and guidance through a difficult journey. At 8 years old, my son Urijah went to heaven (one year into my doctoral program). And, well, the whole trajectory of my life changed, my plans, and my WHY looked different in “a blink of an eye.” I had to choose whether to continue my doctoral studies or not continue. God, you prepared me for this journey, for this moment, and time and lighted the way every step. God, I LOVE and TRUST You with all my heart and soul. Your goodness and faithfulness are not based on circumstance or outcomes. You are the Alpha and the Omega; You promise to work all things for good for those who are called according to your purpose. Romans 8:28

Mama, I do not have enough words to express my gratitude for YOU. You are my left arm, and as my Urijah says, “You are stronger than you know, AMA.” Mama, thank you for your endless prayers for my mind, body, and soul. Mama, you have helped me keep going and have given me the encouragement and reminder that I must complete my doctorate for Urijah and to continue fulfilling God’s mission for my life and for His glory. I love you so much!!! Thelma and Louise. We will be with Urijah sooner than we know, Mama. We are the three partners in crime...

To my little brothers Raul and Anthony, I am blessed to have you both. To my dad, Ruben, thank you for your humor and support. And to my dad in heaven, I am grateful for your passion for education and wild soul. I love you all and appreciate you! Nikki, Marc, and Samara, my three BFFs, I am blessed to have you and love you dearly! Praise God for my village!

Dr. Charles “Chuck” Sands, I would like to express my sincere gratitude for your support, encouragement, check-ins and wisdom throughout my doctoral journey. Proverbs 3: 5-6

Thank you to my program director, chair, and committee. Dr. Greg Bowden and Dr. Bradley Thompson, I appreciate your wisdom and guidance. Your positive spirit and clear direction have been instrumental to my success. Dr. Thomas Frederick and Dr. Christina Gonzalez, your feedback and contributions were valuable to my research and writing. Many thanks!

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If you have found this dissertation remember that JESUS LOVES YOU so much and is waiting for you to come to Him. 2 Peter 3:9

Urijah’s prayer - “God, I pray that all would come to know Jesus as Lord and Savior.”

To God be the Glory forever and always! In Jesus mighty name, AMEN! John 3:16; John 14:6

DEDICATION

Urijah Jacob, I dedicate this doctorate to you. I started this for you and I am finishing it for you my baby boy!!!

Urijah, you are my Godsent child, you are the reason I am the woman of God I am today. You saved my life, Urijah, all for God's glory. You saved my life so that I could help save others. The two most significant gifts from God are my salvation through Jesus Christ and the gift of becoming your mama. **Urijah** your name means "God is my Light." God is indeed the light.

Urijah, you are my most amazing Gorgeous perfect boy, My RIAH, My Sunshine, My baby bear, My Fierce, Larger than Life boy, WILD, Brave, Courageous, a Mighty Solider for Jesus Christ. Urijah, each day I fight the good fight; I do it to bring God the glory and to honor your life until I am reunited with You, my sweet boy! We have more adventures ahead and lots to catch up on.

And, my Urijah, since you departed back to heaven, it has been a fight, sometimes a battle within me to keep going. Yet, God has not let go of Mama, not even for a moment. Jesus continues walking side by side with me because God knows the end of our story, my Urijah.

I am beyond blessed; God chose me to be your Mama. And I am patiently waiting for the day I get to run to you, squeeze you, give you lots of kisses, hold you tight, and hear about all your heavenly voyages and stories while you were waiting for me to come home. xoxoxoxo

Urijah, our plans were originally much different. We originally planned that once I completed my doctorate, I would become a professor and we would have the summers off, travel together, go on fun adventures, and "Of Course" (your raspy voice), bring many to Jesus. However, God had other plans for us, Urijah. We are still going to fulfill God's mission, just in a different way. **God is faithful and will fulfill His promises. God will continue to use our testimony to help people and bring many to Jesus. We must keep our eyes fixed on Jesus.**

Urijah, my sweet boy, Mama did it for you, baby!!! We did it!!! Happy 11th Birthday, Urijah!!!!!!! (in God's timing). God knew Mama needed to give you this birthday gift to push me to walk across that graduation stage and run the marathon race of perseverance. Urijah, you are my WHY! You are my HEART! I love you with all my heart and soul, Urijah Jacob!!!

Love, Mom and Urijah forever and ever!

The BEST is yet to come... This is not the end of the story. There is MORE...

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." 2 Timothy 4:7

"Some do more in 8 years than some do in a lifetime." –Urijah's Grandpa.

Est. 04.12.2013

Urijah Jacob Roque

"Well done my good and faithful servant..." Matthew 25:21

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

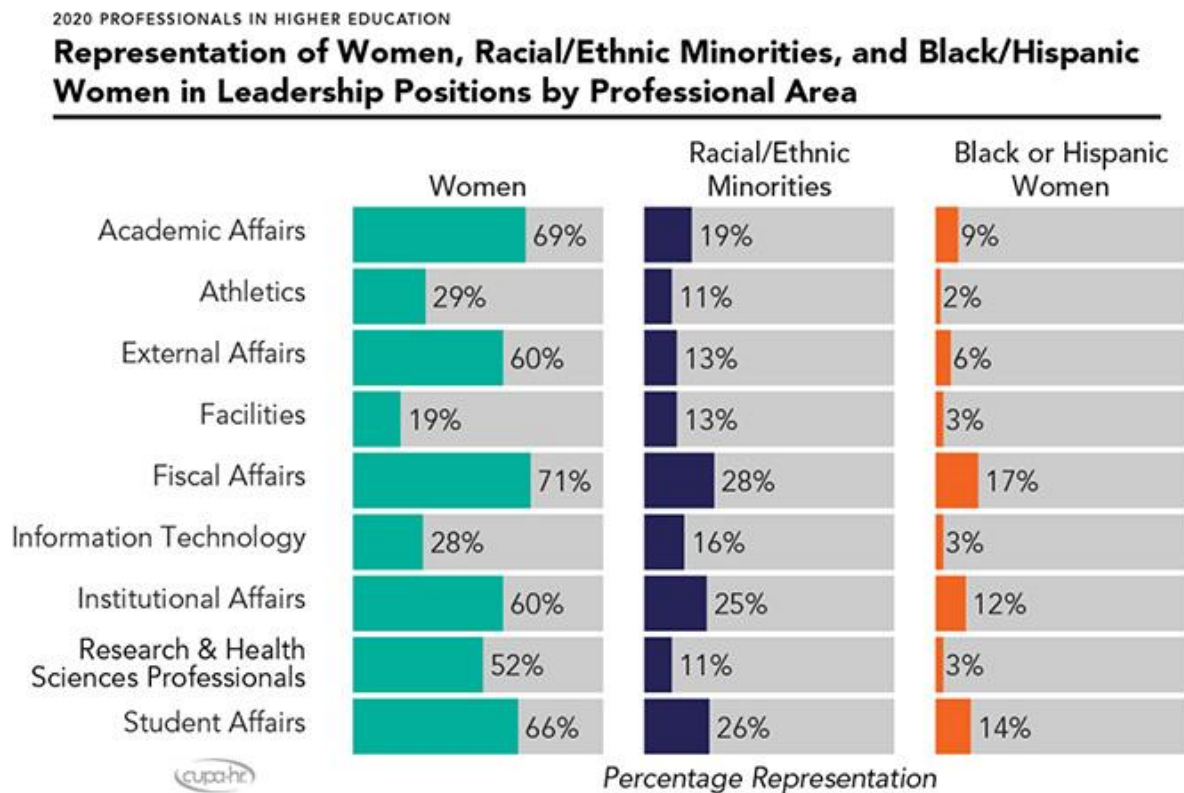
Since 1968, Hispanic Heritage Month has been celebrated in the United States from September 15 through October 15. However, it may be helpful to learn the reason for and significance behind the celebration or its purpose. Hispanic Heritage Week started under President Lyndon Johnson and was expanded under President Ronald Regan to a month-long celebration. National Hispanic Heritage Month celebrates the cultures, histories, and citizens whose ancestry comes from Mexico, Spain, Central and South America, and the Caribbean. Although the United States has created a month-long celebration for the contributions of Hispanics nationwide, only some Hispanic women are noticed, such as Dr. Ellen Ochoa, engineer, astronaut, and trailblazer for the Hispanic community. She was the first Hispanic woman to go to space and later became the first Hispanic and second female director of the Johnson Space Center. These names and stories highlight a few of the Latinas in our history who were influential leaders and began paving the way for other Latinas in the United States. Faith Florez, a descendant of farmworkers, developed an app to keep farm workers safe by monitoring their health. Pura Belpre was the first Latina librarian from New York in 1921. She was a writer and storyteller and is often credited for bringing Spanish to the shelves of libraries. Pura Belpre worked at the New York City Public Library, where she was known to advocate for those who spoke Spanish. She also established bilingual story hours at the library, purchased books in Spanish, and hosted programs. She created an outreach to raise awareness of Spanish heritage and culture during her 45 years with the New York City Public Library. Because of her dedication to the Spanish community, a children's book award is given in her honor to a Latino author whose work celebrates Latino heritage and experiences. Often, Hispanic culture plays an

important role in a Latina’s career trajectory, including solid family relationships, patriarchal roles within the family structure, and respect for elders and authority figures.

Nonetheless, roughly 1.6% of senior executives today are Latina and Hispanic women in the nation’s most prominent companies (Guynn & Fraser, 2022). Figure 1 shows the representation of women among racial and ethnic minorities and more specifically, Black or Hispanic women as of 2020. From the chart, the percentages highlight the need for more diversity among women serving in higher education institutions.

Figure 1

CUPA-HR Report Examines Professional Leadership Positions in Higher Education



Note. From *CUPA-HR Report Examines Professional Leadership Positions in Higher Education*, p. 2, by College and University Professional Association for Human Resources, 2020, May 6 (<https://www.cupahr.org/blog/cupahr-report-examines-professional-leadership-positions-in-higher-education/>).

My motivation for this study stems from my experience as a Latina and my experience in retail and higher education. In 2006, at 18 years old, I started working for a large retail store with a majority of men in leadership and a few women leaders at the midlevel, but none were Latina. Eventually, my mentors in the corporate world were White, Asian, and Latino men. In 2008, with the help of my mentor (a Latino man), I was promoted to lead and, in 2010, to supervisor; I was the only Latina on my leadership team. Although I am grateful to the men who invested in my leadership growth and professional development, having the support of other Latinas may have been beneficial. To see Latinas who looked like me in these leadership roles could have further encouraged my career development. Since switching careers in higher education, I have seen a similar trend of a need for Latinas in midlevel leadership. Although the student demographics have a high percentage of Latina/Latino students, the leadership demographics for staff and faculty are relatively low. So I ask myself, are leaders born or made or a combination of both? Does one become a leader because one is a man, a woman, or a woman of color? One of my goals with this investigation and the motivation behind the study is to support future Latinas by contributing to the research, making a difference, and adding value. I want to be a change catalyst to help other women, specifically Latinas, reach their goals and advance into leadership throughout all organizations. The interest of this research study was to observe the obstacles successful Latina leaders had to overcome and use their strategies to support future Latinas. Thus, there are two questions for the reader to consider. Are Latinas “stuck” in their current roles yet desire to be leaders but do not know how? And how can organizations better support Latinas who aspire to become leaders and assist them in succeeding and reaching their dreams and goals?

Background

The number of Latinas in the labor force has jumped to 12.5 million, and they now account for 16% of the female labor force, which is predicted to grow even more (Mejia, 2021). Moreover, research indicates that the U.S. Hispanic population is the fastest growing, reaching 62.1 million in 2020, an increase of 23% over the previous decade, which outpaced the nation's 7% overall population growth (Passel et al., 2022). Furthermore, Latinas must be represented more in leadership roles within higher education institutions (Eiden-Dillow & Best, 2022). Elenes (2020) indicated that Latinas currently comprise one out of five women in the United States and are anticipated to represent 30% of all women by 2060. Moreover, research has uncovered the fact that Latinas continue to be underrepresented in higher education leadership roles; in 2011, less than 6% were in midlevel management and administrator roles (Garcia, 2020).

The *Women's Leadership Gap* report 2017 unveiled that 39% of women of color represent the nation's female population and 20% of the total U.S. population (Warner et al., 2018). Researchers also found that although Latina student enrollment has increased over the past 2 decades, the leadership in higher education does not reflect the same percentage (S. R. Gonzales & Villarreal, 2021; Sánchez et al., 2020). Acosta (2021) stated that despite advances to create more inclusive workplaces, Latinos face unique barriers and challenges. Sixty percent of Latino professionals aged 18–34 feel they have been overlooked or intentionally passed by for career advancement opportunities (e.g., promotion/pay raise) because of their race, and nearly one in two (44%) Latino professionals have faced blatant discrimination and microaggressions at work.

The data in Figure 2 indicate that the Hispanic population of students in colleges and universities has more than doubled in the last 2 decades (L. Mora, 2022). Yet in Figure 1, the data reveal that women are working in leadership roles in higher education; however, when looking closely at the figure, one can see that the data show that of the women in academic affairs leadership roles, 69% of women, only 9% are Hispanic or Black women. In student affairs, of the 66% of total women, there are only 14% Hispanic or Black women. According to Warner et al. (2018), women of color only hold 4.7% of executive or senior-level positions in the top 500 companies. Other studies have confirmed the significance and importance of having leadership reflective of student populations to enhance the overall success of students (S. R. Gonzales & Villarreal, 2021). Higher education institutions can further diversify their leadership by helping more Latinas move from staff to leadership roles; therefore, it is crucial to examine the experiences of Latina leaders to support the future generation of Latinas. Turner (2010) stated that although Latinas have increased in number among students, faculty, and administrators, challenges still exist that fail to promote, support, and encourage Latinas to seek more leadership roles.

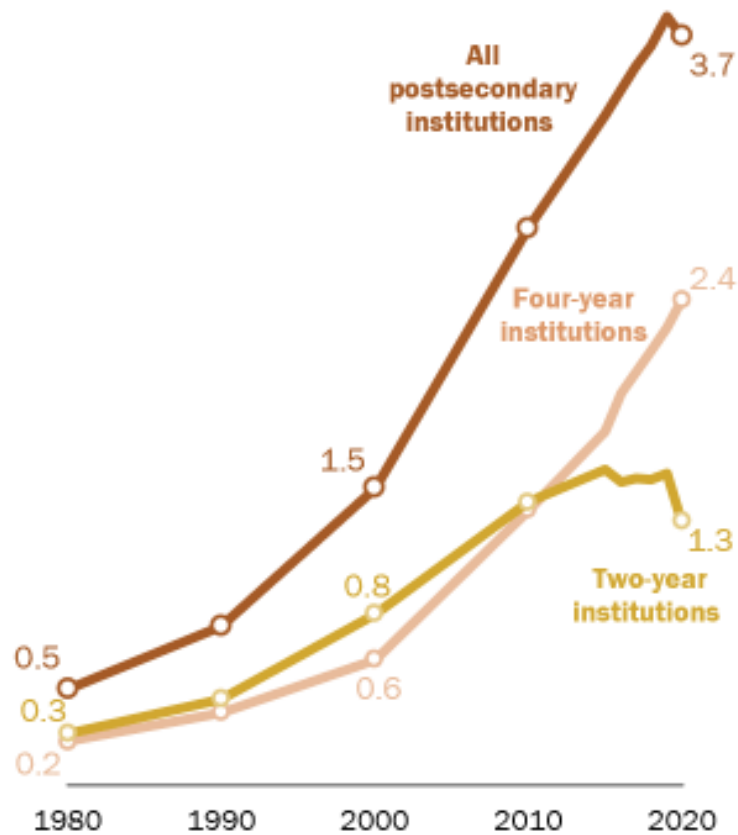
Although Latinas in higher education have been studied, these studies focused on something other than those in midlevel leadership positions. Current research and literature have focused on Latinas in executive leadership roles, and there needs to be more literature focusing on midlevel leadership roles. The gap in the literature for midlevel leadership may be due to a need for more focus on this group. I chose the focus group of midlevel leadership to gather data and help fill in the gap in the lack of literature available to assist leadership in higher education institutions and Latinas in higher education institutions who desire to move from staff positions to leadership. Often, the task can seem daunting for women to move from a staff role into a

Figure 2

Hispanic Enrollment at Colleges and Universities in the United States

Hispanic enrollment at colleges and universities in the U.S. has more than doubled in the last two decades

Fall enrollment of Hispanics at U.S. postsecondary institutions, in millions



Note: Enrollment includes students of all ages.

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Note. From *Hispanic enrollment reaches new high at four-year colleges in the U.S., but affordability remains an obstacle*, p. 1, by L. Mora, 2022, October 7, Pew Research Center (<https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/10/07/hispanic-enrollment-reaches-new-high-at-four-year-colleges-in-the-u-s-but-affordability-remains-an-obstacle/>).

leadership position. I wanted to know the tactics needed to help other Latinas in a staff role and provide a roadmap or tangible techniques to advancement. I wanted to know whether this study revealed similarities and differences with the studies that focused on executive leadership. One of the questions during the interview process was “Are you interested in pursuing executive leadership in the next few years? Why or why not?” Six of the seven participants indicated that they were not interested in pursuing executive leadership for the following reasons: small children, staying student-facing, needing more time to grow, flexibility, and contentment in their current role. This study highlighted the obstacles that midlevel leaders experience to help future Latinas advance beyond a staff position. Sánchez et al. (2020) indicated that most research has examined women of color, but very few studies focus on the experiences of Latina leaders in higher education. This study expanded upon and explored Latina midlevel leaders’ experiences by unfolding their leadership journeys. Furthermore, college campuses can improve their career development strategies and the retention of Latinas who aspire to become leaders in their respective higher education institutions.

Statement of the Research Problem

As opposed to the research of Latinas in midlevel leadership positions, research into the experiences of women leaders in higher education has been conducted on career pathways, strategies, and barriers to their attainment (Burkinshaw & White, 2017; Hannum et al., 2015; Swan Dagen et al., 2022). Barriers identified by women leadership in higher education included not having a leadership identity, lack of support or opportunities, discouragement, different expectations for men and women, and isolation (Hannum et al., 2015). Some of the themes that emerged from the research focused on Latinas at the senior level of leadership in higher

education included the lack of support circles and the need for mentors, the importance of family, tokenism, and system inequities (Eiden-Dillow & Best, 2022),

This qualitative study explored the obstacles Latinas in 4-year public universities in California had to overcome while advancing to midlevel leadership. Higher education institutions can further support Latinas to gain more opportunities for midlevel leadership roles by adopting strategies and support systems that help more Latinas access successful career pathways to leadership. Some methods that may assist in career promotion include mentorship, postsecondary degree attainment, programs focused on providing Latinas with leadership tools, family support, and networks and associations.

Despite the focus in recent years on the need for more diversity among higher education leadership, the numbers of women of color still need to be higher. Higher education institutions must diversify their leadership to mirror the growing population of Latinx students (Eiden-Dillow & Best, 2022; Garcia, 2020). According to Stahl (2021), diversity and inclusion help teams perform better, and the benefits include

- an increased sense of belonging
- increased creativity and innovation
- better decision making
- greater opportunities for professional growth

Also, by having more Latina leaders, higher education institutions will represent the ever-increasing population of Latinas (Garcia, 2020; Velarde Pierce, 2023). Moreover, as more Latinas pursue higher education and desire to become leaders, higher education institutions benefit from developmental programs, faculty, and administrators whom Latina students can visit for direction and motivation (Garcia, 2020).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological research study was to explore the obstacles Latinas overcame to advance into midlevel leadership at their respective higher education institutions. For this study, a midlevel leader is defined as someone who holds the title of manager, supervisor, or director (executive director, director, associate director, assistant director, interim director) or an equivalent to a manager reporting to senior-level or executive-level leadership. Investigating how they overcame the obstacles will assist with the need for Latinas in leadership roles within higher education institutions. This study also aimed to identify factors contributing to the advancement to midlevel leadership positions of Latinas working in higher education. Because Latinas continue to enter the workforce and receive postsecondary college degrees, leaders serving in higher education institutions must aim to close the gap related to supporting and encouraging more Latinas to pursue leadership roles (Santamaria et al., 2014). The representation of Latinas in midlevel leadership positions continues to be minimal, and leadership positions in higher education continue to be dominated by White males and women from other ethnic backgrounds (Kirwan, 2008). Kirwan (2008) examined how Latina midlevel leaders at 4-year public universities described their advancement experience in their respective higher education institutions.

This study was guided by the conceptual framework of authentic leadership and resiliency theory, and these assumptions were tested through a phenomenology qualitative research design. Participants were interviewed to discover whether authentic leadership traits and resiliency theory were used to reach midlevel leadership in higher education institutions. The conceptual framework applied to the study because the research questions explored the obstacles

Latinas overcame to advance their leadership positions and discover the leadership skills that are important while advancing into leadership.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

Main Research Question

Do Latina women experience obstacles in their advancement into midlevel leadership?

Subquestion

Do Latina women receive support from their leadership team as they seek promotion? If so, in what form?

Scope and Significance of the Problem

Latinas and Latinos are among the fastest growing ethnic groups in the United States with a growth rate of 70% since 2000 (Castillo-Montoya & Torres-Guzman, 2012; Menchaca et al., 2016). Nevertheless, they need to be represented more in leadership roles in Higher Education. As the Latinx population grows, so does the number of Latinas and Latinos pursuing higher education (Alarcón & Bettez, 2017; Sánchez et al., 2020). Higher education institutions ought to do a better job of diversifying their leadership to echo the student body. Although higher education institutions have increased in Latinx students obtaining postsecondary education, there is a lack of diversity among faculty, staff, and leadership (Montas-Hunter, 2012). According to M. Mora (2023), “Despite the increase in their representation among college and university employees, Hispanics, especially women, continue to remain underrepresented in faculty and leadership positions” (para. 4). The data reveal that Latinas have made some progress over the years; however, “For example, between 2016 and 2021, 2.8% of college and university chief

officers were Hispanic Women” (M. Mora, 2023, para. 5). Furthermore, these statistics reveal that Latinas in leadership roles remain inconsistent and feeble.

Sánchez et al. (2020) indicated that in the fall of 2016, of the students enrolled in college, 17% were Latinx, yet Latinx leadership was at 9%, and of those 9%, 6% were Latina women. However, 67% of Latinas held staff positions in student services on college campuses, indicating that Latina women are entering and gaining access to entry-level higher education roles. Conversely, the obstacles in this study revealed that to advance, the participants had to tone down their race and ethnicity, navigate the intersection of identities and the field to reach executive leadership roles in their respective institutions. The researchers mentioned that Latina leaders in their early career experiences often felt invisible and struggled in their new roles while feeling if they had to prove themselves or act like someone else to fit in.

Furthermore, although Latinas remain tenuous in higher education, one in five students are of Hispanic lineage in the K-12 schools, so having more Latinas in leadership roles remains necessary. When higher education leaders share the backgrounds of the students they serve, they can draw upon shared experiences (Fernandez, 2018). Exposing Latinx students to more leaders who look like them helps them imagine what they want to become and can reinforce strong self-efficacy regarding the value of their identities. Fernandez (2018) stated, “You can’t be what you can’t see” (para. 4).

Definitions

Authentic leadership. Luthans and Avolio (2003) defined authentic leadership as “a process that draws from both positive psychological capacities and a highly developed organizational context, which results in both greater self-awareness and self-regulated positive behaviors on the part of leaders and associates, fostering positive self-development” (p. 243).

Authenticity. Being true to the self, meaning owning your thoughts and beliefs and acting according to them (Luthans & Avolio, 2003).

Glass ceiling. The invisible obstacles women faced as they struggled to become leaders within their organizations (Barnes, 2017).

Hispanic. Refers to a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race, about the Hispanic population and its origin (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.).

Latina. A woman of Latin American descent (Onorato & Musoba, 2015).

Latino. Often used interchangeably with the term Hispanic (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.).

Latinx. A term used to describe people of or related to Latin American descent of origin. It is a gender-neutral term (Steinmetz, 2018).

Resiliency. The ability to overcome adversity and be successful despite exposure to high risk (Fraser et al., 1999).

White privilege. White privilege is a concept that highlights the unfair societal advantages that White people have over non-White people (Cuncic, 2023).

Organization of the Study

This study examined the lived experiences of Latina midlevel leaders working at 4-year public universities in California. Chapter 1 provided the nature of the study and background, the problem statement, the purpose of the study, research questions, the conceptual framework, the scope of the study, definitions and key terms, and the significance of the study. Next is Chapter 2, which provides a literature review; Chapter 3 outlines the methodology and design of the study, and Chapter 4 details the data analysis. Chapter 5 provides an interpretation of findings, recommendations for future research, and conclusion.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Although numerous organizations have recently prioritized workplace diversity, equality, and access to higher paying jobs, White men remain in most executive positions (e.g., CEOs, financial officers, and management directors). As of 2019, Hispanics are the largest minority group in the United States at 18.3% (Swerzenski et al., 2020). Nonetheless, they only occupy 4.3% of executive positions; of that 4%, only 1% are Latinas (Guynn & Fraser, 2022).

According to Salazar Montoya and Kew (2020),

Latinas ... are underrepresented in educational leadership ... nationally, [and] even in border states like New Mexico where the percentage of Latinx students is very high.

Although Latinx populations are rapidly growing, [they] are not representative [in the] numbers of Latinas in leadership positions. (p. 3)

Despite the ongoing growth of Latinx students in higher education, Latinx administrators struggle to advance to the top. Hazelrigg (2019) revealed that despite the development of Latinx students in college, the demographics for Latinx administrators have remained stagnant, with the ongoing focus on diversifying administrators, faculty, and staff. States like Texas struggle with a lack of Latinx representation in their leadership, yet so much of the student population is Latinx. The American Council of Education report stated that only 30% of college presidents are women; of the 30%, 5% are women of color, and of the 5%, less than 1% are Latina (Hazelrigg, 2019). Hazelrigg stated, “Santiago said seeing more Latinx administrators would be beneficial for Latinx students” (para. 3). Many endorse that higher education institutions’ leaders, faculty, and staff should reflect their student population.

Overview

A literature review determined the limited research on Latinas in higher education. While searching the key term *Latina* using the California Baptist University Library, I found 133,172 results; once I added the critical term *higher education*, the results were reduced to 3,231, and the results were reduced even more once I added *administration* to 230 articles. I tried removing administration and adding the term midlevel leader, and only one article was found through this method of searching for research articles. For this study, I examined the lived experiences of Latina midlevel leaders serving in 4-year public institutions in California. For this study, a midlevel leader is defined as someone who holds the title of manager, supervisor, or director (executive director, director, associate director, assistant director, interim director) or an equivalent to a manager reporting to senior-level or executive-level leadership. The literature highlighted research that serves as the basis for further investigation of the underrepresentation of Latina midlevel leadership in higher education. The literature emphasized the history of women in leadership in higher education, women of color in higher education, and Latina leaders across various sectors, and it went explicitly into Latina leaders in higher education.

Conceptual Framework

For this study, a conceptual framework provided a lens through which to view the research matter. This study was guided by authentic leadership and resiliency theory. The conceptual framework provided a lens to understand better the leadership traits and skills needed to help Latinas advance into midlevel leadership in higher education.

Authentic Leadership

According to Luthans and Avolio (2003), authentic leadership is defined “as a process that draws from both positive psychological capacities and a highly developed organizational

context, which results in both greater self-awareness and self-regulated positive behaviors on the part of leaders and associates, fostering positive self-development” (p. 243). According to the researchers, authentic leadership is often a blend of transformational and ethical leadership. Because of positive psychology, authentic leaders can implement their leadership if it aligns with their values and personality. According to Pillai and Mikkilineni (2021), authentic leaders are developed by their life experiences and critical characteristics of hope, resilience, self-efficacy, and optimism. The researchers indicated that authentic leaders possess four main capabilities:

self-awareness (understanding oneself and the impact they have on others), internalized moral perspective (high ethical values and do not compromise during challenges and pressures), balanced processing (are objective and take informed decisions based on detailed analysis of information and data) and relational transparency (ensures others are transparent, fair, and consistent). (Pillai & Mikkilineni, 2021, p. 133).

Researchers Ngunjiri and Hernandez (2017) indicated that to be influential leaders, women must employ an authentic leadership style that includes integrity, trust-building, transparency, and honesty. Researchers suggested that there is a possible connection between authentic leadership and being an influential leader. Adopting an authentic leadership style, Latina women can be better equipped to advance and hold a presence in higher education institutions.

Resiliency Theory

For this study, resiliency theory provided a conceptual framework for comprehending how some individuals can bounce back after experiencing adverse situations. Resiliency theory supplied the conceptual framing for studying and understanding why some Latinas become leaders and some stay in staff positions without excelling in their organization. Resiliency theory

argues that it is typically not the adversity that is important, but rather how people deal with the adversary. When Latinas face adversity, frustration, setbacks, or failure, resiliency may help them bounce back and overcome obstacles to advance their career.

Ledesma (2014) stated, “Resiliency theory has been researched across many disciplines; for example, in psychology, resiliency was defined as the ability to bounce back and withstand hardship by repairing oneself” (p. 2). In the field of developmental psychopathology, it refers to the ability to cope with challenges and pressures while maintaining an integrated sense of self. In human development, *resiliency* is the ability to withstand and cope with adversity.

The literature revealed two significant contributors to resiliency theory: psychologists Dr. Norman Garmezy and Dr. Michael Rutter (VicHealth, 2015). Dr. Garmezy began his work during the mid-19th century in the field of schizophrenia with adults. Furthermore, Garmezy focused on preventing mental illness through motivation, protective factors, cognitive skills, and positive social change. He then went on to study children who were at-risk. During his research, he found that children capable of cognitive, academic, and social domains were less likely to experience adverse outcomes while growing up. During the research, his team came across children who experienced adversity and preserved social, cognitive, and academic domains yet stood equal to those who did not face adversity.

Dr. Michael Rutter was known as the “father of child psychiatry,” leading the way for several psychiatrists and developmental psychologists worldwide. In addition, he was credited with numerous breakthroughs within his field of work. Rutter (1987) indicated that “resilience is concerned with individual variations in response to risk. Some people succumb to stress and adversity whereas others overcome life hazards” (p. 317). Rutter also noted in the research that people need to ask why and how some individuals maintain high self-efficacy and self-esteem

despite facing similar adversities that lead others to lose hope and give up. Much of Rutter's research focused on vulnerability and protective mechanisms, interaction effects, mediating mechanisms, and opportunities.

Greene's Resiliency Theory

Garmezy (1991, as cited in VicHealth, 2015) defined resilience as "not necessarily impervious to stress. Rather, resilience is designed to reflect the capacity for recovery and maintained adaptive behavior that may follow initial retreat or incapacity upon initiating a stressful event" (p. 8). Greene (2002) indicated that individuals' capabilities change over time and are often modified depending on the individual and their respective environment. Resilience includes internal and external factors that encourage overcoming and managing the most challenging obstacles. Internal factors may influence attitude and mindset, and external factors include the community's well-being. Theoretical assumptions can be applied to Latinas in higher education because these expectations present realities from Latina's identity as women and for many as first-generation leaders in their families. Researchers reinforced that caring relationships and strong support networks contribute to resiliency (Greene et al., 2003; Pillai & Mikkilineni, 2021).

According to Greene (2002), a few critical resilience theoretical assumptions include a link to life stress and people's unique coping capacity; involves competence in daily functioning; is enhanced through connection or relatedness with others; is influenced by diversity, including ethnicity, race, gender, age, sexual orientation, economic status, religious affiliation, and physical and mental ability; and is affected by the availability of environmental resources. In Figure 3 Greene's key theoretical assumptions of resiliency are shown.

Figure 3

Resilience: Key Theoretical Assumptions Resilience

- is a biopsychosocial and spiritual phenomenon
- involves a transactional dynamic process of person-environment exchanges
- encompasses an adaptational process of goodness-of-fit
- occurs across the life course with individuals, families, and communities experiencing unique paths of development
- is linked to life stress and people's unique coping capacity
- involves competence in daily functioning
- may be on a continuum—the opposite of risk
- may be interactive, having an effect in combination with risk factors
- is enhanced through connection or relatedness with others
- is influenced by diversity, including ethnicity, race, gender, age, sexual orientation, economic status, religious affiliation, and physical and mental ability
- is expressed and affected by multilevel attachments, both distal and proximal, including family, school, peers, neighborhood, community, and society; consequently, resilience is a function of micro-, exo-mezzo, and macro factors
- is affected by the availability of environmental resources
- is influenced by power differentials

Note. From *Resilience: An Integrated Approach to Practice, Policy, and Research*, by R. R. Greene, 2002, NASW Press.

Criticisms of Resiliency Theory

Chamorro-Premuzic and Lusk (2017) indicated that resilience is defined “as the psychological capacity to adapt to stressful circumstances and to bounce back from adverse events, is a highly sought-after personality trait in the modern workplace” (para. 1). Sandberg and Grant argued that people can often think of resilience like a muscle: it contracts during the good and expands during the bad times (Chamorro-Premuzic & Lusk, 2017). Chamorro-Premuzic and Lusk stated, “The best way to develop resilience is through hardship, which multiple philosophers have pointed out through the years. ... Nietzsche famously stated ‘that which does not kill us makes us stronger’” (para. 2). However, can too much resilience be negative? For example, too much resilience could end up driving people to aim for unrealistic goals. Nevertheless, leaders tend to encourage or celebrate people who aim high or dream big.

Yet, it is better to adjust goals based on more achievable levels and let go of goals that are unattainable. Research often has revealed that people spend a vast amount of time on unachievable goals, a phenomenon called the “false hope syndrome.” Likewise, people with an excess of resilience can become tolerant of adversity. For example, this can translate to employees dealing with unhealthy work environments or demoralizing jobs in the workplace. According to research, 75% of employees consider their direct line manager the worst part of the job in the United States (Chamorro-Premuzic & Lusk, 2017). At the same time, 65% would opt for a pay cut to have a different manager. Researchers have confirmed that resilience can be highly adaptive and valuable; however, when taken to the extreme, it can deter individuals from attempting seemingly impossible goals or make them tolerant of counterproductive or unpleasant circumstances.

History of Women in the Workplace

Women during the 18th and 19th centuries were instrumental to their family’s economic well-being. Women contributed to the success of making and growing goods sold or bartered to contribute to the home (Yellen, 2020). In the 1700s, women’s work primarily entailed cleaning, cooking, caring for the children and animals, gardens, weaving, and sewing cloth. Women also took over the farm management while their husbands were away on long-term trips.

Unfortunately, many of the women who entered the workforce during the 1600s to the mid-1800s were enslaved or worked as servants, including Native Americans and women from Europe and Africa. Following the American Revolution and leading into the 19th century, one of the primary roles of work for mothers was educating their children. Because of the rise and fall of the American economy, the history of women’s participation in the workforce has revealed a direct correlation (Webb, 2010). During the 1820s, the Industrial Revolution, the “Mill Girls”

could work in mills and get a paycheck. Throughout this time, the economy was strong, businesses were successful, and there were more opportunities to work. At this time in history, women were also seen working outside of the home because of no husband or family responsibilities (Webb, 2010; Yellen, 2020).

Webb (2010) emphasized that “by 1914, America had entered World War I, and women found themselves in the workforce while the men went off to war” (p. 1). After World War I, women remained in the workforce, and women’s roles evolved while social norms also changed. Women comprised 23% of the workforce during this time, and women 15 years or older worked outside the home.

In the early 20th century (1920s), most women did not work outside of the home in the United States, and the women who did work were typically unmarried and young. About 20% of women worked outside the home during this era and were gainfully employed (Yellen, 2020). Women’s work has generally been classified as less important or challenging and less significant—even though necessary tasks like cooking, cleaning, and laundry are vital to the family home and communities. Today, women make up over 50% of the workforce. Mothers who work full-time are known to work 50% more in the house than fathers who work full-time. Women typically need more flexibility in the workplace because they also work at home. Often, this can deter women from excelling in their workplace, holding off on applying for promotions or excelling in the work environment.

History of Women of Color in the Workplace

During the 1930s–1970s, women began to have more independence, and the number of women in the workplace increased. Big waves of women entering the workforce took place following the World Wars. Since women entered, research has been done on the effects on

women and their families. According to Sweet (2021), women will ultimately achieve equal pay to their male counterparts by 2059. It is discouraging to imagine that women will only obtain equal pay to men almost a century after the Equal Pay Act was passed. The Equal Pay Act was passed in 1960 when women only earned 61 cents for every \$1 a man would make. The wage gap is even lower for women of color in the United States; Black women are paid 62 cents, Native Americans 57 cents, and Latinas 54 cents for every dollar (Sweet, 2021). According to Sweet, “Researchers blame the gender wage gap on a variety of reasons, ranging from differences in the industries women and men working, racist hiring and discrimination promotion practices, discrepancies in hours worked, job segregation, and years of experience” (para. 2). Additionally, it has been noted that non-White women work more and work for less (Conway, 2016). Despite the constant struggles women face in the workforce, women have managed to accomplish success in their careers by reaching Fortune 500 CEO’s although numbers are low, women have gone to space, and they have become Pulitzer Prize-nominated poets, civil rights activists, labor activists, and much more.

History of Women in Higher Education Leadership

Parker (2015) briefly overviewed the evolution of female professors and administrators in the United States dating back to the 1800s. For decades, women enjoyed teaching even when women were scarce in business. During the 1960s to 1980s, White women dominated the semiprofessions, including elementary teaching, librarian, nursing, and social work. During this same era, White males dominated professional occupations such as medicine, ministry, law, dentistry, science, university teaching, and law.

Parker (2015) stated, “Between 1870 and 1930, the percentage of women represented in the occupation groups called professions increased from 5% of all employed women in 1870 to

14% in 1930” (p. 4). However, during the Great Depression, there was a decrease in the number of women working. Following the Great Depression, numbers did begin to increase, and in 1950, 10% of professionals were White women. In 1960, White women increased to one third of the labor market, but very few held professional positions. In U.S. universities, women taught literature, home economics, and foreign languages, which were the “soft” courses of the university. Barriers existed even during these times, including quotas, legal restrictions, antinepotism rules, and administrative regulations. In addition to these barriers, women have preferred semiprofessional versus male-dominated professions for centuries.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the workplace and education were moving toward equality for women in higher education regarding administration and faculty. Parker (2015) stated, “The 1964 Civil Rights Act called for equal treatment of minority groups and the elimination of sexual discrimination” (p. 9). The changes in governmental legislation and the strong movement to equality led higher education institutions to become more focused on function versus gender. From 1950 to the present, males have primarily assumed the roles of most presidents, vice presidents, deans, and other top administrative roles on college campuses. Many women are in education and graduate programs, yet men are the predominant population filling the leadership offices that manage higher education.

Women of Color in Leadership in Higher Education

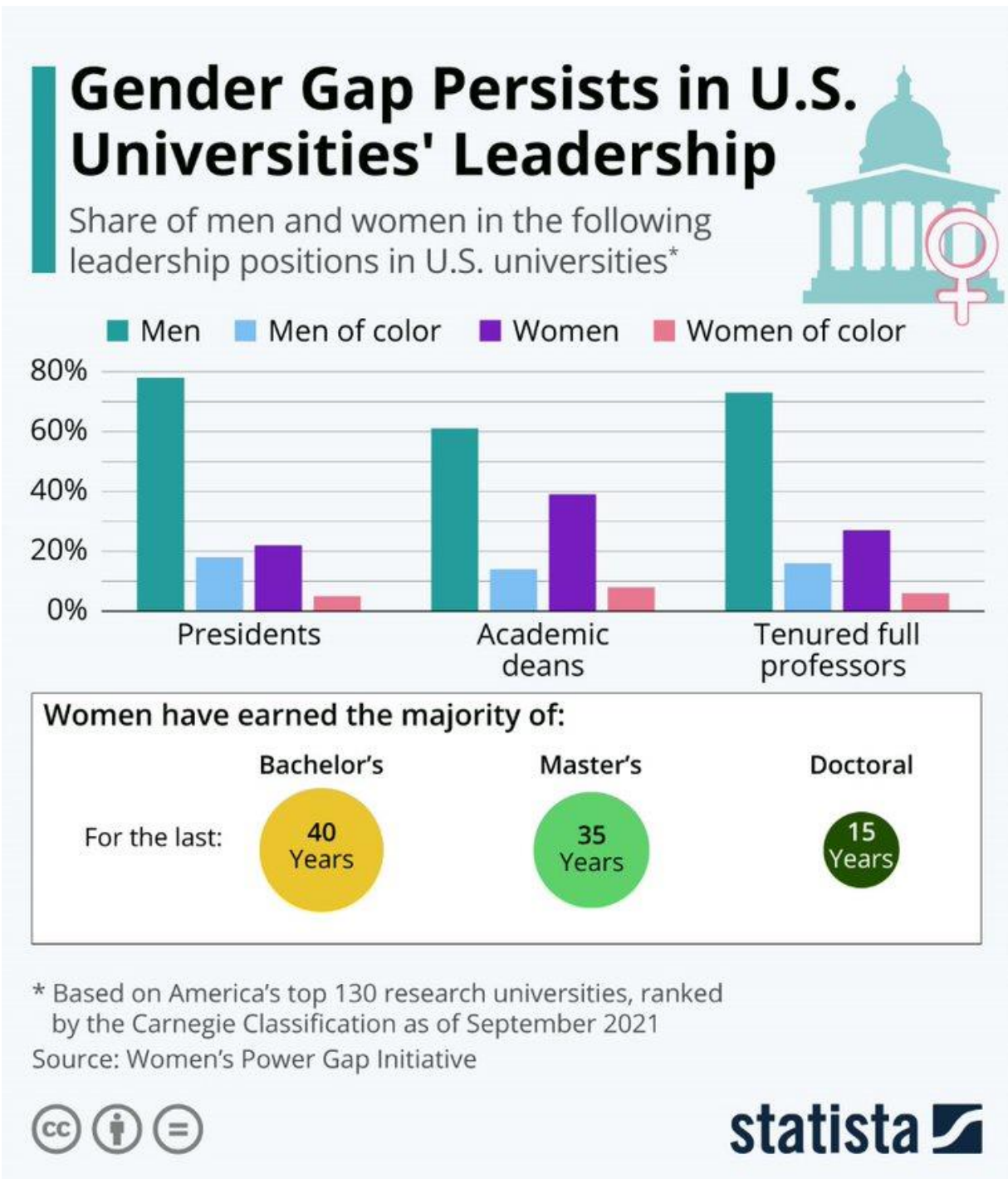
Over the past few decades, women have become a significant part of the labor workforce, and more women are pursuing higher education (Chance, 2021; Hannum et al., 2015). However, women of color remain underrepresented in leadership roles (Chance, 2021; Manongsong & Ghosh, 2021). According to Manongsong and Ghosh (2021), “A leader is an individual within a group or organization who has the most authority and influence over other members through

status, power or expertise” (p. 437). Although this conceptual definition of leadership is gender-neutral, there continues to be a lack of women and minority individuals in leadership throughout industries including higher education. Research has revealed that women of color in leadership add value to organizations and bring fresh and innovative ideas (Chance, 2021; Hannum et al., 2015; Teague, 2015). Nonetheless, women of color hold less than 5% of presidencies in higher education institutions (Manongsong & Ghosh, 2021). Figure 4 reveals the disparity among academic universities across the United States. According to the chart, the percentage of women of color for presidents, academic deans, and tenured full professors remains under 10% (Fleck, 2022).

Additionally, women of color continue to be less represented and have fewer opportunities in higher education leadership (Chance, 2021). Researchers indicated that minority women tend to serve in senior leadership roles almost exclusively at community colleges, minority-serving institutions, and lower ranked schools. Although the percentage of female leaders in higher education is more significant than in other sectors, higher education still must diversify its leadership. The student population continues to diversify; however, the diversity of leaders in higher education institutions remains trailing behind. In a recent study, 59% of graduates were women, and 51% of doctoral and first professional degrees were women (Teague, 2015). During the next decade, higher education institutions should anticipate leadership turnover, take the lead, and diversify the leadership to better represent their student population. Teague (2015) indicated that corporate studies reveal that organizations with more women in leadership are more productive and innovative and tend to be more profitable.

Figure 4

Gender Gap Persist for University Leadership



Note. From *Infographic: Gender Gap Persists in U.S. Universities' Leadership*, p. 2, by A. Flick, 2022, Statista Daily Data (<https://www.statista.com/chart/27336/number-of-men-and-women-at-the-top-of-higher-education/>).

Latina Leadership Across Various Sectors

Latinas continue to be the fastest growing group in the American workforce (Menchaca et al., 2016). However, Blalock (2014) indicated that women leaders in general are held back by their lack of faith in themselves, and this is becoming more evident in Latina leadership. Blalock noted that women must take risks, be open to new ventures, and say yes even when unsure. Latinas specifically need to emulate the character of influential women leaders. Anna Maria Chavez, CEO of Girl Scouts of the USA and daughter of immigrant workers from Mexico, is a prime example of a Latina leader who set the target high and cultivated new opportunities that helped her succeed. Chavez has encouraged other Latinas to become leaders in their families, businesses, lives, and communities (Blalock, 2014, p. 11).

Sánchez et al. (2020) used a qualitative study to answer the question: How do the multiple social identities of early-career Latina higher education administrators influence their experiences of belonging on campus? The researchers used a thematic approach and were able to analyze the experiences of these women. This approach allowed the researchers to collect stories from participants about their unique experiences as entry-level higher education administrators (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Because the researchers used a thematic analysis, the participants could speak openly about their career pathway into higher education (Sánchez et al., 2020). They interviewed eight early-career higher education administrators who identified as Latina, and the participants worked at various universities and colleges around the United States. The study revealed three vital themes related to how multiple social identities impact this group of Latina women at their respective institutions and how their experiences impact their vision of their future. The three themes included (a) toning down their race, (b) intersection of identities, and (c) navigating the field. The study revealed that Latinas who worked at predominantly White

institutions (PWI) felt their race/identity affected their professional experiences in higher education. For example, Andrea, a residence hall director who worked at a PWI, mentioned how her gender largely impacted her Mexican identity. She felt she always had to prove herself and do better than others. Andrea also revealed through her interview that she must be the whitest version of herself and often must hide pieces of her identity. Andrea also discussed the emotional burden of explaining why building connections with other Latinx students and other Latinx colleagues was essential. The researchers also revealed that early-career Latina higher education professionals felt invisible and struggled while navigating their new positions. The participants indicated the pressure to “prove others wrong,” avoid the perception of being “unintelligent,” or the pressure of being the “whitest version of themselves.” Most of the women in the study echoed the literature of other women of color working as administrators in higher education. As mentioned previously, there is a small library of literature centered on the experiences of Latina higher education administrators; however, this body of literature primarily focuses on senior-level administrators. It is critical that scholars also explore the journeys of Latinas as entry-level professionals, which will ultimately prepare more Latinas for top executive roles in the future (Sánchez et al., 2020). Although Sánchez et al.’s study highlighted the experiences of eight women and cannot generalize to all Latinas working in higher education as working professionals, this research does add important context for this group. Creating job opportunities in top administrative roles in higher education will require the support of institutions.

Onorato and Musoba (2015) conducted a study with 11 Hispanic female student leaders at a 4-year public Hispanic-serving institution (HSI). Maria, a new Hispanic student at her college, admires the president of the sorority she is interested in joining and thinks she will never have a chance to become a leader. Maria also wonders whether she will ever be a leader in life.

Maria also has goals of getting into law school but has yet to learn how to achieve these dreams. Onorato and Musoba (2015) stated, “Many universities have leadership courses or leadership programming, and institutional mission statements are generously peppered with phrases about developing tomorrow’s leaders; we do not know enough about how students develop into leaders, particularly students from underrepresented ethnic groups” (p. 15). However, the research confirms that leadership development programs affect cognitive, career pathways, and psychosocial development. The researchers indicated substantive research on White males but far less on diverse groups.

Moreover, there is very little research about Latina women’s leadership development, whether in PWI or minority environments. Onorato and Musoba (2015) focused on the leadership experiences of Hispanic women at HSIs. The purpose of their study was to get a better understanding of Hispanic college women’s leadership identity. The researchers used a case study method approach that involved individual and group interviews to get a well-rounded understanding of the women’s experiences and identities. A case study is an investigation in a real-life framework, and the researchers used a qualitative case study design. Five topics emerged from the interview: (a) encouraging relationships, (b) meaningful experiences, (c) self-development, (d) role of gender, and (e) changing of understanding of leadership identity.

Garcia (2020) provided a study on the intersection of race and gender for Latina midlevel leaders. She was surprised by the need for Latinas in leadership at the public higher education institution where she is employed. Latinas remain underrepresented among faculty and administrators in higher education. Community colleges are often a tangible way for Latinx students to pursue their dreams of obtaining a college degree; nonetheless, Latinas or Latinos are not supported consistently to seek leadership positions. Though more than 40% of Latinx

undergraduates are enrolled at community colleges, they are not likely to see people from similar backgrounds represented at the leadership level in their community colleges.

Obstacles and Challenges for Women, Latinas, and Women of Color

Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) indicated, “Although men and leadership have been studied extensively, women, especially women of color, have been largely ignored in this research and theory development until recently” (p. 171). Sanchez-Hucles and Davis stated, “Popular textbooks on leadership, such as that by Yukl (2009), may devote a few pages to research examining women in leadership roles but ignore the influence of race and ethnicity” (p. 171). They continued,

A current problem is how to expand the number of women and women of color in leadership positions. Increasing the number of women leaders is important for reasons beyond political correctness. At this time, the United States is not producing enough leaders to meet organizational demands, a shortage that is likely to become more acute with the upcoming retirement of the baby boomers (Harris, Moran, & Moran, 2004; Treverton & Bikson, 2003). Women leaders can fill this void. Women comprise 51% of the labor force and provide a significant pool of potential leaders (Catalyst, 2005).

Women predominate in lower level managerial ranks and are only marginally represented at the executive levels. Yet research and anecdotal reports suggest that women are highly suited for more advanced leadership positions (Catalyst, 2005; Richardson & Loubier, 2008). (pp. 171–172)

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2007) reported the following percentages of women in managerial positions by ethnicity: Whites, 39%; African Americans, 31%; Asians, 46%; and Latinas, 22%. Women fill only 2.5% of top offices (Catalyst, 2006). It also must be noted that

Native American women are rarely mentioned in the leadership literature, as their numbers are so slight (Muller, 1998). Women accounted for only 14.7% of Fortune 500 board seats in 2005; of these positions, 79% were held by White women, and were held by women of color (Catalyst, 2006). Women occupy only 24 (2.4%) of the CEO positions in the Fortune 1000 (Catalyst, 2006). This proportion has remained stable in the past decade, although the situation may slowly be changing (Ragins, Townsend & Mattis, 1998). (p. 172)

Barriers to the Advancement of Women Leaders

Although there is no shortage of qualified women to fill leadership roles, and women make up almost half of the labor force, there is still not enough representation of women of color in all workforce sectors. Women outnumber men who hold their bachelor's and master's degrees. However, from Congress to corporate rooms, courtrooms to healthcare, universities to nonprofits, men are more likely to earn more for doing the same work and hold most of the midlevel to executive leadership roles. Women face multiple barriers and gender-based discrimination in the workplace in every country. The bias tends to set in early from the type of education life experience to the kinds of work they get directed into. Women face occupational segregation in the public and private sectors and often experience multiple obstacles, such as a lack of financial and technological resources, mentors, and gender-based discrimination or harassment. The following literature highlights prominent barriers to advancement, which include the glass ceiling, family obligations, imposter syndrome, and a lack of mentors.

The Glass Ceiling

Another obstacle that emerged from the literature is the glass ceiling although many would think women no longer deal with obstacles like the glass ceiling. The term *glass ceiling* was used to describe the invisible obstacles women faced as they struggled to become leaders

within their organizations (Barnes, 2017; Chance, 2021). Latinas may also experience internal or invisible barriers that include pressures not to make mistakes, a force to conform to the college or university norms, limited perceptions of power, and feelings of exclusion from critical networks or groups. The research revealed that Latinas often feel that if they make a mistake at work, they could get fired and frequently feel intense pressure to succeed, especially if they are among the few Latinas in leadership (Garcia, 2020). Other obstacles are feelings of isolation, and these internal barriers can significantly affect overall job satisfaction, success, and performance. Besides, Latinas may also experience shyness or modesty when showing off accomplishments. So, awareness of their strengths, achievements, and skills will help Latinas to advance to higher academic roles.

According to research in the United States, in 2019, 32% of leadership positions were held by White women while Black women had only 4%, Latina women held 4.3%, and 2.5% by Asian women (Chance, 2021). Chance (2021) stated, “Scholars and business professionals agree that more needs to be done to advance women to senior leadership positions in all sectors and industries, specifically women of color” (p. 209). Likewise, some early studies on gender differences related to leadership were by Schein (1975). Schein (1975) compared the female and male middle managers and highlighted their differences. Schein found that to be successful, one had to obtain the attitude, character, and temperament that are more common to men (Barnes, 2017). However, very few looked at minoritized women and the challenges this group faces in addition to being a woman. Barnes (2017) mentioned that although White women may experience a glass ceiling, women of color experience a concrete ceiling. The concrete ceiling represents the difficulty women of color face when becoming leaders in their organizations.

Barnes indicated that women of color represent one third of the workforce yet only hold less than 10% of leadership roles.

According to Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010), “Different terms have been used to characterize this slow advance of women leaders. Some call this barrier a *glass ceiling*” (p. 172).

Sanchez-Hucles and Davis stated,

This trajectory involves diverse challenges, indirect forays, and ventures into foreign territory rather than following a straight line to the top. Women can achieve leadership positions but only by carefully traversing complex paths as they confront issues associated with child care needs, racism, sexism, and discrimination based on identity. (p. 172)

They continued,

Others highlight thicker barriers posed by the racism combined with sexism that women of color encounter, using terms such as *concrete wall* or *sticky floor* (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Betters-Reed & Moore, 1995). More recently, the term *labyrinth* has been used to describe the uneven path of upward progression for women in organizations (Eagly & Carli, 2007). (p. 172)

Family Obligations

Another obstacle Latinas may experience is responsibilities to a family, which is often a cultural value of putting their families first. Likewise, Latinas are expected by their families to choose family obligations over career aspirations and career responsibilities. Also, because Latinas often feel the pressure to work twice as hard as their White counterparts, they may feel guilty about choosing to spend time with their families. Often, Latinas struggle with vital decisions such as deciding to have a career, family, and partner. According to Parker (2015),

women are more employment-orientated than men and may choose other duties and tasks over their career advancement. Women spend time raising children and supporting their spouses. Women's domestic duties and childbearing responsibilities often delay or infringe on their pursuit of leadership. According to Garcia (2020), the role of family and caretaking may hinder Latinas from achieving midlevel leadership. The Latino culture emphasizes prioritizing family before other priorities such as jobs, promotions, and education. Often, Latinas are pressured to put family before their careers and will put their family before a work event. Garcia highlighted that because Latinas feel the unintended pressure of working twice as hard as their White counterparts, the guilt may set in to pick work versus family.

Additionally, Latinas often need help with having a family, career, and a partner and may feel that one will need to be included while trying to balance the multiple responsibilities. Also, there are rooted expectations that a Latina must get married and start a family within a specific timeline. Latinas frequently either put off their career or start having children, fearing they will not succeed if they decide to move forward. According to Garcia (2020), a Latina who chooses to have children early on may not get that far in their career, and this will often deter Latina women from seeking career or leadership opportunities.

Imposter Syndrome

Another internal barrier literature revealed about Latinas is the idea of genuine authenticity in the workplace. The literature indicated that Latinas frequently feel they cannot be authentic and may need to portray themselves as someone else to succeed as a leader. The question becomes how Latina leaders can be authentic and overcome these obstacles, which are both external and internal factors.

According to Manongsong and Ghosh (2021), women of color often deal with the pressure associated with their worth and value in their institutions, a phenomenon known as imposter syndrome. Psychotherapists Clance and Imes (1978, as cited in Dancy and Brown) are primarily linked with imposter syndrome. Clance and Imes defined *imposter syndrome* as “deep feelings of intellectual and professional phoniness in high-achieving individuals” (Dancy & Brown, 2011, p. 616). The term developed from their studies on high-achieving students, particularly college women and women faculty who doubted their success (Dancy & Brown, 2011). Furthermore, these pressures can affect their leadership identity, referring to seeing oneself as a leader. Leader identity is critical to leadership success, and a positive identity helps individuals build their leadership capacity (Manongsong & Ghosh, 2021). Moreover, women of color who aspire to become leaders face identity conflict, resulting in imposter feelings.

Imposter phenomenon consists of the fear of being a fake or feelings that women of color got to their leadership roles by luck (Dancy & Brown, 2011; Manongsong & Ghosh, 2021). Research indicates that women of color often feel fake or believe that one does not deserve their success (Dancy & Brown, 2011). Furthermore, other studies find imposter syndrome connected with general well-being, locus of control, and psychological thinking. Davis (2021) highlighted a first-generation student named Keyli Motino, who was raised in Honduras and began her self-doubt when she saw that she was the only woman in her computer classes. Montino indicated that she had thoughts of not genuinely belonging in class, which affected her confidence. Montino was experiencing imposter syndrome, when one sees themselves as a professional and intellectual fraud, and she is not all alone. Studies indicate that more than half of women say they have felt like an imposter, but in comparison, men only feel this less than 25%. Davis (2021) stated, “For Black and Latina college women, the intersecting challenges of racism and sexism

make them even more susceptible to imposter syndrome” (para. 4). Regrettably, these feelings and situations do not only stop at the college level. They seep into the corporate rooms, where women of color are often the only ones. Vaughn et al. (2020) indicated that imposter syndrome usually affects highly successful women who see themselves as an imposter, and women believe that they are unintelligent or not worthy of their success. Women who struggle with imposter syndrome see themselves as gaining success because of luck or the feeling that they must work harder than their peers to reach a certain level of success. Although imposter syndrome is not limited to women, studying women in academia is important because women generally continue to be lower in early career positions. Likewise, women experience imposter syndrome because of self-doubt, lack of confidence, and feelings of not belonging even if they are successful, have an education, and have significant accomplishments. According to Vaughn et al. (2020) a lack of mentoring, academic culture, and competitiveness can also contribute to imposter syndrome.

Lack of Mentors

The researchers throughout the various studies highlighted the importance of having mentors to help guide the leadership process (Menchaca et al., 2016). Nonetheless, there were often very few Latina mentors in the study’s early experiences of the two Latina titans. Although these women lacked mentors, they needed to allow other Latinas to be mentored. Although mentorship was vital to both women in Mills et al.’s (2016) study, neither had a mentor, so they chose to mentor other women to ensure their path to success was better. However, informal mentoring did come from male figures in their lives. According to Alarcón and Bettez (2017), “Mentoring is a common strategy used to support career advancement” (p. 25). Typically, mentoring is the process of a person of higher rank, distinction, or accomplishment guiding the educational or professional goals of another person, a mentee, in a similar position. However,

women of color constantly have difficulty finding someone similar who mirrors themselves. Peer mentoring spaces can be created for Latinas to disidentify with notions that may prohibit career advancement and create environments for Latinas to thrive and flourish in their career development. Alarcón and Bettez confirmed the benefits of peer mentoring rather than using traditional hierarchical mentoring. The alternative solution mentioned in Alarcón and Bettez is referred to as *muxerista* mentoring. They stated,

A muxerista is both a Chicana/Latina/o feminist vision of social change and an activist commitment to eliminating all forms of oppression and social injustice. Literally, *mujer* means “woman” and *mujerista* means “womanist/feminist.” A muxerista is a Chicana/Latina/o who considers herself/himself a feminist or womanist. The x replaces the j to signify a connection to indigenous ancestry and anti-colonial struggle, as well as the multiplicity/intersectionality of the women’s identities. (p. 28)

Likewise, faculty members can face academic challenges, including isolation, presumptions of incompetence, and self-doubt, which are identical to the study by Menchaca et al. (2016). Peer mentoring has become an alternative solution to formal mentoring, and peers can choose to learn from each other and work together to support their advancement.

Also, women of color are passed over for new leadership opportunities and often experience more criticism than their White counterparts (Chance, 2021; Hannum et al., 2015). Minority women continue to face barriers, including limited role models, obstacles associated with racial and gender biases, gender-based preferences in recruitment, and lack of leadership development and experience (Chance, 2021; Teague, 2015). Gender-based choices are often not intentional but happen because of unconscious biases. These preferences can result in the decision maker choosing someone they believe shares a commonality (Teague, 2015).

Strategies for Advancement for Latinas

There are formal and informal ways to help women of color advance within their organizations. The informal approaches are intertwined into the daily job assignments, the networks of relationships inside and outside the organization, mentorship, coaching from management, and sponsorship. Formal methods include leadership training programs, human resource practices, and workplace flexibility. Some of the vital proven strategies to help women advance are providing challenging job assignments that go beyond the employee's scope of work, prioritizing mentorship and sponsorship for women and minorities, offering workplace flexibility, providing opportunities for leadership training and self-awareness opportunities, creating an inclusive work environment, and providing objective performance evaluations. The following literature shed light on critical practices to help Latina women advance, which include career development, mentoring, and networking.

Career Development

Tessens et al. (2011) found that 50% of women had participated in a leadership program. At the same time, half of the women in their study did not attend those who did recognize the rewards and benefits of attending leadership opportunities. The study also reported that women would participate if offered a leadership program. Some benefits of attending include awareness about promotions, training, shared learning, career planning, strategies, skills and confidence in women's leadership, conflict resolution, networking, and learning about leadership issues. Over 80% of participants revealed that a leadership program would help improve women's skills and knowledge.

Lafreniere and Longman (2008) specified that the Women's Leadership Development Institute (WIDI) evolved over the past decade to adequately equip women to serve in their

current or future leadership roles. In 1998, the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities launched a new program to identify and train more women in higher education institutions. Some criteria to qualify and be eligible for the WIDI program are leadership potential, a doctorate, or the near completion of a doctorate, and confirmed leadership responsibilities in higher education. Moreover, the WIDI experience is for a year. It also includes reading a series of books, a one-year professional development plan, and a shadow experience for a few days with a senior-level mentor from another college campus. The mission of the WIDI program is to identify emerging women leaders in Christian higher education and motivate, equip, and challenge these women leaders. Moreover, the programs help create networks and lasting connections with other women from the WIDI program and encourage them to write their professional development plans. Lafreniere and Longman (2008) indicated that over 60% of those who had participated in the WIDI experience moved into new leadership positions after participating in the WIDI experience.

Coetzee and Moosa (2020) indicated that advancement opportunities, acceptance by their peers (men), work-life balance, recognition, and work conditions can contribute to the positive success of obtaining leadership roles. Women who see a future in which they work will likely stay at that organization. Scholars found three practices that address the lack of women in leadership roles: leadership development programs, mentoring, coaching, and sponsorship for women, and external publicity on the issue (Anderson & Smith, 2019). Moreover, coaches, sponsors, and mentors can offer social support, instill confidence, give insight into personal situations, and offer career advice.

Mentoring

A network of support from various areas within higher education can help women of color advance in their careers (Dancy & Brown, 2011; Manongsong & Ghosh, 2021; Velarde Pierce, 2023). Mentoring is a critical intervention that can help support minoritized women who aspire to become leaders in higher education institutions (Barnes, 2017; Manongsong & Ghosh, 2021). Mentoring is an interpersonal relationship in which a learned person helps a novice learn practices, frameworks, traditions, and professional skills (Dancy & Brown, 2011). Mentoring can be short-term, formal, informal, planned, structured, and spontaneous (Barnes, 2017; Dancy & Brown, 2011). Mentors are encouraged to promote the potential of the mentees and bring new ideas and practices that become transformative for the mentee.

According to Barnes (2017), mentors can help women of color, and mentoring can benefit in the following areas:

1. Mentors can help guide and help with career planning.
2. Mentors can help with risk management.
3. Mentors become role models.

Additionally, research has validated that when women have another woman from a similar background, the relationship between the mentor/mentee is more successful (Barnes, 2017). Women express that they need mentors as they continue to rise to the top (Barnes, 2017; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Also, the mentor relationship must contain a multidimensional approach that requires mentoring up, down, and across. Likewise, Dancy and Brown (2011) indicated that mentoring is critical for faculty of color and helps prepare educational leaders within all educational contexts. Establishing a mentoring bond, building trust, and maintaining confidentiality between the mentor and mentee are essential. Barnes (2017) stated that although

formal mentoring is necessary, finding informal mentors outside and inside your workplace is also good.

Similarly, research has suggested finding a mentor who shares the same gender, background, values, and similar race. These pieces give the mentor and mentee more positive results and build trust (Barnes, 2017; Gonzáles-Figueroa & Young, 2005). There are many benefits to having a female mentor with a female mentee: women leaders want other women to succeed in leadership, and women can help other women manage their emotions.

According to the research, professional development for women of color is critical to their success and advancing into new leadership roles or thriving in their current leadership roles (Dancy & Brown, 2011; Gonzáles-Figueroa & Young, 2005). Professional development can come in annual meetings, professional organizations, and associations related to their field. These meetings offer opportunities to network with like-minded people and to find mentors inside and outside their areas (Dancy & Brown, 2011). Consequently, conferences and meetings become essential in the professional development of faculty of color. Additionally, conferences offer the opportunity to share and learn from one another and can expose faculty of color to network with those in their expertise.

According to Onorato and Musoba (2015), family can often be a vital group of informal mentors Latina women have in their early educational or career journey. The researchers mentioned that family initially pushed the 11 Latina women to become involved. The consistent family message was that each woman could be who and whatever they wanted to become. One of the participants mentioned that their mother said, “I believe that you can do whatever it is that you want to do.” The participant said that is something that has not always stuck with her.

Mentors like family encouraged these women to take on new roles and think differently about leadership.

Additionally, formal mentors helped these women in Onorato and Musoba's (2015) study realize the importance of leadership both through conversations and training. The women in the study also indicated that their peers were essential role models. One of the participants in the survey recalled a friend advising her to open her eyes to a particular situation that she could not see and helped her through the problem. Onorato and Musoba also noted that family encouragement was a vital contributing factor to the success of these women in the study, which contradicts the espoused belief that Latin families tend to hold their children back. The families in these women's lives supported their journey to success and encouraged their educational goals.

Salazar Montoya and Kew (2020) indicated an unequal ethnic representation of Latinas in leadership positions. Also, there still needs to be more research on Latinas in leadership, which needs attention and merits as a continued focus. Therefore, leadership should look at past hiring and equity hiring practices and the direction of educational institutions to remedy the imbalance in the school leadership better. The researchers in this study investigated the factors that contributed to the success of Latinas who hold superintendent appointments. Latinas continue to be underrepresented in educational leadership, whether postsecondary or the K-12 educational system. The Latinx population continues to multiply, yet only some Latinas are in leadership positions. According to Salazar Montoya and Kew, "While the number of Latinas in leadership positions has increased, Latinas have not achieved proportionate representation in significant leadership roles throughout higher levels of leadership, spanning all sectors of work, especially the education sector" (p. 3). The Latinas in Salazar Montoya and Kew's study shared their love

for learning and commitment to serving students, women aspiring to be future leaders and colleagues. The participants in their study agreed that they succeeded professionally because of their dedication, resilience, and perseverance in their careers. The women in their study also affirmed that they had either a group of people or someone encouraging them and pushing them to advance in their profession. They also mentioned that they either sought or created their support system to reach the superintendency. Some of the barriers these women faced were gender nonconformity, the politics impacting the superintendent's role, and gender inequity, specifically for Latinas who serve as superintendents.

Researchers Machado-Casas et al. (2013) studied the benefits of mentoring and the Research for the Educational Advancement of Latinas (REAL) on professors. The methodological approach for their study was through narrative research, which is when the participants share their stories about their lived experiences. The participants were two Latina professors working at HSIs. The two women discussed finding their way as first-year faculty and describe it as the "El Laberinto," which means complicated or uncertain places. When you enter the Labertino, you typically need to learn how to go or how you will even get there. The main thing to know about the labyrinth is that one must figure out the road that leads to the exit. The researchers mentioned that new faculty of color are less likely to have a fully integrated experience in the academic culture at higher education institutions. Likewise, Latinas often experience marginalization and may even encounter self-doubt, invisibility, imposter syndrome, racism, classism, isolation, or a combination of the listed challenges (Machado-Casas et al., 2013). Organizations like REAL aim to provide a space for academic, professional, and emotional support to Latinas in academia.

Additionally, REAL supports academia, collaboration, socialization, and partnerships. Latina faculty members felt some of the feelings in their first couple of years in academia: sadness, loneliness, feelings of not being valued, and even being overburdened. REAL provides support that overcomes the feeling of loneliness, and REAL helps provide a space for honest communication in a kind and friendly way.

Develop Networks

Salazar Montoya and Kew's (2020) recommendation was to develop a professional network. Developing relationships can lead to professional references for the future, connect new leaders with professional opportunities, and link new leaders with professional organizations. Their research confirmed that the same old stereotypes still exist today: men manage the school, and women nurture the learners, meaning that men still lead best, and women teach best. In this study, Salazar Montoya and Kew indicated that the standards are still the same, and the same old mindsets still exist, so this mindset must be changed for actual change to occur. Velarde Pierce (2023) mentioned in her research that there was a consensus among participants that support networks were catalysts along their leadership journey. Velarde Pierce stated,

Mary explained how this might work in detail: Create networks. Networks with people you think are great; do not hesitate to contact them for coffee or lunch. Even if it is people you do not know that well, let us say you think they are a great leader. (p. 293)

The power of networking can unlock opportunities that were not available and bring about unexpected professional experiences (Baumann, 2014). Fellow Latina Rebecca Aguilar stated in an interview that she has used networking to advance her career (Baumann, 2014). She said networking has helped support her professional life, hobbies, and passions. Whether for pursuing her professional activity or her passions and hobbies, she believed networking is built

on the capability to allocate thoughts willingly and fearlessly. It would help if people were open about sharing their thoughts, listening to others, and agreeing or disagreeing respectfully.

Limitations

According to the researchers, the sample size for their studies were relatively small compared to the entire population (Hannum et al., 2015; Nixon, 2017). More research on women of color still needs to be done, and further inquiry is necessary (Chance, 2021). Most of the research for Latinas in higher education was focused on the executive level. I found one research study focused on Latinas in midlevel leadership. Because there is a need for more data regarding Latinas in midlevel leadership, it was essential to further investigate the obstacles Latinas encountered from staff to midlevel leadership. The lack of data and research motivated me to focus on Latinas who went from staff to midlevel leadership roles.

Summary

The literature review provided

- an overview of the issue
- the historical context of women in leadership in higher education
- women of color in higher education
- Latinas in higher education

The conceptual framework of authentic leadership and resiliency theory provided a lens to address the problem and better understand Latinas' experiences navigating their leadership path in higher education. This chapter also included obstacles identified in the literature that Latinas and women of color face and the strategies to overcome those obstacles.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study explored how Latina midlevel leaders in higher education institutions overcame obstacles to get to their respective positions. This study is significant because currently, there is only a small number of Latina leaders serving in higher education institutions across the United States (Garcia, 2020). This study uncovered the unique challenges and barriers each Latina experienced to help better prepare and serve future Latinas, reflecting the growing number of Latinas enrolling in universities and colleges. This study filled a gap in the literature, specifically for Latina midlevel leaders working in higher education.

This study used a phenomenological research method approach. Phenomenology examines life experiences and describes meaning for several individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study focused on the Latina leader's interpretation and perspectives from their respective experiences. Because this study was about the obstacles Latinas overcame to reach midlevel leadership and was rooted in the belief that authentic leadership and resiliency may be influential in helping Latinas achieve leadership, a qualitative methodology and, more specifically, phenomenological research methods were fitting for this study.

This chapter covers the methodology I used for this study. I discuss my rationale for the chosen research approach, sample selection, data collection and analysis, limitations, and ethical considerations.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological research study was to explore the obstacles Latinas overcame to advance into midlevel leadership at their respective higher education institutions.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

Main Research Question

Do Latina women experience obstacles in their advancement into midlevel leadership?

Subquestion

Do Latina women receive support from their leadership team as they seek promotion? If so, in what form?

Protection of Human Subjects

An Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved my protocol for research using human subjects. This research study assessed the lived experiences of Latinas who have attained a midlevel leadership position in higher education. The human subjects in this study were limited to 21 years of age and older. Using a screening survey to identify qualified candidates, I recruited participants through 4-year public universities in California. Informed consent was acquired from eligible participants, and each participant's waiver of informed consent was submitted to the IRB. As mentioned, participants agreed to and signed a document indicating informed consent to participate in the study.

Potential Risks

A potential risk for participants could have been psychological, which includes adverse effects such as anxiety or stress because of reliving the barriers to advancement and personal experiences the participants reflected on while retelling their stories. Suppose the participants had experienced any psychological effects because of the interview process. In that case, the counseling center was available at their respective institution, and they could have contacted me for further instructions on how to receive counseling services.

Another potential threat to the participants was the loss of confidentiality. I securely kept participants' names, interview information, and contact information in a locked cabinet during the research process. The computer containing the interview data was stored in a password-protected computer. There were no participant identifiers, and none of the data were linked to the participants' names or personal information. When the data was collected, as mentioned, there were no names, contact information, or other identifiers of the participants. The only identifier that may have been included in the study was the institution's name or the demographic area of the university; however, if the university name exposed the participant's identity, the name was left out. A pseudonym name was used for each participant in the study. Additionally, no survey data were linked to the participants in the study.

Participants did not receive monetary compensation for participation in the study, and there were no direct benefits from the phenomenological research study. The IRB proposal was submitted, and approval was issued to complete the research study.

Protocol for Unexpected Problems or Adverse Events

- referral to organizational entities (e.g., counseling, human resources, etc.)
- option to withdraw from the study at any time.

Research Design

This study used a phenomenological approach (Moustakas, 1994), providing beneficial insight into the journeys of Latina midlevel leaders in higher education. Moreover, Creswell and Poth (2018) indicated that phenomenologists focus on determining what all participants have in common as they experience a particular phenomenon (e.g., overcoming obstacles to leadership). Van Manen (2014) described phenomenological research as starting “with wonder at what gives itself and how something gives itself. It can only be pursued while surrounding to a state of

wonder” (p. 27). The researcher essentially collected data from individuals who have faced a similar experience, and the description consists of what they experienced and how they experienced it (Moustakas, 1994). Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that phenomenological research seeks to find the ordinary meaning of experiences for several individuals.

Origins of Phenomenological Research

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), “Phenomenology has a strong philosophical component to it” (p. 75). It draws from the German mathematician Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), and others who expanded on the views were Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty. Husserl devoted his life to phenomenological investigations and invented this research method. In addition, phenomenology is ultimately the study of personal experience and the way people view these experiences. Looking at the various perspectives of researchers allows one to see that the philosophical assumptions come back to the notion that phenomenology is the study of the lived experiences of individuals, the development of descriptions of these experiences, and the view that these experiences are mindful ones (van Manen, 2014).

This study was viewed through a conceptual framework that includes authentic leadership and resiliency theory. Through each interview, I asked each Latina what leadership style they used to lead themselves and others. I wanted to know whether the discussions would reveal that Latinas in this study would use self-awareness, transparency, values, vision, relationship building, and a servant attitude to advance and succeed in their leadership roles. Although I identify with Latinas and understand leadership styles that may benefit them, I could not predict or assume that authentic leadership is necessary to advance to leadership. Teaching oneself and others authentically is a matter of acknowledging and embracing who one is, and for Latinas, this means embracing their culture, background, family values, and so forth

(Kirkpatrick, 2021). I determined through this study that attributes of authentic leadership were used by the Latinas in my research; however, the reviews of leadership styles were mixed among the participants for my research. Through the bracketing process, Table 1 reveals leadership style phrases used by the participants during the interview process.

Table 1

Leadership Style Phrases

| Participant pseudonym name | Age of participant | Phrase reflecting leadership style concept |
|----------------------------|--------------------|---|
| Araceli | 50 years old | I want to hear from others; high expectations of myself and others |
| Sariah | 47 years old | Collaborative; hands on; nurturing, empathetic |
| Atziri | 45 years old | Servant leadership; model behaviors; coach; mentor |
| Meredith | 43 years old | Build relationships with people; coach; train |
| Mila | 40 years old | Transformational leadership; empathy, emotional intelligence; building relationships; awareness |
| Valerie | 30 years old | Being true to yourself |
| Dania | 24 years old | Servant leadership; strategic thinking |

The research indicated that leaders who bring authenticity can share their experiences with honesty and understand that being an authentic leader means being one’s whole self instead of being someone different at home and work. The structure of the interviews consisted of a semistructured interview process. With this research method and interview structure, I captured the participants’ thoughts, feelings, memories, and emotions.

Purposeful Sampling

This study applied purposive sampling because there were specific criteria for the participants (Terrell, 2016). Terrell (2016) stated, “Purposive sampling, also known as intentional sampling, is just as the name implies: it is a sample chosen “on purpose” because

those sampled meet the specific criteria” (p. 75). Purposeful sampling means that the researcher selects individuals and locations for the study that can purposefully inform an understanding of the researcher’s problem and phenomenon of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The criteria for this study were midlevel Latina leaders in higher education; the participants were selected from Latina staff midlevel leaders (director, manager, or supervisor) at 4-year public universities in California. The Latina women in this study were limited to staff members at each university. The participants were recruited by emailing a network of individuals who might have had eligible participants who fit the criteria. Once my network of people made recommendations, the recruitment email was sent to Latinas who might fit the requirements for the study.

Sample

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), the sample size depends on the qualitative design being used for the study. For this study, phenomenology was selected because my goal was to find multiple individuals who had experienced the same phenomenon. A purposeful sample of seven midlevel Latina leaders from 4-year public universities in California participated in this phenomenological study. The average age of the participants was 40 years. The sample size for this qualitative study was small because there was a specific criterion for the selected participants (midlevel Latinas from a 4-year public university in California). This study focused primarily on Latina staff who had moved from staff to midlevel leadership positions. Those in executive leadership positions were excluded from this study. According to Creswell and Creswell, an adequate sample size for a phenomenology study “involves a range of 3-10” (p. 186). The literature was the determinate of the sample size. The purposive sampling criteria included identifying a woman of Latina descent, aged 21 years or older, in a midlevel leadership role for at least one year at a 4-year public university in California. To be considered Latina, a

participant or her ancestors must have come from a Latin American country: Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Central or South America, Dominican Republic.

Recruitment

Recruitment for this study was initiated by identifying key individuals in my network who may have known potential participants. I reviewed the websites of California State Universities and the University of California institutions and emailed 20 potential participants explaining the nature of the study. Of the 20 potential participants identified, none responded to the email.

I also contacted individuals at different universities with recommendations for potential study participants. In addition, I used a purposeful sampling technique that primarily focuses on an in-depth smaller sample. Creswell and Creswell (2018) indicated that purposeful sampling is to “purposefully select participants that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question” (p. 185). My main goal in this sampling technique was identifying individuals who would help me answer my research questions. Once I found possible qualified participants, I sent them each an email with the recruitment letter (Appendix B).

Instrumentation

The researcher is the critical instrument in qualitative research, and the interview is the vehicle for gathering data. I interviewed each participant between 30 min to 1 hr and used a semistructured interview with eight questions. The reason for the time disparity among the seven interviews was that they included different personalities, and some of the participants answered with more detail than others. When asked to describe their journey into higher education, the first participant started her reply by beginning from her first job. I quickly learned that it was also essential to provide context for examples when they answered about their journey into higher

education. Participants answered the open-ended questions with details; however, some answered with various illustrations. In addition, some of the other participants answered the questions more concisely. For this qualitative study, I collected data by interviewing participants and recording the data using WebEx and Zoom recording services. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), validity is a strength of qualitative research, and the findings become accurate based on the participant, researcher, and readers.

Furthermore, Creswell and Creswell (2018) included several strategies to confirm validity:

- Triangulate various data sources by examining the evidence.
- Use member checking to determine the accuracy of the findings.
- Use detailed descriptions to reveal results and clarify any biases.

Self-reflection is a vital component of being open and honest. Proper qualitative research contains feedback from the researcher related to their interpretations of the findings formed by their gender, culture, history, background, and socioeconomic foundation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

This study used the following strategies to confirm validity and reliability throughout the research process analysis. I used triangulation by collecting data from seven participants to gain various perspectives on a specific phenomenon (the obstacles Latinas experienced while advancing to midlevel leadership). I used member checking to determine the accuracy of the findings for each participant by taking back specific descriptions from their transcript. This procedure involved a 10- to 15-min follow-up interview or a follow-up email with study participants to allow them to confirm and give feedback on their findings. I used rich, thick descriptions to convey results. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), “When qualitative

researchers provide detailed descriptions of the setting, for example, or offer many perspectives about a theme, the results become more realistic and richer” (p. 200).

Further, a detailed description was provided for each interview question. I also provided negative or discrepant information that countered the themes such as the unintended findings of happenstance advancement and the inability to identify the barriers encountered throughout the study because of being a Latina, woman, or both. By presenting evidence that is contradictory to the findings and themes, the account of the data becomes more valid and realistic.

Data Collection

For this study, data were collected through individual interviews via WebEx and Zoom, and the interview questions (Appendix C) were semistructured to allow for consistency (Onorato & Musoba, 2015). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), a suitable sample size for phenomenology involves a range of three to 10 participants who have all experienced the same phenomenon. Also, Creswell and Poth stated, “A phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (p. 75). They added, “Phenomenologists focus on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon” (p. 75). For this study, a sample size of seven was reached, and I selected participants who moved from staff to midlevel leadership. A midlevel leader is defined as someone who holds the title of manager, supervisor, or director (executive director, director, associate director, assistant director, interim director) or an equivalent to a manager reporting to senior-level or executive-level leadership. Also, I delimited Latina women serving in either staff or executive-level positions. The study was meant to describe the human experience of Latinas who overcame obstacles while advancing from a staff position into a midlevel leadership.

According to Saunders et al. (2018), “In broad terms, saturation is used in qualitative research as a criterion for discontinuing data collection and/or analysis” (p. 1894). Saturation was initially rooted in grounded theory but is now accepted among the various qualitative research methods. As mentioned, because saturation was originally from ground theory, Glaser and Strauss (1967) defined saturation as

the criterion for judging when to stop sampling the different groups pertinent to a category is the category’s theoretical saturation. Reaching saturation means that no additional data are being found whereby the sociologist can develop properties of the category. As he/she sees similar instances repeatedly, the researcher becomes empirically confident that a category is saturated. He goes out of his way to look for groups that stretch diversity of data as far as possible, to ensure that saturation is based on the widest possible data on the category. (p. 61)

Moreover, saturation is the point in coding when no new codes or data occur (Saunders et al., 2018). Likewise, the discussion can move away from the grounded theory definition and move into literature referencing data saturation rather than theoretical saturation. This particular view of saturation focuses on the amount of required data until nothing new emerges, also known as “informational redundancy” (e.g., Francis et al., 2009). For this phenomenological research, the data reached saturation according to the definition of Creswell and Poth (2018) by completing in-depth interviews with seven participants, and detailed descriptions were developed to gather the essence of the experience of all seven participants in this study. I gathered a detailed description from the seven participants and uncovered two significant findings through their lived experience (the importance of graduate education and imposter syndrome). No new data or

themes emerged, and data saturation was researched for this phenomenological study during the research process.

Once the sample of participants was established, I found an agreeable time with each participant to conduct the first interview (e.g., virtual). The participant was reminded that the interview would be recorded. Participants each had one 30-min to 60-min interview and a clarifying interview if needed. The interview was conducted using WebEx or Zoom with the permission of each participant. A clarifying interview was completed as necessary following the initial virtual interview and the transcript review process. Table 2 provides details regarding the participants’ pseudonym, age, and length of interview.

Table 2

Length of Interview by Participant

| Participant pseudonym name | Age of participant | Length of interview | Follow-up interview; emailed findings |
|----------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Araceli | 50 years old | 54:31 | Yes; 10 minutes and emailed |
| Sariah | 47 years old | 32:47 | Yes, via email |
| Atziri | 45 years old | 31:06 | Yes, via email |
| Meredith | 43 years old | 1:00:26 | Yes; 15 minutes and emailed |
| Mila | 40 years old | 30:48 | Yes, via email |
| Valerie | 30 years old | 31:11 | Yes, via email |
| Dania | 24 years old | 32:43 | Yes: 15 minutes and emailed |

For the study, I conducted WebEx and Zoom interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) and kept a journal for myself throughout the study to take notes. Also, I set up an organized system to file all transcripts of interviews, copies of consent forms, and any notes. For this study, it was vital to conduct interviews to gain a perspective on the experiences of Latinas in midlevel leadership (manager, supervisor, director) among 4-year public universities in California.

Hearing about the experiences of Latinas in midlevel roles allowed me to better understand whether Latinas encountered obstacles and, if they did encounter them, what strategies were used to move from a staff-level role to a midlevel leadership role. In this study, Latinas revealed the obstacles they overcame and ultimately provided a guide for other Latinas who desire to reach leadership positions in their higher education institutions. Table 3 gives a brief overview of the participants' demographics including their pseudonym, place of origin, age, level of education, marital status, children, and position title.

Table 3

Participant Demographics

| Pseudonym | Place of Origin | Age, years | Degree | Marital status | Children | Highest position in higher education |
|-----------|-----------------------------|------------|------------|----------------|----------|--------------------------------------|
| Meredith | Guatemala and Mexico | 43 | Master's | Married | Yes | Director |
| Araceli | Mexico | 50 | Master's | Divorced | Yes | Executive director |
| Valerie | Mexico | 30 | Master's | Single | No | Assistant director |
| Dania | Central American, Guatemala | 24 | Master's | Married | Yes | Assistant director |
| Mila | Central America | 40 | Master's | Married | Yes | Graduate student advisor officer |
| Atziri | Mexico | 45 | Bachelor's | Married | Yes | Director |
| Sariah | Mexico | 47 | Master's | Married | Yes | Associate director |

Data Analysis

For the data analysis, I applied the critical research method after the data were collected, and there were various steps in taking apart the data. In general, the intent was to make sense of the data and confer interpretations from the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It was like peeling

back the layers of an onion when taking apart the data and putting it into segments. The data went through a series of steps, as indicated by Moustakas (1994), which included the following:

- describing the experiences of the participants in the study
- creating a list of the significant statements, the researcher finds statements about how the participants are experiencing the research questions.
- grouping the meaningful statements into broader units, and these units are often called meaning units or themes.
- creating descriptions of what the participants experienced.
- drafting a description of how the experience occurred, which is called the structural description.
- describing the phenomenon; this passage is about the essence of the experiences and represents the phenomenological study.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and open coding was used to find common themes. During the data analysis process, reoccurring themes were identified during the data collection. Data underwent a winnowing technique when the “text and image data is dense, so not all of the information will be used in the qualitative study” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 192). Winnowing the data focuses on the relevant data and disregards the other unnecessary parts. I went through the interview transcripts systematically to figure out common words and phrases. Furthermore, I reviewed all interviews and looked for common words and phrases that emerged in the findings. The data went through a validation process to ensure accuracy. The initial step was to organize and prepare the data for analysis, which involved transcribing the interviews and scanning the interviews for keywords and phrases. The second step was to read and look at all the data and to get an idea of what the participants were saying, underlining and

writing notes in the margins of transcripts. The third step was to code all the data by an open-coding method; the coding process included bracketing the data into chunks and writing words in the margins. The fourth step was generating descriptions and findings (themes) using the open coding process. The description process involves a detailed rendering of information about the people, places, or events (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Step 5 involved representing the description and themes in figures and tables.

Limitations

Phenomenological qualitative research is an approach that focuses on the assumption that the essence of a particular topic depends on how the participants experience it. Because this is the focus of a phenomenological study, the researcher documents and records the participants' feelings, perceptions, and beliefs. The study is based on the participants' views and experiences and how they experience a particular phenomenon. Because phenomenological studies focus on experience, it cannot be easy to summarize and interpret findings because of their qualitative nature. Additionally, because phenomenology requires detailed interviews, data analysis can become time consuming, and the data analysis can take weeks or often, months.

Phenomenological research can become labor intensive. Other study limitations included the smaller sample size from which to gather and interpret data. A smaller sample size may make it difficult to determine whether a finding is factual because there are few participants. With a smaller sample size, it may be challenging to assume that the population of Latinas in midlevel leadership experiences the same obstacles. Also, there may be biases because of the nature of the study because it only focused on the experiences of Latina midlevel leaders at 4-year public higher education institutions in California. Likewise, the participants may have recounted only some details of their experience when participating in conducting qualitative interviews. The

participants for this study were not randomly selected, and this study will not contribute to a generalization across all populations. Another limitation of this study was that I am a Latina, and there may have been a possibility for biases while interpreting data.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented an overview of the research method and explained procedures, the selection sample, the interview protocol, the research design, and ethical considerations. I am a first-generation Latina working at a private university in California. I approached this study with an open mind and explored the unique journeys of seven Latina midlevel leaders working in 4-year public universities in California. I used the following validation strategies to avoid negatively impacting the data: data triangulation for the interviews of seven different individuals, member checking to determine the accuracy of the findings, detailed descriptions to reveal results, and clarifying any biases. Participant biases were avoided by framing the interview questions as open-ended, avoiding yes or no responses. By asking open-ended questions and staying away from agreeing or disagreeing, I tried to ensure that the answers from the participants were more honest. I avoided researcher biases by considering and examining all the data obtained. Additionally, I am passionate about helping more Latinas advance into leadership by creating educational and career success tools for Latinas and other women of color in colleges and universities.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

Overview

This chapter discusses the study's findings *on Latinas in Higher Education: A Phenomenological Look Into Their Journeys to Midlevel Leadership*. The qualitative data were collected via Zoom and WebEx interviews by asking open-ended questions, through which participants could provide additional information besides the questions asked.

In this study, I sought to grasp the lived experiences of Latina leaders in midlevel (supervisor, manager, or director) leadership in California public 4-year universities. The seven participants interviewed held positions in midlevel leadership in 4-year public California universities as executive director, director, assistant director, associate director, manager, supervisor or equivalent.

An analysis of the qualitative data consisted of multiple parts, which included the following:

1. Demographic data was collected from each participant.
2. Profiles were gathered to help paint a picture of each Latina story (family background, education, first-generation).
3. Analysis of findings and key themes to better understand the research questions.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological research study was to explore the obstacles Latinas overcame to advance into midlevel leadership at their respective higher education institutions. An investigation into how they overcame the obstacles will further assist with meeting the need for Latinas in leadership roles within higher education institutions. This study also aimed to identify strategies for advancing Latina higher education leaders.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

Main Research Question

Do Latina women experience obstacles in their advancement into midlevel leadership?

Subquestion

Do Latina women receive support from their leadership team as they seek promotion? If so, in what form?

This study was guided by the conceptual framework of authentic leadership and resiliency theory, and these assumptions were tested through a phenomenology qualitative research design. Participants were interviewed to discover whether components of authentic leadership traits and resiliency were used to reach midlevel leadership in higher education institutions. The conceptual framework applied to the study because I explored the obstacles Latinas overcame in advancing their leadership positions and discovered the leadership traits of each research participant.

Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures

This qualitative phenomenological study explored the obstacles Latinas experienced while advancing to midlevel leadership (director, manager, or supervisor). This study recorded and transcribed interviews from seven women who identify as Latina and are working or have worked in a midlevel leadership staff position within a 4-year public university in California.

Qualitative research was selected to help me understand how Latinas described their experience of advancing into midlevel leadership. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), “qualitative research” or “qualitative inquiry” became popular with anthropologists and sociologists who started asking questions about people’s lives in the contexts of social and

cultural contexts in the way they lived, how individuals understood the world, and so forth (p. 6). The goal of qualitative research is not to simplify results from a study or the selected sample from a particular population but rather to dig deeply into the cultural and social aspects related to the experiences of the Latinas at their respective universities.

The selected qualitative research method involved me interviewing the participants to understand their lived experiences of advancing from staff-level to midlevel leadership. This type of research adds value and better represents the viewpoints and experiences of the participants. Qualitative inquiry helped me better understand the experiences and meanings of the Latinas in the study to add to the literature of Latina leadership in higher education.

Participants

The following section summarizes the participants' journey to midlevel leadership. The general overview of each participant gives some background knowledge to help understand their journey to advancement to midlevel leadership.

The following facts provide information about each participant, and all participants selected a pseudonym to help protect their identity and to remain confidential. Furthermore, the universities where they worked remained anonymous.

Participant 1

For this study, Meredith is the pseudonym of Participant 1. Meredith's origin is from Guatemala and Mexico. Her mother is from Guatemala, and her father is from Mexico. Meredith has been in midlevel leadership for about 2 years. She is married and has two children. Meredith is a first-generation student who earned her bachelor's degree in business with a concentration in entrepreneurship, and her master's degree is in higher education: leadership and student development. She originally wanted to make a career in the field of business and had dreamed of

becoming an entrepreneur since the age of 12. She graduated, worked in the private sector for a few years, and quit to start her own business. Then the recession hit in 2007/2008, so she decided to go into substitute teaching and, at that time, did not even think of the possibility of pursuing a career in education. The substitute teaching was flexible for her and her two children. However, she felt discontent with her current situation because she was more interested in becoming a multimillionaire. Meredith recalls God shaking up her world and calling her to education. She never thought she would work in education because she dreamed of owning a business.

Participant 2

For this study, Araceli is the pseudonym of Participant 2. Araceli's family is from Mexico, and she has been in midlevel leadership for 20 years. She is a first-generation college student and comes from a low-income background. Her parents were immigrants; her dad was injured when she was seven, and her mom passed away 7 years later. She felt that during much of growing up she had to take care of herself. She is second to the youngest. She is divorced with three teenagers and has her master's degree. Before working in higher education, Araceli wanted to pursue business. She has earned a bachelor's degree in political science and a master's degree in public administration. Araceli serves as the Executive director for Student Affairs at a large public institution in Southern California.

Participant 3

For this study, Atziri is the pseudonym of Participant 3. Atziri's origin is Mexico, and she has been in midlevel leadership for about 10 years. She is a first-generation college student. She was raised in a two-parent household, and her parents were immigrants. She is the second oldest of four siblings. She knew early on she wanted to work in the service industry as a teacher or a principal. She earned her bachelor's degree in human services and her master's degree in public

administration. She is married, has children, and has her master's. Atziri currently serves as Director of Student Services at a public institution in Southern California.

Participant 4

For this study, Dania is the pseudonym of Participant 4. Dania's place of origin is Central America and Guatemala, and she has been in midlevel leadership for a little over a year. She is single with no children and earned her bachelor's degree in psychology with an emphasis on student and child psychology. Dania is also a first-generation college student. She was raised in a one-parent household by her mother and was the only child of her mom.

Nevertheless, from her dad, she was one of four children. Dania recently graduated with her master's degree in 2021 and is new to higher education. She started working in career services 3 years ago as a graduate student and career advisor. She earned her master's in counseling psychology, and once she graduated, her contract as a grad career advisor ended. She then had to transition and find a full-time professional role in higher education.

Participant 5

For this study, Mila is the pseudonym for Participant 5. Mila originates from Central America and has been in midlevel leadership for 13 years. She is married with children and has her master's degree. When asked about her journey into midlevel leadership, Mila indicated that she originally wanted to be a special education teacher and would attend a community college to get her credentials. While attending school to get her credentials, she also worked as an administrative assistant at a level one position at a significantly sizeable public institution in Southern California. That is when Mila realized that she enjoyed working in higher education. Shortly after finishing her credential program at the community college, she enrolled at a private

university to pursue her master's degree in leadership. She was in a staff position for 6 years before being promoted to midlevel leadership.

Participant 6

For this study, Sariah is the pseudonym for Participant 6. Sariah's origin is Mexico, and he has been in midlevel leadership for about 13 years. She is married, has children, and has her master's degree. When asked about her journey into midlevel leadership within higher education, she indicated that she started working in higher education right out of her undergraduate studies. She is a first-generation student and was only aware of some available internships. She realized she should have taken advantage of her university's many internship opportunities. She did not have the time to do internships because she worked to support herself through school. While going to college, she worked as a bank teller, and once she graduated, she needed to find a profession in higher education. So to get her foot in the door, she applied for a temporary position at a university in Los Angeles. She realized she loved higher education and got a full-time job at the university in Los Angeles. She has worked in the same department since she started at the university. Sariah also mentioned that it took her about 10 years to go from a staff-level to a midlevel leadership role.

Participant 7

For this study, Valerie is the pseudonym for Participant 7. Valerie's place of origin is Mexico, and she has been in midlevel leadership for 3 years. She is single, has no children, and has her master's degree. She is a first-generation college student raised in a two-parent household, and one parent worked in retail and the other as a primary caregiver. Valerie has one other sibling who is older than she is by 15 years. When asked about her journey into midlevel leadership in higher education, Valerie referenced that she started as a site coordinator for

precollege outreach programs. She did not realize that her role was in higher education because she worked with high school students. So as she discovered more about her department's working relationship with the university, she realized she loved working for programs like precollege programs. At that time, Valerie had her bachelor's degree and started inquiring about a master's degree. She knew that she did not want a master's degree in counseling and asked some of her colleagues who were working in higher education but did not major in counseling. One of her colleagues pointed her toward getting a master's in higher education. So she ended up applying for a master's in higher education.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

The following questions were used during the interview.

Interview Question 1

Tell me the story of your journey to your current role.

Possible follow-up questions: How long did it take you to go from staff member to midlevel leadership? What obstacles did you encounter? What strategies did you utilize to overcome those barriers? What academic preparation and professional experiences were vital for you?

All seven participants in this study were first-generation college students with master's degrees. Each of the participants had a slightly different journey to reaching midlevel leadership, and the time frame it took each participant varied. Sariah and Atziri were two of the oldest participants (47 and 45 years old), and it took them the longest time to be promoted from staff to leadership, averaging about 10 years to advance to midlevel leadership. Sariah dealt with many fears and self-doubt, as indicated in her interview. It took Araceli 1 month to move from staff to supervisor because of prior supervisor experience in previous organizations and roles. It took

Dania 6 months to move from team to leadership, and she was prompted because of happenstance. It took Meredith a little over 2 years to move from staff to midlevel leadership. Meredith attended a sizeable private university for her undergraduate degree and had many jobs while raising two children. She worked at a for-profit college before realizing she wanted a higher education career and aspired to start a college one day. She eventually was laid off from the for-profit college and felt lost and unsure of what was to come for her future. Meredith recalled saying, "I didn't know what I was going to do with my life. And I didn't start my master's degree until about a year later."

Following their master's programs, it was interesting that it took the participants different time frames to get from a staff position to a midlevel leadership role, ranging from as little as 1 month to over 10 years. It took Meredith 2 years to merge from staff to midlevel leadership. For two participants, moving from staff to midlevel leadership took slightly over 10 years for different reasons. Valerie took over 6 years, and indicated,

I was a product of our precollege programs. So I started in 2012 as a volunteer, and I've been progressing through roles. So I have been residential advisor, mentor, site coordinator, and following that, moved into my first position as our operations manager. Sariah took over 10 years because she had not completed her master's degree, and Atziri also stayed in a staff role for a little over 10 years.

Also, six out of the seven participants were already working in some form of higher education before advancing to their current role. Araceli was not in higher education but was already working in the private industry. Because of her experience, she rose quickly to supervisor at her university.

Five of the seven participants indicated obstacles while advancing to midlevel leadership. Meredith experienced imposter syndrome, lack of support from leadership, and family obligations while advancing to midlevel leadership. Atziri experienced imposter syndrome as an obstacle to advancement and the importance of graduate education. Sariah experienced imposter syndrome, fear from childhood experiences, the importance of graduate education, and a lack of leadership support. Valerie experienced gender inequality and some forms of imposter syndrome. Mila experienced a lack of support from leadership and the importance of graduate education. Dania and Araceli both experienced happenstance promotion; however, both completed their master's degrees, so there is a possibility that graduate education was a factor in their advancement to midlevel leadership.

Interview Question 2

Regarding your leadership goals, describe the life experiences you have faced that have helped or hindered achieving them.

From the interviews, three participants described life experiences that may have hindered their journeys to advancement. The first experience was Sariah's childhood, which hindered her ability to overcome specific life experiences, including excelling in her studies during a particular time and advancing to other career opportunities. Sariah experienced the loss of her brother when he was only a teenager, which affected her overall well-being growing up. Sariah stated,

I became petrified; I think that is where much of the fear comes from. It made me not want to take leaps because I wanted to be close to my family. So I needed to be very close in case anything ever happened.

She further mentioned that she needs a sense of stability rather than going for another opportunity and taking risks. Araceli's life experience inspired her to want to help others, and she thinks every life experience has helped shape her. Araceli comes from a low-income family living in East Los Angeles. She can remember the times she had to help her parents fill out money orders to pay the rent and often recalls her parents feeling unsure whether they had enough to pay the bills from month to month. She also knows the feeling of having parents with little education, and because Araceli is a first-generation student, she can empathize with first-generation students who are struggling. Araceli stated, "So I feel like those experiences have helped me relate to the constituents that I am now providing services to; I now know that college changed the trajectory of my life and the life of my three teenagers." Meredith stated that one of the most significant life experiences affecting her in reaching her leadership goals was getting pregnant at 19 years old. Meredith had to choose between working full-time while her children were small or waiting until they were old enough to pursue leadership opportunities.

Interview Question 3

How would you describe your leadership abilities and style?

According to Pillai and Mikkilineni (2021), authentic leaders possess four main capabilities—self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing, and relational transparency. The participants elevated elements of the four dimensions during the interviews. Although there were components of authentic leadership revealed during the interview process, the leadership styles were mixed, and there was some overlap among the participants of transformational, servant, and authentic leadership. Araceli indicated that she is a democratic leader. She seeks to hear from others and wants to hear everyone's ideas and feelings; she leads by example and has high expectations of her team. Dania indicated that she has adopted a servant

leadership style and uses active listening skills, communication, strategic thinking, and looks for nonverbal cues. At the same time, she leads with intentionality and purpose. Atziri also describes her leadership style as servant leadership with a combination of transformational leadership traits. Sariah described her leadership style as authentic, and her goal is to be collaborative, nurturing, and empathic; she comes from a place of understanding and values and being supportive of those around her. Mila indicated that she strives to be more empathic and recognizes the importance of having high emotional intelligence while ensuring staff check-ins and building relationships. Meredith indicated that she uses an authoritative leadership style while leading others. Valerie stated,

I like to ask lots of questions and get to the root of things for the folks on our team. So really making sure that I have those relationships with the folks I work with, and that they see an investment in them and their professional abilities.

Valerie also highlighted the importance of doing check-ins, understanding her team, keeping the team focused on the mission, developing those around her, and ensuring folks in her area are well-equipped and prepared to take on leadership roles in the future.

Interview Question 4

What leadership style do you think women must develop to strategically break barriers to advancement and retention?

The responses also varied among participants, with a slight overlap. Valerie and Sariah both mentioned during the interviews that to break barriers, Latinas must develop confidence to advance within their organization. Atziri and Mila indicated that adopting the traits of a transformational leader will help break barriers for Latinas to progress. Mila said, “I feel like it would be transformational.” Mila stated that she recalls transformational leadership as trying to

develop followers who are visionaries and want to create change. Atziri specified, “I think it important to understand transformational leadership and to be courageous in our spaces, especially if we are women of color.” Meredith thinks that women must develop solid relationship-building skills because often, women can be portrayed as being bossy or not bossy enough. Meredith stated that women need to find a steady medium. Dania feels that women need to adopt authenticity while also being servant leaders.

Interview Question 5

How have your social networks (such as professional associations, mentors, colleagues, friends, and family) contributed to your success in overcoming obstacles to advancement to your current leadership position?

Each participant had at least one mentor who contributed to her success. Valerie relied on building an organic network and had people around her who encouraged her as a young leader. Having networks of support was essential to the success of the Latinas in the study. The commonality was that all the Latina women in the study have relied on a village of critical supporters to help overcome obstacles to advancement. Valerie pointed out, “I was lucky that I had the person who gave me my first role within our department, believed in my leadership, and was like her. You know, I’ll help you with this.” Valerie implied she had people with whom she networked in her department, and she participated in committees around campus. Atziri had her family as support, as well as different associations she participated in during her journey to advancement. More specifically, Atziri was involved in Latinx associations on campus that affect staff and faculty. Meredith has relied on her family, her church family, and her sister, who works in the film industry. Meredith has also invested in organizations that assist her in crucial leadership skills (e.g., communication, presentations, and public speaking). Dania had two vital

mentors who helped her during her career early on and had faculty who were key mentors during her graduate studies. Mila relied on an organizational leadership group and had a mentor who supported her. Sariah had a mentor who contributed a tremendous amount of encouragement and advice to take career advancement opportunities in her organization. Recently, Sariah has joined networks that have helped her grow in her confidence in the workplace. Dania had mentors who allowed her to bloom and is also part of a professional association. An observation from the responses is that the young Latinas in the study became more involved in professional associations early on. In contrast, older people in the study relied more on individual mentors.

Interview Question 6

Are you interested in pursuing executive leadership in the next several years? Why or why not?

Most of the Latinas in the study indicated that they do not wish to pursue executive leadership in the next few years. Four participants said they did not want to because of children and family obligations. However, Sariah would consider executive leadership in the next five to 10 years once her children are older. Valerie stated that she was hesitant to pursue executive leadership because she would be away from students, yet her response and insight might be because she is younger still and early in her career with no children; Meredith was the only Latina who indicated she was interested in pursuing executive leadership in the next few years. Meredith's children are in college, which could demonstrate her readiness to advance into executive leadership. This question provided insight into my hypothesis that although Latinas may be attracted to excel from staff to midlevel leadership, many of them are not interested in executive leadership. Because the sample size was small, the responses from the participants'

answers do not affirm my hypotheses but do provide beneficial information regarding interest of advancing into executive leadership.

Interview Question 7

What advice would you give aspiring Latina women aspiring to follow in your footsteps of becoming a Latina leader in higher education?

Four of the seven participants indicated the importance of embracing who you are, staying true to yourself, being authentic, and not comparing yourself to others; all encompass not losing sight of who you are. Dania stated that it is vital not to let rejection be a deterrent and not to fear failure while pursuing career advancement opportunities. Meredith and Valerie agreed that confidence is essential to advance into leadership. Araceli recommended that Latinas need to put in twice the effort although that sounds bad, but to Araceli Latinas need to put in more effort than others to advance. Araceli also mentioned that Latinas need to work on their communication skills because they are very important. Latinas need to have good communication and writing skills to excel in leadership.

Interview Question 8

What else would you like me to know that has yet to be asked during this interview?

At the end of the interview, the participants' responses varied, and they either had no comments or a variety of additional comments, often negative, reflecting on their experience. For example, Sariah recalled going to one of the White males in her department and seeking out advice from him because he considered himself a mentor to Sariah. This was the White males' response to Sariah:

But when I asked him for advice about going back to school, he told me that I really should not. I didn't need it. ... He's like, you're very nice. ... He just made me feel like I didn't have the ability. ... I think he saw me very much staying as I was.

Meredith commented on feeling much more satisfied in a department with other people of color; half the team is people of color. Meredith now feels as if her voice is heard in her new role, and she even mentioned that her boss is a Latina as well, which, in her opinion, makes a huge difference. At the end of her interview, Mila revealed that one of her colleagues felt that Mila has "White privilege." However, although Mila is Latina, she has a fair complexion. Based on the interview responses from the seven participants, the subsequent themes and findings emerged from the data. Interviewees were asked to discuss the obstacles they encountered while moving into midlevel leadership. Each participant was asked how long it took to move from staff to midlevel leadership. Some of the challenges indicated during the interviews are noted in Figure 5.

Figure 5

Obstacles Noted by One or More Participants

| |
|------------------------------------|
| Imposter syndrome |
| Culture: Loyalty to the department |
| Lack of support from leadership |
| Family obligations |
| Gender roles |

Significant Findings

Significant Finding 1: Graduate Education was important to advancement.

Although all seven participants did not express that graduate education was an obstacle they had to overcome, it became evident from their journeys and responses that the importance of graduate education was a factor in their success in overcoming obstacles to advancement. All seven participants received their master's degrees, supporting their advancement into midlevel leadership. Mila originally wanted to be a teacher but worked at a university while completing her master's degree. She indicated, "I really liked working here, and so then I finished the program, but then I enrolled at the ___ masters leadership program because I really knew I wanted to stay at a 4-year institution." After Mila had completed her master's degree in leadership, it took 6 years for her to move from staff to midlevel leadership. It took Sariah 10 years to move from staff to midlevel leadership. Sariah completed her master's degree 10 years after working as a staff member at her university, and she received her first promotion into midlevel leadership shortly after. However, Sariah did mention one of the main things that held her back from getting her master's degree sooner was fear, which stemmed from her childhood because of a family tragedy that instilled fear in her and spilled over into parts of her life, including her educational journey. Although Sariah said that fear held her back from pursuing her master's degree sooner, her responses were still comparable to those of the other participants. Meredith got into higher education shortly after completing her master's degree in higher education: leadership and student development. Until then, Meredith had to work hard to merge into higher education. Atziri stayed in staff roles for about 10 years, and it was not until she earned her master's that she could move from staff to a management-level job. Dania was perhaps able to move up quickly into midlevel leadership by getting a master's degree early in

her career and being surrounded by the right people. Araceli earned her master's degree before working in higher education and had previous experience. So she promoted within 6 months after moving into higher education. Valerie started working in higher education during her undergraduate studies. She indicated that she wanted to make a career in higher education but did not want to pursue counseling. Valerie said,

One of my colleagues pointed me to higher ed, so I started researching higher ed programs, and was like, oh my, this is exactly what I want to do. So I started working towards that and thinking about graduate programs in higher education.

Significant Finding 2: Imposter Syndrome

Meredith dealt with imposter syndrome while in college and through her professional journey. During the interview, Meredith said,

My dad was a gardener at _____. Um, so I grew up around that school. And I remember many times when I was at _____; I had impostor syndrome. Furthermore, I was like, you know, I barely slipped in. Don't catch me; you're going to kick me out and tell me I'm not supposed to be here. And that's what I felt honestly, like, throughout my career throughout my life, it's like, I'm not supposed to be here. Let me lay low so they miss me and discover I'm not supposed to be here. So it was not about making myself stand out. It was about making myself not get fired.

Atziri indicated that one internal obstacle was imposter syndrome. She suggested, "Do you know your stuff? Am I good enough? Do I deserve to be in this role?" Sariah mentioned having feelings of imposter syndrome. She stated there were times when she navigated higher education and became familiar with the systems and how higher education operated that she had moments of What am I even doing here? Sariah felt fear of just not knowing. Araceli stated that she

recalled various moments of feeling like an impostor. She said that it is a real thing that she always deals with. Araceli has been in higher education for over 20 years, and she can remember that when she first started, it was tough to see herself as an expert, and she found it quite challenging to promote herself. She had moments when she questioned her expertise and was hesitant to speak up because what she would say to her colleagues might not be popular. Dania recalled first realizing she had imposter syndrome when she had limiting beliefs about herself and her capabilities. She would ask herself whether she was there because Dania was supposed to be there or because of pure luck. Valerie indicated characteristics of feeling like an impostor and stated, “There were some days where I feel, you know, a little out of place, or maybe I didn’t feel as prepared for something as I thought I would be.”

Culture: Loyalty to the Department

Latinas culturally are raised to be loyal and rooted in commitment. During the interviews, I discovered that one participant was dedicated to their department, which hindered their advancement to midlevel leadership or the next step in the department. Meredith said,

The change is good even though I was hesitant. Because I think another thing Latinos have is this sense of loyalty. I think it’s part of our culture. I felt bad when I started applying for other jobs. I was wondering how I could leave my team. What are they going to do without me? And that’s an obstacle because, like, if I had not applied, I wouldn’t be in this position I am right now; where I am getting to grow, truly grow in my leadership.

Because the sample size was small, this finding did not become significant, but it could have been if there had been a larger sample size.

Lack of Support From Leadership

Sariah indicated one of the external obstacles she encountered was a lack of mentors who could help her grow or even understand what she was dealing with; because she did not have any mentors to rely on, she did what her parents taught her: to work hard. She eventually realized she was working hard but needed to grow professionally in higher education. Mila felt that management pigeonholed the employees in her department rather than elevating their strengths, skills, and qualities. The manager she worked for would only allow the employees to enter job descriptions. When Mila got a new manager, things started to change. Meredith recalled taking on more work and seeking more opportunities to challenge herself. However, no career opportunities were given to her. She was promoted within her department, but it was only because someone left and was prompted because the job became vacant. She felt the promotion was a glorified program manager versus a valued leadership role. She did not feel heard and often felt that her ideas and opinions were disregarded while working in her department. So after about 2 ½ years in her department, she decided to seek career growth outside of her department. She applied for a midlevel leadership role and was offered the job. Once her leadership discovered she was offered a better opportunity in another position, her department tried negotiating with her and showing her more money. Nevertheless, by that point, it was too late. She felt led to take the offer in the department and recalled thinking why was she not offered the leadership opportunity without her seeking it elsewhere?

Family Obligations

Sariah indicated that her children were small, and part of what held her back from advancing to leadership was being present for her children. The associate director job had expectations of traveling internationally, and she ended up leaving that role to spend more time

with her children. Meredith had children when she was 19, preventing her from getting jobs or pursuing leadership opportunities. She stayed in jobs that offered part-time to balance her family and work life until her children were older. Araceli also expressed that having a family and being present with her family took priority over promoting within organizations. Now that her children are getting older, she has more flexibility to focus on her career.

Gender Roles

Valerie indicated that one of the significant obstacles to advancement is being a woman. She mentioned that men are allowed to be more innovative or praised to be more creative. Men are allowed to explore, advance, and try new things. Valerie felt as if she was often second-guessing herself and still determining certain decisions that she made. She found trouble with not being too flexible while at the same time not being too harsh. Dania indicated that the most significant obstacle for her was experiencing sexual harassment. She felt she was preyed upon because she was seen as young, naïve, and inexperienced compared to her peers. Dania's experience of sexual harassment early during her journey affected her physically, emotionally, and psychologically. She said it messed with her mind, and she began having limited beliefs about her abilities. She questioned whether she arrived at her success because of her hard work or because of the help she received.

Happenstance Led to Advancement

During my research, I assumed each Latina would encounter significant obstacles to advancing to midlevel leadership; however, Dania was an outlier to my research. When asked about the challenges she faced to progress to midlevel leadership, she indicated that she experienced happenstance advancement to leadership. After 6 months of being in a staff position, her manager had an opening for the assistant director role and asked her to apply. Dania did not

encounter the typical barriers to advancement and was promoted reasonably quickly. Araceli also had previous experience in her previous profession. She had her master's degree in public administration, which helped her advance to midlevel leadership 1 month into higher education.

The Significance of Mentorship

A strategy that came out of the research was the importance of having a mentor to help support their career advancement. Six of the seven participants indicated that having at least one informal or formal mentor was critical to navigating their way into leadership in higher education. Meredith relied on her informal support (husband, church groups, and sister) to help her advance, ask for career advice, and vent. She was able to use a variety of perspectives to help her with issues she was dealing with early in her career. Dania had three mentors who were faculty members in her department who helped her navigate her journey to advancement. The faculty member identifies as Latino and is in a leadership role within her department. She indicated that her chair saw her skillset and allowed her to bloom. Sariah had a Korean American woman help her navigate through higher education, and she connected with her because she was also an immigrant and held an immigrant mentality. She recalled her mentor sharing a critical saying: "If not you, then who?" Her mentor pushed her to take classes and would continually send her information, and she became a mentor and a friend. Her mentor promoted her from staff to midlevel leadership, and she advocated for her. Even though they do not work directly together, she keeps in touch with her mentor, and her mentor sends Sariah opportunities. Recently, another opportunity arose, and Sariah applied for the job and got the job offer but ended up declining the job because her boss offered her more to stay in her current position.

Araceli primarily had informal mentors who were Latinos in her department. She relied on her supervisors to help mentor her as well. Her supervisors allowed her to ask questions.

Atziri recalled three key individuals who were critical in her professional development early in her career. Two of the mentors were males, and the other was a female, and she highlighted that the reason she ended up having two male mentors was that they really were the ones available at the time. She said there has been a shift in her mentors throughout the years, and women of color mentors surround her. Mila indicated that she had a mentor in her organizational excellence group that helped her during her pursuit of her master's. Her current supervisor is a mentor who has taught her things and helped her with campus resources.

Family and Support Networks

Family and networks were vital to the success of each Latina interviewed. For Meredith, the support of her husband, sister, and church family was instrumental to her success in navigating her way to advance in her career in higher education. Additionally, Meredith joined Toastmasters, which has helped her with public speaking when she took on a leadership role. Toastmasters helped her gain confidence and with speaking to her team. Atziri saw her family as her cheerleaders; they were instrumental to her success in her career and getting this far in her leadership journey. Sariah described a lack of support and networks early in her career. Not having the support and guidance initially hindered her growth in higher education. Sariah invested in self-education and taking on volunteer opportunities to help with her growth and development. Valerie described that she has had supportive leadership and leaders who trusted her to lead program initiatives within her departments. Dania was involved professionally with National Association of Colleges and Employers, which supported her growth and career development. The organization also helps keep her up to date in her current leadership role. Mila participated in a leadership group that the university's vice chancellor organized, and the networking group's name was the organizational leadership group. The group would meet once a

month for a few hours. Additionally, the organizational leadership group held many events on campus, events to meet others around the campus, and it offered great networking opportunities.

Mila was aware of other available positions because of the group as well.

Leadership Styles Unique to Latina Leaders

The leadership styles among the participants were mixed and included democratic leadership, transformational leadership, authentic leadership, empathetic leadership, and servant leadership. Table 1 (added for ease of reference) reflects the leadership phrases used by the participants during the interviews. I asked each participant, “How would you describe your leadership abilities and style?”

Table 1

Leadership Style Phrases

| Participant pseudonym name | Age of participant | Phrase reflecting leadership style concept |
|----------------------------|--------------------|---|
| Araceli | 50 years old | I want to hear from others; high expectations of myself and others |
| Sariah | 47 years old | Collaborative; hands on; nurturing, empathetic |
| Atziri | 45 years old | Servant leadership; model behaviors; coach; mentor |
| Meredith | 43 years old | Build relationships with people; coach; train |
| Mila | 40 years old | Transformational leadership; empathy, emotional intelligence; building relationships; awareness |
| Valerie | 30 years old | Being true to yourself |
| Dania | 24 years old | Servant leadership; strategic thinking |

Two prevalent leadership styles emerged during the interviews: transformational and authentic. According to numerous studies, women tend to have a transformational leadership style. Throughout the discussions, cultural characteristics of leadership were revealed from the research, including empathy, loyalty, relationship focus, and selflessness (Canaday, 2021). These

characteristics were shown through each participant as they shared about their leadership styles and their interactions with their teams.

During Atziri's interview, she said,

I think it's important to understand transformational leadership and to be courageous in our spaces, especially if we are a woman of color. You know, we need to be courageous in the spaces that we're in. Thus, you know, transformational leadership allows us to be courageous, allows us to be daring, in these spaces, it's going to take courage, it's going to take us to take risks, to be uncomfortable, to transform the spaces and the systems that we're in.

Transformational Leadership

Atziri discussed how she leads by modeling behaviors while coaching and mentoring others. Araceli described her leadership style: she seeks to hear from others and wants to hear everyone's ideas and find out how the team is feeling and how they are doing. Araceli discussed how she has high expectations from herself and her team. Burns (1978) defined transformational leadership as "a process where leaders and their followers raise one another to higher levels of morality and motivation" (p. 20). Mila revealed that her leadership style has evolved because she was initially more transformational, and about 6 years ago, she felt her leadership style change and now finds herself more empathic and more aware. Mila also discussed that, in her opinion, Latina women need to adopt a more transformational leadership style to advance into leadership, although her style has since changed. She indicated that by being transformational, one can develop and invest in others to help them become leaders; the leader is the visionary and seeking change.

Authentic Leadership

Sariah discussed the importance of authenticity and confidence in one's work. Mila's leadership style evolved into a more authentic leadership style. She discussed the fact that her leadership style approach is now being more aware and checking in on her team. Although the participants did not clearly state that some of their leadership traits were authentic, their interview responses revealed that they had adopted traits of authentic leaders.

Resiliency Theory

Resilience is the ability to bounce back and pivot when faced with obstacles or challenges. It is possible that the participants in this study displayed resilience by overcoming barriers to leadership promotion, dealing with feelings of being an imposter and finding a way to accomplish their goals despite setbacks and challenges. The Latinas displayed qualities of resiliency theory in their studies, work, and leadership advancement through trials and failures as well as the completion of graduate school.

Summary

This chapter discussed the data analysis and findings from seven Latinas working in various staff midlevel leadership roles in 4-year public universities in California. Creswell and Creswell (2018) said that the sample size depends on the qualitative study design. For a qualitative phenomenology study, a range of three to 10 participants is adequate, and this study included seven participants who fit the criteria from 4-year public universities in California. I used the following validation strategies to avoid negatively impacting the data. Participant biases were avoided by framing the interview questions as open ended, avoiding yes or no responses. By asking open-ended questions and staying away from agreeing or disagreeing, I ensured that the answers from the participants would be more truthful and honest. I avoided researcher biases

by considering and examining all the data obtained. Another validation strategy I used was member checking to determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings. I emailed each participant a final report of the themes to determine whether they were accurate. The interviews revealed Latinas' obstacles while advancing to leadership, the leadership styles needed to succeed, commonalities, outliers, and strategies for advancement.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological research study was to explore the obstacles Latinas overcame to advance into midlevel leadership at their respective higher education institutions. Studies focused on Latinas and the leadership qualities needed to advance and research on Latinas in midlevel leadership are even scarcer compared to the research and literature regarding Latinas in executive leadership. Although higher education and other workforces continually seek to diversify their staff and create pipelines for people of color, the results should match the current college student population. The college enrollment rate for 2022 was White (42%), Black (11%), Hispanic (17.5%), and American Indian/Alaska Native (1%) (Nam, 2023). In the fall of 2020, nearly 75% of faculty members were White. According to the Best Colleges survey in 2021, 26% of students still feel that their college needs to develop more strategies regarding diversity among faculty and staff (Nam, 2023). Research shows that students benefit from diverse faculty and staff regarding their academic success, career trajectory, social engagement, and earnings. Nevertheless, the common ethnicity is White (65.2%) for higher education administrators, and Hispanics or Latinos are at 14.2%.

Significant Findings

Importance of Graduate Education

The results of the research reveal that pursuing graduate education was advantageous in their advancement to midlevel leadership. All seven participants' career trajectories changed after receiving their master's degree. Although the research participants did not imply directly that graduate education was an obstacle, it was an important strategy for the seven Latinas to support their advancement to midlevel leadership. Completing their graduate education for some participants took anywhere from 1 month, 6 months, 2 years, and, for a few of them, 10 years;

however, once they each obtained their master's degree, their career track changed. This finding was encouraging and eye-opening at the same time. As the researcher, I went into this study seeking and trying to figure out the obstacles Latinas experience while advancing into midlevel leadership to help future Latinas in their own advancement. While going through the research process and analyzing the data, it did not hit me that I found a discovery worth value for future conversation for college campuses. If more Latinas realize the importance of graduate education, imagine the possibilities that can open for them as they finish their undergraduate degrees and continue to pursue graduate education. The idea that all seven participants' career trajectories changed once they obtained their graduate degrees is encouraging for the future of other Latinas and women of color. It is tangible for future Latinas interested in moving from staff to leadership.

Claybourn (2023) specified that experts say graduate education yields a personal and professional return on investment. Graduate education can open the doors to better paying jobs and support a faster track to management jobs. Graduate education can also provide esteemed opportunities for personal growth and better networking opportunities, whether with new relationships with professors, peers, or industry leaders. Claybourn highlighted three critical reasons to consider graduate education:

- potential for career advancement and higher paying jobs
- building a professional network
- room for personal growth

Those with graduate degrees earn more, and as stated by the U.S Bureau of Labor and Statistics, weekly earnings for those with a master's degree went up to \$1,574, and in many cases, those with a graduate degree can by-pass entry-level jobs and start in a more advanced

role (Claybourn, 2023). There is also a correlation between those with advanced degrees and employment rates. The higher the degree, the lower the employment rate can be. Moreover, employers value individuals with graduate degrees because they tend to demonstrate transferable skills and characteristics in different industries.

Imposter Syndrome

Five of the seven participants experienced imposter syndrome. From the research, it is evident that women from various backgrounds, ethnicities, and organizations experience imposter syndrome. According to Murray (2023), about 70% of people experience imposter syndrome. It was not surprising to me that five of the seven participants experienced some form of feeling like an imposter, whether during advancement, while on the job, or during the process of applying for a new job. Imposter syndrome is when individuals form self-doubt and associate their success with luck instead of acknowledging their skills and talents. However, research has indicated that factors such as gender and race can increase the likelihood of experiencing imposter syndrome, and women and people of color are at a higher risk because they tend to be underrepresented in the workplace.

Abramson (2021) indicated that imposter syndrome can contribute to anxiety and feelings of depression, fear of taking risks in careers, and burnout in one's job. There is a fear by highly successful individuals that they may be found out or not able to replicate success. Abramson (2021) found that

while people commonly colloquialize this as impostor “syndrome,” “phenomenon” or “experience” are better terms because impostor phenomenon isn't a clinical diagnosis, said Pauline Rose Clance, PhD, ABPP, an Atlanta-based clinical psychologist and professor emerita at Georgia State University, who coined the term “impostor

phenomenon” with her colleague Suzanne Imes, PhD (*Psychotherapy: Theory, Research & Practice*, Vol. 15, No. 3, 1978). “It's a phenomenon experienced by many, and remembering that can help normalize it,” she said. (para. 3)

Ways to conquer imposter syndrome include diversifying leadership by promoting underrepresented groups and creating safe spaces for those from underrepresented groups (e.g., women, people with disabilities, senior citizens, etc.). Abramson (2021) included seven strategies for overcoming imposter syndrome:

- learn the facts and address the “cognitive distortions” contributing to feelings of imposter syndrome
- share your feelings of imposter syndrome with others and be strategic about who you share these feelings with
- embrace your successes and acknowledge your recognition
- let go of trying to be perfect
- nurture a mindset of self-compassion, embrace your fears, and be willing to learn
- be open about your failures with others and look at failures as learning opportunities
- learn to accept that there may be seasons when imposter syndrome arises and it is okay to work through those moments

Unintended Findings

During the research process, there were two unintended findings. The first finding was that not all Latinas who move into leadership experience significant obstacles. Two of the seven participants experienced happenstance while moving into leadership. Although two of the seven did not encounter significant obstacles, most of the participants did experience obstacles while advancing into midlevel leadership. Going into the research, I assumed that all Latinas faced

considerable barriers, which was not the case, and this is something important to consider for future studies.

Another unintended finding was that it is difficult to interpret whether Latinas encounter obstacles because they are simply a woman or a Latina or both. The interview responses were mixed among participants; some felt some of their barriers had to do with being a Latina, but others indicated that being a woman and competing in a man's world was the more difficult challenge.

Conclusions

Main Research Question

Do Latina women experience obstacles in their advancement into midlevel leadership?

Based on the research, Latina's experience obstacles in 4-year public universities, though the barriers that Latinas experience are similar to those of other women. The results of this study revealed that Latina women experience struggles with imposter syndrome, gender inequality, lack of support, and mentorship. One of the distinct obstacles that the Latinas in the study encountered that was unique compared to other women was that Latina women often take longer to obtain a master's degree, which will help Latina women advance faster. The Ed Trust analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau's 2018 report indicated that 15% of White women earned a graduate degree, but only 5.9% of Latina Women obtained a degree (Anthony et al., 2021).

Subquestion

Do Latina women receive support from their leadership team as they seek promotion? If so, in what form?

Based on the research study's results, the support varied among the seven participants. One indication from the responses was that the Latinas with support excelled in their roles and

advanced much more quickly than those who did not get support. For example, in the study, Valerie had leaders who believed in her ability as a leader despite her being younger than her colleagues. Sariah struggled for 10 years in the same role because she felt alone and did not have enough support from mentors surrounding her growth and pulling out her potential. Meredith did not get the support she anticipated in her department, and it was only when she sought out other departments around campus that her department showed interest in helping her succeed. Dania had a supervisor who saw potential in her leadership and encouraged her to quickly apply for a leadership position. She was promoted within 6 months of getting a full-time higher education job. For the first 6 years, Mila felt pigeonholed by management, and it was only when her area got new leadership that things changed and got better.

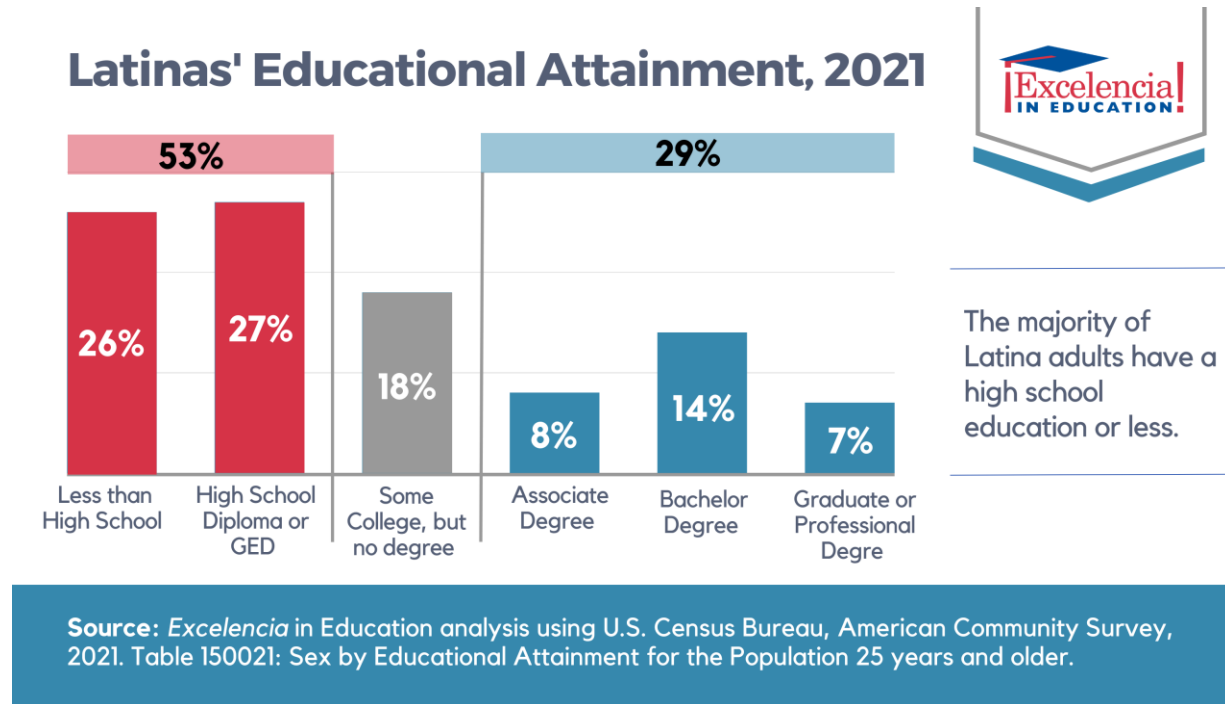
Implications for Action

Implication 1: Provide Support in Education

To help Latinas advance into leadership, there must be support starting with their education. Based on the interviews and the feedback from the participants, getting their master's was critical to advancing into leadership roles. According to A. Gonzales (2023), there are often various obstacles that Latinas face while pursuing a higher education degree, which include belonging to a low socioeconomic background, being a first-generation student, and a need for mentors to help provide support during college. Despite these barriers, 39% of Latinas earned an associate degree, and 33% achieved a bachelor's as HSIs. Eight percent earned a master's degree, and 1% earned a doctoral degree. It is evident from the interviewees that receiving a master's degree increases the chances of moving into leadership, particularly in higher education. Figure 6 shows that most Latinas have less than a high school education.

Figure 6

Latinas' Educational Attainment, 2021



Note. From *Latinas at Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs)*, p. 1, by Excelencia in Education, 2023, March (<https://www.edexcelencia.org/research/fact-sheets/latin-as-hispanic-serving-institutions-hsis>).

Regarding postsecondary education, 7% of Latinas hold graduate or professional degrees. The results from this research study indicate that a significant indicator of advancing to midlevel leadership is the importance of graduate education. Supporting Latinas through student success programs from their undergraduate to postgraduate education will be critical to assist more Latinas to advance to leadership positions in the future. Student success involves support within the school from family and friends, tutoring (e.g., math, writing, etc.), academic advising, mentorship, health and well-being, and engagement.

Implication 2: Create a Staff Mentoring Program at Higher Education Institutions

An example of a staff mentoring program is at UC Blue Ash College, which pairs employees in a mentoring relationship to foster professional development and career growth

while focusing on building an inclusive culture and encouraging diverse networks. The program is for 6 months; however, the program's continuation is at the discretion of the mentor and mentee relationship. Some expectations, goals, and outcomes include increasing organizational/career knowledge, enhancing professional skills, and establishing networking opportunities. Providing high-potential Latinas with a mentor early on in their career and creating an open line of communication will support more Latinas to advance within their higher education institutions. Leaders will need to focus their efforts on Latinx women and men with talent and develop their skills versus pigeonholing potential leaders. Often, Latinas feel they are the only ones in the room or must work harder than their peers to prove themselves. Latinas seek to have leaders support and provide guidance throughout their careers. Higher education institutions need champions looking for women of color who have potential or creating the potential because Latina women are dealing with imposter syndrome or feelings of inadequacy.

Implication 3: Create Programs Focusing on People of Color

An organization like the Hispanic Alliance for Career Enhancement (HACE) is a national nonprofit committed to the employment, development, and advancement of current and aspiring Latino professionals. HACE also created a program specifically focusing on Latinas' success known as Mujeres de HACE. This program is tailored to Latina leaders, managers, supervisors, and high-potential individual contributors with 5 years or fewer of experience. The program helps Latinas through in-depth assessments, one-on-one coaching, branding, expanding upon one's strengths, and improving weaknesses to become better. Numerous success stories have come from this program focused on supporting Latinas' development. Some highlights from the program include 1,500 Latina women completed the Mujeres de HACE program, 70% reported getting promoted, and 70% indicated a salary increase within 12 months after completing the

program. Another highlight is that 80% now also serve on boards or volunteer, and every Latina recommends the program. Another example of a program specific to developing Latinas is LARES (Latin American Recruitment and Educational Services) at the Latina Leadership Institute at the University of Illinois Chicago. The program focuses on the undergraduate level; however, if higher education leaders, faculty, and staff start to prepare Latinas while in college, they will become better equipped when seeking out leadership opportunities in their organizations and have the skills and leadership foundation. The program examines the political, cultural, economic, and social contexts influencing Latinas in the United States. The institute also seeks to understand the Latina identity, experience, and sense of belonging. The objectives of the institute are to develop Latina's knowledge and skills to prepare them for the workforce, leadership to gain tangible opportunities that will enhance the Latina's workforce experience, and network to help Latinas meet other Latina leaders to provide access to resources and make connections in the workforce, and self-advocacy which will address and overcome the systematic and cultural inequities that Latinas may face.

Keys to Success for Aspiring Future Latina Leaders

It is important for Latinas to identify their strengths and bring their authentic self to work and not become afraid to highlight their culture, background, and skillset. Latina leaders must build relationships with their teams and leaders and ask questions, invest in the people around them, and take the initiative on job duties outside their roles. Based on the feedback from a few of the participants in the study, adopting an authentic and transformational leadership style will further assist Latinas when they seek advancement. Results from this study highlighted critical traits of authentic leadership, including self-awareness, staying true to self, relationship building, serving others, and leading with the heart.

Mentorship and Sponsorship

Although mentorship is critical to the success of Latinas advancing within their organizations, sponsorship takes it a step further. Omadeke (2021) specified that “mentorship and sponsorship are powerful tools for personal success and building stronger workforces. Although they are related ... and share some similarities, they are not, as people sometimes assume, the same thing” (para. 1). Frequently, a sponsorship can develop from a solid mentor-mentee relationship. Often, a mentor is older, and the mentee is younger and possibly newer to that specific industry or organization. Nonetheless, mentorship can thrive when an employee seeks to learn from a more experienced employee.

Mentorship is a powerful tool to help Latina advance, and the research from this study revealed that mentors do not always share the same identity, culture, or gender. Yes, a mentor from a similar cultural background and gender can provide a sense of security and commonality, but it is not the determining factor for advancement.

Sponsorship is often the second phase of mentorship. Latinas need a sponsor to advocate as an additional way to advance in their organization further. Latinas need a sponsor willing to support their advancement through letters of recommendation, references on job applications, and other recommended job opportunities.

Qualities Latinas Need to Advance Into Leadership

According to the participants in my study, there are vital characteristics Latinas need to advance into midlevel leadership, including confidence, competence, and understanding oneself. Aim to be goal oriented, obtain new skills, and have a growth mindset. As a Latina seeking leadership, you must maintain sight of who you are and stay true to your values. Furthermore, please do not compare your progress to anyone else’s because all people are unique and bring

different benefits to a team. Another essential quality is to lean on others, not be afraid to ask for help, and surround yourself with people who want to support you. Have a roadmap of where you want to go but be okay with that roadmap changing as you progress in your career.

Recommendations for Further Research

Because the sample size was relatively small compared to the number of Latinas, expanding the scope among all organizations is recommended in future research. It may benefit from reaching Latinas in midlevel leadership across various higher education institutions (e.g., community colleges, private universities, and 4-year public universities across the United States).

Although the research study revealed a significant finding of the importance of graduate education for these seven participants, it may work differently for other Latinas or people from different backgrounds. A recommendation might be to survey Latinas to see whether graduate education was foundational to their advancement. Another recommendation is to be more specific during the interview and ask the participants about the role graduate education played in their advancement to graduate education. I asked, “What academic preparation and professional experiences were vital for you?” However, asking how receiving their master’s degree played a role in their advancement may have resulted in a different response with more insight into the role of graduate education.

Furthermore, other recommendations include building upon the research questions asked during this interview process by inviting more participants from different age ranges (e.g., 21–30; 30–39; 40–50) or various Latinas with various family dynamics (e.g., single parent, two-parent household, divorced, etc.). Another sample for future research is to focus on Latina groups at the staff level versus midlevel leadership and inquire about the obstacles or barriers they encounter to advance to the next level. This study focused on the barriers before promotion to

midlevel leadership. However, another study that would give great insight would be to focus on Latinas at the staff level and research what obstacles they are experiencing that hinder their career growth.

Another recommendation for future research would be to conduct a quantitative study using surveys or assessments. Because this study captured a specific sample from a large population, it would be helpful to expand and compare multiple data types.

Additionally, I recommend adding other questions during the interview process, which include “Do you feel you must suppress your identity as a Latina to get promoted or for your voice to be heard?” Another question that would be beneficial to include is whether Latina’s experience cultural challenges, and if so, what type of challenges.

Additionally, it may be helpful for future studies to test resiliency theory through the interview process or ask a question specific to resiliency theory. Another recommendation would be to offer a resilience test to the participants during the research process, report the test results, and review whether their results connect back to their career outcomes.

Concluding Remarks and Reflections

This study explored the obstacles Latina midlevel leaders experienced while advancing at their 4-year public university in California. The research revealed that Latinas experience similar results to other women while seeking career opportunities and advancement. The findings from the study were imposter syndrome, culture, loyalty to the department, lack of support from leadership, family obligations, and gender roles. The literature revealed that throughout history, women have dealt with not being good enough and not getting sufficient support from their leaders to support their advancement. A few research findings more specific to Latinas are loyalty, culture, and lack of Latina or Latino mentors.

Additionally, the research revealed the importance of obtaining a master's degree to further support the advancement to midlevel leadership in higher education. The participants in this study revealed that a significant key to opening more doors for leadership growth at higher education institutions was getting a master's degree. These research data are encouraging and insightful for future Latinas who aspire to advance in their organizations. The research finding of the importance of graduate education is a topic to further be explored to support Latinas in their personal, professional, and careers.

In conclusion, Latinas must seek support groups and professional networks, find a mentor/sponsor, and, depending on their goals, consider further education for promotions to a midlevel leadership role and above. At the same time, leaders must be strategic and intentional in finding ways to support Latinas to advance and grow in their organizations. There is still a wealth of opportunity for future research to continue investing in Latinas and supporting their advancement further to diversify the faculty, staff, and administration in higher education institutions.

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[work-and-wages-and-how-it-has-created-success-for-us-all/](https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-history-of-womens-work-and-wages-and-how-it-has-created-success-for-us-all/)

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

IRB Letter

RE: IRB Review

IRB No.: 076-2223-EXP

Project: Latinas in Higher Education: A Phenomenological Look into their Journeys to Mid-Level Leadership

Date Complete Application Received 1/26/2023

Date Final Revision Received 02/20/2023

Principle Investigator: Claudia Valdez

Co-PI: N/A

Faculty Advisor: Bradley Thompson

College/Department: JABS

IRB Determination: Expedited Application Approved. Graduate level (doctoral) student research project involving the completion of interviews (initial of approximately 60 minutes with a potential follow-up/clarifying interview of 15-30 minutes); demographic data to be collected; no minor participants; no more than minimal risk/risk appropriately mitigated; no deception utilized; acceptable consent procedures and documentation; acceptable data protection procedures. Data collection may begin, in accordance with the final submitted documents and approved protocol.

Future Correspondence: All future correspondence about this project must include PI, Faculty Advisor, and reference the assigned IRB number.

Approval Information: Approval is granted. In the case of an unforeseen risk/adverse experience, please report this to the IRB immediately using the appropriate forms. Requests for a

change to protocol must be submitted for IRB review and approved prior to implementation. At the completion of the project, you are to submit a Research Closure Form.

Researcher Responsibilities: The researcher is responsible for ensuring that the research is conducted in the manner outlined in the IRB application and that all reporting requirements are met. Please refer to this approval and to the IRB handbook for more information.

Date: 02/28/2023

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>California Baptist University 8432 Magnolia Ave Riverside, CA 92504 www.calbaptist.edu</p> | <p>IRB</p> <p>irb@calbaptist.edu</p> |
|--|--|

APPENDIX B

Recruitment Letter

Dear Participant,

My name is Claudia Valdez, and I am a doctoral candidate in the School of Business at California Baptist University. I am conducting a research study examining the obstacles Latinas overcame to advance to staff midlevel leadership in higher education, and you are invited to participate in the study. If you agree, you are invited to participate in an interview.

To participate, you must meet all the selection criteria listed below:

- Self-identify as a female Hispanic or Latina
- 21 years and older
- Are employed at a four-year public university in California
- Are employed in a staff mid-level leadership role (Director, Manager, or Supervisor)

The interview is anticipated to take at most 60 minutes, and a clarifying interview, if necessary, will take at most 15-30 minutes; the interviews will be audio taped.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your identity as a participant will remain confidential during and after the study. Your confidentiality will be protected using a pseudonym, and data will be securely collected.

Additionally, I ask that you please forward this email to any Latina leaders who meet the criteria above so that they can consider participating as well.

If you have questions or want to participate, please contact me at xxx-xxx-xxxx or

xxxxxxx@xxxxxxxxx.xxx.

Thank you for your participation.

Claudia Valdez
Doctoral Candidate
School of Business
California Baptist University

APPENDIX C

Interview Questions

Hello Ms. _____. My name is Claudia Valdez, and I am a doctoral candidate in Organizational Change and Administration at California Baptist University. I am pleased to meet you.

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this research. I understand you are extremely busy, and I would like to thank you for your time.

Your path to mid-level leadership will help my research. As you know, I am exploring the journeys to leadership of Latina mid-level leaders in higher education, and I look forward to hearing your story. I will remove any identifying information from your story and maintain confidentiality. If you want, you can choose a pseudonym for me to use. As a friendly reminder, I will be recording our conversation. Do you mind?

Demographic questions:

Age: ____

Where is your place of origin (Mexican, Central America, South America, Cuba, Puerto Rican, or other)? ____

Years in mid-level leadership: ____

Relational Status:

Single ____

Married ____

Divorced ____

Widowed ____

Domestic Partner ____

Children: Yes: ___ No: ___

Educational Level:

Associate degree ___

Bachelor's degree ___

Master's degree ___

Doctoral Degree ___

Interview questions:

Please elaborate on your responses to the following questions:

1. Tell me the story of your journey to your current role.
 - Possible follow-up questions:
 - How long did it take you to go from staff member to mid-level leadership?
 - What obstacles did you encounter?
 - What strategies did you utilize to overcome those barriers?
 - What academic preparation and professional experiences were vital for you?
2. Regarding your leadership goals, describe the life experiences you have faced that have helped or hindered achieving them.
3. How would you describe your leadership abilities and style?
4. What leadership style do you think women must develop to have a strategic impact on breaking barriers to advancement and retention?
5. How have your social networks (such as professional associations, mentors, colleagues, friends, and family) contributed to your success in overcoming obstacles to advancement to your current leadership position?
6. Are you interested in pursuing executive leadership in the next several years? Why or why not?
7. What advice would you give aspiring Latina women aspiring to follow in your footsteps of becoming a Latina leader in higher education?
8. What else would you like me to know that has yet to be asked during this interview?